

The Focolare Movement expresses its gratitude towards Paul VI

Together with whole Church, the Focolare Movement expresses its joy and participates in the beatification of Pope Paul VI on Sunday, October 19. The Movement also expresses gratitude and appreciation for the special bond that united Pope Montini to the Focolari during important traits of its history.

His first personal contact with the Focolare Movement dates back to 1952, during its first years in Rome, when as deputy to the Secretary of State he became more acquainted with it. He sensed “the presence of a new charism” that one had to support and encourage. And this is what he did. At that time, the Movement, that had already flourished beyond the Trentino region where it was approved by Bishop Mons. De Ferrari, was being studied by Rome. The suspension that ensued enabled the Movement to be reassured that this study meant “protection and security”. It was through Montini that Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Movement, had her first audience with Pope Pius XII in 1953.

During the fifteen years of Montini’s pontificate, Lubich was received in private audience several times. Her first audience was in 1964. At various times she remarked: “I represented and presented a new Work, born in the Church, with novelties that featured both in its spirituality and its structure; but there were no problems”. Pope Montini was interested in the Movement’s development and diffusion, and particularly in the amendments of its statute. In fact, these were necessary to fit the fulness of its action, the variety of its membership and above all, its very nature that was not reflected in the existing canon law. Pope Paul VI wanted to take this under his personal care, and with wisdom and courage he contributed towards the Movement’s development according to its specific characteristics.

The Movement is also very thankful for the Pope’s early interest in its ecumenical dialogue, while he also encouraged dialogue with persons of non-religious convictions. Very often, the conversation during the audiences led to Chiara Lubich’s meetings at Constantinople with Patriarch Athenagoras I, with whom, as she said, “a very profound supernatural relationship” had matured. While Lubich regularly informed Paul VI about this, he often answered with autographed letters, one of which reads: “... what great comfort, enlightenment and hope filled our spirit when we read the news you shared after your talks with the Venerable Patriarch Athenagoras.....”. After Pope Montini’s death in 1978, when Chiara Lubich spoke of the eight autographed letters received from him, she said: “They are the greatest treasure I possess. They are yet another testimony of his particular love for every single person”.

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