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The Reason of Faith: The Legacy of the Great Pope¹

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Joseph Ratzinger's example and legacy does not consist in being a model for the problematic institution of a "Pope Emeritus" alongside the reigning head of the Catholic Church. For already according to the laws of logic, only one person can represent the plurality of a community in its indivisible whole, so that its organic unity does not disintegrate (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII). For an understanding of the nature of the Catholic Church, this leads to a realisation of the revealed truth of its faith: "The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 23).

The great legacy of the theology professor, cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Pope Benedict XVI lies more in his theological work. It is published in

¹ Translated from Polish, after the German original, by Maciej Górnicki.

the 16 volumes of his *Opera omnia*, amounting to more than 20,000 pages (in his native German and in many translations).

Related to this is his contribution to the pontifical magisterium in the form of encyclicals on the Eucharist and social doctrine as well as on the divine virtues of love, hope and faith.

He remains vivid in the Church's memory as *Augustine redivivus* and the new Pope Leo the Great, with his decisive confession in Jesus Christ – true God and true man, the only Mediator and Saviour of mankind. In Him alone can we place our trust in life and death. Just as the greatest Western Doctor of the Church prayed to God of his joy at the end of his spiritual odyssey: “For thou hast created us for thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in thee” (St. Augustine, *Confessions* I.1; trans. W. Watts; Loeb Classical Library vol. 26; London: William Heinemann; New York: The Macmillan Co. 1912, p. 3), similarly Bishop and Pope Joseph Ratzinger ended the journey of his earthly pilgrimage in spiritual kinship with the last words on his lips: “Jesus, I love you.”

In the traditional piety of his Bavarian homeland and throughout Catholic Germany, this is the first prayer we read from our mother's lips as young children. And it is the core of the Jesus Prayer, intended to shape the deepest spirituality of every Christian: “Jesus, for you I live; Jesus, for you I die; Jesus, I am dead and alive” (according to Rom 14:8).

Joseph Ratzinger's trilogy on Jesus of Nazareth links his theological and spiritual vision of the incarnational presence of God in Jesus Christ with the original mission of St Peter and his successors on his See of Rome. St Peter is the rock on which the Lord builds his Church because, as the spokesman and representative of the whole people of God, he testifies to Jesus as “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). In his confession of Christ, Peter always unites the Church in its foundation. “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).

Contrary to the accusations of Protestants rejecting the apostolic succession of the bishops and the Roman Pontiff, Thomas Aquinas had already made it clear 300 years earlier that Christ alone is the foundation of the Church, her head and the only teacher of the faithful in the original sense of transmitting divine truth

and grace. In turn, the apostles called and empowered by Him and the bishops in their succession are the foundation of the Church, the visible head in the particular Churches and in the universal Church, insofar as they represent Christ. For the exalted Lord himself speaks to the faithful in their proclamation of the Word of God. And in the sacraments, through the ministry of the priests, He communicates to them His grace, which flows down to the members from Him as head of the Church (cf. *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 8 a.6; Comm. on 1 Cor 3:1). “As to the priests of the New Law, they may be called mediators of God and men, inasmuch as they are the ministers of the true Mediator by administering, in His stead, the saving sacraments to men” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 26 a.1, ad 1; trans. Fathers of English Dominican Province; vol. III/1, London: R&T Washbourne Ltd. 1913, p. 344).

Since Joseph Ratzinger’s entire theological output is Christocentric, and Christ’s sonship with God and his mission as the only mediator between God and humanity are central to his thinking and his spirituality, his book on Jesus also presents itself as a hermeneutical principle and key with which we can open the door to the vast realm of his profound thinking on the unity of faith and reason.

This unique constellation of faith and knowledge in Christianity constitutes, even according to the analysis of his neo-Marxist agnostic interlocutor Jürgen Habermas (*Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, Berlin 2019), the essence of all Western culture. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997), prepared under the direction of Cardinal Ratzinger and published by John Paul II, can be understood as a new catechetical summa of the Catholic faith, open to the reason of the faithful in the conditions of the modern world. Addressing today’s Catholic, one could justify the motive for writing this new catechism as the Evangelist Luke did, “so that you may be convinced [as Theophilus once was] of the absolute certainty of the doctrine given to you” (Luke 1:4), that is, of the handed down “doctrine of the apostles” (Acts 2:42), “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word” (Luke 1:2).

The various themes of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under the leadership of its prefect Joseph Ratzinger always had their inner centre in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as

the divine-human mediator of human salvation (theandrisms), who is the head of his body and who is sacramentally present in the Catholic and apostolic Church under the leadership of the Pope and bishops. This is the central message of the declaration “Dominus Jesus: On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” in the Holy Year 2000 of the Incarnation of God.

Joseph Ratzinger was the target of the fierce anger and unquenchable hatred of the so-called progressives or modernists in the Church and of the anti-Catholic neo-Marxist mainstream, since through two instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*Libertatis nuntius* 1984 and *Libertatis conscientia* 1986), he critically but also constructively appreciated Latin American liberation theology (cf. Peter Seewald, *Benedict XVI: Ein Leben*, Munich 2020, part V, 22).

It is clear that this cannot be a simple argument for or against. For “the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21) is the purpose and cause of the manifestation of God as truth and the life of every human being. The raising of man to sonship with God in Christ and to friendship with God in the Holy Spirit, including liberation from original sin and personal sins and all evil of body and soul, is the motive for God’s salvific action in the creation, redemption and fulfilment of man, whom he created in his image and likeness.

