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Audience with the “Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI” Vatican Foundation for the presentation of the Ratzinger Prize 2021

This morning, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the “Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI” Vatican Foundation, for the presentation of the Ratzinger Prize 2021, which has now reached its eleventh edition.

The prizewinners this year are Professor Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz and Professor Ludger Schwiemhorst-Schönberger.

The two winners of the Ratzinger Prize 2020, Professor Jean-Luc Marion and Professor Tracey Rowland, were also invited to participate on the same occasion. Last year the healthcare situation had necessitated the cancellation of the scheduled papal audience.

After greetings from Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., president of the Foundation, and the presentation of the profile of the prizewinners, Pope Francis awarded the prize and gave his address.

The following are the words addressed by the Holy Father to those present during the ceremony:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I warmly welcome you all. I thank Cardinal Ravasi, Archbishop Voderholzer and Father Lombardi for their words of introduction and presentation.

I greet the personalities here present who have been awarded the Ratzinger Prize: Professor Jean-Luc Marion and Professor Tracey Rowland, whom we were unable to celebrate last year because of the pandemic;

Professor Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz and Professor Ludger Schwiendhorst-Schönberger, who are receiving the Prize this year. And I am pleased to welcome their families and friends.

I greet the leaders of the “Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI” Vatican Foundation, the members of the Scientific Committee, the Board of Directors and the Board of Auditors, with their supporters, friends and collaborators.

And I am delighted that, after last year’s interruption, we can resume the fine tradition of this meeting. The welcome participation of several personalities who received awards in previous years also shows that this act, as well as recognising the high cultural merits of certain scholars and artists, establishes a lasting bond, a fruitful relationship for the presence and service of the Church in the world of culture.

The community of prizewinners expands every year, not only in number, but also in the variety of countries represented: now fifteen, on all continents including Oceania - in fact, today we have with us Professor Rowland, who has come specially from Australia thanks to the recent reopening of travel. And, as we have heard, it also expands in the variety of disciplines of study and the arts cultivated.

The dynamic of the human mind and spirit in knowing and creating is truly boundless. This is the effect of the “spark” ignited by God in the person made in His image, capable of seeking and finding ever new meanings in creation and history, and of continuing to express the vitality of the spirit in shaping and transfiguring matter.

But the fruits of research and art do not ripen by chance and without effort. Recognition therefore goes at the same time to the prolonged and patient effort that they require to reach maturity. Scripture speaks to us of God’s creation as “work”. We therefore pay tribute not only to the depth of thought and writings, or to the beauty of artistic works, but also to the work spent generously and passionately over many years to enrich the immense human and spiritual heritage to be shared. It is an invaluable service for the elevation of the spirit and dignity of the person, for the quality of relationships in the human community and for the fruitfulness of the mission of the Church.

The brief presentation of the award-winners and their works - which we listened to just now - was enough to fascinate us and draw us into the currents of the spirit. It invited us to range from philosophical reflection on religion to listening to and interpreting the Word of God, from the Song of Songs to the phenomenology of being and love as a gift. We have heard the names of the main interlocutors of our intellectual work evoked: the great masters of philosophy and theology of our time, from Guardini to De Lubac, from Edith Stein to Lévinas, Ricœur and Derrida, up to McIntyre; and others could be added. They educate us to think in order to live our relationship with God and with others ever more profoundly, to direct human action with virtues and above all with love. Among these teachers there is a theologian who was able to open and nourish his reflection and his cultural dialogue towards all these directions together, because faith and the Church live in our time and are friends of every search for truth. I speak of Joseph Ratzinger.

This Prize is rightly awarded in the name of my predecessor. It is therefore an opportunity for me, together with you, to address to him once again our affectionate, grateful and admiring thoughts.

A few months ago we gave thanks to the Lord together with him, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood; and we feel that he accompanies us in prayer, keeping his gaze constantly fixed towards the horizon of God. You only have to look at him to realise this. Today we thank him in particular because he has also been an example of passionate dedication to study, research, written and oral communication; and because he has always fully and harmoniously united his cultural research with his faith and his service to the Church.

Let us not forget that Benedict XVI continued to study and write until the end of his pontificate. About ten years ago, while fulfilling his governmental responsibilities, he was busy completing his trilogy on Jesus and thus leaving us a unique personal testimony of his constant search for the face of the Lord. It is the most important search of all, which he then continued to pursue in prayer. We feel inspired and encouraged by it, and we assure him of our remembrance to the Lord and our prayers.

As we know, the words of the Third Letter of John - "*cooperatores veritatis*" - are the motto he chose when he became Archbishop of Munich. They express the common thread of the different stages of his life, from his studies to his academic teaching, to his episcopal ministry, to his service for the Doctrine of the Faith - to which he was called by Saint John Paul II forty years ago - up to his pontificate, characterised by a luminous magisterium and an unfailing love for the Truth. *Cooperatores veritatis* is therefore also the motto that stands out on the diploma given to the awardees, so that it may continue to inspire their commitment.

These are words that each one of us can and must draw inspiration from in our activities and in our lives, and I leave them with all of you, dear friends, as a wish, together with my blessing. Thank you.
