

Benedict XVI: The Pope in a Globalized World

The Pope is a figure relevant for both Catholics and non-Catholics, a fact that was recently illuminated by the passing of John Paul II. According to the Global Language Mirror, media coverage in the final days of Pope John Paul II – his funeral, the conclave and the election of the new pope – surpassed the attention given to other important events, such as the tsunami in Asia, the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the deaths of Ronald Reagan and Princess Diana.

Executive Summary

With the beginning of a new Pontificate come new expectations for the role of the Catholic Church. John Paul II, who shared his teachings and influence beyond the realm of Catholicism, was admired by millions of people. His successor, most likely, will continue presenting the original message of Christianity, in order to provide real answers to the fundamental questions in today's society. Benedict XVI is a person with an impressive background, prepared to take on the responsibilities fulfilled by his predecessors and convinced that one of the Church's priorities is Europe.

For Roman Catholics, the Pope is the successor of Peter, the "rock" chosen by Jesus Christ on which to build the Church. But the Pope transcends this definition. This is because many non-Catholics also see the Pope as an important key for the advancement of the ecumenical movement. Moreover, John Paul II was respected by leaders of many other religions, who maintained friendships with him.

John Paul II, in fact, had a great talent for forging inter-faith dialogue, which helped foster mutual understanding and peace among diverse civilizations and cultures. The need for such a force in today's globalized world has never been more evident. And this need is increasingly being acknowledged even by many agnostics and atheists. In his first words as Pope, Benedict XVI showed that he was conscious of this fact and indicated what would be the main priorities during his Pontificate.

Born in Germany, he served as the archbishop of Munich and lived the great societal upheaval of the 1960s there. He has traveled throughout the world, particularly Europe, the United States and Latin America.

He speaks 10 languages and has published more than 40 books. By all indications, he is very well-informed about the social concerns and challenges faced by people around the world. And he will most likely utilize the newest technologies available to carry out his work and put forward his message.

Democracy and Christianity

In today's world, in which ethical relativism is held by some to be necessary for tolerance and democracy, what will be the Pope's stand? He will no doubt determine an appropriate strategy, while innovating in his approach and ways of presenting the fundamental message of Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition.

Several years ago, then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that democracy "lives upon the foundation of sacred truths and values that are respected by all people. If not, democracy sinks into anarchy and destroys itself."

Many years before, Alexis de Tocqueville said something similar in his analysis of democracy in the United States: He affirmed that democracy could only flourish if it was preceded by a determined "ethos."

Christ helps us find the "human" within us that is so necessary if we are to achieve any type of fellowship with one another. He speaks to us of fraternal love, the dignity of every human being and the inherent rights within each person. But he also goes further. Christ is compassionate toward the needs of others.

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Christian humanism is the basis of a civilization whose main values are freedom, justice, love and peace. It is important because this humanism provides a point of departure for understanding. These values can also be embraced by any person who sincerely seeks truth, rejects the dogma of moral relativism and tries to be a better person. It responds to the reality of all humans. Cardinal Ratzinger expressed it this way: "Good and truth are inseparable. It is a fact that we can only do good when we are in harmony with our own internal logic of reality and our own being. We act well when our sense of action is congruent with our sense of self, that is, when we seek truth and we carry it out."

Open to Everyone

Benedict XVI is a Pope who is open to all those who will work decidedly together to foster unity among Christians and inter-faith dialogue. He will do all that is possible to create peace and

compassion in the world. "I call on God for unity and peace for the human family and I call for the availability of all Catholics to collaborate in authentic social advancement and the dignity of all human beings," he said in his first message.

Cardinal Ratzinger, who was born in the heart of the land of the Reformation, has always been very interested in ecumenism and, without a doubt, will promote it. The work will not be easy nor fast, but there is more promise now than ever before. It is significant that two days after the election of Pope Benedict XVI, the patriarch Alex II of Moscow and fellow Russians sent a message of congratulations and hope that, during his Pontificate, friendly relations and dialogue will be developed.

