

gratitude. Let us listen once more to Benedict XVI, before he became the successor of Peter, referring still to St. Josemaría: “He loved and proclaimed the Eucharist in all its dimensions: as adoration of God present among us in a hidden but real way; as a gift, in which he communicates himself to us again and again; as a sacrifice, in accordance with those words of Scripture: ‘Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me’ [Heb 10:5]” (homily during a Mass of Thanksgiving for the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, May 19, 1992).

St. Josemaría was moved, for example, by the closeness of Jesus in the Sacred Host, who awaits us in our churches. “When you approach the Tabernacle remember that he has been awaiting you for twenty centuries” (*The Way*, no. 537). This is an ever-present truth that should move each of us. How

has our personal contact with Jesus in the Eucharist grown during this year dedicated to the Eucharist? How do we love and frequent the sacrament of Penance, necessary to receive the Eucharist worthily when one has gravely offended God and to prepare a less unworthy dwelling place for him. I invite you to consider these questions personally, so that we can answer them with sincerity, with generosity. Let us take the opportune decisions to grow in intimacy with Jesus in those moments dedicated to prayer, when we assist at Holy Mass and when we receive him in Communion.

The Most Holy Virgin is our mother. The task of all mothers is to feed and educate their children. Let us ask her to help us always, like a good Mother, to receive this Bread of Heaven with greater care each day, with greater gratitude, with a love that never ceases to grow. Amen

Articles and interviews

Studi Cattolici (Milan) May 2005

Interviewed by Cesare Cavalleri

1. *Fourteen encyclicals, fifteen apostolic exhortations, eleven apostolic constitutions, forty-five apostolic letters, thousands of addresses, audiences, homilies. The magisterium of John Paul II is both broad and deep. It is impossible, therefore, to synthe-*

size it in a short answer. Nevertheless, what do you see as the main strengths of the thought of the Pontiff who has just left us, in both the dogmatic and the moral realm.

In my opinion, the thought of John Paul II can be summarized in a single word. It is a word written with a capital letter: Christ, the Word of God made Man. In the realm of behavior, Christ as the only model for our conduct. In the realm of theology, Christ as the object and foundation of our

faith. But that Word, that Person, Jesus Christ, is not only the key to the Pope's thought: it is the explanation of his entire life. How difficult it is to distinguish between life and magisterium in John Paul II!

This is stated very clear by the Pope himself in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, which set out the program for his pontificate: "Our spirit is set in one direction, the only direction for our intellect, will and heart is—towards Christ our Redeemer, towards Christ, the Redeemer of man. We wish to look towards him—because there is salvation in no one else but him, the Son of God" (no. 7).

During the past few weeks, so many men and women, whether Christians or not, have expressed their admiration for John Paul II for apparently very diverse reasons, including his holiness, his denunciation of totalitarianism, his efforts for peace, his trust in youth, his defense of life, his support for the family, his concern for the poor, his courage in the face of pain and sickness. In my opinion, this wide variety of perceptions, all of them true, gives voice to the truth that the solution to mankind's great problems is to be found in Christ. It is also significant that many people have returned to Jesus Christ through the Pope's death.

2. *The theological framework for the magisterium of John Paul II is grounded on a specific anthropology. The interest that the philosopher Karol Wojtyla had in the works of Husserl and Edith Stein is well known. But in his last book, Memory and Identity, the Pope explicitly*

played down the contribution of phenomenology and once more emphasized the value of Thomistic realism. What is the relationship between reason and faith, a topic to which the Pontiff expressly dedicated an encyclical?

When Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II, left us for heaven, he still had the same intellectual passion that had led him to penetrate into phenomenology, deeply influenced by the mysticism of Edith Stein. At the same time, his whole magisterium is saturated with the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, as he pointed out in one of his visits to the Angelicum Pontifical University. I think that the change to which you allude falls to the study of specialists. Aside from these considerations, it is evident that, because of his capacity to dialogue with the main currents of modern philosophy, the thought of John Paul II is itself the fruit of the harmony between reason and faith.

In these times of esoteric beliefs and intellectual pessimism, the Pope was a courageous defender of reason. He expressed confidence in the ability of the human intellect to know the truth. And he presented the faith as a light, not as a limit. Christian faith enlightens the intellect in its effort to understand reality.

Faith protects reason from superstition and fear, while inviting it to recognize the existence of mysteries. Faith helps reason to become aware of its limits, but also to regain confidence in its great possibilities.

