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# **The Political Thought of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI**

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## Table of contents

The Political Thought of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI .....	5
Outline .....	5
I. Introduction .....	7
<i>1. Our Political Times: the particular challenges of politics and the underlying premises and assumptions of politics as it is practised today.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>2. Why Ratzinger? Ratzinger's intellectual genius, his background and formation, and his concern for political affairs .....</i>	<i>9</i>
II.....	13
<i>1. The Domain of Politics (the spiritual revolution caused by the advent of Christianity and its effect on the extension of political power) .....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>2. The Person of Politics.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>3. The Hope of Politics .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>4. Political Reason.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>5. The Pre-Political Foundations of Politics .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>6. Religion and Politics.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>7. The Crisis of Law.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Bibliography .....	29



Thy Kingdom Come!

# **The Political Thought of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI**

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## **Outline**

*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.



## I. Introduction

### *1. Our Political Times: the particular challenges of politics and the underlying premises and assumptions of politics as it is practised today*

Beneath the varied and complex phenomena that are termed “politics” today, there are discernible common trends in all our ways of thinking and acting politically. There is a general *disillusionment with politics* which is an expression something more than just the imperfections and fallibility of human life.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is the consequence of the breakup of previous political ideologies that promised an end to human suffering and the entry into a new and definitive era of perpetual peace and progress.<sup>2</sup> Another common trend is *a clearly marked and imposed secularisation of public life*, that is, the intentional removal of the religious dimension of human existence from public life and practice, suggesting that social and political agreement can *only* be achieved if “religion” is removed from public life and discourse (“as if God did not exist”, “*etsi Deus non daretur*”).<sup>3</sup> This has become an assumed premise of political thought today.

Another related premise is an *assumed immanent view of human existence*. By this I refer to the concentration of the totality of human existence to this particular existence and the material reality of this world. We no longer have to “imagine there’s no Heaven”; we presume there isn’t and live within this worldly context as if it is all there is.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The French political philosopher P. Manent writes of two fundamental frustrations with regard to politics today: “The modern State thus rests on the repression, in any case the frustration, of the two most powerful human affects: on the one hand the passionate interest in this world as expressed in active participation in the common thing, and on the other the passionate interest in the eternal and the infinite as expressed in the postulation of another world and participation in a community of faith. As I have said, with these two fundamental movements of the soul repressed or frustrated, the soul no longer recognizes itself, and thus observers conclude that we have entered a post-civic as well as a post-Christian era.”

Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic*, Harvard University Press, 217.

<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest is Professor D. Walsh’s *After ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom*, HarperCollins 1990.

<sup>3</sup> I make some comments on this theme in E. O’Higgins, *Person-centered Politics: A Personalist Approach to Political Philosophy*, Hamilton Books 2024, chapter 12 (Politics and Religion).

<sup>4</sup> This theme is commented on in E. Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism: Two Essays*, Regnery Publishing Inc. Washington D.C.

We have also become used to *people as merely individual, separated possessors of rights*, whose individual and uninhibited freedom is all that matters. We are and should be free from others, from public responsibility; there is no common good, only my good, which needs to be protected and defended from all encroachments.

Related to this exaltation of freedom is *the presumed freedom to affirm (and to have affirmed in public) whatever I want, imagine, or suppose*. What justifies my public view today is the fact that it is mine, and we are supposed to come to political agreements on the equal toleration and affirmation of all views and opinions. This dictatorial notion of *public reason* today is the political form of what we call “relativism”.<sup>5</sup> Ratzinger was very aware of this “dictatorship of relativism”.<sup>6</sup>

These fundamental currents are not just passing fashions, but have percolated through the centuries and are the confluence of various historical, philosophical, theological, and scientific causes that can perhaps be best brought together by the loose term *modern* (and the related terms pre-modern, postmodern and transmodern). Let’s take from J. Ratzinger our first quotation, where he describes this epochal shift in human thought and perspective:

In his own comment on the new premises of modern thinking, Ratzinger contrasts the Ulysses of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* with Columbus, the factual Ulysses, who discovers America:

... according to Dante, Ulysses is shipwrecked on the mountain of Purgatory, at the western limit of the earth; there is a direct transition from the earthly to the metaphysical. The factual Ulysses, though, Columbus, discovers, not Purgatory, but America. The sudden change from medieval thinking that the discoveries of the modern era brought about could not be depicted more geographically than was done by history itself in this event. The world loses its metaphysical borders; wherever man may advance, it appears to be merely the world. What until now had been the heavens is unmasked now as the world, which has the same consistency all around, in which there is no Above and no Below but only the same construct of matter on all sides with the same laws in effect everywhere. The earth is neither a centre nor a foundation, nor is the sky a heaven – everything is just “world”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This notion of “public reason” is commented on in P. Simpson, *Political Illiberalism: A Defence of Freedom*, Routledge 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Ratzinger’s phrase “the dictatorship of relativism” was coined in a homily before his election as Pope, *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, Vatican Basilic, Monday 18 April 2005.

<sup>7</sup> J. Ratzinger, “Contemporary Man Facing the Question of God,” *Dogma and Preaching...*, 78-79. Ratzinger goes on to state that: “Behind these external facts there are shifts in the basic orientation of thought that lend new meaning to the whole. The successes in the progressive discovery of the material world and of its laws are achieved through an ever stricter and more refined application of that method which is characterised by the combination of observation,



As we proceed, it would be wrong to consider Ratzinger as “anti-modern” or “traditionalist”; what Ratzinger does recognise is *the fundamental shift in our categories of thought* and what we need to do to complete, complement, or indeed change in our premises of thought if we are to see, judge, and act properly.

