

On the Political Order

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ON THE EVE OF THE CONCLAVE in which he was elected, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger evoked the image of the Church as a ship battered on every side in a storm-tossed sea.¹ For eight years near the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ratzinger was that barque's captain. Few waves have rocked the Church more than the political waves of modernity and the rejection of the very concept of a sacral society in which religion and political authority are joined as one body under God. It therefore seems particularly important to inquire into the political views of a thinker who spent much of his life in the front lines of the Church's broader struggle with secularism and its concomitant denials of the transcendent. Indeed, defining the Church's role in the public square has become particularly acute in light of Ratzinger's warning in the same homily of an encroaching "dictatorship of relativism."

Benedict's pontificate was a liminal one: both in his being the first Pontiff to be elected in Christianity's third millennium and in his being the first elected after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the reunification of Europe. In much the same way that John Paul II's experience of Russia-dominated Poland offered unique qualifications to lead the Church during its struggle with communism, so Benedict seemed well suited for the struggle with the secular relativism of liberal democracies. His intellectual sojourn through five German

¹ *Homily of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals, Mass "Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice,"* Vatican Basilica, Monday, April 18, 2005, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

universities, in addition to his guardianship of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, gave him an insider's knowledge of the modern West.

Ratzinger speaks of modern secularization as a process that destroyed "the spiritual framework" and "the interpretation of history" that medieval and early modern Christendom had provided. As he says:

This process had a major impact on both politics and ideals. In terms of ideals, there was a rejection of the sacred foundation both of history and of the state. History was no longer measured on the basis of an idea of God that had preceded and molded it. The state came to be understood in purely secular terms, as grounded in rationalism and the will of the citizens.²

In the secular state, Ratzinger explains, the divine legitimation of the political element is abandoned and excluded as mythological: "God is a private question that does not belong to the public sphere or the democratic formation of the public will . . . Public life came to be considered the domain of reason alone, which had no place for a seemingly unknowable God" (WR, 62). In such a state, religion and faith are relegated to the realm of sentiment opposed to reason; God thus ceases to be relevant to public life.

For Benedict, the political question had been framed in light of the Second Vatican Council's concession to modern liberal democracy that "the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields." Yet the Council insisted in the very next sentence that "both are devoted to the personal vocation of man."³ In the post-conciliar Church, and in the face of increasingly secular societies, how ought the Church be related to the "powers that be" in the view of this *peritus* of the Council who became Pope? What is the personal vocation of man that unifies autonomous communities? Ratzinger had argued that

² Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: Europe, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, trans. Michael F. Moore, with foreword by George Weigel (New York: Basic Books, 2006) [originally *Senza radici: Europa, relativismo, cristianesimo, islam* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2004)]. This work will be cited parenthetically in text below as WR).

³ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today (1965), §76, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J., 2 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 2: 1069–135.

Gaudium et Spes is a kind of “*summa* of Christian anthropology and of the central problems of the Christian ethos.”⁴ How are the Christian view of man and the Christian ethos to find their place in modern political orders? This essay will examine these questions, while acknowledging that the relation between church and state cannot be isolated from the broader relations between church and society and faith and culture. It will survey Benedict’s thought over the course of his career and then place it in the context of the current debate.

In general, Benedict carves out a position between two extremes for configuring the relationship between religious bodies and the state. The first, called the “confessional state,” prevailed through much of Christianity after the conversion of Constantine. In it, church and state are explicitly united, even though a division of labor usually obtains. Whether the state or the church was subordinate to its partner varied. The medieval West subordinated the king and polity to the Church, whereas the east relegated the Church to the hegemony of the emperor and the state. A second extreme is the secularism that has dominated continental traditions of liberalism since the Enlightenment. In it, the explicitly secular (*laïque*) state assiduously avoids benefiting religious organizations in any way.⁵

“Theology and the Church’s Political Stance” (1980)

A good place to begin considering Ratzinger’s view of church–state relations is the article “Theology and the Church’s Political Stance” published in the German periodical *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift* and in the Italian version of *Communio*. Here he argues that Christianity opened a completely new chapter in church–state relations with Christ’s teaching in Matthew 22:21, “Render unto Caesar.”⁶

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, Joseph Ratzinger, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) [originally *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie* (Munich: Wewel, 1982)], 379.

