



# Laity today

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PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS

# SPORT: AN EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL CHALLENGE

*Seminar of study  
on the theme of sport chaplains*

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## PREFACE

While the crisis facing today's world of sport is broadly debated and analyzed, its symptoms seem to surface to the headlines almost daily and in ever more alarming ways: doping scandals by those we acclaimed as heroes the day before; enormous economic interests and huge flows of cash; fixed championships and corruption; never-before-seen episodes of fan violence.

These images depict a sport that has lost its original ethos, that is depleted of its values, dominated by the marketplace, sold to the highest bidder, and that has become reduced to theatrical sensationalism. Slightly adapting the terms of Zygmunt Bauman,<sup>1</sup> who advances the concept of “modern liquidity”, and even the “liquidity” of human life, we now have a “liquid sport”, that is to say, one that is without any stable point of reference, without a certainty that is rooted in the truth or in values that are shared.

However full this portrait may be, it does not completely reflect the entire reality of sport. Although somewhat partial, we are nonetheless justified in raising a question which is central to the recent seminar promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the theme – “Sport: an educational and pastoral challenge”, the proceedings of which are published in this present volume. The central question is this: In today's age, can we still speak about educational value in sport? Can sport still educate someone today? And if it can, under what conditions? These questions transcend sport itself and can be extended to all of those sectors of our post modern society which seem to have abdicated their role of educating the younger generations. This alarming omission within these educational environments demands that all who

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Z. BAUMAN, *Modernità liquida*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2003; *Vita liquida*, Laterza, Bari 2006.

still long for a sport worthy of its name make a collaborative effort to restore to sport its pedagogical value and its capacity to assist the human person in his or her growth and development.

Hopeful expectations with regards to sport's educational potential continue to be fostered at all levels. A recent report by the United Nations Interagency Task Force on "Sport for development and peace" affirmed that "Sport is an ideal school of life. The skills learned through play, physical education and sport are fundamental to the holistic development of young people. These skills, such as cooperation and confidence, are essential for social cohesion and are carried throughout adult life. Sport actively educates young people about the importance of certain key values, such as honesty, fair play, respect for self and others, and adherence to the rules and respect for their importance".<sup>2</sup>

The Church as well, as a key protagonist in education, and always attentive to human life in the fullness of its expressions, cannot overlook such a human activity as sport, which has become a phenomenon of great cultural transcendence in our time. "The ecclesial community must take into consideration the dynamic role that sport can play within education. It is not a question of a mythical exultation of sport, but rather, of affirming its positive and far reaching potential, by especially recognizing its formation capacity with regards to the youth, and by avoiding any possible deviations or manipulations therein".<sup>3</sup>

As we will see, the above statement from a pastoral note of the Italian Bishops Conference *Pastoral Commission for Leisure, tourism and sport*, is in the same line of thinking as the papal magisterium of the last century. Regarding sport's educational potential, Pius XII states: "Sport, properly directed, develops character, makes a man courageous, a generous loser, and a gracious victor; it refines the senses, gives us intellectual penetration, steels the will to endurance. It is not merely

<sup>2</sup> UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, Report for the, United Nations 2003, 8.

<sup>3</sup> ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE PASTORAL COMMISSION FOR LEISURE, TOURISM AND SPORT, Pastoral note *Sport e vita cristiana*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 1995, 33.

a physical development then. Sport, rightly understood, is an occupation of the whole man..."<sup>4</sup> Along the same lines, Paul VI observes how the athletes' discipline "calls to mind a sense of self control. What perseverance and tenacity! [...] Does not the athlete's *ascesis* – which St. Paul takes as an example in his first letter to the Corinthians – perhaps remind us of the virtue of temperance? And does not the rigorous need for training and preparing oneself to be put to the test come close to that of prudence? Does not the equality among the opponents, the impartial arbitration in competition, and the fair play of the loser and the moderate elation of the victor recall the virtue of justice? If these moral virtues can contribute to the full realization of the human person in sport, how can they not also be reflected in our society as a whole?"<sup>5</sup> John Paul II willingly expressed his profound conviction that all sporting activities should be a means of formation, that is to say, they should contribute to the integral development of the human person.<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI also confirmed that this discipline "when it is practiced with respect for the rules, can be an educational tool and a means of developing important human and spiritual values".<sup>7</sup>

Together with its extraordinary educational potential, sport can also play a decisive role in helping people to find a greater sense of meaning in a life that is subject to serious moral or physical challenges, such as the many disabled people who regain a sense of self esteem and find new courage in facing their difficulties through the practice of a sport. Nor should we underestimate in our globalized world, the contribution that sport can make in fostering a culture that is rooted in solidarity and fraternity. Not by chance, did John Paul II express his desire that sport be

<sup>4</sup> PIO XII, *Carattere e utilità dello sport nella completa formazione dell'uomo*, in: "Discorsi e Radiomessaggi", VII (1945), 129.

<sup>5</sup> PAUL VI, *Message for the Montréal Olympics*, in: "Insegnamenti" XIV (1976), 589-590 (our translation).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Discorso al Consiglio della Federazione internazionale dello sci*, in: "Insegnamenti" V, 3 (1982), 1536 (our translation).

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Catechism Weekly General Audience, September 21, 2005* in: "Insegnamenti" I (2005), 567 (our translation).

“a factor of emancipation for poorer countries and help to eradicate intolerance and build a more fraternal and united world”.<sup>8</sup>

The Church has known how to tap into sport’s educational potential in concrete ways, even if our memory of this pioneering work on the part of the Church at times needs to be sharpened. According to the president of the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, “It is always difficult to convince those who are involved in youth ministry that sport, when it is genuine and well structured, is not a waste of time, but rather, a great educational investment [...]. With sport as its generating principal, parishes and oratories have been key protagonists for more than a century in forming the youth and engaging in a sacrosanct battle in order to defend our culture. They have struggled to till the rugged terrain of sporting activities in such a way as to raise civic awareness to sports educational value, thus demonstrating the importance of sporting activities within the field of pastoral ministry”.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately in our day, sport’s educational potential – whether professional or amateur – is strongly compromised. The attempt to recuperate this cannot forego a return to certain basic points of human anthropology. At the roots of the evils that afflict contemporary sport is always a way of viewing the human person that is, in one way or another, reductionistic or erroneous. Thus, what is needed is a concerted and meticulous effort by all in order to regain the primacy of the human person. As a means, and not an end in itself, sporting activities should be at the service of the person and organically inserted as one dimension within a greater process of the overall integral formation of the person to which sport can offer a significant contribution as an instrument in the transmission of important values. Because of this, we must make every effort to bring to light all of the possible ways and means within this field that can help sport to rekindle its inherent educational resources without allowing this flame to be smothered by the difficulties that surround it.

<sup>8</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at the mass during the Jubilee for sports men and women*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Ed., n. 44, November 1, 2000, 1.

<sup>9</sup> E. COSTANTINI, *Lo sport non dimentichi le sue radici*, “Avvenire”, in: August 25, 2007, 30.



“Among the various human activities – writes Pope Benedict XVI – is sport, itself too awaiting to be illumined by God through Christ so that the values it expresses are purified and elevated both at the individual and collective level”.<sup>10</sup> In her mission of bringing the Gospel to the world, the Church must not overlook this expectation on the part of sport. Rather, sport should be considered as one of the “new areopagi” to which we are called to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ, – the only response capable of satisfying the profound desires of the human heart and our quest for meaning and purpose. The pastoral attention on the part of the Church to the sporting phenomenon is an expression of her care for the human person, who is “the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: [...] the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself”.<sup>11</sup> Pastoral concern for the field of sport does not wish to stifle the “proper autonomy”<sup>12</sup> of this reality. As the above quoted Commission on Sport of the CEI states: “It is not a question of ‘baptizing’ sport or putting a leash around it, but rather, of allowing sport to reach the fullness of its truth and to help the men and women who practice it to do so in a way that is in harmony with the living of their faith”.<sup>13</sup> The fundamental contribution that the Church offers passes through the conscience and the ethical sensitivity of human persons. The Church, as “expert in humanity” (Paul VI), can offer so much to the world of sport, and looks to it with hope, ready to recognize in it the positive contribution it can lend to the development of the human person. However, the Church is not afraid to decry those aspects of sport which threaten the dignity of the person. In fact, at times, the pastoral presence within the field of sport becomes in a certain sense a “sign of con-

<sup>10</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message to Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, in occasion of the 20th Winter Olympic Games, November 29, 2005*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” English Ed. n. 6, February 8, 2006, 2.

<sup>11</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, n. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes*, n. 36.

<sup>13</sup> ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE’S COMMISSION FOR THE PASTORAL OF LEISURE, TOURISM AND SPORT, Pastoral note *Sport e vita cristiana*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 1995, 14.

tradition” as it runs contrary to a mentality that is often closed off to the inalienable rights of the person, and can even perceive the Church’s presence as a threat to individualism and the autonomy of sport. Not to mention those cases in which this presence is merely tolerated, in order that, among other reasons, the athlete can perform at his best.

This was the context which served as the back drop for the seminar that the “Church and sport” Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity held in Rome from September 7-8, 2007. At the centre of the seminar’s reflection stood the figure of the sport chaplain, a key protagonist in manifesting the presence of the Church within the world of sport. Among the fifty people invited to explore this theme were sport chaplains, sport scholars, directors of Catholic sport associations, professional athletes, coaches and trainers, and volunteers from the world of youth sport, as well as the heads of the pastoral offices for sport in the national bishop conferences of Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. Through a series of talks, panel discussions, and debate, this group of representatives from twenty countries, reflected on the role of the sport chaplain. Among the particular themes that were confronted included: the educational emergency; a review of the pastoral ministry of sport to date; what it is that athletes look for in a chaplain; the concrete experiences of various sport chaplains; the strategic collaboration among national sport chaplains. Through this study, the sport chaplain emerged as a person who is *super partes* and totally dedicated to the overall good of the athletes. Consequently, the chaplain’s task consists in helping athletes to grasp the deeper meaning of their existence and to place their sporting activities within the greater perspective of their Christian vocation, while sustaining them in the practice of their sport in harmony with the faith. In today’s sporting environments that easily succumb to materialism, relativism, and the demands of top performance, the presence of the chaplain is a powerful reminder of the athlete’s dignity. In fact, a chaplain’s contact with both the players and the coaches, and his spiritual presence and guidance can help to place these athletic activities within their proper framework of personal growth and development. In this way, the chaplain lends a decisive voice to the

ongoing dialogue between the Church and the world of sport and constitutes the underlying framework for the pastoral ministry within this field. Certainly, this is not an easy task as the chaplain must know how to establish a relationship with the players and coaches that is grounded in friendship and trust without compromising his own spiritual identity and the genuineness of his apostolic mission. In other words, the chaplain must avoid being a “fan” to the players who is void of any moral or spiritual authority, or of becoming a sort of mascot that no one takes seriously.

Through the course of the seminar, it was also noted that however essential the work of the chaplain may be, he alone does not suffice in order to respond to the demands and needs of a field of apostolic action so vast and so important as that of sport. In order to evangelize this world it is absolutely necessary to employ the efforts of the very same Christian athletes whose contribution to this cause is irreplaceable. Just as the Gospel leaven, the world of sport can best be transformed from within by the testimony of sports men and women who profoundly live their faith in Jesus Christ. In this way, both on the individual level with their personal example, and collectively – as members of Catholic sports associations – these athletes can collaborate in the birth of a new culture of sport that recuperates the primacy of the person with his or her inalienable dignity and that is centred on their authentic and integral development as sons and daughters of God.

At the end of this publication of the seminar proceedings, we have included a small selection of papal discourses that further manifest the Church’s pastoral care for the world of sport. It is our hope that these texts will serve as a stimulus for further reflection on the role of the sport chaplain as well as the many opportunities within sport that await the creative missionary presence of the apostolate of the lay faithful.

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# Sport and the “educational emergency”

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The Dutch historian, J. Huizinga, said that human culture comes into being and is handed on mainly through game-playing; for him, man is “*homo ludens*”.<sup>1</sup> Along similar lines, the media prophet, M. MacLuhan, advances the thesis that one discovers the code to a culture by looking at the way a whole generation plays its games.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, polls conducted among children, adolescents and youth also manifest the prevalent role that recreational activities, particularly the practice of sport, play in their lives.

## I. SPORT AND EDUCATION: MULTIPLE MEANINGS AND AMBIGUITIES

But this does not mean that sport is free of ambiguities. Relations between sport and education have never been simple. In ancient times, gymnastics, which were an expression of vitality and an integral component in the training of the aristocratic youth, had to withstand the excesses of competitive sport. In the early Christian tradition, sport,

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<sup>1</sup> J. HUIZINGA, *Homo ludens: a study of the play element in culture*, Roy Publishers, London 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. M. McLUHAN, *Gli strumenti del comunicare*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1967; H. M. McLUHAN - B.R. POWERS, *Il villaggio globale – XXI secolo: trasformazione nella vita e nei media*, Sugarcoedizioni, Milan 1989.

understood primarily in its passive, spectator dimension, was viewed as a stumbling-block to living the faith and was even considered a form of idolatry.

The episodes of violence among spectators in our own age once again raises the question about the social, ethical and educational value of sport. Increased access to consumer goods and free time has caused sport to grow as a leisure activity known as “amateur” sport. It has led many people, youth and adults, men and women, to even become “fixated” with physical fitness to the point of giving it and the body a certain “cult” status. Politics also enter the scene making sport a means of channelling or strengthening social cohesions, political consensus, and the popularity of dominant social currents which may suit any ideologies whether democratic, totalitarian, right, left or centre.<sup>3</sup> Others also see sport simply as a means of “self-improvement” whether on a personal, relational or cultural level. Yet for a great majority of people, sport is a basic “self-betterment” activity and an attractive resource for an ongoing formation that is achieved through physical exercise and training, as well as through social norms and group interaction.<sup>4</sup>

## II. SPORT AND SOCIAL-CULTURAL ISSUES

For various reasons, sport is often a difficult resource to use properly. One reason is the lack of sound examples. Sport celebrities with their victories or scandals make the headlines and are encouraged by the media. For better or worse, sport “stars” have become models for our youngsters as well as for many adults.

Also, sports have become consumer goods – shows to watch rather than activities to play. They have become a commodity to be traded, and a tool for political manipulation of the masses. They are used to

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. PIVATO, *Lo sport del XX secolo*, Giunti, Firenze 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. BARDULLA, “Sport, turismo e mass-media: le risorse dell’educazione informale”, in: G. ANGELINI et Al., *Educare nella società complessa*, La Scuola, Brescia 1992, 183-211.

channel needs and aspirations, and to subtly create “made to measure” mindsets by those favouring certain forms of conduct in preference to others.

But it is not only the professionalization, commercialisation or politicisation of sport that threatens its educational purpose, for sport faces the same difficulties that exist in everyday life and in other associations. The exaggerated emphasis placed on success and self-fulfilment, sometimes to the point of creating a cult of self (channelled by the mass media and the dominant “neo-capitalist” and “neo-liberal” socialisation forces), is now combined with the wearing down of interpersonal and social relations, the deterioration of political and civil life, a lack of interest in the common good and a rise in organized crime.

The existential suffering of the masses and their desire to escape from these social dangers does not always find a secure exit route. These pressures – whether on an individual or collective level – can easily spill over the brink of resistance.<sup>5</sup> As a result, some people seek to unload their frustrations via sport and it becomes an escape valve for these social disorders.

### III. THE EDUCATIONAL EMERGENCY

At the same time, sport becomes a mirror and a sounding board for these maladies affecting both youth and adults; it is a kind of “litmus test”. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have to face both the complexity of a globalized world in terms of business, production and the market place, as well as the ever-invasive onslaught of information technologies. Not only have socio-economic structures and material production standards changed (efficiency, functionality, utility, productivity, subjective well-being), but life and culture are also changing. At the global level we

<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. VINNAI, *Il calcio come ideologia. Sport e alienazione nel mondo capitalista*, Guaraldi, Rimini 2003; L. TERRENI - L. OCCHINI, *Psicologia dello sport. Aspetti sociali e psicopatologici*, Guerini, Milan 2000.

express this in terms of the knowledge-based society, the “information” society, or the “digital culture”.

If we wish to overcome relativism and fragmentation on the one hand, and an exclusive and fundamentalist way of thinking on the other hand, we must believe in and practice social dialogue (cultural and interfaith dialogue). This is a dialogue that is capable of overcoming intolerance and destruction by terrorism or imperialist domination because it moves beyond prejudice, rethinking the way we form individual and group thought patterns, and because it is grounded in a cultural anthropology that recognizes the fundamental human rights of each and every person, at all times and everywhere.

Things are not easy as one has to come to grips with the following phenomenon: international economic power which over-rides regional politics creating a sense of helplessness; the prevalence of a state of flux: flows and processes (“liquidity”) rather than “consolidated” forms of culture causing an emphasis on flexibility, but also uncertainty and insecurity; a vision of time that is compressed into specific, unconnected moments, preventing us from having a sense of history and belonging; an emphasis on the “virtual” and computer images to the detriment of a sense of what is real and its limitations; the subjectivization of possibilities that were once more objective, and the overemphasis on the values of the moment, without a sense of limit and without “*fundamentum in re*”, that is to say, without objectivity, truth, or a communitarian sense of life and human existence.<sup>6</sup>

While all this applies in general terms to everyone and everywhere, it also has particular repercussions on the youth. For it is they – children, youth, young men and women – who are the first to feel the effects of globalisation, for better and for worse, in their personal,

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. AUGÉ, *Non luoghi. Introduzione a una antropologia della surmodernità*, Eleuthera, Milano 2005; Z. BAUMAN, *La società dell'incertezza*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1999; *La solitudine del cittadino globale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2000; *Dentro la globalizzazione. Le conseguenze sulle persone*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2001; *Voglia di comunità*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2001; *Modernità liquida*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002; *Una nuova condizione umana*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2004; *La vita liquida*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006.



group and community lives. They share in the opportunities provided by technological innovation and the international and worldwide market. The globalized social communications system enables everyone, and primarily young people, to access an immense volume of information, and provides them with the possibility of communicating very rapidly with people and situations near and far, virtually doing away with physical time and space, stimulating their imaginations and their subjective fantasies to the point of effacing the borderlines between the real and the virtual. The generation born after the 1990's has had to deal more with innovation and its frantic pace than with change itself (as was the case, and still is, for the adult or older generations).

Yet, the present generation, while demonstrating a considerable capacity to handle technologies and navigate the Internet and the "second life" world, also exhibits more than other generations, fragility and weakness in their relationships and in their capacity to lead free and responsible lives. (In addition, we can add to this list a deficiency in being able to reflect and conceptualize ideas.) In recent times we have seen depressing episodes, almost daily, of violence and abuse inflicted by youth on other youth, often younger than themselves, and on disabled children, and on girls simply for being girls. It would appear that the culprits have no perception of the damage they cause, no knowledge of the suffering of the victims, and believe that they can play with impunity at the expense of others, or amuse themselves irresponsibly, almost as if it was their due, glorifying in being seen by an anonymous, but morbidly curious, public on the Internet.<sup>7</sup>

In light of this epidemic of deviate behaviour that not only involves youth, many have come to the conclusion that education is in a historic "emergency" situation. The task of educating, that is to say, of helping people to grow and to develop as conscientious, free, and responsible individuals and members of society, has never been easy. But today it is more difficult than ever. At the June 2007 Conference convened by the Rome diocese on *"Education to the faith, discipleship, and witness"*,

<sup>7</sup> Cf. G. ANGELINI, *Educare si deve, ma si può?*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2002.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke about the great “educational emergency”,<sup>8</sup> and the increasing difficulties facing schools and families and every other educational organization.

A new theoretical-pedagogical reflection is needed in order to re-evaluate the ultimate aims of education or at least reflect upon its cornerstones which, up until now, have been the foundation of the Western educational culture: confidence in the individual’s capacity to exercise his freedom worthily, the human capacity to transform reality, and faith in rationality, science and technology.

“Education”, said the Pope during that meeting, “tends to be broadly reduced to the transmission of specific abilities or capacities for doing, while people endeavour to satisfy the desire for happiness of the new generations by showering them with consumer goods and transitory gratification”. This has cast a shadow over what it is “the essential purpose of education”, namely, “the formation of the person to make him or her capable of living a full life and making their own contribution to the good of the community”.<sup>9</sup>

Already several months earlier, in his address to the fourth Italian Ecclesial Conference in Verona of October 19, 2006, the Holy Father recalled that one of “the fundamental and decisive questions is that of the education of the person”. The Pontiff went on to say that “the formation of his mind must be a concern, without neglecting his freedom and capacity to love. This is why recourse to the help of Grace is necessary. Only in this way can that risk for the fate of the human family be effectively opposed, which is represented by the imbalance between the very rapid growth of our technological power and the more laborious growth of our moral resources”.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Eng. Ed. n. 25, June 20, 2007, 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Eng. Ed. n. 25, June 20, 2007, 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Opening address to the IV National Ecclesial Conference at Verona*, October 19, 2006, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Eng. Ed. n. 43, October 25, 2006, 5-8.

#### IV. THE NEED FOR AN ETHICAL-EDUCATIONAL APPROACH TO SPORTS

Can sport, with its social, civil, cultural, religious and historic dimensions,<sup>11</sup> make a specific contribution towards meeting this educational emergency? I believe that in order to answer this question in the affirmative it is not only necessary to overcome the ambivalence, ambiguity, difficulties and risks inherent in the practice of sport as such, but also to make a broad sweeping choice in favour of education that will attempt, as a preliminary step, to steer the educational potential of the individual and group practice of sport in a manner that is correct and humanly worthy. It is only in this way that sport can be a significant means of human development and a major educational resource.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, for all those involved in the direction and management of sporting activities, I would like to mention a few points that need to be taken into consideration in order to advance this choice in favour of educating through sport:

##### *The integral good of the person*

Among the many legitimate intentions that can animate sport organisations, the desire to "educate through sport", particularly in amateur youth sport (but also in semi-professional or fully professional sport) consists in procuring the growth and development of the individual, not only with regard to those values immediately related to physical activity (for example, developing their motor skills or competitiveness, the sense of corporeity, the value of working as a team, the sense of discipline and effort, playing by the rules, etc.) but also with regard to the overall, integral good of the person, taking into account their personal situation and the historical-cultural context that sur-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. KAISER, *Genius Ludi: il gioco nella formazione umana*, Armando, Rome 1995; (editor), *Gioco e sport nelle scienze dell'educazione*, Sagep Editrice, Genova 1996; *Antropologia pedagogica della ludicità*, La Scuola, Brescia 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C. NANNI, *Tempo libero, turismo, sport: in oratorio. Linee operative e indicazioni prospettiche*, in: "Quaderni della Segreteria Generale CEI", XI (2007), 12, 27-46.

rounds them. Concretely, this entails placing the person first, over and above trophies and victories, even though these are certainly not to be sneered at. Today, this also entails the ability to identify the particular human values that are to be strengthened, and conversely, to identify those perils that are to be avoided.

### *Towards an integral humanism*

Educating through sport means having a clear awareness of sport's social dimension and its contribution towards the comprehensive growth of the individual and the community. In this perspective, the personal dimension of "*mens sana in corpore sano*" is combined with a social development that favours an equitable "civil" community life while each dimension is being directed towards the sustainable development of the whole. In this way, sport is linked to and implicit in the formation of a "integral humanism" or, if you prefer, a "new humanism", not in the abstract, but one that is "made to the measure" of specific individuals and communities, and with concrete initiatives to be realized for the good of humanity.

### *Valuing cultural pluralism*

Educating through sport, especially through team sports, favours both in principle and in practice the promotion of an open, democratic and solidarity-based society. In fact, through team sports, children can learn to be tolerant of others, to accept the "otherness" of their opponents, and to reach out to those who might appear "different", and to integrate what is "non-homogeneous" to the group. The universality of sport can also favour dialogue and communication with those who think differently, teaching people not only how to peacefully co-exist (and "how to get along with others"), but it can also teach children how to "give" themselves to others and how to receive the "giving" (and the "for-giving") which comes from others. It also can favour

mutual collaboration and social integration, in solidarity with our neighbours (friends, companions, our loved ones...) as well as those who are not our neighbours for various reasons (as in the case of being opponents).<sup>13</sup>

*Emphasis on an “educational environment”*

The decision to educate through sport both requires and strengthens a sense of community. Consequently, the community is both an agent of growth, as well as a reality that in itself matures with this process. Thus there is a need for an “educational environment” or an organisational structure which has the capacity to manage sports activities and initiatives while at the same time being able to periodically evaluate itself so as to better improve its formative dimension. This will not only make education possible in the general sense but it will also equip an institution with the practical “know how” that comes from experience in order to respond to the most pressing social, human, or ecclesial needs in light of this “educational emergency” and to better counteract the widespread plague of individualism and civic apathy.

The concept of an “educational environment” demands continuity and integration between social institutions and their common educational tasks. At the ecclesial level, this requires integration of an overall plan for the pastoral ministry of sport which can be animated by the laity at the local level.<sup>14</sup> It is precisely along these lines that we can come to view sport as a type of “frontier of the new evangelisation”.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. C. NANNI, *Agonismo sportivo e educazione alla convivenza civile e democratica*, in: “Orientamenti Pedagogici”, XLII (1995), 1, 11-24.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE’S NATIONAL OFFICE FOR THE PASTORAL OF LEISURE, TOURISM, AND SPORT, *Parrocchia e pastorale del turismo, dello sport, del pellegrinaggio*, Paoline, Milan 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY, *The world of sport today: a field of Christian mission*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2006.

V. THE PERENNIAL QUESTION: “WHO WILL TRAIN THE TRAINER?”

One of the priorities for anyone interested in educating through sport – particularly when this is taken up as the prime purpose of a specific sports institution or organisation – is to adopt a training policy that not only inculcates its directors with technical aspects, but also is capable of providing human, civil, social and pedagogical training for all those who, directly and indirectly, promote and manage the practice of sport or the events associated with these leisure time activities, particularly those for young people.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore the perennial question “Who will train the trainer?” becomes especially crucial today, more than before, in view of the “*res novae*” and the multicultural character of globalisation and the prevailing climate.

Professional skills are certainly necessary, but at the same time they also need those skills that are fundamental to educators so that they can be equally competent in conducting themselves in such a way that is humanly worthy, civilly respectable and socially responsible, while also attentive to growth and maturation needs that are proper to each stage of life. Here, I would like to make a few additional observations regarding the training of the trainers.

*A team effort*

In a sporting environment that is concerned with favouring the educational and formative value of physical activity – and in particular those of Christian inspiration – there is a lot of talk about “the centrality of the child”. Although this emphasis is made with the best intentions in the world, it can run the risk of being one sided and reducing the children to mere “objects” of an “educational treatment” applied

<sup>16</sup> Cf. M. POLLO, “*L’animazione attraverso il gioco e lo sport*”, in: *Animazione sociale*, XXVII (1997), maggio, 64-71; G. Tettamanti, *Educare con lo sport*, Vivere In, Milan 2005.

by us, the adults, who are obsessively concerned with applying all the right techniques in order to reach “educational success”.

We need to correct this with a “team effort” where the child becomes a co-protagonist and co-responsible in this process (and not a mere object).

Education is not so much a matter of working “on” and “for” the children who are being educated, as it is the result of a mutual educational relationship “between” the teacher and the pupil with the goal of achieving a “competent” personalisation and a quality of life for all (including the life of the educators!). The students are not mere “objects” or “beneficiaries”, but active team players who are co-responsible for their own growth. And they have to be increasingly more engaged in this process as they mature. This is true everywhere and in every educational situation, but in sport in a particular way.

But that is not all... The educational relationship is not enclosed within a dualistic “I-you” relationship, even though this aspect is fundamental to it. Neither is it simply confined within a group that was amalgamated into a team or assembled in a laboratory. The educational relationship extends beyond this and embraces the whole breadth of life. Consequently, its supreme benchmark is not a test score but rather, humanity itself, in every form – historical, personal and cultural, past, present and future.

To say it in sporting terms, the task of education becomes a “pedagogical championship” where the educational community is not just the passive field, but also an active participant as both a player and the goal towards which all activity revolves. In this great educational “championship”, the different “teams” which come into play are the various individual and community players, each within their own sphere of competence, all interacting and collaborating together (just as soccer is made up of players with specific roles, as well as referees, linesmen, coaches, fans etc.) with their focus on the educational goal that is held in common.

The educators and trainers have the task of awakening, stimulating, and promoting, the use of freedom in pursuit of values in their stu-

dents, sustaining them and accompany them, orientating them responsibly. It is up to them to help bring into play all of the persons and components who make up this educating community: the sports associations, the families, the municipality, and the local church community.

