

TRACES

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01



Faithful friend of the Bridegroom

Pope Francis's homily at the funeral of Benedict XVI
Saint Peter's Square, January 5, 2023

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“**F**ather, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46). These were the final words spoken by the Lord on the cross; his last breath, as it were, which summed up what had been his entire life: a ceaseless self-entrustment into the hands of his Father. His were hands of forgiveness and compassion, healing and mercy, anointing and blessing, which led him also to entrust himself into the hands of his brothers and sisters. The Lord, open to the individuals and their stories that he encountered along the way, allowed himself to be shaped by the Father's will. He shouldered all the consequences and hardships entailed by the Gospel, even to seeing his hands pierced for love. “See my hands,” he says to Thomas (Jn 20:27), and to each of us: “See my hands.” Pierced hands that constantly reach out to us, inviting us to recognize the love that God has for us and to believe in it (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).

“**Father into your hands I commend my spirit.**” This is the invitation and the programme of life that he quietly inspires in us. Like a potter (cf. Is 29:16), he wishes to shape the heart of every pastor, until it is attuned to the heart of Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5). Attuned in *grateful devotion*, in service to the Lord and to his people, a service born of thanksgiving for a completely gracious gift: “You belong to me... you belong to them,” the Lord whispers, “you are under the protection of my hands. You are under the protection of my heart. Stay in my hands and give me yours.” Here we see the “condescension” and closeness of God, who is ready to entrust himself to the frail hands of his disciples, so that they can feed his people and say with him: “Take and eat, take and drink, for this is my body which is given up for you.” (cf. Lk 22:19) The total *synkatabasis* of God.

Attuned in prayerful devotion, a devotion silently shaped and refined amid the challenges and resistance that every pastor must face (cf. 1 Pet 1:6–7) in trusting obedience to the Lord's command to feed his flock (cf. Jn 21:17). Like

the Master, a shepherd bears the burden of interceding and the strain of anointing his people, especially in situations where goodness must struggle to prevail and the dignity of our brothers and sisters is threatened (cf. Heb 5:7–9). In the course of this intercession, the Lord quietly bestows the spirit of meekness that is ready to understand, accept, hope, and risk, notwithstanding any misunderstandings that might result. It is the source of an unseen and elusive fruitfulness, born of his knowing the One in whom he has placed his trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:12). A trust itself born of prayer and adoration, capable of discerning what is expected of a pastor and shaping his heart and his decisions in accord with God's good time (cf. Jn 21:18): "Feeding means loving, and loving also means being ready to suffer. Loving means giving the sheep what is truly good, the nourishment of God's truth, of God's word, the nourishment of his presence."

Attuned also in devotion sustained by the consolation of the Spirit, who always precedes the pastor in his mission. In his passionate effort to communicate the beauty and the joy of the Gospel (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 57). In the fruitful witness of all those who, like Mary, in so many ways stand at the foot of the cross. In the painful yet steadfast serenity that neither attacks nor coerces. In the stubborn but patient hope that the Lord will be faithful to his promise, the promise he made to our fathers and to their descendants forever (cf. Lk 1:54–55).

Holding fast to the Lord's last words and to the witness of his entire life, we too, as an ecclesial community, want to follow in his steps and to commend our brother into the hands of the Father. May those merciful hands find his lamp alight with the oil of the Gospel that he spread and testified to for his entire life (cf. Mt 25:6–7).

At the end of his Pastoral Rule, Saint Gregory the Great urged a friend to offer him this spiritual accompaniment: "Amid the shipwreck of the present life, sustain me, I beseech you, by the plank of your prayer, that, since my own weight sinks me down, the hand of your merit will raise me up." Here we see the awareness of a pastor who cannot carry alone what in truth he could never carry alone, and can thus commend himself to the prayers and the care of the people entrusted to him. God's faithful people, gathered here, now accompanies and entrusts to him the life of the one who was their pastor. Like the women at the tomb, we too have come with the fragrance of gratitude and the balm of hope, in order to show him once more the love that is undying. We want to do this with the same wisdom, tenderness, and devotion that he bestowed upon us over the years. Together, we want to say: "Father, into your hands we commend his spirit."

Benedict, faithful friend of the Bridegroom, may your joy be complete as you hear his voice, now and forever!

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Nazareth, May 14, 2009.
Benedict XVI in the Grotto of the Annunciation.

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Letters

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The Party for Raffi

In November, our Raffaele celebrated his thirtieth birthday. Raffi is our third child and has Down Syndrome, which is why he was abandoned at birth. He came to our house like a Baby Jesus when he was four months old. Since then, he has changed our lives and the lives of so many others. Raffi has built an impressive net of relationships involving dozens and dozens of people with his congeniality, but above all with his affection; he is careful not to “lose” any of the many people he has met on his journey. From teachers and classmates to his friends of the Fraternity, to his friends from the sports groups he has participated in and continues to participate in, to his musician friends, to those he met in the Padua Downs Association, all the way up to the people so dear to him whom the Lord has already called to Himself: grandma Fernanda, grandpa Giovanni, his godfather, Salvatore, and his great priest friend, Fr. Alberto, whom he remembers every day. At his birthday party, he reconnected with his companions on the journey of these thirty years—about fifty people, from his preschool teachers to his friends from pole vaulting, attended with enthusiasm. The amazement of everyone (ourselves included) was truly great in front of the beauty that has sprung from Raffi’s tenacious simplicity in caring for his friendships and passions. None of what has been given to us in these years through him would have been possible without a clear origin for his coming into our family. The origin is our encounter with the Movement and our lived experience in GS and CLU, and later our joining the Fraternity, all of which

has accompanied my steps and those of my wife, Elisa, including our decision to have a family. Our gratitude for Fr. Giussani’s charism has been the impetus for some of the fundamental yeses in our personal and family life: Raffi’s arrival was one of those. Hence, it was our desire to tell everyone about this origin and our gratitude at the party. The simplest and clearest way to do this was to give Traces to those at the party—the “thirtieth” that we were celebrating was closely tied to the “hundredth” of our great friend, Fr. Giussani, who introduced us to Christ. Our journey toward Him was the only reason for our party.

