

“Pope Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger on Politics”
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When Joseph Ratzinger began his theological studies after World War II, what motivated him, he once mentioned, was the desire to give the reason (or, rather, an apology) for our hope (1 Pet 3:15). The basis of all theology in the Middle Ages, *ratio spei* is what moved Ratzinger to choose fundamental theology (originally apologetics) as his initial area of specialization.¹ Fundamental theology, as he understands it, involves two complementary concerns which mark his entire theological endeavour: firstly, to penetrate to the very roots of the faith and so bring the truth to light; and, secondly, to comprehend contemporary culture, within which that faith must be understood, if the reason for our hope is to become evident.

Our present-day world -- modern Western civilization shaped not least by the Enlightenment -- is the ever present background to Ratzinger's theological project. It is both a stimulus and a partner in dialogue, a source of inspiration and an object of critique. Ratzinger is acutely aware of any change of mood in the world around him and so is capable of assessing the slightest blip in that mood, thanks to what one might call his finely tuned "theological seismograph". He is sensitive above all to the cultural changes caused by the shifting of those philosophical and theological tectonic plates under the surface of day-to-day politics which invariably lead to political earthquakes. This sensitivity is what gave his opening lectures on the university at the beginning of each semester an excitement, and a popularity, which attracted the most diverse of students. It is these underlying cultural tectonic plates that grab his attention as a theologian.

These tectonic plates could be given the collective name of the Enlightenment and its aftermath. The influence of the Enlightenment is, in his estimation, both positive and negative. The modern world born of the Enlightenment is both the product of Western Christian civilization and at the same time has become the greatest threat not only to Christianity but to humanity itself, to the world. To distinguish the positive contribution of the Enlightenment

¹Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe: The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), [1st Edition], 61-62.

project from its life-threatening errors (and so to save what is best in the Enlightenment tradition, such as liberal democracy) is one of the primary tasks he set himself in his politics. It is the topic of his famous debate in Munich, January 2004, with Jürgen Habermas, one of Europe's main spokesmen for the Enlightenment today.

By politics, I do not mean the political activity of the Holy See at the world level or at the local level within the some 178 countries or so with which the Holy See has diplomatic relations. What I want to sketch very briefly and inadequately are some features of Ratzinger's "political science", as it were, namely his theological understanding of political life.

Since there is a basic consistency in his writings, certain basic themes can be identified that define his understanding of contemporary politics. These include:

1) The role of religion in politics;

Foundational for Ratzinger's theology of politics² is the distinction between the sphere of faith and that of politics first expressed in the apodictic statement: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mt 22:21). This amounted, in effect, to the liberation of politics from the sacral sphere, thus opening politics up to the sphere of human judgement and decision, the sphere of practical reason, personal responsibility and so of ethics.³ It implies the separation of State and Church, the former a community of necessity (we are born into it) characterized by compromise, the latter a community of freedom or conviction (we are baptised into it) characterized by non-negotiable principles. It also defines the limits set to political authority: that authority does not extend into the sphere of worship and faith. It is, rather, defined by justice in temporal affairs. In its turn, freedom of worship can be seen as the basis of all human rights and the ultimate barrier to totalitarianism. According to Ratzinger, this was essentially the unique contribution of the martyrs to the progress of civilization. "As a religion of the persecuted, and as a universal religion that was wider than any one state or people, it [Christianity] denied the government the right to consider religion as part of the order of the

²For an introduction to Ratzinger's theology of politics, see V Twomey, 'Zur Theologie des Politischen' in *Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, Von Wiederauffinden der Mitte, Grundorientierung: Texte aus vier Jahrzehnten*, published by the *Schülerkreis*, edited by Stephan Otto Horn, Vinzenz Pfnür, Vincent Twomey, Siegfried Wiedenhofer, Josef Zöhler (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, Herder, 1997; 2nd printing 1998) pp.219-30.

