Loving God, loving mankind.
Vittorio Bachelet: a man of dialogue.

Back

An initiative of the National Presidency
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Panel 1
The formative years

Vittorio Bachelet was born in
Rome on 20 February 1926,
In a family from Turin.
The son of Giovanni Battista
an engineering officer who had
settled in Rome for reasons of service, and Maria Bosio.
Vittorio was the youngest of nine children,
three of whom died
at a young age.
He had a very
close bond, in particular, with his
two older brothers, Adolfo and Paolo, who both became
Jesuits, as well as with his brother Giorgio.
Between the 1930s and the 1940s, he had
his secondary education at the Torquato Tasso High School in Rome:
it was here that he developed a critical mindset which soon freed him
from the dominant ideology and the fascist regime's attempt
to indoctrinate the younger generations.
He found cultural and spiritual points of reference far from
official rhetoric, including the 'Eucharistic Congregation'
led by Cardinal Massimo Massimi: in
that small educational community, he deepened his
religious education, placing at the centre th
daily participation in the Eucharistic celebration,
spiritual direction and the annual spiritual exercises.

Panel 2
The years of formation

In 1943, he enrolled in Rome
at the Faculty of Law,
but that year he was unable to
attend
as the university
remained closed following the

fall of the Fascist regime
and the subsequent occupation
of the capital by
Nazi troops.
He was, however, involved
in the activities of the FUCI
(Italian Catholic University Federation).
He became editor of the federation's magazine 'Azione
Fucina', like his brother Giorgio, with whom
he became part of a group of particularly
brilliant young people, including Aldo Moro and his brother
Alfredo Carlo.
In 1947 he graduated, having presented a thesis on 'The relationship between the
State and trade unions', and in that same year
he became a voluntary assistant to Professor Guido Zanobini
in the Department of Administrative Law.
On 27 June 1951, aged twenty-four, he married Maria
Teresa (Miesi) De Januario, whom he had met at the FUCI, and from
their love two children were born: Maria Grazia (1952) and
Giovanni (1955).

Panel 3

A love for law and for his profession

In 1957, Vittorio was awarded a lectureship in Administrative Law
and, in 1958, was appointed to teach this subject
at the University of Pavia.
In 1962, he won the competition for a professorship and took up
the post of lecturer in Administrative Law at the University of Trieste
; in 1968 he was appointed to Rome, first
at the Pro Deo University and then, in 1974, at the Faculty of
Political Science at La Sapienza, where he held a professorship in
Public Economic Law and subsequently
Administrative Law.
His research focused primarily on the relationship between the
democratic structure laid down by the Constitution and
public administration. His most comprehensive works
were produced between 1957 and 1966, a period of intense
political, economic and social changes.

Among these, the volume on 'The Coordination of
in the Public Administration of the Economy (1957) stands out: here
he explored the relationship of 'interpenetration between political activity
[…] and administrative one', aware how delicate and important was
the link between the policy-making stage, entrusted to political choice
and the implementation phase entrusted to the administration.

Panel 4
A love for law and his profession

Unlike many of his contemporaries, who, like him,
had been members of FUCI and Catholic Action, and who
immediately chose the path of political activism within
Christian Democracy, Bachelet preferred to continue his
involvement in professional, civic and church life, within
university and in voluntary organisations, particularly the
Catholic Action Graduates' Movement.
In this way, he developed his own understanding of the relationship between spiritual life
and civic engagement, never seeing himself as
in conflict with others, but as someone called to seek
positive values in society to
engage and dialogue with.
In the years following the Second World War, he defined his profile as a
lay vocation, characterized by an original style of
presence and thought within both cultural life and the life
of the Church.
Between 1950 and 1959, he was editor-in-chief and then deputy editor
of the political culture journal *Civitas*, edited by Paolo
Emilio Taviani and aligned with Alcide De Gasperi.

Panel 5
His appointment as General President of Italian Catholic Action

*"Catholic Action would like to help Italians to love both God
and human beings. It would like to be a simple
tool through which Italian Catholics are helped to
live the life of the Church fully and responsibly;*

and, at the same time, to live the
life of the secular community and civil society.
Catholic Action, in the context of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council
and under the guidance of Paul VI, who
renewed the trust of the Church's supreme magisterium in it,
will draw on the purest strength of its traditions to renew
itself and to serve both the Church and society ever more effectively.
It looks back with emotion and gratitude upon all those who, over the
past decades – and often in difficult times – have guided and
inspired its work in fidelity to the Pope for the uplift
of Italian people in both the religious and civil spheres.
It sincerely hopes, as stated in the letter
approval of its statutes, that Italian people may
see in Catholic Action not a closed circle of
people initiated into exclusive ideals, or an instrument of
fruitless struggle or ambitious conquest, but rather a
friendly crowd of citizens who have taken to heart the
Church's maternal intention to redeem all and
to guarantee the society the irreplaceable and indispensable
instrument of true civilisation."

