

“GIVING THE BEST OF YOURSELF” – A SPORT FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

For many, it may seem strange to speak about sport from a Christian perspective. The question we may ask should be: Are you a Christian who plays sport, or are you a Christian in sport? In 2018, the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life published a new document, entitled “Giving the Best of Yourself”. This document gives a panoramic Christian vision of sport and the human person. As the same document says: “Giving one’s very best is a fundamental theme in sports, as athletes both individually and collectively strive to achieve their goals in the game. When a person gives his very best, he experiences satisfaction and the joy of accomplishment. The same is true in human life in general and in living out the Christian faith” (Giving the best of yourself, Motives and purpose). This document attempts to better understand the relationship between giving our very best in sports and living the Christian faith in every aspect of our lives. The author explains here the various sections of the Document to show how sport and Christian life can be related.

Keywords: Christianity; Faith; Sport; Play; Athlete

INTRODUCTION

For many, it may seem strange to speak about sport from a Christian perspective. The question we may ask should be: Are you a Christian who plays sport or are you a Christian in sport?¹ In 2018, the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life published a new document entitled “Giving the Best of Yourself”. This document

¹ Cf. <https://christiansinsport.org.uk/resources/what-does-the-bible-say-about-sport/> (30. 01. 2024.)

gives a panoramic Christian vision of sport and the human person. As the same document says:

“Giving one’s very best is a fundamental theme in sports, as athletes both individually and collectively strive to achieve their goals in the game. When a person gives his very best, he experiences satisfaction and the joy of accomplishment. The same is true in human life in general and in living out the Christian faith.”²

This document attempts to gain a deeper comprehension of the correlation between employing our highest efforts in sports and embodying the Christian faith in all aspects of our existence.

1. WHAT HAS THE CHURCH SAID SO FAR ABOUT SPORT?

On many occasions and with increasing frequency, the Popes have referred to the sport as a means of promoting the encounter with the Creator, people’s social inclusion, and the development of the nations.³ In a document from 1995 about sports, the Italian Bishops Conference said:

“If there is not a Christian sport, it is instead fully legitimate to have a Christian vision of sport that does not just give sport universally shared ethical values, but advances its own perspective, which is innovative and makes a service to sport itself and to the person and society.”⁴

In the modern world, telling the Gospel to the world of sport understands various education changes so that the Church addresses the sport as a “new Areopagus” of evangelization. For the Church, sport cannot be understood only as a simple physical-motor exercise or skill, defined as a rigorous and meticulous learning of techniques and regulations and the staging of an athletic and professional show. Sport is the articulated reality: there is no sport, but there are sports, and more precisely, it exists under different profiles, contexts, and personal and social experiences.

² The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, *Giving the best of yourself. A document about the Christian perspective of sports and the human person*, Vatican City, 2018, 1; <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/01/180601b.pdf> (30. 11. 2023.).

³ On the web page <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/sezi-one-laici/i-papi-e-lo-sport.html> there are listed all Homilies, Angelus Messages, Speeches, Letters and Documents about sport promulgated by Pope Francis (35), Benedict XVI (11), including one document of John Paul II and three speeches of Paul VI. The papal discourses mentioned in this article are cited from the same web-page.

⁴ Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, *Sport e Vita cristiana*, Rome, 1995., n.32, https://www.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2017/02/Nota_Sport.e.vita_cristiana_1995.pdf (30. 01. 2024.).

In the "world which is the theatre of man's history and the heir of his energies, his tragedies and his triumphs"⁵ sport can assume an important part because somehow it justifies men's position in the theatre of the world, where he strives with all his energies, victories, and defeats to achieve the prize, the perishable one same as the eternal one. There are a lot of Christian athletes who bear witness to their faith through sport.⁶ The relationship between sport and Christian life raises many questions that the Document in analysis attempts to answer.

2. HISTORY AND THE OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT

The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life was established by Pope Francis on 15 August 2016 with the Motu Proprio *Sedula Mater* which describes the responsibilities and functions that previously pertained to the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Council for the Family. The Dicastery is governed by a Statute that was approved *ad experimentum* on 10 April 2018 and entered into force on 13 May 2018.⁷

The Dicastery is competent in those matters pertinent to the Apostolic See for the promotion of life and the apostolate of the lay faithful; for the pastoral care of the youth; the family and its mission; following God's plan and for the protection and support of human life. For these purposes, following the principles of collegiality, synodality, and subsidiarity, the Dicastery maintains relations with the Episcopal Conferences, local Churches, and other ecclesial bodies, promoting exchange between them and offering its collaboration to promote values and initiatives related to the aforementioned matters (Statute, Art. 1)⁸. In the spirit of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which invites us to adopt as our own "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 2.

⁶ For example in Croatia: Marin Čilić, tennis player; Josip Radošević, football player; Blanka Vlašić, athletics; Darko Kralj, paraolympic contester; Željko Babić, handball coach; Zlatko Dalić, football coach. Cf. Boris Milavić, Vjera i sport – odnosi i perspektive, *Crkva u svijetu*, 53 (2018.) 3, 431-451.

⁷ <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/dicasteri/dicastero-per-i-laici--la-famiglia-e-la-vita/profilo.html> (15. 12. 2023.).

⁸ <http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/il-dicastero/lo-statuto.html> (15. 12. 2023.).

this age”⁹, the Church promotes all the initiatives concerning the evangelizing action of the lay faithful in various sectors of temporal affairs, taking into account the competence that other bodies of the Roman Curia may have in these same subjects (Art 6, § 2). The same Dicastery published on 1 June 2018 the document “Giving the best of yourself” about the Christian perspective of sports and the human person.

The document has five chapters. With a quotation from Saint Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy (2 Tim 4:7)¹⁰, the first *Chapter* gives us the motives and purpose of the Document. The main purpose of the document is to help understand the relationship between living the Christian faith in all aspects of life and giving the best in sport.¹¹ In *Chapter 1*, the document presents the motivations and purpose behind the dialogue between the Church and sports. Moving on to *Chapter 2*, it delves into the history of sport, tracing its origins and examining its contemporary manifestations. This exploration also includes a contemplation on the definition of sport and its significance in the global context. In the *third chapter*, a more profound exploration is undertaken to comprehend the anthropological significance of sport, particularly in relation to the holistic nature of the human person encompassing the body, soul, and spirit. Subsequently, the *fourth chapter* examines the specific obstacles that hinder the advancement of a compassionate and equitable sporting environment. These challenges include the degradation of the body, the use of performance-enhancing drugs, corruption, and the potentially negative impact of spectators. The Church acknowledges its shared responsibility with sports leaders in identifying misguided paths and unethical conduct, while also guiding sport towards a direction that fosters human growth. Lastly, the *fifth chapter* provides an overview of the continuous efforts made by the Church to contribute to the enhancement of sports in the modern world. It emphasizes that sport, whether in amateur or professional settings, possesses the potential to effectively educate individuals and shape their moral values.¹² Now, we will present the document’s chapters with some personal observations.