³ See Joseph Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's political stance", op.cit., 160-163.

state, thus stating the principle of the liberty of faith."⁴ This he maintains was the soil out of which, in the course of history, the Enlightenment sprung.⁵ The Enlightenment was born in "places where Christianity contrary to its own nature, had unfortunately become mere tradition and the religion of the state." It is to the credit of the Enlightenment, Ratzinger adds, that it drew attention afresh to basic Christian values and gave reason back its own voice.⁶ One of its products is modern, liberal democracy.⁷ Accordingly, Ratzinger formulates the central question for politics as follows: "How can Christianity become a positive force for the political world without [itself] being turned into a political instrument and without on the other hand grabbing the political world for itself?"⁸

2) Justice as the primary goal of politics:

"The Church's first task in this area is to keep alive in fidelity to her holy tradition, the basic criterion of justice and to detach it from the arbitrariness of power."⁹ By this he means the primacy of ethics (the virtue of justice) over politics and so the primacy of moral responsibility, conscience, and integrity. "Ethics" here means what is objectively right and wrong, irrespective of the circumstances. By conscience here is meant man's God-given, innate moral sense, that sense of what is right and wrong that is intrinsic to human nature, that every man, woman, and child has from birth, though it may be dulled by one's cultural environment and personal history. This is what he described on one occasion as "the basic memory of mankind".¹⁰ According to

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger/ Pope Benedict XVI, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, Introduction by Marcello Pera, translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco, Ignatius, 2006), 47-8.

⁵ "Hence the modern idea of freedom is a legitimate product of the Christian environment; nowhere else could it have developed" (Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church Politics" his *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, translated by Michael J. Miller et al. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 20], 157).

⁶ Ibid. 48.

⁷ He has on occasion reminded his hearers that liberal democracy, whose deepest historical roots are to be found in the Western Christian experience, cannot simply be exported. As we know from tragic experience (e.g. Zimbabwe, Ruanda, Burundi), so-called democracy based simply on the majority principle has helped to destroy these societies and brought untold suffering, corruption, and injustice. See also Joseph Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church Politics" in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, op.cit., 157: "The attempt to graft so-called western standards, apart from their Christian basis, onto Islamic societies what are termed western standards cut loose from their Christian foundations misunderstands the internal logic of Islam as well as the historical logic to which these western standards belong, and hence this attempt was condemned to fail in this form." This prognosis seems to have been confirmed (tragically) by the so-called Arab Spring with its declared aim of establishing democracy in countries with a basically Islamic culture.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "Christian Orientation in a Pluralist Democracy?" in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, op. cit., 216.

⁹ *A Turning Point for Europe?* [Second Edition, San Francisco, 2010], op.cit., 60.

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, op.cit., 41.

Ratzinger, conscience is essentially powerless yet for that very reason limits power and protects the powerless.¹¹

3) The danger to political life (and to humanity) by the closing of the Western mind to God.

By this he means the danger posed to politics by the dominance of a truncated notion of reason that developed in the West over the last four centuries and which now excludes God from public discourse and denies the existence of objective standards of morality. The self-limitation of reason to what is empirical, Ratzinger claims, is the distinguishing mark of modern Western civilization, with the result that religion has been banished to the private sphere. This theme is, in a sense, a metapolitical theme. It is at the level of cultural tectonic plates. And it touches on the other two. But all are interrelated.

These are some of the basic themes Pope Benedict XVI took up and developed in his addresses to politicians and representatives of civil society in New York, London, Paris, and Berlin. In this paper, I will concentrate on the last theme: the closing of the Western mind and its effect on political life.