3. In his 104 apostolic trips all over the world, in his 146 Italian pilgrimages, in his visits to 317 of the 333 parishes in Rome, John Paul II fully exercised his role as universal Pastor, as Primate of the Italian Church and as Bishop of the city of Rome. This Pope, presented by some as "media minded" because of his intelligent and extensive use of the communications media, has always favored direct contact with reality. To what extent are the mass media instruments of evangelization? What apostolic repercussions should we expect from the extraordinary media coverage of the funeral of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI?

The role played by the means of communication in society accounts for the importance that the Church attributes to them. In the end, the essential question is a cultural one. The communications media are both a source of knowledge and an educational force. They create models of behavior, and could even be called "lectureships in morality." It is natural to raise question about the legitimacy and limits of their power. But, above all, Catholics have to feel their responsibility to be present in this "Areopagus," this public forum, a privileged place for giving expression to their faith.

During the events of the past days, television, radio and the press from all over the world have treated the beautiful liturgical ceremonies with respect and dignity, enabling hundreds of millions of people to travel vicariously to Rome, to pray for the Pope, to say

good-bye to John Paul II and welcome Benedict XVI. The so called "system" of the communications media meshed very well with the universal, spiritual structure of the Church.

4. The large crowds, especially young people, on the apostolic trips and the immense gathering of people that we saw in connection with the funeral of the Pope, have led some people to question the real depth of these emotional outpourings, undoubtedly very noble, but perhaps also fleeting. How do you view all this?

Of course, it would be a mistake to confuse religion with feelings. But it would also be a mistake to undervalue emotions. I have already alluded to this point. To be moved by the death of someone we love, to yearn for the presence of a father, are deeply human reactions. Thus the emotion-filled response of so many people during these weeks shows that the Church is truly a family, one that is young and alive, as Benedict XVI said on April 24.

In addition, the profound emotions we experienced may well have important practical consequences. They make a deep impression on the spirit of young people and leave a permanent mark on one's heart. They can take away the coldness that sometimes comes upon us with the passage of the years and prevent skepticism from setting in. Both everyday life and memorable events are important in determining who we are.

I think that many people, once the emotion has died down, will remember having taken part in such an historic moment, experiencing a spiritual reality of great intensity, a moment of grace. In short, they will remember hearing the call of God, who once more touched the portals of their heart. I am convinced that during these days many people have decided to respond to that call, to give themselves to God with a faithful love, to live an upright human and Christian life.

5. In regard to the popular outpouring around John Paul II, there are those who say that people came to applaud the singer, but that they did not like the song. Indeed, the difficulties the magisterium of the Church is having in guiding practical behavior is well known, in matters of right to life, sexual morality, stability of the family.... How do you view this lack of consistency in those who do not hesitate to call themselves Catholics?

When we go to listen to a person with moral authority, we are expressing what we seek, not what we already have. This happens in the religious sphere, but also in other fields, because life is always, in some way, a search, a path, a desire, a yearning for something better, more beautiful, more just.

In this regard, there come to mind some words of John Paul II, when commenting on the famous statement of St. Augustine: "You have made us, O Lord, for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions*, I, 1).

"In this creative restlessness," says John Paul II, "beats and pulsates what is most deeply human—the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience" (*Redemptor Hominis*, no. 18).

Listening to the Pope with attention, with this restlessness, is today a kind of preamble of the faith, a beginning of Christian life. After that first step comes the personal decision to seek formation and light, the yearning to exercise charity, the recourse to the strength of the sacraments.

I dare to say that the Pope fulfills an important mission in drawing men and women of good will. After this there comes into play the apostolic responsibility of Catholics, both priests and laity, who make the Church present everywhere. Before focussing on the inconsistency of some, I prefer to pray that the events we have recently experienced will encourage us to renew our resolution to be more courageous in making Christ known. So many people are telling us in so many ways that they want to get to know him, to deal with him, to love him.

6. You were with John Paul II many times, including outside of official audiences. Can you give us any personal recollection?

A particularly moving memory for me is connected with the death of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, my predecessor as Prelate of Opus Dei, on

March 23, 1994. That day, John Paul II came to Our Lady of Peace, the prelatric church, which we were using as the mortuary chapel. He came to pray and, undoubtedly, to show his paternal affection, during moments when we in Opus Dei were left without a father. That episode for me encapsulates John Paul II: a faithful father who is always present when you need him, who brings his consoling affection at the moment of sorrow.

7. It is undeniable that Opus Dei's history is closely bound to the pontificate of John Paul II. He raised the Work to a personal Prelature on November 28, 1982, beatified the founder on May 17, 1992, and canonized him on October 6, 2002. What is the source of John Paul II's harmony with the spirit of Opus Dei?