Roberto, Padua (Italy)

Listening to the Podcast

Every morning I get in the car and drive to where I work here in Al Ula in Saudi Arabia. During these trips, I listen to the podcast on *The Religious Sense* and even though it’s often hard to follow, it truly keeps me company. I can give an example...Fr. Giussani says that the most common attempt to deal with the mystery is to bridle it, to try to understand it by using our instruments and methods. This attempt always fails, however, and we’re left with a feeling of dissatisfaction. During this period, I’ve often found myself alone and I’ve realized that, in general, people here don’t have a desire to spend time in company with others. What followed was a feeling of discomfort, and at the same time, it seemed to me that an encounter with someone would be the only possibility for Him to happen here. After listening to the podcast and moved by desire I started to ask simply that He reveal Himself in my daily life. I invited Adrian, an engineer from Barbados and a Methodist, to dinner. We spent a beautiful evening telling each other our stories and talking about our faith. Although our viewpoints are different, we found ourselves sharing gratitude for what we have received and that we continue to receive it. On another day,

while I was at lunch with three young people from my team (Arabs and Muslims), we ended up talking about my family—I'm not sure how. When I said that I had lost my mother, they quickly asked, "How did you overcome that?" I spontaneously answered that I didn't overcome it, but rather I dealt with it. Seeing that they were perplexed, I explained how my mom's death was the event that led to the birth of some relationships that, together with a series of other circumstances have, to this day, sustained and guided me. They said to me, "Listening to you speak, we can say: God is great." In that instant, for the first time since I've been here, I experienced a familiarity with these people, and I felt that geography and contingencies were no longer an objection. I returned to the office full of gratitude. And now I am curious to see what will happen next.

Marco Al Ula (Saudi Arabia)

To Rome for Benedict

6 In the last hour of our overnight trip, we made a difficult attempt to reconstruct how many times we went down to Rome over the last twenty years and how many of these were for the purpose of greeting Pope Benedict XVI, but our memories were confused by so many details that resurfaced, adorning the first hours of dawn with gratitude. Going to Benedict XVI's funeral, leaving Sesto San Giovanni in the evening, traveling by bus, napping uncomfortably for a few hours, getting off the bus while it was still night in Via della Conciliazione, waiting for them to open the square, taking our place under the large dome enveloped by the fog and the cold: this whole day followed from decisions that I didn't make. Thank goodness we are moved by love, an overflowing love that takes your breath away and then gives it back, that crushes kidney stones. ("It'll be so tiring, you're not twenty anymore.") It is love, not words. How much ink would be needed to express the enormity of the love that I (and I must say we because I must include my friends in this judgment) feel for you, Joseph Ratzinger. In these past days, our great gratitude hasn't lessened as we have observed how you entered the folds of history, bending and allowing yourself to be led where you didn't want to go, how you became aware of and fell in love with our small people, how you loved the church, resplendent yet sometimes filled with filth. We learned from you to love her. We learned from you to remain firm when we feel like getting up and leaving. "Brush off your uniforms," wrote Madda

in one of his forceful messages reminding us all to wear our "Friends of Zacchaeus" sweatshirts, which we all wore on the bus that was full of forever friends; our efforts are nothing when love is involved. Taking up a point that Ratzinger continually stressed, Guido reminded us that *extra ecclesia, nulla salus*. Ratzinger, who was the most refined thinker of the last hundred years, knew well that that certain flesh is the essential cornerstone. Being in that frigid square (not as filled to overflowing as I had hoped) to give thanks, to weep for the loss of a most precious friend, and to pray about all of this very humbly, it seems to me that, in that small moment in history, we assumed responsibility for the charism.

Marco

Singing in the hospice

Full of the lively and true experience that I have as an adult in the CL university choir, I decided to ask a friend who is in medical school to come and sing in the hospice where I work. She, Francesca, involved a few more university students and we walked around the corridors and rooms singing Christmas carols. When I arrived at the hospice that afternoon, I was concerned about everything going smoothly, but what happened was really powerful. We found men and women moved by music and song in a place so full so silence and grief. The beautiful itinerary of songs was completely changed after greetings, introductions, and especially questions directed at the patients and family members. Some patients revealed to us that they are musicians and others spoke of their homeland, so we improvised songs from their traditions. We saw faces and eyes light up, rekindle as if something they had already enjoyed in life had reappeared before them and for them. At the end, I thanked the university students not only for their perfect execution, but especially for yielding to the object (the method is imposed by the object, as we heard again in the podcast of *The Religious Sense*), for sacrificing in the service of the sick. I was reminded of Fr. Francesco's words to the university choir: "I think the precious service you do is precisely the service of breaking hearts a little bit through the beauty of song." I remain curious to see what God is working within me through these encounters and the life of the choir, and what it has stirred in my young new friends.

Anna, Milano (Italy)

The Poet of Faithfulness

Fr. Edo Mörlin Visconti, an Italian priest who spent most of his life in the Diocese of Gulu in Uganda, died on January 21st. A friend of his recalls his years as a missionary.

