

On Ecclesiology

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Images of the Church

POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS WRITTEN on a very wide range of topics, but his writings on the Church are perhaps more voluminous than those on any other theme. His doctoral dissertation, completed in 1953, dealt with the images of People of God and House of God in the works of St. Augustine, two images of what we call the Church. Ever since then he has shown a consistent interest in ecclesiology. Although the Church appears in the titles of many of his books, he has not written a treatise on ecclesiology. Here I shall try to give the outlines of what such a treatise might look like, if he were ever to compose it.

At the time when Joseph Ratzinger began to write, there was, at least in Germany, a certain reaction against the description of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, the term that Pius XII had privileged in his important encyclical of 1943.¹ The primary objections were two. In the first place, some theologians protested that the idea of the Mystical Body did not sufficiently respect the autonomy and possible sinfulness of the Church's members. It tended to present the Church too triumphalistically as a mere organ through which Christ acted. Secondly, the image of the Mystical Body as explained in the encyclical made it difficult to see how baptism could incorporate Christians who were not Catholics into the body of Christ. Because of these two problems, the young Ratzinger, before and

¹ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 35 (1943): 193–248], accessed May 5, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html.

during the Second Vatican Council, was inclined to prefer the image of the Church as the People of God, another biblical term. “The People of God” is a flexible term that admits of many degrees and modalities of incorporation or affiliation. It is made up of men and women who may or may not be faithful to the Lord. They, rather than Christ, are responsible for their shortcomings. Responding to these difficulties, Vatican II, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* [hereafter, LG], seemed to subordinate the image of the Mystical Body to that of the People of God.²

Although the young Ratzinger was at first enthusiastic about the change of emphasis, he has since become reserved in speaking of the Church as People of God. He points out that the image has a slender basis in Scripture. There are only two texts in the New Testament, it seems, that use this designation for the Church. The image captures the continuity between the Church and the old Israel, but not the novelty of the Church of Christ. Unlike the old Israel, the Church is not sociologically one people. It becomes one people only because it is the Body of Christ, whose Spirit unites peoples of many nationalities and ethnic characteristics. Thus, in some ways the metaphor of the Body of Christ better expresses the real nature of the Church.³

In the years since Vatican II, Cardinal Ratzinger (as he became in 1977) relied increasingly on another image of the Church prominent in the documents of Vatican II: the Church as sacrament of communion or sacrament of salvation. This image conveys that the Church is a sign and instrument of salvation and that she carries within herself the grace that she confers. The Church is the Church because God dwells in her, giving unity to her members, even though they are not sociologically one people. Because the idea of sacrament is somewhat complex and technical, we should not be surprised that

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Henry Traub, S.J., et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 46–48 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “THV”); Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969), 96–101.

³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell (New York: Crossroad, 1988) [originally *Kirche, Ökumene und Politik* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizione Paoline, 1987)], 17–28 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “CEP”); Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985) [originally a German manuscript published as *Rapporto sulla fede* (Milan: Edizione Paoline, 1985)], 47 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “RR”); Ratzinger, *Volk*, 81, 97.

this image of the Church is somewhat neglected in popular works about ecclesiology.⁴

Ratzinger was also ready to speak of the Church as a communion, if that term be rightly understood. He does not mean by it a friendly gathering of like-minded persons, but a grace-given interior union with God, and consequently with all other members of the Church. Communion in that sense is participation in the divine life. It has its source especially in the Holy Eucharist, which is the sacrament of communion.⁵ While approving of the term “communion” in this eucharistic and ecclesial sense, Ratzinger felt obliged to warn that the term has been unduly horizontalized in some recent literature and has become what he calls a “buzzword” for amicable relationships without any particular reference to God.⁶ He also notes quite correctly that the idea of the Church as communion is not central to Vatican II (PFF, 129).

In summary, we may say that the Church is, for Ratzinger / Benedict XVI, a sacrament of communion that opens up the members of the Church to divine life, thereby molding them into a single people, the Body of Christ. A balanced idea of the Church must therefore include aspects of all four images: Body of Christ, People of God, sacrament, and communion.

