

# THE SPOKESMAN BEHIND SAINT JOHN PAUL II

Professional Memories of Navarro-Valls'  
Friends and Colleagues

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## PREFACE

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RAFAEL NAVARRO-VALLS<sup>1</sup>

This is a book of testimonies. Testimonies of people who knew Joaquín Navarro-Valls and wish to share their memories as a memorial tribute. This small tribute had two prequels: the affectionate book edited by Paolo Arullani and published in Italy by Ares, and the one published in Spain by Rialp that I coordinated.<sup>2</sup> I would really like to express my gratitude for all these moving testimonies about my brother.

I appreciated, at the time, that Joaquín's Italian friends were the first to pay him tribute; it was not in vain that he spent his last forty years in Italy. Now, I thank them again because they allowed me to include some of their testimonies as an addition to the English edition of this book. It was not easy to choose just a few from among Joaquín's numerous friends and ask them to write their memories. Moreover, it is possible that some will be upset, and, rightly so, for being forgotten; soon we will have to re-issue an enhanced edition. But I was in a hurry to get the book published due to the growing demand by so many people, and I consider it a duty of gratitude towards my brother.

The contributors are friends "from both sides" of the press office: There were people who dealt with him when he was the pope's spokesman and while Joaquín provided for their informational needs, friendship bloomed, for example, the patriarch of the *vaticanisti*, Luigi Accattoli; Victor Simpson from Associated Press, one of the world's leading news agencies, and his wife, Daniela Petroff; Ezio Mauro, director of two of

<sup>1</sup> Brother of Joaquín Navarro-Valls, Emeritus Professor of Law School of the Complutense University of Madrid. President of the Permanent Conference of Ibero-American Juridical Academies.

<sup>2</sup> Arullani, Paolo (ed.), *Joaquín Navarro-Valls. Ricordi, Scritti, Testimonianze* (Ares 2018); Rafael Navarro-Valls (ed.), *Navarro-Valls, El Portavoz* (Rialp 2019). Thank you, Ares and Rialp publishing houses and Dr. Stefano Lucchini, for your support with this project.

Italy's leading newspapers, *Repubblica* and *La Stampa*; Valentina Alazraki, correspondent of *Televisa TV* channel, the famous Italian anchor-man Alberto Michellini; and George Weigel, John Paul II's outstanding biographer who encountered Joaquín while in search of data, documents, interpretations, and contacts.

Others worked with him in different circumstances: Professor Janne Haaland Matlary, who partook in the Vatican delegation for the international conference on population and women; Fr. Federico Lombardi who, as director of Vatican Radio, shared the task of reporting on the pope and who succeeded Joaquín as head of the Holy See Press Office; and two people who worked for him, Fr. Ciro Benedettini, Press Office Deputy Director for many years, and Yago de la Cierva, who worked with him in the creation of the *Vatican Information Service* and in relation to the School of Church Communications of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Fr. José María La Porte, former Dean of the aforementioned communications faculty, also contributes a piece that digs deep into the personality of Joaquín as a key to better understand the role of Spokesman.

But Joaquín also knew professionals in the field of institutional communication in the secular realm, mainly in banking and academia, as the chapter by Stefano Lucchini, with whom he worked on several occasions, points out. On the same note, the reader will find the brief but quite eloquent recollections of the manager Sergio Marchionne and the politician Beatrice Lorenzin, former Minister of Health in Italy.

Together with all these professional testimonies, so to speak, in which professional relationships became friendships, I have included others of a more private nature. Paolo Arullani and Joaquín's doctor, Dr. Rossana Alloni, explain Joaquín's professional dedication after his departure from the press office and his way of dealing with his illness, while Norberto González Gaitano recalls the memories of many ordinary friends. Cardinal Stanisław Dziwicz, John Paul II's secretary for more than fifty years and his successor in the archdiocese of Krakow, shares some memories that are full of affection, describing several aspects of Joaquín's personality and his close relationship with the canonized pope.

I now leave you in the hands of Joaquín's friends. I hope that you enjoy their contributions as much as I did in preparing these pages.



# A COMMON VISION

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GEORGE WEIGEL<sup>1</sup>

## A FOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

No knowledgeable student of modern Catholic history will dispute the claim that Joaquín Navarro-Valls was the most successful Director of the Holy See Press Office in the history of the institution. All the reasons for such success convey something special about this remarkable man, and about the pope he served, St. John Paul II.