One of the first gestures made by Benedict XVI after being elected was to send a message to the head rabbi of Rome, Riccardo di Segni, in which he promised to reinforce dialogue with

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An Encounter with John Paul II

"He Altered Human History"

One day in 1989, I was invited to attend Mass with Pope John Paul II in his residence in Vatican City's Apostolic Palace. I had to be at the main entrance to be escorted to the Holy Father's apartment at 6 o'clock in the morning. As I crossed Saint Peter's Square, I could see the city of Rome from the height of the Vatican Hill – dark, silent and motionless under the waning moon. In this vast and majestic panorama, only one light was to be seen – that in the Pope's apartment, for the Pope was already in



prayer in his chapel – praying for the city of Rome, the Universal Church and the entire world. That lone light was a sign and a symbol – of faith and devotion and love. Everything about John Paul II – his words, his actions, his stillness, his infirmity – everything, without exception, taught us about God. This was so in the profound reverence with which he read the Mass I attended that morning. This was so even in our chat following the Mass. He encouraged me in my vocation to Opus Dei – in itself, an act of charity. But what struck me most was his extreme ease and human naturalness, a quality of humility that was astounding in someone who had already altered human history through his great pilgrimages to Poland, and through much else besides. You could talk to him as easily and as naturally as though he were your father or brother or best friend. Was there a link between his ability to move mountains and his prayer at 5 a.m. as the city of Rome slumbered, between his spiritual dynamism and his evident humility? Yes, or so it seems to me. It was his devotion to Christ in the New Testament, in the Eucharist and on the Cross. This devotion was the point of departure for his fruitful life.

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the Jewish community. Many Jews demonstrated their appreciation for John Paul II's request for forgiveness for the anti-Semitism of Christians throughout history. He was the first Pope to enter a synagogue and prayed at the Wall of Lamentations.

John Paul II also had many meetings with representatives of Islam and other faiths. In his first message, he addressed those "who follow other religions or who simply look for an answer to those fundamental questions of existence and have not yet found them. I address you simply and with affection and assure you that the Church wants to continue maintaining open and sincere dialogue, in search of the true goodness of human beings and society."

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Pope Benedict XVI

Memories of a Cardinal – Now the Pope

One Saturday morning, three people gathered in a small room at the University of Navarra's main building: a cardinal in the Catholic Church, a Jewish-American economist and a Dutch professor of pharmacy. They were waiting for their investiture as Doctors honoris causa. I was one of them.

We waited there in the little office close to the Great Hall while the official procession filed past outside. It was then that the Jewish economist told the cardinal about the problem he had faced in accepting the honor. The ceremony was set to take place on a Saturday and he was not sure whether he, a Jew, would be able to attend. He eventually decided that he would come, since it was a ceremony and not work. He asked the cardinal what he would have done and whether the decision would have caused him any problems. The cardinal replied, quite simply, that he did not see it as a problem. The cardinal's name was Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.

Ratzinger showed himself to be a great intellectual a few moments later in an extraordinary but uncomplicated speech. He delivered it with the Catholic simplicity of a Bavarian who knows that it is not worth worrying about something that is not worth worrying about. He is a profoundly serene man, full of patience.

On that same Saturday afternoon (I think it was the same afternoon, though the days have blurred into one another; after

all, it was seven years ago), attending a meeting of the university faculty, the cardinal was moved by the observations of a professor from the Faculty of Economics. “The question moved me deeply,” he remarked, returning to it at a later point when we were alone with his secretary and the “little team” that used to accompany him at that time.

The question focused on how to be a good Christian and a good economics professor, how to teach the pursuit of wealth, prosperity and abundance when Christ had loved, lived and preached poverty. Cardinal Ratzinger was moved because the question “affects the very bases of Christianity” (bear in mind that these might not be the exact quotes, since I am working with notes taken during the meeting and later translated). He went on to say that “it is true that, from the point of view of a poor Christ, an economic science would not be Christian if its only goal consisted of asking ‘how can I become rich?’” Continuing, he said that “we must combat misery and unwanted poverty with justice, and this must be the criterion that guides our economics.” He spoke of teaching “the strength to dispense with things” and concluded (I apologize for abbreviating his response and the precise line of argument) that “it is precisely by contemplating Jesus Christ that one sees that the ultimate goal is not to possess but to make it possible to be more. That poor Jesus Christ is the model for an economy that creates those assets that make it possible to be more.”



He is a man who is moved, who reflects on the way Jesus Christ views the world.

Seven years have passed. The gestures, the words and the details which I have seen and read from a distance during recent days, show me that the gestures, the words and the details which I saw and heard at close hand seven years ago have not changed. Pope Benedict XVI is a simple and good man and a great and humble teacher (a difficult combination)!

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