Before answering, I would like to note that all the institutions and all the faithful in the Church felt themselves loved by John Paul II, who always bestowed great pastoral attention on what the Holy Spirit brought forth in the Church. In Opus Dei we want to serve all the successors of Peter, following the example of St. Josemaría. And I cannot fail to mention the fact that Pope Paul VI, of venerable memory, manifested on various occasions both to Msgr. Escrivá and to his first successor, that he ardently wished to see the arrival of a juridical solution for Opus Dei. In the first audience that he granted to my predecessor, Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, he asked him to tell everyone in Opus Dei that he considered Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá to be one of the

persons in the twentieth century who had responded most heroically to God's call.

But I think that the root of the harmony with John Paul II, to which you referred just now, sprang from the Pope's passion for evangelization, from his love for the world, from his awareness of the role of the laity in the Church's mission. The Holy Father's pastoral concerns, his love for mankind, his elevated vision of work as giving dignity to the human person, led him to appreciate the spirit of Opus Dei and its message of sanctification of work and ordinary life. As far as the Prelature is concerned, we have tried to correspond to this affection, to the encouragement to be faithful to the Church, with the desire to never disappoint the expectations of the Holy Father and to loyally second his teachings. All of these memories are now for me a reason to give thanks.

8. John Paul II proclaimed 1338 people blessed and canonized 482 saints. Is this an application of the Second Vatican Council, whose essential message was the universal call to holiness?

Yes, certainly. Some people, in addition, have seen in these large numbers an effort by the Pope to put Christ's message within reach of every man and woman. Indeed, in a society as secularized as ours, there is a need to open all ways of access to souls, to hearts. And the lives of saints are extraordinary vehicles for communicating the faith: living models who are attractive to persons of all races and cultures.

Saint Paul called the early Christians "saints." The saints are in a certain sense "one of us." They show that it is possible to follow Christ. Their example nourishes our hope. I think that John Paul II, here too, wanted to emphasize the reality that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, does not discriminate. He calls everyone to holiness, which is the goal, let us never forget, for which man was created, every man and every woman. In my opinion, John Paul II wanted to tell us that our Lord is not far from anyone, that he is interested in everyone.

9. The life of John Paul II, the "Totus Tuus Pope," was imbued with Marian devotion. Without trying to find a hidden meaning in everything, there is an undeniable connection between the life of the Pope and the apparitions of our Lady at Fatima: the assassination attempt on May 13; the third secret, in which the Pope recognized himself; the death of Sister Lucia on February 13, shortly before the Pope died... I'm not looking for any prophecies, but perhaps the apocalyptic tone of some interpretations of Marian apparitions, which seem to imply that we are reaching the end times, gives pause for thought.

I have a lot of devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. I have frequently prayed before her simple and motherly statue, and am moved by the story of the young shepherds. But I would not know how to begin giving an opinion on these apocalyptic interpretations. I am neither inclined nor prepared to do so. Only God can read between the lines of the book of history. I live on today's page. I trust in the Divine Writer and am firmly con-

vinced that his plans call for a life filled with hope, grounded on the reality that the Son of God has wanted to give his life for us.

10. The brevity of the conclave that elected Benedict XVI gives the picture of a closely united Church, even a unanimous one. Do you think that we have now gotten past the post-Conciliar cyclone and that the often artificial distinction between "progressives" and "conservatives" has been overcome.

The conclave was clearly a resounding lesson in unity, which will undoubtedly mark the future. It was like an echo of St. Ambrose's words, *ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*: "where Peter is, there the Church is found." It also fulfilled once more St. Josemaría's heartfelt aspiration: *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*, all, with Peter, to Jesus through Mary. We have seen how the cardinals, with very different mentalities and experiences and coming from the most varied geographical areas, have set aside their differences and quickly closed ranks in union with Peter.

The distinction between "conservatives" and "progressives" is simply an a priori application of a merely political classification to a rich and profound reality. To interpret the conclave in this way is like viewing reality in black and white. I believe that also here a clear advance has been made, since many commentators now have a better grasp of the nature of the Church.

From the beginning of that gathering, I saw the whole Church, with its prayer and self-sacrifice, inside the

Sistine Chapel, and I had constantly in mind our Lord's promise that he would not fail to hear those who prayed in his name.