Navarro brought to the *Sala Stampa della Santa Sede* a distinctive set of skills and credentials. He was an intellectually sophisticated Catholic layman, well-formed in the church's teaching, intellectually engaged by its theological explication, and committed to it as a way of life that led to happiness and, ultimately, to beatitude. He was a skilled professional in two demanding fields, psychiatry and journalism, and enjoyed the respect of his peers in both medicine and the press. He was an attractive personality, warm and humorous, yet he was also strong enough to make a sometimes-rowdy Vatican press corps behave itself and to push back skillfully against a sometimes-recalcitrant Roman Curia. He did not panic in crises and he was at his best when his job was most difficult. He had the confidence of the man for whom he worked, John Paul II, and they shared a mutual affection grounded in a common Catholic faith and mission.

Perhaps most importantly, Joaquín Navarro-Valls took up his position in 1984 knowing that change was imperative—and that John Paul II would support him in making the necessary changes in Vatican communications. A very accomplished curialist and John Paul's secre-

<sup>1</sup> Distinguished Senior Fellow of *Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center*, author of *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*.

tary of state, Agostino Casaroli, once said of the press, “We don’t really care what they write as long as we can do what we want to do.” That may have been the case when Cardinal Ercole Consalvi represented the Holy See at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, where he and others re-drew the map of Europe after the Napoleonic Wars—and did so without any public scrutiny. But the days of such aristocratic hegemony were long gone, and Navarro understood that what “they” wrote (and broadcast, and live-streamed, and put on the Internet) had a great deal to do with perceptions of what the church taught and what the church did. Those perceptions, in turn, shaped the terrain on which the Catholic Church had to work for the salvation of souls and the healing of the world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Good media relations could help the church tell its story, make its evangelical proposal, and help bend history’s curve in a more humane direction. Bad media relations impeded the proclamation of the Gospel and created obstacles to the church’s action in world affairs. Knowing that, Joaquín Navarro-Valls became both a successful Director of the Holy See Press Office and an influential member of John Paul II’s inner team of counselors.

That the first layman to hold the position of papal spokesman could have had such an impact also tells us something about St. John Paul II.

Karol Wojtyła was an extraordinary man in many ways, but especially in his ability to think “outside” his personal experience and perceive things one might not have thought him likely to understand. He was a devoted priest and bishop who did not divide the church into separate boxes labeled “clergy” and “laity.” He was a dedicated celibate with a profound understanding of the dynamics of human love, especially as experienced by women. He never lived in a mature democracy, but he had a keen understanding of the cultural conditions that make it possible for democracies to flourish. He lived outside the modern economy and never wrote checks or used a credit card, yet he grasped the dynamics of post-industrial economic life and reshaped the church’s social doctrine in a more empirically sensitive key. And while he spent his pre-papal adult life contending with the rigidly controlled and censored media of communist-era Poland, he intuitively understood the importance of the press and the broader media environment for the church.

## A DIALECTIC RELATIONSHIP

When Wojtyła was elected Bishop of Rome in 1978, the Vatican press operation was, to put it charitably, primitive, and seemed more interested in keeping the media at bay than in getting the church's story told well. This was, in part, a function of the attitude expressed by Casaroli, that the press really doesn't count in the world of affairs; it was also a function of incompetence. Papal spokesmen were ill-prepared for their job because they had no experience relevant to doing the job. The mechanisms of the *Sala Stampa*, reflecting the languid, Italianate character of the Roman Curia, seemed to operate in slow-motion and were unable to anticipate news and thus help frame a story in a positive way. Joaquín Navarro-Valls was able to change that and to make the *Sala Stampa* an effective partner in the papacy's mission, because he and John Paul II shared the same "new" idea of the church and the papacy, influenced by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and Navarro's experience as an Opus Dei numerary.

As Navarro once put it to me, he and John Paul understood the relationship between the papacy and the media in dialectical terms. Vatican II had made it clear that the pope had to speak to the world as well as the church; it had also taught that the pope is not a king but a man who emerges from the church and the priesthood—so the pope is fundamentally a teacher and sanctifier of the world—not a politician operating as other world leaders. And what the world had to see in the pope, first and foremost, was the power of the sacraments at work within him. In order to display this power, the pope had to be open to media scrutiny, even as his spokesman had to explain the religious, catechetical, or theological rationale for why the pope did or said this or that to a press corps accustomed to thinking of a pope as another form of prime minister or president.

