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Faith, Politics and Eschatology in the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger

Abstract: This paper situates the political theory of Joseph Ratzinger within the tradition of St. Augustine and argues that while his position on the liberal tradition is in some ways ambivalent, he is closer to the British Tory tradition than to the British Whig Tradition. Ratzinger emphasises that Christian faith destroyed the myth of the divine state and replaced it with a conception of the state governed by 'the objectivity of reason' and for Ratzinger 'true human reason involves morality, which lives on God's commandments'. Ratzinger strongly opposed the alignment of politics with eschatology.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger, natural law, idolatry of the state, eschatology, Whig and Tory traditions, Integralism

Preamble

Gilbert Keith Chesterton once remarked that every Catholic holds two countries in his heart – his own and Poland – and this is certainly true for me. I first came to Poland in August 1989. I lived in Kraków for six months during the period of transition from Communism to Solidarity leadership. The world of 1989 was a much more hopeful place than the world of today. We had a Pope who had spent the first decade of his pontificate waging a war against Marxism and he was on the brink of victory. The academic issue of the year was whether or not the fall of the Berlin Wall meant that we were all Liberals now, as Francis Fukuyama put the proposition. At the time I argued against this thesis explaining that liberalism itself was capable of totalitarian tendencies, and today, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, those totalitarian tendencies are manifesting themselves through our institutions of culture and into the organs of government.

Someone who foresaw these developments even before 1989, was the American Jesuit and Professor of Political Philosophy at Georgetown University, Fr James V Schall. In an essay published in 1984 he observed:

> "What is striking today is the reappearance in political form of the suppressed spiritual in a highly peculiar fashion, at least in regard to the history of political theory. Indeed, we are witnessing the end of "modern" political theory. We are coming to a new turning point in the history of political theory every bit as sharp as the ones inaugurated by Aristotle, the post-Aristotelians, Christianity, or Machiavelli. To suggest that the essential content of this new turning point is that theology has suddenly become politics would be something of a rhetorical exaggeration if taken too literally.
> The fact is, however, more and more scholars…are coming to accept the one is the other, that theology is politics and politics theology" [Schall 1984: 289-290].

These comments were clearly a reference to the rise of liberation theology movements and to the so-called theology of hope, promoted by Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann. While the liberation theology movement is not monolithic – there are different versions depending on the particular social theory chosen to be a partner for theology, one common element in all the strains of liberation theology is their reversal of the relationship between logos and ethos.

Fr Schall observed that this reversal "portends something of a revolution in theology…for the medieval relation of theology to politics was always that theology was the queen of the sciences, the ultimate judge of the truly human, such that it provided a check on the aberrations of politics" [Schall 1984: 289-290]. However with the arrival of liberation theology, "theology is now looking upon itself in a rather opposite fashion. It [has become] a partisan advocate for political well-being. Theology [now] tests its validity by the criterion of political performance. Even more fundamentally, at its extremes, theology is claiming to be the vision which establishes the Kingdom politically" [Schall 1984: 289-290].

While in the Catholic imagination liberation theology is most strongly associated with Latin America, as an intellectual product liberation theology was first crafted in Germany and Belgium in the 1960s. The leading Latin American scholars of the 1960s generation who were sent to Europe for their doctoral studies were

influenced by these developments. The German post-war generation faced the problem of explaining how an ostensibly Christian nation could commit the most barbaric atrocities in human history, while the Latinos were struggling with the pastoral issue of stark social divisions. Both the Germans and the Latinos found explanations for their problems in social theories with a Marxist pedigree. These theories traced the source of evil to the elite classes of Europe and the Anglosphere. The generation of 1968 then went to war against the intellectual frameworks and culture of old Christian Europe and the Christian Anglosphere.