## *2. Why Ratzinger? Ratzinger’s intellectual genius, his background and formation, and his concern for political affairs*

In the hyper-speed culture we all live in, it is easy to get caught up in the ever-changing media and messages that arrive each day, and there is an intellectual form of consumerism that goes from one thing to another, from one guru or influencer to another, the restless desire for change and novelty. At times, it is necessary to fix one’s attention on what is above and beyond the normal trendy voices. My suggestion is that J. Ratzinger Benedict XVI is one of those unique intellects of history that has lit up *real and lasting sources of renewal* for our times and for the future. His wondrous intellect is capable of probing *the profound roots and causes of the phenomena of our times* with great analytical depth. His formation in the theological sources of the Christian faith, especially St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure, as well as the Fathers of the Church, gave him a profound and comprehensive understanding of Christian realities and their universal, historical, and eternal significance. His philosophical and theological approach is not Scholastic and thus provides a complementary vision to the insights and the limits of Scholasticism.<sup>8</sup> He was in touch with contemporary reality and lived through most of the twentieth century and the first 20 years of this century. He recognised *the radical need for renewal* within the Church, for a certain type of renewal that he recognised was slow in arriving, even years after the Second Vatican Council.

He was a brilliant teacher and communicator. Students always understand what he is saying, even when the depth of his thought strains the mind to follow. He was intellectually humble: his intellectual gifts were always put at the service of the simple faith of the people, and he never consciously created an aura of grandeur or importance for himself. He was also uncompromisingly clear and unequivocal. On this point, as Ratzinger himself said:

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experiment, and the development of mathematical theories. Within this method, which limits itself to what is verifiable and falsifiable and from that acquires its generally binding certainty, there is no room for the question about the essential causes of things...The situation becomes critical only when what is accessible to this method with its necessary methodological limitation turns into a positivistic world view which accepts as reality only what is accessible to this method and thus converts the methodological limitation into a fundamental one. The temptation to do so, however, becomes ever greater in the modern era and today appears almost insuperable” (79).

<sup>8</sup> For one comment by Ratzinger on St. Thomas Aquinas see *Milestones*, 44. There are, of course, other sources.

There is a lot of talk today about the Church's prophetic task. The word is sometimes misused. But it is true that the Church may never simply align herself with the *Zeitgeist*. The Church must address the vices and perils of the time; she must appeal to the consciences of the powerful and of the intellectuals, not to mention of those who want to live narrow-minded, comfortable lives while ignoring the needs of the time, and so forth. As a bishop I felt obliged to face this task. Moreover, the deficits were too obvious: exhaustion of the faith, decline in vocations, lowering of moral standards even among men of the Church, an increasing tendency toward violence, and much else. The words of the Bible and of the Church Fathers rang in my ears, those sharp condemnations of shepherds who are like mute dogs; in order to avoid conflicts, they let the poison spread. Peace is not the first civic duty, and a bishop whose only concern is not to have any problems and to gloss over as many conflicts as possible is an image I find repulsive.<sup>9</sup>

Something that has been less well noticed in Ratzinger's writings is his interest in *political thought and practice*. As Pope Emeritus, and in an interview again with Peter Seewald that was published as "Last Testament", Benedict XVI was asked:

— Were you always a very political person too?

He answered: "I have never attempted to exert myself politically, but I always had a great personal interest in politics, and the philosophy that stands behind it. Because politics lives off a philosophy. Politics cannot simply be pragmatic, in the sense of 'we'll do something'. It must have a vision of the whole. That has always concerned me."<sup>10</sup>

In numerous conferences and articles, Ratzinger over the years wrote on the theme of politics, although this has largely not been commented on. In this talk I draw on these essays and conferences and I attach a rudimentary bibliography of these sources.

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church at the End of the Millennium, An Interview with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997, 82-83. The reference to "mute dogs" seems to come directly from a letter of St. Boniface (Breviary, Office of Readings, 5<sup>th</sup> June).

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, Pope; Seewald, Peter. *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, Bloomsbury Publishing, Kindle Edition, 116. Ratzinger also emphasised the importance of keeping the great and practical question of existence front and center in philosophy and theology: "... it reminds professional philosophers and theologians that they are expected to provide something transcending all erudition, namely, an answer to the great questions of life, such as, what is human existence really about? Or, what must we do to live our lives successfully? I think that we must not lose sight of this appeal as we pursue our investigation, because it contains an actual glimpse of the element which binds philosophy and theology together." J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 15.

What is important to mention is that what we glean from Ratzinger's thought on politics and the philosophy that stands behind it are *principles of truth*, rather than proposing a particular political model. This I think is important because the forms, circumstances, culture and history of peoples are so different that there is no one political model that can serve all times and circumstances; rather, as Ratzinger helps us to do, we need to recognise the true principles of political life that then need to be applied intelligently and prudentially to each circumstance.

Let's now look at some fundamental themes of the political thought of J. Ratzinger.



## II.

### *1. The Domain of Politics (the spiritual revolution caused by the advent of Christianity and its effect on the extension of political power)*

The modern political state, which is how we today understand political arrangements, had its theoretical and practical origins in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries with the gradual formation of sovereign (that is, absolute) civil power over all other institutions and authorities in a defined territory. One of the changes this development brought about was a change from the Augustinian notion of *two swords of authority, the civil and the spiritual, within one jurisdiction*, to a doctrine of two kingdoms, an earthly kingdom of absolute civil power, and the relegation of spiritual authority to the private realm of individual conscience. What has developed from this change is the gradual dominance of political power over all aspects of individual and social life.

