We are invited to turn our eyes, filled with the spirit of grace, to the Pontificate of John Paul II, for which we have recently celebrated the 25th anniversary: one fourth of a century, covering the second and third millenniums, during which events bringing great historical changes have taken place. These upheavals have also affected the life of the Church and her mission and also represent as many challenges.

The Holy Father’s pastoral responsibilities to the universal Church require him to understand the meaning of these events and we shall also discuss this.

In the meantime we observe a dual polarity in the work of Peter’s Successor: the apostolic journeys emphasise the attention addressed to each particular Church and at the same time there are also words, decisions and acts that concern all humankind. Speaking of two poles does not imply a separation between two sectors, however, there is always permeation of the particular and the universal within the Church.

The sapiential vision: this is the aspect we wish to emphasise, because wisdom envelops all human beings and events in God’s light, where their ultimate reason for existing is to be found.

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (no. 44) presents an extremely important page on this subject. The encyclical quotes St. Thomas’ intuition on the nature of Christian wisdom. St’ Thomas speaks of Wisdom as a gift from the Holy Spirit that leads to knowledge of the divine truths.

"This wisdom comes to know by way of connaturality; it presupposes faith and eventually formulates its right judgement on the basis of the truth of faith itself. "The wisdom named among the gifts of the Holy Spirit is distinct from the wisdom found among the intellectual virtues. This second wisdom is acquired through study, but the first 'comes from on high', as Saint James puts it. This also distinguishes it from faith, since faith accepts divine truth as it is. But the gift of wisdom enables judgement according to divine truth". Yet the priority accorded this wisdom does not lead the Angelic Doctor to overlook the presence of two other complementary forms of wisdom—philosophical wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect, for all its natural limitations, to explore reality, and theological wisdom, which is based upon Revelation and which explores the contents of faith, entering the very mystery of God.".

Wisdom in fact is achieved analogically at different levels in our spirit and these forms are called upon to integrate in an organic unity.

I believe that John Paul II’s unity of thought starts there. The Pope is a philosopher: a Christian philosopher, open to theology and above all, as Peter’s successor, the guardian of the *depositum fidei*, and as a philosopher he turns to theology to state precisely the exact sense of the doctrine and provide it with adequate formulation. But John Paul II is first of all a man of prayer.

It is in a life of prayer that his first thought finds inspiration. It is in prayer that he finds his principle of unity. More recent texts refer to this explicitly. I am thinking of the pastoral and missionary ‘program’ text, enunciated in a lapidary manner in the *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: sanctity and prayer, and in the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, and the Encyclical *Ecclesia de*
**Eucharistia.** If one avoids referring to the spiritual sources mentioned in these documents, one runs the risk of not understanding the logic that regulates the extraordinary number of interventions and documents that mark this pontificate.

* * *

Wisdom arises from contemplation, however it guides action. On this subject it is useful to reflect upon the relation between doctrine and pastoral. The current trend to separate then is contrary to the very nature of matters, because the evangelical message is a message of redemption, words of life, and the announcement of the message naturally requires an effort to help those who have received it to then enact it and experience a life that conforms with its needs, to grow in theological and moral life. These aspects are complementary and also necessary for a shared mission considered in its entirety.

Interventions or insistence on one or more of these points can only be explained by John Paul II’s singular gift for reading the signs of the times. At times this interpretation reveals great political perspicacity, never however reducible to politics itself, in the most noble sense of the word. These signs of the times are traces of God’s acts or of His design in history and interpretable only in the light of the faith.

In fact, his experience of dictatorships has greatly marked the Holy Father. It is significant that his meditations on this subject spontaneously moves to those saints more or less directly involved in these great tragedies of the 20th century: Sister Faustina, Padre Kolbe, and Sister Teresa Benedict of the Cross (Edith Stein). A direct witness we have said; one really only understands some of these decisions if one is aware they were taken kneeling.

It is within this context that one understands the role played by the Holy Father in the fall of the Berlin wall or in a number of initiatives such as the Assisi meetings where the representatives of the great religions were invited to pray for peace. What intuition led to such audacious acts?