### *The personal dimension*

This “pedagogical championship” demands that the educators and trainers themselves receive thorough and ongoing training. Here are some fundamental points to keep in mind. First of all, one can never take their eye off the task of education. It is necessary to see everything from this perspective, and the child’s education particularly. Secondly, we must give priority to a personal approach. Experience tells us that whoever wants to teach a child math needs to first know the child in his context and environment. One must know their students by their first and last name. They must consider their potential (as based on the individual and their context) as well as their current results. Taking into consideration their pupils immediate surroundings – interpreting people, facts and events – they should encourage the positive values therein and not discourage them. There is good in everyone. Or as the great educator, Don Bosco would say: “There is a point leading to goodness in everyone”.

One must also continually think, judge and act in terms of far-reaching goals and not get too bogged-down in the ordinariness of routine. On the contrary, an educator must think in terms of a continual growth, where all are being educated together, both as a community and inter-generationally. Finally, “keeping an eye on education” requires staying close to each pupil, accepting them as they are and for what they are. Cost what it may, this is the only way to stimulate youngsters to grow and to foster their personal capabilities.

### *Shifting from fear to trust*

Education is based on trust: and this requires educators to be trustworthy people who are skilled in the art of helping others, which is



what education is all about. Therefore, this requires one to be “authoritative” but not “authoritarian”! Some appropriate preconditions that create what I call a “platform” for fostering communication and facilitating trust are the following: the ability to reach out and to welcome; the capacity to listen and to dialogue; to know how to play by the rules; to know how to be near to their students but at the same time maintain a certain distance; and the patience not to expect students to be “good”, “polite” or “in our image and likeness” from the start.

Secondly, one must not expect to fix them all at once but rather to lead them little by little by directing their questions; that is to say, an educator must help them to express their questions in words, helping to expand upon these questions, elevating them to their highest and most beautiful expression.

Education involves a personal decision; it requires taking a personal stand with regards to one’s own life and regarding the life of others. To be consistent in how one thinks and how one acts, to be faithful in one’s relationships, to be true to one’s ideals, proposals, duties and tasks – in a word, to be responsible – is not any easier today than yesterday. In fact, I would like to mention four obstacles that need to be especially overcome today in order to be a witness for the youth and to establish an authoritative and educational presence among them.

We also have to *overcome a certain idea and practice of relationships* which is often reduced merely to its empirical, public, “correct”, “horizontal” dimension, neglecting the dimension of interiority and personal diversity, or the “vertical” dimension that relates to truth and the transcendent. Or, on the other hand, we must also avoid a relationship restricted solely to the interpersonal “I-you” dimension, not open to the personal, institutional and cultural “we” dimension.

Similarly, we have to move beyond an *emphasis on action rather than being*. In today’s performance and efficiency based society, it is common to think of, and to attribute value to, what one has rather than who one is; to focus on the externals rather than on the ontological: roles rather than persons; processes rather than substance; change and

innovation rather than continuity and durability; standardisation rather than regional identity; appearing rather than being; the present rather than the future; the façade rather than the profound identity of the other; functionality rather than the true basis of relationships. In such a perspective, what is spontaneous and free, the moment of contemplation, the deepest sense of being, are easily overshadowed.

Lastly, educators must overcome the myth of “eternal adolescence”. Young at heart: yes; immaturity: no. A childish attitude that consists in always living for adventures and for whatever comes their way has caused many adults to prolong their adolescence to the point of never growing up. In reality, such a mentality is harmful both in itself (as it never allows one to mature and enjoy what is beautiful and proper at each stage of life) and for the youth, as it robs them of finding adequate adult role models in their parents and educators and in the other adults with whom they are in contact. In lieu of this deficiency of sound examples to follow, the youth are turning to the “virtual”, or to celebrities to seek inspiration and orientation.

## VI. AIMING HIGH

Baden Powell, one of those English educators noted for being a pragmatist, in his last will and testament, invited the scouts “to leave the world a little better than how they found it”. In educating through sport, as well as educating in the family, in school, and in the parish or group settings, the time has come to aim high. We cannot be content with the past or status quo, but must seek a higher perspective. While a “reactionary pedagogy” is necessary to respond to the most urgent needs of youth, educators must also seek a long term “proactive pedagogy” that anticipates these needs by helping the youth to discover the value and meaning inherent in these activities.

Educators must also go beyond a pedagogy concerned with personal growth in general to one that focuses on the actual goals to be reached. In the world of sport, this can be translated into an overall

concern for the good of all of those involved in sport, and not just the individual. This means keeping in mind the aims and goals that the practice of sport seeks to achieve in all sectors: the personal, the human, the social, the cultural, the institutional, and ecclesial level.

Lastly, educators must reach beyond a pedagogy “at the service of the individual” – that is, one simply concerned with their personal growth – with a pedagogy that “promotes service”. That is to say, they should foster a pedagogy that provokes an awareness of a sense of mission and vocation, helping the youth to recognize their talents and abilities and to place them at the service of the community, participating and collaborating actively in building a more caring society, more open and favourable to all. In Gospel terminology and within the perspective of the salvation of the world, this is the building of the “civilization of love” that is en route towards the Kingdom of God, where justice and truth will live definitively and completely.

## VII. A LIFE THAT BEARS WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL

Today more than ever, in a historical context that requires us to speak of a “new evangelization” and before the religious pluralism that surrounds us, it is necessary to take into account and bear witness to the “Christian difference”. A proactive educational stance demands that we as teachers, parents, and coaches not merely call ourselves Christians but that we truly live as Christians, make our Christianity something very concrete and real, in all areas of our life, but especially in that of sport.<sup>17</sup>

This demands that we not only have a sufficient and up-to-date knowledge of this “*patrimonium fidei*” in its fundamental points, but also that we advance from a level of religious education equivalent to that of first Holy Communion a level of a mature adult; today’s culture

<sup>17</sup> Cf. ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE’S COMMISSION FOR THE PASTORAL OF LEISURE, TOURISM AND SPORT, Pastoral note *Sport e vita cristiana*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 1995.

demands that we should possess at least a minimal level of Christian culture if not a deep profound faith. We are in need of “well-made Christians”! In fact cultural and inter-religious dialogue will not make much progress without a clear and profound Christian identity.

But on a level still more personal and more profound, it is absolutely necessary that the Christian faith become the very heart of a deep personal spirituality, because today more than ever, education is dependent upon the personal witness of the individual and the community. What is much needed today is an intelligence that is spiritually creative, and above all bears witness to the goodness of the Gospel, that is rooted in the essential, in Christ and his spirit and in the horizons delineated in the Our Father and its seven petitions.<sup>18</sup>

In this perspective, I would like to call to mind the example of Jesus the Teacher, who in his very actions made it a point to always make himself available for others, always going out to meet others, with the desire of establishing a rapport of “salvation”, of being a “good Samaritan”. We can recall how he freed people from evil, consoled them in their suffering, shared personally in the hopes and desires of those who approached him to ask him for something (even those who approached him with a “bad conscience” or malicious intent). Jesus accepted people as they were and attended their requests. By well thought-out questions and active dialogue, he was able to draw people out of themselves into the “horizon of salvation”.

When there is not an “apriori” hardness of heart with those with whom he is speaking, he shows himself to be more understanding than condemning, while never “justifying” their erroneous words or behaviour. In him, people always found a new path that was far more fulfilling than the rest. The degree of commitment he required of them depended on their personal situation and capacity. To some he required a certain degree of goodness as manifested in his words: “Don’t sin anymore”, “You also do the same”, “Do this and you will live”. Whereas,

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE’S Pastoral note “*Rigenerati per una speranza viva*” (1 Pt 1,3), in: “Notiziario CEI”, vol. 4 (2007), 143-172.

to others, he invites them to follow him with all the radicalness of the Gospel: “Come also and work in my vineyard”; “Sell all, and give the money to the poor”; “Go out to all the world and proclaim the Good News”.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to end with a quote from the founder of the Catholic Union of Italian high school teachers, Gesualdo Nosenno. What he says here to educators, I would like to extend to coaches, trainers, volunteers, and all those who work with youth through sports: “Teachers: if you slow down you will lose them, if you get discouraged, they will weaken, if you sit down they will lie down, if you doubt they will despair, if you go ahead of them they will pass you by, if you give them your hand they will give their lives, if you pray for them they will become saints! May you always be an educator who never gives up, who never discourages, who never doubts, who never goes too far ahead, who always offers his hand, and who always prays!”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. G. CAVALLOTTO (ed.), *Prima la persona. Gesualdo Nosenno: una vita a servizio dell'educazione*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome 2000.



## The pastoral ministry of sport: taking stock and looking ahead

CARLO MAZZA\*

It is curious to notice that within the specializations in theology today, there is not a specific sector dedicated to the so-called “Pastoral ministry of sport”. Actual trends in theology don’t seem to be fascinated by an aspect of life that involves millions of people, sportsmen, fans, spectators.<sup>1</sup> However, the lack of reflection on the part of theologians doesn’t stem from a negative attitude or mental reservations on the part of the Church.

Rather, this is owed to the intrinsic difficulty of how to apply theological reflection to the sport phenomenon, especially when considered as a social and cultural phenomenon important for “understanding” and “communicating” the “mystery of salvation”. Because of this, even such a popular aspect of human life, such as sport, is considered void of “appeal” with respect to a real “theological” treatise. And for this reason, there are not many theologians willing to apply this “faith-seeking-reason” reflection to sport.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore this present effort is merely an attempt that is both modest and limited from the methodical point of view. It simply seeks to sketch a rough outline of the pastoral ministry of sport with a minimal level of dignity, agreeable by a certain consensus, and with some degree of tested effectiveness on the practical level. In addition, this attempt

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. EUROPEAN UNION, *White paper on sport*, presented on 11.7.2007, found at [http://ec.europa.eu/sport/whitepaper/wp\\_on\\_sport\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/sport/whitepaper/wp_on_sport_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. MAZZA (editor), *Fede e sport*, Piemme, Casale Monf. 1994.

supposes a few unavoidable assumptions, namely: the positive evaluation and acceptance from the Magisterium of the Church; the possibility of a theological foundation, and an initialized experimentation – although ongoing – on the part of the Church in this field.

After a preliminary and survey investigation, it seems that these above mentioned premises can be retained as most probable of certainty. We follow their course, mentioning each time their degree of feasibility and their level of implementation to date.

#### THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF SPORT IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

At this point I think it is proper to begin with John Paul II's explicit desire for the Christian community to "be in the front ranks in this area, in order to plan a special apostolate adapted to the needs of athletes and especially to promote sports which can create the conditions of a life rich in hope".<sup>3</sup> The words of the Holy Father evidently manifest an invitation to respond to the "needs of athletes" and to devise a special pastoral ministry that can sustain a practice of sport rich in "hope". In reality, it is surely a matter of launching a pastoral initiative "ex novo", which first aims at defining the original status of the pastoral ministry of sport, and, secondly, expresses a specific method and ultimately verifies its feasibility with regards to the evangelizing action of the Church. In a nutshell, this is what I will try to propose with this presentation.

I believe that the pastoral ministry of sport can be situated in both the theoretical and practical horizon of the Church's "mission". As a matter of fact, it is only in the context of mission – considered as an action of evangelization addressed to men and women on the personal level and in the essential relation with their community – that the Church finds the real meaning for her presence, appreciation and con-

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to participants of the Convention on "Sport, Faith and Ethics" of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, November 25, 1989 in: "L'Osservatore Romano" Weekly Eng. Ed., n. 2, January 8, 1990, 5.



crete intervention with regards to the specific times and conditions of humanity. Nestled organically within the human environment – with all of its manifold activities, and multiple needs for self-improvement, success and satisfaction – the Church's aim is that of helping man to reach these many expectations while maintaining precise reference to his transcendent goal of salvation.

In this perspective, sport takes on an important significance: in the modern society, it represents a way of life, a horizon of varying interests, a mix of opportunities, an assortment of relations that create a “world of its own”, with its particular rules, beliefs, culture, and authority. With its extreme technological and technocratic rationalizations and with its global media visibility, sport today is in such a position that it can influence everyday life, from work to leisure.

In reality, if the pastoral care of sport takes upon itself tout court this sense of mission, it is consequently engaged in the evaluation of a specific action of the Church, because the evangelic mandate of “announcing the Word of salvation” to all the world extends in particular to where men and women live out their lives, where they manifest the gifts they have received from the Lord as well as their limits, where they realize their aspirations, talents, hopes and projects.

In fact, given its primordial roots, sport is a “world” inhabited by people with a zest for life, universally fascinated by a practice and a performance that cannot be compared to any other human activity. Since sport is characterized by principles and values, convictions and customs, practices and gestures, languages and knowledge, it appears to naturally respond to the needs of human beings and of post-modern society; it can even be considered the faithful mirror of daily life.

Therefore, the pastoral care of sport shouldn't be considered as something extra-ordinary, or an exception to the rule, even if it is in some degree a specialization. Rather, it should be considered part of the ordinary pastoral action of the Church that simultaneously considers the different sectors of human life in a holistic and inclusive vision, without preconceptions. This criterion is based on simple empirical-practical observations, consequential to common reflections that are

typical of pastoral judgments aimed at effective proposals. In reality this is about the correct use of the classical method proposed by the Social Doctrine of the Church of “seeing” – “judging” – “acting”, according to the wise discretion regulated by the so-called “integrated pastoral approach”, where each aspect of the pastoral care finds its harmonic functionality and its authentic finalization.

On the other hand, it is evident that eventual *aporias* will emerge not only at the “seeing” level but also at the “judging” and “acting” level, due in part to a lack of “theological-cultural” reflection and because of the precarious and confusing practical results in this pastoral field on the local level. Those who affirm the contrary possess a pastoral vision that is not in sync with the context which we are examining, as it is without any empirical verification as to what is actually being done at the level of the local Christian community, with regards to sport as an intergenerational and global phenomenon. Having priests who are sports fans is not enough to say that we are realizing a pastoral ministry to sport. Nor does the practice of sport in the parish oratory, as valuable and meritorious as it is, satisfy the appeal made by John Paul II mentioned above.

If the pastoral ministry of sport is a “special application” within the “ordinary” pastoral ministry, this implies an understanding of both the nature of pastoral ministry and what the adjective “special” stands for in particular. In fact, if we take for granted the *quaestiones disputatae* referring to the authenticity of the pastoral theology in the academic field, we cannot do the same what is “special” regarding the pastoral care of sport as this has to be specified, grounded, and qualified in ecclesial praxis. Even within the field of pastoral care, it’s a matter of passing from the phenomenon to the response. And this step must not be taken for granted. In other words, passing from what appears as an inconvertible pastoral datum to the solution: to what is supposed to be done or is already done in the context of Church’s pastoral action.

In fact, in the case of sport, the phenomenon tends to arouse interest, passion, curiosity; the response calls for an effective initiative, carried out by real persons in concrete circumstances. If the phenomenon

pertains to an abstract knowledge of reality, the response requires practical projects, objectives, people, means, time, methods, etc. In other words, what is needed is a “complex and organic system” of reference that can provided the “necessary” foundation for a real, authentic, incisive, adequate and long-lasting “evangelizing action”.

Obviously, the pastoral action is not just a simple list of “things to do”; it’s not accomplished just by equipping or refining a functional “tool”; the application of reason, organization, and measurement are not enough. The pastoral action is more akin to a harmonic symphony where the dominant chord is the “work of God” as an occurrence of grace and the benevolent manifestation of His merciful love. Here, the co-protagonist is all that stems from the “work of man” while maintaining a correlation that respects the primacy of God and the freedom of man.

Without this clear correlation, there would emerge an excessive human instrumentalisation or the forcing of the will from without. From this reason we can clearly deduce the urgency of a “mission theology” for sport. In fact, there needs to be an interpretative “guide” and a “line” of orthodoxy with respect to a “pastoral action” that is in conformity to God’s salvific plan and consistent with the understanding of the sportsman beyond every risk of simply “doing” or even of “overdoing”.

From the heart of this prospective, we can see how the conditions for a serious and fertile pastoral ministry of sport hinge upon the decision of placing it completely within the Church’s “mission”, so that it is, on one hand, respectably legitimated, and, on the other, not marginalized nor overexposed with reference to the fundamental task of evangelization. In our opinion, this “special” pastoral ministry needs to be formed and supported by five convictions like five great trestles which are capable, feasible, effective and long-lasting, building a “bridge” that can connect God to man and man to God, through sport.

## *A theological foundation*

This intervention does not pretend to develop in a highly rigorous or exhaustive way all those theological points that would be expected from a specialized dissertation. I will limit myself to giving an essential outline, under the profile of an “attempt”. In doing so, I hope to open the “intelligence of the faith” to an initial discussion that must be further explored in all its breadth and depth.

First of all, we must consider an empirical datum, i.e. the phenomenon of the body. The first point of reference for all sporting activity cannot be separated from its immediate and natural fundament which is the body. Starting from the body, sport expresses its nature, form, quality, potential, plasticity, resistance, duration, and all that the corporal dimension represents under the anatomical-physiological profile. Borrowing a phrase from ancient metaphysics, we can say that the body is literally the “*materia signata quantitate*”. However, the corporal aspect, while describing sport by its external appearances – by what is manifested – doesn’t say everything about the body. The exhaustiveness of meanings concerning the body are studied primarily by the human sciences, but are also the subject of investigation by the philosophical, anthropological and theological sciences.

Therefore, from the intrinsic relation between body and sport comes the necessity of elaborating a map of values that becomes constitutive for the formulation of sport’s principle of humanization and its unavoidable reference to the psychosomatic unity of the human being, from which sport attains and fulfils its identity. The principle of humanization and the fact of considering “man as unity in a duality”<sup>4</sup> bring into consideration the anthropological profile of sport and, in a second instance, the creationistic-eschatological profile of man who practices sport. Therefore, it’s a question about establishing how sport intervenes in the development and growth of the human

<sup>4</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical letter *Deus caritas est*, n. 25.

person and how the “athletic-body” interfaces with the Judeo-Christian faith with respect to creation and redemption. It is enough to recall, in this regards, the words of St. James: “The body without the spirit is dead” (*Jas* 2:26).

After a preliminary evaluation, we can note the emergence of some congruencies of value that a meticulous theological anthropology can easily outline and a broad soteriological theology will also affirm as possible to uphold. In the context of a deeper reflection, sport will also reveal a transcendent dimension and it will not be difficult to find visible traces of the salvific plan of God therein as a reflection of His eternal beauty.

Secondly, the “theological” view always refers to the “human person” who plays. Without a doubt, sport is a human activity. So, as expression of man, also sport is subject to the “ontological deficit” typical of persons who bear the consequences of being and acting. This “deficit” is perceived and identified according to ethical, religious and cultural categories, by which each human action is determined and judged. In this sense, human activity is marked at its origin by an intrinsic weakness, by its dramatic limitation.

Within the Catholic perspective, faith teaches that to compensate for this real and insuperable “gap”, the believer has to invoke and receive the mercy of the redeeming salvation offered by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. In this outlook, the human abyss generated by original sin is definitely bridged, and men have been restored by grace to a condition of total integrity. With this gap now overcome and this gift received, man and his activities are now placed in reference to the level of perfection. This is also the case of sport, which, by its nature, tends to reach levels of excellence if not of perfection.

The relevance of this call was underlined by Benedict XVI in the Letter sent to Cardinal Severino Poletto in occasion of the Winter Olympic Games in Turin, 2006. The Pope writes: “Among the various human activities is sport, itself awaiting to be illuminated by God through Christ so that the values it expresses are purified and elevated

both at the individual and collective level”.<sup>5</sup> The verb “awaiting” refers to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans where he declares that “the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God...For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (*Rm* 8:19-22).

If all of creation suffers “the pains of childbirth” for the original fall and in view of its regeneration, then all of human experience also feels this need. Thus all of human activity, in its general and in its specific expressions -sports included – necessarily welcomes the redeeming action of Jesus. These are in need of an efficient and purifying intervention and elevation that can occur when one acts under the power of grace. Indeed, we can perceive this “groaning and suffering” in the common experience of one’s own limit. Particularly in sport, limit manifests itself as an obstacle: like an invincible hurdle, yet always that which must be overcome.

Thirdly, I wish to make reference to Genesis where we read that “God created man in his image” (cf. *Gen* 1:26). The human person is constitutively “stamped” by the creative hand of God and is a manifestation of His “glory”. The term “glory” is heavily charged with meaning concerning the nature of God and His communicative power in favour of man. The human person feels God’s glory within him, or, at times, as if its “weight” were resting upon him. In different forms – through human communication, human creativity and practical action – man manifests this glory. In fact, it has been said with effectiveness and truth that “the glory of God is a living man”.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, within the totality of the universe, it is most of all in man, that the glory of the Lord is made visible.

Apostolic tradition proclaims that man’s body is the “temple of God”, preserving the divine presence and manifesting the glory of He who resides in it. Here the body is not considered only for what it

<sup>5</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message to Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, in occasion of the 20th Winter Olympic Games, dated November 29, 2005*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” English Ed. N. 6, February 8, 2006, 2.

<sup>6</sup> IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus Haereses*, Book IV, 20, 7; SC 100, 648.

reveals but also for what it conceals: the mystery of God and the mystery of man. For this reason St. Paul writes: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?...Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...therefore glorify God in your body” (cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20).

In this perspective, sport assumes a unique and singular importance: that of “manifesting” the glory of God through the utmost gratuitousness of the sporting action in its beauty, its harmony of forms, its perfection of movement. Man realizes himself through his body and, in doing so, manifests a sort of “epiphany” of God. Consequently, from this there emanates an air of sacredness that inspires awe and respect, and which allusively refers to the beauty, truth and goodness of God.

The three “theological” connotations that precede our reflection on the pastoral ministry of sport, cannot exhaust the vast horizon implied in such a theological-pastoral perspective. Through the light of the Spirit, these indicate a path to follow, while excluding others; they offer a correct and attentive re-interpretation of revelation while bringing a concrete newness to the geniality of evangelization.

### *The anthropological profile*

It is evident that the sport phenomenon takes its real starting point from the hermeneutic framework typical of the so-called “anthropological sciences”. This is due to both the nature of these human gestures and to the issues concerning its complex evolution with regards to modern view of humanity, from which new lifestyles and new individualistic ethics derive. Consequently, the characteristics that emerge reveal how sport, far from being just a physical-motor “datum”, embraces other dimensions as vast as the pharmaceutical, nutritional, psychological, socio-cultural and neurosciences.

Our anthropological inquiry has to be enlarged to include such areas as: the new rationality, modern human needs, the advance in biotechnologies, training procedures, the media influence, the transfor-

mation of the status of the athlete to a celebrity, the massive financial investments and the lucrative commercial and merchandising opportunities. This synthetically outlined panorama has an important role in forming public opinion, which is often auto-referential or shaped by advertising and media campaigns. Unfortunately, this tends to passively homologate mentalities and life styles.

A few questions will help us interpret the issue at hand. What is the aim of an anthropological reflection on sport? What does it say about today's sport phenomenon – so pervasive and diversified in its forms and levels of practice, but at the same time so homogeneous with regards to its cultural references, consumer motivations, organizational logics, and in its widely diffused expectations? Which identity of “man” emerges from its continual practice and from the aims that are expected of sport at present and in the future? If anthropology has as its subject man together with his historical-cultural evolution, his forms of public life, the languages and the meanings related to his coexistence on the territory with other races, etc., how is it able to trace a framework of the real “anthropological” condition of sport?

These questions indicate the complexity of the issue and the real difficulty in finding an outline able of receiving a vast theoretical and practical consensus. In this regard, I will just list some general considerations, even if not really generic, to identify subjects, areas and spheres that, directly or not, influence the “sportsman” and determine his particular “*quidditas*”.

The first point concerns the relationship between sport and the human being. This relationship is incorporated into and designed on the person in the concreteness of his physical and generational conformation, his sensorial-emotional reactivity, his endowment of will-determination, his intellectual-cognitive ability and his social capacity. Therefore sport includes in a single and global act the multidimensional reality of the person, putting the person “in the game” with all his faculties and enabling him to verify the result of his performance under different profiles, in the internal and external reflection of himself.



A second point concerns the relationship between sport and those figures and elements needed for its realization. More in detail, we distinguish: the specialist (trainers, physiotherapist, doctor, companion, press agent, manager, etc.); the biochemical substances of different nature involved (nutritional, functional foods, synthetic drugs, etc.); the technical instruments (functional or specialist according to the different disciplines); media influence (information, comments, interviews, gossip, market, etc.). We are in front of a rich and multiple scenario that includes, at the different levels of operation, the interest and programming of specialized and professional subjects, different technological and experimentation domains, research and application labs, and academic masters and university training.

A third point concerns the relationship between sport and the “human environment”. Here we have to include the various environments that are involved and interested in the sports practice that are qualified as “emotional and sensitive places” of sport, such as: the sport community, the group of athletes, the fans and the clubs that organize them, the families, the “world” of those in charge of social communication, the managers and workers of the public and private sports facilities, the people in charge of the public security, etc. This wide and composite “vital environment” supports sport, conditions its functioning, keeps the level of competition high and qualifies its social consensus, security and general order.

It goes without saying that the anthropological values seen in the “points” described above directly or indirectly intervene with a cultural reference-point that works as a support: they have to be analyzed separately then correlated into the pastoral “action”.

### *The ethical dimension*

Sport activity, by its intrinsic nature, touches the ethical dimension as a human activity involving free choice, responsibility and a set of rules. There's no doubt that sport has an “ethical sense” and an ethical dimension. In reality we ask ourselves concretely, how ethics can be

combined with sporting activity, what influence do they have on the entire practice of the competition, how they define professionalism, how they evaluate a sports organization, what impact do ethics have on the economy concerning sports and communication, what limits do they impose in using certain foods, medicines, technologies, etc.

As it is known, the ethical question implies a conscience illuminated by values and capable of sure discernment. Both prepare a judgment able of defining the adaptation of sports action to the inalienable dignity of the person and to the intrinsic nature of sport in general. Since ethics represent an exigent criterion of "acting in sport", they produce sport's motivations, behaviours and practices worthy of man and able of giving a high esteem to sport, preventing implosions and drifts of any type.

Here, the real ethical challenge in sports is revealed. In fact, the sporting ethos is not an abstract dimension, but it concerns first of all the person who practices sport and his necessary environmental and cultural context. In this regard, the specific profiles are pointed out, in coherent relation between them, such as: the values of corporeity, the exigencies of the full development of the person, the sporting rules, the relationship between the people involved, the correctness of information, the use of training methods and techniques, the selection of medical-sanitary personnel. The correlation invoked assures that the horizon of values is shared and recognized by the so-called "sports community". Otherwise, we will tend toward a decline of sport, invalidated by narcissistic subjectivism, pragmatic individualism, growing materialization, ethical relativism all "ideological" forms that threaten sports identity.

It is therefore a question of putting into action some concordant and strategic criteria.

On the one hand, it is necessary to elaborate a general interpretative criterion that we can call "sports ethical principle", an initial generating principle for every activity, thought or action, that goes through the "sport dimension of life" with all the imaginable implications. This principle is seen as a certain judgment criterion and it is based on the

non negotiable dignity of the human being and on the non fungible integrity of life.

On the other hand, it is necessary to educate the conscience with the “essential sports values” as a first condition for starting and consolidating an “ethical mentality” in sport, able of producing coherent acts and positive and virtuous dispositions, where the *discrimen* between good and evil is evident. The sporting “values” are not just good opinions, but are necessarily implied in the very nature of sport. They have to be signalled out and made tangible, known and experimented, under the watchful and sharp guide of the conscience, in a context worthy of man and according to a clear vision of truth, justice and the objective good.

Finally, outlining a systematic table of “virtuous acting” in sports seems indispensable. Its purpose is that of building up the “good and worthy life”, rich in passion, discipline, and specific skills, according to a set of sporting virtues such as loyalty, temperance, respect of oneself and of others, moderation, a sense of one’s limits, and altruism. From here, there stems the urgency not only for an ethical and sectoral code, but also for people to live a life that is responsible, joyful, competitive, rich in significant relationships, and judicious with respect a persuasive cultural of being that is completely centred on success.

In a society devoid of values by consumer and nihilist distortions, sport manifests all the more the urgency of placing again at centre stage the ethical dimension considered as the necessary source from which we can draw the motivational lifeblood and the deterrent capable of checking the ruinous deviations that threaten the athlete (infringement, violations, doping, violence, etc.) at different levels of specialization and competition, and are harmful for sport itself. Here, pastoral initiative finds a favourable and propitious ground.

