

John Paul II's 'Augustinian' papacy

An interview with a close associate of the new Pope

ROME — The following is the text of an NSIPS interview in late October with Dr. Brasca, a close friend of Cardinal Wojtyla, recently elected His Holiness Pope John Paul II. The new pontiff greeted Dr. Brasca with a warm embrace when, on his first trip outside St. Peter's after the conclusion of the conclave, he visited a Polish prelate in convalescence at the Policlinico Gemelli, one of the largest hospitals in Rome.

Dr. Brasca, now at the Policlinico Gemelli, was the director of the Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action, the political affiliate of the Roman Church in Italy) in Milan for six years during the late 1950s. At that time, he worked closely with Cardinal Montini, then Archbishop of Milan. Montini became Pope Paul VI, whose 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* proclaimed technologically advancing economic growth as the basis of the Vatican's global policy.

NSIPS: How would you describe the new pope's orientation in matters of theology?

Brasca: Wojtyla is a professed Thomist, but he is most basically an Augustinian. Modern theological writers usually present St. Thomas as being an Aristotelian. Wojtyla's interpretation of St. Thomas puts him in more of an Augustinian light. If you look at the speech the Pope made yesterday to the Vatican diplomatic corps, you will find that the approach is Augustinian throughout, as when he speaks of an appreciation of positive temporal values. Then again, he says: "The Holy See does not wish to leave its pastoral role.

Involved in realizing the concerns of Christ, how could the Holy See, preparing the eternal salvation of mankind that is its first duty, not be interested in the well-being and progress of the peoples of this

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world?" — Here, especially at the end, there is a harkening back to Pope Paul VI and the *Populorum Progressio*. John Paul II is a humanist pope, and at the same time something of a mystic.

NSIPS: Pius XII, although Italian, was also a "German" pope: Paul VI by the same token was French. How would you describe the Polish John Paul II?

Brasca: As an Italian, with very close working relationships to the Milan archdiocese of Cardinal Colombo, with whom he met often.

NSIPS: How will the pontificate of John Paul II compare with the course established by Paul VI?

Brasca: Just a few weeks ago Cardinal Wojtyla came here to visit me, and was sitting in that same chair where you are sitting now. This was before the death of John Paul I. Wojtyla stressed very much that the line laid down by Pope Paul VI is the one that the Church must follow, and which we must all support. I think that John Paul II will be an even stronger disciple of Paul VI than John Paul I was. Montini and Wojtyla worked together very closely during the Vatican II Council. The Apostolic

Constitution that came out of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, was a Franco-Italian-Polish elaboration, and much of the Polish part came from Wojtyla.

NSIPS: During this century and even before, a permanent feature of Vatican diplomacy has been the promotion of a Franco-German alliance for an Atlantic-to-the-Urals "greater" Europe within the context of a powerful thrust towards world economic development, as in the *Populorum Progressio*. What are the new pope's views on this, and how will he continue the Vatican *Ostpolitik* of Monsignor Casaroli?

Brasca: Since you have used the expression from the Atlantic to the Urals, I must tell you that the new pope uses a very similar expression in an article of his that is about to be published in the magazine *Vita e Pensiero*. I myself have prepared a summary of this article which will be published I think within a day or two in the *Osservatore Romano* (official Vatican newspaper). The pope gave us express authorization to print this article after the conclave had ended. In it he says that the geographical borders of Europe are without question the Atlantic and the Urals. As for the political borders, these change with passing epochs. During the first millennium after Christ, the Eastern border of Europe was dominated by the evangelization of the peoples living there, including of course the Poles. During the second millennium, this area has been marked by military conflicts. It is very interesting that the pope in this con-

text mentions the Soviet Union as one of the nations that has suffered most from these conflicts. The pope also warns against a tendency towards a return to neocolonialism on the part of Western Europe, and calls upon Western Europe to open itself to the needs of the Third World. At the same time he calls for greater liberty in the countries of Eastern Europe, including religious liberty.

As for the Vatican Ostpolitik, I personally think it is very likely that Monsignor Casaroli will be selected as Secretary of State. It seems to me that Casaroli's policies enjoy wide support among Polish Catholics. The Church is telling the governments of the communist countries: we are not the chaplains of the established order in East or West. The Church no longer presents itself as conservative, as it once did, nor as revolutionary, but as progressive. The Church no longer seeks special privileges or concordats with the

communist governments, but merely asks to be allowed to work unhindered. In these questions as in others, John Paul II is a man of solutions, not a man of problems.

NSIPS: *Wojtyla, the son of a sergeant, was himself a worker, and the first leader of the Cracow archdiocese not to come from the Polish nobility.*

Brasca: In all of my many trips to Poland, I have never come in contact with members of the nobility there. This nobility has been largely swept away by the present government, and I personally think this was a good thing.

NSIPS: *There is a long history of conflict between the Holy See and the British Crown, a fact that was underlined earlier this year by the attacks of Prince Charles on Paul VI. How do you see further developments in this area?*

Brasca: There is a long tradition of this sort of thing. I would only say

that in Poland, the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church are in a very good ecumenical relationship. I expect to see, during my lifetime, the final reunification of the Roman Church with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. But as for a unification with the Anglican Church, I think that is a very long way off indeed.

NSIPS: *One last question on Italian politics: Giulio Andreotti has now set 1980 as a likely date for Italian Communist Party entrance into the government. How will the new pope's presence affect this?*

Brasca: I think the Vatican will take a position of noninterference, of letting things in Italy take their course. As long as the presence of the Communist Party in the government does not oblige the other parties to give up their own principles, as long as cooperating in the government is political, economic, technical, there is no cause for any great concern.