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The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 -- symbolized by the Fall of the Berlin Wall -- was an event of major historical significance. It marked the end of the Cold War that had lasted over four decades and had divided the whole world in two, one side under the hegemony of the liberal capitalist West led by the USA and the other under the sphere of influence of the communist Soviet Union. At the time, end of the Cold War unleashed an understandable euphoria. Francis Fukuyama called it *The End of History* (namely the triumph of liberal democracy marking the end of what to him was the dialectical progress of history). President Bush Sr. gave expression to that general euphoria, when he spoke about a "new world order". Cardinal Ratzinger's response was a raised eyebrow and a question mark: Oh, really? How can we talk about a new world order, if, as he argues, the West, despite differences in political and economic structures, in fact shares the same intellectual assumptions as the Marxist East? The question-mark in the title of a collection of essays, written immediately before and after the Fall of the

¹¹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Conscience in its age" in: *Church, Ecumenism, Politics*, op. cit., 172.

Wall, says it all: *A Turning Point for Europe?* In this book, Ratzinger argued that, unless society's underlying assumptions changed there would be no real turning point for either Europe or the rest of the world. "... Marxism was only the radical execution of an ideological concept that even without Marxism largely determines the signature of our age."¹² Marxism, Ratzinger claims, is the product of three components: (1) the myth of progress (a deterministic understanding of history as the unstoppable march to a better world which, for example, was behind Fukuyama's neo-Hegelian interpretation of 1989); (2) the self-sufficiency of the scientific-technological mindset; and (3) political messianism (utopianism). Each of these components is the product of the practical and/or theoretical denial of God. More precisely, each component, in different ways, affirms the primacy of matter over spirit (which is what is meant by materialism).¹³ And all three currents of thought, Ratzinger maintains, still characterize Western civilization as a whole. Fifteen years later, Ratzinger noted that "The essential problem of our times for Europe and for the world is that although the fallacy of the communist economy has been recognized - so much so that former communists have unhesitatingly become economic liberals - the moral and religious question that it [Marxism] used to address has been almost totally repressed. The unresolved issue of Marxism lives on: the crumbling of man's original certainties about God, himself and the universe. The decline of a moral conscience grounded in absolute values is still our problem today. Left untreated, it could lead to the self-destruction of the European conscience, which we must begin to consider as a real danger ..."¹⁴

Acknowledging the Enlightenment's positive values, Ratzinger is also clear about the inherent contradictions of the Enlightenment project, or rather, more seriously, the menace its

¹² Ibid., 129-30. Here Ratzinger was at one with many "dissidents" within the Soviet Union and its satellites, such as Václav Havel, see *Living in Truth. Twenty-two essays published on the occasion of the award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel*, edited by Jan Vladislav (London/Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987).

¹³ See "Theology and the Church's political stance", op. cit. 152-64; here 153-6. It should, however, be noted that Marx's ideology has its roots in a modern version of the ancient heresy of Monarchianism as interpreted by Hegel and Schelling; following Erik Peterson, Ratzinger draws attention to the fact that, like its modern interpretations, Monarchianism too gave rise to what is alien to Christianity, namely a political theology (cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, translated by J. R. Foster, with a new preface translated by Michael J. Miller [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 170-1).

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, translated by Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 73-74. "My pastoral visit to the Czech Republic coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and the 'Velvet Revolution' which restored democracy to this nation. The euphoria that ensued was expressed in terms of freedom. Two decades after the profound political changes which swept this continent, the process of healing and rebuilding continues, now within the wider context of European unification and an increasingly globalized world. The aspirations of citizens and the expectations placed on governments called for new models of civic life and solidarity between nations and peoples without which *the long desired future of justice, peace and prosperity would remain elusive*. Such desires continue to evolve. Today, especially among the young, the question again emerges as to the nature of the freedom gained. To what end is freedom exercised? What are its true hallmarks?", Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Civil and Political Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps*, 26 Sept 2010 [emphasis added].

basic trajectory could prove for society today. Europe, he wrote, "has developed a culture that, in a manner hitherto unknown to mankind, excludes God from public awareness. His existence may be denied altogether or considered improvable und uncertain and, hence, as something belonging to the sphere of subjective choice. In either case God is irrelevant to public life. [What we are left with] is a purely functional rationality that has shaken the moral consciousness in a way completely unknown to the cultures that existed previously, since it maintains that only that which can be demonstrated experimentally is 'rational'."¹⁵