One of the most interesting facts about the student protest leaders in Western Europe in 1968 is that many had spent time in seminaries [Horn 2007, 2015]. In her sociological study of those who took part in the demonstrations in Paris in May of 1968, Julie Pagis came to the conclusion that a common element shared by the student revolutionaries was having grown up in a family where the Christian faith was presented as a moral code [Pagis 2018]. In other words, the accent was on Christian ethics not sacramentality, on obedience to rules rather than on the personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. When the high demands of Christian sexual ethics proved to be too onerous for the generation tantalised by the lifestyle options conferred by the free availability of the contraceptive pill, this generation did not abandon an ethical vision altogether but simply moved the focus of its ethical lens from the territory of sexual ethics to the territory of social ethics. As Augusto del Noce explained their intent, *ascetic Christianity* must now be replaced by *secularised Christianity*, "in which the fullness of the virtues destined to advance the human condition will wipe away the passive and mortifying virtues (which they consider "repressive", even if they do not dare say that explicitly)" [Noce 2014: 181]. Del Noce concluded that this all implied that Catholics must adopt a "new attitude toward sexuality", one that represents a "complete reversal of the traditional Catholic position" [Noce 2014: 181]. In short, contemporary Liberal Catholicism is built upon this alliance of the bourgeois-secular spirit with forms of "New Left" Marxism. As Gerd-Rainer Horn, one of the most distinguished historians of the 1968 era explained: "the utopian, messianic dimension of Catholicism overlapped with secular ideals prominently at work behind the scenes in the long sixties" [Horn 2015]. Messianic Catholicism and Marxism captured the imagination of a generation and these twin forces reinforced one another. Similarly, in an essay published in 1975 Ratzinger referred to the 'intoxicating fervour' with which students of the generation of 1968 turned to the religious pathos of an anarchic-utopian Marxism in which they placed the fulfilment of their Christian hopes. For these students the events in Paris of May 1968 represented a kind of

'salvation-historical event' that would usher in a 'new epoch of Christianity' in which "the Christian concepts of liberation, diakonia and communion should be filled with a new, Marxist realism" [Ratzinger 1975: 439-454].

In 1968 there were student demonstrations in Warsaw but they were demonstrations against Marxism not demonstrations in favour of Marxism. In Germany however, students were interrupting lectures in the name of liberation from elitist tyranny and in Paris both Jesuit and Dominican priests handed out Holy Communion to Marxist students on picket lines. Karol Wojtyła and Joseph Ratzinger both lived through 1968 but on different sides of the Berlin Wall. In 1989 Karol Wojtyła defeated the Old Left and then he spent the remainder of his pontificate in an intellectual partnership with Joseph Ratzinger fighting an intellectual and spiritual battle against the New Left. It is an historical fact that they failed to win that battle and shamefully it was in large measure because the Church herself includes many leaders who see it as their responsibility to correlate so-called Christian "values" with the New Left's projects.

Pope Benedict, who was one of the most highly educated men ever to hold the Petrine keys, is no longer around to take the flak for being the world's centre of opposition to the New Left ideology. Nonetheless one of his many legacies is a substantial body of essays and public lectures where he analysed the foundations of the move to politicise every dimension of cultural life and to turn theology into politics and politics into theology. Younger generations of Catholics can use these essays and lectures as a strategic analyst's report to guide them through the battle that he and St. John Paul II initiated. So, with that historical preamble, let's try and summarise the understanding of the relationship between faith, politics and eschatology to be found in the publications of Ratzinger/Benedict.

1. Politics as Mythology

Ratzinger/Benedict frequently made reference to the fact that one of the great achievements of Christianity was to de-deify the state. In a homily delivered in the church of St Boniface in Bonn before Catholic members of the Bundestag in 1981, Cardinal Ratzinger declared:

> "The state is not the whole of human existence and does not encompass all human hope. Man and what he hopes for extend beyond the framework of the state and beyond the sphere of political action…The state is not the totality: this unburdens the politician and at the same time

> opens up for him the path of a reasonable politics. The Roman state was false and anti-Christian precisely because it wanted to be the totality of human possibilities and hopes. A state that makes such claims cannot fulfil its promises, it thereby falsifies and diminishes man. Through the totalitarian lie it becomes demonic and tyrannical" [Ratzinger 1988: 147-151].