### *The educational purpose*

According to a classic approach to thought and action, most of all in the Catholic field, sport has always found its most noble aim in the

organic support it gives to a pedagogical program for adolescence and youth. In an age in which, as it is said, we are experiencing such an alarming educational crisis in the “universe of values” to the point of this being considered a “global issue”, the pedagogical role of sports seems not only correct and desirable, but also absolutely necessary and not to be postponed.

Certainly the “educational question” considers sport in its “public role” as a promoter of the common good and of citizenship, but more importantly it values its “personal role” since it is deeply related to the development of the person, (lifestyle, behavior, cultural context, etc.). For this and other reasons, the importance of sport in the educational field calls for the competent attention of the Christian community and the investment of the best human and material resources, in particular in planning the harmonious growth of adolescence and young people.

As we can see, a massive anthropological change is occurring among the new generations. A change that distances them even more from the precedent and following generations and that is essentially “caused by bio-psychic factors (in the beginning of the 1900’s the pubertal break arrived at the age of 17, now between the age of 11 and 12), the irruption of the web, the liquation of the social relationships and tradition”.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, sport cannot simply make note of this in passive way as it would be unacceptable to continue with its practice while ignoring these anthropological changes.

Therefore sport, as a notable anthropological and social indicator, is directly involved and has to know how to envision and produce educational programs capable of facing the new emergencies, alone and together with institutions such as schools, family and, when possible, the Church. Furthermore, it seems to be commonly held that sport, on the strength of its *ludic* and appealing nature and of its fluidity and practicalness, is ever more in a position to efficiently balance the needs

<sup>7</sup> G. COMINELLI, “Cavour oggi griderebbe: libera scuola in libero stato” in: *Alza lo sguardo*, <http://alzalosguardo.blogspot.com/2007/06/cavour-e-francini-oggi-griderebbero.html>, (posted June 23, 2007).

of freedom and discipline, creativity and rationality, individual achievement and social integration, which today's changes make all the more stringent.

In reality, we have to admit that also in sport, an educational omen is much easier than the educational 'praxis' because, in the ultimate analysis, it isn't immediately evident what "educating through sport" really means with regards to successfully "developing" all of a person's talents and future possibilities. Sometimes we have superficially thought that mere "playing" could be enough to educate and be educated. Today we are more judicious and critical in the conviction that engaging sport in the educational process implies a more competent vision of sport and of the child athlete who is to be educated; we have a more organic and focused approach to the real ways sport can help to reach the final objective.

But this is not the right place to voice additional dismay about the complex relation between "sport and education". Here, even if briefly, I just want to mention some crucial sport-pedagogy problems of pastoral interest.

If sport intends to be educative, it has to favour the person's "developmental stage" and "individual character". The two references imply a type of sport that is individualized, focused and consistent with the specific conditions of the subject. We are then dreaming of a "sport adapted to the subject", as it is at a professional level. But without taking this level into account, if sport wants to educate, it has to remain in conformity to the subject's conditions, with programs that respond to qualities, aptitudes and personal experiences and well defined technical-athletic criteria.

If sport wants to educate, it has to be able to avail of "highly trained" people, that is to say true "educators" who are prepared not only in technical matters but also enriched with a humanity that is cultivated, mature, and responsible. It is not about finding "academically" equipped people, but rather, people who are "passionately" concerned with accompanying athletes in an evolutionary process that begins with an initial agonistic tension, rooted in a self centred determination, and

passes through a deeper questioning by a subject whose self identity is not yet well-defined. We hope that those who accompany these athletes, well aware of their lofty mission, be, first and foremost, inspiring educators before being technical trainers or coaches.

If sport wants to educate it has to know how to combine play on the field with life off the field and with its own terminology. In the end, it's about creating a harmonious and virtuous interplay that is capable of respecting and distinguishing the three fields – life, game, sport – each with their own autonomy. At the same time, it does not seek to separate them artificially but to coordinate them with wisdom, measure and proficiency. Here, the “educational” aspect plays a central and original role as it draws out the good from personal abilities, worthy intentions, material instruments, experiences, cultural traditions and spiritual sensitivities.

Obviously, the “educational priority” as applied to sport requires a long term, broad based approach with adequate ways and means for control. It is a complex and ongoing work that has need of well equipped and defined “fields”, and willing and united “workers” who are endowed with patience and enthusiasm. Pastoral efforts in this specific field are very promising as there is much to be gained by the many opportunities and multiple levels of implementation.

### *Spirituality in “the world of sports”*

The pastoral approach to the “phenomenon” and the world of sport must necessarily entail a care for its spiritual dimension. This affirmation is founded upon the classic definition of the person, as living *organon*, dynamic and historical, made of “spirit, soul and body” (Cf. *I Thes* 5:23). Being a creature called to perfection, man intrinsically belongs to the spiritual dimension. From this point of view, all criticisms that tend to devaluate or deny the “spiritual” profile in sports err in that they consider this a mere product of an imposed structure or ideological prejudice.

According to a clear Catholic view and after what has been said

above, sport, as it is practiced by the person, reveals a “spiritual dimension” that, just like the “corporeal dimension”, needs to be cultivated, incremented, and significantly “implemented” in the sports practice, while avoiding a commingling or an overlapping, in which these roles and their proper moments are confused. On the other hand, we have to stress that “a spirituality of sport” is not an artificial replacement of a sports mentality with particular sacred signs (even if these are not to be eliminated as they are legitimate personal expressions). Rather, it is that which inspires this sporting mentality from the inside, just as the soul does for the body, offering it a higher quality and deeper meaning. Just a few clarifications also in this case:

To those who practice sport, even if at different levels, it is clear that when sport is seen only in the horizon of corporeality and material instrumentality it has many negative consequences. In fact, when this narrow vision is applied to sport activity, it causes a degeneration of the naturalness, transparency, beauty and gratuitousness of sport. Consequently, many other problems arise in the area of personal motivations and at the existential level: the seduction of success, with the persuasive drive of advancing one’s career through the use of drugs, and, finally, the temptation of corruption. In order to face these dangers, a normative deterrent is not enough if it’s not supported by strong ethical and spiritual inspirations.

Moreover, a search for meaning continues to arise in both youth and adult athletes. This stems from the sports practice and with the interaction of the same, and contributes to the quest for higher and more meaningful reasons for the simple “practice of sports”. This personal need frequently causes states of anxiety, dissatisfaction, isolation and the consequent phenomena of alienation, desolation and psychological trauma. A correct spiritual harmony of the athlete highly contributes to an overall personal balance, a honest competition, the acceptance of one’s limits and an openness to fraternity.

A “spirituality of sport” appears as an obvious need. It has to be created according to the athlete and it has to be proposed in its “theological” integrity without admitting magical or mystifying forms, with-

out giving indulgence to sacred “gestures” or fostering superstitious illusions. While respecting personal feelings and religious “experiences”, the proposal of spirituality in sport aims at establishing a transcendent consciousness that gives a deeper sense to the sporting life, placing God within it as the ultimate point of reference. This requires a real and ineluctable foundation that can orientate the athlete towards a holiness of life, taking inspiration from the one and only model, Jesus Christ, who John Paul II defines as “God’s true athlete”.<sup>8</sup>

We can see how a spirituality of sport made “incarnate” becomes a source of light, wisdom and farsighted vision in facing the problems related to sport; it becomes the “place” where we can experiment attitudes in line with the Gospel; it promotes educational and catechetical formation and facilitates the celebration of the Lord’s Day, participating in the Sacred Eucharist, according to the most appropriate circumstances, times and places. In this proactive perspective, a spirituality of sport tends to form in athletes a sensitivity towards what is of real and endless value, namely, the recognition of the “Glory of God” in sport, gratitude to the Creator for all the beautiful things given to humanity, and the building of solidarity and fraternity.

There is anthropological shift taking place in advanced societies that could be more beneficial in as much as it is a more fluent, synthetic and unified approach with regard to the sports practice. Taking into consideration the positive aspect of this cultural change, it can help us to better understand sport as a unifying exercise of the subject in which we have a fruitful harmonization of the components of “spirit, soul and body” already mentioned. In order to uphold this dynamism, we have to make room for the human spirit as an integral part of this equation. In such a perspective, soul, spirit and body appear equally co-present and active in their specific function, coordinated in light of the overall perfection of the sports practice. From here we can deduce how a well equipped spirituality, while adequately cautious, and fittingly inte-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily during the Jubilee for sports men and women*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Ed., n. 44, November 1, 2000, 1.



grated into athletic exercise, can be something good not only for sport itself but also for the whole “eudemonia” of the person. This being said, we can also easily see how sport needs a real and efficient spirituality if it wants to remain a human phenomenon that is comprehensive to the totality of the person, charged with deeper meaning, as a propitiator of convivial cultures, and a source of individual and common goods that seek a “civilization of justice love and peace”. Here, the pastoral intervention is directly united to the overall aim of Christian education.

In summary, we can say that the “pastoral care of sport” expresses an “ancillary” aspect when compared to overall pastoral care while remaining in perfect sync with the Church’s “mission”. In fact, it is often presented as a “special pastoral action” that harmonizes with the Church’s initiative in this complex phenomenon called modern culture.

In order to be believable and well-founded, the pastoral care for sport has need of a specific “theological” investment, an “anthropological” qualification, an “ethical” valorisation, a “pro-educational” stance and an ongoing “spiritual” cultivation. We can say that these five “arches” constitute the “structure” of a pastoral ministry suitable for sport.

## II. TAKING STOCK OF THIS PASTORAL MINISTRY TO DATE

To attempt to “take stock” of the pastoral ministry of sport to date is very difficult and risky and maybe even empirically impossible due to the scarcity of general information and statistical elements subject to a homogeneous evaluation. But most of all, any attempt that tries to categorize the pastoral care of sport in its existing forms runs the risk of making excessive intellectual and retroactive operations or in any case an analysis that is largely debatable from the formal and historical-practical point of view.

On the other hand, some reasoning shows that, when the Church began to be interested in sport, a sort of “Catholic history” of sport

started to be written. Obviously the Church was driven first of all by “educational” and “pastoral” reasons and not with the intention of “kidnapping” sport as a type of lure or marketing tool. For our present “attempt” it is correct to make a distinction between the “educational” and “pastoral” implications in order to have a more objective “assessment”, and to outline, at the very least, the “processes” that took place, the “figures” involved and the “acquisitions” made.

No matter what the solution to the described perplexities is, I will try to sketch an outline in view of a rational “assessment”, summarizing five “traits” that characterize the long journey made by the Church trying to approach and penetrate the sports “phenomenon”.

### *The leadership of the Papal Magisterium*

A first “trait” of this pastoral journey from its beginning to the present is rooted in the relationship between the Church’s Magisterium and sport. There is no doubt about the crucial importance that the teachings of the Supreme Pontiffs have had on the Church’s public opinion since the beginning of the last century.<sup>9</sup> The different interventions have marked and identified the judgments, the qualities and the modalities of the Church’s “presence” in sports and have determined the form and style of the Christian engagement at the local level.<sup>10</sup>

The contributions offered by the Pontiffs outline a vision of sport intrinsically related to the total development of the person with regards to the humanistic profile, but most of all in function to the moral values. We obtain a conceptual orientation that points out the role of sports as subordinate to the spiritual duties and intent on safeguarding the personal and Christian discipline, taking for granted the positive and temporal autonomy of sport.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G.B. GANDOLFO - L. VASSALLO, *Lo sport nei documenti pontifici*, La Scuola, Brescia 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY, *The world of sport today: a field of Christian mission*. LEV, Vatican City, 2006, 57-74.

There is no doubt that the essential perspective insistently traced by the Papal Magisterium takes its form from the educational value of sport and from ethical decisions made therein. From these two directives there has been much attentive listening and following from the “Catholic world”. So much so that in this perspective, these became the motivational foundations of all sports activities.

In the course of time as sport evolved, the Pontiff’s teachings open to new horizons outlined by society. At the same time, the eye towards sport becomes more “critical” in trying to defend the fundamental values of the human being respect to a sport that tempts to thwart them. The Papal outlook is pointed towards the pursuit of the “values-virtues” obtainable through sport and the prevention of possible deviations, while promoting an authentic sporting *ascesis*.

### *The engagement of Catholic organizations*

Another evident “trait” of this pastoral ministry is the engagement of Catholic associations in sport. If the sudden expansion of the modern sports phenomenon has intensified the sports practice, this has also promoted the emergence of specialized organizations able of supporting sport at all levels. Consequently, on the Catholic front, the Pontiffs immediately found the generous and passionate support from the laity who willingly engaged in the “association movement” with a strong social rooting.

With real operational efficiency, concretely realized on the local level, Catholic associations carried out a laudable task. In a certain sense, they were key pioneers and quite fundamental in experimenting with various “sport practices”, in elaborating a “culture of organized sport”, in affirming the “humanistic value” of sport, and in diffusing the popular practice of sport. This association “activism” even brought about the flourishing of Catholic professional athletes at a national and international level.

We cannot forget an important function carried out by Catholic associations in the field of the sporting movement in general: that of

being a great bulwark in defence of the Christian values in sport in a time in which the socio-cultural setting was marked by populist and materialistic ideologies, political enslavement and tendencies aimed at undermining the credibility of the educational intention of sport.

*Pastoral interest: between “passivity” and “awakening”*

In light of the significant changes that occurred after the Second World War that established new religious, cultural, socio-political and economic scenarios, the Church asked for a pastoral response that was more considerate of the new needs and expectations. The Council “responded” by acknowledging leisure and sport as emerging realities of widespread approval, and also gave its own positive evaluation to the new social phenomena.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly the revival of sports activity at the oratory-parish level has to be interpreted as part of the aggregation movement, as a support to the development of leisure time, and as a response to the growth in the demand for sports as well as the need of physical and psychological well-being. These “conditions” represent both a turning point and a starting point for initiatives orientated in satisfying this new demand and the new needs of the younger generations.

The fact is that the “traditional” pastoral care, strongly structured on fixed schemes, manifested a certain lack of interpretative preparation. Afterwards it took note of this, initially in a more functionalist and exploitable way, i.e. intent in satisfying pragmatically the ludic-sporting emergencies, then in a more reflective and far-sighted way, intent in joining the praxis with the contents of a Christian vision of sport and life.

In this perspective, granted the difficulties, we still see a “revival” of a pastoral interest that places itself within the framework of the crucial relationship between the Church and a society of well-being. The

<sup>11</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes*, n. 61.

implications of this are unfolded and established in the horizon of an apostolic opening towards the typical modern phenomena. In reality, the “revival” of this pastoral care seeks to re-establish a relationship with the vast young sectors that are drifting away from the Church, trying to regroup adherence through significant and appealing activities, even if it has only a modest ideal and limited doctrinal-cultural outline to follow.

### *Searching for the “pastoral sense” of sports*

On the other hand, the Church’s pastoral efforts to engage in the world of sport, although driven by good intentions and a sense of urgency, have eventually turned out to be “short of breath”, because they consisted in a pastoral praxis characterized by generosity but not equipped with a clear and well thought theory to back it. Therefore, the search for the sense of an ongoing and systematic pastoral engagement in sport was unavoidable.

In particular, there was the need to define the object, the method, the aims, the targets, the quality and the role of the pastoral care of sport. Above all, it was necessary to state the reasons for supporting the engagement of the laity in this new “areopagus” of the Gospel proclamation and with a better understanding of the overall goals to be reached with respect to the general plan of pastoral action.

The great effort towards a “conceptual formulation” aroused a prolonged interest in ecclesiastical fields. In fact, the pastoral engagement took the form of a consistent and renewed lay initiative, with a specific strategy. On one hand, it highlighting the structural deficiencies already mentioned, and on the other, it advanced the reflection on sports values, the urgency for more competency and programming on the part of organizations, and the necessity of having the right means in order to better educate and form its adherents.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE’S COMMISSION FOR THE PASTORAL OF LEISURE, TOURISM AND SPORT, *Pastoral note Sport e vita cristiana*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 1995.

*“Programming” innovations*

Once this process of this formulation was set in motion, it revealed the necessity for the pastoral care of sport to elaborate its own proper “plan”. Not only did it need a correct “theological” foundation and a systematic insertion in the Church’s general pastoral care at the local level, but it also required its own specific “plan” that could lead to an educational-spiritual process in benefit of the Christian community and, in particular, of the youth and teenagers and their accompanying mentors, in a context of joint responsibility.

A highpoint was reached during the papacy of John Paul II through various discourses, but, particularly, with the celebration of the Jubilee for the world of sport (1984 and 2000) and the publication of the Pastoral Note of the Italian Bishops’ Conference on “Sport and Christian life” (1995), which were visible signs of a “systematic” attention to the sport phenomenon. The authoritative discourses on the part of the Magisterium caused the local Church to be more conscious of this field and consequently, revealing a more stable and “programmed” interest, beyond the that which was merely occasional and temporary.

In fact we witness what usually happens once you start a pastoral process: the acceleration of demands that lead to determining choices that are always more complex and in need of new human resources and financial investments. On their part, these requests require a more demanding specialization, and while revealing the delicate and dynamic union between the values of faith and the values of sport, they beg for an improvement of the pastoral evaluation with regards to the “world of sport”.

From this simple schematization, it is not difficult to outline in synthesis an “assessment” of the pastoral care of sport. According to the “trends” and the significant “vicissitudes” mentioned, we can deduce a gradual participation of the Church in two different ways. The first, as represented by the Magisterium, is that of a more illuminated and focused participation that has perceived the positive elements of the new sport phenomenon. The other form of participation is represented

by the more vast lay involvement. Consequently, it is more pragmatic and practical as it consists in supporting the educational effort of the Christian communities.

Briefly, we could say that an “assessment” of the pastoral ministry of sport, first of all, takes into account the important role of the Supreme Pontiffs. These have opened the door to understanding sport as an intermediary value and have called upon coaches and directors to act in such a way that respects the integral formation of the athletes and is attentive to impending risks, while respecting the supremacy of the person, the defence of life, and the spiritual and moral elevation of the athletes.

The contribution made on the part of the “association” movement has also been fundamental as they have translated theoretically elaborated concepts to the pedagogical and practical level where the “presence” of the Church emerges through a widespread base of sports activity, inspired by Christian and human principles. Finally, we have to underline the fact that the local Christian communities have understood the pastoral opportunities offered by sport for evangelization. This can be seen in the case of the parish “oratory” which has been welcomed as a great educational resource.

### III. LOOKING AHEAD

To a certain degree, the path we have tried to outline charts the course to follow for the pastoral care of sport at present and in the immediate future. From the various input that has been gathered, we can try to give a general outline capable of consolidating the “ways” already undertaken while offering some new goals with regards to establishing the Church’s “presence” within the world of sport that is more attentive to its evolution in modern society and more specialized in its “evangelization” efforts. I will just present some possible “perspectives”.

### *Theological-pastoral reflection*

First of all, an appeal for a greater theological appreciation and grounding of the vast and complex phenomenon of sport is much desired. As we already said, if this pastoral care is to survive, it needs to be continually nourished by a systematic theological investigation regarding the most pertinent issues. Therefore, one of the future aims within this perspective consists in conducting an all-round theological reflection on sport, gathering the best studies in the field and confronting them constantly with the teachings of the Supreme Pontiffs.

With regard to this, I would like to propose the elaboration of a “theological-pastoral dictionary of sport” as useful tool for teachers in theological faculties and seminaries, as well as priests and the laity engaged in the world of sport at different levels. A “dictionary” can not only be of “service” to the “faith seeking understanding” concerning sports, but it can also be a stimulus for an ongoing thought and the involvement of specialists in this ecclesiastical “project”.

### *Methodology*

These remarks open the horizon to the field of the pastoral care of sport. From what I said, we can clearly see the need of a “practical organization” of this action. For example, it needs the preparation of a pertinent “method”, a set of appropriate “tools”, a regularity of actions, concentrated and integrated with the ordinary pastoral care of the Christian community.

As to this, a big advantage could come from the possibility of availing of a “pastoral vademecum” for a more significant and organic presence of the Church in the world of sport. It could be a useful consulting study aid, of a moderate, practical and immediate nature, designed to answer to the “athletes’ questions” and the expectations of the people engaged in the sport praxis: from the spiritual life to the different problems concerning the vast world of sport, from the athletes to the



managers, doctors, etc. It's not a summary but a pocket handbook, sufficient for daily use.

*"Christian" culture of sport*

The "world of sport" is ever more in need of a "sports culture orientated by Christian principles" as we firmly believe that only a well-inspired "culture" can impact sport with Christian values. This much felt need requires the formulation of an interpretative key for the reality of sport that be penetrated by the light of faith.

In this direction we can deduce that if pastoral care wants to be incisive, it has to be systematic and well "planned". It has to be able to offer tools, analysis, and proposals in such a way as to implement these "ideas" into the practice of sport and to inculcate in the dominant sport "culture" an alternative that is credible, feasible, and efficient in achieving those sporting aims that are in accordance to the Christian vision of the person.

This point appears to be the most urgent and the most fundamental with respect to the pastoral praxis in sport. In fact, in order to be heard and followed, this pastoral ministry needs convincing ideas which can create an educational passion for the present sports phenomenon. It also needs educators who are capable of helping those who practice sport and live by sport to find a deeper sense of "meaning" in all of this.

*The laity engaged in this "field"*

The "world of sport" is presented as a especially apt field of "apostolic engagement" for the laity. It is therefore necessary and urgent to invest in the laity at all levels of the "sport system" since the response to the pastoral challenge of the world of sport is mostly up to them. The lay faithful are immersed in the different levels of responsibility and decision, where general and practical choices are made, where they can influence the sport plans and programs, where

the different policies are adopted and where the present and future of sport is determined.

For these reasons, the pastoral ministry of sport must concern itself with the training of the laity, above all lay “volunteers”, in order to equip, educate and assist them with knowledge and prudence, with far-sightedness and clarity, through appropriate stages of formation, through the sharing of valuable experiences, and with adequate facilities.

### *The task and role of the “Christian” association*

One last point concerns the need of valuing the role that the various associations play in the advancement of sport. Due to their expansion at the local level, sport associations are key in gathering together the youth and authentically guiding them, while also promoting the widespread practice of popular sports as that which is salutary and beneficial for families as well as even providing a multidisciplinary sport training that is more serious.

In this sense, the presence of groups and sport clubs in the ecclesiastical world constitutes a *conditio sine qua non* for the introduction of an ongoing pastoral care that is motivated by Christian principles and values. Our secular society is also in need of sport clubs that can act as an important leaven in the world through their dedication to, and their promotion of these Christian values and, in doing so, offer an “alternative” model of practicing sport.

The general “perspectives” presented above are the fruit of the analysis we have made. At the same time, however, they project an ideal, long-term path to follow that we hope would provide many fine opportunities for the announcement of the Gospel in the world of sport.

Briefly we can say that these future “points” for the pastoral care of sport reveal how much this “special pastoral action” is in need of the following: a “structural” consolidation through an evident and well accepted theological foundation; a clear selection of the best methods

and pastoral practices; the thorough training of the entire “managerial board”, to the point of being gifted with a “missionary spirit”; specific competence and an overall commitment to education.

Moreover, considering the above outline, the pastoral care of sport needs a set of essential means to facilitate its diffusion, grounding, and credibility. This will only be possible if we, with common sense and communion of wills, agree to create a global and “integrated” pastoral approach.

## CONCLUSION

With this presentation, I hope to have given stimulus to a systematic and general reflection on the vast and vital field of sport, observed through a Catholic perspective and in the light of the extraordinary heritage given to us by the Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiffs and the ecclesiastical tradition. The aim has been that of showing the plausibility of the “pastoral care for sport”.

On the other hand, I am well aware of the limits I face in doing so and of the provisional character of a “speech” about such a topic as this. Nonetheless, I am also convinced of the fact that there is no need to be afraid of building thoughts and actions on solid bases that can have a great consent in the Church’s public opinion and throughout the vast audience of the “world of sport”. The underlying reason is to be found in the great desire for the “gospel” to find a “little window” or, even better, an “open door” to run its “course” on the fields where sport is practiced, followed and loved.



# The presence of the chaplain in the world of sport

MANFRED PAAS\*

A Buddhist story tells of a man who sped along a country road on his horse. An old farmer, who was working his field, called to him: “Hey, horseman, where are you going?”. The rider, who had lost control of his horse, turned back and shouted: “Don’t ask me, ask my horse!”.

This scene vividly illustrates how many aspects of life have slipped out of our immediate control – including sports. The recent discovery of doping in cycling is perhaps only the tip of the iceberg. Is performance sport out of control? Are those aspects of sport, which are admired by the Church, such as fairness, justice and responsibility, no longer relevant? Is the chaplain speeding through the world of Sport in the wrong direction? Or can the Church participate in regaining control of sport?

I propose the later as I am fortunate to see many promising signs. Recently, the German Olympic Sports Association’s Coaches Academy, together with the Catholic Academy in the Diocese of Essen, has initiated an ongoing ethical cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Participating coaches and trainers are obligated to attend regular discussions about sports values. Here, in today’s day and age, both pastoral and educational institutions are joining forces to respond to these challenges. Yet without the presence of sports chaplains who are supported by the bishops conference, such projects would be unthinkable.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. “[http://www.dosb.de/de/jugendsport/jugend-news/detail/news/planungen\\_zum\\_13\\_deutschen\\_kinder\\_und\\_jugendhilfetag\\_in\\_essen/9746/cHash/87403b9c4a](http://www.dosb.de/de/jugendsport/jugend-news/detail/news/planungen_zum_13_deutschen_kinder_und_jugendhilfetag_in_essen/9746/cHash/87403b9c4a).”

What, however, does the presence of a sports chaplain mean to the athletes themselves? I offer a response that is based on my personal experience as chaplain at the Olympic summer games in Seoul (1988), Barcelona (1992) and Atlanta (1996) as well as the time I spent with these German athletes in my visits to their training camps prior to these events. In my conversations with them, the athletes often asked me to pray hard so that they might win. Yet, how can I pray for the victory of a team? Whoever follows this thought through can see, how each team's chaplain would end up competing in prayer: a Protestant pastor for the American team, a Catholic chaplain for the Italian team, an Orthodox Bishop for the Russians, the Muslim imam for the Arabs and a Buddhist monk for the Korean team. With such a prayer competition, we could eventually do away with the sports competition itself! (It is interesting to note, that at the games in Seoul, on my accreditation form in the category of "sports discipline" was written the entry "priest").

All joking aside, the subject of prayer is nonetheless an interesting step in building this relationship between performance sports and the Church. John Paul II was once asked: "What does the Pope pray for?" This was not in view of sports but rather in general. He answered "*Gaudium et spes, luctus et angor hominem huius temporis*", that is, "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time" as he cited the preamble of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of The Second Vatican Council – this was the subject of the Pope's prayers.<sup>2</sup> This is the key as well for understanding the significant of the presence of the chaplain in the world of sport and in the life of an athlete. Anything that affects humankind must also affect the Church. "For the sake of humanity" and not just out of a personal passion, sport is of great concern for a Pope, for a chaplain and for the entire Church.

In spite of several sports related stories and images in the Bible, sport is not an eminent focus of the Church's attention. Her eminent

<sup>2</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, A. Knopf, NY 1994, 20.

attention is the salvation of humanity. But “for the sake of humanity” sports are a subject of pastoral concern<sup>3</sup> and the sports chaplain is, in a certain sense, the bridge between the Church and the human person who is the athlete; he has to cultivate this personal contact with the athletes.

During the days leading up to competitions such as the World Championships, Olympics, Para Olympics, I committed many hours to making house calls to the rooms and the dormitories of the athletes. Mostly, I passed out letters of welcome from the Church and a brief meditation booklet. I was often privileged to hear the life stories of young athletes – often the star athletes. During the games, there inevitably arose many discussions about dealing with organizational failures and obvious judicial errors, which diminished the performances of these male and female athletes, and even on occasion robbed them of their laurels. I believe that my hospital visits or bedside visits to the injured athletes, as well as our brief conversations, for example, at breakfast or in the arena, have helped many.

Since the focus of the athlete at these major events is almost exclusively to their athletic performance itself, I tried to help them to see, while sensitive to their ups and downs, that there is more to life than sports. This message was equally important to transmit to the media, the organizers and trainers, as it was for the athletes themselves who are under a lot of pressure and have much to express and “get off their chest”.

The Church services at the sports events were often full of life and vitality. Yet, he who is familiar to the subject matter knows that the majority of participants are those who have their competitions behind them, or are the reserve athletes, as those who have yet to perform rarely attend.