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1.

¹⁰ “I have fought to the end the good fight, finished my course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim 4:7).

¹¹ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 1.

¹² Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 3-4.

2.1. Motive and purpose for this Document

The presentation of the motives and purpose of the document is offered by one noteworthy initial interrogation: "How could the Church not be interested?" This document intends to be a brief presentation of the views of the Holy See and the Catholic Church on sports.

As known, Pope Pius XII and Paul VI have enthusiastically opened the dialogue between the Church and the world of sport in the 20th century, promoting the aspects that are common to sport and the Christian life and joining the ideals of the Olympic movement with those of Catholics:

"Physical effort, moral qualities, love for peace: on these three points the dialogue that the Church maintains with the world of sport is sincere and friendly. Our desire is that it is ever wider and more fruitful".¹³

The Church tries to approach the world of sports because it desires to contribute to the construction of an increasingly authentic, humane sport and not a mere competition. The Church's justification behind this can be attributed to its understanding of the human person as a holistic entity comprising body, soul, and spirit. Consequently, the Church strives to prevent any form of reductionism in sports that diminishes the inherent worth and value of the human individual.

In 1904, Pope Pius X initiated a significant milestone in the Vatican's history by embracing the realm of sports and organizing a youth gymnastics event. The historical records of that era vividly express their astonishment and admiration towards this remarkable gesture made by the Pope. A story is reported that, in response to the question from a puzzled priest of the curia, "Where are we going to finish?" Pius X replied, "My dear, in Paradise!"¹⁴ Undoubtedly, Saint John Paul II elevated the significance of engagement and dialogue with sport to the utmost level within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Following his preaching in front of 80,000 young athletes at the Olympic Stadium in Rome during the Jubilee of 2000, he took the initiative to establish the Church & Sport office. Since 2004, this office has been dedicated to studying and advocating for a Christian perspective on sport, emphasizing its role in fostering a more compassionate, harmonious, and equitable

¹³ Paul VI, *Address to the members of the International Olympic Committee*, 28 April 1966.

¹⁴ Cf. Antonella Stelitano – Alejandro Mario Dieguez - Quirino Bortolato (ed.), *I Papi e lo sport*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2015., 4-5.

society, as well as its potential for evangelization.¹⁵ Although John Paul II did not draw up a theology of sport, his many messages and declarations are among the foundations on which the theology of sport can be based.

Until now, the Church has been engaged in dialogue with sport from the earliest years of its existence. It is well known that Saint Paul used sports metaphors to explain the Christian life to the Gentiles. He warned the Christians of Galatia, "You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?" (Gal 5:7); and he urged Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith" (1Tim 6:12a). About his own pilgrimage, he wrote, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14) and "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2-Tim 4:7). In his reflections on Christian commitment in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul combined the images of running a race, boxing, and training properly for an athletic contest.¹⁶ In the Middle Ages, which lasted approximately from 476 A.D. until the 1500s, the age when faith replaced reason, the only educator was the Church. As the radical social changes of chivalry emerged later, during the High Middle Age (1000-1300 A.D.), the military functions of chivalry rejected caring about the body, and hostility against the body developed.¹⁷ During the medieval era, lay Catholics engaged in games and sports during feast days and Sundays, which constituted a significant portion of the year. This recreational activity received theological backing from Thomas Aquinas, who contended that games could possess a virtuous aspect due to their association with moderation. According to Aquinas, a virtuous individual should not solely focus on work but should also distribute time for play and recreation.¹⁸

There has been a tendency lately, in part because of the way the history of sport has been written, to suppose that the Catholic Church has only had a negative view and impact on sport, especially in the medieval and early modern ages, because of negative Catholic

¹⁵ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 12.

¹⁶ Michael P. Kerigan, *Sports in the Christian Life*, Centre for Christian Ethics, Baylor, 2008., 22. Marinko Vidović explains those texts in Marinko Vidović, Pavlova uporaba športskog rječnika i metafora. Ciljno usmjereno ljudsko/kršćansko djelovanje, *Crkva u svijetu*, 53 (2018.) 3, 375-415.

¹⁷ Cf. Duygu Harmandar Demirel - Ibrahim Yıldıran, The Philosophy of Physical Education and Sport from Ancient Times to the Enlightenment, *European Journal of Educational Research* 2 (2013.) 4, 192.

¹⁸ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 11-12.

attitudes toward the body. But this is grounded on a misreading of Catholic attitudes toward the body during these ages, and it misses the positive influence of Catholic theological, spiritual, and educational traditions on sport as an aspect of culture¹⁹. In this way the words of Saint John Paul II are meaningful:

"The Christian attitude towards sport as towards the other expressions of the person's natural faculties such as science, learning, work, art, love, and social and political commitment is 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."²⁰

Sport is highly esteemed by the Church, as it provides a platform for individuals to cultivate virtues such as temperance, humility, courage, modesty, tolerance, and patience. Moreover, it offers opportunities to encounter beauty, goodness, truth, and joy, which are universally accessible to people from diverse nations and communities. Regardless of the skill or proficiency in sports, this aspect of sport makes it a genuinely contemporary global phenomenon, capturing the passionate interest of the Church.²¹ The very beginning of the Document precisely affirms:

"The Church has been a sponsor of the beautiful in art, music and other areas of human activity throughout its history. This is ultimately because beauty comes from God, and therefore its appreciation is built into us as his beloved creatures. Sport can offer us a chance to take part in beautiful moments, or to see these take place. In this way, sport has the potential to remind us that beauty is one of the ways we can encounter God".²²

Sport is a human universal and has taken on a new level of importance in our time, and so it too finds an echo in the hearts of the people of God.

Sport is a result of modernity and, at the same time, has been made a "custodian" of modernity. Furthermore, in the contemporary era, the realm of sports is experiencing significant transformations and facing immense pressure to adapt. Church is hoping that sport experts not only "manage" change but also do so by seeking to understand and hold firm to the principles so dear to ancient and modern sport: education and human promotion.²³ The Church not only promotes engagement in sports but also seeks to actively

¹⁹ Cf. Dries Vanysacker, The Catholic Church and Sport. A burgeoning territory within historical Research, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, Louvain Journal of Church History* 108 (2013.) 1, 342-356.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Homily in the occasion of the Jubilee of the Redeemer*, 12 April 1984.