Ratzinger then went on to suggest that such a state of affairs was not necessarily behind us. He noted that "when the Christian faith falls into ruins and faith in mankind's greater hope is lost, the myth of the divine state rises again, because man cannot do without the totality of hope" [Ratzinger 1988: 144]. He suggested that "although such promises pose as progress and commandeer for themselves the slogans of progress and progressive thinking, viewed historically they are nevertheless a regression to an era antedating the *novum* of Christianity, a turning back along the scale of history" [Ratzinger 1988: 144]. He concluded that "such politics that declares that the kingdom of God is the outcome of politics and twists faith into the universal primacy of the political, is by its very nature the politics of enslavement; it is a mythological politics" [Ratzinger 1988: 144]. Against this mythological politics he argued that the faith offers "Christian reason's sense of proportion, which recognizes what man really can accomplish in terms of a free social order and is content with that, because it knows that mankind's greater expectations are safe in God's hands" [Ratzinger 1988: 144]. Ratzinger told the politicians in his congregation that "the first service to politics rendered by the Christian faith is that it liberates man from the irrationality of political myths, which are the real threat of our time" [Ratzinger 1988: 144]. In short, Christian faith destroyed the myth of the divine state and replaced it with a conception of the state governed by what Ratzinger called 'the objectivity of reason'. He was however quick to add the caveat that "this does not mean that it brought an objectivity devoid of values, the objectivity of statistics and mere social dynamics" [Ratzinger 1988: 145]. This is because "true human reason involves morality, which lives on God's commandments" [Ratzinger 1988: 146].

2. Joseph Ratzinger and Natural Law

Statements such as these raise the thorny issue that never disappears from academic discussions around Catholic conceptions of natural law and that is the question of whether natural law requires a theological foundation. This is sometimes expressed by the question 'can the second side of the tablet in which the Ten Commandments were chiselled be accepted in the absence of the first?

Or to put the proposition even more acutely, in the absence of a belief in the first commandment, that there is only one God, the God of Israel, and that the service of all other gods is idolatry, is it always wrong to steal another's wife or donkey? Why is this so important? Why have so many academic articles been published about this? It is, arguably, because in the mid-to-late twentieth century, as Western societies underwent a process of deep secularisation, Catholic scholars emerged who tried to argue that the Catholic natural law tradition could be accepted by anyone of any faith tradition or none. All one needed to purchase the intellectual package was something like a Kantian belief in "pure reason" uncontaminated by faith traditions. One only needed to be reasonable according to eighteenth century canons, faith in the God of Abraham was not a necessary pre-requisite. Russell Hittinger described this mentality and the political strategy it fostered as a form of natural law devised for "Cartesian minds somehow under Church discipline" [Hittinger 2003: 62].

So where did Ratzinger stand on this question?

In a paper he wrote in 1962 Ratzinger offered his own analysis of the word *physis* (nature) in the Pauline Letters. This is of course relevant to his understanding of natural law since the oft cited biblical text on natural law is found in St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, Chapter 2, Versus 14-16, where St. Paul refers to the law written on the hearts of the gentiles. Ratzinger concluded that "if we try to summarise the Pauline data, we find that Paul no doubt attributes to nature a certain guiding character, but it by no means assumes the status of an unambiguous and absolute norm. Man receives true enlightenment about his being, not from *nature*, but rather from his encounter with Christ in faith" [Ratzinger 2011: 157]. Thus, for Ratzinger, with the coming of Christianity "the biological concept of nature becomes a theological concept in a new sense: nature is understood, not in terms of biology or rational metaphysics, but rather in terms of the concrete history that has taken and is taking place between God and man" [Ratzinger 2011: 156-157]. In other words, Aristotelian nature is not Pauline-Christian nature because Aristotelian nature does not factor in the effects of the Fall or the Incarnation. This later becomes a central issue in Ratzinger's reading of *Gaudium et spes*. Like other commentators on this document, Ratzinger noted that there is a significant difference between an understanding of the human person as 'merely theistically coloured', that is, in some sense made in the image of God as per the account of creation in *Genesis*, and an understanding of the human person which takes into account the Trinitarian anthropology of the New Testament. In the earlier

sections of *Gaudium et spes* the Old Testament vision predominates. For Ratzinger the starting point of anthropology has to be the notion of Christ as the new Adam: a merely theistically coloured account of the human person is, he argues, both an inadequate anthropology and an inadequate theology of creation. A full theology of creation is only intelligible in eschatology. As he puts it: "the Alpha is only truly to be understood in the light of the Omega" [Ratzinger 1969: 115-164]. Moving forward from the 1960s to the pontificate of St. John Paul II, in an article on the renewal of moral theology in the light of *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), Ratzinger concluded that "no ethics can be constructed without God" [Ratzinger 2019: 135-155]. He argued that even the Decalogue is not to be interpreted first of all as law, but rather as a gift. It begins with the words "I am Yahweh, your Lord," and having noted this Ratzinger argues that without the first tablet of the commandments and this preamble the second tablet 'would not work' [Ratzinger 2019: 367]. Somewhat emphatically Ratzinger stated, "we cannot yield on this point: without God, all the rest would no longer have logical coherence" [Ratzinger 2019: 367].