11. *I would appreciate knowing your view of Benedict XVI, in light of your acquaintance with him.*

I see him as a person who stands out for his theological intellect, his clear vision of problems in the Church and in contemporary culture, and his broad outlook. One should also mention that he has already spent many years serving the Church and is a man with a deep spiritual life. Anyone who has dealt with him even briefly can give witness to his refinement and ability to listen.

In the face of a world convulsed by conflicts, the Holy Father shows himself to be clearheaded and calm, prepared to give reasons for the Church's hope, for faith in its Master. If to all this one adds that the Holy Spirit has sought him out, it seems to me that he is in the highest degree the right person for this moment in history.

12. *What does the name that the new Pope chose suggest to you.*

Personally, the name's reference both to St. Benedict and to Pope Benedict XV seems to me to highlight the importance the Church gives to culture and to striving for peace. I think that today we Catholics have the responsibility to strive to make the faith understandable to our fellow men by stressing the Christian roots of culture, especially in Europe. I refer to culture in the broad sense: the climate that Christian families create

around them; the fostering of works of mercy; and also scientific research, films, and literature. Catholics today have to be builders of peace and a culture of life.

To most Catholics the choice of the name provoked surprise and a healthy curiosity to know the reasons. The newness of the name is thus another reminder to unite ourselves more to the Pope and his intentions, as he himself never ceases to ask us.

13. *What most struck you about the work of Cardinal Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith?*

His capacity to harmonize charity with service to the truth. He has been a good example of St. Paul's advice: *veritatem facientes in caritate* (speaking the truth in love, *Eph* 4:15). In the book, *The Ratzinger Report*, we read: "Dogmatic definition is a service to truth, a gift offered to believers by the authority established by God. Dogmas, someone has said, are not walls which prevent one from seeing, but, very much to the contrary, windows opened to the infinite." These words were written by Cardinal Ratzinger a few years after he was put in charge of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I think they are one of the keys to his leadership of that Congregation.

14. *In an article published by Professor Joseph Ratzinger, before becoming a cardinal, in the magazine Studi Cattolici (no. 69, December 1966), one finds a strong defense of liturgical reform and, at the same time, a pointing to some overly hasty applications. Do you think that this*

concern might be one of the priorities of the new pontificate?

One finds an explanation of this concern in some other words written by Cardinal Ratzinger a few years ago: "The inexhaustible reality of the Catholic liturgy has accompanied me through all phases of life. And so I shall have to speak about it again and again" (*Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, p. 20). If we take into account that the liturgy is an action of God, open to man's participation, we understand its centrality in Christian life. I think that Pope Benedict XVI is very attuned to the sacredness of the liturgy, where heaven and earth unite in such a mysterious beauty, and that he daily experiences the efficacy of the adage, *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

15. *The pastoral program of the Church for the third millennium was sketched out by John Paul II in his apostolic letter Novo Millennio Ineunte. Will the new Pope have an easy task?*

It seems to me very important to emphasize that, now and always, the application of that program is the responsibility of the whole Church, not just of the Pope. The abdication of this mission by the faithful, both priests and laity, would mean giving in to a comfort-seeking that would have grave consequences. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II said: "I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples" (no. 3).

The work of Benedict XVI will be made less difficult to the extent that we strive to support all Catholics with our prayer and our work, each of us giving testimony to Jesus in the place we occupy in society. Also in this regard the words of St. Leo the Great are very appropriate: *agnosce, christiane, dignitatem tuam!* recall your dignity, O Christian. We are all called to build up the Church, in full adhesion to the Holy Father and his magisterium.

16. *In his homily during the Mass pro eligendo pontifice, the cardinal dean, Joseph Ratzinger, spoke of a "a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires." What are the principal moral problems that Christians have to confront today?*

It is not easy to answer such a broad question. We could speak about many subjects, but I would like to mention here only two virtues: charity and chastity.

In the first place, I think that Christians have to reaffirm their conviction that charity is the summit of the Gospel message. Charity in its full sense, that is to say, not only the occasional extraordinary gesture, but constant charity, in one's family, with one's friends, among one's colleagues; concern for the sick, the poor, the lonely, the sad, the needy; charity at work, in politics, in the economy. Really we are speaking of a personal virtue, of one of the greatest gifts that the Church can offer to the world. We are also speaking of the Holy Spirit, who is uncreated Love, and of his action on souls.