Statement issued by Bachelet to Rai
on the day of his appointment as General President
of Italian Catholic Action
6 June 1964

Panel 6
His appointment as President-General of Italian Catholic Action

Bachelet's professional career soon became intertwined
with the call to serve in Italian Catholic Action
, which at that time had over three million members.
He was appointed General Vice-President in June 1959,
just a few months after Pope John XXIII's announcement of his intention to
convene all the bishops in Rome for a new Council,
to reflect on the present and future of the Christian message, on the relationship with
modernity and on the need
for the 'renewal' of the Church.
On 6 June 1964, it was Pope Paul VI who appointed him, at

at the age of just thirty-eight, to the presidency of the association,
aware that it would fall to him to lead it
in putting the Council's guidelines into practice.
During his presidency (1964–1973), Italian Catholic Action
underwent a radical transformation in its forms
, culminating in the promulgation of the new Statute in
1969, drafted with the contribution of all the constituent parts
of the association, at both national and local levels.

Panel 7

The courage to make a choice:

"Renewing CA to implement the Council"

As part of the process to adapt to the conciliatory style
of the 1960s, Catholic Action, led by Vittorio
Bachelet, underwent throughout the 1960s,
an insight took hold that encapsulated the entire process and which still characterizes
the life of the association today. This insight
is known as the 'religious choice'.
This expression summarises a series of
reflections that were not merely the product of that period but
had run through the entire history of the association,
finding expression, for example, in a text from 1948
in which Giuseppe Lazzati had highlighted the need to
distinguish between 'Catholic action' and 'political action', but
also in the debate within the national leadership
of the association's youth branches, which culminated in the
the resignations of Carlo Carretto in 1952 and Mario Rossi in
1954 from the presidency of the GIAC, in order to affirm the
ecclesial and formative nature of the association in
contrast to the then General President,
Luigi Gedda, who was more inclined towards direct political involvement
on the part of Catholic Action.

Panel 8

The courage to make a choice:
“Renewing Catholic Action to implement the Council”

These were demanding and arduous years, but extremely fruitful, during which Bachelet had to tackle numerous issues, both in terms of rethinking of the association’s constitution, with the transition from a multitude of coordinated but autonomous entities to a unified organisational model, and in terms of engagement with society, at a time characterised by major political and cultural changes, from youth protests and the onset of the economic crisis following years of growth.
Bachelet saw Catholic Action as a forum where it would be put the Second Vatican Council into practice, envisioning the association as a means capable of conveying the Council’s teachings to the rank-and-file Italian Catholics.
These years thus provided the Church with a group of people willing to commit themselves to build a community of believers more faithful to the Gospel message.
Through this far-reaching commitment, Catholic Action thereby ensured that the Church was was fully aware of what the Council was calling for, thereby laying the foundations for a more general renewal of the way of being believers and citizens in their own time.

Panel 9

The courage to make a choice:
“Renewing Catholic Action to implement the Council”

The expression ‘religious choice’ first appeared at a conference in 1968 and subsequently in the program of the three-year period 1967–1970.
However, it found its full theoretical development in the new Statute and, in particular, in the preamble written by Bachelet.

This defines the “essentially
religious and apostolic nature of Catholic Action’
referred to its missionary commitment amongst people:
it identifies Christian formation of consciences as
the association’s specific task, in the belief
that attention to society requires an effort to interpret it,
through the ‘signs of the times’, needs and religious hopes, and
to help all Christians to live fully the reality
in which Providence has placed them, alongside their brothers and sisters.
As a consequence of this choice, there was a gradual
abandonment of the overlap between
associative commitment and direct commitment to support and, at the
same time, influence the Christian Democrat party.
The religious choice, however, was not an escape from reality or
from responsibilities in the temporal sphere, as
some hastily interpreted it, but, as
Bachelet wrote, it “helped to rediscover the roots of
faith and to live them out consistently, in order to rediscover the points of
reference that underpin one’s life and one’s
civic and political commitment”.