The threat posed by this "truncated notion of reason", as he put it, i.e. reason reduced to measuring what can be quantified (what is useful or expedient, what can be scientifically verified) includes the threat to Western society itself as well as to the rest of the world. It is, in the first place, the threat posed by the almost unlimited power put in man's hands by science and technology without supplying the corrective of any effective moral restraint. In *Spe salvi*, he quotes the secular philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno, who "formulated the problem of faith in progress quite drastically: he said that progress, seen accurately, is progress from the sling to the atom."¹⁶ Technology has given man enormous powers without giving him any awareness of those moral restraints that alone can keep such powers in check and keep them human. In the absence of a public consciousness of moral restraint (i.e., when morality has lost its self-evidential character), the only restrictions society considers are those of man's own (technical) ability. Society no longer feels bound by what man ought to do or ought not to do. If man's increasing knowledge about how to do things, Ratzinger once wrote, "does not find its criterion in a moral norm, it becomes a power for destruction, as we can already see from the world around us. Man knows how to clone human beings and so he does so. Man knows how to use human beings as 'storerooms' of organs for other men and so he does so. He does so, because this seems something demanded by his own liberty Even terrorism is ultimately based on this modality of man's 'self-authorization', not on the teachings of the Qur'an."¹⁷

The body politic is profoundly affected in another way by the exclusion of God from public discourse: it is becoming an increasingly disorientated society. The exclusion of God has created a void at the core of Western society. This is evidenced in the spread of drugs, sexual

¹⁵ *Christianity and the Crisis of Culture*, op. cit.,30; see also *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, op. cit. 154-6.

¹⁶ *Spe Salvi*, #22.

¹⁷ *Christianity and the Crisis of Culture*, op.cit., 42. See the analysis of the contemporary assumption that technology transcends morality (as in Oppenheimer's attitude to making the atom bomb or in that of the inventor of napalm) in Josef Pieper, *The Concept of Sin*, translated by Edward J. Oakes, SJ (South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine's Press, 2001), 16-33.

licence, and terrorism - forms of escape from the boredom and banality of a life where nothing is sacred. Ratzinger once commented that, if people are convinced that all there is to life is what we experience here and now, discontentment and boredom can only increase – with the result that more and more will look for some kind of escape in a search for ‘real life’ elsewhere. Escapism and various forms of "dropping out" become endemic. "The loss of transcendence evokes the flight to utopia" he once pointed out in the 1970s, after revolution and utopianism erupted on the European and American universities in 1968.¹⁸ "I am convinced that the destruction of transcendence is the actual amputation of human beings from which all other sicknesses [in society] flow. Robbed of their real greatness they can only find escape in illusory hopes."¹⁹ One such illusory hope is the (fundamentally Gnostic) dream of a perfect society in the future to be achieved by tearing down the existing corrupt political structure and replacing it with a hoped-for perfect society ruled by justice and peace. This dream is bound to end in a nightmare. (The most recent example of this, it seems to me, is the so-called Arab Spring, which started in the most secular of Islamic African states, Tunisia.)

But for most people in the West who live as though God did not exist, all that now counts is life in this world. Physical well-being -- symbolized by the body beautiful, style, and "wellness" -- becomes paramount. The only principle that matters is: look after Number One; save your own skin. As Cardinal Ratzinger summed up in the homily at the Mass opening the Consistory that elected him Pope (18 April 2005): "... letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine’ [Eph 4:14], seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires." It is of note that Fukuyama recognized the danger of relativism for democracy. He wrote in *The End of History*: "Relativism – the doctrine that maintains that all values are merely relative and which attacks all 'privileged perspectives' – must ultimately end up undermining democratic and tolerant values as well." If there is no objective morality, law has the ground taken from under its feet - as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out to the German parliamentarians in Berlin during his Address to the Bundestag (22 September 2011).

