

FROM THE EDITORS

AT HOME IN THE WORLD
AT HOME IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

It is by no means accidental that ‘Home’ has been chosen as the theme of the volume of *Ethos* published to commemorate the centenary of the birth of John Paul II, the Patron of our Institute. The Pope frequently expressed his strong attachment to his home, his nation, and his fatherland, where he grew up and where his character was formed. In his teaching, the concept of home acquired a still broader meaning; in conformity with the Christian tradition, John Paul II considered the Church, the world, and the eschatological reality as a home, *domus aeterna*. In his view, at the heart of any home lies a *communio personarum*: a community of persons who make a gift of self to one another; a community, in fact, whose foundation and model is the family. The whole pontificate of John Paul II radiated that idea. He wished the Church, at both the universal and parish levels, to “take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships,”¹ to be “a home and family for everyone,”² and to offer hospitality also to those who do not live in it permanently. Indefatigable in undertaking apostolic travels, the Pope endeavored to build special relationships with people of all the continents and, wherever possible, with representatives of different religions in order to create a global community and to make the whole world the home to everyone.

The editors of the quarterly *Ethos* have always aspired to collaborate with the Pope in his effort. In 1982, when the John Paul II Institute was established at the Catholic University of Lublin, its founders and, in particular, Fr. Tadeusz Styczeń, the first director, a friend of the Pope’s, and his successor to the Chair of Ethics, planned to start the publication of a scholarly quarterly which would become an integral part of the Institute. John Paul II welcomed the initiative with a lively interest. However, the government of the communist Poland made the implementation of the project impossible by categorically refusing its consent. It was only before the Pope’s third visit to Poland, thanks to the mediation of Archbishop Achille Silvestrini, that the Institute was granted the

¹ J o h n P a u l I I, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Section 64.

² *Ibidem*, Section 85.

permission to publish the quarterly.³ Inspired by Karol Wojtyła's philosophy, which found a unique expression in the teaching of John Paul II, the new journal adopted a personalist perspective in addressing the intellectual challenges posed by the contemporary world. *Ethos* has been published for over thirty years and, despite undergoing inevitable changes, it continues to follow the Pope's vision of an open dialogue among intellectuals. During John Paul II's pontificate, the Apostolic Palace of Castel Gandolfo frequently provided home for scholars representing various disciplines, outlooks on the world, and philosophical orientations so as to make it possible for them to express their ideas and enjoy freedom of thought. Likewise, *Ethos* and the John Paul II Institute also strive to be a home for all those who sincerely search for truth, goodness, and beauty and who consider the truth they have discovered as good and beautiful. Creating such a 'home' has in a sense become a moral duty also in the present age, which is one of post-truth, post-dialogue, and post-culture. The refutation of truth in the modern world is in a way remindful of that characteristic of the communist reality, imposed on countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War and permitting only materialistic worldview, instituted (also among academic milieus) by way of either administrative pressure or coercion. The example of John Paul II helps us discover how such a task can be fulfilled.

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In his Letter for the Centennial of the Birth of Saint Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI wrote: "When Cardinal Wojtyła was elected Successor of St. Peter on 16 October 1978, the Church was in a dramatic situation.... Therefore, in essence, an almost impossible task was awaiting the new Pope."⁴ The dramatic situation in question was caused, as one can read in the Letter, by the way in which the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council had been presented to the public and by problems related to the implementation of the post-conciliar reforms. According to Benedict XVI, the Polish Pope resolved those difficulties, thus becoming "a liberating restorer of the Church,"⁵ and

³ The permission to publish journal *Ethos: Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL* [Ethos: Quarterly of the John Paul II Institute at the Catholic University of Lublin] was finally granted, by the head of the Main Office for Control of Publications and Shows, on March 11, 1988. The first volume of *Ethos*, issued that [same] year, focused on the topic of national minorities.

⁴ B e n e d i c t XVI, Letter for the Centennial of the Birth of Saint Pope John Paul II (May 18, 2020), Polish Bishops Conference, <http://episkopat.pl/benedict-xxi-john-paul-ii-is-not-a-moral-rigorist-he-showed-forth-the-mercy-of-god/>.

⁵ Ibidem.

aroused a new “enthusiasm for Christ and his Church”⁶ by the example of his personal attitude of faith.

Speaking to Peter Seewald in 2010, Benedict XVI expressed the same view in more detail: “Karol Wojtyła was sent by God to the Church, so to speak, in a very specific, critical situation, in which, on the other hand, the Marxist generation, the 1968 generation, called the entire West into question and in which, conversely, real Socialism fell to pieces. In the midst of this conflict to open a path for a breakthrough to faith and to show that it is the center and the way—that was a historic moment of special sort.”⁷ While the contribution of the Polish Pope to the fall of the communist regime is usually described in terms derived from political and social sciences, the cited words of his successor show a deeper, more spiritual aspect of the role John Paul II played in the process. Benedict XVI confirmed in his final conversation with Seewald, that he highly valued the strategy of radical opposition to totalitarianism adopted by the Pope ‘from behind the iron curtain’: “Of course, one could not hope then that this regime would soon collapse. But it was clear that, rather than trying to be reconciled with it through conciliatory compromises, one must strongly confront it. That was John Paul II’s basic insight, which I shared.”⁸ It also seems noteworthy that while referring, in his commemorative Letter, to the initiative of granting John Paul II the title of “the Great,” Benedict XVI compared his predecessor to Leo I and Gregory I, i.e., the only two popes in history who bore that title and who saved Rome by defying power with the spirit and achieved political success with the strength of their faith.⁹