Panel 10

The courage to make a choice:
“Renewing Catholic Action to implement the Council”

*“In setting out the guidelines for our work, the first point is that of
the fundamental choice underlying our commitment; that is to say,
the one we have referred to as a religious choice. There are many
tasks for Christians within the Church, and there are tasks that vary
at different times. In particular, lay associations
which collaborate in its apostolate may choose one or
the other focus within the broad range of
responsibilities that lay Christian has in the building and
mission of the Church.
But if there is a turning point in human history, if there is a period of upheaval
in the life of the Church to respond to God’s plan
so that the new phase in human history is not deprived of
the proclamation and witness of his Word, then it is not
a matter of making minor adjustments; it is not enough, even if*

it is necessary to contribute one's own brick every day to the
the common edifice. We need to dig deeper,
rediscover the roots of the Christian vocation to holiness, and
live it in that union with God in Christ who made the
the saints the leaven of his Church and, at the same time, of human history
... At turning points in history, it becomes more urgent to
all Christians to be truly Christian
within the Church and in the world, and to live an authentic
Christian experience in its fundamental relationship with Christ and with
brothers and sisters—that is, in the original experience of faith and
charity. The Church exists for this very purpose."

From the introductory address delivered by Bachelet
at the first National Assembly of Italian Catholic Action
25 September 1970

Panel 11
Service is joy:
the 'bell-ringer' of Domus Pacis

'...Deep down, I think we should give a great deal of thought to the
powerful words John spoke at the start of the Council: 'There
are those who always see everything is going wrong, whilst
we believe there are many worthwhile, positive things".
We must hold fast to this as an attitude of
hope, which enables us to overcome even these shadows, to
overcome these risks too, and to overcome evil with good.
And this also applies to the life of society. We have
spoken a great deal about this. It is a commitment we must rediscover in
its Christian essence. And here too, should there be
difficult situations (and there will probably be
difficult situations), we must always bear in mind
a fundamental trust, which is not in our
strengths or in formulaic phrases, but in God's ultimate help and
in the ability we will have, if we trust in Him, to turn
things for the best.
As Tagore says – and as we should all be able to say at the end of
our lives: 'I was asleep and dreamt that life was nothing but
joy; I awoke and saw that life was nothing but service,

I served Him and saw that service was joy'. May we all
of us truly rediscover that service is joy.
May we all truly rediscover that service is
joy. This is the wish of your faithful servant, the
"bell-ringer of the Domus Pacis".

From Bachelet's closing address to the second
of Italian Catholic Action
23 September 1973

Panel 12
Service is joy:
the 'bell-ringer' of Domus Pacis

'What is Catholic Action? We have spoken about it at length, but
it seems to me that it is above all a community of Christians who
know one another, who love one another, who work together in the
the name of the Lord, who are friends: and this network of men and
women working in every diocese – young people, adults,
young people and children, who throughout the Italian Church in
harmony, with a shared spirit, now largely free of
organisational structures, but truly being
more and more, as one heart and one soul, they seek to
serve the Church.
And that is the great thing.
Because we serve CA not because we are interested in making
Catholic Action great; we serve Catholic Action because we care rendering
the service within the Church that is asked for all our brothers and sisters.
And I believe this is truly what matters most.
Sometimes we feel the urge to look to the future – to the future
of our association, but above all to the future of the
Church and of humanity; I believe we must look to
this future with confidence, and also with hope, even though
we're fairly certain that the difficulties we'll face
will be much less than those we have faced
so far…."
From Bachelet's closing address at the second
National Assembly of Italian Catholic Action
23 September 1973

Panel 13
The call to political engagement

In 1973, Vittorio Bachelet concluded his term of office as national president of Catholic Action, leaving behind an organisation that had undergone profound changes in structures and in the way it supported believers in their formation and in their role as citizens. The end of his term of office did not, however, mark his departure from Church life – far from it. Vittorio continued to make his contribution, particularly as vice-president of the Pontifical Commission for the Family and as a member of the Preparatory Committee for the first Conference , dedicated to 'Evangelisation and Human Promotion' (1976).

It was in 1976, however, that he accepted the offer to take on a commitment in politics. The previous year, Benigno Zaccagnini had been appointed to the secretariat of the Christian Democrats , and had initiated a far-reaching process of renewal of the party.

Vittorio Bachelet decided to play his part in this process, throwing himself into it personally, and consequently accepting to stand as a candidate for the Rome City Council. He ran a low-key yet engaging election campaign, involving his closest friends and maintaining his style of being an attentive listener, which led him to meet with groups and individuals in order to fully understand the needs of citizens. He was elected to the position of municipal councilor in June 1976.