¹⁸ On the intellectual situation on the German universities that led to the student revolutions in 1968, see Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's political stance", op. cit., 157.

¹⁹ "A Christian Orientation in a pluralistic democracy?", in Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, op.cit., 211.

Echoing Juvenal, Ratzinger once pointed out that "... where there is no longer anything worth dying for, life is no longer worthwhile; it has lost its point. And this is not only true of the individual: a land [or country], too, has values that justify the commitment of one's life; if such values no longer exist, we lose the reasons and the forces that maintain social cohesion and preserve a country as a community of life".²⁰ Those values, though particular in their cultural expression, are basic to our very humanity. They are God-given and so transcend all positive laws, all political and economic power. They are objective values, which can be recognized by man's inner sense for good and evil that we call the voice of God in our hearts, if we are open to it. What Benedict XVI once said of Christian discipleship applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to all men and women of good will: "... one must be able, if necessary, to give up the whole world to save true values, to save the soul, to save the presence of God in the world (cf. Mk 8:36-37)."²¹

The central concern that is common to all the Pope's major addresses to politicians (New York, London, Paris and Berlin) is the need for society, local and global, to recover the divine element in our humanity, which includes that moral consensus without which society flounders and humanity is endangered. At the United Nations' General Assembly in New York marking the 60th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out to the nations of the world that human rights are fundamental to humanity only because of the (faith-inspired) insight that human rights are God-given²² and so, for this very reason, are binding on all governments. Divorced from God, human rights lose their real significance as a measure against which all positive laws are measured.

The Pope also stressed at the United Nations the urgency of entering into dialogue with the Church and World Religions to help re-establish that moral consensus which is need for genuine co-operation among nations. In so doing, he was aware -- a point he developed in other writings -- that, behind the differences in religious rites, there is a profound harmony among the World Religions regarding basic moral values (the wisdom traditions of humanity). These moral values need to be recovered and made politically relevant, since they are being threatened today by the dominant scientific-technological mindset of Western civilization. That mindset has relegated God and morality to the private sphere, considering both to be purely subjective. The Pope's appeal to the United Nations to enter into dialogue with the World Religions, and in

²⁰ *A Turning Point for Europe?* [Second Edition], op. cit., 45.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Christ and His Church: Seeing the face of Jesus in the Church of the Apostles* (London, CTS, 2007), 44.

²² One is reminded of the opening sentence of Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*: "...all men are created equal."

particular with Christianity, the historical humus of modern democracy,²³ is one that he repeated in London and Berlin in his addresses to politicians and representatives of civil society. And this, I think, is significant.

What he did not speak about at the UN, or in the Bundestag, or in Westminster Hall, were *specific* moral issues.²⁴ For example, the parliament at Westminster was the first in the world to introduce abortion (1967) and the first to introduce legislation to permit experimentation on human embryos for IVF (1990), against which evils he has often protested. And yet those topics went unmentioned in his historic address to parliamentarians gathered in Westminster Hall. Instead he praised Westminster for its long tradition of democracy before turning the attention of his audience to St Thomas More, who, in 1535, was condemned to death for putting God before Caesar, conscience before the State, ethics before politics. The Pope's main concern was to draw attention to the need for the State and civil society to engage in a dialogue with the Church and the other World Religions so as to forge a new moral consensus. What he rules out a priori is direct political action by the Church.²⁵ In this context, one could also mention his fundamental objection to liberation theology, namely that it in effect had absorbed faith into politics (thereby reversing the basic thrust of the New Testament).