The Four Creedal Attributes

In the creed, we declare our faith in the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Ratzinger not only accepts these four attributes, as do all believers, but he explains them in ways that reflect the special characteristics of his own theology.

The Church, he says, is not a self-enclosed entity. Her unity has its unfailing source in Christ, her head. The Church is so united in

⁴ CEP, 19; Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) [originally *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie* (Munich: Wewel, 1982)], 44–55 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “PCT”).

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1966) [originally *Zur Gemeinschaft gerufen: Kirche heute verstehen* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1991)], 76.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: the Church as Communion*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn et al., trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) [originally *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2002)], 132 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “PFF”).

him that she becomes with him one mystical person, bound to him by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love. Indivisibly one, the Church is not fragmented by the sins of her members or even by schism and apostasy. As a young theologian, Ratzinger was convinced that the Church, as Body of Christ, is more inclusive than the Roman Catholic communion.⁷ But in more recent years, he insists, in opposition to Leonardo Boff and a number of ecumenical theologians, that the Church is not something that exists in a divided manner, partly in the Catholic Church and partly in other churches and communions.⁸

Vatican II taught that the Church “subsists” in the Roman Catholic communion (LG, §8). By this technical term, the Council meant that the Church of Christ is present in Catholicism as a complete subject, in her full integrity, although some elements of the Church may be found outside her visible limits.⁹ Christians who are not Catholics are in imperfect communion with the Church of Christ.¹⁰ Sharing the Lord’s concern for the unity of all his followers, Catholics continue to pray and labor so that the elements of the Church found in other communions may be incorporated into Catholic unity. Such unification, while it may to some extent be assisted by ecumenical dialogue, cannot come about except as a gift from God (CEP, 134; PCT, 199–203).

The second attribute of the Church is holiness. In his earlier work, at least through the 1960s, Ratzinger was willing to say that the Church herself is sinful as well as holy,¹¹ a position still held by many theologians. She is holy, he declares, because the Lord’s power of sanctification dwells in her, bestowing holiness in the midst of human unholiness. In these texts, he is not content to say that, since the sins of the members are contrary to the inner nature of the Church, the Church is not defiled by them. But this early position of Ratzinger

⁷ Ratzinger, *Volk*, 235.

⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification on the Book *Church: Charism and Power* by Father Leonardo Boff, O.F.M.,” March 11, 1985, in *Origins* 14 (April 4, 1985): 683, 685–87.

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “*Deus Locutus Est Nobis in Filio*: Some Reflections on Subjectivity, Christology, and the Church,” in *Proclaiming the Truth of Jesus Christ: Papers from the Vallombrosa Meeting* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 13–30, at 24–27; PFF, 144–49.

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Volk*, 100.

¹¹ THV, 47; Ratzinger, *Volk*, 244, 255–60; Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) [originally *Einführung in das Christentum* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1968)], 263–64.

appears to be bound up with his preference for the image of the Church as People of God. The images of the Church as sacrament, Body of Christ, and communion, preferred by the later Ratzinger, are not easily reconciled with the idea of the Church herself as sinful. However that may be, Ratzinger certainly ascribes the holiness of the Church primarily to the holiness of the elements that belong formally to the Church—the word of God, the sacraments, and the sacred ministry. Thanks to sacramental baptism, all the members are consecrated to God, and thereby receive a certain ontological holiness. The Church is the great sacrament that symbolically contains the divine holiness and confers a share of it upon those who submit to her ministries. The Church is most of all herself in the saints, who put up no obstacles to the grace of God.