In many environments, chastity is—if I may use the expression—an absent virtue, exiled, something that produces a devastating prejudice against a person. Paradoxically, one finds a certain shame in mentioning it, while all shame has been lost in speaking in public about the most twisted perversions, thus giving a sense of normality to every kind of disorder. Christian purity brings us immediately to Jesus, who asked of his disciples a cleanness of sight, of heart and of conduct. Unfortunately we are living in an eroticized society, where sex has become a type of merchandise that is bought and sold. We are seeing the terrible consequences of this painful loss of humanity, which turns a rational creature into an animal. Catholics have to restore to the world an appreciation for chastity, which is more closely linked to charity than might at first seem the case. In a certain sense, chastity is a form of charity: of love for God, of respect for oneself and for others.

17. *St. Leo IX, whom historians consider the best German Pope of the Middle Ages, condemned the erroneous theories of Berengarius of Tours about the Eucharist at the Synod of Vercelli in the year 1050. Perhaps it is not just by chance that Benedict XVI, who was elected on April 19, the liturgical feast of St. Leo IX, has emphasized the fact that his election took place during the Year of the Eucharist proclaimed by John Paul II.*

One of the first documents of John Paul II—his letter *Dominicae Cenae*, in 1980—was on the Eucharist. His last pastoral decision, of great symbolism, was to center this year, which became the last of his pontificate, on the

Eucharist. Thus, the first synod of bishops that the new Pope will preside over will be dedicated to the Eucharist, “the center of the Church’s life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1343) and the source of its evangelizing mission. Indeed, all of this makes us think of God’s ordinary providence, which always finds a way to help us look “towards the center,” towards the Eucharist.

18. *In one of the thanksgiving Masses for the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, on May 19, 1992, Cardinal Ratzinger defined the founder of Opus Dei as “a great man of God, who traveled all over the world to bring to everyone the courage of Christian normality, which is precisely holiness: to live the gift that we received in baptism.”*

I have noticed that Benedict XVI likes to consider the Christian life as a seed deposited in the soul at the moment of baptism. At first it seems insignificant; nevertheless it shows itself to be efficacious in the face of evil and, above all, it brings goodness to the world. It brings, so to speak, clean water, water that makes all the deserts fruitful. It is a question, in the end, of the Gospel parable of the mustard seed, which sums up the aspirations of all Christians, and consequently of the faithful of Opus Dei, placed as we are in the midst of the world. The mission of Catholics in society can be seen in this way: as bearers of a small, and at the same time great, seed of peace and joy that matures within the soul and spreads throughout the world.

19. *In these moments, what are the priorities of Opus Dei in carrying out its service to the Church?*

The service that the Prelature carries out can be summed up in its formative task, open to priests and laity, men and women, of all cultures and professions. The formation that Opus Dei gives helps to remind people of an essential truth: that all Christians are called to imitate Jesus in our daily lives, that our vocation is to serve others, to love them, precisely through our profession and our dealings with others. Serving others in one's ordinary life, discovering the dimension of service contained in all human work, is an excellent way of making Christ known. I also like to stress that the work of Opus Dei is directed to everyone; it isn't limited to any particular sector of society. It tries to help every Christian to bring Christ's light to those around him. This means both transmitting the treasure of the faith, and learning from others, who are loved and redeemed by Christ. It also fills me with joy that the faithful of Opus Dei, both men and women, seek to look towards Mary, the woman of the Eucharistic, who knew how to make her entire life an oblation, in union with Christ's sacrifice, for all souls.

Rome

April 1, 2005

In regard to the sickness of Pope John Paul II

In the midst of the peace that the Holy Father always conveys to us, we are all deeply concerned by the recent turn in the health of our beloved John Paul II.

I recently learned that he wanted to pray the Stations of the Cross today, to

meditate again on the sufferings of Our Lord. We unite ourselves to the prayers of the Pope, who is giving us so clear an example, in the midst of his suffering, of the trust that comes from being with Jesus.

I pray for his Holiness, for all that he bears in his soul. And I ask God to accompany him, to fill him with his light, and to flood him even more with serenity.

I am sure that I am speaking for multitudes of people in saying that we Catholics, in particular, wish we could be at his side, accompanying him moment by moment, not leaving him night and day. We can do that with our prayers. Today, the first Friday of the month, is a good occasion to pray to Our Lord in the Eucharist for our beloved Pope.

Rome

April 2, 2005

Upon receiving the news of the death of Pope John Paul II

Today more than ever is a time to pray, closely united in Christ, our hearts full of gratitude to John Paul II. He spent himself day after day until his last breath in order to fulfill his mission as Father and Shepherd.

Today our filial gratitude is mixed with sorrow, profound and serene sorrow. Throughout these nearly 27 years we learned to love John Paul II with our whole heart, which now is rent by his absence.