⁵ See, for example, article 1 of the *Constitution* of the Fifth Republic (October 4, 1958): “La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique, et social,” accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958/texte-integral-de-la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958-en-vigueur.5074.html>.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Theology and the Church’s Political Stance,” in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell (New York: Crossroad, 1988) [originally *Kirche, Ökumene und Politik* (Cinisello

“Until then,” he says, “the general rule was that politics itself was the sacral.”⁷ Ratzinger thinks that Christianity introduced a sharp break with ancient politics, which conceived the sacred and the secular as one. Indeed, the gods were the provident protectors of the local city. Without their life-sustaining aid, the city was lost. Ratzinger sees Christianity as the origin of a dualistic understanding of the political and religious orders of society:

It is precisely this separation of the authority of the state and sacral authority, the new dualism that this contains, that represents the origin and the permanent foundation of the western idea of freedom. From now on there are two societies related to each other but not identical to each other, neither of which had this character of totality.⁸

Ratzinger understands Jesus to have founded a new community distinct from any particular society or political order, and it was meant to remain distinct. Indeed, Ratzinger understands the Church to be a universal society transcending all others.

Furthermore, he explains that the balance between these two communities has often been disturbed, especially during the Middle Ages and early modern era. But it is not just that an imbalance obtained during these periods; the blending of the two communities “falsified the faith’s claim to truth and turned it into a compulsion so that it became a caricature of what was really intended” (CEP, 161). These are harsh words for medieval Christendom.

Yet, even in “the darkest periods,” as Ratzinger calls them, the faith preserved what he refers to as a “pattern of freedom.” What he seems to mean by this expression is that the Christian faith tradi-

Balsamo: Edizione Paoline, 1987)], 152–64, at 161; originally published in *Internationale katolische Zeitschrift* 9 (1980): 425–34, and *Communio* [Italian edition] 53 (1980): 60–71, and reprinted in *Wem nützt die Wissenschaft?* ed. L. S. Schulz (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1981), 106–17. *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* will be cited as “CEP” in both text and notes.

⁷ Ibid. Cf. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Law, Religion and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956) [originally *La cité antique: étude sur le culte, le droit, et les institutions de la Grèce et Rome* (Paris: Durand, 1864)].

⁸ Ratzinger, “Theology and the Church’s Political Stance,” 161. Cf. Robert A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Theology in the Thought of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

tionally maintains the inviolability of the conscience. It does so by bringing the believer into a relationship with God. In other words, through his entry into the Church, the Christian enters into a divine communion. On this sacred communion, no merely earthly authority dare tread. The believer lives in intimacy with his God; he thus possesses a citizenship no human authority can take away and a freedom to obey the moral law that such authority cannot violate. Moreover, the Christian faith introduces a holy authority that protects “the pattern of freedom presented in the fundamental evidences of the faith.” Faith presents a criterion to which the conscience can appeal. Hence, no worldly rule may call black what sacred rule calls white, or vice versa. This dichotomy sets up the Church as a publicly recognized guardian of the moral law (CEP,162).

From this same pattern of freedom established by Christian teaching emerged the impulse toward the dissolution of total authority. Ratzinger makes the claim that the modern idea of freedom cannot be separated from its Christian environment and transplanted into any other system. For this reason, he makes incisive comments about how the attempt to graft Western freedom onto Islamic societies “misunderstands the internal logic of Islam” and is doomed to failure. He claims, for instance, that “the construction of society in Islam is theocratic and therefore monist and not dualist.” Dualism, which is the precondition for freedom, presupposes for its part the logic of the Christian thing” (ibid.). Without this Christian dualism, Ratzinger thinks that freedom becomes nearly impossible.

Furthermore, even though God is the supreme arbiter of the moral law and the Church is the moral law’s guardian, the Church, as a voluntary society, should not use the state to enforce its moral law. Ratzinger writes:

This community in its turn, the Church, understands itself as a final moral authority which however depends on voluntary adherence and is entitled only to spiritual but not to civil penalties, precisely because it does not have the status the state has of being accepted by all as something given in advance.” (ibid.)