Two decades later in 2014 as Pope Emeritus, Benedict declared: "The idea of human rights holds up in the final analysis only if it is anchored in faith in the Creator God" [Benedict XVI 2018: 19]. In this context he quoted Hans Kelsen's point that it is reasonable to derive an Ought from what Is only if someone deposited an Ought in the Is. Pope Benedict also agreed with Professor Marcello Pera that "when separated from the concept of God, the concept of human rights finally leads not only to the marginalization of Christianity but ultimately to its denial" [Benedict XVI 2018: 20].

The Ten Commandments are regarded by some scholars as the essential content of the natural law while other scholars have a much narrower definition of the content. Russell Hittinger uses the expression the 'three foci of the natural law'. By this he means that natural law can be regarded as: (i) a matter of propositions or precepts that are first in the order of practical cognition, or (ii) as a property of human nature, or (iii) as the ordinance of a divine lawgiver. The first approach views the subject of natural law through an epistemological lens, the second through an ontological lens and the third primarily through a theological lens. Some scholars will use only one lens, some two and some all three. For those who use more than one lens a further issue arises of the relationship between the lenses. How are the epistemological, ontological and theological dimensions to be integrated? Looking into these lenses Eberhard Schockenhoff has found three neuralgic points: the first is whether the fundamental self-evidential insight of

practical reason applies only to the highest basic principle that good should be done and evil avoided or whether it extends to other principles such as those found in the Ten Commandments; the second is how to relate practical reason to natural inclinations and the third is the relationship between the general principles and the specific judgements.[1]

As far as I have been able to discover Ratzinger nowhere addresses these issues or otherwise offers his own definition of the precise content of the natural law. His most extensive article on natural law was published in 1964 and the general thrust of the article took the form of a criticism of tying the Church's social teaching too strongly to the tradition of natural law which he noted has always been influenced by historical factors [Ratzinger 1964: 24-31]. The article did not provide an account of what he regarded as the best practice definition of the concept. One way of reading it is against the back-drop of what he clearly regarded as the problematic recourse to the notion of 'pure nature' which he suggested had crept into the Catholic understanding of natural law. This reading is consistent with the 1962 article and the comments he made on the document *Gaudium et spes* in 1969. At best all these articles tell us is that he did not like versions of natural law based on a sharp separation of nature and grace and thus the idea of 'pure nature'. We can also say that he believed that in the absence of a belief in a creator God the whole edifice of Christian ethics collapses. Another way to put this is to say that he thought that the Kantian project of separating faith from reason, privatising faith and promoting a form of reason detached from revelation and trying to use this truncated form of reason to defend Christian ethics is a self-defeating project. It is an exercise in narrowing the scope of reason or amputating reason rather than allowing it to be open to revelation.

3. Higher Laws and Blunt Instruments

We come however to another conundrum and it is this. Notwithstanding these articles written early in his academic career, in various public speeches Ratzinger/ Benedict made reference to the need for governments to recognize that they themselves are subject to a higher law. In these speeches he commonly refers to the fact that this is not exclusively a Catholic idea but one shared by all the 'wisdom traditions' of the world. These traditions accept the idea that there is an order in creation. However Ratzinger acknowledges that this presupposition is not shared

[1] This paragraph of this paper was taken from the author's earlier work on 'Natural Law in Catholic Christianity', supra.

