

**DIALOGUE BETWEEN HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
AND THE STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS OF
COLLEGIO SAN CARLO OF MILAN**

Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 6 April 2019

[Link](#)

[...][Silvia Perucca, teacher] Good morning Holy Father. My name is Silvia and for the past 13 years, I have been teaching at the classical high school, Collegio San Carlo. We teachers at all educational levels are faced with ever-greater educational challenges on a daily basis. We live in a multiethnic and multicultural society, oriented toward the future and which constantly offers the opportunity to meet and encounter different people, tools and educational methods — just think of the technology and the opportunities it offers but also of the inevitable risks it brings with it. As educators, we wish to teach our students a way to better seize these opportunities by opening ourselves up to others without fearing possible challenges, aware that this does not mean losing our own identity, but rather enriching it. Today, therefore, we would like to ask you how we can best convey to our students the values rooted in Christian culture and at the same time how we can reconcile them with the increasingly inevitable need to educate in relationships and encounter with other cultures. Thank you.

Thank you. I will begin with the last part of the question and then work backwards. “How can we reconcile ourselves with the increasingly inevitable need to educate in relationships and about encounter?”, and “How can we better convey to our students the values rooted in Christian culture?”.

The key word here is rooted. And to have those roots, it takes two things: consistency, that is, soil — a tree has roots because it has soil — and memory. According to analysts, scholars — following the school of Bauman — the bad thing today is liquidity. Bauman’s last book is called “Nati liquidi” (“Born liquid”), and it says that you young people were born liquid, without substance. But German tradition — and this is a curiosity — rather than saying “born liquid”, says “uprooted”. Liquidity is created when you are incapable of finding your identity, that is, your roots, because you are incapable of going further with memory, and to confront your history, the history of your people, the history of humanity, the history of Christianity: those are the values! This does not mean that I must close off the present and wrap myself up in the past and stay there out of fear. No: this is cowardice.... But you must go to the roots, take the fluid from the roots and bring them forth with growth. Youth cannot move forward if it is not rooted. Values are roots, but with this you must grow. Water those roots with your work, challenging it with reality, but grow with the memory of your roots. For this I strongly advise you to speak with the elderly: I defend my age group, but we must speak with the elderly, because they are the memory of the people, of the family, of history. “Yes, but I speak with dad and mom”. This is good, but the intermediate generation is not very capable — today — of passing on values, roots, like the elderly. I remember in the other diocese, when several times I said to the young people: “Shall we go do something? Shall we go to this rest home and play the guitar to help the elderly?”. “Father, how boring. Let us go for a little while...”. The young people went there, began with the guitar, and the

elderly who had been sleeping began to wake up, to ask questions: the young people to the elderly, the elderly to the young people. In the end they did not want to leave. But what was the allure of the elderly? The roots! Because the elderly brought to life the values of their history, of their personality, values that are a pledge to go forward. This is why root values are important — I am using your word: it is really important. Then, a second thing is one's identity. We cannot create a culture of dialogue if we do not have identity, because the dialogue would be like water that ebbs away. With my identity I dialogue with you who have your identity, and we both move forward. But it is important to be aware of my identity and to know who I am and that I am different from others. There are people who do not know what their identity is and live à la mode; they have no inner light: they live off fireworks that last five minutes and then go out. To know one's identity. This is very important. Why did you have this or the other reaction? "Because this is how I am...": to know your identity, your history, your membership in a people. We are not mushrooms born alone. We are people born into a family, a people, and many times, this liquid culture makes us forget that we belong to a people. One criticism I will make is the lack of patriotism. Patriotism is not just going to sing the national anthem or to pay homage to the flag: patriotism is belonging to a land, to a history, to a culture ... and this is identity. Identity means membership. One cannot have identity without membership. If I want to know who I am, I must ask myself the question: "To whom do I belong?".

And the third thing: at the beginning you spoke about a multiethnic and multicultural society. Let us thank God for this! Let us thank God, because dialogue among cultures, among people, among ethnicities is a richness.... Once I heard a man, a father of a family, who was happy when his children played with other people's children, of another culture ... people whom perhaps we underestimate and also scorn, but why? Perhaps your children will not grow up sheerly in your race? "Father, what is more pure than distilled water?" — a man once said to me. "But to me ... I do not taste the flavour of distilled water ... it does not help to quench my thirst". The water of life, of this multiethnicity, of this multiculturalism. Do not be afraid. And I am touching a wound here: do not be afraid of migrants. Migrants are those who always bring us richness. Even Europe was made by migrants! Barbarians, Celts ... all these who came from the North and brought cultures; this is how Europe expanded, with the juxtaposition of cultures. But today, pay attention to this: today there is the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land in order to impede this encounter with other cultures, with other people. And those who raise a wall, who build a wall, will end up a slave within the walls he has built, without horizons. Because he lacks this otherness. "But Father, do we have to welcome all migrants?". The heart open to welcome, first and foremost. If I have a racist heart, I must really examine why and convert. Second: migrants must be received, accompanied, integrated; so they may receive our values and we may know theirs, the exchange of values. But in order to integrate, government leaders must do the math: "But my country has the capacity to integrate only this". Dialogue with other countries and try to find solutions together. This is the beauty of human generosity: to welcome in order to become richer. Richer in culture, richer in growth. But building walls is not helpful.

A short time ago I quoted that beautiful phrase of Ivo Andrić in the novel "The Bridge on the Drina", when he speaks of bridges and says that bridges are something so indescribable and so great that they are angels, they are not human things. He says

this: "The bridge was made by God from angels' wings so that men can communicate". The greatness of building bridges with people is for communication, and we grow with communication. Instead, closing off within ourselves leads us to be non-communicators, to be "distilled water", without strength. This is why I tell you: "teach young people, help young people to grow in culture and in encounter, to be capable of encountering different people, differences, and to grow with differences: this is how we grow, with comparison, with good comparison.

There is another thing underlying what you are saying: today in this western world of ours another culture has really grown: the culture of indifference. The indifference that comes from relativism: mine is mine, period; and from the abolishment of all certainty. The culture of indifference is a non-creative culture, which does not allow you to grow; however culture must always be interested in the values, in the histories of others. And this culture of indifference tends to extinguish the person as an autonomous, thinking being, so as to dominate and drown him. Be attentive to this culture of indifference. Integralism, fundamentalism, and the sectarian spirit derive from this. This, more or less, we must consider: an open culture that permits us to look at a foreigner, a migrant, a member of another culture as a person to be listened to, considered and appreciated. Thank you.[...]