In his view, the Church renounces coercive force by its very nature as a voluntary society. By contrast, however, he is not advocating the dominance of the state. Without the Church, freedom is extinguished, “because there the state once again claims completely for itself the justification of morality” (ibid.). In post-Christian societies, this prob-

lem becomes particularly acute, because in them the total state does not take the form of a sacral authority, but of an ideological authority, which is far more dangerous. The ideological state, without a publicly recognized authority of conscience, becomes totalitarian.

In short, the Church must work to achieve and maintain a dualistic balance between itself and the secular authority such that freedom is preserved. “Hence the Church must make claims and demands on public law,” argues the Pontiff, “and cannot simply retreat into the private sphere. Hence it must also take care on the other hand that Church and state remain separated and that belonging to the Church clearly retains its voluntary character” (CEP, 163).

“A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?” (1988)

In an article on the indispensability of Christianity, Ratzinger clarifies how he understands the Church’s social role. It is not only indispensable; it is unique. The Church ought not content itself with being one voice among many “social forces,” nor with being merely a voice expressing humanity’s religious need.⁹ On the contrary, the Church is “a public and publicly relevant authority.” Ratzinger thus agrees with Robert Spaemann that the Church must understand itself “as the place of an absolute public validity surpassing the state under the legitimizing claim of God.” The Church is to advance a claim to public validity without, however, impairing the state’s pluralism and religious tolerance. As Ratzinger puts it, “The state must recognize that a basic framework of values with a Christian foundation is the precondition for its existence” (CEP, 219). The Church thus constitutes an indispensable authority in societies that would be free.

Address to Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques (1992)

Ratzinger was inducted into the French Academy, taking the seat of the eminent Russian physicist and Soviet dissident Andrei Sacharov (1921–1989). Following the Academy’s long-standing custom, Ratzinger gave a speech praising his predecessor. In it, he treats political questions at

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?: The Indispensability of Christianity in the Modern Age,” in CEP, 204–20, at 218; originally published in *Pro fide et justitia: Festschrift Kardinal Casaroli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Schambeck (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1984), 747–61, and reprinted in *Das europäische Erbe und seine christliche Zukunft*, ed. Nikolaus Lobkowitz (Cologne: J. P. Bachem, 1985), 20–35.

some length. He says that the question before the free world today is the one Sacharov faced: How are we to assume our moral responsibility? “Liberty only preserves its dignity if it remains connected to its foundation and ethical mission.”¹⁰ A liberty of simply satisfying one’s needs is not a true human liberty; it is the liberty of an animal. Democracy resting simply on the rule of the majority cannot avoid a dogmatism that destroys itself.

Ratzinger’s thesis is an old one: democracy conceived as simply rule of the majority leads to the tyranny of the mob. In order to preserve itself, democracy must be constituted by a freedom ordered by law, right, and goodness. Ratzinger inquires into how we are to give law and goodness the force that they need against the naiveté and cynicism of our time. Here he appeals to Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) which, he says, always impressed him. The Frenchman sees that an essential condition of ordered liberty is a moral conviction nourished in America by Protestant Christianity. “For a culture and a nation to cut itself off from the great ethical and religious forces of its history,” says Ratzinger, “is to commit suicide.” The Christian Church thus must exercise a vital public mission in the world today.

Address to Italian President (2005)

In 2005, when he became pope, Benedict continued to speak about the appropriate role that the Church ought to hold in society. During a visit to the Italian President Carlo Ciampi, he reaffirmed the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* §76, that the Church and state are autonomous and independent. What binds them together is their commitment to a common project of seeking the welfare of the human person, though in different ways. The Pope argues that, when the message of Christ the Savior is heard, “the civil community also becomes more responsible and attentive to the needs of the common good and shows greater solidarity with the poor, the abandoned and the marginalized.”¹¹ The Church carries out “a humanizing service” by her teachings on moral values. On another occasion in Italy shortly thereafter, Benedict also

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Réponse, Installation du Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger comme associé étranger*, November 6, 1992, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.asmp.fr/fiches_academiciens/textacad/ratzinger/installation_ratzinger.pdf.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, “Address to the President of the Italian Republic,” June 24, 2005, Zenit.org, July 1, 2005; accessed May 4, 2017, <https://zenit.org/articles/benedict-xvi-s-address-to-president-of-italy>.

quotes John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centissimus Annus*, §46: "a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism."¹² Although room exists for a healthy secularism of the state, this does not mean that the Church may be excluded from its role as teacher of morals.

