Thy Kingdom Come!

Title: The Political Thought of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI

*Objective and method*: The purpose of this lecture is to present in general outline the recurrent themes of the thought of J. Ratzinger that have a direct application to political affairs. Ratzinger had a particular interest in politics and political ideas and wrote a notable number of articles and conferences on various aspects of political phenomena, even if these writings are dispersed in various publications.

I have discerned 7 major themes of political thought in Ratzinger’s writings and with each one I will give a brief description of the present-day situation, the fundamental diagnosis that Ratzinger offers, and some possible applications of his thought as approaches to solving our present political predicaments.

By way of introduction, I will describe the general contemporary view of ‘politics’ as we perceive the phenomenon today, and I will also suggest why J. Ratzinger is uniquely qualified and relevant to our understanding and to the renewal of politics today.

I will quote directly from Ratzinger’s writings when possible. Due to the constraints of time, it will not be possible to mention every reference, though everything that I mention has a source. Occasional comments of mine will be clearly identified.

Outline:

1. Introduction:
2. *Our Political Times:* the particular challenges of politics today (the phenomena and the underlying premises and assumptions of politics as it is practised today).
3. *Why J. Ratzinger*? Ratzinger’s intellectual genius, his background and formation, and his concern for political affairs.
4. 7 Major Themes of the Political Thought of J. Ratzinger
5. *The Domain of Politics* (the spiritual revolution caused by the advent of Christianity and its effect on the extension of political power).
6. *The Person of Politics* (the Christian notion of the human *person* introduces a much more profound anthropology that has direct relevance to the purposes and practices of politics).
7. *The Hope of Politics* (what are the human person’s fundamental hopesand to what extent are political aspirations legitimate?).
8. *Political Reason* (the ‘pathologies of reason’ that Ratzinger identifies at the source of our moral and religious blindness today and the need to rediscover greater sources of truth and goodness).
9. *The Pre-Political Foundations of Politics* (the need for a moral and religious basis for political structures and democracies).
10. *Religion and Politics* (how religious truth can and should imbue political thought in pluralistic and multicultural societies)
11. *The Crisis of Law* (the importance of law for politics and the present crisis in the notion of law).
12. Conclusions and Applications (possible applications of Ratzinger’s thought to contemporary politics).

*Bibliography:*

Ratzinger’s writings on political themes are dispersed in various collections and publications. I will offer an indicative list of these publications (in English). As most of these publications are collections of conferences and articles (and not complete books), they can be read individually with great profit. Ratzinger’s written style is always concise and clear, even though his thought is profound; he is a wonderful communicator of the written word.

The books I have recommended for the Acton bookshop are:

-J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004.

-J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2011 (the last section of the book contains 8 essays on themes to do with politics)

-J. Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval: Meeting the Challenges of the Future,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2014.

You will also find many of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s articles, discourses and homilies on the internet (public domain) and the Vatican website for Pope Benedict XVI.