

“The Pope has shown the evangelizing power of a mystic”

Cardinal Julián Herranz was one of 30 cardinals named in the October 21 consistory. The President of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts speaks in several interviews of his admiration for John Paul II and of his life in Opus Dei.

11/03/2003

Interview in *El País* (with Enric González)

Q. John Paul II has been a traveling Pope, a pilgrim. It would seem that he's been more occupied with evangelization than with managing the Vatican.

The media has given a lot of importance to the Pope's more than 100 trips, and to the thousands of people he's touched through them. They've also focused on the dozens of doctrinal documents he's promulgated. But there is another activity of John Paul II's that doesn't get mentioned often, which is the source of everything else he does: the countless hours that he spends praying before the Blessed Sacrament. What impresses me in my personal dealings with him is his mysticism. He is a man who lives in continuous union with God. He not only is the vicar of Christ, but also

wants to make Christ present in his words, his teaching, and his actions. I think that mystical dimension is the source of all his apostolic and missionary energy.

Q. Perhaps for you the high point of these past 25 years was the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá, with whom you lived and worked for many years.

I lived with him for 22 years, and from the first day I met him, I could see that he was a saint. Perhaps that sounds too strong, too certain. But I saw repeated examples of his heroic faith and continuous union with God. The day I met him, a young man who was living in our residence had died. He came into the room with all the sorrow of a father who had just lost his son. The suffering was reflected on his face. He got on his knees and kissed the young man on the forehead. We prayed a Response for

the Dead, and, then, going out of the room, his face was transformed and he began to smile. And he said: “I smiled because your brother has won the last battle. He has finished his life fulfilling the will of God.” His life reflected the human and divine dimensions of Christ, and made you fall in love with the humanity of Christ: “perfectus Deus” and “perfectus homo,” perfect God and perfect man.

Q. Opus Dei is commonly said to seek power and influence. What's the explanation for that?

I would say there are two reasons. First, the spotlight always falls on those who have prominent positions in society, business, politics, or academia. It never falls on the multitude of members of Opus Dei whose activities are unremarkable: professionals, artists, workers, farmers. The second reason is that

some people don't understand the political and professional independence of the members of the Prelature. I have always found the diversity of political views in Opus Dei remarkable. I was 20 when I joined the Work [Opus Dei], and my personality was already quite established. I had directed a university magazine in Madrid. To give you an example, once I had spent the night in the *Dirección General de Seguridad* [a political jail run by the Franco regime] because I had been caught red-handed with some other students painting huge signs in the main avenue of Madrid with the phrase, "Long live the agrarian revolution in Andalusia!"

In Opus Dei there is great freedom in everything which is a matter of opinion. Yes, there is a common denominator shared by all the members of Opus Dei, but the common denominator is something

John Paul II has emphasized greatly: the mandate of the Church's social teachings to defend life, marriage, freedom of education, the rights of parents, ethics in economic affairs, and the equality of persons. There we all must agree - but not just members of Opus Dei: all Catholics.

Interview in El Mundo (with Rubén Amón)

Q. Opus Dei has grown extraordinarily during the Pontificate of John Paul II. How much does Opus Dei owe the Pope and how much does the Pope owe Opus Dei?

I know some people talk about Opus Dei's "lobby" and its influence on John Paul II. But I think it's simply that the Pope has a lot of confidence in some of the new institutions in the Church. Opus Dei is one of them, but not the only one. John Paul II's sympathy towards the theology of

work at the base of St. Josemaría Escrivá's teachings predates his papacy. Opus Dei for its part owes the Pope fidelity and obedience to his teachings. It's clear to me that the faithful of the Prelature try to help him with their prayer and mortification, which today hardly anybody talks about. But one has to know how to carry the cross with grace, as John Paul II does.

What is the true state of the Pope's health?

His physical limitations are significant, as are his speech difficulties. He is taking up the Cross like Jesus did. He thinks about others rather than himself, because he is the servant of the servants of God. He has to fulfill his pastoral service till his last breath. But I want to emphasize that the Pope's mental condition is fine. His intelligence is as clear as ever. His memory remains

intact. Additionally, he continues to show the same force of will and tenacity in his pastoral work.

What is your assessment of this quarter-century Pontificate?

People talk about records, about marks, about miles traveled. But there is another phenomenon which we haven't heard too much about: the Pope has set a record for hours spent praying before the Blessed Sacrament. These 25 years are a great proof of the enormous evangelizing power that a mystic has.

Interview in ABC (with Juan Vicente Boo)

What does your appointment as Cardinal mean to you?

The appointment means that I now form part of the Pope's Senate, part of the body of electors that assists

him in governing the universal Church. I accept the appointment with peace and I put it all in God's hands.

It seems clear to me that my appointment is not a reward for any personal virtues. Rather, I think it shows an appreciation on the part of the Pope for three things. First, for Canon Law, as I preside over the dicastery that helps the Holy Father in Church law matters. Second, for Spain, my home country. And third, for the institution to which I belong, Opus Dei.

You are a mountain climber and a poet, just like the Pope....

No, not quite the same. He is a true poet. His "Roman Triptych" is amazing, a difficult poem. People have debated whether metaphysics can be rendered as poetry, and he has shown that it can be....

As for the mountains, I took that up during my university years in Madrid. After coming to Italy I have gone to the Alps, and during long missions in Latin America I have climbed some mountains in the Andes. Mountain climbing is a sport which lets you pray. You walk contemplating nature for hours, speaking with God, thanking him for so many beautiful things you see, asking him to show you the solution to some problem. Nature helps you think about the theology of Creation: you can see in all that beauty an image, small and incomplete but real, of the infinite beauty that is God.