Weekly Audience (2005)

At a weekly audience in September 2005, Benedict discussed the unique role that the Church holds in society. "At the very center of social life," he teaches, "there must be . . . a presence that evokes the mystery of the transcendent God."¹³ The Pope returns frequently to the Church's sacramental role. Without it, society risks being utterly secularized, which in turn involves the threat of authentic freedom's being lost to relativism. He does not think that the Church's central role in social life involves any special privileges, "but only the legitimate conditions of freedom and action to fulfill its mission." In return for this freedom, the Church, he says, will work to safeguard the dignity of every person and to work for the common good.

"The Soul of Europe" (2005)

In an article published after becoming pope but written before, Benedict discusses three models for how church–state relations can work in practice: one is the secular model, in which the state is strictly separated from any religious bodies; the second is the state–church model found in liberal Protestantism in Germany and northern Europe; and the third model is socialism, which in turn took two paths—either democratic socialism or totalitarianism. Benedict praises democratic socialism for providing a significant public role to churches that counterbalances the extremes of the secular and state–Church models.¹⁴ Benedict thinks that the American political order falls somewhere between the secular and state–church model. It divides church and state without denying

¹² Benedict XVI, "Address to the Italian Christian Workers' Association (A.C.L.I.)," Clementine Hall, January 27, 2006, accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060127_acll.html.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Weekly Audience, Wednesday, September 14, 2005, accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20050914.html (quotation translation taken from <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-stresses-need-for-god-s-presence-in-social-life>, accessed May 4, 2017).

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, "The Soul of Europe," *Inside the Vatican*, July 2005: 13–14.

churches an important public weight, as he puts it.¹⁵ Democracies need the Church, because without its contribution, they lose the very freedom that they are meant to insure. The underlying value of human dignity precedes any human political act.¹⁶

Particularly interesting in this text is Benedict's refusal to advocate a bland religious indifferentism that would regard all religions as equally good signs of transcendence. He clearly thinks that the Roman Catholic Church must preach its fundamental doctrines without embarrassment or attenuation. This robust Catholicism may mean that certain partially committed Catholics may leave. Indeed, the Church may grow smaller, even as committed Catholics can give witness in modern society to the parable of the mustard seed. Numbers are not what matters, urges Benedict, who reminds us of the transformative power of the unvarnished Gospel. It gives an antidote to relativism, the pandemic disease that imperils the very existence of liberal democracies. Ironically, to a large extent, it is the effect of the freedom that is liberalism's cornerstone. Although originally constructed to insure religious tolerance, liberalism has often led to an indifferentism that denies both universal truth claims and religion's public role.¹⁷

Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom (2010)

Benedict's state visit to the United Kingdom was arguably the single most important of his papacy. Given the turbulent history of England and the Holy See in the reign of Henry VIII, any encounter between these two heads of government would be historic. The pontiff used this opportunity to enter into a carefully considered dialogue with modern secular politics. That he chose the country whose defection from the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century secured the eventual and enduring success of the Protestant Reformation is also significant. For these reasons, the two major addresses of this journey make required study for anyone wishing to understand Benedict's own political thought.

On September 16, 2010, the Pope was greeted by Queen Elizabeth II at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, the monarch's official residence in Scotland. In his opening remarks, Benedict sets the

¹⁵ Ibid, 13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ For Benedict's treatment of the political order in his encyclicals, see the other articles in this present issue of *Nova et Vetera* (English).