with contemporary post-modern intellectuals and those influenced by them. In 2004 in his dialogue with Jürgen Habermas he therefore described natural law as a 'blunt instrument' since it presupposes a concept of nature in which nature and reason mesh and this is no longer generally accepted [Benedict XVI 2018: 190]. The fact that he sometimes recognises that natural law is a blunt instrument and sometimes implores governments to acknowledge the existence of higher law, with natural law being a classic example of such, has led some commentators to suggest that this is an unresolved tension or even contradiction within Ratzinger's theo-political vision. Much-discussed articles on this topic have recently been written by the American Jesuits Sam Zeno Conedera and Vincent L Strand [Conedera, Strand 2020: 669-694; idem.: 2023: 889-918]. Conedera and Strand have also drawn attention to the fact that if we look at the Catholic intellectual landscape, when it comes to an understanding of the relationship between faith and politics, there are at least three different 'political camps'. First, there are some scholars seeking to defend some form of integralism, that is to say, that they want to back-track in some way on the separation of Church and State. Secondly, there are some scholars continuing to defend "Whig Thomism" which represents an attempt to synthesise the liberal and Thomist traditions. Thirdly, there are some scholars, predominately those associated with the English edition of the journal *Communio,* who are highly critical of the liberal tradition and have led the charge against the Whig Thomist project. Conedara and Strand also make the sociological observation that younger generations of Catholic scholars tend to be more attracted to either the neo-integralist position or the *Communio* critique of the liberal tradition. This is because they share the belief that the liberal project is a failure.

There are also two other positions not mentioned by Conedera and Strand. The first is the position or positions which flow from liberation theology and which, as described above, tend towards the politicisation of theology and thus the immanentization of the eschaton, reversing what St. Augustine and Ratzinger/Benedict thought was a great achievement of Christianity to acknowledge a higher good and a higher realm than the political. The second is the position of the Radical Orthodoxy scholars, typified by John Milbank and Adrian Pabst in their work *The Politics of Virtue:Post-Liberalism and the Human Future*. There has always been a strong overlap of the intellectual positions of the Radical Orthodoxy scholars and the Anglophone *Communio* scholars. Not only do they share a strong critique of the liberal tradition, they also share the positive endorsement of Henri de Lubac's criticism of extrinsicist contructions of the nature and grace relationship, and, as a matter of logic, the faith and reason relationship. Conedera and Strand read

Ratzinger/Benedict as standing in a kind of no-man's land somewhere between the Whig Thomists on the one side and the Anglophone *Communio* scholars such as the late David L Schindler, his son David C Schindler and Michael Hanby on the other. My own reading of Ratzinger/Benedict is however that he is much closer to the *Communio* side of the debate.

4. Was Ratzinger a Whig?

The strongest argument for the theory that Ratzinger/Benedict shared some sympathy for Whig Thomism and was thus not totally opposed to the liberal tradition can be found in essays or speeches where he distinguishes the Continental Liberal tradition stemming from Rousseau which he did regard as toxic from British traditions of liberalism for which he had some respect. For example, in his essay on 'Truth, Values and Power' first published in 1993, he wrote:

> "In the Anglo-Saxon sphere, democracy was at least partly conceived and realized on the basis of the tradition of natural law and of a fundamental Christian consensus that certainly had a very pragmatic character. In Rousseau, on the other hand, democracy is employed to attack Christian tradition, and he stands at the head of a stream of thought that tends to conceive of democracy as antithetical to Christianity" [Benedict XVI 2018: 142].

Further affirmative comments for Anglo-style liberal democracy can be found in his papal address in Westminster Hall on September 17, 2010. On this occasion he declared:

> "Britain has emerged as a pluralist democracy which places great value on freedom of speech, freedom of political affiliation and respect for the rule of law, with a strong sense of the individual's rights and duties, and of the equality of all citizens before the law. While couched in different language, Catholic social teaching has much in common with this approach, in its overriding concern to safeguard the unique dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, and in its emphasis on the duty of civil authority to foster the common good" [Benedict XVI 2018: 154].

There is, I believe, a way of reading these statements that makes them consistent with the position not only of the anti-liberal *Communio* scholars but also

consistent with the Radical Orthodoxy scholars, and thus, not as an endorsement of the Whig Thomist project. As Frederick Wilhelmsen wrote in *Christianity and Political Philosophy*:

> "There is another tradition (from the Whig) which runs back, like a narrow and straight road, through Chesterton and Belloc to the Tory-Radicalism of William Cobbett and beyond to the Cavaliers and to the King who died for England: there the road broadens into a great highway filled with the yeomen who rose in the Pilgrimage of Grace" [Wilhelmsen 1982: 99].