Panel 14
The call to political engagement

"And this is the twofold contribution that Catholics can and must make to the formation of the ruling class: an active contribution of moral and spiritual integrity and a concrete service of competence capable to achieve success in human terms as well.
Perhaps the greatest error of a still widespread mindset is to

believe that there is an insurmountable hiatus between the two, an abyss which only in individual life allows the fulfilment of a profound morality and a true Christian inspiration, whilst in social and public life, the the prize can only go to the troublemakers, to those who are prepared to make any compromise with their own conscience, to whom are granted the freedom to engage in flattery and slander, lies, revenge, and the exploitation for their own ends of gullible masses under various pretexts, and the thirst for money and power. And one can hardly believe it – try asking even many convinced Catholics — that in social and political life there may be those who can succeed whilst maintaining not only purity of heart, but even that right intention through which every action brings the glory of God even before the service of mankind."

From the article *'The Responsibilities of Public Life*', written by Bachelet for the Catholic Action magazine *Iniziativa*
April 1953

Panel 15
In the service of the State: the role of Vice-President of the CSM

At a very difficult time for the country, plagued by severe social tensions and beset by violence of terrorism, Bachelet was appointed by Parliament as a member of the Superior Council of the Judiciary, of which, on 21 December 1976, he became Vice-President, elected by a single vote more than Giovanni Conso, the candidate put forward by the left-wing factions.
Bachelet headed the judiciary's self-governing body judiciary at a time when it too was characterised internally by intense debate.
A delicate task that Vittorio was able to carry out with an remarkable ability to engage with all viewpoints, steering the debate back towards a shared commitment to serve the republican institutions, for the common good.
Faced with the anti-democratic challenge of terrorism, which

reached its peak during those years with
almost daily attacks on politicians, magistrates, journalists,
trade unionists, business leaders and law enforcement officers, Bachelet
always saw the Constitution as the foundation of
country's social and political cohesion, to which one should look even
in the most difficult times, and in the participation
of all citizens in public life
life the key to reaffirm the reasons of
democracy.

Panel 16
In the service of the State:
the role of Vice-President of the CSM

"Terrorism cannot accept an alternative to
civil war, to the armed struggle it has been waging for nearly a decade,
regardless of its lack of success and the moral and political isolation
in which it finds itself.
The democratic alternative is the main objective it
sets out to destroy, because democracy is a
constant refutation, a daily condemnation of the way terrorists
think and act… democracy, on the other hand, is
the heritage of the workers, who form the social and political foundation
of the Constitution; democracy is the
living proof that conflicting interests
do not preclude their resolution. Nor does it preclude coexistence;
democracy is a daily conquest and victory against
oppression; it is the defence of hard-won rights.
This is not the longest path to greater justice
in society: it is the only path.
The other path—that of armed struggle—already contains within it the
seeds of dictatorship, to be imposed first and foremost upon and against
the working masses.
The contemptuous isolation in which the ruling elites
terror, in relation to the working class and the general public as a whole, already
reveals the kind of power they would seek to exercise."

From a preparatory note by Bachelet
for the commemoration of Deputy Public Prosecutor Emilio Alessandrini,

murdered by 'Prima Linea' terrorists
29 January 1979

Panel 17
The 'Bachelet method': a recognised and recognisable style of leading the CSM

"The day after (his appointment), Vice-President Bachelet gathered us in his office, greeted us very warmly and immediately outlined the prospects for his role: he spoke of the operational procedures for managing the committees and the plenary session, relations with the President of the Republic, the Minister and the Parliament regarding the proposals and bills required to be submitted to the Houses; he outlined how and what precautions he intended to carry out work on the offices and emphasised the need to reform the judicial system, as well as civil and criminal proceedings. I did not fail to notice the calmness he spoke of these matters, as though they were contents and methods that came naturally to him, for it would have been strange not to think of them that way.
He concluded by stating that he was always open to discussion and added that it would be advisable for each group to appoint a representative with whom to maintain regular contact. Casadei Monti, in agreement with the others and perhaps as a gesture of reciprocity – frankly, I thought – nominated me as the representative of the Constitutional Commitment.
From there, and with a fair amount of initial scepticism, that journey of collaboration with Vice-President started , gradually developing into mutual respect and then friendship, which continued in parallel with my intense and consistently independent work within the Council."

Text taken from a memoir by Luigi Scotti, a magistrate and member of the CSM, during the Bachelet 40th Conference
2020

Panel 18
The Bachelet 'method': a recognised and recognisable style in leading the CSM

"Every day, Bachelet brought patience, dialogue, a willingness to engage and a willingness to listen. He often told the representatives of the Council groups: 'We are all people of good will, and it would be a disaster if people of good will start quarrelling. The more numerous, acute and disruptive contradictions are, the weaker the defence for human coexistence is. Terrorism targets precisely these contradictions within institutional structures'. The quest to build consensus, characteristic of the entire Bachelet administration—at times exasperating but always fair and courageous, contributed decisively to keep the judiciary united, whilst not stifling debate and dissent... In short, Vittorio Bachelet conveyed, through his words, a human confidence in democracy – that is, a democracy designed for people who naturally talk and debate one another and, together, seek the truth and perspectives for action. Bachelet, in the Council represented civil society rather than a political faction or a cultural sector, and it was from this he drew his capacity for dialogue."