The third attribute of the Church, catholicity, has both a qualitative and a quantitative sense. Qualitatively, it means that the Church has the fullness of Christ's perfection within her; quantitatively, it means that she has a missionary dynamism as wide as the world. The Church is for all peoples and all cultures.¹² The ministry of the Apostles was catholic in the sense that they as a group had responsibility for, and authority over, the universal Church. The Lord did not assign them to be pastors of particular dioceses or regions. The sacraments, by their nature, affect our relationship, not to the particular, but to the universal Church. By being baptized and confirmed, we are inducted or incorporated more deeply into the Church as a whole (PFF, 141–42). The whole Church and every part of her is catholic because all the members are in communion with one another. Catholic unity, says Ratzinger, consists in adherence to the word of God and the sacraments and in submission to the hierarchical leadership of the pope and the body of bishops.¹³

Although Ratzinger as a young theologian welcomed the rediscovery of the local church at Vatican II, he was already, at that time, conscious of the danger that local churches would isolate themselves and fall into mutual disunity (THV, 121–22). A few years ago, he had a controversy with Bishop (now Cardinal) Walter Kasper on the question of whether the universal Church was or was not prior to the local church. Ratzinger took the position that the Church is first of

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) [originally *Unterwegs zu Jesus Christus* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2004)], 131–33.

¹³ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 67–68.

all universal (and in that sense catholic). Only subsequently and, one may say secondarily, does it become a multiplicity of local or regional churches. What Jesus founded was a single Church governed by the Apostles with and under Peter as their head. The development of particular churches within the Catholic communion occurred later, as the Church expanded through missionary activity. Eventually, the Church had bishops assigned to govern particular churches or dioceses. The idea of the Church, however, does not itself imply the existence of particular churches. Even today, people must be members of the universal Church in order to belong to a particular church. Thus, the reality of the universal Church is both historically and logically prior to that of particular churches. It is simply wrong, Ratzinger believes, to hold that particular churches are prior to the universal Church (PFF, 133–43).

The fourth attribute of the Church, apostolicity, means that the Church continues to be what, in essence, she was when Christ ascended into heaven and left her in the hands of the Twelve. The Church is not a product of human creativity; she does not become whatever the leaders and members wish to make of her. The Church is prior to all human initiative; we can only receive as a gift what God has been pleased to bestow. A Church constructed by the efforts of men and women like ourselves would not be worth having. It would not be capable of mediating salvation.¹⁴

The apostolic deposit of faith, sacraments, and ministry have been bequeathed to all generations of believers. As the original companions of Jesus, the Apostles received the call to participate in his mission and were given authority to act in his name. Through the sacrament of ordination, bishops become successors of the Apostles, carrying on the ministry of the Twelve. They are not powerful in the sense of having a mandate to remake the Church; they are bound to obedience and fidelity in adhering to the legacy that has been committed to them. But as custodians of the deposit of faith, sacraments, and ministry, the bishops have supreme authority in the Church, always in union with the successor of Peter, their visible head.¹⁵

Apostolic succession, for Ratzinger, involves the abiding presence of the word of God in witnesses who are its commissioned bearers.¹⁶ The bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are collectively responsi-

¹⁴ RR, 45–46; Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 136–40.

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 94–103.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Volk*, 115.

ble for the direction of the universal Church. The see of Rome, as the Apostolic See par excellence, is the touchstone of the apostolic succession. Other churches must be in communion with the bishop of Rome in order to stand in the succession.¹⁷

The notions of catholicity and apostolicity are at the heart of a dispute that Cardinal Ratzinger had with Edward Schillebeeckx. The Belgian Dominican, together with several other theologians, maintained that, in the absence of an ordained priest, the local community could designate one of its own members to preside at the Eucharist. Ratzinger insisted that the congregation cannot bestow the Eucharist on itself. It becomes a church only by being received into the universal Church. Because the Eucharist is a sign of the unity of the whole Church, both synchronic and diachronic, the priest-celebrant must receive through ordination the power to act in the name of the Church. The Eucharist, therefore, is essentially linked to priesthood, and priesthood depends upon apostolic succession. A Eucharist celebrated outside the apostolic succession would be invalid (PCT, 286–87, 293; PFF, 143–44).

Structures of the Church

The Church exists in the world as a structured society, but she is more than that. According to Cardinal Ratzinger, she cannot be adequately understood by the categories of sociology or political theory. In a study of primacy and collegiality, he suggests that all errors in this matter rest ultimately on the tendency to apply profane constitutional models to the Church, overlooking her divine origin.¹⁸ Governed by Christ her Lord, the Church is neither a monarchy, nor an oligarchy, nor a democracy. She is not an organization comparable to multinational corporations, nor is she governed by a bureaucracy taken up with paperwork.¹⁹ As a sacramental reality, the Church needs to be understood in light of personal responsibility and sacramental ministry. “The more administrative machinery we construct, the less place

¹⁷ Ibid., 126–27; Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, trans. Kenneth Baker et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962) [originally *Episkopat und Primat* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1961)], 54–59.

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Volk*, 169.

¹⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002) [originally *Gott und die Welt: Gaubens und Leben in unserer Zeit. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald* (Stuttgart: Deutsche-Verlags-Anstalt, 2000)], 342–43.

there is for the Spirit, the less place there is for the Lord, and the less freedom there is.”²⁰

The divinely instituted structures of the Church, Ratzinger contends, are sacramental and, therefore, hierarchical (RR, 49). This is preeminently true of the Eucharist, the sacrament of sacraments, which the Lord gave to the Church at the Last Supper. The Eucharist may be said to make the Church. In instituting this sacrament, the Lord also established the apostolic ministry, empowering it with his words to the Apostles: “Do this in memory of me.”²¹ The ecclesial Body of Christ, since it originates from Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharist, is material and visible; it is not a mere moral unity like a business corporation.²²

The bishops, as successors of the Apostles, preside over the Church and the sacraments. Every Eucharist is celebrated in union with the local bishop or ordinary, who must be in communion with the whole college of bishops. The idea of collegiality, taught by Vatican II, implies that the bishops as a group teach and govern in moral unity, together with, and never without, the successor of Peter (THV, 50–52). Because the Lord gave Peter a unique role in the apostolic college, he alone among the Apostles has successors of his own. No one in the Church today is successor of James or John, of Paul or Barnabas (CEP, 36).

The apostolic succession gives priority to those particular churches that were founded by Apostles and especially to Rome, where Peter and Paul, the leading Apostles, ministered and were martyred. Ratzinger draws a contrast between apostolic theology, which he favors, and the later patriarchal theology that arose in the East in the fourth century. Patriarchalism, he holds, is a post-Constantinian development that places too much emphasis on administrative factors, such as the proximity of the imperial court at Constantinople.²³ Under the influence of this patriarchal theology, Western theologians began to regard the pope as the “patriarch of the West.” But in the 2006 edition of the *Annuario pontificio*, Benedict XVI expunged this title from the official list of the offices of the bishop of Rome.²⁴

²⁰ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 146.

²¹ Ibid., 75.

²² Ratzinger, *Volk*, 47, 84–89.

²³ Ibid., 133.

²⁴ See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “On File,” in *Origins* 41 (March 30, 2006): 688.

While recognizing the importance of communion or fellowship on every level, Ratzinger attaches no less importance to the principle of personal government in the Church (CEP, 32; RR, 60–61). His experience has taught him that, when popes or bishops rely on anonymous committees, they cease to teach with boldness and conviction as their office demands (RR, 61). Each regional bishop, Ratzinger believes, is personally responsible for his own diocese, and the pope is personally responsible for directing the whole Church. This responsibility cannot be delegated to, or limited by, other agencies. It would be a mistake to think of the college of bishops as a kind of parliament that would restrict the primatial power of the pope by majority vote. It works together with him, never against him. It has no constitutional or other power to limit the discretion of the pope, who is always free to make decisions on his own authority, in accordance with what he knows to be the teaching of Scripture and the tradition of the Church.²⁵

In an early article on the theology of councils, Professor Ratzinger explained that councils were meetings of those members of the Church, the bishops, who had responsibility to teach and govern. Ecumenical councils are valid when approved as such by the pope and are infallible in articulating the faith of the People of God. Ratzinger took issue with the proposal of Hans Küng that the Church could hold a general council consisting of representative priests, religious, and lay people in addition to bishops. He also rejected Küng's suggestion that the Church herself is a kind of permanent council. This idea, if implemented, would turn the Church into an incessant debating society, raising ever new questions to be discussed and decided.²⁶

During Vatican II, Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops, a new organ that meets in plenary assemblies in Rome once every two or three years. There have been conflicting opinions about the status and authority of the Synod. At the time of the Council, Father Ratzinger hailed the Synod as “a permanent Council in miniature” and something that introduced an element of collegiality into the permanent structure of the Church (THV, 142). But in his later writings as a cardinal, he pointed out that the Synod, though it has

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, “La collégialité, développement théologique,” in *L'Église de Vatican II: Études autour de la Constitution conciliaire sur L'Église*, ed. G. Baraúna, vol. 3 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 763–90, at 778–81; Ratzinger, *Volk*, 187–90.

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Volk*, 147–70.

a permanent secretariat, is not permanently in session. It meets only occasionally, when the pope convokes it. It has no legislative or doctrinal authority, but is advisory to the pope in the exercise of his primatial office. It serves also for an exchange of information among the bishops. It is not a permanent synod, nor is it an organ of collegial government (CEP, 46–61).

Another organ that has received institutional status since Vatican II is the episcopal conference, which is regional and, in many cases, national. During and immediately after the Council, Ratzinger seemed to think that these conferences had a kind of legislative or doctrinal authority of their own.²⁷ But the experience of the conferences over the past fifty years has persuaded him to change his mind. Since the early 1980s, he has taken the position that the conferences have no theological basis; they are purely practical instruments to facilitate cooperation among the bishops of a region (RR, 58–66).

The ministerial structures of the Church, according to Ratzinger, exist for the sake of advancing the holiness of all the members, the overwhelming majority of whom are laymen and laywomen. There is no limit of the sanctity to which lay persons can rise; all are called to be holy (THV, 55–57). Priestly ordination is not for the personal sanctification of the ordained, but for service to the whole People of God.²⁸

Pope Benedict has not as yet presented a full-orbed theology of the laity. He clearly does not see them as having a necessary role in the Church's threefold mission to teach, sanctify, and govern. Lay persons may, of course, assist the clergy in church affairs, such as being readers at Mass and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. They can also offer valuable advice to the clergy in their tasks of teaching and governing the People of God. But their primary task is to sanctify the temporal order, including the family, the neighborhood, the marketplace, and the public square, rather than to engage in ministry within the Church.²⁹

²⁷ THV, 57; Joseph Ratzinger, "The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality," trans. Tarcisius Rattler, O.S.A., in *The Church and Mankind*, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Concilium: Theology in an Age of Renewal* 1 (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1964), 39–67, at 64.

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 79.

²⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 (2006): 217–52], §29 (this encyclical will be cited in text and notes as "DCE"), referring to John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81(1989): 393–521, at 472. See also

Mission of the Church

The Church is missionary by her very nature. In founding her, God made her his instrument for gathering the People of God from all nations into union with the Lord and visible unity among themselves.³⁰ Although the Church may surely assist in the salvation of her members, Ratzinger seems never to have regarded personal salvation as the principal motive for missionary activity. He emphasizes the Church's service toward the unity of the human family.³¹ Vatican II's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus* [hereafter, AG], on which the young Ratzinger collaborated, linked missionary expansion particularly with the attribute of catholicity. Missionary proclamation, it declared, is not only an injunction laid upon the Church by her divine Founder but also an inner demand of the Church's catholicity. The Decree also states that missionary activity is necessary for the Church to pursue her goal of proclaiming and establishing the kingdom of God everywhere (AG, §1). Ratzinger is willing to say that the Church exists for the sake of the kingdom of God, but he cautions that the kingdom is not extrinsic to the Church; it is already present, at least inchoatively, in the Church herself. As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger took occasion to reprimand theologians such as Paul Knitter, who tend to separate the kingdom of God from the Church (DJ, 18).

Consistent with Vatican II, Ratzinger divides the mission of the Church, like that of Christ, into three ministries: teaching, sanctifying, and ruling. In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict translates these into the threefold ministry of doctrine, sacraments, and charity (*kerygma*, *leitourgia*, and *diakonia*) (DCE, §25). The formulation of doctrine and the ministry of the sacraments are primarily committed to the hierarchy, but the ministry of charity or service is common to all Christians. Charity, as Pope Benedict understands

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on "Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life" (November 24, 2002), §1, *L'Osservatore Romano* (English), January 22, 2003, 5; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), §1939.

³⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Jesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (2000), §22 (this work will be cited in text and notes as "DJ"), in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Jesus*, ed. Stephen J. Pope and Charles Heffling (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002): 3–23, and in *Origins* 30 (September 14, 2000): 209, 211–19. See also Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 76.

³¹ Ratzinger, *Volk*, 103–04.

it, is not just another form of social assistance, but a distinctive work (an *opus proprium*) of the Church (DCE, §29). To show how it differs from social and political programs, he explains that charity addresses immediate human needs in concrete situations; it proceeds from faith active in love and is independent of parties or ideologies. Charity, as Pope Benedict here explains it, refrains from proselytism; it does not seek to make converts out of its beneficiaries. The Pope does, however, note that pure and generous love, insofar as it offers an outstanding witness to the presence of God, frequently draws people to the Church (DCE, §31).

DCE contains a noteworthy discussion of justice and charity. Justice, the Pope believes, is not a work distinctive to the Church; it is a concern that the Church shares with all members of society. The Church seeks to motivate her own members to pursue justice, but they could and should aspire to be just even if they were not Christians. The formation of just social structures, therefore, is the task of politics; it is not the duty of the Church as such (DCE, §§28–29).

Keeping her distance from politics, the Church does not normally engage her authority in teaching what measures will, in the concrete, advance or impede the cause of justice. To do so would be to confuse the proper tasks of the Church and the State. In her social teaching, the Church lays down certain norms to guide the faithful, but she leaves to secular governments and citizens the task of applying the norms to particular concrete situations. In this way, the Church leaves intact the role of the State and the freedom of the laity who engage in politics.³² But the encyclical is problematic insofar as it lends itself to being interpreted as though charity should be left to the Church and justice to the State. I do not interpret the Pope as implying that the Church may ever be unjust or that the State should refrain from being charitable.

Church and State

On questions of Church and State, Benedict XVI comes surprisingly close to approving the American principle of separation. I say surprisingly, because he has the reputation of being an Augustinian and a conservative. The American system is more Lockean than Augustin-

³² DCE, 28; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia* (1986), §80, accessed May 5, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html.

ian, more liberal than conservative. Pope Benedict frequently quotes Alexis de Tocqueville with approval.³³ He does not hearken back to the nineteenth-century papal statements on the desirability of establishing Catholicism as the religion of the State.

Fundamental to the thought of Benedict is the saying of Jesus, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:21). This saying of the Lord, for Benedict, establishes what was at the time a revolutionary principle: namely, that there are two distinct societies with different spheres of responsibility. The State has responsibility for public order but not for religion; the Church has responsibility to strive to bring people to eternal life but not to regulate their secular affairs (CEP, 160–61). The State has the power to impose civil penalties; the Church has the power to impose only canonical penalties, such as exclusion from the sacraments (CEP, 161).

This dualism of competences means that neither the Church nor the State can exercise absolute control over human existence. In rejecting absolutism, the separation of Church and State protects human freedom. Whenever one of the two societies arrogates to itself both the religious and the secular roles, human freedom is imperiled (CEP, 162).

Sometimes in the past, one of the two powers has sought to perform the work of the other. In the Middle Ages, the Church frequently tried to control civil society, and in the days of absolute monarchies, the State sought to settle religious questions and regulate the religious life of citizens. Addressing contemporary questions, Pope Benedict is critical of the political theology of Johann Baptist Metz and of the liberation theology that has been popular in Latin America. Both of these movements, he believes, overextend the role of the Church in secular matters, which ought to be the responsibility of the State.³⁴ Particularly noxious, in his view, is the political

³³ CEP, 238; Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006) [originally *Werte in Zeiten des Umbruchs: Die Herausforderungen der Zukunft bestehen* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 2005)], 51 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “VTU”); Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: Europe, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, trans. Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2006) [originally *Senza radici: Europa, relativismo, cristianesimo, islam* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2004)], 108–09 (this work will be cited in text and notes as “WR”).

³⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, ed. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America

messianism that liberation theology borrows from the Marxists (CEP, 189–90). The Church should not be depicted as an instrument for ushering in the utopian society of the future. As an Augustinian, Benedict is convinced that the city of man can never become the city of God. Great harm has been done by states seeking to build utopias here on earth, as Lenin and Stalin tried to do within recent memory (CEP, 213).

The dualism of powers should not amount to a divorce. The Church can and should teach moral principles that are binding on the State. Moral education pertains to the doctrine of salvation and, therefore, falls within the Church's competence. In her social teaching, the Church sets certain limits beyond which the State may not go without violating the law of God. For example, the State has no right to enact laws that violate basic human rights, such as the authorization of genocide or infanticide (VTU, 69, 72).

For human rights to be secure, they must not depend upon the discretion of any human authority, even that of the State, as their source and guardian. They must have a transcendent source and guarantor. But the State is not competent to discern the transcendent; Church and State must therefore collaborate. The State needs religion in order to uphold the natural rights and duties that underlie its laws. Religion needs the State to make and enforce laws that effectively secure the rights of the citizens (CEP, 163; VTU, 59).

The State has no competence to pronounce on truth and falsehood in religion. Without adopting any one religion as official or established, the State can properly recognize that certain religions motivate the citizens to perform their civic duties more conscientiously. In order to perform its own task, therefore, the State should encourage the religious life of the citizens. Because the eclipse of the transcendent would be harmful for the State itself, the State would be well advised to allow religious groups to be present on the public scene rather than to allow religion to be weakened by banishment to the sphere of privacy (CEP, 219–20).

Many modern philosophers, influenced no doubt by Kant, hold that the Church has no role in public life and that public life should

Press, 1988) [originally *Eschatologie: Tod und ewiges Leben*, ed. Johann Auer and Joseph Ratzinger, *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik* 9 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1977)], 57–60 (this work includes two appendices written after the appearance of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Letter on "Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology," May 17, 1979).

be regulated by reason alone. But a religion of pure reason, Pope Benedict maintains, would lack specific content and moral power. Revelation enables reason to grasp the implications of the moral law with greater clarity and certitude. In most parts of the world today, no one religion commands a consensus. But even in a situation of religious pluralism, the State can encourage its citizens to find the transcendent through religions that uphold the moral law. As mentioned above, public order is better maintained if citizens have moral principles based on their religious convictions and training (WR, 109).

Conclusion

As a young theologian at the time of Vatican II, Ratzinger displayed a sharp intelligence but still lacked the balance and circumspection shown in his later theology. In his enthusiasm for reform, he was too one-sided in opting for the model of the People of God and in favoring the decentralization effected by local churches and conferences of bishops. In his mature writings, he has corrected these imbalances and has given reliable leadership in “reforming the reform” that has been erroneously attributed to Vatican II. He presents a rich and full-orbed vision of the Church derived from the images of People of God, Mystical Body, sacrament, and communion in confluence. He recognizes the necessity of collaboration among pastoral leaders but balances such collegiality with an emphasis on the personal responsibility of popes and bishops.

He continues to oppose excessive centralization, but at the same time, he supports institutions and symbols that reinforce visible unity. While requiring continuity with the past, he disavows restorationism as unrealistic. Above all, he is concerned to subordinate the Church to Christ her sovereign Lord. Without separating the Church from the world, he strives to keep the Church free from secular entanglements and never tires of recalling her to her specific mission of holiness and salvation. In the end, he presents the Church as a divine mystery that surpasses human comprehension and control. Revering the Church as God’s loving gift in Christ, he instills in his readers a like sense of reverence and loyalty.