Fr. Ratzinger, in 1962 gave a lecture in Salzburg on the public impact of Christianity in the context of the Roman empire as understood by two Church Fathers, Augustine and Origen. What Ratzinger is describing is the intellectual and spiritual revolution that the Christian faith brought to the understanding of the extension or domain of politics. Ratzinger explains:

In Greco-Roman culture the unity of the world had its source in pantheism; the divine was itself a part of the world, and the world had divine status. Hence the unity of humanity could be converted directly into political reality. There was unity in the world itself, and so this unity could be realised within the world and from out of the world's own resources. The Roman emperor saw himself as the one who would bring this divine world power into being and therefore as the channel connecting the divine and the world of human beings.<sup>11</sup>

Christianity, however, reveals a God who *stands apart in freedom* and whose *power is independent of the world*.<sup>12</sup> Instead of one Roman cosmopolis, there are now two poleis or cities, one relative to the other. Now the final and authentic cosmopolis was to be found in the Church, which did not deny, but reduced, relativised, limited, the role and power of the civil (polis) authority.<sup>13</sup> In this sense

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<sup>11</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The Unity of the Nations...*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger often emphasises the fact that Christianity is not a doctrine of political revolu-

the Church is the new cosmopolis, while respecting the relative and limited role of state authority. As Ratzinger writes in another context:

... in his saying that we must give Caesar what is his and God what is his, Jesus separates imperial power and divine power. He takes the *ius sacrum* (sacred law) out of the *ius publicum* (public law) and thereby cuts in two the fundamental constitution of the world of antiquity, indeed, of the pre-Christian world in general. In separating the *ius sacrum* from the emperor's *ius publicum*, he created space for freedom of conscience, at the edge of which every power ends, even that of the Roman god-emperor, who thereby becomes a mere man-emperor and is transformed into the apocalyptic beast when he nevertheless tries to remain a god and denies the inviolable space of conscience. Hence, with this saying a limit is set for every earthly power and the freedom of the human person is proclaimed, which transcends all political systems. For this limit Jesus went to his death: he witnessed in suffering to the limit of power. Christianity begins, not with a revolutionary, but with a martyr.<sup>14</sup>

By the way, this refusal by Christians to declare Caesar as divine, *Kaisar ho Kurios* (Lord) meant that Christians were considered atheists in the Roman empire. One can also appreciate the courageous novelty of the Christians who declared Jesus, and not Caesar, as *Kurios* (and, indeed, *Kyrios Kurion*, "the Lord of Lords").

The question this Christian understanding of the relative role of civil authority within the greater, final and authentic cosmos of the city of God *raises today* is whether, in the development of the modern state, we have surreptitiously reverted to the totalitarian dominance of the Roman empire, where politics has become our de facto theology and religion, and where theology and religion are circumscribed by politics (and not the other way round).

## 2. *The Person of Politics*

One of the ingrained, embedded, notions of our political culture is *the individual*. What most characterises "the people" is their separate individuality, and hence the rights and freedoms of each one within the political state. There is, of course, a vitally important truth in this doctrine of distinctive individuality that

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tion. For example: "The faith of the New Testament does not know of the revolutionary but is acquainted with the martyr: the martyr recognizes the authority of the State but also knows its limits. His resistance consists in the fact that he does everything that serves the law and the organized community, even if it comes from an authority that is a stranger to the faith or hostile to it, but he does not obey when he is ordered to do evil, that is, to go against the will of God. His resistance is not the active resistance of violence but rather the resistance of one who is ready to suffer for the will of God. The combatant in a resistance movement who dies with a weapon in hand is not a martyr in the New Testament sense." J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Today and Tomorrow...*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics...* ("Conscience in its Time"), 168.

is recognised in Constitutions and Conventions. At the same time, a political structure that assumes that we are *only* separated individuals whose individual freedoms and rights are to be affirmed as *against* others is a profoundly defective notion that distorts and frustrates the social vocation and destiny of the human person, as well as the particular notions of freedom and rights.

In *The Notion of Person in Theology*, Ratzinger, in his exegesis of the Old and New Testament, detects the essentially relational being of the human person, in the image and likeness of the relational Being of the Trinitarian God. He says:

Man is the creature of relatedness. He is the more himself, the more totally and deliberately his relatedness reaches out toward its final goal, toward transcendence...

If man is more at home with himself and is more himself, the more he is capable of reaching beyond himself, the more he is with the other, then man is more himself, the more he is with the wholly Other, with God.<sup>15</sup>

The essence of mind or spirit in general is being-in-relation, the capability of seeing oneself and the other... openness, relatedness to the whole, is an essential element of spirit. And it comes to itself precisely by the fact that it not only is but also reaches beyond itself. In going beyond itself, it possesses itself; only by being with the other does it become itself and come into its own. Or, to put it yet another way: being with another is its form of being with *itself*.<sup>16</sup>

This is the “common truth of a single humanity present in every man.”<sup>17</sup>

In an essay titled *Truth and Freedom*, Ratzinger at one point refers to the child in the womb of the mother and says the following:

If we open our eyes, we see that this, in turn, is true not only of the child but that the child in the mother’s womb is simply a very graphic depiction of the essence of human existence in general. Even the adult can exist only with and from another, and is thus continually thrown back on that being-for which is the very thing he would like to shut out.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> J. Ratzinger, “On the Understanding of ‘Person’ in Theology”, in *Dogma and Preaching*, 194.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 192, 193.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ratzinger, “Truth and Being”, *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996), 27. H. Urs Von Balthasar has a similar thought: “It is here that the substance of my thought inserts itself. Let us say above all that the traditional term “metaphysical” signified the act of transcending physics, which for the Greeks signified the totality of the cosmos, of which man was a part. For us, physics is something else: the science of the material world. For us, the cosmos perfects itself in man, who at the same time sums up the world and surpasses it. Thus our philosophy will be essentially a meta-anthropology, presupposing not only the cosmological sciences but also the anthropological sciences, and surpassing them toward the question of the being and essence of man. Now man exists only in dialogue with his neighbor. The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only