This brings us to another point. Even though there is a great appreciation and necessity for the chaplain’s presence at top level sports, the presence of the chaplain is just as important in the everyday activities of the athletes. In fact, we could make this analogy. What the blessing

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 61.

of new Church bells is for a parish priest, the Olympic games are for the sports chaplain. Both the bell benediction and the Olympics share the following: they are noisy, favour interesting encounters and draw the attention of the media. Yet these are exceptions. The normal workday for a parish priest is his service as a pastor who must take care of his parishioners. So too, the normal workday for a sports chaplain consists in his pastoral service to the sports associations, in catholic schools and organizations, in holding ecclesiastic and ethical sport seminars, and in supporting the work of the laity who serve the world of sport.

How does a sport's chaplain, then, go about these tasks? What is his specific contribution? A word from *Lumen Gentium* may serve as a guide to our response to this inquiry: "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear; ...Christ the Lord... fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling".<sup>4</sup> In light of this, I have tried in all of my initiatives to meld together three things: the irreplaceable experience of fair sports; the promotion of a sense of community spirit; the sharing and interpreting of the Christian message.

What has helped me substantially in my work has been the "Scientific Commission for Church and Sport in Germany" which is part of the German Bishop's Conference. During two annual workshops made up of about a dozen of people – ranging from sports scientists to theologians and sociologists – current sports themes are considered in great detail in order to make public statements and develop documents such as the "Christian Perspective in Sports" (10 volumes) and the "Church and Sport Forum". Participants at these workshops, in turn, avail themselves to all the dioceses in order to make presentations, lead discussions and meetings, to identify the challenges of sport and to assist in developing solutions. Presently, each diocese in Germany has a representative for "Church and sport". They all meet once a year for an exchange of initiatives and to broaden their general knowledge of sports.

In most dioceses in Germany, there is close contact between these

<sup>4</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22.



diocesan sport representatives and the Catholic sports association “Deutsche Jugendkraft” (“German Youth Power”) also known as DJK, which has more than 1100 clubs and over half a million members throughout Germany. Sports clinics for priests, lasting an entire week, and “Sportexerzitionen” (these are weeklong meetings which combine an intellectual/spiritual exchange, physical exercise and sports play) are increasingly appreciated. The confessional structure in Germany fosters ecumenical aspects; representatives of the different churches meet regularly with representatives of the German Olympic Sports Association. The results of such meetings are, for example, the ecumenical workshop “Church and sport”. Their themes show, how much sport is a welcome partner for the church, and churches are a welcomed partner for sport. I mention a few themes: sport for seniors; motion, play and sport on an educational basis; sport for the handicapped; sport for the mentally retarded; sport for youngsters in trade schools and factories; unemployment and sport; woman and sport; immigrants and sport. I have seen that by working together, many initiatives for the disadvantaged can be mobilized and sustained.

Of course, during these “Church and sport” workshops, many ethical aspects are also addressed, such as fair play and the relation between work, stress and leisure time. It is not surprising that this contact with various religious groups has promoted ecumenical work. The joint sports declaration of the two main churches in Germany, entitled “Sport and Christian ethics” is a good example of this. Here I am reminded of the words of Pope Benedict: “It is the Lord’s commandment, but also the imperative of the present hour, to carry on dialogue with conviction at all levels of the Church’s life. This must obviously take place with sincerity and realism, with patience and perseverance, in complete fidelity to the dictates of one’s own conscience in the awareness that it is the Lord who gives unity, that we do not create it”.<sup>5</sup> What is being discussed and lived

<sup>5</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the ecumenical meeting at the Archbishop’s residence, Cologne, 19 August, 2005* in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly Eng. Ed., n. 34, 24 August, 2005, 8.

at the national level, has exemplary character for the gatherings at the regional and local levels. A comprehensive mutual understanding, however, has not yet been achieved.

I have referred to all of these efforts and initiatives, because I am convinced that only through the continual joint efforts of those engaged in “Church and sport”, can educational solutions be achieved and implemented. Sports chaplains have constructed, and can continue to build, bridges between the Church and the world of sport, providing many pastoral opportunities that before did not exist. They offer “moments of reflection”, and a concrete ecclesial “presence” in the world of sport. In fact, their liturgical celebrations – at times extending beyond the physical boundaries of the Church as they overflow into the public square – often create interest particularly among those with agnostic views. Yes, we know that there is no secret formula for a sport chaplain. It is only through ongoing, personal and frequent contact with athletes and trainers themselves within the top sports associations and sport clubs, that top athletes (despite their many commitments) will eventually attend such gatherings. In this regard, a Catholic sports association – such as the DJK – can greatly facilitate the work of a sports chaplain through its manpower and the organizational strength that it provides.

As a last point, I would like to mention a few things from my new vantage point, as it is now exactly eleven years since I became the pastor of a large city parish with more than 25,200 Catholics and several social institutions. Although I am no longer a full time sport chaplain, sports are a part of the pastoral ministry of the parish. Among the many youth clubs in my parish we have five DJK sports associations with almost 2,000 members. This is a meeting point for people of different religions and beliefs. I am limited as a parish priest to periodic contact with the leadership of these clubs and only occasional participation in activities (for example: sports events or annual retreats). In this sense, it has proven invaluable that each Catholic sports club has a engaged Catholic contact person to the parish. It is also desirable, that the sport’s club chairmen are invited to events with the other leaders of the Church’s social organizations on a regular basis.

From the very beginning of my service in the parish, I have promoted the idea of a youth pastoral centre. This is the “Philip-Neri-Zentrum” (PNZ) which has been located at the main train station of our city since its foundation in 1998. Here each week we offer programs including dance and gymnastics, which are open to all. The youth enjoy volleyball tournaments and soccer games which are concluded in the evening with a Mass and social event. Many youth attend the “*Ora et Labora* weeks” which consist in a week of communal living with prayer, work, and meals in common. This exposes new youth to the “Oratory”, meaning “prayer room” and continues the work undertaken in the spirit of Philip Neri.

Finally we enjoy being hosts in our community. We have excellent facilities and a first class catering service through the food service of our hospital. Toward the end of April 2007, for example, we hosted 120 guests among the 1300 youngsters from 13 nations, who arrived to participate in the Salesian “Sportsplay” tournament play taking place in our Diocese. This event takes place each year in a different country and consists of five days of sport activities, singing, prayer and the promotion of world understanding of the highest order. It would have been a joy for Don Bosco to see.

“Hey, horseman, where are you headed?” I conclude by saying that the roads of sport are wide open. A chaplain in the world of sport can achieve little, if he only appears as an event amplifier. His real chances at success are in the continued day to day work, in the promotion of Catholic communities, who are oriented towards sport and society, and in drawing strength from the example of Philip Neri and Don Bosco.



## **Collaboration among chaplains: towards a common strategy at major sports events**

KEVIN LIXEY\*

**I**n the debate and discussion during these past two days, we have been anticipating this discussion about developing a common strategy at the major sporting events. Besides having experienced Olympic chaplains in our midst – in attendance at this seminar are four priests who serve as the Catholic chaplains for the Austrian, German, Italian and Polish Olympic teams – we also have chaplains for the national soccer teams to the World Cup, as well as other major sporting events. As there is also the other side of these events, that of the pastoral care provided by the local Church, we have with us priests and laity who have been involved in the planning and organization of pastoral care at such local events as the World Cup of soccer, as well as the representative of the Catholic Church in London who is part of the organizing committee for the London 2012 Olympics. Yet, before addressing the concrete points of a strategy among chaplains and the local church at major sporting events, I wish to back up for one moment in order to place all of these efforts in light of the new evangelization and in light of this new reality of having a point of reference in the Holy See for “Church and sport” related activities.

### *On the frontier of the new evangelization*

In the blue print for this “Church and sport” section within the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Secretary of State spoke of sport as one of

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the frontier's of the "new evangelization".<sup>1</sup> As we may recall, this term "new evangelization" was used by the John Paul II in reference to the Great Jubilee, seeing the past 2000 years of Christianity, not only as a point of arrival, but even more so, a new point of departure! "The Christian community" – stated John Paul II – "is journeying again, driven by the love of Christ, to undertake the new evangelization [...] It is at the beginning of a new mission".<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, in *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, recalls how the modern world reflects the situation of St. Paul who spoke before the *Areopagus of Athens*, as he writes: "Today there are many 'areopagi', and very different ones: these are the vast sectors of contemporary civilization and culture, of politics and economics. The more the West is becoming estranged from its Christian roots, the more it is becoming missionary territory, taking the form of many different 'areopagi'".<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the vast world of sport is a great frontier for the new evangelization, and these major sporting events form the many "areopagi" of contemporary culture. Although seven years have now passed since the Great Jubilee and this appeal for the new evangelization, it seems that sport is still waiting for the arrival of this new missionary impulse. Hopefully, the establishment of this section for sport in the Vatican can be a part of this new missionary thrust, as well as a prominent sign of the fact that sport is now a universal phenomenon, and as such, is an occupation and concern of the Universal Church.

Even though these major events are and remain *per se* sporting events, and not "spiritual events" they still are "major events" of global relevance that attract the attention of millions, dominating the media throughout the duration of the event in such a way as to insert themselves, whether welcomed or not, into the daily life of those people who live in those cities where these events take place.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. THE HOLY SEE, *L'Attività della Santa Sede nel 2004*, LEV, Vatican City 2005, 829.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily during the concluding Mass of the Synod of the Americas*, December 12, 1997 in: "L'Osservatore Romano" Weekly Eng. Ed., N. 51/52, 17/24 December, 1997, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, n. 57.

We can recall one of the big sports events in the past years. Being in Italy, perhaps the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin comes to mind. Although these Winter Games are generally not as big as the summer Olympics, there were 80 countries represented, with 2,508 competing athletes (960 women and 1,548 men) in 84 events. Yet, there were more journalists than athletes (2,688 journalists, agencies and photographers) and 6,720 radio and TV personnel. Nearly three persons from the media for every athlete! But what really impressed me, was seeing and speaking with the vast array of volunteers. There were 18,000 volunteers who gave up more than two weeks of their time and at their own personal travel expenses to offer their help, at times standing around in the bitter cold just in case someone was lost or needed directions. When I asked one man why he decided to volunteer, he simply said “I like to help people”.

Yet, this is only a flicker of the magnitude of the summer Olympics in 2008 in Beijing, where the organizing committee is seeking the help of some 80,000 volunteers! Think of how the Catholic Church could benefit from the presence of 80,000 “volunteer missionaries” to evangelize the world of sport whether it be at a major event or year round!

Shifting to another sport, we can recall the World Cup of Soccer in 2006 in Germany. Once again, a great human effort went into the organization of this month long, multi-city event. To give you an idea of the volume of participants, each match averaged 52,401 people for an overall estimated total of 3,353,655 people! But this is not all, the 2006 World Cup stands as the most watched event in television history with an estimated 26.29 billion viewers over the course of the tournament, and the final game attracted an estimated audience of 715.1 million people.<sup>4</sup> Truly a major global event! In order to handle the influx of millions of visitors, state governments, local governments, and even local churches came into play, offering their help and hospitality.

Obviously, these are not simply social events, but a huge financial enterprise that engages big business and causes profits to churn, mer-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006\\_FIFA\\_World\\_Cup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_FIFA_World_Cup).

chandise to be sold, and consumers to respond to these artificially created “demands” of an enormous leisure culture. In a technical review of the World Cup 2006, FIFA and Germany’s World Cup organising committee reported a revenue surplus of € 135 million for the event. If these figures are correct, the German organising committee would receive € 94 million and the other € 41 million would go to FIFA. Yet, unfortunately, these major events are not just about soccer. It was also reported that an estimated 15,000 young women were “imported” into the country as part of a “legal” ring of prostitution which catered to the spectators of these events.

So, should we consider these major events as simply negative experiences – occasions for sin, debauchery, or at best total distractions from real life? Or, along the lines of St. Paul, might we consider them as “areopagi”, real opportunities to bring people into contact with Christ and the Gospel message of salvation? St. Paul tried to become all things to all people, in order to save some of them (Cf. *1 Cor* 9:22-25). And this “some” includes those within the world of sport. In fact, the Apostle to the Gentiles found in sport, if not a means, at least a symbol and an occasion to describe the realities of the spiritual life in a language accessible to the people of his time and place.

During the Jubilee of Sport, John Paul II expressed his desire that this event “be an occasion for everyone, dear leaders, managers, sport enthusiasts and athletes, to find new creative and motivating zeal through sports that know how, in a constructive spirit, to reconcile the complex demands made by the current cultural and social changes with the unchangeable requirements of the human being”.<sup>5</sup> We too, need to find this new creative and motivating zeal in order to also correspond to the intricate demands placed upon us by our culture and society. What if the Catholic Church could tap into just a fraction of all of this energy, of this volunteer power, or of this media hype? As St. Paul reminds us, they do all of this merely to receive a perishable wreath, but

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the International Convention on Sport*, 28 October, 2000, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly Eng. Ed., n. 46, 15 Nov. 2000, 9.



we are working for an imperishable one! (1 Cor 9:25). Christ's words in the Gospel of Luke also come to mind as he laments that the "sons of darkness are more astute than the sons of light!" (Lk 16:8).

So, the challenge is clear and the door of opportunity lies wide open before us. The first Vatican seminar on sport, held in 2005, considered the world of sport today as "a field of Christian mission". Now we take a step forward and consider in greater detail, what each of us can do, especially we who are priest chaplains. Although it should be noted that this field is not exclusively the work of clergy, as sport offers many opportunities for all. In fact, it is one of the ripest fields for lay involvement and apostolic action. Let us now consider some of the ways we can work together in responding to this challenge.

### *Point of reference within the Church*

With regards to major sporting events such as the Olympics, it is important to note that the Church normally operates on the principle of subsidiary collaboration. The local church, the diocese or bishop's conference of the country where the sporting event or events are taking place, normally take upon themselves the task of providing the pastoral care for all of those involved in these extraordinary events. This does not discourage the help that can come from outside support, international collaboration, and the proposal of other initiatives, but it should be clear that the local ordinary is ultimately in charge of the "pastoral care" in conjunction with the event and remains the point of coordination at the local level.

Nonetheless, in the case of these major sporting events, I believe we can say that we are at a new beginning. This new "Church and sport" section can serve – and is already functioning – as a point of reference and as a liaison between the Church at the local level and around the world. Through the previous seminar that we held in 2005, we have been able to identify and unite from around the world the "Church and sport" representatives at the national level within the Bishop's conferences. This office has also been instrumental in connecting various

Catholic International sports associations with each other. Often, the same priest who represents the “Church and sport” section within the national bishops’ conference also serves as the Olympic chaplain of his country’s team.

This present seminar has also been able to serve as a means of introducing Olympic chaplains to each other. In fact, the Catholic Olympic chaplains of two different countries discovered that they have been chaplains at three editions of the Olympics, but have never met until this seminar! Whereas, before these chaplains were on their own and had no one with whom they could discuss their challenges, they now have been able to exchange ideas and experiences.

While respecting the leadership role of the local Church which hosts these major events, the objective today is to take a closer look – together with all of you present, – at some opportunities, initiatives, or suggestions that could help to not only maximize your work as chaplain, but also to open the door to other initiatives which perhaps go well beyond the scope of the chaplain but stem from their experience at these major sporting events through the years.

In spite of the barrier of language, the great strength and beauty of the Catholic Church is universality. How can we take better advantage of this universal synergy to enhance the presence and pastoral care of both the athletes and the faithful at these major events? How can the “novum” of this office for the pastoral care of sport in the Holy See help you in your particular work as chaplains and directors of Catholic sport associations? A central point can coordinate efforts on the International level by facilitating the exchange of information, of ideas, of possible collaboration among countries. We can help to avoid reduplicating work, and better maximize the pastoral contribution that the priest chaplain makes at these events.

When trying to consider the pastoral care and evangelization efforts at major sporting events as a whole, it seems that these encompass three basis sectors: the pastoral care of the athletes themselves-directly under the care of those Catholic chaplains who are officially accredited to attend the Olympic Games; the pastoral care of the spectator and aux-

iliary personnel who are physically present at these events; the realm of the mass media – those who follow these events via the many forms of mass media.

### *Collaboration in the pastoral care of athletes*

The pastoral care of athletes is at the heart of the theme of this seminar. As one of the panel discussions of this seminar has been dedicated to provided an array of experiences of sport chaplains at various levels, including the day-to-day work, I wish to now focus on the specific pastoral work of a chaplain at the major sporting events. These chaplains are usually assigned to the pastoral care of a particular group of athletes, such as a national Olympic team, or the national soccer team or a championship team. Or, they might be assigned to the care of athletes of a particular language group. The chaplain's pastoral care consists primarily in celebrating Mass for the athletes, trainers and staff (at the best possible time for all), administering the sacrament of reconciliation, offering counselling and spiritual direction, and visiting the injured athletes.

In the case of the Olympics, the pastoral care of the chaplains within the "Olympic Village" is subject to the specific norms of the I.O.C. which has made religious services a part of the Olympics since London 1908. An I.O.C. accredited chaplain<sup>6</sup> has access to the "Olympic Village" where the athletes reside and which is not open to the public. There, the chaplain is permitted to "minister" within the Official I.O.C. designated "worship spaces" and not outside of these while in the Village. Chaplains present at this seminar, agree that one of the best worship spaces has been the "Centre Abraham" at the 1992 Olympic Village in Barcelona. It was a centrally located and aesthetically attractive worship space designated for use by all monotheistic religions.

At the 2006 winter Olympic Games in Turin, athletes were housed

<sup>6</sup> Note that each chaplain's type of accreditation varies according to the degree of endorsement he has from his country's national Olympic committee.

in three different Olympic Villages. Depending upon their specific discipline, some athletes stayed in the Olympic Village near the Olympic headquarters in Turin, while other athletes were housed outside of the city in the skiing villages of Sestriere and Bardonecchia. Due to the multiple Olympic Villages, chaplains were faced with the challenge of dividing their presence between the different villages in order to avail themselves to their athletes who were scattered throughout this vast geographical area.

Also in the case of Turin, two small classrooms served as the “official worship spaces” for the athletes in the particular Olympic Village of Sestriere. Chaplains from all faiths had to arrange among themselves a schedule of worship times, etc. It is said by chaplains that determining the schedule for Mass times is always a great challenge as each athlete has a different schedule according to their particular events and they have to share this worship space with others. Given their past experience, many of the veteran chaplains calculate what times will work best for them and their athletes, yet it always remains a challenge.

There is also the challenge of having to furnish these empty rooms in a dignified yet temporary way for each Mass for once the Mass is finished everything has to be removed to make way for the next group’s “worship service”. Again, in the case of the 2006 Winter Olympics, due to the modest settings of the worship spaces, some of the Catholic chaplains made use of the Catholic Church in the village of Sestriere where the local priest was very accommodating. This parish accommodated not only the Olympic athletes, but also spectators, with “multilingual” Masses on Saturday evenings and Sundays during the Olympics.

### *Collaboration in the pastoral care of spectators*

It should be noted that the profile of the visiting spectator is more akin to a tourist than a “pilgrim”. Yet, often this major events can offer the spectator – tourist an opportunity to come into contact with cul-

tural attractions of a religious nature. Before the World Cup of Soccer in Italy in 1990, John Paul II noted: “You have come from every part or the world to Rome, the ancient home of the Caesars and the ever living centre of Christianity. The Eternal City offers you its heritage of classical monuments and Christian values. Try to listen to the noble human and religious message addressed to you by the many memorials and ruins that are so filled with history. Do not be distracted guests, unable to hear the thousand voices speaking of moral greatness and above all Christian heroism, often expressed by the supreme witness of martyrdom!”<sup>7</sup>

Those present in Turin for the Winter Olympics may recall the crowds of people visiting the exhibition of the Holy Shroud, the Cathedral, and the displays in honour of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. In fact, in Bardonecchia where Pier Giorgio had skied, there was a display about him and his life in a small church that was a few hundred meters from the giant half pipe where the athletes competed! Snowboarders and skiers could not have had a better patron on that occasion. In fact, one skier had the name Frassati written on the bottom of her skis. These are visible signs of the Church’s presence at these events, and little ways of evangelizing the present moment.

In the case of the Olympics in China, the local Catholic Church may not have as much to offer by way of Christian cultural sites, but it does want to welcome its visitors. The Bishop’s Conference of the Catholic Church in China has entrusted the overseeing of the pastoral care during the 2008 summer games to the Beijing Diocese.<sup>8</sup> The bishop of Beijing’s assistant for diocesan affairs, Fr. Peter Zhao, said

<sup>7</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse at Rome’s Olympic Stadium*, 31 May, 1990, in: “l’Osservatore Romano” Engl. Ed. n. 24, 11 June 1990, 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. “L’Osservatore Romano”, 22 September, 2007 where it was reported that The Holy See recognized the ordination of the new Bishop of Beijing, His Exc. Joseph Li Shan. For further understanding regarding the situation of the Catholic Church in China, read Pope Benedict XVI’s *Letter to all faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China*, at link: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070527\\_china\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070527_china_en.html)

that his diocese is preparing a comprehensive service plan for the Olympics and already offers regular masses in English at the Cathedral in Beijing.<sup>9</sup> On the official web site of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, visitors are offered a listing of local worship places that includes several Catholic churches in Beijing.<sup>10</sup> Some of the common challenges the local organization faces are: the diversity in languages; consequently, communicating events (mass times); convenience of location. To accommodate Catholic spectators, perhaps a “Church Centre” could be established as was the case during the Olympics in Sydney. This consisted of a information booth in the middle of the City of Sydney which had a permanent staff of volunteers to help tourists find their appropriate Church services.

### *Mass media opportunities*

The 3:1 ratio of reporters to athletes – as we have seen in the case of Turin, graphically depicts the intense and multiform media attention that the major sporting events receive. Yet, even before the use of internet and television, the Pontiffs of the past century have not allowed some of the major world sports events to pass by without some form of commentary, whether through a letter or telegram to the local ordinary, with words of greeting and good will for the event’s success. In fact, these events have provided an occasion for the Holy Father to briefly communicate to the athletes and participants the Church’s thought with regard to sport in general or the particular significant of these world events, thus helping us as Christians and men and women of good will, to evaluate these occasions in the proper perspective, and within the light of the Gospel. A brief analysis of these messages through the years, reveals two recurring themes.

Regarding the Olympics, an appeal has been made throughout the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <http://www.ucanews.com/2007/08/31/dioceses-prepare-to-meet-spiritual-needs-of-olympics-athletes-visitors.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <http://www.en.beijing2008.cn/spectators/beijing/worshipcenters>.

last century to reflect on this universal and peaceful gathering which involves so many nations as a visible manifestation that we are one human family, capable of living in harmony and fraternity. Thus, a general appeal has been made so that these international gatherings might always promote peace and respect of others through friendly and fair competition.

In occasion of the Olympics or a European or World Sports championship, the Pontiffs have also frequently made appeal to the athletes themselves, aware of the great relevance they have as they are watched and admired from youth around the world. "This phenomenon -as John Paul II observed - exposes you athletes to considerable psychological pressures because people tend to extol you as heroes, as human models who in spire ideals of life and action, especially among youth. And this fact places you at the centre of a particular social and ethical problem. You are observed by many people and expected to be outstanding figures not only during athletic competitions but also when you are off the sport field..."<sup>11</sup> Because of this the Pontiffs have tried to encourage the athletes to live up these high demands by not only physical training but also by constantly engaging the spiritual dimensions of their person.

Naturally, the media hype around these events can help to amplify the Holy Father's voice with respect to these events. In past years, with occasion of the Olympics and World Cups, some of the "Church and sport" offices of the Catholic Bishop's Conferences have prepared athletes prayer books and other spiritual books to accompany athletes and spectators on these occasions. Some countries may be able to benefit from the work already done by other countries in this field and we are willing to share with others these initiatives as they are made know to us.

These major events can also be occasions for ecumenical collaboration, as was the case with the Olympics in Athens where there was a

<sup>11</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse with occasion of the World Athletics Championship*, Sept. 2, 1987, in: "L'Osservatore Romano" Eng. Ed. n. 36, Sept. 7, 1987, 5.

collaborative effort between Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants and the Greek Biblical Society.<sup>12</sup> Also at the Winter Olympics in Turin, many copies of a seven language Gospel of Mark were distributed to the athletes and spectators. This was an initiative of The Italian Catholic Bishop's Conference, the Waldensian Church and the Sacred Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy (Ecumenical Patriarchate) who promoted this edition which was published and distributed in cooperation with the Italian Bible Society and the British Bible Society. At present, investigation is underway regarding the feasibility of the publication of the Gospel of Mark in English and Chinese for distribution at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Government approval is required as there are restrictions on the publication and distribution of the Bible in China.

### *Conclusion*

These are just some of the ways that the Church, at the local, the national and the international level, can collaborate at these major sporting events. Having the opportunity for chaplains to make contact in advance and become acquainted with each other and how the process works is key. It is our hope that this "Church and sport" section can be of ongoing assistance in this area especially. With time, we hope to better "equip" sport chaplains for their mission, by, on one hand, creating an overall awareness and sensitivity of the importance of this work, and, on the other hand, by providing these chaplains with practical tips and suggestions from those who have experience in this field. In some sense, this seminar has been an initial step, and we can even say "historical step", towards these aims.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. I. SPITERIS, *La pastorale per gli sportivi in occasione dei giochi Olimpici ad Atene* in: THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, "People on the Move", n. 96 (suppl.) December 2004, 231-235.



## The sport chaplain and the work of youth formation

JOSEF CLEMENS\*

As I have been assigned the task of concluding this seminar, I wish to offer all of you – without presuming to make an exhaustive summary – an interpretive key: the remarks that Pope Benedict XVI made regarding the formation of youth which he gave to Catholic educators of the Diocese of Rome on June of 2007.<sup>1</sup> In fact, I must say that I was surprised to find such a close convergence between the ideas expressed during our seminar and those of the Holy Father regarding the challenges to be faced in educating the youth and the solutions provided therein.

His Eminence, Cardinal Stanisław Rylko, opened our reflection with this fundamental question: Considering the crisis and evident contradictions that plague sport today, is it still possible to attribute to it an educational role? In response to this question, the talks and interventions revealed the great complexity of the problems that face sport. In particular, we saw how sport's tremendous growth in popularity over the years has often caused it to be “used” as an ambiguous means of promoting political or social ideologies or to fulfil purely economic gains. Furthermore, we saw how this same ambivalence – made ever more poignant within a global and relativistic society that has left its mark on contemporary man – is making it difficult to proceed in a constructive way within this world of sport.

Additionally, we have considered how the world of sport is also a

\* His Excellency, Bishop Josef Clemens was ordained a priest for the German diocese of Paderborn in 1976. From 1984 to 2003 he was the personal secretary of the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. At the end of 2003, he was appointed Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and was ordained bishop on January 6, 2004.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, in: “L'Osservatore Romano” English Ed. n. 25, 20 June, 2007.

mirror of a secular society that has gone to the extreme, at least in some European countries, of attempting to erase some fundamental signs and elements of its Christian origin. The Holy Father, in the above mentioned address to educators, clearly pointed out how secularism has grown side by side with the crisis in formation of youth at the elementary level.

“Today, in fact, – noted Pope Benedict XVI – every educational task seems more and more arduous and precarious. Consequently, there is talk of a great ‘educational emergency’, of the increasing difficulty encountered in transmitting the basic values of life and correct behaviour to the new generations, a difficulty that involves both schools and families and, one might say, any other body with educational aims”.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to a crisis that prevails in many families and schools, we must also face the negative messages that are proposed by the mass media, all the more intrusive when it comes to sport since it is inevitable influenced by the media. With regards to this the Pontiff noted that “Today, more than in the past, the education and formation of the person are influenced by the messages and general climate spread by the great means of communication and which are inspired by a mindset and culture marked by relativism, consumerism and a false and destructive exaltation, or rather, profanation, of the body and of sexuality”.<sup>3</sup>

In our seminar we have considered that the serious problems that afflict sport are not particular only to the world of an athlete, but are rooted in a crisis of values that involves our entire globalized society. A new concept of life has emerged – described by some such as Zygmunt Bauman as a “liquid” – which finds its source in the rapid progress of information technology, the over emphasis on the “quality of life”, the rapid spread of multiculturalism, and, above all, from an ethical and existential relativism which is the real culprit of the educational crisis. Frequently, this rapid transformation catches educators off-guard and

<sup>2</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, in: “L’Osservatore Romano” English Ed. n. 25, 20 June, 2007, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

unprepared because they themselves lack a critical eye or even imbibe this same relativism.