In the face of the vulgar Marxist criticism of Christianity that it is only concerned with the afterlife and the inner life and in this way neglects this world and man’s material-social existence in the world, the Second Vatican Council recently stated in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World that the Church’s religious and humanising mission cannot be diametrically or dialectically opposed (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 31). Quite the contrary! It is only in the light of Christ, the God-man, that the unity of the universal orientation towards God and the concrete responsibility of man, “which God willed for himself” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24) for God’s creation, nature, history and society, can be properly recognised and translated into the ethical-social dimension.

The possible conflict potential of liberation theology stems not from the Gospel itself and its realisation in the Catholic Creed, but from its unresolved attitude towards Marxist philosophy in its multiple

theoretical manifestations and its mainly man-destroying effects in “real existing socialism.” With equal firmness, Catholic social teaching rejects “capitalism” directed solely towards individual profit, which – as the political-sociological equivalent of “communism” – grew out of the same abyss of nihilistic materialism.

Faith is clearly not a counter-ideology to modern ideologies, which have emerged from the dialectical interaction between idealism (rationalism) and materialism (empiricism, positivism), creating an interplay of dualisms whose destructive delusion is difficult to get rid of. Faith as boundless trust in God is not an ideology at all, which – as a construct of a finite mind – can be derived from the “will to power” (Nietzsche). That is a rule of superhumans (in the always right Politburo, the philanthropic financial centres and the planning offices of the social engineers of the New World Order) over the dumb masses of people.

Conversely, faith is the total surrender of the mind to God and union with Him in love, which He is in the communion of Father and Son and Holy Spirit (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum*, no. 5). Faith is profoundly compatible with all the real knowledge of the world and of man that we can acquire in the light of our reason. The supernatural knowledge of faith presupposes the natural cognitive capacity of man, who can infer the existence and wisdom of God from the existence of the contingent world and its order (Rom 1:20).

The appearance of a dissonance between the results of modern natural science and history does not stem from an actual contradiction with the revealed truths of the Christian faith, but rather from an ideological contamination of the results of scientific research or also from a poor self-understanding of believers (in reduction to cultural Christianity or humanist religion as a spiritual potential for the cohesion of society).

It is the task of theology to carefully prove the intrinsic unity of reason and faith on the way of a de-ideologisation of the sciences or the misuse of faith for worldly interests or even to justify unjust social conditions or inhuman conditions of human life. The pre-Christian currents seeking the ultimate mystery of being in the God of the Greek philosophies stand in a fundamentally different relationship to the personal God of self-revelation in Jewish and

Christian faith, whom post-Christian and anti-Christian self-redemptive ideologies categorically reject as contrary to human freedom. Therefore, the modern natural and historical sciences contaminated by them must first be detoxified in order to create a synthesis with the Christian faith.

Drinking seawater can be deadly. We can only enjoy it if we take the trouble to desalinate it. The best wine is rendered undrinkable by a drop of vinegar which makes it impossible to drink. It requires a process of purification, just as grace presupposes nature, but it cannot complete it until it is first cleansed of the remnants of sin and death.

We reject on principle Auguste Comte's positivism as a doctrine of salvation because it does not acknowledge a supernatural goal. However, this does not preclude the recognition of the scientific discipline of sociology, which he founded, and making its correct insights into social processes fruitful also for Catholic social teaching.

Marxism goes back to the analysis of the Industrial Revolution and its enormous social effects. In its militant atheism and reduction of man to a conglomeration of social conditions, it essentially denies the personhood of man in his relation to God and ultimately culminates in the anti-humanism or post-humanism of political or technocratic totalitarianism. Communism is the story of its own denial (Gulag, Katyń, Fields of Death).

This also concerns psychology and psychoanalysis, which, as a method of understanding human emotional life, must be separated from Freud's mechanistic and atheistic conception of man. Similarly, in Darwin's theory of evolution, insights into biological laws must be radically separated from the ideology of "social Darwinism," which sought to justify the destruction and exploitation of what it saw as "inferior races," the "law of the most powerful," and then revealed all its godlessness and hostility towards humanity in the greatest crime in human history. Both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI not only theoretically exposed the intellectual contradictions of these atheistic ideologies, but directly experienced their inhuman consequences in their childhood and youth.

In venerating Joseph Ratzinger's intellectual and spiritual legacy as a teacher of the faith, we honour him most by leaving Pope Benedict XVI himself the last word in his spiritual testament:

“Stand firm in the faith! Do not be confused! Often it seems as if science – on the one hand, the natural sciences [...]. I have witnessed from times long past the changes in natural science and have seen how apparent certainties against the faith vanished, proving themselves not to be science but philosophical interpretations only apparently belonging to science – just as, moreover, it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith has learned to understand the limits of the scope of its affirmations and thus its own specificity.

For 60 years now, I have accompanied the path of theology, especially biblical studies, and have seen seemingly unshakeable theses collapse with the changing generations, which turned out to be mere hypotheses: the liberal generation (Harnack, Jülicher, etc.), the existentialist generation (Bultmann, etc.), the Marxist generation. I have seen, and see, how, out of the tangle of hypotheses, the reasonableness of faith has emerged and is emerging anew.

Jesus Christ is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life – and the Church, in all her shortcomings, is truly His Body.”