



## THE FIRST YEAR OF BENEDICT XVI

Benedict XVI has turned out to be a pope of some surprises. When Cardinal Ratzinger, the Panzer Kardinal, God's Rottweiler, was elected Pope April 19, 2005, the Catholic Right was ecstatic and the Catholic Left was worried, to say the least. Now, a year later, with no bloodbath in sight, the positions are reversed: the Catholic Right is worried and the Left is pleasantly surprised. What to make of this slightly timid man who smiles and waves to crowds, invites visiting students to ask him as many questions as they want, visits his cats daily in his old apartment because they are not allowed in the Apostolic Palace, sacks the long-established Vatican haberdasher for misaltering his white soutane, and takes a half-hour every evening to play Mozart on his piano? What to make of a Pope who delegates beatifications and canonizations to other bishops (even warning that we should not beatify or canonize too easily) but ordains fifteen priests for the Diocese of Rome himself, as befits the Bishop of Rome? What to make of a man of 78 who jokes that his will be a short pontificate but in the meantime takes the name of a contemplative and a unifier, both of which activities usually require long and patient effort?

Benedict's first year certainly seems to show that he would like to be a unifier, as that term is defined by his own fairly traditional Catholic view. To cite just a few examples, he has reached out to the schismatic Lefebvristes/Society of Pius X, trying to find a compromise they and the Church can live with. He has pressed ahead with talks with the Russian, Chinese and Vietnamese governments to normalize relations. He seems to be increasing overtures to the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches pushing toward reunion. Not only has there not been a wholesale crackdown on liberal theologians but he received his former colleague from Tübingen University, Hans Küng, at Castel Gondolfo for 4 hours. Küng periodically asked John Paul II for an audience over 27 years and was never favored with so much as a reply.

There are, of course, some disturbing signs appearing during this pontificate as well. One of the most disquieting, in my opinion, at least, is the growing cult of John Paul II and the way it seems to be encouraged by Benedict XVI. This cult, which even includes a push for his rapid canonization, strengthens the position of the papacy in general, and of the present pope, who was so closely associated with John Paul II for almost 20 years, but it also subtly sustains and expands Pope Wojtyla's entire restorationist agenda. That, perhaps, is its greatest danger for all of us who believe in the

democratic, reforming thrust of Vatican II - that this hero worship of John Paul II might extend his influence for another 20 or 30 years beyond his lifetime.

But Benedict XVI is not John Paul II and some of their differences are reasons for hope. Benedict XVI is a much better trained and more professional theologian than John Paul II ever was. This could allow him to examine complex theological questions more dispassionately than his predecessor. Thus Benedict XVI could ask the Curia to examine the question of whether married couples in which one partner has AIDS could be allowed to use condoms to protect the health of the uninfected partner.

Benedict XVI is not as stubborn as John Paul II, who could be absolutely immovable in his opinions, and he doesn't appear to allow favoritism or personal grudges to distort his judgment. Thus, quietly, we are seeing Benedict XVI right some wrongs of the John Paul era.

Bishop Wuerl of Pittsburgh, who, by his erudition, work ethic and standing among American bishops, should have been promoted to a more important see, was blackballed by John Paul II because he had gone over the head of a friend of the Pope in the Curia in order to obtain the laicization of an abuser priest in his diocese. Now, Wuerl has been named by Benedict XVI to succeed Cardinal McCarrick in the Archdiocese of Washington. Whether one agrees with Bishop Wuerl's conservative brand of Catholicism or not, one has to recognize the fundamental decency, fairness, hard work and erudition of the man and that this is the stuff bishops should be made of.

The most widely publicized wrong that Benedict XVI has righted was his re-opening of the case of Marcial Maciel Degollado, the founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, the year before John Paul died, and his removal of Maciel from the public eye this Spring. John Paul had protected Maciel and stymied every attempt to bring him to ecclesiastical justice for the sexual abuse of Legionnaire junior seminarians for years, as well as showing the Legionnaires every possible mark of favor, even to the point of performing their ordinations. The decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which was approved by Benedict XVI, may seem too mild for the offense, but it is actually quite severe. Maciel cannot say Mass in public, preach, lecture, write, or give interviews for publication. Rather, he is invited to retire to a life of prayer and penance. His order of 600 priests and 2500 seminarians is thanked for its service "independently of the person of the founder." The judgment is unmistakable.