The Regensburg lecture in 2005 was in effect an appeal to fling open the windows of the bunker created by the modern truncated notion of rationality, namely "the self-imposed limitation of reason to what is empirically falsifiable", and to let the light of God's world enter into our modern world.²⁶ The lecture was addressed to the world of science and scholarship (and so indirectly to the world of politics in the broad sense of the term). In it Pope Benedict outlines the three stages of the dehellenization of Western thought (robbing it of its metaphysical foundations) that shaped the Enlightenment and produced the positivist limitation of reason.

²³ See Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's political stance", op. cit., 160-163, where he summarizes A.A.I. Ehrhardt, *Politische Metaphysik von Solon bis Augustin*, III volumes (Tübingen, 1959-69), especially volume II, *Die christliche Revolution* (1959); see also Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago & London: (The University of Chicago Press, 1952).

²⁴ The Church's position on these issues is of course well known. And at the UN, the Holy See's Permanent Observer Mission misses no opportunity to make known the Pope's views on such topic and presents them in the relevant debates.

²⁵ See e.g., *A Turning Point for Europe?* [2nd Edition], op.cit., 62ff.

²⁶ *Regensburg Lecture*. Here I allude to the Pope's *Address to the Bundestag* six years later: "In its self-proclaimed exclusivity, the positivist reason which recognizes nothing beyond mere functionality resembles a concrete bunker with no windows, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions, being no longer willing to obtain either from God's wide world. And yet we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that even in this artificial world, we are still covertly drawing upon God's raw materials, which we refashion into our own products. The windows must be flung open again, we must see the wide world, the sky and the earth once more and learn to make proper use of all this."

Tracey Rowland shows how in his lecture the Pope tried to demonstrate that “Islam and modern secularism share the same voluntarist tendency.” In both, the will is paramount, not reason. Both fail to recognize “a *logos* [divine reason] inherent in the order of being itself”. Ratzinger “was pleading at least as much with contemporary militant secularists as with contemporary militant Muslims to recognize that they share a common philosophical starting point”,²⁷ namely a purely instrumentalist understanding of reason. The object of the Regensburg lecture was to broaden the generally accepted concept of reason in Western civilization (and its application in every academic discipline, including theology) so that what is truly human can be recovered once again. For this reason, the Pope argues, theology, properly understood, is central to the task of the university. Theology should keep the question of God - and so the meaning of human existence - before the minds of the academic world and with it the questions regarding the values which are essential to our humanity.²⁸ In turn, theology will be helped by the critical questions raised by the other disciplines. It too must be saved from turning religion into idolatry or faith into an ideology. Faith and reason, properly understood, help to purify each other.²⁹

In sum, a more all-embracing concept of reason is needed if humanity is to be equipped to overcome the dangers which stem directly from the enormous, new possibilities placed in our hands by progress in science and technology. Before his election, he had warned: "... the attempt, carried to extremes, to shape human affairs to the total exclusion of God leads more and more to the brink of the abyss, toward the utter annihilation of man."³⁰

But the recovery of the full grandeur of reason, i.e. one that is open to God and objective morality, is also needed so that Western civilization can enter into a real dialogue of cultures and

²⁷ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 121.

²⁸ On the proper role of theology on the university (as opposed to a purely positivistic approach to theology which would reduce theology to simply one discipline among others), see Ratzinger, "Theology and the Church's political stance", op.cit., 157ff.

²⁹ See Mark Johnston, *Saving God. Religion after Idolatry*, by the Princeton philosopher who questions all three monotheistic religions (Princeton, 2011). Commenting on the ambiguity of religion as both a great chance and a great danger to man, Ratzinger ascribes to atheism the positive role of helping to purify religion's false (i.e. anthropological) notion of God: see his early article "Atheismus" in *Wahrheit und Zeugnis: Aktuelle Themen der Gegenwart in Theologischer Sicht* edited by Michael Schmaus and Alfred Läßle (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1964), 94-100, here 96-7.