In an open, honest, professional relationship, Navarro understood the press would be able to do its job while the pope would have new ways of getting his message out to the world and the church. That this method could have a considerable impact on world politics was demonstrated by the role the church and the Holy See (and Joaquín Navarro-Valls) played before and during the 1994 U.N. World Conference on Population and development at Cairo and the 1995 World Conference

on Women in Beijing; in both cases, effective Vatican communications and Navarro's unofficial diplomacy thwarted the efforts of major world powers to enshrine grave wrongs like abortion as "rights" under international law.

### THE SPANISH CICERO

As I look back over the notes from many conversations with Joaquín Navarro-Valls, I am struck by the breadth of territory we covered as he helped me prepare both volumes of my John Paul II biography, *Witness to Hope* and *The End and the Beginning*.

At the beginning of our collaboration, Navarro was one of my guides through the labyrinth of the Roman Curia. He had a penetrating insight into its deeply-ingrained institutional habits. And he helped me to understand that, at least at that moment in history, its lethargy and the curial reluctance to cooperate with a biographer like me were less a matter of rascality or corruption than they were of what he termed the "human environment" of Vatican life. Like John Paul, Navarro-Valls was quite aware of how shattering it had been for the Italians who dominated the Curia to lose the papacy, and how difficult it was for them to adjust to a non-Italian pope—and a Spanish layman as papal spokesman. So, it was best, he often suggested, to try to make the balky curial machinery work for you, even if that required a certain amount of massaging egos and even if the pace was slower than one would have liked.

This sometimes required great patience. I remember being stunned when Navarro told me that the cardinal secretary of state, Angelo Sodano, had said offhandedly, in Navarro's presence, that: "*stranieri* [foreigners] don't really fit in well here." Others might have vocally challenged such a crude observation; Navarro simply let it pass, even as it must have taught him an important lesson. At the same time, lines had to be drawn when lethargy became an impediment or when aristocratic snobbery threatened to impede John Paul's determination to make his house the church's house, where he could meet the church's people and get information he was unlikely to get from official channels. One curial monsignor, later a nuncio, complained of John Paul's constant meeting with various individuals and groups,

saying that “this used to be a place of respect and good taste; now it’s Campo de’ Fiori.” Navarro brushed that away, too, saying that of course it was Campo de’ Fiori—for the church had to be in the world in order to convert it, and the pope had to know what was going on in the world in order to bear witness to Christ in it. In this sense, Joaquín Navarro-Valls understood what John Paul II meant by the “New Evangelization” long before the pope used that phrase.

#### HUMOR AS A MEDICATION

Navarro was my teacher in other ways. He confirmed my sense that the “holy conspiracy” theory about John Paul and Ronald Reagan, promoted by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, was “rubbish” (a favorite Navarro word for nonsense): John Paul and President Reagan had pursued “parallel paths” toward a peaceful resolution of the Cold War, but their methods were quite different. Navarro explained to me how, with respect to the papacy and Italian politics, John Paul II had “broadened the Tiber,” extracting the Curia and the Italian bishops from their machinations in local and national politics and challenging the Italian church to reconvert Italy—a task in which the Polish pope took a leading role.

He was perhaps most helpful in deepening my understanding of how John Paul conducted his life and his papacy. The pope’s intense prayer life and insatiable intellectual curiosity led to him spend a long time trying to understand a problem or issue from the inside, before attempting to address it. John Paul was a master of time management, who lived his days in carefully scheduled minutes. He understood the importance of the medicine of humor when things got difficult, and he was determined not to let the old-fashioned bureaucratic machinery he had inherited depress him—or change his conviction about his obligations. John Paul’s ability to focus on the things he really cared about, rather than letting himself be ground down by internal opposition or curial incompetence, was another aspect of his pontificate that Navarro underscored: Focusing on the big picture, rather than bureaucratic trivia, kept the pontificate moving forward when it might otherwise have stalled or ground to a halt.

## UNUSUAL DIPLOMACY

Perhaps my most fascinating conversations with Joaquín Navarro-Valls involved his role as an unofficial papal diplomat, working in Cuba to make arrangements for John Paul II's historic visit to that island-prison in January 1998. Fidel Castro was not an easy man to deal with, but Navarro seems to have handled him with grace, wit, and just enough toughness to gain the Cuban dictator's respect.

