

Incontro pedagogico europeo – Cadine (TN - Italia) 9-10 ottobre 2010

Interview with Giovanni Bachelet

Question:

First of all, a special thank you for granting us this interview. We wanted to begin with a question related to those years called "years of lead", because of terrorism. We ask you for an explanation of those years for young people and educators from all over Europe who are listening to us. It was a time of great wounds and grief, like the one in your family, but also a time that saw very beautiful signs and extraordinary hopes.

Answer:

They were very difficult years which coincided with my being 20 years old. Every week, we can say, we would read in the first pages of our newspapers, about attempts on people's lives, terrorist attacks, with many deaths and wounded people; about bombs in public places: trains, stations. There was almost a climate of pre-civil war. Precisely in those years, however, Italy did not adopt special laws but kept its own democratic Constitution and its own system of representation. It placed out there, in institutions and in the nation, new energies that before did not participate in our political life and in so doing managed to win this challenge. It was a challenge not shaped like a civil war in the classical sense because in most of the cases involved, the victims were not "fighters" of two fronts, but normal citizens, or representatives of institutions: magistrates, politicians, journalists who were just carrying out their duties and were unarmed.

PRAYER BY BACHELET AT THE FUNERAL OF HIS FATHER (it is inserted in the video of the interview)

"For those in their responsibilities, in society, in Parliament, in the streets, who continue today the battle of democracy in the front lines with courage and love. We want to pray today also for those who killed my dad because, without taking anything away from justice which has to triumph, on our lips may there always be pardon and never vengeance, always life and never the request for others' death".

Question:

The day of your dad's funeral everyone was struck by your words of forgiveness, this struck very much the entire nation.

Answer:

In reality, in those years many of the terrorism victims' funerals were occasions for despair or protests against a weak state or a request for special laws or even, at times, for the death penalty. We were not the only ones, however, to have done such reasoning, to have pronounced such prayer, to have expressed such Christian thought. I remember for instance the wife of Walter Tobagi who died that same year; but several other families of victims almost immediately indicated that they were not in war, as Saint Paul says, and they did not hate anyone.

I believe that, all together, it was this and not so much our prayer in particular, which contributed to down play a "terrorist theory of an imperialistic state, almost similar to the totalitarian fascist state which oppressed the people." All this demonstrated that some who were called with scorn "Servants of the State" were people who believed not only in the democratic Constitution and in its rules, and in the rights of every person including also those who are arrested or detained, but they also did it with a Christian inspiration which was at the base of their lives and also of their civil commitment.

Question:

We noticed that when you talk and write about your dad you use the term "Dad" with the capital D. How was your dad as a father, as an educator?

Answer:

He had the capacity to listen more than to talk. The example of his life spoke for him and this is one other reason for which I use the capital letter. I could see his life every day in his work, in his enthusiasm, in his love for his children and for many other people who came by our home. Our house was rather a crossroads of people coming and going and there was a beautiful understanding between my mom and my dad, without which nothing or almost nothing of what he was doing was clearly and obviously possible.

Maybe this is the hardship for educators. What remains in us the most is what we see more than what we hear. One of the lessons of my father is that the first duty of a Christian is also the duty of every citizen. It means to do our own work well, to contribute with our own daily activity to the common good. For him his work was also his vocation: research and teaching. This brought him to be in contact with many young people some of whom became in turn scholars in his same subject.

Question:

In those "years of lead", as you said before, violence was breathed daily. Today times have changed, certainly many things have changed for the better.

Although we can still notice signs of violence, of abuse of power, of segregation, even in our schools and in our small communities. At times these signs are evident and very apparent.

Answer:

What would you want to say, what could you say to the young people of today in front of the phenomenon of violence in our societies? Maybe my father would say that some values and some principles of our Constitution - that also back in those years were doubted - they require for every generation an educational effort to become life. Maybe in every period of time there is some different temptation to violence and maybe in every period of time we need a generation of parents and teachers capable of transmitting the beauty and the joy of a common life, in the respect for others, in the ability to discover in each person - especially in the weakest and most different, something we can learn.

Question:

Your father used to often repeat "it is important to sow the good seed and to remember what is good".

Answer:

As teachers we can't love our students all the way if we do not aim at excellence in our educational abilities and in all that relates to our own disciplinary and pedagogic preparation.

Question:

Your father was killed precisely in the university halls. Your father loved young people very much, loved his profession very much. How was your dad as an educator, as a teacher?

Answer:

Whoever carries out his or her work in the best possible way realizes that perfection destined to improve the world as a whole. What is needed is a certain flexibility capable to draw from everyone the best rather than a policy of standards from which some will always be fatally excluded.

Question:

There is one sentence by our present Pope Benedict that he wrote in a book after the Vatican Council. A book that your father knew and loved and he would keep underlining a sentence by pencil: "Only those who create by themselves a future, who simply want to teach, changing only the others, remain sterile".

Answer:

This is a sentence I discovered after many years that Dad had underlined in that small book and it appeared to me very meaningful in his life. My Dad had as a central idea: that of being open to changing oneself as a true spring for change in the world. He knew and chose conversion for himself without asking others to convert. And this is true also in teaching because it is more difficult and it costs and requires a great Grace from the Lord: that of being able to be every day, even at 50 or 60, capable to recognize what has to be changed and to try to change it.