The perception without doubts concerning the unity of the human family, and also the perception of the religious sense inscribed on the heart of each human being, since each is inclined to find within himself the fundamental attitude of the creature facing its Creator, to whom obedience is owed and the cult of a life lived according to truth and justice.

We can link a series of very prominent acts to this superior sense of history’s requests; I shall mention only two: the Pope embracing the Crucifix during the ceremony asking for forgiveness, and on March 12th 2000, his prayer at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

In invoking an interpretation of the signs of the times and a number of highly symbolic events, I have intended to emphasise that the pastoral act arises from wise observation.

* * *

Like Paul VI, John Paul II has incessantly committed himself to developing intuitions and implementing the decisions taken by the Second Vatican Council. Much has been achieved; in particular one should bear in mind the two Codes of Canon Law and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

But it is the doctrinal dimension we wish to concentrate on now. We are aware of the active role played by Karol Wojtyla in elaborating the *Gaudium et spes.* Two quotations often appear in his teachings; the first is no. 22: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come,(20) namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown".
In my opinion, it is in the light of this fundamental text that one understands better the profound unity of John Paul II’s teachings. In fact, everything the Church says about the world and its destiny achieves sense in the mystery of Christ. While the atheism expressed by Feuerbach speaking of a drift and degradation of Christology in anthropology, is strongly affirmative, on the contrary integral humanism finds its authentic foundations in the mystery of Christ. Furthermore, there is an emphasis of the organic bond between the Pastoral Constitution 
*Gaudium et spes* and the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* on the Church.

I believe that it is not an exaggeration to consider paragraph 24 which we have quoted as the germ of the great encyclicals of the beginning of the Pontificate concerning the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, to which one must add the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, which emphasises the bond that exists between Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. This theme transmits all the Holy Father’s Marian teachings: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* defines the rosary as a Christological and contemplative prayer.

On the other hand it is the Christological rootedness itself that allows John Paul II to state that the Church’s social doctrine is integrally part of its preaching.

Another affirmation in *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24, § 3, repeats:

"(…)man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself."

These words contain two major affirmations. The first is at the basis of the Christian idea of humankind: man is a person, having sacred rights that society and all others must absolutely respect. The implementation of this principle is a very broad one, ranging from human rights to bioethics.

The second concerns the fulfilment of the person’s humanity within and also for the gift of self. An individualistic concept, in which the individual contained within himself and his own interests, is excluded. In particular, the doctrine of human love and marriage finds its foundations in this.

On this subject it is necessary to eliminate a widespread prejudice: one hears that John Paul II is broad-minded on the subject of social issues, but rigid, rigorously rigid, on issues concerning sexual and conjugal morality. I believe this criticism is unjustified. This becomes clear when one considers that relations between men and women are the first environment for this respect and acknowledgement of the person. In fact, societies in which equality between men and women is denied and in which women are considered and treated as inferior beings, are societies unable to dominate violence.

Interpreting the signs of the times, without directly considering events, but the often contradictory trends acting within contemporary society, has induced John Paul II to discern the fundamental cultural issues representing the defence of the family. This defence in fact would not be what it should be if the rights of women and the human richness of the female genius were not parallely acknowledged.

***

In attempting to emphasise the principle of unity and coherence in the teachings of a particularly fecund pontificate, I have been obliged to leave aside a number of documents and works of equal importance. I shall simply quote them.

The truth of human love defers to the truth of humankind, and this is presupposed to the consideration of morals. The great encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (1993) presents the basic notions for Christian morals, while it denounces two deviations that characterise the current mentality: the separation between freedom and truth and that between faith and morals. *Evangelium vitae* is structured as an extension of the *Veritatis splendor*. The Holy Father involved his authority in condemning particularly serious sins, such as abortion and euthanasia.
The truth is once again the main issue treated in another great encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (1998) which provides a precise answer to the crisis of the truth.

One must also quote the request for forgiveness: the holy Church, which included also sinners, forgives and asks for forgiveness. The call for the purification of memory has greater consequences for ecclesiology. Within this perspective, John Paul II has opened the way for a Christian theology of Israel.

Finally, the doctrine of peace has been provided with great progress by the present Pontiff. Other subjects also deserve mention, such as for example ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, inter-cultural relations, but unfortunately there is no time.

+ Cardinal Georges Cottier, OP.