Told to address Castro as "Commandante," Navarro insisted on calling him "Mr. President"—a clear signal to the Cubans that, as he put it later to me, "I'm not going to play on your linguistic or ideological turf." When the discussion turned to the January 1998 visit, Navarro deftly put the burden of the visit's outcome on the man known as *El Jefe*, saying that the papal visit was a fact and that "it is in the interest of Cuba that this visit be a great success—Cuba should surprise the world." That appeal to Castro's vanity seemed to work. When Navarro followed up by raising the question of Christmas 1997 being a public holiday for the first time since the Cuban Revolution, Castro balked, saying that it was sugar cane harvesting season and he couldn't let people off work. Once again, Navarro knew which card to play: "But the pope would like to thank you publicly for this when he arrives at the Havana airport." *El Jefe* conceded, muttering that "It's just for this year," and Navarro, who knew when to accept victory quietly, quickly replied, "Fine, we are grateful, we shall let next year take care of itself." When Castro said that getting visas for priests wanting to come to Cuba before the visit would take time, Navarro said that they were needed now to help prepare the people and make the papal visit a success. Castro asked, "How many do you need?" Navarro, who admitted to me that he was taking a stab in the dark, replied, "Half of those on the waiting list." And a few days later, fifty-seven visas were granted: exactly half those on the waiting list.

These exchanges on issues, which lasted long into the small hours of the morning, were punctuated by the standard Castro lectures about American aggression, the American trade embargo, the evils of capitalism, the glories of the Cuban Revolution, and so forth. Navarro, who, as a Spaniard and a psychiatrist had an intuitive sense of important aspects of Castro's character, thought that the Cuban's "exaggerated sense of honor" made him a "prisoner of his own history" for whom it was too late, personally and historically, to stop fighting what he had been fighting for decades, no matter

how unsuccessfully. This did not make Castro any less responsible for his crimes; but it did suggest that the way to make January 1998 a success for the church and John Paul II, and to open up some space for freedom in Cuba, was to work *with*, rather than against, the grain of Castro's pride and passions. Thus, Navarro turned to advantage the information he had gotten from various ambassadors to Havana, that their governments were waiting until the end of January [1998] to redefine their policy toward Cuba. Casually mentioning this to Castro, as if it were something the dictator obviously knew already, Navarro thus gained more leverage for Cuban cooperation, with the regime allowing people to come to papal events freely and broadcasting the events on Cuban radio and television.

In Cuba, the layman and informal intermediary, Navarro, was able to accomplish more than conventional diplomacy could likely have achieved. But he was not above letting the Cuban dictator know that sycophancy was not a tactic he would ever adopt. So, at three o'clock one morning, after six hours of negotiation, a bleary-eyed papal spokesman said to the Cuban dictator, as Castro was seeing him out, "Mr. President, your great mistake was in not making Coca-Cola the official sponsor of the Cuban Revolution." *El Jefe*, to whom no one had spoken that way in forty years, laughed.

#### STRATEGIST AND SERVANT

In the final analysis, Joaquín Navarro-Valls was an extraordinarily successful papal spokesman and unofficial diplomat because he and the pope he served shared a common vision of the church's role in the late modern world and how Catholicism's evangelical mission, which included the church's public witness with both dictators and democrats, could be advanced by a carefully crafted and skillfully executed communications strategy. They also trusted each other, spoke regularly, and could explore issues, personalities, and strategies together within a bond of friendship and confidence. Any future pope and future director of the Holy See Press Office looking for a template to make Vatican communications work in service to the church's mission need look no further than the historic—and historically consequential—partnership between Pope St. John Paul II and Dr. Joaquín Navarro-Valls.





## A GREAT CHOICE

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VICTOR L. SIMPSON<sup>1</sup>

### HE'S "YOUR TYPE"

When I first met Joaquín Navarro-Valls he was debating Italian politics with a colleague at the Foreign Press Association in Rome. We were both foreign correspondents, he for the Spanish newspaper *ABC* and I for the American news agency Associated Press.

We both traveled in our jobs to the Middle East and elsewhere in Europe, enjoyed the espresso at our association's bar, played tennis, and used English as our common language. We also enjoyed the occasional cigarette.

But he certainly dressed better than I did, looking sharp even in sports clothes, and I recall saying to my wife Daniela that she should meet him. "He's your kind of guy," I said.