²¹ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 4.

²² Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 3.

²³ *Idem*, 2.

participate in the realm of sports, aiming to be seen as a contemporary gathering place for people of different backgrounds and as a platform where the message of the Gospel is proclaimed. In this regard, Christianity does not merely offer a superficial endorsement or a detached label to sports, but rather presents itself as an additional element that can contribute to the overall enrichment of the sporting experience. This seems to be not *a Christian sport but a Christian vision of sport*.

The last purpose, but not less meaningful, are some remarks about the pastoral of sport that the Document proposes. It refers to the need for the promotion of “a sport for the person” that can give meaning to life and fully develop the person morally, socially, ethically, and spiritually. The Church’s involvement in sports manifests itself through a diverse and extensive pastoral presence, which is motivated by the Church’s concern for the well-being of individuals.

3. THE PECULIARITY OF SPORT

3.1. Sport is a universal phenomenon

The second chapter of the Document portrays sport as a universal phenomenon. The sport is a kind of anthropological constant. Etymologically, the term ‘sport’ itself is relatively recent. It stems from the Old French expression *desporter* or *se desporter* – which is a derivate of the Latin word *de(s)portare* – and means to amuse oneself.²⁴ In the early Modern Age, the term ‘sport’ was coined, marking a significant development in the language. Subsequently, this term became widely employed to encompass the diverse range of activities that captivate numerous individuals, whether they participate as athletes or observe as spectators.²⁵

So, it will be good to know and answer how sport acquired its current shape or what its main characteristics are. Before becom-

²⁴ Tratándose de una realidad muy compleja y de tipología variada, no resulta fácil definir qué es el deporte. En un sentido muy amplio, pero también, por ello, muy elemental, diríamos que “lo que llamamos deporte se constituye como juego (tiene un carácter lúdico y recreativo, pero también regulado), ejercicio (en el plano físico y/o en el intelectual) y competición (frente a uno mismo o a otros)” (Juan Jesús Álvarez Álvarez, *Deporte y Trascendencia: el hombre en busca de un sentido último*, *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*, 15 (2020.) 45, 322).

²⁵ Cf. Peter Gummert, “Sport”, in: Hubert Cancik - Helmuth Schneider (ed.), *Brill’s New Pauly*, Antiquity volumes: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e15301940 (30. 01. 2024.).

ing a global phenomenon, the sport existed throughout the entirety of human history. What are the relationships between sport and Christianity? Historians of Christianity and sport have tried to answer one or more of the following three key questions:²⁶

1. What were the reasons for the embrace of sport by the Christian churches from the late nineteenth century onward?
2. Has the role of the Christian churches in the rise of modern sport been proactive and creative, or has it been a defensive damage-limitation exercise?
3. How far has Christianity been changed by its embrace of sport, and have the changes been on balance, good or bad?

Already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many – albeit not all²⁷ – sport activities in the West disengaged from the religious and cultural contexts they formerly had belonged to. Certainly, it should be acknowledged that sport as a whole has not lost its relevance. Nevertheless, presently we are witnessing the emergence of institutionalization, professionalization, and commercialization, indicating a shift in its nature.²⁸ The rise of sports authority and the revival of the educational principles from ancient Greece led to a progression where physical activities became increasingly recognized as an integral component of a comprehensive education. Numerous forward-thinking educators, spanning from John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) to Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724-1790), the pioneer of the philanthropic movement, and finally to Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), embraced this holistic concept and incorporated it into educational programs that placed significant importance on physical exercise.²⁹

The primary objective of the Olympic Games, nonetheless, was not solely focused on athletic rivalry, but also encompassed the commemoration of human excellence and aesthetics. The Olympic motto, *Citius, altius, fortius*" (faster, higher, stronger) – which Coubertin had taken over from the Dominican Henri Didon³⁰ – thus

²⁶ Cf. Hugh McLeod - Nils Martinius Justvik - Rob Hess, Sport and Christianity: Historical Perspectives – An Introduction, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 35 (2018.) 1, 3-4.

²⁷ Cf. Patrick Kelly, *Catholic Perspectives on Sports: From Medieval to Modern Times*, Paulist Press, New York – Mahwah/New Jersey, 2013., III.

²⁸ Wolfgang Behringer, *Kulturgeschichte des Sports: Vom antiken Olympia bis ins 21. Jahrhundert*, C.H. Beck, München 2011., 198-238.

²⁹ *Giving the best of yourself*, 16.

³⁰ Cf. Norbert Müller, Die olympische Devise 'citius, altius, fortius' und ihr Urheber Henri Didon, in: Wissenschaftliche Kommission des Arbeitskreises Kirche und

refers not only to physical excellence but also to human excellence in general. It is crucial to highlight that, from a critical perspective, Coubertin viewed Olympism as undeniably a religion focused on worldly matters, for he explicitly called it a *religio athletae*³¹. Even though, for him, *religio athletae* was considered from an educational and moral point of view, not a religious one.

Nevertheless, despite the diminishing claim of sport to be a religion or to possess an inherent connection with other human accomplishments like arts, music, or poetry, it remains susceptible to being utilized for ideological purposes. This susceptibility arises from the pursuit of perfection by the human body in sports. Notably, major sporting events such as the Olympic Games or World Championships showcase exceptional human bodies displaying top-notch performances to a global audience. However, a high-performing human body can be interpreted in various ways, allowing for a wide range of meanings to be associated with it. Consequently, sport, especially at the elite level, is frequently employed as a means to convey political, commercial, or ideological messages.³²

Observing a society where shame and failure were unmercifully disdained, where there were no consolations for losers or rewards for simply taking part, we might ask – what force drove a person to do this, to risk the humiliation of failure, to strive for unattainable heights? It was more than recreation, more than social custom, and more than professional obligation. It was a burning drive for spiritual excellence that went beyond the practical considerations of everyday life in order to discover what was best in humanity.³³

Sport (ed.), *Forum Kirche und Sport 2*, NDV, Düsseldorf, 1996., 7-27.

³¹ “The religious experience of human beings and society cannot be precisely captured in one definition. Religious studies try to examine ideas, beliefs, concepts, and other phenomena and realities concerning the relations between human beings and the sacred, including the historical and cultural contexts that define how religious phenomena are understood. The range of these studies is wide and includes different levels of reality, such as human attitudes (faith, piety), activities (worship, church service), qualities (sacredness, holiness), psychological attributes (I, purpose), sociological aspects (caste, church), social roles (parenthood, priesthood), specific space and time (feast, temple), ritualized events (death, wedding), cultural products (music, literature), worshipped material objects (crucifix, taboo), or people (saints, prophets), and so forth”; Ivo Jirásek, Religion, Spirituality, and Sport: From Religio Athletae Toward Spiritus Athletae, *Quest*, 67 (2015.) 3, 291.