What is the political relevance of this? Ratzinger writes:

We must return to the idea that man's freedom is a freedom in the coexistence of freedoms; only thus is it true, that is, in conformity with the authentic reality of man. It follows that it is by no means necessary to seek outside elements in order to correct the freedom of the individual. Otherwise, freedom and responsibility, freedom and truth, would be perpetual opposites, which they are not. Properly understood, the reality of the individual itself includes reference to the whole, to the other.<sup>19</sup>

If this is true, if the person is more than his or her individuality (more than not merely being somebody else, not merely being separate from all others), then our political projects need to reflect a common social good that is not just the sum of individual rights and freedoms. Each one of us as persons needs to discover and develop this *pregiven relational context of our being*, and to imbue political thought and practice with a renewed social dimension of existence.<sup>20</sup> If we do, then the notion of common good would take on a substantive meaning and purpose.

It is an interesting exercise to recognise how much of our legislation and political projects are based not on personal being, but on separated individuals.

### 3. *The Hope of Politics*

It seems that we live in a profoundly *unambitious* political age. What seems to dominate our political horizon is economic welfare, an important enough consideration but hardly the measure of human social excellence or a virtuous society. We are heirs to a profoundly post-ideological context in which a *pragmatic materialism* is all we aspire to achieve. Speaking of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet bloc, Ratzinger writes that:

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by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter, the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: (1) that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all being is one; (2) that that love is good, therefore all Being is good; (3) that that love is true, therefore all Being is true; and (4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all Being is beautiful. We add here that the epiphany of Being has sense only if in the appearance [Erscheinung] we grasp the essence that manifests itself [Ding an sich]. The infant comes to the knowledge, not of a pure appearance, but of his mother in herself. That does not exclude our grasping the essence only through the manifestation and not in itself (St. Thomas).” H. U. von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (Kindle Locations 1124-1127). Ignatius Press.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ratzinger, “Truth and Being”, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger, in this essay, refers to Hans Jonas’ *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*: “On the basis of this insight, Hans Jonas has defined responsibility as the central concept of ethics. This means that in order to understand freedom properly we must always think of it in *tandem with responsibility*. Accordingly, the history of liberation can never occur except as a history of growth in responsibility” (30).



An exact observation of the events leads directly to the heart of the matter: the power of the spirit, the power of convictions, of suffering and of hopes, has thrown down the existing structures. This means that the materialism which wanted to reduce the spirit to a mere consequence of material structures, to the mere superstructure of the economic system, has been brought down. But here we are no longer speaking only of the problem of Marxism and its world of states—we are speaking about ourselves. For materialism is a problem that affects us all; its breakdown compels all of us to an examination of conscience.<sup>21</sup>

So how do we recover the real aspirations of human existence beyond a materialist well-being and at the same time *not* fall prey to the false hopes of political ideologies that misguided millions of people into war, suffering, and misery?

Ratzinger recognises that the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ introduced into history an orientation to hope in a definitive *new* Heaven and *new* earth, as graphically expressed in the Book of Revelation. For this reason, for this hope, the early Christians could not use the title of the Roman Emperor as *Conservator mundi*, he who maintains the world in stability and peace. Christ brought the promise of a new Heaven and a new earth, and therefore the Christians choose for Christ the name *Salvator mundi*, the Saviour of the world, with the clear implication of change and transformation.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, Ratzinger distinguishes 3 distinct forms of hope for the future. The first is the *eschatological hope* of the profound and definitive transformation of all of earthly reality “at the end of time”, with the second definitive coming of the Lord God (we affirm this in the words of the Creed: “I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”). This definitive transformation, which is our hope, will be by the Lord God’s action.

The *second form of hope* is the possibility of bettering our world to the degree possible, according to our knowledge of the ideals of goodness and justice. Ratzinger explains this real hope in this way:

And this is precisely where we find the connection between “eschatology” and “utopia” as furnished by Plato: the individual and the community can continue to exist only if there is an overarching just order of being from which they can derive their standards and before which they stand responsible. “Reality” can be

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<sup>21</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Turning Point for Europe: The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 91. “The real essence of materialism, which does not just consist of the denial of one sphere of reality but is at bottom an anthropological program that is necessarily connected with a certain idea about the interrelations among the individual spheres of reality. The claim that mind or spirit is not the origin of matter but only a product of material developments corresponds to the notion that morality is produced by the economy (instead of the economy being shaped, ultimately, by fundamental human decisions).” Joseph Ratzinger, “A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy,” in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, lc. 3023.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, 47-48.

structured meaningfully only if ideals are real; the reality of the ideal is a postulate of experienced reality, which thereby shows itself to be a second-class reality. Plato's otherworldliness and his theory of ideas, while not invented for mere political purposes, are definitely parts of a political philosophy: they represent the standards that are presupposed by every effort to organize the political community... Platonic thought succeeds in making a real synthesis: politics remains an affair of the practical reason, the polis remains polis. But reason gets more room to operate by being given a glimpse of what is truly just, namely, Justice itself: the Good has not less but more reality than particular goods have.<sup>23</sup>

*The third – and misplaced – form of hope* is the confusion of eschatological hope with its immanent realization in the here and now. Ratzinger's term for this misplaced hope is *chiliasm*, The Greek term *chiliasm* originates in the Book of Revelation 20:1-6, that refers to a thousand-year reign of Christ before the end times.<sup>24</sup>

