



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE CEREMONY CONFERRING THE
INTERNATIONAL PAUL VI AWARD
ON Mr JEAN VANIER**

Thursday, 19 June 1997

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I offer my cordial greetings to you all, gathered here for the presentation of the prize awarded by the Paul VI Institute of Brescia in memory of my venerable Predecessor, born in Concesio precisely 100 years ago. So far this prize has been awarded mainly to outstanding figures in the world of culture and art. This year for the first time it is being awarded to a representative of that Catholic world which is actively involved — with well-founded inspiration and theory — in the area of human formation and charity, and I am particularly pleased to present it personally to Mr Jean Vanier, founder of Community of L'Arche. He is a great spokesman for the culture of solidarity and “the civilization of love”, both in the fields of thought and action, in his commitment to encouraging the integral development of every man and the whole man.

I have already had the pleasure of twice welcoming Mr Vanier here in the Vatican, in 1984 and in 1987, together with representatives of the communities he has founded. Today's occasion is a fitting opportunity to express the Church's gratitude for a work that supports persons with disabilities in a much valued Gospel style which offers an original social service and at the same time an eloquent Christian witness.

I greet dear Bishop Bruno Foresti of Brescia, and I thank him for the words he has just addressed to me. I welcome the directors of the Paul VI Institute, and in particular its President, Dr Giuseppe Camadini, and Archbishop Pasquale Macchi, who was so close to Pope Paul VI. Once again I express to everyone my appreciation of the many projects promoted by this praiseworthy institute and especially for this award, which in some way continues the special attention the Servant of

God Paul VI paid to individuals recognized by contemporary man as “teachers” because they are first and foremost “witnesses” (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 41).

In awarding this year's prize, reference has appropriately been made to the Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, which Pope Paul VI promulgated 30 years ago, calling everyone's attention to the spiritual and moral demands of authentic development. Today, as an important recognition is conferred on Jean Vanier and Community of L'Arche, let us thank the Lord for inspiring and fostering in his Church concrete signs of hope which show how it is possible to live the Gospel Beatitudes in everyday life, even in situations that are sometimes complex and difficult.

2. In a message addressed to a group of pilgrims of the Faith and Light Association, who came to Rome in 1975 for the Holy Year, Paul VI wrote that attention to handicapped persons is “the most important test of a fully human family, of a truly civilized society, a fortiori of a Church that is authentically Christian” (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIII [1975], p. 1197).

On the path it has followed for more than 30 years, as the President of the Paul VI Institute reminded us, L'Arche has become *a providential seed of the civilization of love*, a true seed and the bearer of an obvious dynamism. This is evident from its remarkable expansion in many regions of the world: it is present in 28 countries on the five continents. However, it is not limited to philanthropy nor even to mere assistance. Despite its growth and expansion, L'Arche has been able to preserve its original style, a style of openness and sharing, of attention and listening which always considers the other as a person to be accepted and deeply respected.

Doubtless this is due to the *spiritual dimension* that Mr Jean Vanier has always known how to put at the heart of the Community of L'Arche. It is an eloquent message for our time, which thirsts for solidarity but especially for a spirituality that is authentic and profound.

In this regard, how could we fail to think spontaneously of Fr Thomas Philippe, a Dominican who inspired and encouraged Mr Vanier to take the path to which the Lord was calling him? Subsequently he always accompanied him with his prayer and his presence. Today we pay a fervent tribute of gratitude to him who now lives in the “Arche of heaven”.

And how could we not remember all those men and women who surrounded the different communities of L'Arche with their silent and generous service? The distinction conferred today is also meant for all these people. It particularly honours individuals with handicaps, from the first two whom Mr Jean Vanier took into his home, to the great number of those who currently belong to L'Arche. Indeed they are the principal figures of L'Arche, who with faith, patience and a fraternal spirit make it a sign of hope and a joyful witness to the Redemption.

3. As I warmly congratulate Mr Jean Vanier, I hope that the work founded by him — as a whole and in every community — will always be accompanied by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit,

to respond fittingly to the Lord's plan, thus alleviating the suffering and needs of so many brothers and sisters.

Finally I invoke the constant protection of Mary most holy and cordially impart to you and in a special way to the Paul VI Institute, as well as to the founder and the members of L'Arche, a special Apostolic Blessing.

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