In fact, he liked to point out that when Pope John Paul II named him his spokesman in 1984, he was serving as the press association's president, elected by his fellow members. That was in response to whispers that he got the job because of his membership in the conservative Catholic organization Opus Dei.

Thus, I could only think: "Great choice."

### THE PATIENCE TO PERSIST

As it turned out, it was—even though the road was sometimes bumpy, as he had to overcome an Italian-centric press operation and the reluctance up to then to give any information at all. His predecessor, an

<sup>1</sup> Former Rome Bureau Chief for the *Associated Press*. He chronicled four papacies in 35 years covering the Holy See.

Italian priest, Romeo Panciroli, was known as the “non mi risulta” man, meaning “I don’t have anything on that.”

Navarro revolutionized the press operation, bringing in computer technology and finally giving access to many of the 450 accredited Vatican journalists.

Of course, the system wasn’t perfect. “He nakedly and openly played favorites,” based on the importance of your publication and whether he could trust you, as the Vatican writer John Allen put it.

Some calls he returned immediately—others went unanswered. Full disclosure: 90 percent of the time, he answered mine. I think it was often out of mutual respect.

It is important to understand how dedicated he was to the two popes he served under, first the Pole John Paul II and then the German Benedict XVI, and how set he was on getting their messages out, as different as the two men were.

Navarro-Valls was much more than the “pope’s spokesman,” a rare non-Polish aide in John Paul’s inner circle.

Of course, this man who was so cool and restrained with looks to match, spoke four languages, and held degrees in journalism and psychiatric medicine; though, he could be forgiven for a touch of vanity.

As the skilled tennis player he was (I can personally attest to his skills), he had the patience to persist, a player who rushed the net only when the point was secured.

## MY WORK CLOTHES

In 1997, just a few months before the papal pilgrimage to Cuba, he flew to Havana and was summoned for what turned out to be a six-hour long encounter with Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

Navarro-Valls said he told Castro that the pope had one particular request—that the regime restore the Christmas holiday that was abolished under communism. Castro kept his word to do so.

It was Navarro-Valls who came to my aide when Cuban authorities told AP officials that I would not get a visa to report on the papal trip and that they should choose another AP correspondent in my place. No reason was given except for some vague pretext about something I wrote when Castro visited Rome earlier that year.

It came as a shock to me as I had so much looked forward to covering the historic trip.

“Tell your people you are on my list for Cuba,” he said—a man of his word. We never heard another objection from the Cubans.

It was never said, but I believe he was instrumental in getting me to John Paul’s dinner table on a Qantas flight back from Australia in 1986, my first papal trip since my family found itself in the middle of a terrorist attack at the Rome airport a year earlier. My 11-year-old daughter was killed.

The invitation from Navarro-Valls (who was not at the dinner) caught me completely by surprise —my face was covered with stubble from a morning shave and my clothes wet from a monsoon during a stopover in the Seychelles. But how could I say no to the pope?

He immediately put me at ease. When I apologized for what I described as my “work clothes,” he gripped his white robes and replied graciously, “These are my work clothes.”

#### THE RIGHT TO BE INFORMED VS. PRIVACY

He had earlier made his mark representing John Paul at the U.N. Population Conference in Cairo in 1994, where there was a strong push to enshrine abortion as a basic human right. Navarro helped put together a coalition to counter that.

Not everything went smoothly.

In what should have been the most routine of press briefings, I remember sitting aboard the papal plane in Guatemala in 1996 taking notes as Navarro-Valls described a meeting the pope had had with Rigoberta Menchu, a Nobel peace prize winner known for her critical views of the Roman Catholic Church.

Navarro said she seemed much more moderate and understanding than she had been depicted in the press.

A short while after we had closed our notebooks and taken off, he sent an aide to tell reporters to forget the remarks because the meeting never took place. No explanation was ever given, but it was clear he was embarrassed because no one had bothered to tell him the meeting had been canceled.

Navarro-Valls was continuously barraged with questions on John Paul's health, which had become increasingly fragile in the decades after he was shot in the abdomen by a Turkish gunman in 1981.

With his background as a physician and a journalist, he took the position that basic medical information needed to be given while the patient had a right to privacy. "This is not the United States," he told me.

But I guess he gave into his journalism side when, during a trip to Hungary in 1996 when the pope looked extremely frail, Navarro said John Paul suffered from an "extra pyramidal syndrome," which often refers to the dreaded Parkinson's disease.