³² Cf. Dries Vanysacker, The Attitude of the Holy See Toward Sport During the Interwar Period (1919–39), *Catholic Historical Review*, 101 (2015.) 4, 794–808.

³³ Cf. <https://theotherjournal.com/2016/05/26/training-olympian-soul/> (15. 12. 2023.).

3.2. A possible definition of sport

Throughout history, scholars and researchers in the fields of sports philosophy and science have dedicated considerable efforts to establish an appropriate definition and comprehensive description of sport.³⁴ To date, a universally accepted definition for this task remains elusive, indicating its inherent complexity. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that sports are susceptible to historical transformations. To portray what sport is, the document gives us some interesting elements³⁵:

1. The concept of sport is associated with the human body in motion.
2. Sport is a ludic activity. This means that sport is not an activity to achieve an external purpose but has its own purpose.
3. The performance of a sport is normally subjected to certain rules.
4. It has a competitive character.
5. Sport is a competition regulated by particular rules of the game, then equality of opportunity has to be warranted.

Summarizing those five features, the Document recaps that:

"Sports are bodily motions of individual or collective agents who, following particular rules of the game, effect ludic performances that, on the condition of equal opportunity, are compared to similar performances of others in a competition."³⁶

As has already been noticed, this is not an exhaustive definition of sport since it exhibits lots of fuzzy edges.³⁷

Sport is not solely an isolated activity, but rather it is intricately connected to its surroundings. In essence, a sporting competition can be seen as a narrative that unfolds the tale of a rivalry between two or more entities vying for an artificial objective, devoid of real-life intentions. Adhering to the specific regulations of the

³⁴ *Giving the best of yourself*, 6.

³⁵ *Idem*.

³⁶ *Idem*, 7.

³⁷ In a similar vein, the sport historian Allen Guttman applied binary distinctions to define sport. He starts from the general category play and then goes on by determining sport as organized play (= games), competitive games (= contests), physical contests (= sports). For more, see Allen Guttman, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill – London, 1988. The best book in Croatian language that explains the definition and philosophy of sport is written by Matija Mato Škerbić, *Filozofija sporta. Nastanak i razvoj jedne discipline*, Pergamena, Zagreb, 2021., particularly the pages 19-108.

game, these entities strive for excellence. Beyond their personal motivations, the participating sides showcase aesthetic and artistic expressions that are intelligible to others, thereby allowing for active interpretation. Ultimately, it can be asserted that sport constitutes a distinct realm of its own, characterized by a pursuit of playfulness devoid of external objectives. However, this encapsulated world also possesses an external dimension, as it presents itself to outsiders in the form of a highly evocative narrative. Nevertheless, this narrative lacks specific content, enabling it to be imbued with various forms of meaning.

Sport is never lacking of its contextual backdrop. Initially, we must consider the foundation upon which sports are built. It begins with a group of children gathering in a courtyard during the day to engage in activities such as football or basketball. On a larger scale, the establishment of sports governance, the implementation of doping monitoring programs, and the organization of major sporting events all contribute to the broader context of sports.³⁸ This is the task of sports organizations, such as clubs or national and international associations. In general, we might call these organizational forms of sport the sport system. Sport includes a specific system on an individual or collective stage. It evolves and develops according to a variety of cultural and historical practices while becoming more integrated into the fabric of daily life. Modern sport has been (and continues to be) modeled and trained in response to the turbulence of social and cultural existence.

4. THE MEANING OF SPORTS

Chapter 3 of the Document talks about the significance of Sports for a person. Sport serves as a medium through which individuals can explore their profound quest for ultimate significance, while also fostering human autonomy and ingenuity. The realm of sports encompasses various virtues such as fairness, selflessness, elation, unity, bravery, egalitarianism, reverence, and camaraderie, all of which contribute to this pursuit of meaning. From a Christian perspective, ultimate significance is derived from the supreme delight that emanates from experiencing the all-encompassing affection and compassion of God, as manifested in a profound connection with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. This

³⁸ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 8.

connection is not only cultivated within oneself but is also actively practiced and demonstrated within the community of believers.

According to John Paul II, the Church regards sport with respect because it values

"everything that contributes to the harmonious and complete development of the person, body and soul. She encourages, therefore, what aims at educating, developing, and strengthening the human body, in order that it may offer a better service for the attainment of personal maturity."³⁹

Although it is a prevalent notion in historical research on sports to depict Catholic perspectives on the body as predominantly pessimistic, Catholic theological and spiritual customs have consistently emphasized the inherent goodness of the material world, which was brought into existence by God. Furthermore, these traditions assert that an individual is a harmonious unification of body, soul, and spirit. John Paul II describes sport as "a form of gymnastics of the body and of the spirit"⁴⁰ and summarizes it in one of his messages as follows:

"Sport, as you well know, is an activity that involves more than the movement of the body; it demands the use of intelligence and the developing of the will. It reveals, in other words, the wonderful structure of the human person created by God, as a spiritual being, a unity of body and spirit. Athletic activity can help every man and woman to recall the moment when God the Creator gave origin to the human person, the masterpiece of his creative work."⁴¹

From a theological and Catholic point of view, some key aspects that come out of the sport. They are freedom, creativity, and cooperation⁴², but also in the sport, some rules need to be followed.

Men and women, who are made in the image and likeness of God, have been given the opportunity to partake in the act of divine creation. However, it is important to recognize that freedom is accompanied by responsibility, as the choices made by individuals have the power to influence their relationships, the community they belong to, and even the entirety of creation. It may seem unexpected, but sports can be considered as a component of God's benevolent creation. While it is true that human beings are the ones who have invented sports, it is worth pondering upon the origin of our inherent playfulness. The creativity, the desire for human relation-

³⁹ John Paul II, *Address to the Italian National Olympic Committee*, 20 December 1984.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Address to the managers and athletes of the Italian soccer team of Milan*, 12 May 1979.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Address to Participants of Athletic Championship: Be Examples of Human Virtues*, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly English Edition) 36 (7 September 1987.), 5.

⁴² Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 9-10.

ships, and the instinctive desire to play that all people, of all ages and across all cultures, have are all part of what it means to be made in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:27).⁴³ This is where the idea of 'play'⁴⁴ comes in, which is implicit in humanity's calling to develop and delight in God's creation. To play is to creatively enjoy something for its intrinsic good. Building upon Johan Huizinga's classic definition of play, Erik Thoennes says:⁴⁵

"Play is a fun, imaginative, non-compulsory, non-utilitarian activity filled with creative spontaneity and humour, which gives perspective, diversion, and rest from necessary work of daily life."

