



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
AT THE CLOSE OF THE CONCERT
GIVEN BY "LA SCALA THEATRE" IN HIS HONOUR**

Paul VI Hall

Friday, 8 February 1979

1. In the first place I wish to thank, on behalf of all those present, the organizers and the artists who have offered us this moment of spiritual enjoyment: let the expression of my sincere and cordial gratitude go to them, and to all those who collaborated in the success of this concert.

2. My thought then goes to Maestro Krzysztof Penderecki. It is not the first time I have been present at the performance of a work of his. I remember the "Passio et mors Domini Nostri Jesu Christi" according to St Luke in the academic courtyard of Wawel Castle; I remember the performance of "Utrenia" in St Catherine's Church in Krakow. I could never have imagined that I would have the privilege of receiving Mr Penderecki in the "Paul VI" Hall in the Vatican, in the first months of my pontificate.

I am deeply moved.

3. I wish to congratulate you, Maestro, on this masterpiece, which confirms, in its content, the line of your preceding artistic researches. It is difficult for me to say something more as regards the essential part, the strictly musical aspect, with regard to which I must limit myself to expressing a mere impression.

I must confess that this impression is a deep one. As far as the content is concerned, there comes to my mind a sentence uttered, perhaps even before the war, by an artist I knew well:

"Every great work of art is

—in its inspiration and in its root—religious."

I think that Maestro Penderecki's great works confirm this principle.

This time he has turned to Milton. I think that "Paradise Lost" has become an opportunity to express, in the language, so original, of his composition, some questions that man asks himself; the questions that regard the fundamental problems of his existence and his destiny.

The answer to these questions, which we find in the first pages of Holy Scripture, in the first chapters of the book of Genesis, cannot but impress us by its depth and its logic.

It is not a question of a mere chronicle of some events; there recorded are the fundamental experiences to which man must always return, in his existence, in spite of the clarifications that biblical hermeneutics has brought on this matter. I would say that the first chapters of the book of Genesis protect from the risk of alienation that which is substantially human in each of us.

I wish, therefore, to congratulate you, Maestro, on the idea of appealing to this source through the poem of the great English writer.

Personally I am very happy that this musical work has come from the pen of a Polish composer. This is once more a testimony of the Christian mould by which the whole of our culture is penetrated. And since the language of music is more universal than that of literature, I hope that this fruit of the artistic creativity of a fellow-countryman of mine may become cause of artistic emotions in all contemporaries, regardless of their nationality.

And I thank the Lord deeply for this.

I conclude with sincere congratulations to the individual artists, to the gifted soloists, to members of the orchestra of the Theatre "alla Scala" and to the choir of the Chicago Opera, who have rendered the inspired composition in such a masterly way.

My Apostolic Blessing to all.

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