Edoardo “Edo” Mörlin Visconti was born in 1947 to a noble Milanese family, who transmitted to him faith, love of his land, and deep and rare cultural refinement. During his high school years, electrified by his encounter with Fr. Giussani, he threw himself wholeheartedly into Student Youth. He went on to study medicine for a year, during which time he discovered his priestly and missionary vocation. In May of 1971, having just returned from a trip to Uganda, Fr. Giussani proposed that he become a priest in the seminary for adult vocations founded by Fr. Pietro Tiboni in Kitgum, and asked him to obey the Combonian missionary all his life long. “At your command, I will lower the nets,” was the prompt answer of the young man, then a PIME seminarian. On April 9th of the next year, in Kitgum, accompanied by Fr. Tiboni, he was ordained as a priest of the Gulu diocese. There is a photograph of his first Mass, celebrated in the chapel of the village of Opette, together with his seminary teachers, Tiboni, Giuseppe Franzelli, and Giuseppe Frigerio. In the foreground the newly ordained priest is raising the chalice with the blood of Christ. In the background behind him there is a painting of the Pietà, with the sorrowful Mother of Jesus holding her son in her arms. This was to be prophetic of his priestly life, offered in faithfulness and always, above all, experiencing suffering and misunderstandings, but accompanied by Our Lady. While he was serving as a parish priest in various communities of the Ugandan diocese, he realized that in explaining the gospel to his humble faithful, he was helped by the frankness and spontaneity of the Milanese dialect he loved so well. An expert in many languages, including the Acioli dialect, he discovered his poetic disposition, supported by the practice of extraordinary formal rigor. First with quatrains, taking as his point of departure his homilies to parishioners, he wrote the gospel of daily life in the Milanese dialect, *El Vangel per el dì d’incou*. Then, during the guerilla warfare that afflicted his people, he wrote the Rosari in sonnet form, *I tre coron*

del Rosari. Finally, his great friend Fr. Giampiero Baldi asked him to write the Acts of the Apostles in the Milanese dialect, and so he completed his dialect trilogy with *La Gesa e la soa mamma*.

His priestly life in service of the church in Gulu, in the midst of wars and misery, tribal hatred, and massacres, was marked by faithfulness to the Lord, through Mary. With his companions in vocation, Alfonso and Patrick, he co-authored the Prayer of Consecration that Fr. Tiboni would later share throughout the world. He consecrated his genius to Christ, employing it fruitfully in *Christ is Communion and Life*, the first form of presence of CL in Uganda and in Africa. Still important are his original translations into English of the books Giussani proposed to his friends, which became the patrimony of CL members in Uganda, *The Announcement Made to Mary* by Paul Claudel and *Miguel Mañara* by Oscar Milosz. In addition, Fr. Edo made a very important contribution to the translations of Fr. Giussani’s books into English. His versions, written together with Fr. Patrick Stevenson in Uganda, circulated for many years in Africa, and formed the basis for later translations. In addition to translating personally, he accompanied the initial work of other translators, helping them become familiar with Fr. Giussani’s terminology. Through this work, he accompanied one of these translators, a Protestant, along her path to conversion to Catholicism. His friendship was faithful, sure, constant, and boundless. He never failed to keep his promises to pay regular, affectionate visits to people. His poems are dedicated to the many people who enjoyed with gladness his limitless love.

In his last years God asked of him his greatest gifts, his highly acute memory, his polyglot and elegant communication, and his physical strength. Edo gave everything. Up to the last, his blue eyes shone with his passion for mission and his longing for his friends, above all those who had preceded him to the Father’s house. He passed on to heaven on January 21st.

Filippo Ciantia

Close-up

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November 29, 2006,
Turkey. At the home
of the Virgin Mary in
Selçuk, near Ephesus.

© CatholicPressPhoto

The fecundity of Benedict XVI



Aura Miguel

Vaticanist for *Rádio Renascença*.

The people in line to pay their last respects to the pope emeritus, the gratitude for his testimony, an inheritance that is more pertinent today than ever, and his “pedagogy of desire” that flowed from the fullness of joy.

The number of those who traveled to Rome to pay homage to the pope emeritus was surprising: almost two hundred thousand people of all ages waited in long lines to pay their last respects to Benedict XVI. Wonder at the numbers was expressed not only by the Vatican organizers, whose initial estimates had been much lower, but also by the over one thousand journalists who converged on the Vatican after his death.

This reality demonstrated that Benedict XVI, attacked and criticized for years in various currents of public opinion, was actually beloved of the people of God; they were now an anonymous people that gathered in Saint Peter’s Square to bid him farewell.

In light of these facts, some cardinals and academics began to call Benedict XVI a “doctor of the church.” Various analysts quoted Francis’s words from a recent interview, in which he praised the lucidity and humility of Benedict XVI, calling him “a great man, a saint.”

Members of the media remember a similar ferment after the death of John Paul II: on that occasion as well, many of the faithful mentioned “sainthood soon.” But there is a substantial difference. In 2005 the Polish pope was still in office, while Benedict XVI resigned almost ten years ago. So, what explains the popularity of a man who spent the last ten years living a retired life, without a role in the foreground of public life? For me, there is only one word: gratitude.

An immense gratitude for his testimony and everything he did to confirm us in the faith in Christ.

There is no doubt that his inheritance, so vast and deep, is still pertinent today, especially in his diagnosis of a West that is “mortally wounded,” that “hates itself” and rejects its Christian roots, drifting without a destination, “following the wind of fashion.” We have not forgotten his admonishments when he asked us: “By ridding himself of God and not expecting salvation

from Him (...) when man eliminates God from his horizon (...) is he really happy? Does he really become freer?” And above all, there was his conclusion that “in the end, man reaches the point of finding himself lonelier and society is more divided and bewildered.” (Homily for the Opening of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 5, 2008)

In this context of solitude without a destination, the light of Benedict XVI’s pontificate shines like that of a lighthouse. “The purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is,” he said on the first day of his pontificate. “We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful

“Men and women, after all, know well what does not satisfy them, but they cannot imagine or define what the happiness they long for in their hearts would be like.”

People waiting to enter the chapel of rest and the funeral in Saint Peter's Square.

than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him,” he proclaimed during the homily at the Mass for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome on April 24, 2005.