Revolution and utopia – the nostalgia for a perfect world – are connected: they are the concrete form of this new political, secularized messianism. The idol of the future devours the present; the idol of revolution is the adversary of reasonable political action aimed at making concrete improvements to the world. The theological vision of Daniel, and of apocalyptic literature in general, is applied to secular reality, but at the same time it is mythologized and profoundly distorted. Indeed, the two foundational political ideas—revolution and utopia—are, in connection with evolution and the dialectic, an absolutely anti-rational myth: it is urgently necessary to demythologize them, so that politics can carry on its work in a truly reasonable way.<sup>25</sup>

The challenge for us is to place our definitive trust and hope in the Lord God's continuing and ultimate transformation of this reality and existence, and, at the same time, to rediscover the real, if limited and always imperfect, improvement of a truly human, personal society. This means to steer clear of irresponsible revolution (or the naïve promise of technology<sup>26</sup> and a cost-free world) *on the one hand*, and, on the other hand, to release ourselves from a pragmatic, mundane, subhuman, material existence.<sup>27</sup> We cannot live without a real vision of hope. As

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<sup>23</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, Ignatius Press, 231.

<sup>24</sup> "Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years." *Book of Revelation* 20:4, RSV.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Homily for Pentecost 2012* on the contemporary version of the Tower of Babel.

<sup>27</sup> A. Solzhenitsyn referred to this unambitious, mundane view of pragmatic politics in his

the Book of Proverbs states: “where there is no vision, the people perish.”<sup>28</sup> What reasonably ambitious vision do we offer for our political community?

#### 4. *Political Reason*

The al-Qaeda 9/11 attacks were patent examples of a *religious fanaticism* that has on occasions in history been inflicted on humanity by those who are blinded by their allegiance to the Absolute. This is a *pathology of religion* (disease, caricature, distortion) that is easily recognisable. Much less easy to recognise and perhaps for that reason much more prevalent in our public discourse is what Ratzinger terms *pathologies of reason*.<sup>29</sup> What does he mean by this? We have become *accustomed* to forms of thinking and perceiving that concentrate on what is physical, quantifiable, what can be used, and we have discovered the laws and structures of the physical universe that we have put to great use. We continue to live in an age of scientific, technical, and electronic revolution that seems to bring us to potential changes that we have never contemplated before, which also bring with them promises and expectations.

While Ratzinger is clearly not opposed to these advances of science and technology<sup>30</sup>, he repeatedly draws attention to the lob-sided and therefore insuffi-

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Harvard Address: “I have spent all my life under a Communist regime, and I will tell you that a society without any objective legal scale is a terrible one indeed. But a society with no other scale than the legal one is not quite worthy of man either. A society which is based on the letter of the law and never reaches any higher is taking very scarce advantage of the high level of human possibilities. The letter of the law is too cold and formal to have a beneficial influence on society. Whenever the tissue of life is woven of legalistic relations, there is an atmosphere of moral mediocrity, paralyzing man’s noblest impulses. And it will be simply impossible to stand through the trials of this threatening century with only the support of a legalistic structure.” A. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart, Harvard Commencement Address*, 8th June 1978.

<sup>28</sup> *Book of Proverbs* 29:18 RSV.

<sup>29</sup> “However, we have also seen in the course of our reflections that there are also pathologies of reason, although mankind in general is not as conscious of this fact today. There is a hubris of reason that is no less dangerous. Indeed, bearing in mind its potential effects, it poses an even greater threat—it suffices here to think of the atomic bomb or of man as a ‘product’. This is why reason, too, must be warned to keep within its proper limits, and it must learn a willingness to listen to the great religious traditions of mankind. If it cuts itself completely adrift and rejects this willingness to learn, this relatedness, reason becomes destructive.” J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> “Reaction and resentment against technology, which is already noticeable in Rousseau, has long since become a resentment against humans, who are seen as the disease of nature. This being that emerges out of nature’s exact objectivity and straightforwardness is responsible for disturbing the beautiful balance of nature. Humans are diseased by their mind and its consequence, freedom. Mind and freedom are the sickness of nature. Human beings, the world, should be delivered from them if there is to be redemption. To restore the balance, humans must be healed of being human. In ethnology, this is the thrust of Levi-Strauss’s thinking; in psychology, of

cient and defective obsession with only this form of *instrumental*<sup>31</sup> or *technical reason* that has blinded us to the other fundamental modes of experience and perception, an *atrophy* of our intellectual capacities.

In one of Ratzinger's most remarkable discourses to politicians, precisely to the German parliament (*Bundestag*), Ratzinger draws attention to this public pathology of reason. The discourse is evocatively titled *The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law*. Speaking of this narrowing of reason, Ratzinger says:

Fundamentally it is because of the idea that an unbridgeable gulf exists between "is" and "ought". An "ought" can never follow from an "is", because the two are situated on completely different planes... The same also applies to reason, according to the positivist understanding that is widely held to be the only genuinely scientific one. Anything that is not verifiable or falsifiable, according to this understanding, does not belong to the realm of reason strictly understood. Hence ethics and religion must be assigned to the subjective field, and they remain extraneous to the realm of reason in the strict sense of the word.<sup>32</sup>

Ratzinger then uses for those in Berlin a most powerful image:

In its self-proclaimed exclusivity, the positivist reason which recognizes nothing beyond mere functionality resembles a concrete bunker with no windows, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions, being no longer willing to obtain either from God's wide world. And yet we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that even in this artificial world, we are still covertly drawing upon God's raw materials, which we refashion into our own products. The windows must be flung open again, we must see the wide world, the sky and the earth once more and learn to make proper use of all this.<sup>33</sup>

The challenge we face in public discourse is to reintroduce, reawaken the ethical and religious modes of perception of their real objects. Ethical and religious "values" are experiences of something or someone *real* that I experience and can therefore value as good. Others are also capable of these ethical and religious experiences and we, as a society, can come to a basic agreement about ethical and religious experience that is vital in order to have a human society. Ratzinger points out that:

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Skinner's. At the scientific level, both men express a mood that is more and more widespread, and that, in various forms of nihilism, is becoming an ever-greater temptation for the youth of the West." J. Ratzinger, "In the Beginning...": *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 94.