There are, in other words, two traditions within modern English political theory, one described as the Whig Tradition, the other as the Tory Tradition. The terms "Whigs" and "Tories" go back to pejorative expressions used in the 1700s, Tory derived from an Irish word for a Papist outlaw and Whig derived from a Scottish word for a horse thief. The Whigs tended to take a positive view of the French Revolution and to view history as a progressive movement toward ever more enlightened views of social life and governance, the Tories were historically more deeply embedded in pre-eighteenth century Christian intellectual frameworks. According to Milbank and Pabst's reading of British political history there is a whole raft of concepts commonly associated with life in a liberal democracy which are not actually the fruits of the liberal tradition, but legal concepts with a Christian, Roman or Germanic law provenance. These include: freedom, equality, toleration, individual rights, constitutionalism, mixed and balanced government, the rule of law, a fair trial, *habeas corpus,* and trial by peers [Milbank and Pabst 2016: 29].

Again, according to their Radically Orthodox reading, the problem is that these concepts got mixed up with concepts of a late scholastic Franciscan provenance. These include: univocity (the denial of inherently different qualitative degrees within being), nominalism (the denial of the reality of universal modes of existence), and voluntarism (the insistence that divine and then created will is the primary determinant of reality). The works of Catherine Pickstock are valuable in this context of explaining the Franciscan pedigree of modern liberalism. Pickstock locates a decisive shift away from a metaphysics of participation in the work of Scotus toward the doctrine of the univocity of being rendering Scotus (not Aquinas) the forerunner of the liberal tradition of political theory [Pickstock 2005: 281-325].

A significant effect of the Franciscan elements is that the relationships between the members of a community become contractual and this in turn leads to the primacy of the political and the economic over the social, which Radical Orthodoxy scholars regard as a key hallmark of the Whig tradition.

If this priority of the political and the economic is an essential hallmark of the liberal tradition, then Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is not much of a liberal, politically speaking. In British parlance he is much more like a "Turquoise Tory" (a Tory with a strong interest in ecology) than a "Whig Thomist". Benedict did not affirm a political theory that gives priority to private interest over a conception of the good of the society, or, to put the proposition slightly differently, he did not support a view of society as simply the aggregate of private interests. He was an heir to the tradition of 19th century German Catholic social theory associated with names like Baron Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, whom he cited in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, and Heinrich Pesch SJ. Pesch famously said that "individuals are not simply scattered atoms. The Kantian juxtaposition of the "I" and "the world" cannot lead us to a morally correct relationship of the individual to the community in which he lives…it is clear that man is of his very nature a social being" [Pesch 2003: 42]. Moreover, contrary to the anti-metaphysical orientation of contemporary liberalism, Ratzinger/Benedict insists that the realm of the political must remain concerned about the truth. Nothing in this analysis is to say that Ratzinger/Benedict would have self-consciously identified himself as Radically Orthodox, or that he would have been familiar with the expression "Turquoise Tory", merely that it is possible to affirm some elements of what are commonly associated with liberal democratic forms of government, especially as they are found in the Anglosphere, without simultaneously affirming the Whig Thomist project.

5. Fidelity to the Truth

In his second volume of the *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy Benedict rhetorically asked the question: 'can politics accept truth as a structural category' [Benedict XVI 2018: 52]? He followed this up with a second question, what might be described as the question from the perspective of German Critical Theory. It was: "By relying on truth, does not politics, in view of the impossibility of attaining consensus on truth, make itself a tool of particular traditions that in reality act merely as forms of holding on to power" [Benedict XVI 2018: 52]?

In answering these rhetorical questions Benedict referred to the statement of Jesus to Pilate, that his purpose for entering the world was 'to bear witness to the truth'

and he also referred to the Thomistic maxim that God is "*ipsa summa et prima veritas*" – the sovereign and first truth. From these premises Ratzinger concluded that "bearing witness to the truth" "means giving priority to God and to his will over and against the interests of the world and its powers. God is the criterion of being. In this sense, truth is the real *king* that confers light and greatness upon all things" [Benedict XVI 2018: 54]. According to Ratzinger there is 'no discontinuity' between the proclamation of the kingdom of God in the Galilean teachings and in the discourse with Pilate. In both biblical moments kingship is defined by truth. The error of Pilate was that he sacrificed "truth" on the altar of civic peace. He knew that Christ was not in fact a threat to the Roman governance of Palestine but he did not want to contend with the civil unrest that would have ensured if the mob had not got their way. Contemporary liberal political theory, especially the "Political Liberalism" associated with the works of John Rawls, is built precisely on a Pilation foundation. As the title of one of Rawls most famous articles declares: "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical' [Rawls 1985: 223-51].