In other words, Benedict XVI, while offering his own personal testimony, was always concerned about the destiny of each person, making known to them the love of God and revealing that there is nothing more beautiful than the living Christ. This was acknowledged in the Deed that the Holy See placed in his coffin during the funeral ceremony stating that “Benedict XVI placed the theme of God and faith at the center of his pontificate, in a continuous search for the face of the Lord Jesus Christ and helping everyone to know Him.” The confirmation of this certainty was strengthened by the words of Pope Francis in his January 5th homily before the coffin of Benedict XVI: “Like the women at the tomb, we too have come with the fragrance of gratitude and the balm of hope, in order to show him once more the love that is undying. We want to do this with the same wisdom,

tenderness, and devotion that he bestowed upon us over the years.” To conclude, as a journalist who followed the entire pontificate of Benedict XVI, I would like to quote one moment among many possible moments that demonstrate his wisdom, so intelligent and humble at the same time. It is his catechesis on November 7, 2012 in Saint Peter's Square, in the midst of the Year of Faith, on the theme of desire.

“**What can really satisfy** man's desire?” was the question that Benedict XVI posed in this catechesis, explaining that “men and women, after all, know well what does not satisfy them, but they cannot imagine or define what the happiness they long for in their hearts would be like.” The pope proposed a “pedagogy of desire” that means, among other things, “never to be content with what you have achieved,” because “it is precisely the truest joy that unleashes in us the healthy restlessness that leads us to be more demanding—to want a higher good, a deeper good—and at the same time to perceive ever more clearly that no finite thing can fill our heart. In

this way we will learn to strive, unarmed, for the good that we cannot build or attain by our own power (...). We all, moreover, need to set out on the path of purification and healing of desire. We are pilgrims, heading for the heavenly homeland, toward that full and eternal good that nothing will be able to take away from us. This is not, then, about suffocating the longing that dwells in the heart of man but about freeing it. So that it can reach its true height.” As he himself explained in the general audience, “When in desire one opens the window to God, this is already a sign of the presence of faith in the soul, faith that is a grace of God.” Benedict XVI was eighty-five years old when he said these words, but I was fascinated by the freshness and power of his desire. Ratzinger testified to this certainty throughout his life, with a fecundity of faith so extraordinary that it became evident to all. The tribute the faithful paid him in the days of mourning, days lived with deep gratitude for the unshakable love of the pope emeritus for Jesus Christ, endless source of the love that never ends, demonstrates this eloquently. ■



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The search for the Beloved

His urgent task was to convey faith as “a fact concerning life”; indeed, “a happy life.” Pierluca Azzaro, the Italian translator of the Opera Omnia, speaks of Ratzinger, and what united him to Fr. Giussani.



Tommaso Ricci

Jerusalem, May 15, 2009.
In prayer at the Holy Sepulchre.

“I had mostly indirect dialogue with Pope Benedict, through his works. The last time we met he looked at me and said, smiling, ‘I am your executioner....’ And I replied, ‘No, Your Holiness, it is the opposite, I derive nourishment and also joy from translating you works.’” This small recollection says much about the nature of Pierluca Azzaro’s relationship with the German theologian and pontiff as the translator and editor—hired in 2007 by the Vatican Publishing House—of Benedict XVI’s *Opera Omnia*. This was a “speleologist’s” job that took him into the depths of Joseph Ratzinger’s texts. After graduating and obtaining his doctorate in Germany, Azzaro now teaches History of Political Thought at the Catholic University of Milan and is the secretary of the Ratzinger Foundation.

You bear a heavy burden in safeguarding and transmitting the work of Pope Benedict XVI for the future....

Yes, in part because our activity takes the form of initiatives that have to do with this transmission: we annually award the Ratzinger Prizes to personalities who have brilliantly explored the thought of Benedict XVI or who have drawn insights from his thought that they have then made flourish in their own field of research; for example, the composer

Arvo Pärt and the French humanist Rémi Brague. We also organize symposia on Benedict or on themes that were close to his heart. But this is not a big thing. I think his thought is rather safeguarded by pursuing his great intuitions.

Tell us about one....

For example, that Christianity today is passed on through small communities where there is a real experience of faith, something he noticed back in the 1960s. Thus, symposia and conferences are good, but also necessary is living the faith as he lived it and as he wished it to be lived.

What do you think of the idea that Ratzinger was born to be a theologian rather than to devote himself to governing the church? Behind this statement, isn’t there an idea of doing theology that is different from Ratzinger’s?

He defined theology, beautifully, as the “search for the Beloved.” He always thought that theology should help us meet “the Beloved who is present.” And this was basically the very first of his intuitions; namely, in the early 1950s he understood that yes, there was a whole framework of Christianity that was still alive as structures, demonstrations, and events, the Christmas and Easter Masses, but that all the central terms of Christianity—res-

urrection, forgiveness, mercy—were no longer saying anything, either to mature people or—and this was the thing that disturbed him most—to young people. Ratzinger was then a young parish priest teaching religion classes and celebrating Sunday Masses for young people. His most urgent task from that point forward, throughout his entire life, was to convey faith as a fact concerning life; indeed more, a fact concerning *a happy life*. There is a very beautiful sentence in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* in which, employing his capacity to be concise and simple that distinguished him, he affirms that there is only one question: What is the path to happiness, what makes life happy? And his answer is, by interior conviction, Jesus Christ. Until the end of his days he tried to convey this. So, yes, he was a theologian, but a theologian open to life. And something else also demonstrates this.

Which is?