stage for his entire visit. He recalls the Christian roots of the Queen's realm, noting that "the monarchs of England and Scotland have been Christians from very early times" and that saints like Edward the Confessor and Margaret of Scotland shine lustrously.¹⁸ Benedict here follows a strategy employed by his predecessor. When making an apostolic journey, John Paul II would remind the hosts of the Christian identity of the local culture, recall the historic bonds between the Church and the local society, and reaffirm the transformative force for good of Christianity in culture. Accordingly, Benedict proceeds to cite William Wilberforce's work to end the international slave trade, Florence Nightengale's service to the poor and sick, and Cardinal Newman's eloquent inspiration to his fellow citizens. Finally, he cites at length Christian pastors "who spoke the truth in love" when they stood against Nazi tyranny. Benedict summarizes Christianity's historical role with clarity:

As we reflect on the sobering lessons of atheist extremism of the twentieth century let us never forget how the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society and thus to a reductive vision of the person and his destiny.¹⁹

In continuing, Benedict reminds the Queen that her government and people have been shapers of ideas that have had an impact far beyond the British Isles.

On the following day, the Pope addressed members of Parliament and other civil and religious leaders in Westminster Hall. In his talk, Benedict explicitly takes up "the perennial question of the relationship of what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God."²⁰ He

¹⁸ "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Audience with HM The Queen and State Reception," Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, September 16, 2010, *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 17, 2010, 8, accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100916_incontro-autorita.html. Here he is quoting his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 101 (2009): 641–709], §29.

¹⁹ https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100916_incontro-autorita.html (originally published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 17, 2010, 8).

²⁰ "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Meeting with Representatives of British Society, Including the Diplomatic Corps, Politicians, Academics and Business Leaders," Westminster Hall, City of Westminster, September 17,

says that he wants to reflect on “the proper place of religious belief within the political process.” Early on, he cites the case of St. Thomas More. It brings to the fore the “dilemma” of loyalty to both God and Caesar. He thus comes to his central question: “Where is the ethical foundation for political choices to be found?” Benedict responds that it is found in reason’s prescinding from the content of revelation. This claim has two implications: first, that the role of religion is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be discovered by non-believers; and second, that religion’s role is not to propose concrete political solutions, because this role is outside the “competence of religion.” Religion, Benedict argues, helps to “purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles.”

Benedict admits that religion’s corrective role is not always welcomed, in no small part because of “distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism,” which can create social problems themselves. On the other hand, Benedict warns that reason, too, can fall prey to distortions when it rejects the corrective supplied by religion. He mentions two such distortions: that reason can be manipulated by ideology and that reason can be applied in a way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. He then supplies two examples from history of these distortions: the slave trade and the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century. In order to avoid the distortion of either faith or reason, the Pontiff avers that secular rationality and religious belief need one another. Their “dialogue” is good for “our civilization.” “Religion . . . is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation.”

Benedict then proceeds to warn of the marginalization of religion, and Christianity in particular, that is taking place in some quarters. Some would silence it or relegate it to the private sphere. He warns against Christians in public roles being required to act against their conscience. Benedict encourages the assembled leaders to promote the dialogue between faith and reason at every level of national life. He cites examples of how religion has contributed to effective action for the public good, such as food production, clean water, job creation, education, support to families, especially migrants, and basic

2010, accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100917_socie-ta-civile.html.

healthcare. In addition, he alludes to the Holy See's role in promoting peaceful relations among nations. Finally, he insists on the freedom of the Church to act according to its principles in the public square, and on the basic rights of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of association.

A Ratzingerian View of Church–State Relations

In his book *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, David Schindler attempts to clarify the contemporary possibilities for configuring church–state relations in the post-Vatican II age. His analysis of the spectrum of opinion helps to clarify Benedict's own position. Schindler points to *Gaudium et Spes* §§ 36 and 59 as setting the stage by their affirmation of a certain autonomy for the secular order.²¹ He then sketches the various postconciliar options that seem to be left standing by Vatican II.

Schindler calls one option neoconservatism, which accepts many elements of liberalism and, so, insists that church and state both recognize their proper spheres of influence. This view is a sort of Catholic liberalism, in Schindler's view, because it tends to regard the Church as having reconciled itself with democratic liberalism. According to Catholic liberals (among whom Schindler counts the Jesuit John Courtney Murray), the Church's involvement with the secular order is to be strictly limited in order to preserve the legitimate autonomies of the secular and the divine orders. This does not deny that the Church contributes to the common good by helping to build a public morality. Still, the Church must never lose sight of its heavenly mission and transcendent purpose. Neoconservatism tends to what Schindler calls a dualism that separates too strongly the divine and secular orders. Indeed, the dualism of Schindler's neocons is not really all that far from the dualism of Thomists, who tend to hold that the secular and divine orders are distinct, each having its own integrity.²² Thomists recognize the superiority of the divine sphere but insist that secular authority appropriately governs its own

²¹ David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 5. This work will be cited in the text below parenthetically by page number.