6. Christianity as Revelation and Christianity as a Form of Life

In the context of the idea that morality should refer to a common way of life, not merely a private habit, Ratzinger was influenced by V. Possenti's reading of Maritain, according to which "the source of truth for politics is not Christianity as revealed religion but Christianity as leaven and a form of life that has proved its worth in the course of history" [Benedict XVI 2018: 142]. This sounds very MacIntyrean in the sense that a tradition is defended by reference to the internal coherence of its practices, the integrity of the human person engendered by participation in such practices and the general appeal of the culture so created, rather than by an appeal to metaphysical arguments or recourse to scripture, at least not in the first instance. For example, one can make a judgement about the relative merits of government by Communists and government by the Hapsburg family by simply looking at a streetscape in any number of middle European countries. Decaying concrete blocks stand side by side with the baroque and rococo public buildings of the Hapsburgs and their gelato-coloured townhouses with their whimsical decorative flourishes, resembling the icing on wedding cakes. One form of government, the Communist, is associated with ugliness and uniformity and shoddy workmanship that is structurally dangerous, while the other form of government, Hapsburg monarchy, is associated with beauty and individuality and structurally sound architecture. This is an example of how social practices and the cultures they create can in themselves be an argument for one form of government over another, without recourse to principles that are found only in the Gospels.

There would however be no Hapsburg-inspired cultures as we know them, if the Hapsburgs had not been a Catholic family.

While invoking Possenti's distinction between Christian tradition as dogma and Christian tradition as a "form of life" Ratzinger concedes that "this presupposes a certain amount of optimism about the evidential character of morality and of Christianity, and the relativists would not accept this" [Benedict XVI 2018: 143]. "The real problem that confronts us today is reason's blindness to the entire nonmaterial dimension of reality" [Benedict XVI 2018: 145]. Here is the suggestion that when recourse to truth is blocked, one may have to resort to invoking another transcendental such as beauty. This means that there is a kind of sliding scale of argumentation. For those who are Catholics a reference to revelation can be made. One can go directly to St. Paul or other scriptural authors. However for those who have despaired of truth, one might have to make arguments around the idea of Christian tradition as a "form of life" that somehow remains more attractive than neo-pagan lifestyles. This will usually mean a reliance on the transcendental of beauty or goodness or common sense.

A concrete example of this kind of argumentation may be found in the attitudes of people who may be post-Christian but who, when the denial of a universal human nature is taken to its logical extreme, begin to realise that something is very wrong. Hundreds of examples could be given of this phenomenon, mostly in the context of the promotion of gender ideology in educational institutions. People do not have to be practising Christians to think that the world has gone mad when invited to tell a service provider by which pronoun they would like to be associated. My favourite example is from a recent case in the United Kingdom. Many of the elite schools in that country are under the corporate governance of the Church of England. In one of those schools a child recently decided to identify as a cat. When she was ridiculed by her classmates the teacher responded by admonishing her classmates for their intolerance of the lifestyle choices of others. Parents of the admonished children were furious and this became front-page news in the United Kingdom. This example shows that parents who may not read papal encyclicals or journals of political theory may nonetheless accept that some forms of life are normal or natural and others not.

Thus the fact that Ratzinger/Benedict sometimes makes reference to natural law and in other places merely to a form of life is not necessarily a tension or contradiction within his thought, but simply a response to the sociological fact that different arguments are more persuasive than others, depending on the social context.

What is absolutely clear is that he stood opposed to the tendencies in liberation theology to turn politics into theology and theology into politics. It is also clear that he believed that for Christian ethics to have any credibility there needed to be at least a base line belief in a kind of rationality – he would say *logos* – within creation. Moreover, he is also quite clear about the fact that there is no freedom without truth. Above all, Ratzinger/Benedict stood opposed to the current social trend to re-deify the state, to treat the state as a saviour/redeemer figure, to search for salvation in a new political mythology and its dream of perfecting humanity through social engineering policies.

