

beginning to sculpt a crucifix. Thus when the sculpture was finished, he said, it would be easier for him to make an act of sorrow and love while looking at our Lord on the Cross.

Benedict XVI has said the same thing. I ask you to pray every day for him, more each day, to help and assist him, realizing that he is watching over each one of us. The Pope remarked in an address to artists gathered in the Sistine Chapel: “An essential function of genuine beauty . . . is that it gives man a healthy ‘shock,’ it draws him out of himself, wrenches him away from resignation and from being content with the humdrum—it even makes him suffer, piercing him like a dart, but in so doing it ‘reawakens’ him, opening afresh the eyes of his heart and mind, giving him wings, carrying him aloft.”²

I think that this should be the deepest desire of the artist involved in religious iconography: to strengthen the faith of believers, to give wings to their hope, to prompt them to love God with their whole being. Thus St. Josemaría’s ardent desire will be made a reality: “Bring the whole world, all the human values which attract you so strongly—friendship, the arts, science, philosophy, theology, sport, nature, culture, souls—bring all of this within that hope: the hope of Christ.”³

With this hope, I now have the joy of inaugurating the exposition of the works of Maestro Romano

Cosci presented on the premises of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

“Happy Birthday, Holy Father!” for Pope Benedict XVI’s 85th Birthday, *Famiglia Cristiana*, Italy (March 28, 2012)

The birthday of one’s father is always a joyful occasion for the children. This is what we who are the Church’s sons and daughters now experience with the birthday of Benedict XVI. I recall with emotion the day of his election, seven years ago, when he first addressed the expectant crowd in St. Peter’s square, and referred to himself as a “simple and humble worker in the Lord’s vineyard.”

This is how the Pope is carrying out his Petrine ministry, with the serenity of one who abandons himself completely in God’s hands. It is an example for all of us, and we feel encouraged by this Father of ours, humble and close to each one of us, to build up the Church as the place of unity and love described by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles.

Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam, “all with Peter to Jesus

2. Benedict XVI, Address to Artists, September 21, 2009.

3. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 293.

through Mary,” St. Josemaría so often prayed. The Pope, the successor of Peter, is always the visible source and foundation of the Church’s unity. We know that, united to him, we find ourselves united and close to Jesus, our Savior. Ours is a unity of hearts with a special joy, above all now that we celebrate the birthday of the Pope, a few days before the anniversary of his election as Roman Pontiff.

The Holy Father’s untiring dedication in the service of the Church “moves” us in the most literal sense of the word: it moves our affections and also our will to be more faithful to Benedict XVI. He has dedicated his whole life to God: right from his youth, when he sensed God’s call to the priesthood; and later, over the years, contributing with his intellectual gifts to a deeper theological grasp of the Church’s doctrine and with his activity as an apostle and pastor to stirring up the faith in the hearts of many people. Now, as Pontiff, he continues with this mission, grounding his ministry in the celebration of the Eucharist and in prayer, realizing that only with Christ’s grace can the Church carry out the task our Lord has entrusted to her.

Congratulations, Holy Father! We love you deeply, with a filial affection, and we ask God to grant you abundant graces, and to fill your ministry with fruits of sanctity for the Church and with peace for civil society.

Bishop Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei.

An interview granted to *La Nouvelle Expression* Douala, Cameroon (April 13, 2012)

*“Opus Dei, an Expression
of God’s Love for Mankind”*

Bishop Echevarría, this is the third time you have come to Cameroon, following your trips in 1989 and 1998. What does our country represent particularly for you and the Work?

St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, felt a great love for Africa. I was given the gift of working for many years at his side, and I saw the great interest with which he followed Opus Dei’s first steps on this continent: first in Kenya, more than fifty years ago, and after that in Nigeria. His first successor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, was the one who oversaw the beginning of Opus Dei in Cameroon, in 1988. In my opinion, the countries of Africa, and Cameroon in particular, are a great hope for the Church. Pope Benedict XVI has a lot of confidence in this continent and also a lot of confidence in your country, as we saw during his visit to Cameroon in 2009 and in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Africa Munus*.

Since your last visit here, what changes have especially impressed you, speaking particularly about the Work?