During his pontificate, John Paul II had to face multiple problems also within the Church, the issue of sexual abuse being particularly grave and most widely discussed. In the final interview he gave to Peter Seewald, the Pope Emeritus addressed the objection that John Paul II did not tackle the latter issue vigorously enough: “It always depends on the information. When he was sufficiently informed and saw what was going on, he was wholly convinced that it had to be tackled energetically. Under the existing Church law it was not possible to dole out the most severe punishments. I said then that we needed new amendments. The Pope immediately gave me a free rein on this. We created new legal norms and structures, just so that the issue could be dealt with.”¹⁰

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010, Kindle Edition), 69.

⁸ Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, trans. Jacob Phillips (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016), 170f.

⁹ Benedict XVI, Letter for the Centennial of the Birth of Saint Pope John Paul II.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, 199f.

In *Light of the World*, Benedict XVI similarly explained the Vatican's response to the accusations against the founder of the Legionaries of Christ: "Unfortunately, we addressed these things very slowly and late. Somehow they were concealed very well, and only around the year 2000 did we have any concrete clues. Ultimately unequivocal evidence was needed in order to be sure that the accusations were grounded... Meanwhile we have had an Apostolic Visitation carried out and appointed a delegate who together with a group of collaborators is preparing the necessary reforms."¹¹

When asked about the problems with which John Paul II failed to deal, the Pope Emeritus said: "There were some of course. But I would say that the Pope tackled what he could tackle. New issues arise again and again, and you can never tackle them all."¹² In an earlier conversation, Benedict XVI answered the same question in reference to the final stage of the pontificate of the already ill Pope: "Certainly John Paul II sometimes put off making decisions. But on the whole, business was very much attended to, thanks to the collaborators whom he had chosen. And he continued to make the major decisions, as he had always done. He was suffering, but he was also fully aware. The apparatus of the Church, if you will, was quite definitely in action."¹³ On this occasion, the Pope Emeritus also observed: "The time of his suffering was no empty one, then. I think it was very important for the Church herself to receive this lesson in suffering after a great burst of activity and to see that the Church can also be governed through suffering and that it is precisely through suffering that she grows to maturity and is enlivened."¹⁴

It was John Paul II's 'mission of suffering' that his successor particularly admired: "I am convinced that—after he took it up with mighty force, took all of humanity on his shoulders as it were, and for twenty years bore the weight and the suffering of the centuries, he had proclaimed his message—a period of suffering belonged to that pontificate."¹⁵ Simultaneously, in his commemorative Letter, Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of the message of God's mercy proclaimed by John Paul II and encouraged the readers to try and comprehend not only the texts his predecessor had authored, but also his life: „Throughout his life, the Pope sought to subjectively appropriate the objective center of Christian faith, the doctrine of salvation, and to help others to make it theirs.... John Paul II is not the moral rigorist as some have partially portrayed

¹¹ Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, 46n.

¹² Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, 192f.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, 80.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 80n.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, 21n.

him. With the centrality of divine mercy, he gives us the opportunity to accept moral requirement for man, even if we can never fully meet it. Besides, our moral endeavors are made in the light of divine mercy, which proves to be a force that heals for our weakness.”¹⁶

While initiating, as the new Successor of St. Peter, the beatification process of John Paul II immediately after his death, Joseph Ratzinger was already convinced about the holiness of his predecessor: “This death had intensely moved me, naturally, because we were very close.... At the same time, I had the awareness that he is there. That he blesses us from his window in heaven, as I then said on St. Peter’s Square too. That wasn’t just words. That genuinely came from an inward awareness that even today he sends blessings down, that he is there and that the friendship endures in a different way.”¹⁷ In his commemorative Letter, the Pope Emeritus offers a definition of the holiness in question: “According to the Church’s standards, sanctity can be recognized by two criteria: heroic virtues and a miracle. These two standards are closely related. Since the word ‘heroic virtue’ does not mean a kind of Olympic achievement but rather that something becomes visible in and through a person that is not his own but God’s work which becomes recognizable in and through him.... The point is that a person lets God work on him, and so God’s work and power become visible through him. The same applies to the criterion of the miracle.... A saint is the man who is open to God and permeated by God. A holy man is the one who leads away from himself and lets us see and recognize God. Checking this juridically, as far as possible, is the purpose of the two processes for beatification and canonization. In the case of John Paul II, both were carried out strictly according to the applicable rules. So, now he stands before us as the Father, who makes God’s mercy and kindness visible to us.”¹⁸ Finally, in the conclusion of his Letter, Benedict XVI affirms: “It is true that God’s power and goodness have become visible to all of us in John Paul II. In a time when the Church is again suffering from the oppression of evil, he is for us a sign of hope and confidence.”¹⁹ It seems that these words require no further comment.

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¹⁶ B e n e d i c t XVI, Letter for the Centennial of the Birth of Saint Pope John Paul II.

¹⁷ B e n e d i c t XVI, Peter S e e w a l d, *Last Testament: In His Own Words, Last Testament in His Own Words with Peter Seewald*, trans. Jacob Phillips, 177n.

¹⁸ B e n e d i c t XVI, Letter for the Centennial of the Birth of Saint Pope John Paul II.

¹⁹ Ibidem.