His love of book-length interviews. He had a splendid relationship with journalists and never denied himself to those who, from the height of a professorship, might seem like amateurs. He once said to me, “Look, actually, for me, talking to a journalist helps me come down from the ivory tower of abstract thoughts and focus on the very concrete questions that, by nature, a

“Faith has always been transmitted, by voice, by encounter, by dialogue! I would betray myself if I failed in this dimension; indeed, if I did not feel the need for it.”

journalist is inclined to ask: What does faith have to do with life?” On another occasion, when asked if he felt uncomfortable interacting with journalists, he replied, “But that is how faith has always been transmitted, by voice, by encounter, by dialogue! I would betray myself if I failed in this dimension; indeed, if I did not feel the need for it.”

Can you outline, from your particular point of view, Ratzinger’s relationship with Communion and Liberation?

He approached the experience of CL thanks to the theological journal *Communio* and Hans Urs von Balthasar; again, because of an idea of theology in dialogue with life and practiced in a communal dimension. At that time, the conflict with Marxist ideology was bitter, and he liked how CL accepted the challenge. What was the greatest accusation of young Marxists at that time against their Christian peers? “For you, faith is something consolatory, admit it; you believe in comforting yourselves, because you are not able to achieve what we want to achieve and will achieve.” Fr. Giussani instead reversed the perspective: by believing we are

even happier than you; among us there is the joy that faith brings. Just by translating Ratzinger’s texts, not because of my contacts or affiliations, I realized that he saw the realization of what he would have wanted the council to be in CL. He saw these hundreds of young people going to confession, living the faith in a breezy, free way, who gave new meaning to words that had totally lost any significance for the majority of Christians: forgiveness, salvation, community, liberation, the faith that makes us free.... At that time, the opposite idea dominated, according to which faith was an oppression. He saw in this Movement the future of his original idea of communities of faith experience—he called them *Erfahrungsgemeinschaften des Glaubens* in German—generated by charismatic personalities. He was very clear, as he said in his funeral homily, that Fr. Giussani was a lover of Christ. And after all, this is also the last thing Ratzinger himself said before he died: “Lord, I love you.” What united them—I speak for what Ratzinger conveyed to me about himself and Fr. Giussani—was that they were both in love with Christ. And those who saw them so in love were drawn by hope: let’s see if I can fall in love like that too. ■

On the road with Him

Snapshots of the pontificate, as related by someone who followed Ratzinger all over the world. Whether he was in front of a few people or a massive crowd, “for him it was the same: at the heart of those moments was Christ.”



Stefano Maria Paci
Vatican reporter for Sky TG24

I was with him in the vast clearing in Sydney, Australia when he celebrated Mass in front of half a million young people. I was with him in the mountains in Turkey when he celebrated the Mass on a small altar outside of the house where, according to tradition, Mary and John lived after the death of Christ. The vicar of Christ on Earth had before him only a few dozen people; this hearkening back to the time of the early church was brought to life by the multiple armed soldiers standing behind us, who nervously stood in formation looking out over the valley in case of an attack resulting from the Islamic world’s misunderstanding of the Regensburg address.

It amazed me that in such different circumstances, his attitude while he was at the altar was exactly the

same: he was totally engaged in that incredible mystery that was happening in his hands. I understood that, had there been millions of people or forty, for him it was the same: at the heart of those moments was Christ, who returned to give himself to humankind in the bread and wine.

I was with him at the UN, where he spoke before the powerful leaders of the world and received a long standing ovation, and then also in Cameroon and Angola, where he reminded religious leaders to care for the least and to abandon their single-minded pursuit of profit and power. I was at Ground Zero, in that empty hollow where he knelt, a scene that evoked the abyss that religions fall into if they forget man. I went with him to Bethlehem, the place in the Palestinian territories where everything began, which, he said, remains “a sign

of contradiction.” There, he pointed out that “in the course of the centuries the great door leading into the house of God has become progressively smaller.” He entreated us to symbolically work to “open it ever more fully to welcome, renew and transform every human heart.”

Click. Click, click. These snapshots of his pontificate come to mind as I look at the crowd of 250,000 people who went, facing what was for many a great shock, and after about a decade of his being out of the public eye, to pay their respects to him. His was only in apparent decline—he kept working, perhaps in a different way, but still wholly dedicated to that affection to which he had dedicated his whole life. “In silence, he is sustaining the church,” said Bergoglio when he announced the worsening of the pope emeritus’s health



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Australia, Sydney, July 17, 2008.
 The pope during the World Youth Day.

in order to affirm how prayer is a dynamic action that has a concrete impact on the world and on history. At the funeral services, Francis added, “Only God knows the value and strength of his intercession, of his sacrifices offered for the good of the Church.”

I went together with Joseph Ratzinger, the 265th successor to Peter, pope of the Catholic Church, servant of the servants of God, on national and international trips. Before that, I followed him during the years he was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which determines what is Catholic and what is not. Then I witnessed the ten years in hiding, when he chose to stay, planted like a tree in prayer, in the heart of the church, on the hill where the Vatican sits and is the resting place of the bones of St. Peter and his friend Karol Wojtyła, who wanted him in Rome and rejected his refusals based on an age limit, hoping that he would take his place, a task that Ratzinger certainly was not aiming for.

He was a genius at conveying intuitions about Christianity in a way that was accessible to everyone, while also being steeped in theology. He was humble, shy, sharp-minded, and very attentive. When I had the opportunity to speak with him, he gave me his attention, as if the only thing that existed was his interlocutor. He was so sensitive when it came to relationships with people, so much so that during the meetings of the Congregation, he allowed the youngest to speak first so that they might not feel afraid to speak after well-respect-

“His was only in apparent decline—he kept working, perhaps in a different way, but still wholly dedicated to that affection to which he had dedicated his whole life.”

ed theologians. “Pray for me, that I may not flee for fear of the wolves,” he implored the faithful during his first Mass as pope. The wolves that wanted to attack him, both inside and outside the church, were many.