<sup>31</sup> D. Walsh, *The Luminosity of Reason*..., Introduction.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to Reichstag Building*, Berlin, Thursday, 22 September 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Men are capable of reciprocal comprehension because, far from being wholly separate islands of being, they communicate in the same truth. The greater their inner contact with the one reality which unites them, namely, the truth, the greater their capacity to meet on common ground. Dialogue without this interior obedient listening to the truth would be nothing more than a discussion among the deaf.<sup>34</sup>

## 5. *The Pre-Political Foundations of Politics*

I suppose that most of us live in what are termed Constitutional democracies, that is, a political structure that is determined by a basic legal document that constitutes the structures and processes of government, as well as the rights of citizens and other matters. Common to our political heritage is a doctrine of the division of basic public powers, electoral processes, the limits of executive power, and what is loosely termed “due process of law”. We consider ourselves safe and secure once we see that our structures and processes thus defined are followed.

But what happens when our faithfully observed Constitutional structures and processes result in unjust and divisive outcomes. In March of this year, after both Houses of the French Parliament had passed a bill proposing abortion as a Constitutional right, President Macron had the Constitutional option of either holding a referendum or holding a joint parliamentary “congress” at the Palace of Versailles and achieving a 3/5 majority. He chose this latter option and of the 925 MPs and senators eligible to vote, 780 supported the amendment, which would give women the “guaranteed freedom” to choose an abortion, by the amending of the 17th paragraph of article 34 of the French Constitution that defines the law and its limits.<sup>35</sup>

On the theme of political structures and processes, Ratzinger makes a profound comment on a phrase that is taken from Thomas More’s *Utopia*, *instituta et mores*. *Instituta* refers to the political structures. Ratzinger’s point is that what is of much greater importance in political society than *instituta* are “mores”. What is Ratzinger referring to by *mores*? Having made a comment about a creative renewal of structures, Ratzinger writes:

At present, however, the threat comes from exactly the opposite direction—from a complete oblivion of the second basic ingredient of political life, the mores. We are talking not about morality but about custom or life-style, that is, a complex of basic convictions that express themselves in ways of living that

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2010, 34.

<sup>35</sup> See the report of Kim Willsher in “France makes abortion a constitutional right in historic Versailles vote”, *The Guardian*, Mon 4 Mar 2024.

give shape to the consensus about the basic values of human life. Alexis de Tocqueville has impressively demonstrated that democracy depends much more on mores than on instituta. Where no common persuasion exists, institutions find nothing to lay hold of, and coercion becomes a necessity.<sup>36</sup>

The stronger the underpinning of mores, the fewer instituta will be needed. The question of education, that is, of opening up reason to the whole of reality above and beyond the merely empirical, is not less important for “utopia” than the question of the proper distribution and control of power. The neglect of mores does not enlarge freedom; it prepares the way for tyranny: this prognosis of de Tocqueville has been confirmed only too exactly by the developments of the last hundred years.<sup>37</sup>

What Ratzinger is challenging here is the over-confidence in structures and processes that (we think) of themselves will guarantee the justice and peacefulness of our political society, so much so that we do not have to be good. One is reminded of T.S. Eliot’s famous lines: *They constantly try to escape From the darkness outside and within By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.*<sup>38</sup>

What *are*, then, the pre-political foundations of politics? Ratzinger writes that:

... ethics alone cannot supply its own rational basis. Even Enlightenment ethics, which still holds our states together, is vitally dependent on the ongoing effects of Christianity, which gave it the foundations of its reasonableness and its inner coherence. When this Christian foundation is completely removed, nothing is left to hold it all together... The essential thing is this: reason that is closed in on itself does not remain reasonable, just as the state that tries to become perfect becomes tyrannical. Reason needs revelation in order to be able to function as reason. The reference of the state to the Christian foundation is indispensable for its continuance as a state, especially if it is supposed to be pluralistic.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Ecumenism and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, Ignatius Press (“Eschatology and Utopia”), 237. Some political philosophers seem to have acquiesced to this view. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, for example, declares that: “the democratic constitutional state is an order of freedom and of peace rather than an order of truth and of virtue.” Cf. M. Rhonheimer, *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy*, The Catholic University of American Press, Washington D.C. 2013, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 238. Ratzinger refers to Tocqueville’s “tyranny of the majority” when he writes that: “But majorities, too, can be blind or unjust, as history teaches us very plainly. When a majority (even if it is an utterly preponderant majority) oppresses a religious or a racial minority by means of unjust laws, can we still speak in this instance of justice or, indeed, of law?” J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> T.S. Eliot, “The Rock VI,” in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot*, 159.

<sup>39</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics...*, 205 (“A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy? On the Indispensability of Christianity in the Modern World”).



What is clear here is the concerted role of ethical and religious education in forming persons capable of a profound social vision. Without that, our democratic institutions and processes are only powerful weapons in the hands of those who choose the might of power over the truth of authority.

## 6. *Religion and Politics*

It is common to address this theme of religion and politics in terms of *Church and State*, and blithely repeat the mantra of complete separation of Church from State. By this we justify a political culture that prohibits and eliminates any and all public references and expressions of religion. I suggest that this argument of “the separation of Church and State” is used as a smokescreen to hide a virulent suppression of religious truth and practice.

Ratzinger is very clear on the necessary distinction of institutional Churches from political power.