At the core of the definition of play is that it is autotelic; it is for its own purposes. Play need not be justified by its effects, psychological (peace of mind), physical (better health), and social (learning teamwork) impacts, etc.; it is simply creatively delighting in and enjoying God's good creation for its own sake.⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann rightly grounds this theologically. Humans are *homo ludens* because they are made in the image of *Deus ludens*. Moltmann points out that God did not create the world out of necessity or obligation, nor is there any purposeful rationale for why something exists rather than nothing. Creation, therefore, must have its ground in the goodwill and pleasure of God. "Hence the creation is God's play, a play of groundless and inscrutable wisdom. It is the realm in which God displays his glory"⁴⁷.

Sport reminds us that to be truly free is also to be responsible. It is easy for a person to lose sight of the need for effort and sacrifice to achieve one's goals. Here, the Christian understanding of freedom applies to sport in that freedom allows humans to make proper choices and sacrifices even when they are required to go through the "narrow gate".⁴⁸ In a certain sense, the Christian life

⁴³ <https://www.christiansinsport.org.uk/resources/films-to-show-at-an-event/what-does-the-bible-say-about-sport/> (15. 12. 2023.).

⁴⁴ Jeremy R. Treat, More than a Game: A Geology of Sport, *Themelios* 40 (2015.) 3, 395.

⁴⁵ Cf. Erik Thoennes, Created to Play: Thoughts on Play Sport and the Christian Life, in: Donald Deardorff - John White (ed.), *The Image of God in the Human Body: Essays on Christianity and Sports*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter-Wales, 2008., 79-100; <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/holy-play#fn1> (30. 01. 2024.).

⁴⁶ Cf. *Idem*, 395. The Old Testament vision of play is well presented in Andelo Maly, Ples, igra, borba ili trka za vjeru. Sportski jezik kao starozavjetna biblijska metafora, *Nova prisutnost*, 16 (2018.) 1, 59-71.

⁴⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, Reinhard Ulrich Harper & Row, New York, 1972., 17.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mt 7:13-14.

resembles a marathon rather than a short sprint. There are many stages, some of which are very difficult to overcome.

Gregory of Nazianzus and other Church Fathers held the belief that the Christian life could be likened to a game. This perspective was also shared by Pope Francis, who has discussed the concept of play in relation to Christian joy.⁴⁹ Sport brings joy to those who engage in it regularly, despite the obstacles and demanding trials they may encounter. It is evident that this joy is a precious blessing, as it is consistently rooted in love, and this principle holds true for all levels of sport activities.⁵⁰ The connection between joy and love in sports holds significant lessons for us regarding the correlation between God, love, and joy in our spiritual existence. While acknowledging the sacrifices and hardships that arise from training and engaging in sports, it is crucial to recognize that the ultimate purpose of sports is to bring joy to both the participants and the ardent enthusiasts worldwide.

Sports provide evidence of justice as they necessitate adherence to rules. The rules serve to comprehend that justice is not solely subjective but possesses an objective aspect, even within the realm of play. Contrary to popular belief, sports rules do not restrict human creativity; instead, they foster it. To attain their goals within the prescribed norms, athletes must exhibit immense creativity. They must strive to astonish their opponents with innovative and unforeseen tactics or strategies.

The concept of freedom can be compared to the analogy mentioned above. Just like in sport, where the rules are clearly defined, adhering to these rules enhances the athlete's freedom and creativity. It is human beings who create and agree upon the rules that govern various sports, setting them apart from other daily activities. Therefore, sports are built upon a foundation of cooperation and agreement regarding the constitutive rules. Cooperation comes before competition in this context. Unlike war, which arises when people no longer believe in cooperation and fundamental rules are not agreed upon, sports involve participants engaging in a contest governed by rules, rather than seeking to annihilate an enemy. In fact, it is the opponent who brings out the best in an athlete, making the experience enjoyable and captivating.

The word competition alludes to this experience, as the word comes from the two Latin roots *com* – with – and *petere* – to strive

⁴⁹ Cf. Francis, *Address to participants of the IV Meeting promoted by Scholas Occurrentes*, 5 February 2015.

⁵⁰ Cf. Josef Pieper, *About Love*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1974.

or to seek⁵¹. The competitors are “striving or seeking together” for excellence.

The Document refers to the idea of *fair play*. Athletes demonstrate their commitment to *fair play* by not only adhering to the prescribed regulations but also upholding principles of justice towards their adversaries, thereby ensuring a level playing field for all participants to actively participate in the game. Sporting activity “must be an unavoidable occasion to practice human and Christian virtues of solidarity, loyalty, good behaviour and respect for others, who must be seen as competitors and not as mere opponents or rivals.”⁵²

In this way, sports can set higher goals beyond victory, toward the development of the human person in a community of teammates and competitors. *Fair play* allows sports to become a means of education for all of society about the values and virtues found in sports, such as perseverance, justice, and courtesy. Sport, like any other element of God’s creation, has undergone a distortion in its original purpose due to the presence of sin. It is important to recognize that sin is not an external force solely attributed to sport itself; rather, it is an inherent inclination within all individuals to reject God and misrepresent His benevolent creation. Instead of utilizing our talents to honour God, we often prioritize seeking personal recognition and glorification. We damage our relationships by cheating instead of playing fair. Sin infects sport just as it does every area of human life.⁵³

Speaking of virtues that can be developed in sport is said that athletes have the mission to be “educators as well, since sport can effectively inculcate many higher values, such as loyalty, friendship, and team-spirit.”⁵⁴ The list of specific virtues implied by the ancient concept of *aretē* varies, but generally it includes *eusebeia* (reverence), *andreia* (courage), *sophrosynē* (self-control), *dikaiosynē* (justice), and *sophia* (wisdom).⁵⁵ The Church, following St. Thomas Aquinas, has taught that courage represents a mean point between cowardice on the one hand and recklessness on the other.⁵⁶ In the

⁵¹ *Giving the best of yourself*, 10.

⁵² John Paul II, *Address to the Mexican national soccer team*, 3 February 1984.

⁵³ <https://www.christiansinsport.org.uk/resources/films-to-show-at-an-event/what-does-the-bible-say-about-sport/> (15. 12. 2023.).

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Address to members of the fifa*, 11 December 2000.

⁵⁵ <https://theotherjournal.com/2016/05/26/training-olympian-soul/> (15. 12. 2023.).