²² Cf. Michael Novak, "Thomas Aquinas, the First Whig: What Our Liberties Owe to a Neapolitan Mendicant," *Crisis*, October 1, 1990, accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/1990/thomas-aquinas-the-first-whig-what-our-liberties-owe-to-a-neapolitan-mendicant>.

sphere, not by delegation but by nature. Hence, there ought to be no interference by the ecclesial authority in the secular, except when the moral law is gravely imperiled.

Schindler calls the second option liberationism. It thinks that the Church lives in desperate need of turning herself to the world and learning from it. Indeed, the Church is to embrace a preferential love for the poor and to collaborate at all levels with people of good will in order to build a just social order. This urgent task necessarily involves breaking down the barriers between the Church and the world; but what is more, the Church must come to recognize its own failures in reversing unjust social structures. Liberationists tend to regard the Church as deeply complicit in these structures. Hence the Church must forgo its stance of superiority. She can never stand outside of the world, lecturing it about what is just. Instead, the Church must confess its guilt, come down from its magisterial pulpit, and take up the hard task of learning how to build a just society from those who have already been so engaged. Although liberationism blurs the distinction between church and world, it integrates the two orders by subordinating church to the state. It thus differs from the integralism of the right, which subordinates state to church.

Schindler thinks that both postconciliar options find warrant in Vatican II (3). Advocating neither position, however, he opts for “a third way” that avoids their extremes (9). This middle path, charted by *communio* ecclesiology, holds that the Christian should stand at the heart of the world even while remaining in the center of the Church. Schindler points to Hans Urs von Balthasar as this position’s origin. In fact, he believes that Balthasar has correctly outlined what Vatican II really meant when it called for greater openness to the world (1–2, notes 1–2). As Schindler puts it, “The burden of *communio* ecclesiology is that the Church can be itself only [also] by penetrating the world—and hence the world’s social-economic orders—with itself” (10). As such, the Church resembles the soul vivifying the body with its own life. *Communio* ecclesiology thus avoids the errors of liberationism, which loses the Church in the world, and the errors of neoconservatism, which keeps the Church alongside the world (10). The one extreme assimilates the Church to the world, whereas the other separates the Church from the world. By contrast, in *communio* ecclesiology, the Church subsists as the sacrament of Christ for a world transformed by new life. Schindler describes this life as a marriage in which “the whole world, in and through the Church, is destined for a transfiguring espousal with Jesus Christ” (21).

Benedict's approach moderates between the extremes of integralist confessionalism and secularism. In the middle, however, it shares considerable company with Thomists or neoconservatives and Schindler's political theology. Yet Benedict seems to offer a distinctive position, a sort of hybrid, which agrees with Thomists' positive appraisal of the American political order on the one hand and with the *Communio* school's keen sense of the Church's public role on the other hand. What seems absent are some of the traditional notions that served as the political foundation of Christendom. Particularly absent, given Ratzinger's own *Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, is any retrieval of political Augustinianism. This name has been given by scholars to the medieval tendency, articulated especially in the thirteenth century, to absorb the secular order into the sacred, thus subordinating state to church.²³ It contends that the secular power lacks justice, and thus legitimacy, without juridical incorporation into a distinctly Christian society sanctioned by the Church. It appeals to texts in the *The City of God* such as: "Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies?"²⁴

Conclusion: The Benedict Option

Roman Catholics will no doubt remember the Lent of four years ago for the rest of their lives. They suddenly found themselves confronted with an occurrence that will remain in the history books until the last trumpet: the first abdication of a Roman pontiff in nearly six hundred years (the last one being Gregory XII's in 1415). From henceforth, in every biography of Benedict XVI, whether long or short, one of the first events mentioned will be his renunciation of the Petrine Ministry on February 28, 2013. Most people have focused on Benedict's stated reason for his decision: his lack of strength of a healthy mind and body. But perhaps what is more worthy of consideration is the nature of the life that he has chosen for his retirement. Based on his declared intention to retire to a life of prayer, Benedict XVI is effectively fulfilling the monastic vocation implicit in his namesake, St. Benedict of Nursia.