This “educational emergency” that also threatens sport in a dramatic way, is, according to Pope Benedict XVI, “an inevitable emergency” as He goes on to observe that “in a society, in a culture, which all too often make relativism its creed – relativism has become a sort of dogma – in such a society the light of truth is missing; indeed, it is considered dangerous and “authoritarian” to speak of truth, and the end result is doubt about the goodness of life”.<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen, the educational crisis also corresponds to a crisis in role models as the youth lack persons to whom they can turn to for reference or for guidance. To fill in this vacancy, the world of sport is quick to offer a multitude of fans its own sport heroes – champions whom the youth seek to imitate for their sporting ability and yet end up emulating them also as role models for their personal lives.

Our reflections have brought us to the conclusion that sports are at a decisive crossroads: Sport must either rediscover its great potential for transmitting values and authentic virtues or it will succumb to a dominating utilitarianism that limits sport to pure physical activity or pure business. As it emerged in our discussion, educational institutions and sport associations are continually threatened by the danger of a reductionism ideology that prevents the person from being considered as a whole, in his or her entirety.

Noting a similar reductionism in education, the Holy Father observed that “education tends to be broadly reduced to the transmission of specific abilities or capacities for doing, while people endeavour to satisfy the desire for happiness of the new generations by showering them with consumer goods and transitory gratification”.<sup>5</sup>

Sport can only escape from this crisis imposed upon it by the “dictatorship of relativism” only if the world of sport learns how to open up to God, the only one who can guarantee the authentic values of life and human relations.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

The athletes who have offered us their testimonies highlighted the importance of being able to find in their sport's environments some type of reference to God, especially in the person of a chaplain or by some other means. One athlete, in fact, even lamented the lack of such a figure and the negative consequences suffered due to the absence of priest in his sporting world.

In some countries, such as Germany, the world of sport is traditionally considered as non-confessional. However, out of respect for the personal convictions of the individual, an openness to the transcendent is becoming more and more universally acknowledged as something that is necessary for all, and does not in any way jeopardize a healthy secularism.

The Holy Father also pointed this out during an encounter with a group of Italian clergy. "There is light and hope – said the Holy Father – only if God appears. Our life has a meaning which we must not produce ourselves but which precedes us and guides us. In this sense, therefore, I would say that together, we should take the obvious routes which today even the lay conscience can easily discern. We should therefore seek to guide people to the deepest voices, to the true voice of the conscience".<sup>6</sup>

The rapid spread of ambiguous aims that are centred on only the material "success" of an individual or an institution's which are at times quite at odds with the common good and even harmful for the youth involved, makes it all the more urgent the presence of an educator who is authentic and courageous, well prepared, and determined to find a balance between these extremes. And this is precisely the field of the sport chaplain.

The sport chaplain finds himself on the front line as a unique point of reference for the youth, but not only for them. The figure of the priest, then, manifests its particular significance in opposing the onslaught of relativism and atheism.

<sup>6</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the clergy of Belluno-Feltre e Treviso*, in: "L'Osservatore Romano" Eng. Ed. n. 32/33, August 8/15, 2007, 6.

As we have heard in the testimonies of the players, the sport chaplain manifests a closeness on the part of the Church that can be of sustenance for those suffering the loneliness or disorientation that can especially arise in disaggregated families and even dispose one to confrontational or alienist behaviour.

With respect to this, Pope Benedict XV recalled that “education and especially Christian education ... has need of that closeness which is proper to love. Especially today, when isolation and loneliness are a widespread condition to which noise and group conformity is no real remedy, personal guidance becomes essential, giving those who are growing up the assurance that they are loved, understood and listened to”.<sup>7</sup>

As was noted more than once during our seminar – taking into account the need to form the very parents of these children is all the more urgent as they are either absent or incapable of transmitting to their children basic values. Yet, the role of the chaplain remains irreplaceable even when the children come from families that are solid and intact, for as the Holy Father also noted, “as children gradually grow up, their inner desire for personal autonomy naturally increases. Especially in adolescence, this can easily lead to them taking a critical distance from their family. Here, the closeness which can be guaranteed by the priest, Religious, catechist or other educators capable of making the friendly face of the Church and love of Christ concrete for the young person, becomes particularly important”.<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning of this seminar and throughout, the essential credentials of a true Christian educator have been called to mind, and these hold true for the essential characteristics that the sport chaplain must possess. First of all, he must be concerned for the good of sport, be committed to it, and go beyond seeking temporary solutions to its maladies, but have the courage and bravado to propose more lasting solutions.

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, in: “L'Osservatore Romano” Eng. Ed. n. 25, June 20, 2007, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

It was seen that a chaplain must live his mission in a gratuitous way, not expecting immediate results for his work, but remaining true to what he proposes while knowing how to maintain a positive rapport with these young athletes. To recap some of the suggestions made during the seminar, it was noted that the chaplain should be present not only at the big competitive events, but also in the other moments of an athlete's life; he should manifest himself as a friend, but also as an authoritative voice, as one who is also capable of educating the coaches and trainers and also the parents. It is asked that the chaplain welcome, orientate, and know how to "train" this passion for sport in the youth, accompanying them in the difficulties and promoting a sense of joyful hope. He should know how to live up to the demands of being on this frontier by orientating all to those values that transcend the result-driven world of sport, knowing how to interpret and enlighten these deeper aspirations that surface in these athletes, regardless of their religious perspective. Here too, it was mentioned the need to write or prepare materials that can help the athletes to reflect on the deeper meaning of their sporting endeavours.

Perhaps the task and responsibility that is assigned to the sports chaplain can seem like too much, far exceeding their human capacities. Yet, to help us to better understand what is really the heart of the matter, we have the Holy Father's words that outline a type of identikit of the educator when viewed in the light of Christ: "The task of education passes through freedom but also requires authority... A witness of Christ does not merely transmit information but is personally involved with the truth Christ proposes and, through the coherency of his own life, becomes a dependable reference point. However, he does not refer to himself, but to Someone who is infinitely greater than he is, in whom he has trusted and whose trustworthy goodness he has experienced".<sup>9</sup>

More than once, was it expressed during this seminar the desire that the Church make its pastoral action within the world of sport more active at all levels. As "Mater et Magister" of all Christians, and of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

humanity, the Church recognizes that sport can play a role in transmitting fundamental values. As it was fittingly recalled – her mission encompasses all spheres of human life, including that of sport. Furthermore, the Holy Father reminded parents and educators that the Church, according to Vatican II, cannot remain extraneous from these human spheres. He urged us with these words: “we certainly cannot fail to take interest in the overall orientation of the society to which we belong, in the trends that motivate it and in the positive or negative influence that it exercises on the formation of the new generations. The very presence of the community of believers, its educational and cultural commitment...are in fact an invaluable service to the common good and especially to the children and youth who are being trained and prepared for life”.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the participants of this seminar expressed their hope that the presence of the Church within the field of sport might shed light on the profound motivations, the anthropological premises that cause so many people from so many cultural backgrounds to practice this activity. As we have recalled, the authentic human foundation, which is consequently also Christian, of this much shared interest is none other than an expression of the desire for happiness and fulfilment that is enkindled within the human heart. In fact, it is this very thirst for the Absolute that constitutes the guarantee and underlying premise of an educational itinerary that is capable of purifying and elevating sport so as to bring out its inherent values. In order for sport to be truly “formative”, it must reawaken the authentic ideals of its original inspiration. These are values that are compatible with the values inherent to the practice of Christianity: the exercise of the human virtues, loyalty and self sacrifice, a sense of responsibility, dedication and asceticism. This is all a matter of, as expressed in the words of the Holy Father, “obeying the voice of being”.<sup>11</sup> [In this perspective, the need has also been

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the clergy of Belluno-Feltre e Treviso*, in: “L'Osservatore Romano” Eng. Ed. n. 32/33, Aug. 8/15, 2007, 6.

expressed for having a systematic and theoretical method for pastoral ministry to sport that can point out its theological, anthropological, ethical, educational, and spiritual aspects].

We have seen that the pastoral care to the world of sport is such a broad ranging and important task that cannot be sustained solely by the work of chaplains. What is needed, is an entire network of people who are engaged in the formation of youth through sports, particularly Catholic organizations. In this regards, it is desirable that all of the national bishop's conferences establish an ad hoc liaison to favor the coordination among all formational institutions on the national level, just as the "Church and sport" Section within the Pontifical Council for the Laity is at the level of the universal church. However, in order to efficaciously penetrate the world of sport this collaboration should be as far reaching as possible and should also extend to the ecumenical level. Along these same lines, Pope Benedict stressed that, with regards to the education of youth, the entire Christian community, with all its many branches and components, "must express and manifest...our willingness and readiness to work together to 'build a network', to achieve with an open and sincere mind every useful form of synergy...".<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, many have expressed during these days their hope that the Holy See might provide a type of *vademecum* that could provide orientation for the pastoral ministry of sport, serving both to channel the efforts of all those already engaged in service to the world of catholic youth sports, and to solicit a greater interest in this field on the part of pastors. Additionally, many chaplains have expressed their need of booklets or other materials grounded in scripture and a spiritual vision of sport that can assist hem in the evangelization efforts in this field.

As we will continue to analyze and evaluate the many suggestions and initiatives that have surfaced during these days of reflection, I wish to now conclude my remarks by thanking all of the participants – the

<sup>12</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the participants of the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, in: "L'Osservatore Romano" Eng. Ed. n. 25, June 20, 2007, 4.



experts, athletes, coaches and trainers, and all those who work in the pastoral field of sport, but especially, the sport chaplains. We have seen that this work is not at all easy, nor often appropriately appreciated, and nearly always stretches you beyond your other pastoral obligations. Despite these difficulties, we believe that the Lord will not allow his help and consolation to be lacking, as a sign of that closeness that he has wanted to establish with humanity as manifest in the incarnation of his Son and his presence in the Church.



## **I. PANEL DISCUSSION**

**What athletes look for in a sport chaplain**



Heartfelt concern for the youth of today is “the” preoccupation of every parent, and should be so for every educator and every priest, for keeping close at heart the happiness and development of every young person is what is at stake in the task of each coach and teacher. For the deep desire of every youth is the pursuit of happiness and this deep desire is also at the root of the educational value found in sport.

Because of this, we must give the young people more than a game of soccer, or volleyball, or basketball, or whatever other physical skill... We are entrusted with the task of offering them something much more precious: that of giving them a sense of meaning to their lives. We must help them discover the very source of hope and the deeper motive for which life is worth living; a motive for giving their best effort, for sweating it out, for living by the rules, for respecting others...

At the dawn of the third millennium sport must be in touch with the very heart of youth in order to help them to truly mature, and not to chase after merely business and performance which now seems rampant at every level and at all costs! Sport should neither be considered as the remedy for all our ills, yet neither should it be disregarded – as it often is in schools or parishes – as something “superficial” among the more serious things of life.

In fact, it is necessary to have the courage to admit that sport does not always educate and at times, when educators use it improperly, it can even be de-formative. A sport that transgresses or tries to ignore its educational dimension is one that has betrayed its mission and has rejected the very values upon which it is founded.

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Certainly sport itself does not pretend to be capable of saving the world. Nor is it a panacea, magic wand, or miracle cure. Sport is simply a formidable educational tool. But, this instrument requires educators who have the motivation, competence and skills needed in order to use it in favour of youth education.

If youth sports don't serve to better the lives of our young people, if they do not help them to prepare them to face the difficulties in life, to teach them to assume responsibility, and to respect the rules and norms of civil society, then it has failed in meeting its objectives.

There are symptoms of a profound cry that stems from an illness embedded in the souls of youth and children. But there is only one response: the work of education, which signifies helping these boys and girls to give reason to the hope that is already within them. It is even present when they practice sport, for it comes from the reason that is within them.

In this field, the work of a chaplain is crucial. His task is that of accompanying, orientating, coaching them in sacrifice, giving them hope and helping them to constructively build their life project. Examples of living, and concrete actions are what educate youth in responsibility, in solidarity, in constructing a life not trapped in only the relentless pursuit of trophies and medals, but rather, a life capable of offering adolescents and teenagers the possibility of self betterment, of living a life of meaning, with dignity and with zest.

It is said, that we adults tend to speak frequently about the problems of youth but seldom do we speak with young people. In light of this observation, we would now like to listen in this panel discussion to the young athletes themselves. What is it that they seek or expect from a sport chaplain? We have the pleasure of having with us a former Italian soccer player, a semi professional basketball player who is now studying for the priesthood, a very young world record breaking swimmer on her way to the Beijing Olympics, and a professional soccer coach from Chile. Let us listen to what they have to say about the role of a chaplain.

Regarding the needs and expectations of professional athletes, it would be good to have a better understanding of the challenges in the life of a professional athlete. Life has its difficult moments that everyone has to face sooner or later and the same holds true for professional athletes. We can often read in the news papers about the “dramas” of sport athletes such as the suffering of an upsetting loss or a serious injury. Even though the papers tend to dramatize everything, professional sports are full of their ups and downs. In my own career, I have been sidelined for long periods of time for very serious injuries. However terrible these injuries were, I have always been able to recover from them and return to play again. In fact, we can even speak about these “unfortunate” injuries as truly “formative” experiences because these set backs help us to grow and mature as persons.

For me, the objective of sport is really that of seeking to practice it in the best possible way. I do so, not to “become a star” but in order to give my very best. When one achieves success in sport, sport becomes also a way of communicating this emotion, as well as one’s own behaviour. In fact, in a certain way, professional sports can reflect our culture as they are made up of so many different types of personalities and characters.

However, keeping this perspective is not always easy while playing professional sports. Our environment has become a business and this term itself can reduce one to feel like the mere product of a contract and

\* Eusebio di Francesco is a former centre midfielder, who made his debut in the Italian division league in 1995 at Piacenza. He began playing for “Roma” in the 1997 season, and it was with this team that he reached the height of his career winning the 2000-’01 Championship, playing in 168 games and scoring 14 goals. He is married with three children and coaches youth soccer in Piacenza.

bound to so many circumstances and factors. Because of the lucrative financial incentives one unwillingly accepts these commitments in certain situations. Frequently when the expected results are not achieved there is one more unhappy face, not only on the part of the trainers, but also the fans. For them, the only thing that matters is victory, and victory always.

Yet, if I had to make the choice between arriving first in sport and second in life, I would prefer to arrive second in sport rather than in life. Because, the player comes and goes, but it is the man who remains. To win in life means becoming a person who can live and transmit noble values to those who are around them.

This being said, I have tried to live this out in my own way. In doing so, I have been encouraged, and even at times pushed along, by others, including priests. I believe that the presence of a sports chaplains here is very important. Perhaps in my case, however, I can see this better now than before. They have told me that I have values that are not easily found in the world of professional sports. Nonetheless, it has not been easy to give testimony to these values. Don Mimmo, a priest and a friend, has encouraged me to keep striving to do so in my own way.

In soccer, we sometimes see players making the sign of the cross before a penalty kick or after scoring a goal. What is the interior motive for which they do this and who is to judge this? Not me. Personally, even though I am a believer, making the sign of the cross in public is not something I like to do. This is a question of personal preference. On the other hand, when I played for Roma, before the home games, we would have mass on Saturday at the chapel at Trigoria where the team trained. This is something that I liked.

Although my professional career is over, I continue to remain involved in the world of soccer as I direct a soccer school. Also, I continue to be motivated in my work with the youth by the presence of a priest. My goal is to help the children in this program to grow as persons precisely through their experience of soccer. Now that I am a father of three children I have a much better understanding of the importance of this activity in the formation of the youth.



In fact, the proper attitude and perspective of the parents is a key factor in the formation of youth. When I was a child, I had to make the choice between playing soccer or bicycling. My father would have preferred me to pursue cycling and he never pressured me to play soccer. I decided to make soccer my sport. Today, I am proud of the choice that I made as I have realized my childhood dream. I am thankful that my parents were supportive, but never coercive in this choice. I now try to go forward with a sense of responsibility.

So often I see parents yelling angrily on the sidelines in order to make a champion out of their 7 or 8 year old. I battle against this and try to educate both children and parents. I know that I am not a chaplain nor a priest, but my involvement with youth soccer allows me to feel the duty and weight of being an educator. At times I feel the need to intervene in order to help the parents for the good of the children. I hope that perhaps they might listen to what I have to say because of the my experience as a former player.

This area of youth sports is also a crucial area where a priest can be of so much benefit and his presence is greatly needed, especially here in the world of soccer, but also in the parish oratories and sports clubs where the priests are rarely to be found. Certainly he must win over their respect and prudently intervene in order to help the families as well as the youth to approach sports with the proper attitude. Because of this, I would like to make an appeal to all priests – this isn't a homily – to give more of their attention to those areas of youth sport and also to reach out to the parents, who are the primary educators of their children. They need your help in order to recover these values, and to come back to the Church, because these are the same values that the Church teaches and shares. Although all of us know this, it is good to be reminded of it every now and then.

LORENZO CURBIS\*

Although the world of a professional basketball player is not easy to evangelize, there are nevertheless many opportunities that I think would benefit greatly from the presence of a chaplain. The world that I experienced – that of division II professional basketball in Europe – was an environment in which the players were completely polarized by the practice of their sport. All centred around their success... they trained for this. Typically the players began playing at a professional level while still in their teen's – some even living away from home at the age of 14 in order to play for a club that will guarantee them a professional career.

In the case that they are successful they immediately find themselves with a lot of income, and fame (if not on the national level, at least at the local level). This “success” obviously can have a negative impact on their maturation process and the establishment of a hierarchy of values. Especially if they are very young and already with a big contract, they can tend to live superficially in a world that revolves around them.

Because of this, there tends to be a great spiritual poverty in professional sports. As a player, I live for myself. I am living to realize “my” dream, and for “my” things. Additionally, a player is surrounded by others with the very same mentality as everything in their life tends to revolve around their sport. Because of their constant travelling, they socialize with their same teammates and it is difficult to establish social relationships beyond the circumference of their team or to “escape” from the world of basketball that surrounds them.

The players are necessarily conditioned by economic factors. With-

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out being explicitly told, every player feels the pressure upon him to succeed as he knows that he will be cut if he does not perform well. This same pressure to win means that some players will need to frequently change cities in order to play for another team that will guarantee them a better contract or position. This does not help them to have stable points of reference or to establish enduring relationships.

When I was 17, I wanted to become like that player there – which meant having the things that that player had and even being strong and aggressive like that player. Consequently, to do so, one has to demonstrate their muscle on the court and often at the expense or injury of others. Instead of learning respect for one's opponent, players are often taught to deal with their adversaries in a conflictive way.

Economic pressure can also weigh heavily on players who are married. I recall a friend who was married with children who changed cities nearly every year in order to continue playing professionally. His wife and children suffer this as well as they have to change schools every year because of their father's "work". And the same can be said for coaches. There is the constant dilemma between perhaps staying put in division II or moving to another city to be in division one and earn more money. Thus there is this constant challenge of being continually uprooted.

Then there is the problem of life after sport and the question: "What will I do when I quit playing?" A young player who believes he has a bright professional future may limit his academic studies to the bare minimum never thinking about a university career. The problems arise then when his professional career ends. One serious injury is enough to force the player to seriously rethink their future and make a radical change of lifestyle. Or, if you are not "winning" your career may also abruptly come to an end. Then you find yourself suddenly without a job, with 30 years of age and wondering what to do next. You are back in school in order to get a diploma or degree – the oldest in the class – without any friends. You would like to marry and have a family but as you have always been travelling, you have no stable relationships.

I think the case of my friend a fellow teammate is an exception to

the rule and a special grace. Like me, he was not a great academic. So after many years of professional basketball in division II, he quit playing and is now a bricklayer. Knowing that I am studying for the priesthood, he recently called to tell me with a great sense of pride: "Brother Lawrence, guess what! I have just finished working on the construction of a Church!" Thanks be to God, he has found a beautiful wife and now has a baby girl. Certainly, God is at work whether there is a chaplain or not but I think that this is a particular grace as not all players have such a happy ending to their career.

Before these challenges, the professional club tries to compensate and help their players. At times, the level of human formation achieved by the young player depends in great part on the club and the degree of influence it has in the life of the players beyond that of the basketball court. Certainly there are some very good ball clubs. Personally, I can say that the team I played for taught me a great sense of discipline and a healthy spirit of sacrifice which has come in handy in other areas of my life. The management staff providing assistance for the younger players with their studies and even counselling. In a certain way, the club assumes the role of a mother in providing for the basic need of the players. This, in turn, benefits the entire team in the long term as their players have less to worry about.

Yet, in spite of all of this, a club can never substitute the role of the parents of these youth who are living away from home. Furthermore, the club often is neutral or indifferent to religious practices or to the negative and dangerous environments that are often frequented by these youth. Here there is a great hole to be filled.

For the above reasons, it is difficult for these young players to seriously reflect about their life or about God. During the seven years of professional basketball, I encountered many very good people, but I never remember ever having a conversation about religious or spiritual themes. We were generally so far away from God, so forgetful of Him, that the spiritual never entered the picture.

While I was playing professionally, I did not know there existed such a thing as a sport chaplain because neither in our club nor the

other teams had a chaplain. So, as I attempt to respond to the question: “What would I expect from a sport’s chaplain?” I will try to do so with the mentality of a 19 year old, and not as a seminarian.

First of all, I would expect to find in a priest someone who is concerned for my genuine good. At times, the players have no point of reference – especially the younger ones. They are far away from their parents and the club wants to make them little champions and has all the material resources to do so. The club has all the means to make them successful as players, but not men. In this perspective, a priest chaplain would have been a point of reference for me and could have been a great help. I would have asked him for advice and orientation because I know that he would have sought my overall good, and not simply that of the team. And without this orientation, these players are candidates for future unhappiness. For as long as you win, you have fame and money, but inside... What do you have?

A sports chaplain can also help these athletes to escape from this world that revolves exclusively around them. Involving the entire team in supporting works of charity can help the athletes and staff have a new perspective towards life and can help them to see how their God given talent and treasure can be used to help others in need. A chaplain can help them to also see that their good example on and off the field as a well known athlete can be a powerful tool in conveying the values found in good sportsmanship to youth.

Additionally, the chaplain should not limit his pastoral work to only that of the starting team but should extend throughout the club to the younger players in such a way as to allow a Christian spirit to pervade the entire sports club. It would be advantageous to seek among all of us here, a way of coordinating the work of sport chaplains at an national and international level. Not only to share experiences, but above all to find ways to take advantage of the laity to create an operative model with the purpose of evangelizing this world of sport and enabling it itself to be an agent of evangelization.

I would like to mention one final point with regards to coaches. We have seen how a coach spends as much time with the players – if not

more – than parents. Because of sports inherent formative dimension, a coach can transmit so many values and help players learn such things as sacrifice, responsibility, sincerity, team work, etc. So, the attention and Christian formation of coaches and trainers should also be considered a part of the pastoral ministry of a sport chaplain.

KATE ZIEGLER\*

As we have already heard, and as I will reiterate, the need for sport chaplains is noteworthy. They can play an important role at major competitions, such as the Olympics, but also in daily life. They provide a support system for us athletes who face many struggles and temptations (I can attest to this) that come with being a top level athlete.

Ever since I was little I loved the water. I started swimming when I was six years old, and I have been swimming ever since, just because I love it. At age thirteen I was swimming at a national level and by sixteen I made my debut on the USA National team. At that young age, my eyes were opened, as I saw many challenges and temptations that top level athletes have to face: you have to dedicate hours and hours to training; you have to face social, emotional, mental, and physical difficulties and pressures; there are many sacrifices you have to make. For example, I can't always go out with my friends and I can't always see my family because I am travelling far from home and I am not following the same schedule of your typical nineteen year old college student. Because of these pressures that are placed on athletes, by themselves and by others, there are often temptations that they fall victim to such as doping and other things which can cause athletes to act in immoral

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ways. In addition, because of their status as top level athletes, they often can get away with doing these things.

The demanding schedule of competing at the Olympic level is also tremendous. When we go to an International competition, we will arrive at the pool around 6 am for warm ups, swim in Olympic “pre-competes” until about noon. Then we go back to the hotel for team meetings, lunch and rest only to arrive back at the pool at 4 pm for warm-ups for finals, we compete, and we don’t finish the competition until about 9 or 10 pm at night. With this hectic schedule, there is little time for me to go to Mass or receive the sacraments. At times I bring a Bible along with me and read it on my own. There is one other girl on the team who is open about her faith and sometimes we will pray together....but I think it would be great if there was a sport chaplain as we don’t have one for the swim team. If there was a chaplain with whom we could speak to who could understand our hectic schedule, maybe we could arrange a suitable time for a Mass so we could receive the sacraments.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to have someone we could go to in these stressful moments to discuss our problems and concerns.

I realize that my swimming talent is a gift from God. I pray daily, not just to win – which is great – but rather, to give glory to God through my swimming and to do what He wants me to do with this gift. There is a prayer that I say before competing which is Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength”! This is a reminder for me. It helps me remember that I can only achieve good things through God who gives me strength. Not everyone is able to keep this perspective. A lot of times, no matter how much you remind yourself, the hectic blur of activities does not always allow you to keep God in focus. Furthermore, the media and others, put so much pressure on you that this can also make you lose your focus. For instance, I have seen that after you have a success like winning the world championships, the media and all the people on the team are telling you, “You are so great!”. They glorify you and tell you that you are wonderful and you even make the front page of the newspaper. After receiving all of

this praise it is easy to say to yourself, “Yeah, I did win. I am pretty good!” and you start getting a big head. With this egotism, you can start to take all the credit. This is a dangerous thing. You have to constantly remember that it is not just me. It is a team effort; it is my coaches, my family, my friends, and most importantly, God who are all helping me.

These are the temptations related to moments of victory, but there are also times when you don’t win. In fact, you can’t win every time you jump into the water. Let me share with you another experience. This past summer, I broke the world record in the 1,500 meter in June. In July, we had a small local meet where we were really not expected to break any records because we were not getting the proper rest, etc. Nonetheless, my grandparents, cousins, and aunts and uncles came to the meet to watch me swim. They didn’t care if it was a big competition or not. They just wanted to see me swim. However, there were many reporters who showed up at this event, expecting me to break another world record, which I personally was not expecting to do, as I was not properly prepared for this event. I swam the 800 freestyle and I won by quite a bit. In fact, I did my second best time ever. I was really pleased as it was the fastest I had ever swum at this type of meet at this particular moment in the season. I was happy because my grandparents were happy.

However, a reporter came up to me afterwards and said: “Tough break! You must really be disappointed that you didn’t break the world record! What do you think? That wasn’t very good, was it?” I tried my best to reply that I was pleased, but I was a little startled by these comments and started thinking to myself that maybe I really didn’t do very well, even though I had thought so, etc. This is an example of the useless pressures that are placed upon us. In this case, I had my family to turn to for support. But at International competitions, you don’t always have your family to turn to and it can be hard to get away from all of the media hype and to enter into a positive environment.

So, on both sides of the coin, it would be really nice to have a sport chaplain at International competitions. In the times when you win, it would be good to have someone to talk to in order to keep everything



in perspective, in order to not get ahead of yourself and becoming over-confident. Also, the same applies for those times when you don't do so well. Sometimes people – myself included – mistakenly think that when they lose they did not pray hard enough or wonder what they did wrong to merit a loss. Yet, this is the wrong perspective. God gives the gifts and the blessings when He wants. Who are we to question Him about this?

I would like to make one other point regarding talents. Even though we need to remember from whom it is that our gifts and talents come from, it is equally important that we do not become “identified” or “defined” exclusively by our talents. Although my swimming talent is a great thing, there is a danger that people know me only as “Kate Ziegler the swimmer”, or “the world record holder”, etc, and not as a normal person. As a sophomore at college, the new arrivals on the swim team are afraid to approach me because they think that just because I hold a world record they cannot talk to me. I went over to them to introduce myself and they still seemed to be so distant and at awe. I had to say to them: “I am just Kate, please don't be afraid of me!” Then there are others who want my autograph – which is really flattering – but they don't even know anything about me. They don't know that I am a sophomore at college, that I have career plans, that – just like any other normal girl – I love to go shopping, etc. People don't know these other things about me because they only see me as an athlete. The danger in this is that when you define who you are only by your sport, you can forget about all your other interests, such as God and your friends. And God forbid that a day might come when I get injured or lose my sport talent, ...and then what? If I have only defined myself by that one thing – “Kate Ziegler the swimmer” – then I would be lost.

However, there are also very many positive things that can come from success. Because people know who I am they want to hear my story. So, when I do have the attention of the media or when I am doing an interview, I want to share my faith. I want people to know, not just by my words, but also by my example, by the way I carry myself, that I am a Catholic. I want to share both my love for swimming and my love

for God. But sometimes, because I am only 19 and I still have to grow in my spiritual life, I don't always know how to share my faith with others and transmit this. So again, to have a sport chaplain, especially in those big occasions like the Olympics, with whom I could talk before doing an interview, or who could give me some guidance on how to share my faith would be a wonderful benefit.