⁵⁶ *Giving the best of yourself*, 14.

face of adversity, whether it be personal or collective, the ability to persevere and make ethical choices demonstrates immense courage. This is particularly evident in the realm of sports, where individuals and teams often find themselves at a disadvantage. These instances serve as compelling evidence that sport is replete with moments that exemplify great bravery. Moreover, the practice of sport fosters the development of these qualities. By emphasizing teamwork, sports serve as a valuable educational platform that helps individuals transcend their own self-interests. Within this context, each player's unique skills and abilities are harnessed and channelled towards a shared objective. In essence, sports provide an arena where individual talents are utilized for the collective benefit of the team.

People who participate in sports are well acquainted with the concept of sacrifice. "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."⁵⁷ Considered a sacrifice, sport helps to develop virtues of courage and humility, perseverance, and fortitude; those represent the spiritual, psychological, and physical qualities tested in many sports.⁵⁸

Also, the Second Vatican Council noted that concerning the building up of harmonious communities, sport can "foster friendly relations between people of all classes, countries, and races."⁵⁹ All this can bring us to harmony, which refers to balance and well-being and is essential for true happiness to be experienced, especially in sport. Harmony signifies equilibrium, and this correlation extends to encompass the entirety of a person's existence, including their moral, physical, social, and psychological aspects. Sport serves as a highly effective platform for individuals to develop fully. It is an endeavour that has the potential and should strive to foster equality among all human beings. Each individual is crafted in the image and likeness of God, deserving of a life lived with dignity and respect. Every person possesses the same entitlement to nurture their unique abilities while also acknowledging and honouring their personal limitations. Despite the diverse array of conditions, talents, and capabilities, the existence of distinct performance categories must not give rise to concealed hierarchies or rigid boundaries between different groups of people. This destroys the feeling of

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of sports people*, 29 October 2000.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 11-12.

⁵⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 61

the primary unity of the human family. What the Apostle Paul asks for the Christian community as a reflection of the body of Jesus Christ should be experienced in sport⁶⁰.

As Pope Benedict XVI said:

“Sports can bring us together in the spirit of fellowship between peoples and cultures. Sports are indeed a sign that harmony is possible”⁶¹.

Together with harmony, sport develops solidarity. Solidarity within a sports team pertains to the cohesion that can be fostered among teammates as they work collectively towards a common objective. This shared endeavour implants a sense of individual recognition and admiration among all the participants.

By its real meaning,

“sport exposes the tension between strength and weakness, experiences which both belong indispensably to human existence. Sport is a realm within which humans can authentically live out their talents and their creativity but at the same time experience their limitations and finitude, as success is by no means guaranteed”.⁶²

Thus, sport can serve as a paradigm that illustrates how a person may become himself through the experience of community.

Finally, in the context of the modern world, sport stands out as a remarkable illustration of the harmonious integration of the physical and spiritual aspects of human existence. Merely prioritizing physical prowess, for instance, could imply that individuals are self-reliant entities. A narrow understanding of freedom implies an unaccountable self that adheres solely to personal regulations. Similarly, an excessive emphasis on communal values can undermine the inherent worth of each individual. Lastly, disregarding the interrelation of the body and soul leads to an attitude that either completely disregards the physical aspect or promotes materialistic tendencies.

In conclusion, it can be stated that within the realm of sports, individuals undergo a unique encounter with the interplay of strength and weakness, the voluntary adherence to established regulations that shape a collective norm, the expression of individuality in relation to the community, and the harmonious integration of the physical and spiritual aspects of their being. Furthermore, sports provide a platform for humans to encounter beauty, an elusive concept that may find its profound significance unveiled through the medium of sports.

⁶⁰ Cf. 1Cor 12:21-27.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, *Ángelus*, 8 July 2007.

⁶² *Giving the best of yourself*, 15.

5. CHALLENGES OF SPORT IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

The evaluation of current advancements in sports should be based on whether they stem from an acknowledgment of the inherent worth of individuals and demonstrate sufficient regard for others, all living beings, and the natural environment. Additionally, the Church acknowledges the significance of finding joy in one's participation in sports and fostering harmonious coexistence among human beings. Engaging in sports allows individuals to experience their physical existence straightforwardly and positively. When participating in team sports, athletes understand that the most fulfilling experiences arise when there is a strong bond among players, and they collaborate effectively. Nevertheless, like any other aspect of human existence, sports can be misused to undermine human dignity and infringe upon people's rights. In such instances, the Church speaks out to safeguard human dignity and genuine happiness.⁶³ This is why it is important to promote human values in sport.

From this standpoint, it is imperative to critically evaluate a range of phenomena and advancements. This principle applies not only to sports but also to various aspects of societal existence. The social doctrine of the Church consistently emphasizes the need for individuals engaged in politics, economics, or science to reflect upon whether their endeavours contribute to the well-being of the human person and the establishment of a fair system. Similarly, individuals involved in sports must confront this fundamental inquiry. Sport is under serious threat when it is pursued with the mindset of "winning at any cost". Athletes should also have the freedom to come together and advocate for their own interests. They should not be hindered from expressing themselves as citizens and in accordance with their beliefs. They must be treated as individuals with all their inherent rights. Discrimination based on social or national origin, gender, ethnicity, race, physical attributes, or religion should never find acceptance within the realm of sports.

As we have already said, sport is a complex phenomenon that requires a collective sense of responsibility for it to thrive. This responsibility extends to spectators and supporters who engage with sports directly or indirectly through media platforms. These individuals could demonstrate their respect for players on both sides of the competition and voice their disapproval of unsportsmanlike conduct. Even spectators who support the opposing team have a

⁶³ Cf. *Giving the best of yourself*, 16-17.

role to play in upholding fair play. Furthermore, many individuals actively participate in sports within natural environments. As a result, athletes and sponsors of sporting events bear an additional responsibility to treat the environment with the utmost respect. They must recognize the importance of preserving and protecting the natural world in which these activities take place. In sports involving animals, particular attention must be given to ensure that they are treated ethically and not merely as objects. It is crucial to prioritize their well-being and ensure that they are not subjected to any form of cruelty or mistreatment.

The Church places great importance on the personal accountability of every individual involved in the realm of sports. It urges each person to conscientiously strive towards fostering a compassionate and just sporting atmosphere to the best of their capabilities. In doing so, they play a significant role in enhancing the overall state of the sporting domain and upholding the principles of respect and equity. This document aims to tackle four specific issues that the Church perceives as grave challenges faced by sports in our modern times:⁶⁴

1) *The debasement of the body*

As one American football player commented after his career was over, "I realized, paradoxically, how cut off and removed I was from my body. I knew my body more thoroughly than most men are ever able to, but I had used it and thought of it as a machine, a thing that had to be well-oiled, well-fed, and well-taken care of to do a specific job."⁶⁵ When adolescents undergo such physical transformations, there is a potential danger of disconnecting from their own emotional experiences, thereby hindering their ability to establish intimate relationships. This is a crucial aspect of personal growth for young individuals.⁶⁶ Sports that inevitably cause serious harm to the human body cannot be ethically and morally justified.

