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SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2005

Pope Benedict: Quite The Busy Pontiff and Don't Interrupt Him When He's Listening, Thank You Very Much

by Michael in New York on [4/24/2005 12:15:00 PM](#)

The New York Times has a lengthy, nuanced article about [the '68 student revolt in Europe and how it radically shaped the thinking of the future Pope Benedict XVI](#). It's well worth reading for anyone who wants to learn more about Ratzinger and what makes him tick.

However, maybe we can learn more from a Washington Post article. Hilariously headlined "Pope Wants Dialogue" on the main web page, it describes the [Pope's first meeting with reporters](#). Yes, the Pope who wants dialogue:

...sat on a gilt throne in a large auditorium and read a statement of thanks in Italian, German, French and English, but took no questions. When John Paul was elected pope in 1978, he first met with reporters inside the tight confines of the Clement Room in the Apostolic Palace, took questions and mingled with journalists.

...Benedict lectured the journalists on the need to possess "clear references of the ethical responsibilities" and to engage in a "sincere search for the truth and the safeguarding of the centrality and the dignity of the person." Vatican TV broadcast not only his speech, but also the images of a line of clerics as they approached the pope, knelt and kissed his hand.

Now *that's* dialogue. Bush must be jealous. The British, as always, weren't afraid to be caustic and noted a cultural snub that passed by the Americans. The Independent's reporter quoted the Pope as saying:

Only by a "sincere search for the truth and the safeguarding of the centrality and dignity of the human being" can the media "fulfil the purpose of God, who has put them at our disposal."

So that was clear. We assembled in the Paul VI Hall, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Don't Knows and None of the Aboves, to fulfil God's purpose - if we were doing our jobs properly, that is.

Benedict took no questions, unlike his predecessor, who fielded them for 40 minutes at his first press encounter. And the new Pope shocked Spaniards and Latin Americans in the audience by reading his brief message in Italian, English, French and German, but not in the language of half the Catholic world: some wondered if this might be an oblique rebuke to Spain's Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, for giving Spain's homosexuals the right to marry - condemned by a top Vatican official this week as "an iniquitous law" - so painfully soon after the papal

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