The Christian empire attempted at an early stage to use the faith in order to cement political unity. The Kingdom of Christ was now expected to take the form of a political kingdom and its splendor. The powerlessness of faith, the earthly powerlessness of Jesus Christ, was to be given the helping hand of political and military might. This temptation to use power to secure the faith has arisen again and again in varied forms throughout the centuries, and again and again faith has risked being suffocated in the embrace of power. The struggle for the freedom of the Church, the struggle to avoid identifying Jesus' Kingdom with any political structure, is one that has to be fought century after century. For the fusion of faith and political power always comes at a price: faith becomes the servant of power and must bend to its criteria.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Random House Publishing Group, 39-40. English theologian A. Nichols comments in detail on the gradual submission of the Bavarian Protestant Church to National Socialism in the times of the Weimar Republic of Germany. “However, a synthesis of evangelical piety and volkisch nationalism was fairly common: a halfway house to the ‘German-Christian’ movement assiduously fostered by the Nazis.<sup>19</sup> The National Socialist take-over brought swift changes to the organisation of this Bavarian Protestant church. Although a pastor sympathetic to the regime, Hans Meiser, was imposed as presiding bishop and armed with wide executive powers, his conservative Lutheranism enabled him to defend the independence of his community despite the growing party pressure for a centralised Reich Church. Under the Reich bishop Ludwig Müller, the Nazified Deutsche Christen intensified their efforts in this direction, using the slogan ‘the swastika on our breasts, the cross in our hearts’, but aiming at the subordination of Evangelical theology to the needs of nationalist ideology. This provoked the formation of the ‘Pastors’ Emergency League’ headed by Martin Niemöller and later to become the nucleus of the ‘Confessing Church’. The collapse of liberal theology before the advance of Nazi ideology would later be cited by Ratzinger as one of the more instructive lessons provided by the history of his homeland.” Aiden Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Bloomsbury Publishing, Kindle Edition, 8.

At the same time as Ratzinger rejects the fusion of political power with religious institutions, he points out that public and political practice makes a concerted effort to eliminate the religious source of truth in public. He recognises that:

It is true that a new moralism exists today whose key words are justice, peace and conservation of creation, words that call for essential moral values of which we are in real need. But this moralism remains vague and thus slides, almost inevitably, into the political-party sphere. It is above all a dictum addressed to others, and too little a personal duty of our daily life. In fact, what does justice mean? Who defines it? What serves towards peace? <sup>41</sup>

What Ratzinger does see is that, as a consequence of this pathology of reason (which we spoke about):

... in the wake of this form of rationality, Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner unknown before now to humanity, excludes God from the public conscience, either by denying him altogether, or by judging that his existence is not demonstrable, uncertain and, therefore, belonging to the realm of subjective choices, something, in any case, irrelevant to public life.<sup>42</sup>

This public attack on religion is not confined, in Ratzinger's view, to Christianity. There is something more fundamental, more philosophical, being perpetrated:

The real opposition that characterizes today's world is not that between various religious cultures, but that between the radical emancipation of man from God, from the roots of life, on one hand, and from the great religious cultures on the other. If there were to be a clash of cultures, it would not be because of a clash of the great religions which have always struggled against one another, but which, in the end, have also always known how to live with one another but it will be because of the clash between this radical emancipation of man and the great historical cultures.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Address at Subiaco*, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Ratzinger has an interesting comment to make on the necessary receptiveness of Christianity to other cultural forms and beliefs: "This basic principle must take on concrete form in practice in the intercultural context of the present day. There can be no doubt that the two main partners in this mutual relatedness are the Christian faith and Western secular rationality; one can and must affirm this, without thereby succumbing to a false Eurocentrism. These two determine the situation of the world to an extent not matched by another cultural force; but this does not mean that one could dismiss the other cultures as a kind of *quantité négligeable*. For a Western hubris of that kind, there would be a high price to pay – and, indeed, we are already paying a part of it. It is important that both great components of the Western culture learn to listen and to accept a genuine relatedness to these other cultures, too. It is important to include the



Ratzinger's proposal to public reason is to be reasonably open to the possibility of God's existence and Revelation. Instead of the assumed and imposed *etsi Deus non daretur* that public reason imposes today, a more rational approach is Ratzinger's:

The search for such a reassuring certainty, which could remain uncontested beyond all differences, failed. Not even the truly grandiose effort of Kant was able to create the necessary shared certainty. Kant had denied that God could be known in the realm of pure reason, but at the same time he had represented God, freedom, and immortality as postulates of practical reason, without which, coherently, for him no moral behavior was possible.

Does not today's situation of the world make us think perhaps that he might have been right? I would like to express it in a different way: The attempt, carried to the extreme, to manage human affairs disdaining God completely leads us increasingly to the edge of the abyss, to man's ever greater isolation from reality. We must reverse the axiom of the Enlightenment and say: Even one who does not succeed in finding the way of accepting God, should, nevertheless, seek to live and to direct his life *veluti si Deus daretur*, as if God existed. This is the advice Pascal gave to his friends who did not believe. In this way, no one is limited in his freedom, but all our affairs find the support and criterion of which they are in urgent need.<sup>44</sup>

This, I think, expresses the real fault lines of the vital political struggle for religious freedom of expression in our Western political and cultural society, what we are really speaking about when we talk of "Church and State".

## 7. *The Crisis of Law*

Law and laws serve as a fundamental instrument of government power. In our constitutional democratic states, all government power can only be used by means of laws, orders that follow an established parliamentary procedure and that are validated by majorities in Congress and Senate, and then signed into legal effect by a Head of State, President or monarch, and then officially published.

This is what we have become accustomed to understanding what law is. The problem with this is that great injustices and evils can be perpetrated by such a notion of law. One of the classic books on Natural Law was written by a practic-

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other cultures in the attempt at a polyphonic relatedness, in which they themselves are receptive to the essential complementarity of reason and faith, so that a universal process of purifications (in the plural!) can proceed. Ultimately, the essential values and norms that are in some way known or sensed by all men will take on a new brightness in such a process, so that that which holds the world together can once again become an effective force in mankind." J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today And Tomorrow*...82.