So, as you could see, I have identified a few ways I could benefit from having a sport chaplain. Athletes have their coaches to help them on a daily basis as a mentor for their sport. They have their family and friends to help them as mentors with social, emotional, and mental support. But a chaplain is a spiritual mentor! I think this is just as important as having a coach and having family and friends. Especially during competitions, to have a chaplain who could facilitate the reception of the sacraments to keep the athlete nourished in this way would be something invaluable. In my case, on the US swim team, we do not have a chaplain. Yet, this is something that I would love to see as I think it would be a huge benefit for everyone. Even though not many people on the team are outspoken about their faith, I think that if they did have someone with whom they could talk about spiritual things, and if they had someone to set an example, this would be of enormous value.

## ARTURO SALAH\*

What do I as a coach, look for in a sport chaplain? I should begin by stating that professional sport chaplains – at least in my experience coaching professional soccer in Chile – are not as common to find as they are in Europe. But, at the same time, I think that the per-

Olympics.

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spective of South America, while different from that of Europe, can offer another vantage point beneficial for the discussion of this seminar.

I had a unique experience when I was at the “La Catolica” in Chile. I consider it “unique” because this first division professional team happens to be affiliated with the Catholic University in Santiago. This particular setting enabled us to have a very positive experience of a sport chaplain as we were blessed with the presence of a very zealous priest who played an integral part in the overall formation of the players and the team spirit. Consequently, ever since then, I have always invited priests to be present in the life of the teams that I have coached. Although they were not “official” chaplains, they exercised this role to a great extent as they occasionally celebrated mass for the players and attended to their spiritual needs.

In order to respond to the question: what athletes look for in a sport chaplain, it is necessary to first take into account some of the external factors that come into play in the world of sport. Taking into account these factors will enable us to better understand the way a priest can serve as a chaplain to the world sport.

Within sporting activities, certain Christian and human values such as solidarity, respect, tolerance, teamwork, discipline, willpower, and tenacity intersect. These are Christian values as well as human values. However, as it was previously mentioned, we need to be mindful of the fact that our society has become predominantly secular and, as such, these values that are proper to both sports and Christianity have become totally separated from the realm of religious experience. They are no longer incarnated in the life of a Christian as his identity has been reduced to a mere title or the performing of certain rituals or displays of popular piety which at times borders on superstition.

Thus, the first thing that a chaplain must do in working with a sports institution, is to incarnate in his own life, by his example and his nearness to the players, the virtues and values that are common to both sports and the faith. In order to do this, as the former basketball player said, a priest must show a genuine interest in this activity. If he does not practice a sport, he should at least respect the players interest in it and

he should value this activity which the players hold so dearly. A chaplain should also understand the great demands it places on the players.

At the same time, given the separation between the life of faith and ordinary life, the chaplain needs to gradually earn his position among the players by winning over their respect. Normally, professional athletes are not accustomed to having a priest present at their sporting activities nor in this world sport in general. Because of this, it is fundamental that the players know that he is there to help them and not only them but also their families and those around them. He cannot or should not force his presence nor his beliefs on them. Rather, little by little, the spiritual assistance that a priest gives will come to be appreciated to the point until it becomes something "necessary" for the athletes.

I believe that by establishing a personal relationship with the players, and winning over their trust, the athletes will come to value his role as a representative of Christ. We can recall how Christ himself was always near to his disciples and how he was always preoccupied and concerned about the most basic human necessities of those around him: how he showed his concern for the newly weds by transforming the water into wine at Cana; how he multiplied the loaves to feed the hungry crowd; or the miraculous catch of fish. So too, the chaplain must imitate Christ in demonstrating his concern for the human needs of these players. The chaplain's concern for the human needs of these young professionals will eventually open the way to their spiritual needs.

It is also important to consider how the chaplain can be a positive reflection of the love of God the Father for these athletes. Our society today, and particularly in my own country, is witnessing a crisis of the paternal figure. Certain masculine characteristics that were once greatly appreciated have been rejected by today's currents in thinking. Many athletes today, especially from Latin America, often come from adverse social and economic conditions and have not had as a point of reference a good paternal example in their own natural father. In addition, many of these athletes become fathers of children at a very early age. So, how can we expect them to be good fathers of their children if they

have not received an adequate example due to the adverse conditions with which they were raised? Subsequently, what image of God the Father will such a person have? I believe that this is where their Catholic faith can help them along with the positive example of a dedicated priest. In fact, in these circumstances, I have seen how a chaplain can play an enormous role in educating them in their faith and in living their own fatherhood. His example can help to make up for what might have been lacking in their own upbringing. In this way, the true image of God the Father will be less difficult for them to see, and their faith can support them in their difficulties.

Once the chaplain has won over the confidence of the players and has earned his role among them, he, in turn, must win over the support of the entire sports association. It is fundamental that the chaplain be considered as a part of the team just as the other staff members such as the doctor or physiotherapist are. In this way, the spiritual functions that he realizes are not seen as something peripheral, but rather, as an essential contribution to the overall good of the team where the spiritual and mental elements are valued as important as the physical elements.

At times, as we have already seen, one great challenge is that of reconciling the liturgical calendar with the game and practice schedule. As game days typically fall on Sundays (and Saturdays are often travel days) this creates a difficulty in complying with the religious precept of Sunday Mass and certain feast days. Here one hopes that the chaplain will be flexible and creative in finding a solution which meets the needs of the liturgical schedule and the requirements of the club and its players in order to help them in the best way possible.

In summary, we can say that the most important task of a chaplain is that of educating the young players in Christian and human values. The gradual but constant effort on the part of the chaplain – being close to them and counselling them in time of need, exposing them little by little to the grace of the sacraments – is an irreplaceable support that will help the players face the significant problems that many youth face today: broken homes, immaturity, drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuity and threatening social environments.

At the same time, the compatibility for the Christian faith to harmonize with the discipline of sport is obvious, as this occurs naturally with the values and virtues that they share in common. When we add to this, the need that athletes have to feel God near to them in their sporting activities, we can see that the sport chaplain is in a unique position to help them with all this.

Although some of these realities may be different from those of athletes in other countries, many of these problems are common to young people around the world, and not just athletes. In light of this seminar, it is my hope that the Church in Latin America, could, as a majority, have more sport chaplains to serve these athletes. In the meantime, all of us have the mission of teaching, fostering and exemplifying those values and virtues that are common to both a committed Christian life and the exercise of sport.

## **II. PANEL DISCUSSION**

### **Experiences of sport chaplains**





A chaplain is, of course, generally a priest to whom is entrusted in more or less a stable manner, the pastoral care of a particular portion of a community or group of Christ's faithful. The particular group that we are considering at present, is that of athletes, especially the ministry to some group of athletes, whether during the season or during the year, or even on a special occasion or event.

As many of us have seen, the particular spiritual needs of this group are abundant enough. In my own particular experience, prior to coming to Rome, I served as chaplain to the Philadelphia Eagles, an American football team which is part of the NFL. Even the way I became involved with the team, is telling of the special nature of the work of this ministry.

A few years ago, a head trainer of the Eagles wanted to become a Catholic. Yet, he had difficulties making it to the parish classes that are a part of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. At that time, I was living at the home of our diocesan bishop and working in the chancery office as Moderator of the curia and Vicar for administration. On weekdays, I would celebrate an early Mass at a local parish before arriving to the chancery office. This young man, the head trainer, would come to this 6.30 am mass each morning. One day, after mass he told me about his problem of not being able to attend the evening classes due to the conflict it had with his work schedule. Likewise, he told me he could not make the make-up classes. So, he asked me if I would consider giving him instruction at an alternative time. Because he was very earnest in his desire to become Catholic, I accepted his request and instructed he and his wife who also attended this instruction with him.

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At that same time the current chaplain of the Eagles became ill, so they asked me if I would fill in occasionally and celebrate mass before some of their games, which I did. Eventually the chaplain's health declined, and he had to resign. Consequently, I eventually took over duties as their chaplain on a regular basis.

At the beginning, my duties consisted in celebrating Mass for the players, coaches, trainers and other personnel. Four and half hours before each home game, we would have the Mass. After steadily role fulfilling this function for some time, my role as chaplain expanded to include additional pastoral and sacramental care. Besides preaching the Word of God, providing the sacraments, and instructing coaches and players in matters of the faith, and, of course discussing aspects of their spiritual life in individual conversations, this care began to extend to the family members of these players. Members of their family would come to training camp, or I would see them before or after a game, and I would eventually get to know them.

I soon realized, firsthand, that often these players, coaches and trainers, are just simply not able to regularly attend Mass at their parish Church due to their professional commitments. They would tell me that their interaction with their parish priest is sporadic, and because of this, at times this relationship can even become strained. During the off season, these same people tend to travel. This is their only vacation time, so they tend to get away for these two months in order to spend time with their extended families and relatives who they rarely see during the season. So again, they are away from their local parish. To further complicate matters, there is the "dominate sports culture" which is driven along by commerce and where the pressure to succeed has become enormous. The hours spent in training at the stadium are very long, often extending to 16 hours a day. In addition, the amount of attention that the fans give to these athletes, causes many of these to become local heroes within their community. This can also create a lot of pressure for them and their spouse and children as they too assume a certain celebrity-hero status.

However, all of these factors have also created an atmosphere

where the players and coaches are open to listening and to exchanging ideas about matters of faith with members of the clergy. As the chaplain's role has extended beyond the crucial and essential role of administering the sacraments, the chaplain has a unique opportunity to help guide these people to become leaders for their local community and can help them to be models of virtue for society, promoting not only human values, but also Christian values in the way they live and speak. My experience with the Philadelphia Eagles showed me that sport chaplains, fulfil a need as they provide for a group of people who because of their condition in this stage in their life, are not able to avail themselves to the ordinary care of parish priests.

Now, I am currently working in a seminary in Rome, as the Rector of The Pontifical North American College. Besides focusing on the essential goal that the seminarians become men of prayer – a person in close communication with the Lord – the next aspect that we focus on with the students is their pastoral formation and the necessity of the priest to be available to the faithful, whenever they are legitimately, in need of him. The priest is one who lays down his life in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd in service of the flock. Sport chaplains are also called to do the same in an important, but often unstructured way, but nonetheless, in a very critical ministry of our time.

The late John Paul II pointed out on several occasions the great a responsibility that is placed upon professional athletes because the eyes of sports fans throughout the world are fixed on them. As he once reminded professional soccer players before a World Cup: “Be conscious of your responsibility! It is not only the champion in the stadium but also the whole person who should become a model for millions of young people, who need “leaders”, not “idols”. They need men who can convey to them the zest for challenge, a sense of discipline, the courage to be honest and the joy or unselfishness”.<sup>1</sup>

Yet who will help these athletes to become these true leaders? Here

<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address at the blessing of Rome's Olympic Stadium*, 31 May, 1990, in: “l'Osservatore Romano”, English Ed. n. 24, 11 June 1990, 4.

we see the important and transcendent role of the sport chaplain! I was asked to introduce this topic of experiences of sport chaplains by telling my own experience. It is now my pleasure to introduce five priests who will now share with us broad variety of pastoral experiences in various sectors of sport that include: a chaplain of a national Catholic sport association, a chaplain of a national soccer team, a chaplain of a professional soccer team in Italy, a chaplain to professional rugby in France, and a chaplain to the Polish Olympic team.

### CLAUDIO PAGANINI\*

Before my work with a Catholic sports association, I was chaplain of the Brescia Soccer Club, a professional team. Those eight years of pastoral ministry to sport professionals offered me ample opportunities to meet top athletes of diverse religions and nationalities. While accompanying the directors and players and their families on both a human and spiritual level as chaplain, I was frequently engaged in such pastoral duties as celebrating the pre-game mass, hearing confessions, baptizing children, confirming, blessing marriages and celebrating funerals.

Yet, however gratifying this work with professionals might be, it cannot be compared to the rich and unbounded potential of pastoral work as the National Ecclesial Consultant of the *Centro Sportivo Italiano* (CSI). Allow me to explain why. Whereas the success of professional sport's ministry often depends in great part on the charismatic personality of the chaplain, the fruit that comes from priestly ministry within a Catholic youth sports association like the CSI, is based more on all that goes into the programming and realization of virtue and faith

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based projects and initiatives. In other words, whereas in the world of professional sports, the presence of the priest and his personality is the determining factor – and this is limited to a few –, in Catholic youth sports, the presence of a priest plays a much greater role in truly and profoundly influencing the vertex of the association in determining its goals and its initiatives that in turn will affect many more people. Furthermore, it is not making a profit nor the instrumentalisation of the athlete that prevails in youth associations like the CSI, but rather, the motto: “educate through sport”. This motto in fact is a mission that is often expanded to becoming that of “evangelize through sport”.

The CSI is the oldest multiple sport association in Italy. Originally founded in 1944, as an initiative of “Gioventù Italiana” of Catholic Action, today, it has over 850,000 athletes spread through out 13,000 sporting clubs with 42,000 teams and 100,000 coaches, animators, referees and directors. We cannot forget the 160 priests who are chaplains at the diocesan level, and another 20 priests who are regional ecclesial consultants at the regional level, and lastly the national ecclesial consultant (myself) who is appointed by the President of the Italian Bishops’ Conference. All of this enables me to say in jest that the CSI is larger than a diocese!

It should be noted that the CSI is not characterized by a drive for profit which is often typical of the large soccer clubs and sports associations. Furthermore, the CSI enjoys ecclesial recognition based upon the indications given by the Italian Bishop’s Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity in their 1981 document: *Criteri di ecclesialità dei gruppi, movimenti e associazioni*. This criteria can be summed up in the following: fidelity to Church’s teaching; conformity to the Church’s mission; communion with the local ordinary; recognition of the multiple forms of association; openness to collaboration.

Fidelity to these indications adds value to even the occasional sporting activity which consequently becomes incorporated into the “pastoral ministry” that is recognized by the Church. Here I would like to stress that the CSI is above all an educational and pastoral ministry carried out by laity who realize in full the indications of the Second Vat-

ican Council regarding the role of the lay faithful in the Church. It could also be noted that the Italian laity have been actively engaged Catholic sports associations for the past century whereas lay involvement in diocesan offices has only taken place during the past 15 years or so...but this is a theme for another seminar.

The statutes of the CSI requests the presence of a priest (the so called “ecclesial consultant”) at the diocesan, regional, and national level of the association. I think it is important to underline the uniqueness of the term “ecclesial consultant” with regards to the other terms used by other associations such as spiritual assistant, spiritual father, counsellor, or chaplain. The ecclesial consultant is a priest who is “in” the CSI more than just “of” the CSI; he realizes his role in the name of the Church since he received an official mandate from his bishop for this. His pastoral work is not limited only to the sacraments but extends to the formative realm of the athletes and coaches, the educative network, and to the pastoral formation initiatives in his territory. In this way, his presence guarantees the association’s fidelity to its roots and to its Christian-inspired educational goals. With the term “consultant”, the specific educational task of the Church is also brought into light which it can offer to all indiscriminately whether Catholic or non Catholic. Here the Church as “Mater et Magistris” accompanies her children on both a human and a spiritual path.

In the *vademecum* for the ecclesial consultant of the CSI, all priests engaged in ministry within the Association are charged with the following duties: the promotion of human and Christian values at all the sportive, social, or ecclesial gatherings that are affiliated with the CSI; to be a sign and testimony of the bishops pastoral care with regards the Association; to promote opportunities of evangelization and formation, especially directed to the youth, directors, referees, trainers, and athletes. to periodically inform the ecclesial authority who appointed him on the status of the association; to participate in the initiatives of the CSI that are realized in the parishes, oratories, and other diocesan structures, etc; to be a reminder that the CSI is a Catholic association that operates in harmony with the CEI. The ecclesial consultant fulfills the pastoral responsi-

bility that responds to him – whether the local, regional, or national level – but always in conjunction with his corresponding ordinary. He, as the principal “agent” of pastoral action, is the point of reference for the association with regards to all pastoral ministry.

The fecundity of the ecclesial consultant’s presence in the life of the association is achieved in the degree in which he accompanies and participates in the formative projects of the association. The most appropriate moments for the pastoral initiatives – the summer courses, the camps, and the different stages of formation, the periodic encounters with the various groups within the association – should always be inaugurated with a moment of prayer or a reflection as proposed by the ecclesial consultant.

There are numerous initiatives – based in the educative experience of the oratory that has sought the integral formation of the person – that are quite useful and efficacious to incorporate into the world of sport, such as: the inauguration /closing ceremonies of the sports year; the “Christmas for Athletes” and “Easter for Athletes” celebrations; pilgrimages; formation courses for the association directors; workshops in collaboration with those responsible for youth ministry; human formation initiatives that target professional athletes and secular sports associations; works of charity and solidarity; initiatives that promote the positive testimony of top athletes; the preparation of sports-prayer booklets for youth and children; formation courses for the parents of the children who practice sport.

Within the CSI, the ecclesial consultant can offer and bring to fruition multiple pastoral projects that – if supported by constant attention, evaluation, and thoughtful insertion into overall scope of the local Church’s pastoral program – can serve as a model for an integrated pastoral approach at the local level that upholds the world of sport as a privileged environment for the purpose of evangelizing the youth. This is our response to the challenge of the “ordinariness” of pastoral work which Cardinal Rylko mentioned. The CSI seeks to make everyday sport an extraordinary instrument of pastoral work used at the service of evangelization and human formation. Within this context, I would like

to mention some opportunities that the ecclesial consultant can take advantage of with the help of his formation team.

Some research indicates that pastoral outreach to the so called “frontier” of a community can build bridges between the heart of a community and those who stand at the threshold or remain outside. In this perspective, the youth of today are often at the threshold, as they live in uncertainty and are often so indecisive. The relational capacity of the educator requires that they help the youth overcome this uncertainty and indecisiveness and enter into full communion with a life defined by meaning. If the youth who are at this delicate threshold in their lives are not welcomed, they run the risk of abandoning the Church forever. Sport today offers a place where marginalized youth can encounter the Church; it is a bridge between the plaza and the Church. It can be a moment of truth for those who are on the edge between belonging to the Church or abandoning it altogether. Inspired by the example of St. Joseph, the ecclesial consultant can also be a sort of step father to these children. Since priests are less present in the classroom today, sport becomes in this sense an opportune occasion to reach out to these youth and families that might be at a distance from the Church or a priest.

Due to the great amount of time that a coach or trainer spends with the youth and also due to the leadership role the coach has with the players compared to that of a catechist for example, he or she becomes a key in evangelizing the youth. It is the children themselves who often share many of their personal problems with the coach in the course of these sporting activities. An attentive coach can easily detect in the behavioural problems of youth the lack of a sound family life that can ensure a harmonious and serene development. Much has already been said about this point. Let me just add that the CSI invests at least ten percent of its time in formation activities for its formators. This is not limited to improving technical skills, but seeks to offer them a psychological and religious training that equips them to understand the problems and concerns particular to each phase of a child’s development.

Especially today, where safe and formative environments are lack-



ing, a sports association that is open to all people can welcome first and second generation immigrants. In Italian schools alone there are 164 different nationalities present! Thus, the experiences of practicing a sport in common – both on and off the field – can provide a reciprocal opportunity for these youth to share social and human values. Sport also offers many occasions for meeting people of different religious traditions. By establishing a dialogue with the youth, the ecclesial consultant can explain to them that there are different ways in which people live their relationship with God, of praying, celebrating Holy Days, so as to help them live in harmony, etc. This is a concrete and simple way to contribute to inter-religious dialogue. At the same time, they can be moments to help Catholic youth strengthen their own Christian identity without being embarrassed or afraid. In fact, my own experience with professional soccer often showed many Catholic players to be much more hesitant to bear witness to their faith than many Muslim, Jewish or Buddhist players.

I mention one last point on the need for priests to offer well-planned, attractive, and meaningful liturgical celebrations. By “well-planned and attractive” liturgical celebrations, I wish to stress the need for the priests to prepare the young athletes to live these liturgical moments through a prior catechesis or a short explanation of the signs and symbols involved, something akin to a catechumenal itinerary for these sportsmen. Furthermore, as journalism makes use of sport analogies, they can also be applied to the spiritual life, where the priest is a spiritual coach and referee, and catechesis is akin to athletic training, etc. As St. Paul made much use of examples from sport to help explain the proclamation of Gospel, so must we in our work with the youth.

In conclusion, I wish to return to the year 1943, when the president of Catholic Action at that time, Dr. Gedda, laid out some specific characteristics for a Catholic sports movement that would come into existence the following year. He stressed the importance for the future CSI to be: a vivid expression of the youth of Catholic Action; a means of developing an apostolic method for the pastoral ministry to sport; a means of creating specialized ecclesial assistants for this new pastoral

reality. The evaluation of these goals today is certainly positive. At the same time, these prophetic tasks still remain very actual. Catholic sport associations have great need of spiritual assistants, chaplains, ecclesial consultants, ... whatever they are called does not really matter. What matters is that they are specialized in the pastoral ministry to sport, just as others are specialists in other pastoral fields (education, labour, family, vocational work...) and that the importance and value of this field is recognized for the contribution it can make for the evangelization of the new generations through sport.

### ALFONSO LOPEZ\*

In June of 2006, I was able to accompany the Mexican National soccer team to the World Cup as their chaplain. Although I had occasionally celebrated mass for some professional teams in Mexico, this was a totally new experience for me. This opportunity to spiritually assist these players along with their families and the many Mexicans who were there with the team in its host city of Göttingen was very interesting and gratifying for me as a priest.

What is the benefit of having a chaplain at the World Cup? What does he do? Certainly he does not score goals! Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to repeat the words of the president of the Mexican Soccer Federation, who said the following at the end of the mass of Thanksgiving: "Father, I would like to thank you for being with us because your presence as a priest has made our days together as a team both more human and more Christian". I think this is precisely what the priest brings to these events as his presence within the world of sport – even professional sports – can make it a more human and Christian activity.

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What does a priest actually do at the World Cup? In my case, I was able to celebrate Mass in Spanish each day for the players and their families, as well as for the directive and technical staff and the Mexican fans who were staying in the same hotel and wanted to attend Mass. In fact, it got to the point where I was celebrating two masses a day as those who couldn't attend mass in the morning due to their commitments would come in the evening. These people did not want to miss this opportunity to encounter Christ daily in the Eucharist. In addition to celebrating Mass and hearing confessions, I attended people in spiritual counselling.

However, it should be noted that it was not so at the beginning. The first day after our arrival, I posted a schedule for mass and confessions (as we were in Germany everything was to be well ordered), yet, only a few people from the team showed up. It was then that I realized that the players were not going to come on their own and that I must go out in search of them. So I dedicated a lot of time under the hot sun attending the team's practices in order to get to know the players. I often had to wait for the right moment to present myself and strike up a conversation with them. Yet, as a result, Mass attendance steadily increased. I think this was in part due to the fact that the players came to know the priest not in the sacristy, but rather, there on the sidelines in their world of soccer.

As professional coach Arturo Salah mentioned: "The priest needs to win the respect of the players". I think the way to gain their respect is through service: by being a good shepherd who is always attentive to their needs and always available to help them. The players need to know that we are there to help them spiritually. And this applies to all those who make up the team, from the president to the players as well as the technical staff on down to its last member. Because of this, by the end of the World Cup, I had a long line of people including the team's cooks, technicians, and water boys, who wanted either go to confession or ask me for a blessing before their flight home the next day. All of these people were made to feel a part of the team and sought out the team's chaplain as well.

I also came to realize how difficult it is for the players to make time for their spiritual life during these intense moments. I noted how some players who were attending daily mass had to sacrifice some of their time for breakfast or had to rise earlier than the rest. Because of this, these same players became the spiritual leaders of the team and encouraged others to attend mass by their example.

My presence among the Mexican team seemed quite providential right from the start in order to help the team through a tragic moment. Soon after our arrival in Germany, I was awakened in the middle of the night and I was asked to be the one to tell our goal keeper that his father had suddenly died. When I arrived to his room I found several players already gathered outside the goalie's room in a sign of solidarity in this moment of suffering of their fellow team mate. After speaking with him, I invited all those present to pray for the repose of the soul of his father and for him and his family. All of us knelt down in prayer before an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (an image of Our Lady was never lacking!) and with great fervour we prayed some "Hail Mary's" for the these intentions. This brought the team together in a unique way and also marked the general tone for the rest of the World Cup in which the team lived in a spirit of unity, charity, and faith.

For the sport chaplain however, the critical moments are not only those of tragedy. For the athletes, the moment of the game ...the moment of competition, is also very important because it is there that their entire career is on the line. It is the moment when their life as a professional hangs by a thread as all of their years of training and effort are put to the test. It is an important moment when the priest can and should be present to the players in a special way.

Five hours before our decisive game with Argentina, we had the celebration of the Eucharist, promoted by the team's spiritual leaders. The mass was attended by all. As we were all very nervous, I told them: "Look, all of us, myself included, are extremely anxious about this game. But only one thing really matters – that we simply give the very best we can. If we give our best, we have given everything. No one can ask for more than this..." At the end of the mass, all the players spon-

taneously knelt down before an image of the Blessed Mother to place all their efforts in her hands. Although we did not win that game, many said it was one of the most intense, most battled games of the Word Cup. It was hard to swallow this defeat, but we were left with the satisfaction of having given our very best. The following day, we celebrated the Sunday Mass in thanksgiving for the many graces we received during these emotional and unforgettable weeks that were lived with much joy, charity and faith.

During this seminar, someone pointed out that the chaplain needs to share in the human part of the athlete's lives in order to allow them the opportunity to approach us regarding the spiritual. This was my experience as well. I noticed how players would eventually have the courage to approach me to seek my advice or help regarding spiritual matters. But also, I noticed how difficult it is for some of them to open up. I noticed some players who seemed to want to speak with me but were hesitating to do so for some reason. Two of them waited until the last day to tell me: "Look Father, we would like to talk to you about something...we need to have our marriages blessed". One player had been civilly married for five years and the other for four. They were not happy watching their fellow players receive Christ in the Eucharist while they remained in the back with their arms crossed; they wanted to receive Christ in the Eucharist. I am happy to say that one was married in the Church soon after the World Cup and the other is taking marriage preparation classes in order to do the same. There was also the case of a Mexican player who had not been able to arrange for his one year old to be baptized as he was playing in Germany. I was able to help him find a Spanish speaking priest to help him with this. If they are given the opportunity, sooner or later these players will approach you in order to seek help in resolving their spiritual needs.

Even now, a year after the frenetic activity of the World Cup, I have been able to stay in touch with many of the players of the Mexican team. It seems that God was able to plant in all of their hearts a desire to grow in their Christian vocation. Now they are now seeking other priests to help them to cultivate this.

This beautiful experience at the World Cup has opened my eyes to the importance of the pastoral ministry to sport in the Church. Although in many countries this pastoral ministry to sport is new, it seems that God is anxiously awaiting that priests learn how to transmit Christ to these athletes as they are leaders of society and have such a great impact in the lives of children and youth. It is important that we always and everywhere bear witness to who we are as priests, and this includes the world of sport, which has a particular need for evangelization. At the same time, the world of sport has great resources to tap into – namely, the noble hearts of those athletes who aspire to lofty goals, who possess great ideals, who know how to fight and to win, and, above all, how to conquer themselves. So I would like to conclude by encouraging priests, especially those who work with youth, to be more present as a priest within the world of sport.

VITTORIO TRANI\*

By way of introduction, I am a Conventual Franciscan Friar from the Province of Rome. For 29 years, I have been a chaplain at the “Regina Coeli” prison here in Rome. I guess I am “doing my time” for my sins here on earth... Last May, a special soccer match was held at “Regina Coeli”: the national team of prisoners against a team composed of Italian priests. The trainer of the soccer team “Lazio” generously dedicated his time to coach the team of inmates. I let down my fellow priests as I rooted for the teams of inmates since I am their chaplain and the prisoners won! It was a great event that I hope will be repeated in the future.

For fifteen years, that is, since 1992, I have collaborated as a sport’s chaplain for the “Società Sportiva Lazio”, a first division soccer team

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in Rome. It all happen by circumstance, soon after the death of Padre Lisandrini. (This “little friar” was quite a personality in Italy. Not only was he a fan of Lazio, but he practically lived with the team as he would travel to the away games as well.) When the Lord suddenly called him home, Dino Zoff, the team’s trainer at that time, together with the director, asked me to fill in as the team’s chaplain. So I began, and I have exercised this role continuously for fifteen years. I have experienced the ups and downs of the team, such as the year 2000 when Lazio was at the top having won the European Championship, and the past few years when it has been further down in the rankings. However, it has always been a great experience.