2) *Doping*

The issue of doping has a profound impact on the fundamental principles that underpin the concept of sport. Regrettably, in today's world, it is not only practiced by individual athletes, but also by teams and even nations. Doping gives rise to a multitude

⁶⁴ Cf. *Idem*, 18-20.

⁶⁵ Cf. Dave Meggysey, *Out of Their League*, Ramparts Press, Berkeley, CA, 1970., 231.

⁶⁶ Cf. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1980.

of complex moral dilemmas as it contradicts the values of health and fair play. It serves as a prime example of how an unwavering determination to "win at any cost" can corrupt the essence of sports by leading to the violation of its inherent rules. In certain sports that employ mechanical means such as cycling, motorsports, and Formula One, fair play is compromised through the adoption of mechanical fraud or doping. This fraudulent behaviour can be carried out by individual athletes, but it can also extend to a larger group with the assistance of mechanical aides, driven by sponsors, or even orchestrated on a grander scale. It is the responsibility of sports organizations to establish effective regulations and create a supportive institutional framework that not only encourages and rewards individual athletes for their integrity, but also minimizes any incentives to resort to doping.

3) Corruption

As the deliberate manipulation and deception of players and spectators employed to exploit their inherent desire for sporting competition. If we think about the Latin root of the word corruption, it derives from the word *corrumpo* which literally means to decompose, to disintegrate, to lose value, to become putrid and useless. Applied to the world of sports, it is quite enough to understand its meaning. Corrupted sport is an abused sport.

4) Spectators

The experience of unity and solidarity transcends the boundaries of age, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, serving as a remarkable wellspring of delight and aesthetic splendour. When a team emerges victorious, the fans become a cohesive entity, but this sense of camaraderie persists even in the face of defeat and disappointment. They wholeheartedly support their players and uphold the principles of *fair play* by demonstrating respect towards not only their own team, but also the opposing fans and the referees.

The degradation of the body, doping, corruption, and sometimes the negative influence of spectators can be harmful to the integrity of the sport.

6. THE CHURCH IS AT HOME IN SPORT AND THE SPORT IS AT HOME IN THE CHURCH

Considering the Church as a key protagonist, the last part of the Document offers some considerations about the pastoral of sports and gives an overview of the Church's efforts to contribute to

the humanization of sports in the modern world. According to the Italian Bishop Conference:

“the pastoral care of sport is a necessary moment and an integral part of the ordinary pastoral care of the community. The first and specific purpose of the Church in the sports field is manifested as a commitment to give meaning, value and perspective to the practice of sport as a human, personal and social fact.”⁶⁷

The Church has its responsible presence since the Church does not avoid the co-responsibility for the development of sport and its fate. Because of this, the Church desires to enter into dialogue with different sports organizations and governing bodies to advocate for the humanization of contemporary sports.⁶⁸ The Church possesses a well-structured and institutionalized presence within the realm of sport, enabling it to advocate for a Christian perspective on sport through diverse means and at different levels. Within its own organizational framework, the Holy See encompasses various entities that are invested in the phenomenon of sport, approaching it from an institutional, pastoral, and cultural standpoint. In numerous countries, national Episcopal Conferences collaborate closely with national and international sports associations that actively promote the practice of sports.

Sport has the unique ability to unite individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those who are oppressed, marginalized, immigrants, natives, wealthy, powerful, and impoverished. It serves as a common ground where people with different social statuses and experiences can come together, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie. In some instances, sport even transcends boundaries and creates a shared space, similar to an inclusive and welcoming Church. The Church can be considered a modern Courtyard of the Gentiles since the Church sees great value in various interactions that can foster a sense of the unity of the human family. Such a space can also make possible, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, a dialogue with those “to whom God is unknown and who nevertheless do not want to be left merely godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown”⁶⁹. He speaks of the Church’s mission to such people:

“I think that today, too, the Church should open a sort of ‘Courtyard of the Gentiles’ in which people might in some way latch onto God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery, at whose service the inner life of the Church stands.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, *Sport e Vita Cristiana*, n. 43.

⁶⁸ *Giving the best of yourself*, 20.

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2009.

⁷⁰ *Idem*.

There is one important consideration that we must assume:

"The human person who is created in the image and likeness of God is more important than sport. The person does not exist to serve sport, but rather sport should serve the human person in his or her integral development".⁷¹

Pope Francis has advocated for the inclusion of play and sport in a comprehensive educational approach that encompasses intellectual, emotional, and physical development.⁷² The significance of Catholic education in sport cannot be overstated. Throughout the history of Christianity, sport has been recognized as a powerful symbol for the Christian way of life. The Apostle Saint Paul himself acknowledged the value of sport as he used it as a means to connect and communicate with the people of his era. By incorporating sports, games, and other recreational activities, it becomes possible to guide young individuals toward a more profound comprehension of the scriptures, Church teachings, and sacraments. Furthermore, sport serves as a platform to introduce young people to the fundamental virtues of fortitude, temperance, prudence, and justice, thereby facilitating their personal growth in these virtues.⁷³

The aim of the sport can be as follows:

1. Sport can create a culture of encounter and harmony;
2. Sport can be understood as a work of mercy;
3. Sport creates a culture of inclusion.

The emergence of the Paralympics and the Special Olympics serves as a tangible indication of how sports can present a remarkable avenue for inclusivity, imbue life with purpose, and symbolize optimism⁷⁴. These initiatives provide individuals who are displaced or facing the challenges of poverty with the chance to partake in sporting activities, thereby promoting the common good.

The last part of the document explains various environments of sport pastoral ministry and its promotion in numerous con-

⁷¹ *Giving the best of yourself*, 2.

⁷² Francis, *Address to the participants of the World Congress "Education today and tomorrow: A Passion that is renewed"*. Paul VI Hall, 21 November 2015.

⁷³ "In the field of physical education, St. John Bosco, who was just a youth chaplain in Turin in 1847, was probably the first Catholic educator to have recognized the importance of movement, play and sport for the holistic development of the personalities of young people. For Don Bosco, educating through sport means cultivating the personal accompaniment of the young person as well as mutual respect, even in competition" (*Giving the best of yourself*, 22).