²³ Henri-Xavier Arquillière, *L'augustinisme politique: essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen-Âge* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1934). See also Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1965).

²⁴ Augustine, *The City of God* 4.4. For more, see Charles McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West, from the Greeks to the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: Macmillan, 1932).

In a sense, the Pope Emeritus lives as a monk in his own monastery, in the heart of the Vatican, in the heart of the city of Rome.

With regard to this new life, we do well to ask if Benedict is not exercising “the Benedict option.”²⁵ This term applies to those Christians who have chosen to separate themselves from modern secular culture. It ultimately derives from the closing lines of Alasdair MacIntyre’s seminal work *After Virtue*. There, at the end of his survey of the progressive breakdown of contemporary ethical discourse, he famously asks whether we are waiting for a new, though very different, St. Benedict. This new figure is to lead us back to communities where the virtues can flourish. Possessing a unifying narrative and common purpose, they will provide the context necessary to sustain the moral life.²⁶

In an address originally given to the Italian senate in 2004 and later published in *Without Roots*, Ratzinger speaks of two different philosophies of history: those of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. Spengler claims that cultures follow the law of a natural life cycle through various stages from birth, to a rise and flourishing, then to a decline and death. In his view, not only is the West declining, but nothing can be done to prevent its extinction. Still, it could bequeath its heritage to a new culture. Toynbee argues harshly against Spengler. He contrasts scientific progress, which is material, with true progress, which is spiritual. He argues that the West is in a crisis because it has embraced “secularism” by abandoning religion for “the cult of technology, nationalism, and militarism” (WR, 68). Toynbee rejects Spengler’s determinism and insists that the fate of any society lies with its creative minorities. Perhaps in his monastic retreat, Benedict, ratifying Toynbee, seeks to become a creative minority of one.

Much as every monk withdraws from the world to enter more profoundly into the mystery of faith, so too has Benedict XVI. In doing so, he continues to be the teacher and professor that he has always been, in so far as his newly chosen life instructs the larger Christian world, in a renewed and unusual way, about the role of contemplation and prayer in the Christian life. For the modern age, in which so many people have come to see the will to power as the

²⁵ Rod Dreher, “Benedict Option,” *The American Conservative*, December 13, 2013, accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/benedict-option>.

²⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 245.

key to the meaning of history, Benedict's life of solitude gives witness that, ultimately, we are born for intimacy with God.²⁷ That Benedict should end his extraordinary life in such quietude is not surprising when we consider his understanding of prayer:

Christian prayer holds the key to making the whole world a celebration, a feast, namely affirmation. Asiatic contemplation is not affirmation but liberation through the renunciation of being. The Marxist approach is not affirmation but outrage, opposition to being because it is bad and so must be changed. Prayer is an act of being; it is affirmation of the ground of being and hence a purifying of myself and the world from this ground upward.²⁸

In his death on the Cross, Christ is the model of this prayer, and so Benedict also speaks of the "paradox of divine truth that shines forth precisely in the Crucified as extreme poverty and powerlessness: he is the icon of God because he is the manifestation of love, and for that reason the cross is his glorification."²⁹ N V

²⁷ Contrast Aristotle, for whom the purpose of life is the mind's divine union, with Nietzsche, for whom Christianity, insofar as it preaches meekness and humility, represents the attempt of the weak to gain power and dominance over the strong.

²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "On the Theological Basis of Prayer and Liturgy," in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Harper, 2007), 155–66, at 163–64; reprinted from *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986) [originally *Das Fest des Glaubens: Versuche über die kirchliche Liturgie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1981)], 11–32.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, trans. Martha M. Matesich (New York: Crossroad, 1996) [originally *Ein neues Lied für den Herrn: Christusglauben und Liturgie in der Gegenwart* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1995)], 25.