He encountered some even during his first international trip, just a few months after being elected, when he went to the World Youth Day, which, coincidentally, took place in Germany, the land of his birth. I was surprised to find that, rather than the warm welcome to a fellow German as I would have expected, he was met with large signs in the streets criticizing him. Disrespectful banners were hung in the cities and the newspaper headlines ridiculed him. I was outraged when he, a university professor turned pope, was forced to not attend the inauguration of the academic year at the University of Rome, which was founded by a pope, due to a petition that was an intellectual embarrassment. Faithful to doctrine, yet gentle in his demeanor, he did not want to engage in conflict as many encouraged him to do. Instead, he simply sent the text that he had meant to read, in which he exalted the use of reason, the only means of verifying the concreteness of the Christian message.

I was with him in Regensburg, when he delivered a magnificent speech on how Christianity was influenced by Greek culture, which became, however, the pretext for bloody violence against Christians. Instead of reiterating the correctness of his argument, he just apologized, asking for forgiveness for any mistakes he might have made. On February 24, 2005, when I was about to arrive in Milan to do a live report on the funeral of Father Giussani officiated by Cardinal Ratzinger, I got a call from the director of Sky TG24, who told me to come back to Rome. John Paul II had just been taken to the Gemelli Hospital, where a colleague was going to report live. When I got

off at the train station in Milan, I ran to catch a taxi to the airport... A year earlier, in an interview with Ratzinger, I asked him about his relationship with Father Giussani. He responded with his meek smile and told me a story. At the end of an audience with him at the Vatican, Giussani forgot his glasses on the table. Later, Ratzinger could not find his own glasses, so he tried on Giussani’s. “I discovered,” he said, “that I could see so clearly, and I wore them for a long time until Father Giussani came to visit me again. When I returned them to him, he told me that we share the same gaze on reality.”

At a certain point during the long live coverage on the day of Benedict XVI’s funeral, I became overwhelmed by emotion when speaking about him. Miguel de Unamuno wrote, “A man is himself and what surrounds him.” Ratzinger has surrounded a good part of my life, and I am immensely grateful to him. While live on TV, my voice cracked and my eyes teared up. In that moment, I was saying that even though the world and the church may be crying, in paradise there was a big celebration because one of the Lord’s most beloved children had finally come home. Have a nice trip, Your Holiness! ■




18

My teacher and maestro

The philosophy of Jaspers, doubts about faith, and the lessons of Professor Ratzinger. One of his students and assistants in Regensburg, talks about the freedom and openness of a long-lasting relationship.



Josef Zohrer



Josef Zohrer and his wife Gisela
greet Benedict XVI.

My contact with Professor Ratzinger began during a time when many things were changing in the church after the end of the Second Vatican Council, when society was shaken by the student protests of 1968. In general, and above all in the theology faculties, there was a spirit of optimism that radically questioned what had been valid until then and promised a new spring for the church.

I myself had entered into a crisis of faith shortly after beginning my studies in theology. I had found some initial grounding in the philosophy of Karl Jaspers, whom I had encountered by chance and whose radical openness in facing the great problems of human beings fascinated me. But I saw a problem in the fact that Jaspers's was probably a philosophical faith that radically excluded the possibility of God's revelation and incarnation. His reasoning seemed plausible but I also realized that he would have separated me from the faith of the church.

During that period, one of my brothers gave me Joseph Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*. I immediately liked it because it was marked by an open spirit, like Jaspers. My impression was that Ratzinger did not avoid the central questions of human life and did not settle for answers marked by a modern taste. This motivated my decision to continue my studies at the University of Regensburg, where Ratzinger taught at the time.

I still remember clearly my trepidation as I waited for my first meeting with the already world-famous theologian, but I was amazed by his simplicity, how he asked about my journey and how he listened to my concerns. He encouraged me to take my questions seriously and to inquire more deeply into Jaspers's philosophy to better understand the premises and foundational elements of his thought.

This first impression of a "normal" man was confirmed and substantiated when I was his research assistant, with duties ranging from driving him places to publish-

ing his texts. Since Ratzinger did not have a car and his home was on my way to the university, I often picked him up in my old Renault 4. We talked about things that happened to us and told stories from our daily life. He had a very subtle sense of humor and irony, and we laughed a lot together. One time my car battery died and he got out to help me push.

I knew I could always ask him my personal questions. He always listened to me attentively and with great sensitivity, and his answers were brief but precise. Later he followed my life and that of my family from a distance, but always with great interest. Perhaps it was exactly this union of exceptional genius, deep faith, and simple humanity that made him such an extraordinary person.

The circle of Ratzinger's doctoral students, which I joined after my final exam, encompassed very different theological directions, but our maestro gave each of us the space needed to find his own road. He always respected our freedom, accompanying us with critical questions and stressing scientific rigor. Once he wrote that God would accompany us with a "long cord." This is exactly the way I saw Ratzinger in my itinerary of research and study. It was very rare for a word of personal reproach to cross his lips; he gave each of us all the time needed to grow, even if some later took completely different roads. But he took care to keep the bond alive with them as well. He also showed particular attention to his students from non-European countries, encouraging them to compare themselves against their culture of origin and from there to explore the newness of the Christian faith.

It was in Ratzinger's lessons that his thought emerged with great clarity. For me, they were a wonderful experience that taught me a great deal. Starting from current questions, he accompanied us on the journey



Weltenburg Abbey, 1977. The last gathering of the doctoral students with Ratzinger before his nomination as archbishop of Munich, together with Karl Rahner.

of the logic present in the faith, showing us how it was able to respond to all the questions that had been posed to it. His methodical clarity and openness to all of reality, together with his respect for the freedom of each person, also characterized the atmosphere of his monthly seminars, which always began with Mass. All this gave me great certainty in facing life, and I in turn tried to relate with my students in the same way. In this sense, Pope Benedict was very similar to Fr. Giussani, although they had different temperaments.