On the Saturday evenings before the home games, I celebrate mass for the players and the technical staff. Obviously, this opportunity for evangelization presents itself each time in a different way, according to the people who are present. The number of participants varies as the players change from year to year, and also the team’s directors change frequently. Presently, those who participate in the liturgy include: staff members; some players on a regular basis; others who attend from time to time; other players not at all. We currently have two Muslims and two Orthodox Catholics on the team. The Orthodox sometimes attend and obviously the Muslims do not.

Special events are also organized for Easter and Christmas. We have always chosen to gather as a family during the Lent or Easter season. This past year we chose Ash Wednesday and it was a very beautiful experience. Although I feared that this choice may not have been properly understood or would be poorly attended, I was surprised to find just the opposite to be the case. At times we make generalizations and believe that in certain environments or among a specific group of people the sacramental signs of the faith will not be adequately appreciated. But here I was happy to discover this not to be the case as the group was very responsive to this liturgical moment and its meaning. In other years we have had the Easter blessing of homes, or have celebrated the Easter Vigil together. Whatever it may be we chose one event during Easter to come together as a family according to what

works best for the particular circumstances of the team. On the other hand, regarding Christmas, there are players who collaborate each year in preparing a Nativity scene outside of the locker room. This is now a longstanding tradition and normally remains throughout the month of January in memory of Christ's birth.

In addition to these liturgical functions, are added the occasional priestly services such as the preparation and administration of the sacraments such as marriage, baptism, and confirmation to the players and their family members.

At times I have asked myself: "Why are you here in this environment?" We have already heard the answer in the words of those who spoke before me, but let me say that I think our presence is important. In this particular context, or, this "inner circle" of professional athletes, there are many reasons why the presence of the priest is quite relevant.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to understand the workings of professional soccer, and above all, the players, and how it is that they are perceived from the outside world. People hold these professional athletes in great esteem, as if they were superhuman, or even of a divine nature. This attention and praise can greatly influence their attitudes and behaviour, especially since they are often alone, far away from their family, suddenly very rich, and surrounded by people who are constantly praising them. The great majority of these players lack the psychological strength and savvy to handle all of this pressure. Thus, there is always the risk that all of this can get to their head. Discipline can also become a problem as celebrity status and money can throw them out of balance, not only as athletes, but even more so as individual persons.

In the world of professional soccer, it is known that the young players especially need someone who can help them to recover their sense of balance after being throw into this new and dangerous situation. Here the priest can be of help. Especially if we understand what the players are going through. Some people will tell you that as a priest you are wasting your time in trying to help them. It is not a question of wasting time. Rather, it is a matter of trying to help to recuperate what can easily be lost in the environment that they are immersed in.



Another motive which justifies the presence of a priest in the world of professional sport is the good you can do in helping the athletes and the people who work with them, to open their eyes to the needs of others. There was once a Lazio coach who was not Catholic but had a great admiration for the Pope and Catholicism. During his many years in Rome, he had placed me in charge of a several initiatives of solidarity and charity that he himself would actively promote. I helped him select some projects designed to help the poor, especially children. With his contributions, we were able to build homes for many poor families in Brazil. Obviously, this was as very positive experience. In fact, there are several works of charity that are supported by the players themselves. All of these initiatives have helped to mature their sensitivity to the needs of the poor, not only the material needs, but also the needs of those going through a period of suffering or sickness. Having accompanied players to children's hospitals I have seen first hand how their presence was a great comfort for the children. But also, I saw how they were eye-opening experiences for the players and helped them to avail themselves more readily to attend to the needs of others.

Let me share with you one event that occurred in a hospital in Rome. There was a child there who was recovering from serious psychological problems. This boy was a big fan of the player Fiore, who at that time was playing for Lazio. One evening over dinner I spoke to coach Mancini about this situation, and how beneficial it would be for this child to meet Fiore. So it was decided that all three of us, Mancini, Fiore and I would pay this child a visit after a practice. We informed the parents who had prepared a room for a little reception without saying anything to their son. What a great surprise it was for the child when we showed up. I still remember the joyful tears on that child's face, as he realized that he himself, among the many doctors and children of the hospital, was the reason for the visit of such famous people. It was like an injection of happiness and a source of extraordinary encouragement for this boy. This is another valid reason why I remain in the world of sport: to open the hearts of these players to the sufferings and needs of those around them.

I have chosen not to get too involved in the life of the team or to keep up with all social engagements and have remained on the sidelines. I show up only for the more significant moments. For example, when there is the inauguration of a new fan club, I will attend as it is an opportunity to give a Christian significance to this large event. I will also attend some fan club events, primarily those of particular significance, such as the encounter of the Lazio clubs formed of handicapped persons. There is a club in Rome made up of more than 300 boys and girls in wheelchairs. The encounter of this club with the players is for them a beautiful experience. This opportunity for these children – who are at times marginalized due to their physical disability – to be front and centre with their favourite sport's heroes is a moment of joy and sustains them in facing their difficulties.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm my belief that we as sport chaplains must be engaged in the pastoral care of this sector. I am absolutely convinced of this. We must not abandon the world of sport, leaving it void of a priestly presence, even if it is true that some do not share our faith or participate in what we offer. As mentioned previously, we must establish a relationship at the human level with all of these people, which sooner or later, will bear its fruit. Even if the number of practicing Catholics is few, a professional sports team always provides a pulpit by which so many others can be reached, such as the fans of the team and others related to the team, and society in general.

RAFAËL COMIOTTO\*

First of all, I want to thank the Pontifical Council for the Laity for organizing this meeting, as it provides us a unique opportunity to share and exchange ideas regarding our pastoral work to the world of sport, and in my particular case, to the world of professional rugby.

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The paths of providence are often woven by the encounters we have with people and the occurrence of unique events or special experiences that leave deep impressions. This was the case with my involvement in rugby. Personally, I have never played rugby. Neither did I watch rugby matches on TV as I child. Nor did I know of anyone who ever practiced this sport. Even though many considered it to be a violent sport for men who wanted to engage in rough competition, I was indifferent to rugby.

But, as providence would have it, the first parish I was assigned to as a newly ordained priest was the same parish of the captain of Grenoble's rugby team! The captain's name was Willy Taofifenua, which is a Wallisian name and he, true to his name, had a real Wallisian culture... that means he had a very strong catholic identity, for Wallis and Futuna are two predominantly Catholic islands in the southern Pacific, which lie east of New Caledonia and north of New Zealand. At that time, the Grenoble rugby team was playing in the top national level, the Top 16, which is now called the Top 14, as there are currently 14 clubs that make up the French national championship. All of this is to say that meeting Willy gave me the chance to be immediately introduced to the highest level of French rugby, as he was a leader in the French rugby world and greatly respected in Grenoble. Since the team captain was in my parish, I committed Willy and his fellow sportsmen to my pastoral care. I did it very naturally, within thinking twice. For this reason: a new, and original "special parish" was established and began to develop to this new world of rugby. Around 1996, rugby became professionalized in France, and thus many foreign players came from the South Pacific, especially from Tonga, Samoa, and New Zealand, and well as from Africa, to make their living playing rugby. Many of these foreigners were Catholics and Christians, and far from their homes and local parishes and at times they were a bit ostracized. So I began little by little to take them under my care, yet in my spare time, as I never received an "official mission" to the world of rugby from my bishop.

As people from Oceania tend to be very big men, they are

respected for their strength. Since they accepted me, I was also respected as the “priest of giants” in a world where strength is the first law! Yet, even though rugby may seem somewhat brutal, it upholds the values of true sportsmanship. This is perhaps the second reason why I embraced this particular mission and have persevered in it. Behind the first impression of a violent sport – as contests seem like a real fight – you can find many human virtues such as: courage, respect, fidelity, friendship, fairness, and solidarity. On the field there is intense competition, but off the field, after the game, they are all friends. And as a priest, during the time I spend with the players, there are many opportunities to speak about spiritual and philosophical questions and about the values we have in common and why they are important and worth conserving.

My presence offered these apparent warriors a “good excuse” to speak about these things which often goes against the stereotypes that depict them as mere “mountains of muscles” with little intellect. I found it just the contrary as I often met players with a keen intellect who engaged in very thought provoking conversations. In fact, we should recall that initially rugby was an academic sport!

Through the years, this pastoral care to the world of rugby and has built up strong friendships with players and personnel and has opened many doors throughout France. Players have sense of loyalty and they entrust their life to my care. That is why I take care of the players’ families too.

My now, I am known by most of the players throughout France. One day, a rugby coach in a TV interview labelled me “the priest of rugby-men in France”. It is now the seventh time I am with the national selection, so I personally know between six to ten of the players who are on the national team. Because of this, I have a great responsibility to these men. You have to be faithful to who you are as a priest because of this trust, and you also have to avail yourself to them, especially when they are in the face of adversity! They have their times of success, and their times of weakness too... when they are injured, or they are underperforming. At times they do not know how long it will take for them to

recover. They can experience a lot of solitude and lot of temptations. There is also the biting question of doping. I have come to know players with these sad experiences. You try to help them, to understand them, to give them guidance, and especially, to help them up when they have fallen.

Finally, a word about some religious considerations. The values of rugby remain basically Christian. Many people who practice this sport are religious, and some are also superstitious! We have to help educate them about their faith. We have to explain the love of God, and the plan of God for each one of them. I realize that the spiritual knowledge of people in France is very poor! Yet the thirst is there. Young players especially are interested in talking about God and the Church, sometimes all it takes is the courage to touch on these topics. I think it is fair to say however that the foreigner players are even more interested in religion than the native French. The Argentinean people are very practising Catholics and the Anglo Saxons love to talk about the Bible. Like everyone else, rugby players want to grow in the knowledge of their faith once they are helped to realize its importance in their life, and when they are given the opportunity.

In conclusion, looking back at my life as a priest, I am always surprised when I consider how my pastoral ministry has evolved to embrace this particular sport. As an “unofficial” but faithfully committed rugby chaplain, more and more, I feel that I have been called to this special and captivating ministry. I am proud to be considered by the players as the “friend of God” if this helps them to trust in the fact that God offers them his friendship as well. In the end their ultimate question is always the same: “How can I be a good man?” and my answer is always the same: “God is the best partner you can have on your team” and “Seeking growth in your spiritual life is the best competition of your life!”.

EDWARD PLEŃ\*

First of all, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this event. This initiative of offering us chaplains the opportunity of getting together in order to share experiences with others has been for me very useful and I wish to express my gratitude to all of you for this. My presentation will consist of two parts. First, I will describe how the pastoral ministry to sport is organized in Poland. Then I will share with you some of my responsibilities as the National Chaplain of sports men. Before I begin, however, I would like to share a brief reflection.

What is the “pastoral ministry to sport”? How can it be defined or in what does it consist? The pastoral ministry to sport finds its foundation in the Christian humanism of the person and is inspired by some universal values, namely: healthy competition, friendship, the mutual recognition of the dignity of the person, solidarity, justice, and peace. It has as its purpose and mission that of “impregnating” the world of sport with the values of a Christian ethos, that excludes the instrumentalisation of the person, and safeguards against a possible inversion of the hierarchy of values which is fueled by a “win at all cost” mentality.

The pastoral ministry to sport seeks to create the favourable conditions in order to rediscover the values that God has written in the heart of every person. Its highest aim is the elevation of the human qualities of the athlete, through the appreciation of the transcendent dimension of the person and their fundamental dignity as beings created in the image and likeness of God, the crowning work of his creation. Those engage in this ministry have the mission of helping sports men and women to recognize and live according to this truth.

Regarding the structure of the pastoral ministry of sport in the Catholic Church in Poland, this ministry officially began in 2001 when the Polish Bishops' Conference nominated Bishop Marian Florczyk as

\* Rev. Edward Pleń is a Salesian priest from Poland. Shortly after the Polish Bishops' Conference appointed a bishop to head up the Pastoral Ministry of Sport in 2001, Father Pleń was nominated the National Chaplain of sportsmen.

its delegate to the world of sport. Successively, the Bishops' Conference nominated me as the National chaplain of sportsmen. Together, Bishop Florczyk and I began to give structure to this pastoral ministry to sport. Today, every diocese has its own sport chaplain.

The local bishop oversees the pastoral care of sport in his diocese, while the sport chaplains work directly with the sport associations and clubs. In accord with the delegate for sport of the bishop conference, as chaplains, we give life to the pastoral work of sports men and women at the national level by attending and actively participating in the most important sporting events. Some of the major initiatives that we are engaged in include: the publication and promulgation of a "letter to athletes" on behalf of the Polish Bishops' Conference. The last letter was published in occasion of the Olympic Games in Athens with the title: "In defence of the good of the games". Actually, we are preparing a new letter from the bishops to all sportsmen in occasion of the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. This message will also make reference to the European Soccer Championship which will be held in Poland and Ukraine in 2012; the publication of a "Prayer Book" with occasion of the Olympic Games; the organization of a number of study seminars on the formational and educational aspects of sport. Some past seminars themes include: "Church and Sport", "Sport and Education", "Sport and the dimension of the person", "The theology and philosophy of sport", "Sport at the service of youth", "Sport and violence".

Twice a year, the sport pastoral council holds a national meeting with the 47 sport chaplains from each diocese. Also present at these meetings are the chaplains to sports clubs, and associations and youth teams; about 300 people altogether. We also organize "days of reflection" or spiritual exercises for athletes, trainers, directors and chaplains. Within the Polish Bishops' Conference, Bishop Florczyk presents an annual report on the pastoral activities to the world of sport.

Other activities of national relevance include a Christmas event with national athletes and their families which involves about 1500 people; an Easter get together; a sport's pilgrimage to *Jasna Gora*; clerical soccer and table tennis championships; championships for seminarians;

championships for the Catholic youth associations (*Parafiada*, A.C.S, Salesians); summer vacation sport and recreation camps. Regarding this last point, the Salesian sport organization “SALOS” holds approximately 300 summer camps for more than 15,000 youth.

Sport also provides us with many ecumenical meetings with the other sport associations, that are present in Poland such as the Orthodox sport association, the Lutheran sport association, and the Jewish Maccabiah Games.

The National chaplain is nominated by the Polish Bishops' Conference and charged with the following tasks with regards to the pastoral care of elite athletes: to be present at the Olympic Games, and the World Cup or European soccer championships; to participate in the conferences, activities and assemblies related to these major sporting events (note that the travelling and lodging costs are normally covered by the national Olympic team or other organizations related to these events); to officiate at marriages, baptisms, and funerals of national athletes and their families; to assist national athletes in the preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and Confirmation, and to administer the Anointing of the sick; to organize and invite athletes to the days of reflection and spiritual exercises which range from 3 to 6 days in duration; to personally accompany these athletes during particularly difficult moments in their lives such as a family or marital crisis; to attend to sick or injured athletes, especially those who are at times left abandoned in their convalescence; (the importance of this act of charity is often overlooked in elite sports and can do so much good to boost moral); to keep in frequent contact with these athletes through epistolary or email correspondence (with occasion of certain events or milestones, Christmas or Easter greetings, birthdays or feast of their patron saint); to participate in the assembly meetings of the National Polish Olympic Committee and the parliamentary commission of “Physical Education and Sport” where it is possible to present the Church's teachings regarding sport. The National Chaplain also meets regularly with the Minister of Sport.

It is my opinion that the tasks of the national chaplain should not



be any less than those proper to one engaged in the pastoral work of sport. That is to say, he should be committed full time to this pastoral work so that it becomes the centre of his ministry and not just one more burden or an additional task that is added on to his other numerous responsibilities. Pastoral ministry to the world of sport is a year round task and not just limited to the few days of a championship or the Olympics because the athletes themselves have need of this spiritual assistance not only during these peak moments but throughout the entire year. The chaplain must be always available and accessible, especially during the preparation for these events as well as immediately after them. Furthermore, the chaplain must not simply wait for the athletes to come to him but must actively go out to meet them and to establish a good *rapport* with the athletes. They must follow the footsteps of Pope John Paul II, who was attributed with these words in his last days, referring to the youth: "I have sought after you and now you have found me".



## **APPENDIX**

**Some texts from the Pontifical Magisterium useful  
for the reflection on the work of sport chaplains**



## From an address to the Centro Sportivo Italiano<sup>1</sup>

Pio XII

Rome, October 9, 1955

As you begin a new decade in your association's existence, the important event of the Olympics, which will be held in Rome, stands on the horizon. You have enthusiastically accepted the choice of this venue, because it is a sign of the esteem shown by the other nations for the young athletes of your country.

For different motives, this news has been received also by us with pleasure. Not only because this event will be a means by which many people can come to know the countless holy and beautiful things with all of the spiritual benefits that are home to this centre of Christianity, but also, because it will offer others the occasion to breath an air of universal fraternity, proper of Christian Rome. If it is very beneficial in the present time to promote and favour the meetings of different peoples in order that from this mutual understanding will surge brotherly love and fraternity, this encounter in "the" City, mother of civilizations and peacemaker *par excellence*, will all the more effectively consolidate among the throngs of youth the good will for peace and collaboration.

What might be the role of the *Centro Sportivo Italiano* in the framework of the Olympics? It is our hope that it will begin to prepare athletes who are capable of distinguishing themselves in those games, and who, together with their other national teammate, can give honour to their flag. But, it is still of greater importance that these young Catholic sportsmen, and others, including the spectators, bear witness before

<sup>1</sup> Part of his address where he speaks of the role of the CSI in the upcoming Olympics of 1960. Cf. *Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Pio XII*, Vol XVII (1955), 277; 186-287 [our translation].

the eyes of their guests, and in a manner worthy of the name and of the greatness of Catholic Rome, to the virtues we mentioned previously.

Dear sons and daughters of the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, – and all young people dedicated to sport who are attracted to the ideal of physical perfection, or of attaining a medal, or glory – you already know why we have taken the time to carefully explain to you some of sports values and aspects.

Sport, when it is understood in a Christian way, is, an efficacious school for that greatest of all endeavours which is eternal life where the goals are that of the perfection of the soul, the prize of beatitude, and the unfading glory of the saints. This is the greatest of all competitions to which sport pales in comparison, while revealing significant differences! Whereas with the sports competitions, all are free to compete, in the spiritual arena, everyone is obliged to compete and to persevere; whereas in the former only one person receives the crown of victory, in the later, victory can be attained by each and every person. But, above all, in the former, people throw in the towel and declare defeat when they run out of energy, whereas in the later, there is always a divine force which comes from God ready to assist us and to strengthen us in our weakness for God wants all of men to be saved and to be victorious.

I exhort you then, dear young people, who are so impassioned with life, and filled with vitality and enthusiasm, to save the best part of your ambitions and your energy for this spiritual contest, with steadfast confidence that you will be victorious in reaching your prize, through your courageous will power and the grace and example of the one who is victorious over the world, Jesus Christ.

With these expressions of our will, which we lift in prayer to the throne of the Most High, we invoke upon all our beloved Catholic youth an abundance of heavenly favours, signified by Our Paternal Apostolic Blessing which we which we impart on you with all our heart.

## Inaugural address at the new location of the Pontifical Oratory “St. Peter”<sup>1</sup>

*Paul VI*  
*Rome, June 29, 1968*

We are here to visit, admire, and to bless this new and splendid location of the Oratory St. Peter on the very day that all the Church celebrates the feast of this Apostle, the first bishop of Rome who has bore witness to Christ with his words (that the Gospel of Mark has especially handed down to us), with the first pastoral governance of this Roman Church, and with his very blood.

We are very pleased above all that the Oratory St. Peter continues its activity in a new location even more beautifully and better adapted to its aims for it would have been displeasing if the present use of the former location of the Oratory would have brought an end to this dear and useful institution. Our joy is thus expressed with fond memory for all those who have founded, assisted and erected the Oratory from the beginning: it is expressed in the recognition of all those clergy and laity, who have facilitated, favoured, promoted, and benefited with such dedicated and assiduous care its new and magnificent construction and its more efficient functioning.

Our satisfaction and our gratitude for the completion of this new, beautiful and providential Institution go in a special way to the Knights of Columbus, so praiseworthy even in Rome, for the recreation and sport fields and Christian education, which this organization has for many years supported in Our city. To them goes the credit and merit for the construction and financing of the original Oratory of St. Peter, demolished to make way for the new future Audience Hall; to them

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, VI (1968), 836-840 [our translation].

also goes the credit for the gift of land on which the buildings and sports fields of this splendidly renovated Oratory of St. Peter. To the Supreme Knight, and to his collaborators and to the entire flourishing and meritorious Association We express Our gratitude, Our applause, and Our best wishes while We send them with esteem and paternal affection Our Apostolic Benediction.

At the cost of repeating what all know regarding an institution such as this, we wish to affirm on this present occasion the providential character of an Oratory for the youth such as this: for its aims, for the interest with which it understands and provides for the needs of the youth; for the assiduous and ardent zeal that its personnel, moved in an apostolic way and grounded in pedagogical experience, duly realize; for the complementary –and it can even be added, indispensable– functions that it exercises with respect to the school and the family; for the religious, moral, and social fruits that have already been achieved and that are being sought. For all of this, the Oratory merits our full recognition and our encouragement. It is our desire that many, many children and youth, will attend its activities and come to love this place; that a work such as this be multiplied and that it will prosper wherever it exists, and could come into being where it does not yet exist along side every parish. And if every parish cannot afford such a spacious and well equipped facility as this, it is our hope that there would be such spaces and structures so as to attract, assist, and educate the youth.

Here our thoughts should touch upon the immense problems of the youth, whether those of the early stages of childhood and adolescence, or those that come in the full vigour of their youthful years with all of its new experiences. Here there is so much we could say about this theme as it holds so much interest in public opinion of our day for its seriousness, and is so close to the Church's mission as an Educator! For now, we will only outline some of our thoughts that regard those works like the one before us, dedicated to the human, civic, and Christian formation of the youth. We would first like to state that the youth have need of being loved: this need is expressed in different ways, but always with the same intensity of sentiment; they express this carefully,



with the apprehension of a youthful spirit, yet with dedication, that even reaches the point of sacrifice. Where love is lacking in their infancy and growth, and in the attainment of self mastery of their faculties and energy, then the principle factor is missing – that which is derived from within, that which educates, that which makes the individual a true and complete person. One of the primary manifestations of our love for the development of young people is to provide them with the opportunity to play. The youth have need of exercising their energy in the serene and intense joy of playing. Play, which adults often deem as a superfluous activity because it has no utilitarian aim, is, however, a gymnasium in which the youth become more conscious of themselves and the world around them. In play, their emotive senses are awakened, their physical strength is developed, and while their imagination is especially opened and works to prepare the way for thought, their will is strengthened. A child who has lacked this vigorous and ordinary play in their early years, does not easily become a well balanced person, gifted with a true sense of life's purpose. Too many young lives who have lacked a healthy growth by means of an engaging, lively and genuine play, are unconsciously prone to the most dangerous deviations along their path of social development. Play, which pedagogically forms part of the balanced development of youth, seems to us to be an indispensable factor. Here then is one of the motivations that guides the Church in her role as Educator in gathering together children and young people so that they play. And today, as you know, play is organized in a very determined form called sport! St. Charles Borromeo, St. Philip Neri, and St. John Bosco, to list three names tied to the educational legacy of the Church, have been great and untiring promoters of the parish Oratory, and consequently, of youth sports. To touch upon a humanist and educator, all too forgotten today, we should mention Vittorino da Feltre, who founded at in Mantova, the “*casa gioiosa*” (house of joy) which changed its name to “*casa giocosa*” (house of play) to better demonstrate the pedagogical function of play where *ludus* (sport), school and recreation all combine together. This then is a primary manifestation of our love for youth and it is sufficient

to justify the costs, care, and fatigue that goes into making institutions, such as these Oratories, a reality.

But, certainly, play is not enough in itself. These young lives have need of something else. We can enumerate a list of those components that make up the programme of an educator who is passionately dedicated to the good of these youth: they have need of study; they have need of faith and religious life; they have need of social development, and where it is possible, training for a future profession. The Oratory is the home to all of these activities. Yes, the schools and the family respond to these needs in part, but not in a complete way. This is especially true for those values of life and their proper ordering which are primarily learned through experience. The youth need to be initiated, trained and continually led to the virtues, to moral fortitude, and to correct principles that will lead them to their true destiny. In many cases, all this can be well obtained in an environment such as this, where moral, social, and spiritual values are adequately expressed. This is especially true where the loving educator does not seek to rule over the pupils, but rather, instils a sense of freedom and responsibility, and in doing so, accomplishes this supreme “art”, that of forming complete men and women, good and loyal citizens, true Christians.

For this, we conclude by restating our praise for this magnificent gymnasium of human and Christian formation, and our encouragement for all the good that will come from these wise and loving efforts, as we impart our Apostolic Blessing.

## Homily during the Jubilee of Sport in the Holy Year 1984<sup>1</sup>

*John Paul II*  
*Rome's Olympic Stadium, Aprile 12, 1984*

**T**his extraordinary Holy Year would not have been complete without the witness of faith shown also by those involved in the world of sport, that human and social phenomenon which has such importance and influence on people's way of acting and thinking today. So it is a great joy for me to be with you, men and women devoted to sport, in order to celebrate the Jubilee of the Redemption accomplished by Christ through his Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

St. Paul, who had been acquainted with the sporting world of his day, in the first Letter to the Corinthians, which we have just listened to, writes to those Christians living in the Greek world: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!" (1 Cor 9:24).

Here we see that the Apostle of the Gentiles, in order to bring the message of Christ to all peoples, drew from all the concepts, images, terminologies, modes of expression, and philosophical and literary references not only of the Jewish tradition but also of Hellenic culture. And he did not hesitate to include sport among the human values which he used as points of support and reference for dialogue with the people of his time. Thus he recognized the fundamental *validity of sport*, considering it not just as a term of comparison to illustrate a higher ethical and aesthetic ideal, but also in its intrinsic reality as a factor in the formation of man and as a part of his culture and his civilization.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The most authentic dimension of sport: to create a new civilization of love* in: "L'Osservatore Romano" English ed. n. 17, April 24, 1984, 4.

In this way St. Paul, continuing the teaching of Jesus, established the Christian attitude towards this as towards the other expressions of man's natural faculties such as science, learning, work, art, love, and social and political commitment. Not an attitude of rejection or flight, but one of respect, esteem, even though correcting and elevating them: in a word, an attitude of redemption.

### *Positive values*

And it is precisely this idea of Christianity accepting, adopting, perfecting, and elevating human values – and thus as a hymn to life – which I would like to pass on today to you and to all those who in whatever way and in every country of the world practice or are interested in this human activity called sport.

The Jubilee sheds the light of the Redemption also on this human and social phenomenon, exalting and emphasizing its positive values.

We cannot ignore the fact that in this field too, unfortunately, there are certain negative or at least questionable aspects which today are rightly analyzed and criticized by experts in the study of customs and behaviour, aspects which undoubtedly cause suffering to yourselves. But we also know what great efforts have been made to ensure that the “philosophy of sport” always prevails, the key principle of which is not “sport for sport's sake” or other motives than the dignity, freedom, and integral development of man!

You yourselves, in the *Sportsmen's Manifesto* that you have launched for this Jubilee, solemnly state that “sport is at the service of man and not man at the service of sport, and therefore the dignity of the human person is the goal and criterion of all sporting activity...Sport is sincere and generous confrontation, a meeting place, a bond of solidarity and friendship...Sport can be genuine culture when the setting in which it is practiced and the experience it brings are open and sensitive to human and universal values for the balanced development of man in all his dimensions”. And you also say that sport, “by reason of its universal nature, has a place on the international level as a

means of brotherhood and peace,” and that you wish to commit yourselves to ensuring that it “is for individuals and for the world an effective instrument of reconciliation and peace!”

### *Sincere fraternity*

Yes, dear athletes, may this truly extraordinary meeting revive within you the awareness of the need to commit yourselves so that sport contributes to making mutual love, sincere fraternity, and authentic solidarity penetrate society. For sport can make a valid and fruitful contribution to the peaceful co-existence of all peoples, above and beyond every discrimination of race, language, and nations.

According to the *Olympic Charter*, which sees sport as the occasion of “a better mutual understanding and friendship for the building of a better and more peaceful world,” let your meetings be a symbolic sign for the whole of society and a prelude to that new age in which nations “shall not lift up sword against nation” (Is 2:4). Society looks to you with confidence and is grateful to you for your witness to the ideals of peaceful, civil and social living together for the building up of a new civilization founded on love, solidarity, and peace.

These ideals do honour to the men and women of sport who have worked them out and proclaimed them, but in a special way they do honour to the numerous champions – some of whom are here today – who in their careers have lived and achieved these ideals with exemplary commitment!

### *Temple of the Spirit*

In the passage that we have listened to, St. Paul also emphasized the interior and spiritual significance of sport: “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things” (1 Cor. 9:25). This recognizes the healthy dose of balance, self-discipline, sobriety, and therefore, in a word, of virtue, which is implied in the practice of sport.