So it would seem in Benedict XVI we have a man who, among other things, is a secure theologian, with compassion, a desire to do what is right, preferably without breaking the bruised reed, in traditional but theologically responsible ways.

And perhaps a man with a sense of some urgency due to his age. A great deal of his legacy will of course depend on the kind of bishops he appoints as well as on his decrees and Curial appointments but so far, there are grounds for cautious hope.

Christine M. Roussel

## PRESIDENT'S REFLECTIONS

We have been seeing an increasing hype for the canonization of Karol Wojtla, Pope John Paul II. What is "canonization"? It is a declaration by the Catholic Church that a person is a "saint." A non-Catholic would raise several questions in order to understand his Catholic friend. I suggest that we Catholics should pose the same questions to ourselves.

What is a "saint"? The word, coming from the Latin *sanctus*, simply means "set apart," as in "sacred" (Latin for priest is *sacerdos*), and in Hebrew *perushim*, "set apart," as in "Pharisees." The idea is that some thing or person is set apart for the divine. Although none of this is particularly helpful to live by, our English term "holy" does point us in a salutary direction. It comes from the German *heilig* (English cognates: heal, health, healthy) and way behind it the Greek *holos* (whole), and is related to "salvation," (Latin *salus*, meaning health, as in the English cognates salutary, salubrious, salute).

So, a saint, a holy person, is a (w)hole person! And therefore, one to be held up as an inspiring example to be imitated. This is why until the 17<sup>th</sup> century Saints (*Heilige* in German) were popularly declared venerable and imitable persons. Only after 1634 did the Vatican reserve to itself the power of declaring someone a *Heiligen*, adding huge fees for the process.

Those Catholics calling for the *official* declaration of sainthood (canonization, according to the rule, *kanon* in Greek) are moving in the healthy direction of reclaiming the Proclamation of (w)holiness by the *sensus fidelium*. For those of us who are persuaded that the Catholic Church began the process of "coming of age" in Vatican II, John Paul II is venerable and imitable in his promotion of justice, human rights, and democracy in the world – but *not* in his systematic suppression of them in the Church!

In fact, we Vatican II Catholics have three eminently venerable, imitable, saintly, (w)holy "St. Johns," namely, St. John XXIII, St. John Carroll, and St. John England. They

promoted justice, human rights, and democracy not only in the world, but—precisely because they are such important values— also *in the Church*.

Let us take them as our model *Heilige*. One little step in that direction would be to reclaim the Popular Proclamation of Saints by going to <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/851447623> and get others to do likewise.

Leonard Swidler

REVIEW OF JOHN L. ALLEN, JR. *OPUS DEI: AN OBJECTIVE LOOK BEHIND THE MYTHS AND REALITY OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FORCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* (NY, DOUBLEDAY, 2005)

As implied in the title, John Allen has set himself an ambitious goal in his latest book: to give a truly objective examination of a highly controversial group greatly favored by the late Pope John Paul II. Unfortunately, the result of his year's research and labor, while interesting and highly informative, is far from objective. However unintentionally, Allen's book emerges more as an attempt to refute the most strident charges against Opus Dei. One is almost tempted to add another subtitle to it: "Apologia pro Amicibus Suis?"

What is perhaps the most serious flaw of John Allen's examination of Opus Dei is his dependence on his subject itself for almost all his documentary evidence and even many of his other sources of information. Because of Opus Dei's emphasis on secrecy - or, as they prefer to call it, discretion - and its careful guarding of its written documents, even its Statutes, there are no independent archives of Opus Dei's foundational documents, training materials, or internal memos. When Allen wanted to see a document, he asked the information officer (read PR/spokesman) assigned to help him who told him if it was available or not, and if available, gave it to him to read in Opus Dei's offices. Thus, there was no external or independent source for Opus documentation. It could show only what it wished to show. The same was true for the much more frequent instances when Allen wanted to know Opus policy or formation for its members on a particular point: again, his only response was the Opus Dei line as stated by a professional PR person.