7. Ratzinger and Integralism

Finally, to complete the engagement with the thesis of Conedera and Strand, some comments need to be made about Ratzinger and Integralism. The preliminary point is that although there are various forms of integralist political theory a common hallmark is a high regard for the cultural achievements of saintly monarchs – not only in the medieval era but even in recent times. One thinks, for example, of Blessed Emperor Karl, of his wife the Servant of God Empress Zita; of the Servant of God, Queen Elena of Italy; of King Baudouin of Belgium who abdicated as king for a day, rather than have his name associated with pro-abortion legislation; of Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg who refused to give his assent to pro-euthanasia legislation; and to Blessed Prince Vladimir Ghika, regarded as the St. Vincent de Paul of Romania, who died in a Communist concentration camp in 1954. Conedera and Strand are of the view that Ratzinger/Benedict had no sympathy for integralism but it may be argued that his position was more nuanced. While he certainly thought it necessary for those who ran the Church and those who ran the State to be different people, there is no evidence to suggest that he had a problem with the concept of Christian constitutional monarchy, such as exists in Belgium and Spain as well as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Ratzinger/Benedict was certainly a man in love with the high culture of Catholic Europe, and for centuries it was precisely the aristocratic and royal families of Europe who promoted that culture through their academic foundations and through their support for the arts and sciences generally.

Today there are still noble families – some have titles stretching back to the middle ages, others have no titles at all, but they are recognised in Catholic social circles as families who consistently produce religious vocations and leaders who defend the faith in the public square. Ratzinger/Benedict understood the need for these contemporary noble families to be the leaven in society, to show case what he called

'forms of Christian life", to defend the truth, to exhibit goodness, and to promote beauty. Along with the Christian conception of nobility as heroic virtue comes the Christian conception of chivalry –the idea of self-sacrificial service for the good of those less powerful. Nobility and chivalry are conceptual twins and Ratzinger/Benedict was no stranger to this relationship between nobility and chivalry. It was showcased for all of Germany to see in the behaviour of Bishop Clemens-August Graf von Galen, the so-called Lion of Münster, who stood up to the Gestapo. It is also known that Ratzinger/Benedict had a particular interest in the statue of the Christian knight in Bamberg Cathedral. A whole academic industry has built up around the question of who the knight of Bamberg Cathedral is. Some commentators argue that the knight depicts Charlemagne, others disagree, but regardless of who the statue depicts, the knight is a symbol of Christian chivalry.

The need for contemporary Catholics to be chivalrous, to be heroic in the face of attacks on the faith, is a theme recognised in the thought of Pope Benedict's friend, Cardinal Robert Sarah. While in 1989 Francis Fukuyama argued that we are all liberals now, in 2017 Cardinal Sarah told faithful Catholics that "spiritually, we are all sons of the martyred Vendée!". By Vendeens he was referring to those heroic Catholics, both peasants and aristocrats, who were martyrs for the faith during the period of the French Revolution. Cardinal Sarah declared that "in the face of the dictatorship of relativism, in the face of thought terrorism which – once more – wants to tear God out of the hearts of the children, we need to find again the freshness of spirit, the joyful and ardent simplicity of these saints and of these martyrs" [Sarah 2017]. If indeed we have reverted to living in a culture where people put more trust in the state and the bureaucrats who run the state than in the God of revelation, then we will certainly need a whole new generation of chivalrous noble souls to turn this culture around.

It may therefore be argued that while Ratzinger would insist that persons should always enjoy freedom of religious expression, and that such freedom is intrinsically connected to their free will and their human dignity, he would nonetheless agree that the goal of human history is to restore all things in Christ, and he would understand the need for noble Catholics, including whole noble families, to work precisely for this end.

Conclusion

Following the demise of European Communism in 1990 Poland's Adam Michnik reflected that "we are the children of our Judeo-Christian culture, and we know

that this culture, which recommends loyalty to the state, commands us to bend our knees only before God. We know therefore, that we should put faithfulness to truth above participation in power. We know, by reaching for our roots, that the truth of politics resides, in the end, in the politics of truth…We reject belief in political utopia" [Michnik 1990: 28-29]. Ratzinger/Benedict would wholeheartedly agree that the truth of politics resides in the politics of truth and that we must reject belief in political utopia, we must resist the idolatry of the state. Poles are particularly good at resisting this temptation.

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