To be a good sportsman, one must have honesty with oneself and

with others, loyalty, moral strength (over and above physical strength), perseverance, a spirit of collaboration and sociability, generosity, broadness of outlook and attitude, and ability to live in harmony with others and to share: all these requirements belong to the moral order: but St. Paul adds straight afterwards, "They (namely the athletes in the Greek and Roman stadiums) do it to receive a perishable wreath (that is, an earthly, passing, fleeting glory and reward, even when it evokes the delirium of the crowd), but we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9:25).

In these words, we find the elements for outlining not only an anthropology but an ethic and also a theology of sport which highlights all its value.

In the first place, sport is making good use of the body, an effort to reaching optimum physical condition, which brings marked consequences of psychological well-being. From our Christian faith we know that, through Baptism, the human person, in his or her totality and integrity of soul and body, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own, you were bought with a price (that is, with the blood of Christ the Redeemer). So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Sport is competitiveness, a contest for winning a crown, a cup, a title, a first place. But from the Christian faith, we know that the "imperishable crown," the "eternal life" which is received from God as a gift but which is also the goal of a daily victory in the practice of virtue is much more valuable. And if there is a really important form of striving, again according to St. Paul it is this: "But earnestly desire the higher gifts" (1 Cor 12:31), which means the gifts that best serve the growth of the Kingdom of God in yourselves and in the world!

Sport is the joy of life, a game, a celebration, and as such it must be properly used and perhaps, today, freed from excess technical perfection and professionalism, through a recovery of its free nature, its ability to strengthen bonds of friendship, to foster dialogue and openness to others, as an expression of the richness of being, much more valid and to be prized than having, and hence far above the harsh laws of

production and consumption and all other purely utilitarian and hedonistic considerations in life.

*Gospel of love*

All of this, dear friends, reaches its fullness in the Gospel of love, which we have heard proclaimed through the words of Jesus, quoted by St. John, and which is summed up in the single commandment: Love! Jesus insists: "Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love..." These things I have spoken to you, and that your joy may be full...

"This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you... You are my friends if you do what I command you... "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide... "This I command you, to love one another" (*Jn* 15:9-17).

On an occasion as unique and significant as this meeting of ours today, I wish to pass on to all of you, and especially to the youngsters, this message, this appeal, this commandment of Christ: Love! Love one another! Abide in the love of Christ and open up your hearts to one another! This is the secret of life, and also the deepest and most authentic dimension of sport!

To all of you I wish to say further: In this age which is so marvelous and so tormented, strive to build a culture of love, a civilization of love! You can contribute to this by sport and by your whole behaviour, by all the freshness of your feelings, and by all the seriousness of the discipline which sport can teach you. Live as people who stay friends and brothers and sisters even when you compete for the "crown" of an earthly victor! Shake hands, join your hearts in the solidarity of love and limitless cooperation! Recognize in yourselves, in each other, the sign of the Fatherhood of God and the fraternity in Christ!

I trust in the sincerity of your faith and your willingness; I trust in your youth; I trust in your determination to strive beyond the world of sport, for the salvation of modern man, for the coming of those "new

heavens” and that “new earth” (2 Pt 3:13) for which all of us are yearning with the ardour of Christian hope. I feel that the Church, no less than your homelands, can count on you!

You have models to inspire you. I am thinking, for example, of Pier Giorgio Frassati, who as a modern young man open to the values of sport – he was a skilful mountaineer and able skier – but at the same time he bore a courageous witness of generosity in Christian faith and charity towards others, especially the very poor and the suffering. The Lord called him to himself at only 24 years of age, in 1925, but he is still very much alive among us with his smile and his goodness, inviting his contemporaries to the love of Christ and a virtuous life. After the First World War, he wrote the following: “Through charity, peace is sown among people; not the peace that the world gives but the true peace that only faith in Christ can give us, making us brothers and sisters”. These words of his, and his spiritual friendship, I leave with you as a program, so that in every part of the world you too may be messengers of the true peace of Christ!

I hope that you will walk towards the future with that “new heart” which each of you will have been able to achieve in this Jubilee of the Redemption, as a gift of grace and a victory of love! Amen!



## Address to the participants of the “Sport, Ethics, and Faith” Seminar<sup>1</sup>

*John Paul II*  
*Vatican City, November 25, 1989*

In expressing my cordial welcome to all of you, Diocesan Directors of the sports apostolate, directors of athletic associations of Christian inspiration, and to authorities of the Italian world of sports, I want to express my deep satisfaction to the Italian Episcopal Conference which, through the work of the department responsible for this area, has sponsored the national congress on “Sports, ethics and faith for the development of Italian society”. Your presence reminds me of my memorable meeting with the athletes in Rome’s Olympic Stadium during the Jubilee Year of the Redemption on 12 April 1984.

On that occasion I recalled “the fundamental validity of sports not only for providing terms for illustrating a superior ethical and ascetical ideal, but also in its intrinsic value as a factor in the formation of the person and a component of culture and civilization”.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, we know that St. Paul refers to sports activity to point out the spirit of courage demanded by the Christian life if one truly wants to be in conformity to Christ. Life according to the Gospel requires a rigorous and constant discipline, and is manifested as a continuous challenge against the forces of the powers of evil present and at work in us and the world. Therefore St. Paul, quite aware of the difficulties, invites us to “fight the good fight of faith” *1 Tim* 6:12), not becoming

<sup>1</sup> This seminar was held by the Italian Episcopal Conference in preparation for the upcoming World Cup of Soccer. Cf. *Sports viewed as a service to mankind* in “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Edition, n. 2, January 8, 1990, 5.

<sup>2</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *L’Omelia della Messa per il Giubileo internazionale degli sportivi*, in: “*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*” VII (1984), 1006.

discouraged by obstacles, and suggests that we not forget the certain reality of the prize, saying “run towards the finish line to receive the prize to which God calls (you) on high” (*Phil* 3:14).

Christian life, therefore, is like a rather demanding sport, combining all a person’s energies to direct them towards the perfection of character, towards the goal which realizes in our humanity “the measure of Christ’s gift” (*Eph* 4:7).

Your congress is fittingly set within the context of the preparations for the coming World Cup competitions, in order to prepare a serene reflection on an event that will certainly attract the attention of billions of people, at the same time offering the possibility to examine the contribution which sport makes to the development of the person and the improvement of the quality of life. May this time of the Church’s reflection cause a growth in the value and authoritativeness of a farsighted teaching to protect man in his physical and moral integrity.

In repeating once again that the Church “cannot abandon man” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14), but also that the human person is the object of her care, it is legitimate to ask ourselves how sports can truly contribute to the improvement of modern society. We are all concerned on this account because sports can degenerate into manifestations which dishonour the noble ideals which they can promote, and for which millions of people are interested in them.

An indisputably positive factor is the fact that today sports are characterized by a demand for quality and meaning. It is necessary to restore to them not only a renewed and continuing dignity, but most of all the capacity to evoke and sustain some of the deepest human needs, such as mutual respect, a freedom that is not empty but directed to an end, renunciation for a purpose.

Your congress is devoted to showing the relationship between sports, ethics and the faith in the complexity and vastness of the various fields, in order to deepen reflection on the reality of sports and to foster a renewed involvement in it corresponding to the objectives of formation, particularly of young people. The Church must be in the front ranks in this area, in order to plan a special apostolate adapted to

the needs of athletes and especially to promote sports which can create the condition of a life rich in hope. I am referring to the various activities which the Catholic athletic associations, both in the parishes and the youth centres which are helped by organizations animated by Christian principles, organize for children and young people. I express to them my affection and appreciation for their valuable educative work.

Your congress has also sought to study the relationship between sports and society, in the conviction that sports is a valid factor of socialization and growth in relations of friendship in an atmosphere of solidarity. In such a way you have also sought to view the basic connections between athletic aspects and moral ones.

The ethical conditions of the person in sports and the various situations of athletic organization also need a reference to the relativity of sport in regard to the primacy of the person, thus emphasizing the subsidiary role of sports in God's creative plan. Therefore, sports must also be viewed within the dynamics of service, and not in that of profit. Keeping in mind the objectives of humanization, one cannot fail to notice the unavoidable task of transforming sports ever more into an instrument of the elevation of man towards the supernatural goal to which is called.

Since sport does not exist for its own sake it runs the risk of being raised to the status of a vain and dangerous idol; these deceptive and misleading expressions, which unfortunately are sometimes observed, must be avoided. A healthy use of sports must be attentive to these deviations in order to prevent that well-known occasional recourse which aims merely at obtaining results, but is not concerned with the true advancement of the person or ultimately that of sport itself.

Your presence offers me the occasion to express my good wishes for the success of the coming world soccer championships. I know that you have focused your attention on this event also, which will involve not only the cities chosen for the qualifying matches, but millions of people throughout Italy, also because of the presence of so many players and fans from all parts of the world, and the problems which will involve many institutions, organizations, and reception groups.

My wish is that, on the occasion of such an event, the competition may be a wonderful occasion for the exchange of friendship and fraternity. The meeting of persons of various nationalities for a loyal and serene confrontation on the playing fields in some way represents a type of universal gathering where the values of unity and peace emerge. In such a way sports will make its contribution to the building up of the world we wish for, in which every individual truly feels that he is the other's brother and sister.

To you and the whole athletic world I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of the light and inner strength which only the Lord can give.

## Address in occasion of the blessing of Rome's Olympic Stadium<sup>1</sup>

*John Paul II*  
*Rome's Olympic Stadium, May 31, 1990*

**D**ear Sports Enthusiasts,  
In a few days, this sports arena, like so many others in different Italian cities, will become the centre of interest of the football fans of the whole world: it will be the setting of the festival of youth, the festival of football.

I extend warm thanks to Mr. Joao Havelange, President of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), Mr. Arrigo Gattai, President of the Italian Olympic Committee, and the Hon. Franco Carraro, Mayor of Rome, for the kind words which they have addressed to me. I offer respectful greetings to the President of the Council of Ministers and all the authorities present. A special greeting to all of you, the friends of sport, representing the nations that will be taking part in the World Cup, to the directors and craftsmen who have contributed to the refurbishing of the Stadium. Together with the Cardinal Vicar, I greet the young people of the city of Rome who have been determined not to miss such an important event.

My thoughts go also to all those following this ceremony on radio and television in many countries of the world. I greet you all with affection.

I willingly accepted the invitation addressed to me, at the opening of the World Football Championships, to bless this refurbished and enlarged Olympic Stadium. My presence here is meant to express once more *the Church's pastoral concern for the world of sport*. In the coming

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope inaugurates 'Italia 90' Cup in: "L'Osservatore Romano" Weekly English Edition, n. 24, June 11, 1990, 3-4.

days many people from every continent will be converging on this and other stadiums. Their enthusiasm for sport gives them a common interest which brings them together in honest rivalry and sincere friendship. These are values to which the Church cannot remain indifferent, for they are closely connected with the message of universal brotherhood which she proclaims.

In the coming days the various teams will be called upon to face an extremely exacting challenge: to ensure that every game is an occasion of honest play, recreation and friendship. This is a challenge that involves not just the players but all sports enthusiasts. In fact, the value of a football competition like this consists basically in the fact that it enables so many people, differing in background and nationality, to come together, get to know one another, learn to respect one another, and to enjoy competing with one another honestly and in a spirit of healthy rivalry, without giving in to the temptation to selfishness and violence.

Sport is certainly one of the most popular human activities and can greatly influence people's behaviour, especially that of the young. But it too is subject to risks and misunderstandings, and must therefore be directed, developed and guided so as to express its potential in a positive way.

"Sport is at the service of man and not man at the service of sport" – this is what we read in the "Manifesto" signed by numerous athletes in this very Stadium on 12 April 1984 on the occasion of their International Jubilee. "Sport", the document continues, "is the joy of living, the desire for self-expression in freedom, the striving for complete self-development; it is a test of loyalty and generosity, a meeting place, a bond of solidarity and friendship".

Yes, apart from being a festival of sport, the World Football Championships can become *a festival of solidarity between the peoples*. But this presupposes that the competitions are considered for what they really are: a game in which the better side wins, and at the same time an occasion for dialogue, growth, understanding and mutual human enrichment.

It is therefore necessary to specify and overcome *the dangers which threaten modern sport*: from the obsessive preoccupation with gain to the commercialization of almost every aspect of sport, from the excessive emphasis on the spectacular to athletic and technical exhaustion, from the use of doping and other forms of fraud to violence.

It is only by effectively recovering its purpose and its educational and social potential that sport can play a significant role and make its own contribution to fostering the hopes which move people's hearts, especially the young, in this last part of the century which is leading us into the Third Christian Millennium.

On the work sites, both those opened in the various cities for the restructuring of stadia and those set up to provide new services, thousands of craftsmen and workers have been employed and have been working extremely hard. Tragically, some have been killed in the course of the work: as I pray to the Lord for the deceased, I also express my sincere sympathy to the families who have been so severely struck.

The consideration of this "human cost", dear sports enthusiasts, also confirms my hope that the efforts and sacrifices made will make "Italia '90" a moment of growth in brotherhood for your fellow citizens and for all people. Concern with the sporting spectacle which in these coming days will occupy world public opinion must not cause us to forget the urgency of the problems and of the great expectations of humanity. Indeed, it should convince us all even more that by concentrating our living energies and coordinating our wills in a general mobilization, as has been done here, we can face and conquer the great challenges of our time: the struggle against hunger, the attainment of peace, the building of a world in which every human being is accepted, loved and valued.

I entrust to all of you this wish of mine, which becomes an urgent encouragement and trustful prayer.

At this point I cannot fail to offer a special greeting to you, the players from so many countries, who are the real protagonists of the coming world matches. The eyes of sports fans throughout the world are fixed on you. Be conscious of your responsibility! It is not only the

champion in the stadium but also the whole person who should become *a model for millions of young people, who need "leaders", not "idols"*. They need men who can convey to them the zest for challenge, a sense of discipline, the courage to be honest and the joy or unselfishness. Your steady and generous example can inspire them to face life's problems with equal commitment and enthusiasm.

It is significant that some of the expressions of the language of sport are not unfamiliar to Christ's disciples: terms like selection, training, self-discipline, persistence in resisting exhaustion, reliance on a demanding guide, honest acceptance of the rules or the game. For the Christian life too demands systematic spiritual training, since the Christian like "every athlete exercises self-control in all things" (1 Cor 9:25).

Dear players, you have come from every part of the world to Rome, the ancient home of the Caesars and the ever living centre of Christianity. The Eternal City offers you its heritage of classical monuments and Christian values. Try to listen to the noble human and religious message addressed to you by the many memorials and ruins that are so filled with history. Do not be distracted guests, unable to hear the thousand voices speaking of moral greatness and above all Christian heroism, often expressed by the supreme witness of martyrdom!

The Pope is here among you to bless this refurbished Stadium, but he is here above all to call your attention to *the treasures that twenty centuries of Christian history have accumulated in this City* through the contribution of whole generations of believers. You will be able to recognize its traces in the religious and civil buildings, in the names of streets and squares, in the words inscribed on stone or spoken from the lips of the faithful, who still today throng its churches.

Dear young people, you are the very best that your respective nations have to offer for this sporting competition. Be proud of this honour, but also take to heart the responsibility you have to represent your country with dignity, offering in fair exchange the gift of your zest for life and for everything that makes life noble and great. Do not forget that nothing in the world is greater or more noble than what was brought to us by Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh for our eternal salvation.



In his name I express the hope that your stay in Rome, which is the See of Peter and the centre of the Church, will bring each one of you closer to the treasures of truth and life that the Gospel upholds for all people of today and tomorrow. May the sporting effort which you are preparing for help you to strive for the highest goals to which life's struggle calls you. With these sentiments I ask God to look kindly upon all who will take part in this generous and honest competition so that it will be a source of harmony and friendship.

May the blessing of Almighty God be in your hearts and fill them with peace and joy!



## Homily during the Jubilee of Sport during the Great Jubilee<sup>1</sup>

*John Paul II*  
*Rome's Olympic Stadium, October 29, 2000*

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!” (1 Cor 9: 24). In Corinth, where Paul had brought the message of the Gospel, there was a very important stadium where the “Isthmian Games” were held. It was appropriate, then, for Paul to refer to athletic contests in order to spur the Christians of that city to push themselves to the utmost in the “race” of life. In the stadium races, he says, everyone runs, even if only one is the winner: you too run... With this metaphor of healthy athletic competition, he highlights the value of life, comparing it to a race not only for an earthly, passing goal, but for an eternal one. A race in which not just one person, but everyone can be a winner.

Today we are listening to these words of the Apostle as we gather in Rome's Olympic Stadium, which once again is transformed into a great open-air church, as it was for the International Jubilee for the world of sport in 1984, the Holy Year of the Redemption. Then, as today, it is Christ, the only Redeemer of man, who welcomes us and illumines our way with his word of salvation.

I offer a warm greeting to all of you, dear athletes and sportsmen and women from every corner of the world, who are celebrating your Jubilee! My heartfelt “thanks” to the International and Italian authorities of sport institutions, and to everyone who helped to organize this extraordinary meeting with the world of sport and its various dimensions.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Even the greatest champions need Christ* in: “L'Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Ed., n. 44, November 1, 2000, 1.

I thank Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Giovanni Petrucci, President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, and Mr. Giovanni Rossi, a gold-medal winner at Sydney and Atlanta, for their addresses to me, expressing the sentiments of you all, dear athletes. As I look at all of you gathered in such orderly fashion in this stadium, many memories of sporting experiences in my life come to mind. Dear friends, thank you for your presence and thank you especially for the enthusiastic way you are observing this Jubilee event.

With this celebration the world of sport is joining in a great chorus, as it were, to express through prayer, song, play and movement a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. It is a fitting occasion to give thanks to God for the gift of sport, in which the human person exercises his body, intellect and will, recognizing these abilities as so many gifts of his Creator.

Playing sports has become very important today, since it can encourage young people to develop important values such as loyalty, perseverance, friendship, sharing and solidarity. Precisely for this reason, in recent years it has continued to grow even more as one of the characteristic phenomena of the modern era, almost a “sign of the times” capable of interpreting humanity’s new needs and new expectations. Sports have spread to every corner of the world, transcending differences between cultures and nations.

Because of the global dimensions this activity has assumed, those involved in sports throughout the world have a great responsibility. They are called to make sports an opportunity for meeting and dialogue, over and above every barrier of language, race or culture. Sports, in fact, can make an effective contribution to peaceful understanding between peoples and to establishing the new civilization of love.

The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 invites each and every person to engage seriously in reflection and conversion. Can the world of sport excuse itself from this providential spiritual dynamism? No! On the contrary, the importance of sports today invites those who participate in them to take this opportunity for an examination of conscience. It is

important to identify and promote the many positive aspects of sport, but it is only right also to recognize the various transgressions to which it can succumb.

The educational and spiritual potential of sport must make believers and people of good will united and determined in challenging every distorted aspect that can intrude, recognizing it as a phenomenon opposed to the full development of the individual and to his enjoyment of life. Every care must be taken to protect the human body from any attack on its integrity, from any exploitation and from any idolatry.

There must be a willingness to ask forgiveness for whatever has been done, or not done, in the world of sport that is in contrast to the commitments made at the last Jubilee. They will be reaffirmed in the "Sport Manifesto", which will be presented in a few moments. May this examination offer everyone – managers, technicians and athletes – an opportunity to find new creative and motivating zeal, so that sport, without losing its true nature, can answer the needs of our time: sport that protects the weak and excludes no one, that frees young people from the snares of apathy and indifference, and arouses a healthy sense of competition in them; sport that is a factor of emancipation for poorer countries and helps to eradicate intolerance and build a more fraternal and united world; sport which contributes to the love of life, teaches sacrifice, respect and responsibility, leading to the full development of every human person.

"Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing" (*Ps* 125:5). The responsorial psalm reminded us that persevering effort is needed to succeed in life. Anyone who plays sports knows this very well: it is only at the cost of strenuous training that significant results are achieved. The athlete, therefore, agrees with the Psalmist when he says that the effort spent in sowing finds its reward in the joy of the harvest: "Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves" (*Ps* 125:6).

At the recent Olympic Games in Sydney we admired the feats of the great athletes, who sacrificed themselves for years, day after day, to achieve those results. This is the logic of sport, especially Olympic

sports; it is also the logic of life: without sacrifices, important results are not obtained, or even genuine satisfaction.

Once again the Apostle Paul has reminded us of this: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9:25). Every Christian is called to become a strong athlete of Christ, that is, a faithful and courageous witness to his Gospel. But to succeed in this, he must persevere in prayer, be trained in virtue and follow the divine Master in everything.

He, in fact, is God's true athlete: Christ is the "more powerful" Man (cf. Mk 1:7), who for our sake confronted and defeated the "opponent", Satan, by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus inaugurating the kingdom of God. He teaches us that, to enter into glory, we must undergo suffering (cf. Lk 24:26,46); he has gone before us on this path, so that we might follow in his footsteps.

May the Great Jubilee help us to be strengthened and fortified to face the challenges that await us at this dawn of the third millennium.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk 10:47).

These are the words of the blind man of Jericho in the Gospel episode proclaimed a few moments ago. They can also become our words: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!".

O Christ, we fix our gaze on you, who offer every person the fullness of life. Lord, you heal and strengthen those who, trusting in you, accept your will.

Today, during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, athletes throughout the world are gathered here in spirit, above all to renew their faith in you, man's only Saviour.

And those, like the athlete, who are at the peak of their strength recognize that without you, O Christ, they are inwardly like the blind man, incapable, that is, of seeing the full truth, of understanding the deep meaning of life, especially when faced with the darkness of evil and death.

Even the greatest champion finds himself defenceless before the fundamental questions of life and needs your light to overcome the demanding challenges that a human being is called to face.

Lord Jesus Christ, help these athletes to be your friends and witnesses to your love. Help them to put the same effort into personal asceticism that they do into sports; help them to achieve a harmonious and cohesive unity of body and soul.

May they be sound models to imitate for all who admire them. Help them always to be athletes of the spirit, to win your inestimable prize: an imperishable crown that lasts forever. Amen!





## From an address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Aosta<sup>1</sup>

*Benedict XVI*  
*Val dal' Aosta, July 25, 2005*

First of all, I should like to thank you for having called our attention to the need to attract young people to the Church; they are easily attracted instead by other things, by a way of life that is rather remote from our convictions. The ancient Church chose the way of creating alternative living communities, not necessarily with ruptures. I would say, therefore, that it is important that young people discover the beauty of faith, that it is beautiful to have a direction, that it is beautiful to have God as a friend who can truly tell us the essential things of life.

This intellectual factor must then be accompanied by an emotional and social factor, that is, by socialization in faith; because faith can only be fulfilled if it also has a body, and this involves human beings in their way of life. In the past, therefore, when faith was crucial to community life, teaching catechism, which continues to be important today, would have sufficed. However, given that social life has drifted away from faith – since all too often even families do not offer a socialization of faith – we must offer ways for a socialization of faith so that faith will form communities, offer vital spaces and convince people through a way of thought, affection and lively friendship.

It seems to me that these dimensions ought to go together, for the human person has a body and is a social being. In this sense, for example, it is wonderful to see so many parish priests here who have come

<sup>1</sup> At the end his address, His Holiness, Benedict XVI, responded to various questions. This is his response to a question regarding the youth. Cf. *Address to the clergy of the diocese of Aosta*, July 25, 2005 in: “L'Osservatore Romano”, Weekly English Edition, n. 31, August 3, 2005, 4.

with groups of young people to spend their holidays together. In this way, young people share the joy of their holiday period and live it together with God and the Church, in the person of their parish priest or parochial vicar. It seems to me, in Italy too, that the Church today offers alternatives and possibilities for socialization in which young people can walk together with Christ and shape the Church.

## Message in occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Winter Olympic Games<sup>1</sup>

*Benedict XVI*  
*Vatican City, November 29, 2005*

To My Venerable Brother  
Cardinal Severino Poletto  
Archbishop of Turin

With great pastoral attention, you have asked certain priests to begin some appropriate spiritual initiatives on the occasion of the 20th edition of the Winter Olympic Games, which will be held in February 2006 in Turin and other areas of the region, involving the people of the Dioceses of Turin, Susa and Pinerolo.

Numerous athletes, sports managers and trainers as well as many journalists and broadcasters from around the world will gather for this important event.

Moreover, for the upcoming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, you, Venerable Brother, will preside at a special Eucharistic Celebration in the Sports Palace of Turin, during which the flame will be presented that will remain alight for the entire year of 2006 in the diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. It is for this reason that in preparation for the Olympics, the date of 8 December takes on a festive meaning, namely: “A light for sports”.

For Christians, reference made to light points out the Incarnate Word, Light of the world that illumines man in all his dimensions, including sports. There is nothing human – except sin – that the Son of God by becoming man did not give worth to. He “worked with human

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *A Light for sports': training for spiritual medal* in: “L'Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Edition, n. 6, February 8, 2006, 2.

hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved”, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us 40 years ago in *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 22).

Among the various human activities is sport, itself awaiting to be illumined by God through Christ so that the values it expresses are purified and elevated both at the individual and collective level.

From this moment, I assure you of my prayer, so that the upcoming Olympic Games serve as an opportune occasion for believers to reflect, as the Apostle Paul suggested to the Christians of Corinth, upon the directions that can also be applied to spiritual training that derive from sport (cf. *1 Cor* 9:24-27).

May the upcoming Olympic Games also be for everyone an eloquent sign of friendship and contribute to strengthening relations of solid understanding between peoples! How can we fail to recognize how necessary this is in our day, where humanity is marked by many tensions and is yearning to build a future of authentic peace?

I invoke the heavenly intercession of Mary Immaculate so that the light of Christ, which she perfectly reflects with her entire existence, may enlighten the souls of those who, in one way or another, will be taking part in the Olympics.

To them, as to you, venerable Brother, to Bishop Alfonso Badini Confalonieri of Susa and to Bishop Piergiorgio Debernardi of Pinerolo and to the respective diocesan Communities, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing.

# Address to the Austrian National Alpine Ski Team<sup>1</sup>

*Benedict XVI*  
*Vatican City, October 6, 2007*

**D**ear men and women athletes!  
I am pleased to greet all of you here in the Vatican just a few weeks after my trip to your beautiful country; this occasion brings to mind such fond memories of my visit. I cordially welcome you to the Apostolic Palace, the home to the successor of Peter. I thank you Mr. President, Prof. Schröcksnadel, and Mrs. Hosp, for the kind words you addressed to me on behalf of all here present.

As members of the Austrian national alpine ski team, it is possible to say that you are ambassadors throughout the world where skiing and winter sports are held in great importance. At the same time, you are also, in a certain sense, important role models of integration within your own country where there is such great appreciation of winter sports. Many look up to you, not only for your noteworthy sporting achievements, but also for the virtues and values that are characteristic of your sport: perseverance, determination, spirit of sacrifice, internal and external discipline, attention to others, team work, solidarity, justice, courtesy, and the recognition of one's own limits, and still others. These same virtues also come into play in a significant way in daily life and need to be continually exercised and practiced. In fact, you, dear athletes, shoulder the responsibility – not less significant – of bearing witness to these attitudes and convictions and of incarnating them beyond your sporting activity into the fabric of the family, culture, and religion. In doing so, you will be of great help for others, especially the youth, who are immersed in a rapidly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Siate atleti che cercano il premio sella vita cristiana* in: “La Traccia: Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI”, Oct. 2007, 1176-1177 [our translation].

developing society where there is a widespread loss of values and growing disorientation.

This holds true not only for sport, but for all people. Body, spirit and soul form a single unity and each component must be in harmony with the other. You know how necessary this interior harmony is in order to reach sporting goals at the highest levels. Consequently, even the most demanding sports must be rooted in a holistic view of the human person, recognizing his profound dignity and favouring an overall development and full maturity of the person. Otherwise, if sport is only focused on mere material performance, it will fall short of realizing its necessary social dimension. In the end, sporting activity must help one to recognize their own talents and capacities, their very efforts and their own very life as gifts that come from God. For this reason, sport should always have God our Creator as its ultimate point of reference. It is in this sense that the Apostle makes reference to sports competition in order to recall man's highest calling: "Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one" (1 Cor. 9:24-25).

Dear friends, you are not only sports competitors, but also athletes who are striving to attain the crown of the Christian life. May your example spur on others to "compete" in their own sphere in order to attain that which is lasting and good, and to be athletes of Christ who wants to give to all people the true life. Be assured that I will accompany you abundantly with my prayers while I cordially impart on you and your members and friends my Apostolic Blessing.

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