Another serious problem with Allen being so much exposed to the Opus line is that, like many or even most people today, he lacks the kind of knowledge of history in general and Catholic and theological history in particular that would provide a counterweight against which to measure OD's claims. The most egregious single example of this is Opus' oft touted claim that in emphasizing the role and sanctification of the laity, Escriva was a prophet foretelling the insight of Vatican II. If Allen knew a bit

about the many lay Catholic Action movements that sprang up all over Europe before World War I, inspired by the publication of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, he might not swallow Opus' inflated claims so blithely. A better knowledge of the history of the spirituality of the Benedictines, Dominicans, and Franciscans and their extensive Third Orders would provide a similar corrective on the Opus "insights" of the sanctification of work or "divine filiation." Instead, Allen gushes what a "riveting historical figure" Escriva was (p.43).

Actually, beneath the hype and exaggerated claims, there are only really two main differences between these traditional Third Orders and The Work: first, the creation of a group of lay consecrated virgins (the numeraries, Opus Dei's shock troops, who constitute 20% of its membership) and secondly, the much tighter rein Opus Dei keeps on its 70% supernumerary membership, "requesting" (read requiring) weekly confession or spiritual direction, whereas the much looser traditional Third Orders have only monthly meetings or events and no specific policy on frequency of confession and spiritual direction. It might in fact be interesting or even instructive to compare the numbers of adherents claimed by Opus Dei to those of the Third Orders of the Franciscans, Dominicans, and the Benedictine Oblates to gain more perspective on this supposedly unique phenomenon of Opus Dei.

The only other external "controls" (very partial ones) on Opus Dei's monopoly on information on itself is from disillusioned former members who have written about their experiences, like Maria del Carmen Tapia, Miguel Fisac, and the contributors to ODAN, the Opus Dei Awareness Network. These people can testify verbally or in writing to what they experienced but few if any were ever able to take documentation of their claims out of Opus Dei when they left. Allen seems to have read at least some of their accounts (although his omission of a bibliography or footnotes make it difficult to be sure) and even interviewed a sprinkling of the dissatisfied formers, but then he always appears to have asked his OD "handlers" to respond to their charges. Invariably, in his book, much more space is given to Opus Dei's response or self-justification than to the original charge. Opus Dei also put Allen in contact with former members who left or changed status within OD on good terms, leading Allen to the conclusion that many more have left The Work on good terms than on bad.

Opus Dei's spokespersons also frequently emphasized that The Work is basically decentralized and its local and national centers have a great deal of independence relating to formation and day-to-day administration. Thus, little in writing, few central records or overall statistics and supposedly few or no written records of the running of their local and national centers by their directors, either for the past or the present. One frequent refrain when confronted with horror stories from ex-members is "well, that might

have happened in that center with that director back then, but it certainly doesn't happen any more. It was an aberration." Allen doesn't seem to see the incongruity of Opus Dei's claims: if centers are independent and Opus Dei in Rome doesn't have detailed written documentation, how can it claim to know what did or didn't happen in the past or in the present in its centers? If centers are so independent, how can an Opus spokesperson know what is being suggested, taught or allowed relative to its members?

Allen seems to have made a fundamental decision to believe what Opus Dei tells him. He doesn't seem to even entertain the thought that they might give him a less than totally honest answer to his questions or might even bend the truth "for the good of The Work." Since Allen's didactic methodology is to take the most extreme and strident criticisms of Opus Dei, ask his Opus handlers to respond to them, and then draw his conclusions, his almost total lack of scepticism relating to what OD tells him is a major weakness of his book.