³⁰ *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, op.cit., 50. Immediately after his Address to the Bundestag, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to representative of Berlin Jewish Community in the same Reichstag building, the epicentre of the Shoah. Among other things, he stated: "The Nazi reign of terror was based on a racist myth, part of which was the rejection of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ and of all who believe in him. The 'almighty' of whom Adolf Hitler spoke was a pagan idol, who wanted to take the place of the biblical God, the Creator and Father of all men. Refusal to heed this one God always makes people heedless of human dignity as well. What man is capable of when he rejects God, and what the face of a people can look like when it denies this God, [this] the terrible images from the concentration camps at the end of the war showed."

world religions. By excluding the ultimate questions, the Pope pointed out in his Regensburg Address, "the world's profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures." This perception of Western civilization as an attack on all they hold sacred seems to be the principal motivating force behind Islamic terrorism, though the form that terrorism is taking is, paradoxically, shaped by the Western scientific-technological mindset. They know, and reject, the Western hubris that arises from this mindset, while at the same time they use the products of Western science and technology for their own ends. The tragedy is that Christians living in those societies are often the ones who pay the price for Western hubris, since they often are seen as representing "the West".

Commenting on the omission of any mention of God or Europe's Christian roots in the proposed European Constitution in the year before he was elected Pope, Ratzinger contended that: "If we come to experience a clash of cultures,³¹ this will not be due to a conflict between the great religions, which of course have always been at odds with each other but, nevertheless, have ultimately always understood how to coexist with one another. The coming clash will be between this radical emancipation of man [with its denial of God] and the great historical cultures [based on religion]." In other words, two tectonic plates will collide. It seems to me, that the collision is already taking place in the hearts and minds of people in every continent where the efficiency of scientific and technological mindset comes into conflict with the traditional moral values of humanity.

Implications for contemporary politics

Firstly: the primacy of God. We are talking about the need for Transcendence, what is always beyond human grasp yet grounds all our knowledge and activity.³² We should perhaps talk more about the public recognition of the centrality of the search for God in order to renew modernity from within. This is how Western monasticism created modern Western civilization. Monasticism was the existential source of European culture, as Pope Benedict XVI stressed in his address to the world of culture at the *Collège de berardins* in Paris (2008). The monks

³¹ The allusion is to Samuel P. Huntington's counter-thesis to Fukuyama.

³² There are many dangers in invoking the name of God in the political arena, not only by Muslim extremists but even by politicians and statesmen appealing to their Christian constituents; they too risk offending against the Second Commandment. Another real danger is that of reducing God to a tribal god - implying that He is on our nation's side in its declared battles with the forces of evil.

transformed European culture not by setting out to create a new culture at a time when Roman civilization was imploding. The transformation of European culture was a by-product, as it were, of their search for God. *Quaerere Deum*: that was their motivating force and so they transformed European culture from within. The same search is needed today, albeit now on the universities, which themselves were the fruit of the original monastic search for God. The search for God is by its very nature a search for morality, the path to God.

What this means in the concrete was articulated by Vaclav Havel when he was a persecuted dissident in Communist Czechoslovakia. He tried to convince intellectuals in the West at the time about the need to recover once again: "... the 'pre-speculative assumption that the world functions and is generally possible at all because there is something beyond its horizon, something beyond and above it that might escape our understanding and our grasp, but *for just that reason*, firmly grounds this world, bestows upon it its order and measure, and is the hidden source of all the rules, customs, commandments, prohibitions and norms that hold within it."³³

If the body politic is to recover its sense of direction and if politicians are to recover the trust of the people which is essential to a healthy society, what is needed is the recovery and public recognition of those moral norms that are universally valid. This must be accompanied by personal integrity among all those who hold public office, which integrity alone engenders trust. This can only be achieved, not by structures (ethical guidelines and commissions) but by acting in accordance with conscience, properly understood.³⁴ For the professional politician, judge, administrator of justice or manager, this means the priority of conscience above mere expediency: the priority to principle above pragmatism (admitting that pragmatism determines the greater part of politics, but never at the expense of moral principles).³⁵ To live by the priority of moral principle over pragmatism requires moral courage. To adhere to your (genuinely moral) principles must needs bring you into conflict with the powers and principalities of this world --

³³ Václav Havel, *op.cit.*, 137.