It was the first official reference to the illness, and some in the Vatican wanted Navarro fired. It took nine years for a confirmation that the pope had Parkinson's—on his death certificate in 2005.

## PART OF MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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DANIELA PETROFF<sup>1</sup>

### THE RELIEF BALM

I walked into the office at the *Stampa Estera* to pick up my new press accreditation to be greeted by its incredibly handsome president. “So you must be the famous ‘Daniela’ Victor talks so much about,” he said—a twinkle in his eye. I nodded and lamely muttered that my husband had spoken so highly of him too, all the while thinking “boy Victor, when you said that he was ‘my kind of guy,’ how right you were.”

Gioacchino as the Italians called him, walked me to the door and with the engaging smile which became one of his trademarks as papal spokesman, we exchanged polite promises that the three of us must get together soon. However, what seemed, at the time, little more than social wishful thinking turned out to be the beginning of a deep friendship.

Saturday lunches at his favorite fish restaurant in Fiumicino, tennis games in Fregene where he became one of the favorite guests at my parents’ beach house, and other in-town get-togethers. Of course, I enjoyed joining them but Victor and Gioacchino had their man-to-man relationship complete with intellectual sparring on a wide range of subjects.

When he was named to head the Vatican’s press office, we were so proud of him but selfishly feared our carefree days together were over.

Instead, he made a point of finding time for his old friends, and soon the friendship circle was enlarged to include many from the press corps he had bonded with on the papal trips. His 50th birthday was

<sup>1</sup> *Associated Press* journalist.

quite memorable—complete with a homemade birthday cake hidden under a cardboard replica of St. Peter’s Basilica, made by one of the more artistically talented journalists.

It was not long before that celebration that our family was struck by the terrible loss of our 11 year-old daughter Natasha and the wounding of our son, Michael, 9, in the terrorist attack at Rome’s Fiumicino airport on December 27, 1985. Gioacchino’s friendship was instrumental in pulling us through those unbearable days. As Vatican spokesman, he made sure a papal representative, the then American Archbishop Justin Regali, was present at the funeral Mass to convey Pope John Paul’s prayerful solidarity with what had become a very public tragedy.

Soon after the acute pain of loss passed, Gioacchino put on his doctor’s hat and through veiled subterfuge like a good meal at our favorite restaurant lent his expertise on how to cope with grief. I’m reminded of one simple thought which he offered after noting that I was struggling not only with my loss but also my own identity. “Daniela, remember, it is all part of your autobiography,” he said. It has stayed with me all this time and is still a source of comfort.

“MAMMA”

The following fall, Victor took his first papal trip after the tragedy, and the invitation conveyed by Gioacchino to have dinner with the pope was no coincidence.

With the same “I had nothing to do with it” discretion I nearly found myself on a plane to eight southern and western cities in the United States to work as a liaison between the U.S. Bishops’ Conference and the Vatican press corps, not all of whom spoke English.

It was a great way to lift my spirits and, at the same time, tackle my innate fear of flying. However, the master plan fell through when I discovered, to my joy that I was pregnant and at my age (41) did not want to take any risks. Thus, following my husband, Gioacchino was the first to hear the good news and, after him, the entire U.S. Bishops’ Conference who had to be told that I was no longer on the trip!

When Deborah Marie was born in December that year, everybody rejoiced in the new gift of life. Gioacchino was one of the first visi-

tors at the hospital and came to her baptism in the chapel of Natasha's school which was followed by a huge *fiesta* for family and friends thrown by the Marymount sisters.

It was around this time that Gioacchino nicknamed me "Mamma," and although I was never sure exactly what he meant by it, I took it as a compliment. However, I do know that with his usual discretion, he never took any credit for our new-found happiness, but in his heart he knew he had done a good job.

#### THE TREASURE OF FRIENDSHIP

Gioacchino was as private as he was discreet, and it was not until it was much too late that we found out about his illness. The last contact was a brief e-mail exchange with Victor in which he described his condition as "more *in bed* than *out of bed*" and sent love to me and the family. Soon after, we delivered a handwritten letter to his home from the two of us thanking him for the long years of friendship and telling him how precious they had been to us in good times and bad. At first, I worried that the letter had not gotten to him in time. But then I realized it didn't really matter. Gioacchino knew how we felt, and we knew he felt the same way, too.