After his nomination as archbishop of Munich and Freising, our maestro continued to hold annual gatherings on current topics, featuring talks by important scholars from various disciplines, as well as by his ex-students. It was his express desire that the *Schuelerkreis* (the circle of ex-students) should continue even after his election to be the successor of Peter. Until his resignation, he participated actively in the annual gatherings in Castel Gandolfo, and we were able to meet Pope Benedict once again as the “professor” who listened attentively to the speakers, moderated the following discussion, and impressively summarized and appraised the results. We had the impression that this open academic atmosphere in which not all the words were made public did him good.

I will always remember Pope Emeritus Benedict as a great witness to the faith who was much further ahead of us in both theological and human terms. I am even more grateful to him for the evident trust he placed in me over all these years, and also in my wife Gisela, who received permission to translate for him the book-interview *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Catholic Church* from Italian into German. ■

Genius and orderliness

Even as a child, he loved Mozart. Perhaps because the music resembled his way of expounding his own thought. The masters of the two “graces.”



Alessandro Banfi

At the piano during a vacation
in the Alps, July 2006.



“Mozart’s music is itself synonymous with Grace and grace: it is evidently a gift, something that falls down from above on the audience with great clarity.”

In recent days, authoritative voices have said and written that Joseph Ratzinger had “a Mozartian aura” (Claudio Magris); that he was a great admirer and performer of Mozart (Riccardo Muti); and that he lived in “that realm of sounds which, in the miracle of inspiration and the very rational wisdom of composition, mysteriously surpasses human limits and boundaries, bringing us closer to the eternal” (Nazzareno Carusi). In the remembrance of who Benedict XVI was, a small chapter concerns the relationship between the pope emeritus and Amadeus. As a passionate admirer of both, I wanted to share a few snapshots of this profound relationship.

The child prodigy. The first and immediate reflection is about simplicity. Mozart’s musicologists and biographers have written a great deal about his having been in some sense a perennial child prodigy, in the sense that throughout his unfortunately short life, he never abandoned that simple spirit of childhood, of immediate simplicity, of true spontaneity of soul proper to the beginning. Just think of his piano works written in Paris in the summer of

1778 (*The Turkish March* – “Ah! Vous-dirai-je maman”), the playfulness of his dramas, and the profound lightness of his symphonies. It is awe that is the real driving force behind Mozart’s music. Serenity is the ultimate destiny, the last word of his works. Karl Barth writes in his work *Church Dogmatics* that “Mozart heard the harmony of creation to which shadow belongs but in which the shadow is not darkness, deficiency is not defeat, trouble cannot degenerate into tragedy and infinite melancholy.” Benedict XVI, on the occasion of a concert in Castel Gandolfo in 2010, said of his beloved Amadeus: “Every time I hear his music I cannot but think back to my parish church when I was a boy when, on feast days, one of his ‘Masses’ resounded. I felt in my heart that a ray of Heaven’s beauty had reached me, and I have this sensation every time, today too.” Often when Ratzinger spoke of Mozart he also referred to himself as a child, a boy, in that ultimate serenity that united them both. Davide Proserpi expressed it well in his message to the Movement on Benedict XVI (see p. 48): “Giant because of his intellectual and spiritual stature, because of the depth of his thought; a child be-

cause in the candor of his gaze, in his way of speaking, which were so simple and direct, a child’s heart shone through.”

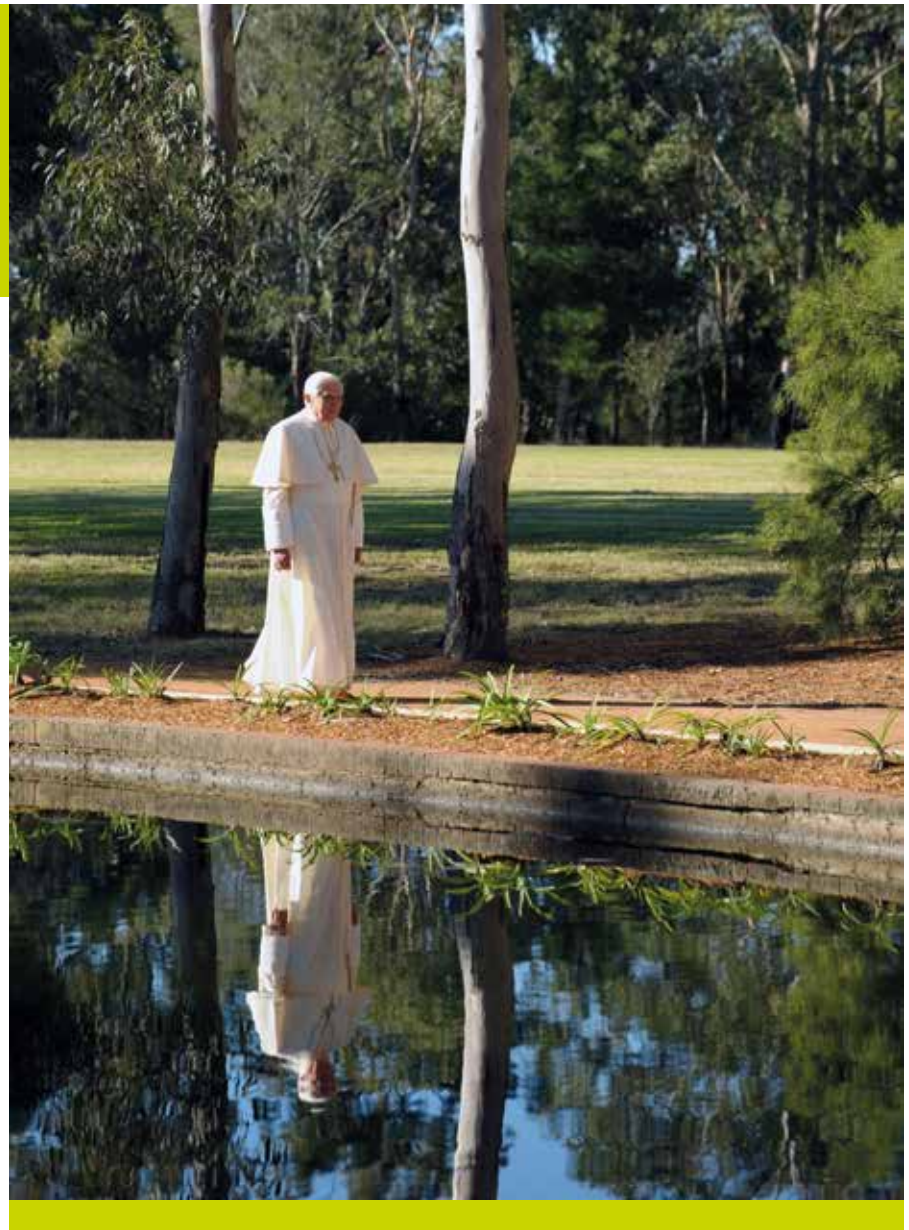
Counterpoint and the use of reason.