³⁴ Addressing civil and political leaders and members of the diplomatic corps in the Presidential Palace, Prague, Pope Benedict XVI, 26 September 2009, said: "The thirst for truth, beauty and goodness, implanted in all men and women by the Creator, is meant to draw people together in the quest for justice, freedom and peace. History has amply shown that truth can be betrayed and manipulated in the service of false ideologies, oppression and injustice. But do not the challenges facing the human family call us to look beyond those dangers? For in the end, what is more inhuman, and destructive, than the cynicism which would deny the grandeur of our quest for truth, and the relativism that corrodes the very values which inspire the building of a united and fraternal world? Instead, we must re-appropriate a confidence in the nobility and breadth of the human spirit in its capacity to grasp the truth, and let that confidence guide us in the patient work of politics and diplomacy." See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *On Conscience* (Philadelphia/San Francisco: NCBC/Ignatius Press, 2007).

³⁵ What needs to be stressed here is the limitation to moral principles (as distinct from principles that are ideologically determined, such as forms of government, which are open to debate), since in all other issues, as Ratzinger points out, compromise is of the essence of politics.

and may cost more than you would like. The model here are St Thomas More, held up by Pope Benedict as a model for all in public life during his speech in Westminster Hall. Other models include the men and women of the German resistance movement he mentioned in his speech to the Bundestag. By way of contrast, to quote Havel again (writing in the early 1980s), the real malaise of contemporary politics, both in the Communist East and the liberal-capitalist West is that politicians consign their conscience to the bathroom.

What is the task of the Church in the political sphere? Ratzinger's reply to that question is, in the first place education, understood not simply as schooling, no matter how important that is. Education must be taken in the "great sense" it had for the pagan Greek philosophers. The Church "must break open the prison of positivism and awaken man's receptivity to the truth, to God, and thus to the power of conscience. She must give men the courage to live according to conscience and so keep open the narrow pass between anarchy and tyranny, which is none other than the narrow way of peace."³⁶ This in turn implies that the Church must maintain what he calls the balance of the dual system of Church and state (each autonomous in their own sphere) as the foundation of political freedom. This is needed to withstand the totalitarian tendencies of every political authority that claims to justify its own moral values based on its chosen political ideology. "Hence the Church must make claims and demands on public law 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."³⁷

Above and beyond that, Ratzinger once wrote: "Our greatest need in the present historical moment is [for] people who make God credible in the world by means of the enlightened faith they live. The negative testimony of Christians who spoke of God but lived in a manner contrary to him has obscured the image of God and has opened the doors to disbelief. [...] We need men whose intellect is enlightened by the light of God, men whose hearts are opened by God, so that their intellect can speak to the intellect of others and their hearts to the hearts of others. It is only by means of men who have been touched by God that God can return to mankind."³⁸

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³⁶ *A Turning Point for Europe?* [2nd Edition], op.cit., 61

³⁷ "Theology and the Church's political stance", op. cit. 163.

³⁸ *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, op.cit., 52.

The above is but the tip of an iceberg, but hopefully it gives some little inkling of the kind of contribution Pope Benedict XVI has made to political science. In recognition of this contribution (but also probably in recognition of his own public witness and moral courage), Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was made an *associate foreign member* of the *French Academy of Politics and Morals* of the *Institut de France* in 1992. He replaced the nuclear physicist and Soviet dissident, Andrej Sakharov, who once wrote that "The closure of half of all the Churches deals no lesser blow to a country than the closure of all scientific institutes would do." Ratzinger/Benedict's contribution to political science has been to demonstrate the truth of Sakharov's pithy statement.