

(English translation)

Rome, September 25, 1977

This is How I saw the Pope

You've had several audiences with Pope Paul VI. What has been your strongest impression of these audiences?

The strongest impression that I had was certainly during the first audience. I felt I was in front of a person who loved in a very special way. The wisdom in the Pope's words was such that it overcame all the juridical obstacles still present; he understood; he received in his soul the whole content of the Movement that I was presenting to him. The Pope himself encouraged me to say everything, because there everything was possible.

I remember feeling a perfect harmony between what the Pope was saying and what it seemed to me had come from God for the life of this Movement. My impression was so strong that I remember feeling almost as if the room where the Pope holds his audiences was wide open and that heaven and earth touched right there.

If they had led me in front of his person blindfolded and I had not had the chance even to hear his voice, I think that after a while I would have said, "I am with the Pope."

In talking to him what was your impression as to the main motivating force behind the Holy Father's action?

Certainly it is the effort of fulfilling, moment by moment, his very special vocation of loving more than the others. This is what Jesus asks of him. This is what gives him, together with the primacy of authority, the primacy of charity. "Do you love me more than these?" Jesus asked Peter. This is the anguish, the constant effort of the Pope.

While talking about public audiences, he once said that those who were not satisfied with what they saw externally could understand a secret which is present there. This secret, which is the cause of both joy and torment for the Pope, is contained in the word "more." "Do you love me more?"

In "Dialogues with Paul VI" by Jean Guittou, the Holy Father affirms that one must be in the place of a Pope to understand how much this very short phrase, "Do you love me more?" is like a knife which penetrates even into the joints of the bone, the nerves, the very marrow.

"How do you know," the Pope asks himself, "if you love MORE?"

"What is comforting in this anguish," he answers, "is that you can love universally. You can say, no one is a stranger to me, no one, even though he may be separated."

According to you, what is the Holy Father's characteristic attitude in dealing with people?

Paul VI loves everyone without fear; and therefore, he creates a certain unity among believers and non-believers. He gives himself to everyone in a striking way. Very many Protestants of the most varied Churches remain deeply impressed by the attitude of the Pope, by the love that consumes him, by his making himself all things to all men, as St. Paul says. Maybe this is another reason why Athenagoras called him Paul the Second. The non-Catholic visitors have a great esteem for the Pope. With his attitude the Pope gives the guidelines of his Pontificate. He stands for dialogue with the entire world. Paul VI sees all of humanity as one potential family, as one nation.

I am convinced that it would be useful for those who may have some criticism of the Pope to visit

him. They would experience his profoundly human and supernaturally warm presence. They would see how close he is to everyone, how he forgets himself, how truly humble he is, like the servant of the servants of God. All this would surely dispel every perplexity and doubt.

What answer would you give to those who judge Paul VI as being contradictory and uncertain in the decisions of his pontificate? For example, in "Humanae Vitae" he appears conservative; in his dialogue, progressive.

The Holy Father cannot be judged by human criteria.

The Holy Spirit is present and acts in him as in no one else.

As soul of the Church, the Holy Spirit provokes in it divergent tendencies which are signs of life. Examples of such are pluralism and truth, personality and sociality, freedom and grace, knowledge and charity, primacy and collegiality. If we consider Christianity and the Church only humanly, these tendencies can appear to be contradictory, paradoxical and sometimes even confusing. If, however, we look at the Church from within, we see that the Holy Spirit magnificently harmonizes everything into the unity of the Mystical Body.

We can say the same thing of what the Holy Spirit works in the Holy Father.

If we look at the Pope from the viewpoint of truth and love, we see that he never contradicts himself. He is more faithful to the content of Revelation than anyone else. At the same time he is faithful to what the Holy Spirit inspires him to do for the good of the Church today. For example, in "Humanae Vitae" one is aware of the Pope's fidelity to the Holy Spirit in tradition. In his dialogue with the world one can see in a concrete way the Pope's fidelity to the very same Spirit that manifests the "signs of the times."

Regarding the Holy Father's uncertainty in making decisions, it should be remembered that Peter's boat is not carrying the peaceful, triumphant Church, but rather the earthly one, and is threatened on all sides by all kinds of winds of this world.

The Pope must make his decisions in the name of Christ whom he represents. He has to do it in the midst of a confused ensemble of voices that almost always want what is contrary to religion.

One could never say that he is overly prudent.

Paul VI is prudent, not uncertain. This is proven by the fact that he is extremely courageous, for example, when he chooses to be unpopular in order to remain in the friendship of Christ and of those who belong to Christ and are not of this world.

Prudence, courage and universal love are the most precious qualities for one who has to rule humanity by serving it.

(Published in *Living City*, February 1978, Volume 17 – No.1, pp14-15.)