The second evident common trait between Amadeus’s music and Ratzinger’s work is the particular *forma mentis* of their reasoning. Completely German, it is based on a simplicity of presentation of two voices that distinguish between and contrast with each other, in an almost geometric way, both rigorous and graceful. The young Amadeus learned the art of counterpoint in Bologna from Fr. Giovan Battista Martini. Ratzinger, the young theologian of the Second Vatican Council and an admirer of Karl Barth, won the esteem of theologians by expounding concepts in a very clear way. Mozart and Ratzinger’s expression is geometric, Latin, logical. And at the same time beautiful, aesthetically pleasing to hear and to follow. When on February 11, 1785, Wolfgang was dealing with his first paid concert in Vienna, free of all commissions perhaps for the first time in his career, he composed the extraordinary Piano Concerto No. 20 (K 466), in which the piano, which he played, is a character in dramatic dialogue with the orchestra. Unforgettable are the bright and serene beginning and ending. In this extraordinary work, counterpoint became a form of representation of the intimacy of the human soul. Take Benedict XVI’s speech to the Bundestag in September 2011: it was an oration perfect in its presentation, development, and final resolution. Perfect in content, but also rigorously geometric in form and in the use of reason, and with an ending characterized by bright and serene hope.

Sydney, July 14, 2008.

Masters of the two graces. The third and final point concerns a concept fundamental to the work of these two Bavarian giants (Salzburg belonged to Bavaria in the late eighteenth century, as did Marktl am Inn in the twentieth century). And that is the concept of Grace (i.e., the Grace of God), a concept that is often accompanied by the neighboring concept of grace, in lower case (i.e., formal elegance or beauty). It has always struck me that a great musicologist, atheist, and communist like Massimo Mila, used this very term in his monographic essay on the *Marriage of Figaro* to explain the music of Amadeus. Indeed, he writes about the “grace” that descends “from above” and not only forgives and resolves the comedy of deceptions, the “crazy day” of the plot, but makes the opera audience itself feel invested with a divine, “sacred” forgiveness.

Mozart’s music is itself synonymous with Grace and grace: it is evidently a gift, something that falls down from above on the audience with great clarity, something that imposes itself and seems to come, as it were, from outside the artist himself. Just as Ludwig van Beethoven’s music is a titanic effort of construction, Amadeus’s music seems to come, to flow, without glitches or jolts, from elsewhere, and at the same time it is graceful, gracious, and gentle. Full of Grace. And of grace. In his *Last Testament*, Ratzinger told Peter Seewald, “I am not the one doing things. I also could not do it alone, he is constantly



© Catholic Press Photo

there. I must only listen and make myself wide open to Him.” Few theologians like Ratzinger take up the consciousness of Grace, even as doctrine. Taking up the battle of the magazine *Il Sabato*, he was the one who would warn of the risk of modern Pelagianism, of a heresy that denies Grace. In recent days, much has been written and said about the pope emeritus’s kindness. It is true: for Ratzinger it was also a form of life. But the root of this Grace with a capital G is profound. It originates from an ultimately positive vision of the person and of human life. As in the music of Mozart, in Ratzinger’s writings and works there is always a pacific, resolved ending that rests on infinite trust. In the film *Amadeus*, Milos Forman has Mozart, who is writing the invocation of the *Salva me* in the *Requiem* on his deathbed, ask his colleague Antonio Salieri: Do you really believe in it? Salieri is hesitant, but Mozart is serene and falls asleep in peace. We know that the pope emeritus, as he said in his last words, loved the Lord, and was certain of that salvation. ■

To Give One's Life for the Work of Another

LUIGI GIUSSANI

Edited by Julián Carrón

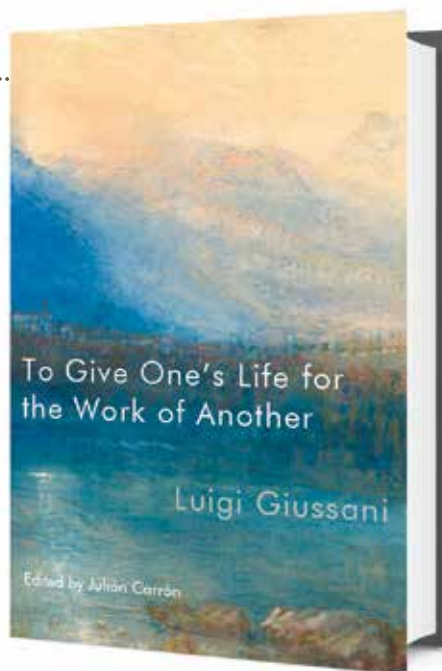
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