Text taken from a tribute by Luigi Scotti, a magistrate and member of the CSM, during the Bachelet 40th Conference 2020

Panel 19
12 February 1980: the lay martyrdom

In 1980, Italy was still experiencing a period of intense turmoil, struck almost daily by terroristic actions. The judiciary itself was the subject of serious controversy linked to alleged links between certain judges and the Red Brigades, the main responsible, amongst other things, for the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, a close friend of Bachelet's,

and his bodyguards in 1978.
In that situation, Bachelet's commitment to keep
the CSM united, in close collaboration with the President
of the Republic, Sandro Pertini, was fundamental in
keeping the judiciary and the entire country anchored
to the values of the Constitution. It was precisely this work of his that
led to threats against his life, resulting his name appearing in
documents of the Red Brigades; despite this, or perhaps precisely
because of this, Bachelet declined to have a security detail.
On 12 February 1980, as he was leaving the university lecture theatre
at La Sapienza named after Aldo Moro, accompanied
by his young assistant Rosy Bindi, he was approached
by two people who fired several shots,
killing him and leaving him lying on the landing of the
staircase.
News of his death spread immediately; his
relatives and even the President of the Republic rushed over.
The whole country was struck by grief and dismay.

Panel 20

12 February 1980: the lay martyrdom

Two days after the murder, the state funeral was held
, broadcast live on television. For the prayer of the faithful
, Giovanni, the twenty-five-year-old son of
Bachelet, who read out a text on behalf of the family in which
he appealed to God to remember the authorities, the judges, the
police officers, the Carabinieri and the prison officers who
were fighting to defend democracy, even at the risk
their lives, concluding as follows:
"Today we also wish to pray for those who harmed
my father, because, whilst in no way detracting from the justice that
must prevail, may forgiveness always be on our lips
and never vengeance, always life and never the demand for
death of others."
The live television broadcast amplified the power of that message,
allowing the whole country to hear it and helping
many Italians to understand it might be possible to tackle in a different way
the spiral of hatred that had been afflicting the nation for years.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, commemorating the death of Bachelet, described it as a 'secular martyrdom':
"The fruitfulness of his death, in the echo of human and Christian values, that has spread, in an unforeseeable way, around his memory, has confirmed the deep roots of the disciple's life and death in the life and death of the Lord. A few words from the son, great in their unassuming, straightforward simplicity and in their lack of rhetoric, were sufficient to make known to the whole nation the Christian Bachelet and the image of his Lord, made manifest in him."

Panel 21
The relevance of his thinking today: being a true Christian at pivotal moments in history

*"On the hundredth anniversary of Vittorio's birth Bachelet: *La Repubblica* pays tribute to his memory and the legacy of his civic commitment and his cultural contribution. Vittorio Bachelet, a jurist of the highest calibre, was able to combine a dedication to knowledge and research with active social engagement and extensive commitment, first within the Italian Catholic University Federation and subsequently in Catholic Action.*
Vittorio Bachelet's approach was characterised on dialogue and reconciliation, not easy to put into practice during the years in which he was active, marked by conflict and violence. He approached the roles he held within institutions and in voluntary organisations in keeping the ideals of democracy and pluralism that guided him throughout his life.
Bachelet always saw dialogue as a valuable source of collective enrichment, as well as an essential tool for the protection of the common good...
La Repubblica is grateful to Vittorio Bachelet for his work and his example."

From the Statement by the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Vittorio Bachelet birth
20 February 2026

Panel 22
The relevance of his thinking today: being true Christians in moments of historical turning points

On the evening before his assassination, Vittorio Bachelet
attended an official reception at the
at the Holy See, to mark the
commemoration of the Lateran Pacts.
Inside a diplomatic residence hosting
civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries, Bachelet found himself chatting
with a young journalist.
He spoke of his experience as president of Catholic Action
, but also of the difficulties the country
had been facing for years now, and of the commitment he had shown,
during this very difficult period, as vice-president
of the Superior Council of the Judiciary.
In this conversation, in which he spoke candidly to a
young man, he shared with us his final words, which we
:

“Listen, I’m at peace.”
Truly at peace. Alive.
There are problems, and they do bring sadness,
but we must carry on living because we have hope…

“For my part, I live in the belief that
small signs can become a great light.”