These are not vain comments made by someone who merely disagrees with Allen's opinions. I am a trained historian with specializations in early modern and modern Europe. I have done research in primary sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> century French wars of religion to World War II's Vichy government. I also spent 20 years working for a large international law firm and did many "due diligence" investigations of target companies in multi-million dollar mergers as well as other kinds of legal research. Had I ever made the kind of extrapolations or manifested the kind of naivete that John Allen demonstrates in most of his book, I would have been reprimanded or even shown the door.

None of the above is meant to imply that John Allen's *Opus Dei* is not a valuable resource. Allen has done a tremendous amount of research and brought together a wealth of materials. This book is a goldmine of well-organized information on Opus Dei, its history, structure and official positions on the controversies to which it has given rise. One can learn a great deal about Opus Dei by reading John Allen's book. One simply has to recognize the bias of which he seems unaware and exercise extreme caution in accepting his conclusions.

Opus Dei, which is almost as media-savvy as the Legionnaires of Christ, has praised Allen's book to the skies. They know good PR when they see it.

Christine M. Roussel

## HIGHLIGHTS OF BOARD MEETING

The Fall meeting of the ARCC Board of Directors at Bordentown NJ began on Friday evening (4/28/06) with a discussion of the Tom Fox article in AMERICA urging

liberal groups to focus more on spirituality than reform. The general consensus was for ARCC to do both. Flowing from this we took up the canonization by proclamation of two saintly heroes of democracy in the Church, Bishops John Carroll and John England. Other examples of outstanding leaders emerged in our discussion, and from this came the idea of publishing a 2007 calendar of deceased Catholic saints to be canonized by proclamation. It should be ready in time for purchase at the CTA conference in November.

Jean Krejci, a long time contributing member of the board, resigned, indicating that she has her hands full dealing with Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz in Lincoln, NE. Thank you, Jean, and good luck. We are praying for you.

With the cuts made in our administrative expenses, the financial report for this year indicates that, so far, our budget is once again balanced. ARCC has a new toll-free number, 877-700-ARCC - tell your friends. Ingrid Shafer reported that hits on our website have increased significantly and recommended that we explore using new tools developed by CivicActions for online organizing and running grassroots campaigns.

The Hans Küng Award Committee presented three candidates. From among these the board selected Archbishop Jean Jadot, Apostolic Delegate to the U.S. from 1973 to 1980, as the recipient of the ARCC 2006 Hans Küng Rights of Catholics in the Church Award to be presented in November. A location in DC for a lecture and proclamation will be sought.

The above are only a few of the highlights of a full-agenda weekend meeting. ARCC runs on the resources of an all volunteer, working board and the wonderful support of our members. Thank you all for helping to bring us together for the opportunity to pray and get things done. Please do not hesitate to ask for more details about the meeting.

Robert Schutzius, Ph.D. Secretary.  
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*You can be an ARCC Angel and help us publish an issue of ARCC Light by making a \$500 donation. This can be done by an individual or a group, and it can be as a memorial or a tribute that will be acknowledged on this page. Please contact Bob Schutzius (rschutz1@prodigy.net) for details.*

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June 15, 2006

Fellow ARCC Members:

Starting this June, 2006, ARCC will inaugurate a simplified and more efficient system of Annual Membership Renewal.

Membership renewal (and customarily \$25 dues) will come due on June 1 of every year.

New members joining ARCC from June through December will be asked to renew their membership on the next June 1, while new members joining January through May will be given an extension until June 1, of the following year.

To make this transition we ask all members who renewed their membership in 2005 (paid nothing after January 2006 ) to please renew at this time for the year June 1, 2006 to May 31, 2007. Those of you who have renewed since January, 2006 need not renew until June 1, 2007.

We hope this will help us keep track of our great membership to whom we are most grateful.

If your membership dues are due according this new system, please send checks to:

ARCC  
3150 Newgate  
Florissant MO 63033

Or pay by major credit card by going to: [http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/join\\_arcc.htm](http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/join_arcc.htm)

Thank you very much!

Pax!

Len Swidler, President  
ARCC

**Note: Please excuse the delayed publication of this ARCC Light issue. Our print shop changed directors.**

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