<sup>44</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Address at Subiaco*..., 10.

ing German lawyer, Heinrich Rommen in Germany of the 1930s. He observed that “Our modern dictators are masters of legality... Hitler aimed not at a revolution, but at a legal grasp of power according to the formal democratic processes”<sup>45</sup>, what Rommen called *Adolf Légalité*. What is wrong with our law today?

Ratzinger recognises the necessary role of law in politics:

It is the specific task of politics to apply the criterion of the law to power, thereby structuring the use of power in a meaningful manner. It is not the law of the stronger, but the strength of the law that must hold sway.<sup>46</sup>

The problem arises when numbers decide questions of truth and justice:

But majorities, too, can be blind or unjust, as history teaches us very plainly. When a majority (even if it is an utterly preponderant majority) oppresses a religious or a racial minority by means of unjust laws, can we still speak in this instance of justice or, indeed, of law? In other words, the majority principle always leaves open the question of the ethical foundations of the law.<sup>47</sup>

Ratzinger explains that the ethical sources or foundations of our laws *can be discovered in our natural world*:

Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never proposed a revealed law to the State and to society, that is to say a juridical order derived from revelation. Instead, it has pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law – and to the harmony of objective and subjective reason, which naturally presupposes that both spheres are rooted in the creative reason of God.<sup>48</sup>

What this means is that basic foundational principles of ethics can be known and accepted by *the common human experience of reality*, assuming we are humanly open to this mode of experience. Referring to what we discussed previously as “the pathology of reason”, Ratzinger cites the Austrian jurist H. Kelsen to exemplify our contemporary blindness when it comes to ethical experience:

Fundamentally it is because of the idea that an unbridgeable gulf exists between “is” and “ought”. An “ought” can never follow from an “is”, because the two are situated on completely different planes. The reason for this is that in the meantime, the positivist understanding of nature has come to be almost universally

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<sup>45</sup> Heinrich Rommen, as quoted in *The Natural Law*, Liberty Fund Indianapolis 1998, xi (Introduction by Russell Hittinger).

<sup>46</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today And Tomorrow...*, 69. Ratzinger, in his discourse at the Lumsa University’s faculty of Jurisprudence said that: “The denigration of law is never in any way at the service of liberty, but is always an instrument of dictatorship. To eliminate law is to despise man; where there is no law there is no liberty” (3).

<sup>47</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today And Tomorrow...*, 70.

<sup>48</sup> Benedict XVI, Reichstag Building, Berlin, Thursday, 22 September 2011, 3.

accepted. If nature – in the words of Hans Kelsen – is viewed as “an aggregate of objective data linked together in terms of cause and effect”, then indeed no ethical indication of any kind can be derived from it.<sup>49</sup>

This, translated into juridical theory, is what is called legal positivism.

Ratzinger offers us a task to be achieved if this legal positivism is not to expose our societies further to tyranny in a legal form:

The elaboration and structure of law is not immediately a theological problem, but a problem of “recta ratio,” of right reason. Beyond opinions and currents of thought, this right reason must try to discern what is just — the essence of law, and is in keeping with the internal need of the human being everywhere, distinguishing from that which is destructive of man. It is the duty of the Church and faith to contribute to the sanity of “ratio” and through the just education of man to preserve in his reason the capacity to see and perceive. Whether this right is to be called natural right or something else, is a secondary problem. But wherever this interior demand of the human being, which is directed to law, or the need that goes beyond changing currents, can no longer be perceived and therefore spells the total “end of metaphysics,” the human being is undermined in his dignity and in his essence.<sup>50</sup>

What this means is that we as Christians need to be entirely reasonable, to offer the reasonable justifications for what we can all come to know and appreciate. What is necessary and vital for us to live socially can be discovered and shared because we are human, not specifically because we are Christian.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 3-4. In an address at the Faculty of Jurisprudence of the Lumsa University in Rome, November 10th, 1999, Ratzinger explains the philosophical roots of positivism: “The ‘end of metaphysics,’ which in broad sectors of modern philosophy is superimposed as an irreversible fact, has led to juridical positivism which today, especially, has taken on the form of the theory of consensus: if reason is no longer able to find the way to metaphysics as the source of law, the State can only refer to the common convictions of its citizens’ values, convictions that are reflected in the democratic consensus. Truth does not create consensus, and consensus does not create truth as much as it does a common ordering. The majority determines what must be regarded as true and just. In other words, law is exposed to the whim of the majority, and depends on the awareness of the values of the society at any given moment, which in turn is determined by a multiplicity of factors. This is manifested concretely by the progressive disappearance of the fundamentals of law inspired in the Christian tradition. Matrimony and family are increasingly less the accepted form of the statutory community and are substituted by multiple, even fleeting, and problematic forms of living together. The relation between man and woman becomes conflictive, as does the relation between generations. The Christian order of time is dissolved.”

<sup>50</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Lumsa University...*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> It is of course true that the Christian faith necessarily further enlightens reality and reveals both our ultimate social and transcendent destiny, our dependence on God as Savior, and the necessary and yet free gift of grace. At the same time, “Thou shalt not kill” is a humanly evident experience of reality.

These 7 themes represent, I suggest, in a very summary manner the major political themes of the thought of J. Ratzinger.

I have taken up too much of your time this afternoon. Thank you.

## 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.

I would also like to humbly suggest my *Person-centered politics: A Personalist Approach to Political Philosophy*, Hamilton Books (Rowman & Littlefield), Lanham MD, 2024 in which I often refer to the political thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI.