

Pope Benedict XVI and Modernity: A Patristic Theologian's Perspective

JAMES LEE
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, TX

Introduction¹

IN A SERIES OF RADIO addresses delivered over the course of winter 1969–1970, Joseph Ratzinger sketched out a picture of the “crisis of the present,” a crisis in which “faith is being shaken to its foundation,” and the future is being set in motion “along roads that lead we know not where.”² According to Ratzinger, the crisis of the present day is, in essence, a long-deferred resumption of modernism.³ Modernism laid the foundation for a particular kind of relativism that remains the chief threat to humanity, for rather than preserving human freedom, relativism actually effectively eliminates it. Left unchecked, relativism will lead to the destruction of the ethical foundations of the past and to the dehumanization of society.

Some thirty-five years later, Cardinal Ratzinger reiterated his stance on the dangers of relativism in a homily delivered *pro eligendo romano pontifice* (“for the election of the Roman Pontiff”) on April

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper, particularly John C. Cavadini, Brian E. Daley, SJ, and Abbot Austin Murphy, OSB. Any errors that might remain are my own.

² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 11. The original German edition appeared as *Glaube und Zukunft* (München: Kösel, 1970).

³ See Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2007), 141; cf. Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 104 (*Glaube und Zukunft*, 92).

18, 2005: “We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism, which does not recognize anything as certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.”⁴ Far from waning, the threat of relativism has grown stronger since Ratzinger’s warning decades ago. In his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI, now Pope Emeritus, continued to draw attention to relativism and its role in the ongoing crisis facing the Church in the modern world.⁵ What is the origin of this crisis? What remedy might a patristic theologian such as Benedict have to offer?

The present study traces Benedict’s genealogy of modernity and his diagnosis of the root cause of the relativism that undermines the foundations of society. It also considers how Benedict draws on patristic theologians, such as Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254) and Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354–430), in order to provide a response to the challenges of the Church in the present time. For Benedict, these Church fathers offer lasting insights that are not relegated to the past, but can be applied today.⁶ A retrieval of patristic thinking does not mean merely winding back the clock. Rather, it is an engagement

⁴ For the text, see *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2007), 22. Nine years earlier, as prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, addressing the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops Conferences of Latin America in Guadalajara Mexico, Ratzinger singled out relativism as the central problem for the faith in the present time; see Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to his Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 25–26. See also Edward T. Oakes, S.J., “Resolving the Relativity Paradox: Pope Benedict XVI and the Challenge of Christological Relativism,” in *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*, ed. John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 87–113.

⁵ Harding Meyer, “Pope Benedict XVI as Theologian, Philosopher of Religion, and Ecumenist,” in *The Pontificate of Benedict XVI: Its Premises and Promises*, ed. William G. Rusch (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 37–38.

⁶ Ratzinger recognizes the significance of the particular historical contexts in which theological work takes place, yet such contexts need not limit the theological insights yielded to the past. He most often addresses such hermeneutical considerations in terms of biblical studies, but such considerations apply to patristic theology, which offers insights that are compatible with modern methodologies. An example of this is *Dei Verbum*, which provides “a synthesis between the lasting insights of patristic theology and the new methodological understanding of the moderns,” as stated in the preface to the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), cited in Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 58.

with the richness of patristic thought that has force in new historical contexts. Thus, we find in the early Christian theologians a renewable resource and a light in the present darkness that leads along a road whose end we can, and indeed must, know.

Modernism

Using Europe as a case study,⁷ Benedict offers a diagnosis for the developing dictatorship of relativism. He identifies two particular periods that resemble ours: 1) modernism, beginning roughly in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, and 2) the age spanning the Enlightenment and the Great Revolution of the West, often referred to in German cultural history as the Rococo.⁸ Both possess a systematic preference for a certain kind of rationality over against tradition. Modernism “bears the greatest resemblance to the present situation in the Church,” and in fact, the contemporary crisis is a continuation of the modernism that “never really came to a head” but was “interrupted” by the changes at the beginning of the twentieth century and the First World War.⁹

Three key principles characterize modernism: 1) belief in progress, 2) the absolutization of the scientific-technical civilization, and 3) the promise of a new humanity of the messianic kingdom.¹⁰ At

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point The Church in the Modern World-Assessment and Forecast*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994). Cf. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 202–22.

⁸ Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 140–41. The Rococo period spanned from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries and was characterized by a curious *mélange* of positive and negative beginnings; see Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 104–05.

⁹ Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 104. According to Rowland, Ratzinger does not see modernity as an entirely new culture, completely severed from Christian roots. Rather, it is entangled with the Christian heritage and proceeds according to what Rowland calls a “double helix” genealogy, with reference to two sets of three intellectual moments in which the Hellenic component of culture was severed from the Christian: (1) the mutation of the doctrine of creation, which can be traced to Giordano Bruno (1545–1600), Galileo (1564–1642), and Martin Luther (1483–1546); (2) the subversion of the Greek strand, which began with Luther, and continued in the de-Hellenization of the nineteenth century with Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), and (3) the anti-European attitude that surfaced in the aftermath of two world wars, in which the synthesis of Greek and Christian thought was seen as no longer having relevance to contemporary non-Christian European cultures (Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 106–11).

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 124.

first glance, these may seem fairly innocuous. However, these three principles, which modernism synthesizes, are the foundation for a relativism that threatens to dehumanize society. How?

In a series of lectures and essays collected under the title *A Turning Point for Europe?*, Benedict identifies the underlying philosophy of the principles of modernism.¹¹ At the root is a particularly pernicious kind of materialism, one that does not simply deny spirit, but rather subjugates spirit to matter in principle and origin.¹² Spirit is reduced to a product of irrational forces: the *Logos*, or “reason,” of creation is replaced by irrationality. “Self-consciousness,” a term used to denote human rationality, is the consequence of the movement of random particles. Along with this primacy of matter over spirit, science becomes an all-embracing worldview with strict rules based on verifiable certainty. The result is scientific positivism, with its correlate in the humanities in the form of sociology. The beginnings of this “human science” can be traced to Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and “the physics of man,” in which humanity becomes the object of social science, such that any knowledge of man arises from a study of the rules that govern society.¹³ The “person” now denotes an individual who is merely a mechanism of socialization.¹⁴ Religion can be reduced to sociology, psychology, or anthropology.¹⁵ This follows

¹¹ Ibid., 83.

¹² Ibid., 83, 104–06. See also Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, esp. 148, 175; Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 181.

¹³ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 86; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 197; Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 13–34. Comte would be followed by Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) in the development of the sociology of religion and the establishment of sociology as a fixed discipline in the modern academy; see Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995). For more on Comte, Durkheim, and other important figures in the development of sociology and religious studies, see J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), esp. 107–30, and 157–77.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 87.

¹⁵ The work of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), German philosopher and sociologist, remains particularly influential in the reduction of religion to anthropology and other social sciences. As Preus notes, “Comte’s vast scenario for the new worship thus unfolds reminiscent of Feuerbach’s thesis that theology is finally revealed to have been anthropology from its very beginning” (*Explaining Religion*, 125). For Benedict’s discussion of theology, see Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 148–59; and *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

from and includes the determinism of the antecedent materialism in which spirit is a “by-product” of matter.¹⁶ This is what Benedict labels the “new metaphysics” of modernity.¹⁷

The net effect of such metaphysics is the delegation of religion and morality entirely to the subjective, private sphere.¹⁸ Ethics is replaced by “utility,”¹⁹ and moral relativism reigns supreme. The goal of progress proceeds without any ethical limitations. God and humanity are made subject to the aim of technological progress. In such a scheme, progress is conceived *against man*, for even man must be sacrificed in the name of a scientific-technical civilization.²⁰

Furthermore, this civilization is predicated upon a mechanistic interpretation of human history.²¹ Under the “physics of man,” there are necessary laws and exact predictions.²² Human freedom is excluded, for modernism as such cannot deal with the genuine freedom of moral agents, but can only see humanity as a set of probabilities subject to social, political, and economic factors. Using the predictions afforded by the science of humanity, one can remodel history in a mechanical way. That is, if one knows and can manipulate the laws governing irrational forces, one can control even rational, or “self-conscious,” subjects. Human history is governed by the remodeling and enlarging of structures.²³

The Marxist system translated these fundamental presuppositions into a political myth of almost irresistible power, following the logical application of the “new metaphysics.”²⁴ Like positivism, Marxism denies the primacy of *Logos*, such that reason or rationality is perceived as generated “dialectically” by matter, a kind of satellite of the post-Hegelian philosophy of history.²⁵ The “truth” of ethics

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 87.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., 49–52, 55.

²⁰ Ibid., 89.

²¹ Ibid., 88.

²² Ibid., 87.

²³ Ibid., 84.

²⁴ Ibid., 88; cf. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 214.

²⁵ This metaphysic leads to the mechanistic interpretation of history (Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 88). Cf. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 151–52: “As a form of materialism, [Marxism] necessarily rejects the primacy of the *Logos*; in the beginning was not reason, but rather the unreasonable; reason, being a product of the development of the irrational, is itself ultimately something irrational. This means that things, being unreasonable, have no truth; instead, truth is something that only man can determine; it is something man-made,

is simply a human postulation.²⁶ The search for truth is replaced by the measurement of utility, the highest good sought by a society that becomes inherently vulnerable to a totalitarian regime.²⁷ True human freedom is eliminated, and along with it the ability to recognize acts of love that are predicated upon genuine freedom. The project of dehumanization progresses indefinitely.

As evident in Europe and elsewhere in the last few centuries, totalitarian states rise, yet they are bound to fall. In the end, Marxism failed precisely because of its exclusion of freedom and justice, a tyranny that could not last.²⁸ However, this was not without great cost. Totalitarianism is a constant threat to a society that synthesizes the principles of modernism. This is the imminent danger of relativism—humanity becomes prey to domination. Benedict also identifies further drastic social consequences of relativism: Religious foundations of the past are abandoned, leading to the deterioration of culture; drugs and terrorism become commonplace in humanity's search for the transcendent;²⁹ and the end result is a society that is

and that means in reality that there is no truth. There are only human constructs, and this necessarily implies the partisan character of reason.”

²⁶ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 88.

²⁷ Concurrent with relativism is the destruction of conscience, which precedes totalitarianism: “The destruction of the conscience is the real prerequisite for totalitarian followers and totalitarian rule. Where conscience prevails, there is a limit to the dominion of human command and human choice. . . . Only the unconditional character of conscience is diametrically opposed to tyranny; only the recognition that conscience is sacrosanct protects man from man's inhumanity and from himself; only its rule guarantees freedom” (Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 160).

²⁸ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 7–9: “Now, at the end of the century, we have experienced the internal disintegration of Marxist ideology together with the structure of power it had created . . . through the internal collapse of a system and its intellectual foundations, that is, through the powers of the spirit and not through military or political force. Herein lie both the hope and the special responsibility of this event.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20: “Drugs are the result of despair in a world experienced as a dungeon of facts, in which man cannot hold out for long. . . . The ‘great journey’ that men attempt in drugs is the perversion of mysticism, the perversion of the human need for infinity, the rejection of the impossibility of transcending immanence, and the attempt to extend the limits of one's own existence into the infinite. The patient and humble adventure of asceticism which, in small steps of ascent, comes closer to the descending God, is replaced by magical power, the magical key of drugs—the ethical and religious path is replaced by technology. Drugs are the pseudo-mysticism of a world that does not believe yet cannot get rid of the soul's yearning for paradise.”

dissatisfied, bored, and aimless.³⁰

In effect, religion is perceived as a narcotic, and it is assigned to the domain of the irrational.³¹ Witchcraft and magic grow in popularity, and new mythologies are formed, as seen in the “new age” movement. The parallels to ancient Gnosticism, in which mythology is linked to an all-embracing interpretation of reality and knowledge becomes redemption, are striking.³² Science and technology, which Benedict affirms are able to contribute greatly to “making the world more human,” can also destroy mankind and the world.³³ They are worshipped, along with other ambiguous powers in history, in the “new paganism” of the enlightened West.³⁴ And with the primacy given to the irrational, a suspicion of reason emerges, leading to a skepticism that become nihilism, and ultimately despair.³⁵ This kind of society easily acquiesces to a political power whose aim is complete control of the masses through manipulation of structures, coupled with the promise of a “perfect humanity.”³⁶

Today we find ourselves suffering the effects of a hopeless positivism.³⁷ The tyranny of moral relativism yields the constant peril of political domination. Although totalitarianism need not take the form of Marxist government, it operates on the premise that human moral effort can be bypassed in favor of mechanisms. As Benedict notes, democracy is not immune to such forms of domination.³⁸ The menace to democracy lies in an unwillingness to accept the

³⁰ Ibid., 15–40.

³¹ On this “new religiosity,” see *ibid.*, 100.

³² Ibid., 101.

³³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (2007), §25.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 159: “Thus worship is directed, not to the only good one, from whom in any case nothing is to be feared, but to the many ambiguous powers who concretely beset our life and with whom one must come to terms. I would call this chronic defection from the one God to the many ambiguous powers in the history of religions paganism in the qualitative sense of the word. In this sense, we are threatened today by a new paganism in the enlightened Western world, but also for this reason in all other cultures too.” Furthermore, Benedict asserts, “it is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love” (*Spe Salvi*, §26).

³⁵ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 93–94, 107–08; cf. 15–40.

³⁶ Ibid., 85: “The presumption that claims one can construct the perfect man and the perfect society with structural formulas is the real core of modern materialism, and this core has been shown to be an error.”

³⁷ Ibid., 102: “Relativism unites easily with positivism; it is indeed positivism’s own philosophical basis.”

³⁸ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 193.

intrinsic imperfection of human society in the attempt to establish a perfect world free of transcendent truth.³⁹ With religion banished to the private sphere, relativism reigns under the guise of “tolerance,”⁴⁰ and the superior force of the ideology of technological progress will destroy the ethical traditions on which the great societies of the past were founded and sustained.

Despite its fatal flaws, Benedict does not discredit modernism entirely. Its failure lies not in the preference for reason, but rather in its degeneration of reason. “In the critique of modernism, one must not reproach its confidence in reason, but only the narrowing of its concept of reason.”⁴¹ Benedict argues that faith in reason or *Logos* is the condition for the possibility of the activity and validity of human rationality.⁴² To subjugate *Logos* to the irrational is to undermine reason and its significance altogether.

As we have seen, at the center of the destruction and the dehumanization of society is a particular kind of relativism predicated upon a materialism that eliminates genuine human freedom. According to Benedict, freedom without any ties is not freedom at all,⁴³ but

³⁹ Ibid.; cf. Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 187–88.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 127: “The realm of religion becomes the genuine place where tolerance reigns: religion’s sacred principle must above all be that it does not step out of this tolerated area of what is merely private and does not lay claim to any rights in public life. But all this means that Europe will export technical skills without ethos, and ultimately against ethos.” Cf. Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 207–25.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 104.

⁴² Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 149: “As a general rule, whenever the Big Bang is seen as the primordial beginning of the universe, the measure and foundation of reality is no longer reason but the irrational; then reason, too, is only a by-product of the irrational that has come about through ‘chance and necessity,’ indeed, by mistake, and to that extent is itself ultimately something irrational. Then there is no way of explaining, either, why one should see in it a permanent standard, a final court of appeal; since reason itself is unreasonable, the irrational in all its forms can lay claim to the same rights alongside reason and with it.” Ratzinger argues that faith is reasonable: “Faith is not the resignation of reason in view of the limits of our knowledge; it is not a retreat into the irrational in view of the dangers of a merely instrumental reason. Faith is not the expression of weariness and flight but is courage to exist and an awakening to the greatness and breadth of what is real. Faith is an act of affirmation; it is based on the power of a new Yes, which becomes possible for man when he is touched by God. It seems to me important, precisely amid the rising resentment against technical rationality, to emphasize clearly the essential reasonableness of faith” (Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 104).

⁴³ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 88–89.

rather slavery—in this instance, slavery to a materialistic worldview that falls into the trap of the promise of unlimited progress in which man is a cog in the survival of the fittest progression.⁴⁴ True freedom demands an ordered existence that necessitates a right order of law. Such law must be based upon transcendent truth. This is the truth that comes from God alone, a truth that transcends human postulation, as in the biblical example of the law given at Mount Sinai.⁴⁵ The people of Israel become free only by becoming a legal community that appeals to supernatural truth. The lack of freedom is the condition of being without law, whereas true freedom is given through the law revealed by God, placing man in right relationship to himself, creation, and the creator.⁴⁶

The remedy for relativism is not freedom from the law, but freedom through the law grounded in transcendent truth.⁴⁷ Truth is the source of justice,⁴⁸ for it arises from a law that is received, rather

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, esp. 53–54, 73; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 175, 186, 240.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 73.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 109–10: “Modern rationalism, on the basis of its methodological self-limitation, declares the irrational to be the origin of the rational. This means that it must declare the basis of freedom to be that which is not free, that is, that freedom, like reason, is a by-product of the self-construction of the world. Against this, faith, which knows the Logos as the beginning, has the primacy of freedom as its starting point. Only the link to the Logos guarantees freedom as the structural principle of what really exists. . . . The philosophy of freedom that comes from faith . . . has no simple formula for the world. Or, to put it more exactly, its formula for the world is the freedom of God’s love, which calls us in Jesus Christ and ever anew shows the path for man’s freedom.”

⁴⁸ Benedict turns to the biblical notion of justice, or *mishpat*, as found in the prophets, especially Isaiah, and the Exodus narrative. In Isaiah 42, the task of the servant of the Lord, a mysterious messianic figure, is to give justice to the world. The Servant stands in parallel to Moses, the Mediator who hands on the Law at Mt. Sinai. Only through this handing on of the Law does the Exodus take on meaning and stability. Liberation comes from the gift of the Law bestowed by God and through the mediation of reason that makes itself accessible to God. Yet freedom never attains complete perfection within history, since man in his historical existence always retains the freedom to refuse the mediation of reason (hence it is impossible to achieve utopia). Jesus is the Suffering Servant who suffers for justice, and in whom the Law and Prophets form a new unity. The Servant does what Moses did, giving the *mishpat* that comes from God and bringing about the reconciliation of freedoms. Justice is now no longer Torah, but precisely *mishpat*; it is an open form of law that

than conceived arbitrarily.⁴⁹ Furthermore, freedom and justice are necessary in order to establish a society of love and true charity. Love defines humanity,⁵⁰ and love alone is able and willing to suffer for truth rather than to discard it in favor of opinion.⁵¹ A dehumanized society is one that seeks to eliminate human freedom, and hence the capacity to love, for the sake of mechanized structures.⁵² Further, such a society places popular favor at the service of the ego over and above transcendent truth, the truth that is the condition for the possibility of freedom, justice, and charity.

must attain the synthesis of universality and particularity, remaining open to the future while adhering to the immovable criterion of truth. Reason and will must attempt to make concrete and put into practice the criterion of God's *mishpat*, thus forming the social responsibility of the Christian. This is not the "Kingdom" itself, but rather directs all toward the Kingdom through justice and love. The *mishpat* of God is the *locus* of Catholic social doctrine (Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 41–77). For more on Benedict's discussion of utopia, see: *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 223–38; Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 184–86.

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 48; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 154–55.

⁵⁰ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 111: "It is not the denial of the person but rather the person's highest act, namely love, that creates that unity for which we yearn from the depths of our existence, as creatures of the triune God." Cf. *ibid.*, 57: "The Church's fidelity to her true nature is shown in her ability to support human beings in the vocation to love, to bring the vocation of love to maturity and to give it concrete form in the life of the community. Through the power of love, the Church must serve the poor, the sick, the lost, the oppressed. She must go into prison, into the suffering of mind and body, as far as the dark way of death. In areas torn by the strife the human race has always experienced and will always experience, the Church must give men the strength to survive and, with the power of forgiveness, awaken the capacity to make a new start."

⁵¹ *Spe Salvi*, §39: "Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity."

⁵² Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 176–77: "The capacity to love, that is, the capacity to wait in patience for what is not under one's own control and to let oneself receive this as a gift, is suffocated by the speedy fulfillments in which I am dependent on no one but in which I am never obliged to emerge from my own self and thus never find the path to my own self. This destruction of the capacity to love gives birth to lethal boredom. It is the poisoning of man. If he were to have his way, man would be destroyed, and the world with him. In this drama, we should not hesitate to oppose the omnipotence of the quantitative and to take up our position on the side of love. This is the decision that the present hour demands of us."

The Church in the Modern World

What is the role of the Church in the healing of a world suffering from the effects of relativism? To begin with, the Church holds to the conviction that the world is rational, not as a causal by-product of irrationality, but rather as created by the divine *Logos*.⁵³ Reason flows from *Logos*, which is the foundation of its being. It is this *Logos* that gives meaning to all things as the principle and cause of creation.⁵⁴ The *Logos* invests human reason with meaning. Further, truth as apprehended by reason is given and revealed by God. The Church receives and accepts this truth, affirming that man is not its constructor, but its receiver.⁵⁵ The Church is ordered to the service of truth. Thus, one of the principal tasks of the Church in the modern world is to expand and broaden the concept of reason in accordance with divine truth.⁵⁶

Moreover, the Church is concerned with moral education.⁵⁷ She purifies the conscience of society in order to prevent its twisting into a “super-ego.”⁵⁸ As such, she is a resource for the state, although she is neither reducible to it nor subservient to it. Religion must not

⁵³ Ibid., 104–11; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 149–59, 175.

⁵⁴ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 109–10; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 148.

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 28–40 and (on justice and education) 54–56; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 155; Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 183.

⁵⁶ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 204; Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 104. Elsewhere Benedict identifies three primary characteristics of the Church, drawing upon the dictum of the fifteenth-century Dominican John Stoykovic of Ragusa, a Western envoy to the Byzantine East: 1) confession of faith, 2) communion in the sacraments, and 3) obedience to the apostolic work which correspond, respectively, to 1) *kerygma*, 2) *leitourgia*, and 3) *diakonia* (Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 98–99). For more on Benedict’s ecclesiology, see Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996); Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005); and Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, trans. Michael Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 54–56; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 193; Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 188–89.

⁵⁸ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 55; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 160, 204. For more on Benedict and conscience, see the helpful overview by D. Vincent Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

become politics, nor politics religion.⁵⁹ The Church remains herself and is defined by her worship of God.⁶⁰ It is in fidelity to this worship that she is able to encourage governors and the governed to ask right questions about the regulation of society.

Patristic Retrieval

In his critique of modernity, Benedict draws heavily on patristic sources, such as Augustine and Origen, whose insights remain strikingly relevant. In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine argues against the *literati*, groups of the learned who had been displaced from Rome after the sack by Alaric and the Goths in 410. Against the *literati*, Augustine asserts that a return to the pagan practices and sacrificial cult of the Romans would not lead to the reestablishment of the Empire.⁶¹ Benedict sees Augustine's polemic primarily as an attack on political religion, which holds the state's good higher than truth.⁶² In seeking the good of the Empire above the transcendent truth of God, justice is lost and the state is reduced to a mere "band of robbers."⁶³

⁵⁹ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 56–60, esp. 57–59: "What the Church has to remember is that, though the sources of law have been entrusted to her safe-keeping, she does not have any specific answers to concrete political questions. She must not make herself out to be the sole possessor of political reason. She points out the paths for reason to follow, and yet reason's own responsibilities remain. . . . All this comes together in the Church's most interior and yet also most human task: the task of making, not just talking about, peace, in deeds of love. No social service of the state can replace Christian love in both its spontaneous and organized forms. In fact, social service totally disintegrates when it loses the inspiration of the love that comes from faith. . . . Consequently, the Church does less, not more, for peace if she abandons her own sphere of faith, education, witness, counsel, prayer, and serving love and changes into an organization for direct political action. In so doing, she blocks access to the wellsprings from which the powers of peace and reconciliation continually flow. Only when she respects her limits is she limitless, and only then can her ministry of love and witness become a call to all men." Cf. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 155–59; Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 105.

⁶⁰ Drawing largely upon Augustine; see Ratzinger *Die Einheit der Nationen: eine Vision der Kirchenväter* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1971), Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969), and Ratzinger's dissertation on Augustine's ecclesiology, published as *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1992); Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 94–105.

⁶¹ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 134–39; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 165–66, 200–08; Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 30–33, 94–105.

⁶² Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 105.

⁶³ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 47, 128; see Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 4.4.

Furthermore, Augustine dismantles the “myth of progress” of the Empire through the demythologization of the Roman Empire and its imperial power.⁶⁴ No state is absolute, no political structure eternal.⁶⁵ History is not the product of irrational forces under the command of the Empire. Rather, history finds its source in God’s providence.⁶⁶ God alone is eternal, and the Church must remain steadfast in her worship of the one true God.⁶⁷ She is a sign of the kingdom to come and a witness to the world, embodied in the martyrs who offer their lives for the glory of God and not the state.⁶⁸ Thus we see in

⁶⁴ See books 4–5 of *De civitate Dei*, in which Augustine’s aim is to de-mystify the Roman Empire and to demonstrate that the Empire ascended to power not because of the pagan gods, but according to divine providence; see esp. 4.1–4, 33, and 5.1, 9–14, 21–23; cf. John Cavadini, “Ideology and Solidarity in Augustine’s *City of God*,” in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 93–110.

⁶⁵ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 146: “The Christian faith destroyed the myth of the divine state, the myth of the earthly paradise or utopian state and of a society without rule.”

⁶⁶ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 4.1–4, 33; 5.1, 9–14, 21–23. Christopher Collins notes that Ratzinger’s view of history is influenced not only by Augustine, but also by Bonaventure: “I would argue that it is important in this regard to recall Ratzinger’s appropriation of Bonaventure’s theology of history. It seems that his understanding of the pneumatological aspect of the church provides a way of accounting for the fact that the church by its very nature is always unfolding in history. The one *Logos* that begets many *semina* in salvation history is a reality that accounts for both continuity and change in the life of the church”; in Christopher Collins, *The Word Made Love: The Dialogical Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 98.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.19: “dum illud constet inter omnes ueraciter pios, neminem sine uera pietate, id est ueri dei uero cultu”; Latin text from *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (hereafter, CCL) (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 1953–), 47:155; English: “Let it be agreed among all who are truly godly that no one can possibly have true virtue without true godliness—that is, without true worship of the true God”; in *The City of God*, trans. William Babcock, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, vol. 1/6 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 172. Cf. Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 30–33.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.18: “nullo modo superbient sancti martyres, tamquam dignum aliquid pro illius patriae participatione fecerint, ubi aeterna est et uera felicitas, si usque ad sui sanguinis effusionem non solum suos fratres, pro quibus fundebatur, uerum et ipsos inimicos, a quibus fundebatur, sicut eis praeceptum est, diligentes caritatis fide et fidei caritate certarunt?” (CCL, 47:152); English: “The holy martyrs will by no means turn proud, as though they had done something worthy of winning participation in that homeland where there is true and eternal happiness, if they did battle, even to the point

Augustine the rejection of the myth of absolute progress found in modernism, as well as the traction needed to reconceive the meaning and course of history as a function of divine providence rather than blind forces.

For Origen of Alexandria, the Church is the new patrimony, the fatherland for Christians who are never at home in this world.⁶⁹ In *De principiis*, Origen shows how the process of eschatological fulfillment has begun, yet is not complete, and the Church experiences a tension between present and future.⁷⁰ The consummation of the world is a gradual process that happens through improvement, correction, and advancement in degrees by different individuals and by the Church as a whole.⁷¹ The kingdom of God is achieved in varying degrees now in individuals, but will only be fulfilled at the end of human history.⁷²

of shedding their blood, in the faith of love and the love of faith—loving not only their brothers for whom their blood was shed, but also, as commanded, the very enemies by whom it was shed” (Babcock, *The City of God*, 169). Cf. *De civitate Dei* 5.19: “et ideo uirtutes habenti magna uirtus est contemnere gloriam, quia contemptus eius in conspectu dei est, iudicio autem non aperitur humano. . . ideo que instat ardens, ut potius ille laudetur, a quo habet homo quidquid in eo iure laudatur” (CCL, 47:155); English: “To one who possesses the virtues, then, it is a great virtue to despise glory, for his contempt for glory is seen by God, even if it is not apparent to human judgment. . . . Therefore he eagerly entreats them to give their praise not to him but rather to the one from whom we receive whatever in us is truly worthy of praise” (Babcock, *The City of God*, 171–72).

⁶⁹ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 251.

⁷⁰ See Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 49.

⁷¹ Origen, *De principiis* 3.6.6: “In hunc ergo statum omnem hanc nostram substantiam corporalem putandum est perducendam, tunc cum omnia restituentur, ut unum sint, et cum deus fuerit omnia in omnibus. Quod tamen non ad subitum fieri sed paulatim et per partes intellegendum est, infinitis et immensis labentibus saeculis, cum sensim et per singulos emendatio fuerit et correctio prosecuta”; in *Sources chrétiennes* (Paris: Cerf, 1978–1984), 268:246; English: “Into this condition, therefore, we must suppose that the entire substance of this body of ours will develop at the time when all things are restored and become one and when ‘God shall be all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28). We must not think, however, that it will happen all of a sudden, but gradually and by degrees, during the lapse of infinite and immeasurable ages, seeing that the improvement and correction will be realized slowly and separately in each individual person”; English translation from *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth, repr. ed. with forward by John Cavadini (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 328.

⁷² Ibid.; cf. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 50.

According to Benedict, both Origen and Augustine understand the world as provisional.⁷³ The Church is a foreigner in a land of exile, a pilgrim people traveling to her heavenly homeland. However, the Church does not exist in isolation or separation from earthly reality. She is not an isolated ghetto of believers. Rather, she serves as an instrument of God. Moreover, this emphasis on the eschatological does not undermine the significance of history, but rather raises its value, for the world must be penetrated by God's Word and transformed by union with the source of truth.⁷⁴ The *Logos* is the principle of truth by which all things were created, and the *Logos* is the true light that shines in the darkness of error and ignorance, enabling all people to see the way to return to God.⁷⁵

For both Origen and Augustine, the worship of the Church is key. In Origen's apologetic work against Celsus, a cultured despiser of Christianity, the worship of Christians distinguishes Christianity from any form of superstition or false doctrine.⁷⁶ Likewise, according to Augustine, true worship is the defining feature of Christianity. In *De civitate Dei*, he develops a rich theology of worship in which Christians offer the daily sacrifice of the Eucharist, which is the perfect sacrifice of Christ made present on the altar, and are thereby transformed and conformed to the son of God as a living sacrifice.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 201; Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 105.

⁷⁴ Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 106. On the nature of Ratzinger's theology of history, Collins rightly observes, "while it has as its source the eternal *Logos* that is *beyond* history, [it] is only really communicated *in* history. It is precisely the primacy of the *Logos*, in fact, that makes it possible to develop a theology of the church that is utterly reliant on history" (*The Word Made Love*, 101).

⁷⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.67–68.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, esp. 6.1–24, 8.1–14.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.6. Augustine cites Rom 12:1–2, in which Paul exhorts Christians to be offered as a "living sacrifice," by the mercy of God, and not to be "conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewal of your mind" (RSV-CE). Christians are thus conformed to Christ, who is the mercy of God made flesh, such that they become living "vessels of mercy" (*vasa misericordiae*; cf. *De civitate Dei* 21.24, in *CCL*, 48:790), transformed and configured to Christ the head. As the body of Christ, Christians are offered on the altar; cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.6: "hoc est sacrificium christianorum: multi unum corpus in christo. quod etiam sacramento altaris fidelibus noto frequentat ecclesia, ubi ei demonstratur, quod in ea re, quam offert, ipsa offeratur" (*CCL*, 47:279); English: "This is the sacrifice of Christians: *although many, one body in Christ*. And this is the sacrifice that the Church continually

The Church is defined by Christ's self-gift on the Cross, and her members are configured to him as a sacrifice in the celebration of the sacraments.⁷⁸ The Church undergoes transformation as a sign of the final transformation to come, when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).⁷⁹

Benedict follows Augustine and Origen in his emphasis on worship and eschatology.⁸⁰ Further, Benedict affirms the *kerygmatic* mission of the Church in the proclamation of the transcendent truth

celebrates in the sacrament of the altar (which is well known to the faithful), where it is made plain to her that, in the offering she makes, she herself is offered" (Babcock, *The City of God*, 312).

⁷⁸ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.20: "unde uerus ille mediator, in quantum formam serui accipiens mediator effectus est dei et hominum, homo christus iesus, cum in forma dei sacrificium cum patre sumat, cum quo et unus deus est, tamen in forma serui sacrificium maluit esse quam sumere, ne uel hac occasione quisquam existimaret cuilibet sacrificandum esse creaturae. per hoc et sacerdos est, ipse offerens, ipse et oblatio. cuius rei sacramentum cotidianum esse uoluit ecclesiae sacrificium, quae cum ipsius capitis corpus sit, se ipsam per ipsum discit offerre. huius ueri sacrificii multiplicia uaria que signa erant sacrificia prisca sanctorum, cum hoc unum per multa figuraretur, tamquam uerbis multis res una diceretur, ut sine fastidio multum commendaretur. huic summo uero que sacrificio cuncta sacrificia falsa cesserunt" (CCL, 47:294); English: "In the form of God, then, the true mediator—since, by taking the form of a servant, he became the mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ—receives sacrifice together with the Father, with whom he is one God. In the form of a servant, however, he chose to be a sacrifice rather than to receive sacrifice, and he did so in order to keep anyone from thinking that sacrifice should be offered, even in this case, to any creature at all. At the same time, he is also the priest, himself making the offering as well as himself being the offering. And he wanted the sacrifice offered by the Church to be a daily sacrament of his sacrifice, in which the Church, since it is the body of which he is the head, learns to offer its very self through him. The sacrifices of the saints of old were the manifold and varied signs of this true sacrifice, for this one sacrifice was prefigured by many, just as one thing may be expressed by a variety of words, in order to recommend it highly but not monotonously. To this supreme and true sacrifice all false sacrifices have now given way" (Babcock, *The City of God*, 328).

⁷⁹ *De civitate Dei* 22.30. On Ratzinger's appropriation of Augustine's eschatology, see Patrick J. Fletcher, *Resurrection Realism: Ratzinger the Augustinian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014); cf. Cyril O'Regan, "Benedict the Augustinian," in *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*, 21–60.

⁸⁰ O'Regan, "Benedict the Augustinian," 46–50; Geoffrey Wainwright, "A Remedy for Relativism: The Cosmic, Historical, and Eschatological Dimensions of the Liturgy according to the Theologian Joseph Ratzinger," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5.2 (2007): 403–30; Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 177.

of God.⁸¹ This truth alone serves as the foundation for justice and freedom. The promotion of justice through purified discourse in the search for the common good is a profound concern for the Church and will demand sacrifice, although as Benedict makes clear it is clear that “a just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church.”⁸² The Church must be willing to suffer for the sake of truth, for this is a witness of love.

Ultimately, love in truth (*caritas in veritate*) is the remedy for a dehumanized society.⁸³ Like truth, love is first and foremost a gift.⁸⁴ Modern man is bent on rejecting this gift in the name of progress. The mechanization of history eliminates human freedom and effectively destroys the capacity to love.⁸⁵

The encyclicals of Benedict’s papacy are directed at establishing the proper conditions for a just society so as to foster acts of charity. Benedict emphasizes the capacity to suffer out of love, for this is what constitutes humanity fundamentally. As he declares in *Spe Salvi*, “to suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are fundamental elements of humanity, and

⁸¹ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 62–77; Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 200; de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 217–30.

⁸² *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), §28: “The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.” Cf. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 57–59.

⁸³ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 57. This emphasis upon love as the primary vocation of the Church is perhaps the reason for Benedict’s reversing of the sequence of Paul’s dictum *veritas in caritate* (Eph 4:15) for the title of his third encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. Benedict is concerned that charity has been “misconstrued and emptied of meaning” (*Caritas in Veritate*, §2). “Love—*caritas*—is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth” (ibid., §1). Only in transcendent truth does charity “*shine forth*, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. . . . Truth, in fact, is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos*, and hence communication and communion” (ibid., §3–4).

⁸⁴ Ratzinger, *A Turning Point*, 176–77.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

to abandon them would destroy man himself.”⁸⁶ Man is not alone in his suffering, for God became man in the person of Jesus Christ in order to suffer with him “in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood. . . . Hence, in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with* us. . . . *Con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God’s compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises.”⁸⁷ Like Augustine, Benedict appeals to the martyrs, “who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way—day after day. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day—knowing that this is how we live life to the full. Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity.”⁸⁸

Beneath this appeal is a deep theology of redemptive suffering in which acts of sacrifice and true love are never lost, but are taken up in the suffering of Christ, the Redeemer.⁸⁹ Christ offers the perfect

⁸⁶ *Spe Salvi*, §39. See also §38: “The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through ‘com-passion’ is a cruel and inhuman society. . . . Furthermore, the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life itself becomes a lie. In the end, even the ‘yes’ to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my ‘I,’ in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of myself, for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.”

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, §39.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ See *Spe Salvi*, §35–40; see also *Eschatology*, in which Benedict develops a theology of redemptive suffering based on Christ’s descent to *Sheol* on Good Friday. Suffering the dark night of the soul in faith is a participation in Jesus’ descent to the dead. “Hell” takes on a completely new meaning and form, such that, for the saints, “‘Hell’ is not so much a threat to be hurled at other people but a challenge . . . to suffer in the dark night of faith, to experience communion with Christ in solidarity with his descent into the Night. One draws near to the Lord’s radiance by sharing his darkness. One serves the salvation of the world by leaving one’s own salvation behind for the sake of others. In such piety, nothing of the dreadful reality of Hell is denied. Hell is so real that it reaches right into the existence of the saints. Hope can take it on, only if one shares in the suffering of Hell’s night by the side of the One who came

act of sacrifice and praise to the Father on the Cross,⁹⁰ to which all sufferings may be joined for the benefit of souls.⁹¹ In this way, salvation is always communal, never simply individual.⁹² Faith must not focus solely on the salvation of the individual believer's soul, so as to become another object of utility for the ego. This is a form of spiritual pride. Redemptive suffering offered out of love of God and neighbor leads one outside of oneself and guards against a kind of complacency that leads to destruction. What might this complacency look like? Here Augustine again proves insightful.

In *De civitate Dei*, the bishop of Hippo takes on the best, not merely the worst, representatives of the Roman Empire, as evident in books 5 and 8. These books are often perceived as Augustine's tacit appreciation of the virtues (or excellences) of the ideal citizens and philos-

to transform our night by his suffering. . . . The idea of mercy . . . must not become a theory. Rather, it is the prayer of suffering, hopeful faith" (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 217–18). By offering their suffering in union with Christ, the saints serve "the salvation of the world." Their suffering is efficacious for the salvation of souls. The saints endure "Hell" in this life that others may enjoy Heaven (cf. *Spe Salvi*, §45). This is how the saints will judge with Christ; it is a judgment of love through intercession, since judgment involves the whole Christ (*totus Christus*)—that is, Christ the Head and the members of his body, the Church: "The fact that the saints will judge means that encounter with Christ is encounter with his whole body. I come face to face with my own guilt vis-à-vis the suffering members of that body as well as with the forgiving love which the body derives from Christ its Head. . . . [I]ntercession is the one truly fundamental element in their 'judging.' Through their exercising of such judgment they belong, as people who both pray and save, to the doctrine of Purgatory and to the Christian practice which goes with it. As Charles Péguy so beautifully put it, 'J'espère en toi pour moi.' 'I hope in you for me'" (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 232).

⁹⁰ Following Augustine; cf. *De civitate Dei* 10.6, 10.20, 10.22.

⁹¹ *Spe Salvi*, §39–40.

⁹² Ibid., §§13–28, 42–44; see also Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 237–38: "Heaven will only be complete when all the members of the Lord's body are gathered in. . . . The perfecting of the Lord's body in the *pleroma* of the 'whole Christ' brings heaven to its true cosmic completion. Let us say it once more before we end: the individual's salvation is whole and entire only when the salvation of the cosmos and all the elect has come to full fruition. For the redeemed are not simply adjacent to each other in heaven. Rather, in their being together as the one Christ, they *are* heaven. In that moment, the whole creation will become song. It will be a single act in which, forgetful of self, the individual will break through the limits of being into the whole, and the whole take up its dwelling in the individual. It will be joy in which all questioning is resolved and satisfied."

ophers of the Empire.⁹³ Indeed, he seems to concede the excellence of those such as Cato, who sought something truly praiseworthy—namely justice—while doing so out of the lust for praise and glory.⁹⁴

Augustine goes on to extol the excellences of heroes such as Torquatus, Regulus, Valerius, and Cincinnatus, who provide models of honor, courage, justice, and poverty.⁹⁵ Yet these men ultimately fall short due to the lust for glory.⁹⁶ They serve not so much as models of emulation, but as warning signs. Augustine is warning Christians against the kind of Roman triumphalism that leads to destruction.⁹⁷ These heroes are living examples of the pathology of pride. They have performed deeds of excellence, yet out of the insatiable desire for glory and praise. Christians, on the other hand, must seek the glory of God as living witnesses of God's mercy, doing all things out of love for God and for the building up of the Church rather than for

⁹³ Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.12; the Latin *virtus* may be translated as “excellence,” which denotes a kind of power.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.12–14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.13, 5.17–20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.18–19: “quo modo se audebit extollere de uoluntaria paupertate christianus, ut in huius uitae peregrinatione expeditior ambulet uiam, quae perducit ad patriam, ubi uerae diuitiae deus ipse est, cum audiat uel legat ualerium, qui in suo defunctus est consulatu, usque adeo fuisse pauperem, ut nummis a populo conlatis eius sepultura curaretur? audiat uel legat quintium cincinnatum, cum quattuor iugera possideret et ea suis manibus coleret, ab aratro esse adductum, ut dictator fieret . . . nonne omnes christiani, qui excellentiore proposito diuitias suas communes faciunt . . . intellegunt se nulla ob hoc uentilari oportere iactantia, id faciendo pro obtinenda societate angelorum, cum paene tale aliquid illi fecerint pro conseruanda gloria romanorum?” (*CCL*, 47:153–55); English: “How will a Christian dare to take pride in choosing voluntary poverty in order to walk less encumbered, during the pilgrimage of this life, on the path that leads to the homeland where God himself is the true wealth? How will he dare to do this, that is, when he hears or reads that Lucius Valerius, who died while holding the office of consul, was so poor that his burial had to be paid for by public subscription? Or when he hears or reads that Quintius Cincinnatus, when he owned less than two acres of land and was tilling them with his own hands, was taken from the plow to be made dictator? . . . There are Christians who put their riches into a common holding with a more noble purpose. . . . But do they not all understand that they have no reason to swell with pride on this account? They do this, after all, to obtain a place in the company of the angels, while those Romans did something very similar for no greater reason than to preserve the glory of Rome” (Babcock, *The City of God*, 170).

the building up of one's ego.⁹⁸

Benedict follows Augustine in the warning to guard against pride. In the pathology of pride, truth is subordinated to opinion. This yields a kind of complacency in the form of an inability to engage in self-criticism.⁹⁹ One becomes the slave of opinion and can no longer see in the proper perspective. This amounts to a denial of the need for the transcendent truth that comes from God alone, generating the myth of self-sufficiency that Augustine so adamantly seeks to unveil.

Complacency has its effects on both the individual and institutional levels of society: the individual is a slave to the demands of the imperial machine; the institution becomes defined by the secular powers that assign its value according to its utility; and society becomes susceptible to manipulation by a "band of robbers." This complacency, in Augustine's estimation, is the reason for the fall of the Roman Empire. For Benedict, the modern world faces the same inclination towards complacency, and a society ruled by relativism is subject to domination by totalitarian regimes. In today's world, as in Augustine's time, the sources of social downfall are found in the lust for praise, whereas the sources of social renewal are found in humility and in the recognition of the transcendent truth of God. This applies not only for the common citizen but also for those in positions of political power.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 5.19: "quantumlibet autem laudetur atque praedicetur uirtus, quae sine uera pietate seruit hominum gloriae, nequaquam sanctorum exiguis initiis comparanda est, quorum spes posita est in gratia et misericordia ueri dei" (CCL, 47:156); English: "And so, no matter how much we may praise and proclaim the virtue which, lacking true godliness, serves the end of human glory, it is in no way to be compared with even the tiniest first steps of the saints, who have put their hope in the grace and mercy of the true God" (Babcock, *The City of God*, 173).

⁹⁹ On self-criticism and the role of Christianity in politics, see Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 200.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.24: "sed felices eos dicimus, si iuste imperant, si inter linguas sublimiter honorantium et obsequia nimis humiliter salutantium non extolluntur, et se homines esse meminerunt; si suam potestatem ad dei cultum maxime dilatandum maiestati eius famulam faciunt; si deum timent diligunt colunt" (CCL, 47:160); English: "Rather, we call Christian emperors happy if they rule justly; if they do not swell with pride among the voices of those who honor them too highly and the obsequiousness of those who acclaim them too humbly, but remember that they are only human beings; if they make their power the servant of God's majesty, using it to spread the worship of God as much as possible; if they fear, love and worship God" (Babcock, *The City of God*, 178).

Conclusion

In the end, Benedict's critique of modernity stands as a warning, not merely for secular society, but also for the Church. It is a clarion call against the complacency that arises in the search for the satisfaction of the ego above the search for truth and the common good. In whatever historical circumstances, the Church would do well to heed the warning of Benedict, echoing patristic figures such as Augustine and Origen, against the lust for praise and the exaltation of opinion over truth. A society that is based upon relativism independent of the transcendent truth of God will inevitably dehumanize itself. Further, in the modern world, the desire for prestige over truth and the reluctance to suffer for the sake of deeply held religious convictions are signs of the disintegration of society. When a society refuses to uphold justice for all of its members, particularly its weakest, it becomes grist for the mill of the new Empire, and subservient to the next band of robbers. Its identity will be defined by the state, and it will be sacrificed in the name of empty progress.

The Church, however, must be defined by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, which stands as a sign of contradiction to world. Christ's sacrifice, offered in perfect freedom and humble love, must penetrate and transform each and every aspect of the Church. According to Benedict, in today's world, the Church must be herself. By offering true worship, she participates in the sacrifice of Christ, and her members are transformed and configured according to the mercy and compassion of the *Logos* made flesh. By receiving and proclaiming divine truth, the Church broadens and expands rational discourse. She forms the hearts and minds of the populace, purifies its conscience, and guides significant decisions that have moral purchase in both civic and private life. Finally, it is only through authentic humility, as revealed in and administered by the God-man, that renewal may begin for a society in crisis. This is the way to the heavenly homeland, the way of the humble Mediator. Christ is the light that shines in the midst of the present darkness, and as God and man, Christ provides true hope for a dehumanized society to recover its humanity. For, as Benedict proclaims: "Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us 'to the end,' until all 'is accomplished' (John 13:1, 19:30)."¹⁰¹ N-V

¹⁰¹ *Spe Salvi*, §27.