⁷⁴ Similarly, the formation of the first Refugee Olympic Team in 2016 and the development of the Homeless World Cup are significant means through which the societal benefits facilitated by sports can be expanded. See the web-pages: <https://olympics.com/ioc/refugee-olympic-team>; <https://www.homelessworldcup.org>.

texts. Namely, the first teachers are parents. As the same document admits:

“If sport runs the risk of being the occasion to divide a family and to diminish the sanctity of Sunday as a holy day to uphold, it also can help integrate a family with other families in the celebration of Sunday, not only in the liturgy but in the life of the community. This does not mean that sport matches should not take place on Sundays, but rather, such events must not excuse families from attending Mass and should also promote the life of the family within the community”.⁷⁵

There are some places where the sport can “be at home”: parishes (and oratories or youth centres); schools and universities and amateur sports clubs and associations. It is interesting that the document also mentions fitness centres and parks (as new places of sport)⁷⁶, where it is possible to come across youth, adults and elderly people interested in a culture of well-being and open to a humanized holistic interpretation of life, of unity between body, soul, and spirit.

The Church should develop suitable pastoral strategies to support and guide players and athletes, a significant number of whom wield substantial influence in both the realm of sports and the broader global community (*Professional sport*). A part of this accompaniment should be to help these athletes stay in touch with the intrinsic meaning of their participation in sport. Pope Francis declares:

“This professional dimension must never push aside the initial vocation of an athlete or team: be amateurs. When an athlete, even a professional one, cultivates this dimension of being an ‘amateur’⁷⁷, society benefits and that person strengthens the common good with the values of generosity, camaraderie and beauty.”⁷⁸

The media serves as a significant interlocutor for the Church in matters pertaining to sports. Additionally, it is imperative for the Church to engage in dialogue with professionals in the domains of sports science and medicine. By engaging in conversation with these individuals, the Church can acquire extensive knowledge regarding the current dynamics of sports, enabling her to make informed and precise judgments..

Speaking about the care of sport, the pastoral workers document is clear in saying that there is no pastoral care of sport without an educational strategy. Sport needs educators and not simply

⁷⁵ *Giving the best of yourself*, 23.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, 23-24.

⁷⁷ Amateur is intended here as an athlete who participates out of love for the sport, and not only for the money.

⁷⁸ Francis, *Address to a delegation of the National soccer teams of Argentina and Italy*, 13 August 2013.

service providers.⁷⁹ The pastoral plan can involve materials, one-on-one interactions, and highly specialized workshops for sports coaches that will involve guidance on a spiritual or ecclesial level, empowering them to be witnesses, "to proclaim Jesus Christ by one's words and actions, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world."⁸⁰ Here the main role has family and parents, volunteers, the same as priests and consecrated. In planning pastoral through sport, the Document gives some suggestions:

1. The beauty of sport should be at the service of education;
2. Sport can rebuild educational partnerships;
3. Sport should be at the service of humanity, not for profit;
4. As the basis of sport remains playing;
5. Reject individualism, selfishness and isolation;
6. Sport includes all and
7. There should be an ecological vision of sport for its sustainable development.

Sport in this particular setting has the potential to challenge cultural norms, and these encounters can assist adolescents in recognizing their involvement in a broader collective and in comprehending the significance and direction in their lives.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

During his address to the Italian Sports Center in 2014, Pope Francis urged his audience and continues to urge us presently, to dedicate our utmost efforts, not solely in the realm of sports, but also in all other aspects of our lives:

"As sportsmen, I invite you not only to play, like you already do, but there is something more: challenge yourself in the game of life like you are in the game of sports. Challenge yourself in the quest for good, in both Church and society, without fear, with courage and enthusiasm. Get involved with others and with God; Don't settle for a mediocre "tie", give it your best, spend your life on what really matters and lasts forever."⁸¹

The human person, created by God is unified by body and soul (or by body, soul and spirit), as well as expressed in the Scripture and by theologians. We invent sports, and we attribute meaning to them. In ancient Greece, the motivation for doing this was spiritual

⁷⁹ *Giving the best of yourself*, 24-25.

⁸⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some aspects of Evangelization*, n. 2, 3 December 2007.

⁸¹ Francis, *Address to members of the sports associations for the 70th Anniversary of the foundation of the CSI (Italian Sports Center)*, 7 June 2014.

– it was a religious attempt to cultivate *aretē*, the perfection that the deities represented; perhaps it was even a way to make their presence felt on earth. The value of sports today – even their economic value – depends ultimately on that ancient spiritual connection. If we can see sports again as a kind of spiritual striving, if we can revive their ancient connection to *aretē*, to such eternally valuable virtues as *eusebeia*, *andreia*, *sophrosynē*, *dikaiosynē*, and *sophia*, I think we can revive their social value today.⁸²

The question that may be raised at the end is: Are there Christians who play sport or are you Christians in sport? The Document *Giving the best of yourself* offers valid answers. The connection that exists between sport and life can also be considered in relation to the connection between sport and religion. The effort to win an award in any sporting competition is comparable to the struggle of human life in order to win the incorruptible award. For both, it is important to give the best of yourself.

»DATI NAJBOLJE OD SEBE« - SPORT IZ KRŠĆANSKE PERSPEKTIVE

Sažetak

Mnogi možda smatraju da je pomalo čudno govoriti o sportu s kršćanskog gledišta. Na početku je stoga potrebno postaviti kršćaninu sljedeće pitanje: Jesi li ti kršćanin koji se bavi sportom, ili si kršćanin u sportu? Dikasterij za laike, obitelj i život objavio je 2018. godine novi dokument pod nazivom Dati najbolje od sebe. O kršćanskom pogledu na sport i osobu. Ovaj dokument daje panoramu kršćanske vizije o sportu i ljudskoj osobi. Kao što sam dokument kaže: »Dati najbolje od sebe je temeljna tema u sportu, jer se sportaši i pojedinačno i kolektivno trude postići svoje ciljeve u igri. Kad netko daje sve od sebe, osjeća zadovoljstvo i radost što je nešto postignuo. Isto vrijedi i za ljudski život općenito, kao i za život kršćanske vjere« (Dati najbolje od sebe, Motivi i svrha). Dokument stoga pokušava bolje protumačiti odnos između davanja najboljeg u sportu i žive kršćanske vjere u svakom aspektu našeg života. Autor u svome članku objašnjava različite dijelove Dokumenta da bi pokazao kako sport i kršćanski život mogu biti povezani.

Ključne riječi: kršćanstvo; vjera; sport; igra; sportaš

⁸² <https://theotherjournal.com/2016/05/26/training-olympian-soul/> (30. 01. 2024.).