

# The Pope and the World



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*The Thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI*

By

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The Pope and the World: The Thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI

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WITH APPRECIATION FOR THE POPE EMERITUS



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# INTRODUCTION

Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, is the 265<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Catholic Church, and the first Pope *Emeritus*. He follows the Philosopher Pope, John Paul II, and is known to some as the Theologian Pope for his extensive writing on innumerable subjects in both his official capacities as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Bishop, Cardinal, Pope, as well as his writings in a private capacity as a theologian.

Through all his books and publications, as well as the vast literature available as official Vatican documentation on [Vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)<sup>1</sup> as Audiences, Homilies, Speeches, Messages and Letters, the writing of Joseph Ratzinger are as extensive and varied as can be found by anyone in the last centuries.

What makes the writings of Pope Benedict XVI so interesting is of course that he was Pope, the Supreme Pontiff, and head of the Catholic Church. But more than this, while his Papacy has amplified his name recognition, it is probably his writings and commentary as the Prefect of the CDF, earning him the nicknames of the *Pope's Rottweiler* and the *Panzer Kardinal* (referencing both his tenacity and German background), under the Papacy of John Paul II for over 20 years that have set him apart.

Though not meant in a complimentary manner, the nicknames highlight a major difference between the writings and commentaries of Ratzinger as Cardinal and Prefect, and the communication style adopted by Ratzinger as Pope. The Pope that the world came to know was very different to the popular characterisation of Cardinal Ratzinger, and over the period of his Papacy, this adaptation has softened the edges of the public persona of Cardinal Ratzinger.

The people who knew Joseph Ratzinger, as a person, pastor and theologian, rather than the Prefect for what was previously known as the *Holy Office*, and prior to that, *the Inquisition*, were not surprised at the soft-spoken, gentle and thoughtful Pope that emerged from 2005 onwards. This is the person who Joseph Ratzinger is and always has been. While often seemingly severe, strict and dogmatic in his writings—in his official capacity—a very soft-spoken, introverted and kind person is clearly visible in his more personalised work. This comes across particularly so in his

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<sup>1</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020.  
<http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en.html>.

interview-books with Peter Seewald, and to a lesser extent, *The Ratzinger Report*, with Vittorio Messori. It was the latter that generated the most interest, being the Rottweiler's first attempts to reveal the man behind the very public role in 1985.

However, in his responsible position as the gatekeeper of the soundness of the Doctrine of the Faith, he was required to adopt a strong, clear, and oftentimes, very uncompromising position, particularly in the face of dissent across the world. His positions, though orthodox and adhering to the Tradition and Doctrine of the Faith, were very often not popular with those that sought to shape the Church—and Society (as those were very much interconnected)—in a socialist, revolutionary, and subjective model. This displeasure often manifested itself in an exaggerated characterisation of the Prefect by these opponents, creating a false impression of the future Pope. Of course, such an approach is neither unusual nor new, where argumentation and debate fails, it is often the tactic of idealists to resort to personalised and *ad hominem* attacks in order to present the person as objectively wrong rather than address the content of their views.

While the commentary is often exaggerated, and the intention nefarious, overall, the impact was to both amplify the voice of Cardinal Ratzinger, but also ensure that he was, however much many of the commentariat wished it would never happen, the likely successor to John Paul II. The Papacy brought greater attention to the works and writing of Joseph Ratzinger, increasing the accessibility of an already multi-million bestselling author to new audiences, but it was relatively seldom that the utterings of the Pope elicited a hostile reaction.

While the various writings of Joseph Ratzinger as a theologian and as a Cardinal and Prefect over the course of more than 50 years are at all times profound, thoughtful, and challenging, it is the series of interview books that provide the most personal insights into the thoughts and mind of the Pope Emeritus, much more so than his carefully crafted memoirs of his first 50 years, *Milestones*.

The first of these, *The Ratzinger Report*, with Vittorio Messori, arrived like a thunderbolt, a potentially risky move from the right-hand man in the Vatican. Whether the interview was designed to soften the public image of the *Panzer Kardinal* it was certainly successful in this regard, but also a public relations exercise to remove the veil of mystery from the man tasked with addressing the main challenges facing the Church at the time, undergoing an onslaught from a cultural shift across the western world. Latterly, *The Ratzinger Report* provides, with its annex on *Liberation Theology*, while controversial, a more accessible and clear enunciation of

the problems with this ‘theology’ that are not easy to discern from the official and carefully crafted Vatican documents.

*Salt of the Earth* and *God and the World* followed later in 1997 and 2002, and from a distance, could have been interpreted as early plays to position the Cardinal—in the public eye at least—as a candidate for the Papacy. Always open, frank, and interesting, the interviews provide insights into the thoughts of the second most powerful Catholic on Earth at the time, with wide-ranging commentary on most anything and everything, often hitting targets from unexpected angles.

In *Salt of the Earth* for example, those who sought a horizontal Church in the name of brotherhood, were put in their place by a reminder that Cain and Abel, the first pair of brothers, resulted in fratricide. Then there was Romulus and Remus.<sup>2</sup> In the defence of the accusation of pale, male, staleness foisted on the clergy, and particularly the Cardinals, Ratzinger, slightly tongue-in-cheek, defends against ageist accusations, claiming that they move so slowly there is no danger of any decisions being rushed.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking on the challenges facing the Church, still, and probably even more relevant today, the Cardinal had plenty to say on subjects that were almost unaddressed in his Pontificate. On divestment, he acknowledged that there may be a case for the Church to examine its conscience and acknowledge that holding onto some of its earthly possessions may be damaging to its position rather than resolutely defending its accumulated institutions.

“Unfortunately, however, it has always been the case in history that not even the Church has had the capacity to reject earthly possession on her own; rather, her possessions have had to be taken away from her again and again, and this forcible removal turned out to be for her salvation.”<sup>4</sup>

On the never-ending issue of divorced and remarried people receiving the Eucharist, the Cardinal provides simplicity and clarity to the issue that has been politically charged and complicated in recent years. People who cannot receive communion are not excommunicated in the formal sense; they are simply not in a position to receive the sacrament.

“The real reason why the problem has become so dramatic is that Communion has become a sort of social rite and that one is really stigmatized if one doesn’t participate in it. If it becomes plain again that

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<sup>2</sup> *Salt of the Earth*, with *Peter Seewald*, 1997, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 192

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192

many people should be saying to themselves: I've got a few things to answer for, I can not go up to Communion as I am now ..."<sup>5</sup>

The list is endless: end of life care and nourishment, euthanasia, evangelisation, evil, aging, the Holocaust, infallibility, Hans Küng, Liberation Theology, polygamy, sex (“And sex is not something to be labelled ‘sin’ and dismissed but is first of all a gift of creation. In my present job, I have to talk a great deal about it. I do try to avoid reducing morality, to say nothing of Christianity, to the sixth commandment, but the insistent questions of the Christian people compel us to deal constantly with this area of human existence”<sup>6</sup>), Steppenwolf, Vatican II and women priests (“The question is just this: Does it come from the Lord or not?”<sup>7</sup>) to highlight but a few.

In *God and the World*, the Cardinal continues to address a multifarious list of subjects in a very composed and thoughtful manner, often discussing issues that one would not expect of the enforcer of the faith. Speaking about aliens, he muses that we may not be alone in the universe. We just cannot know—we cannot comprehend the breadth of God’s work, but we just have no serious grounds for thinking there are aliens.<sup>8</sup>

The various interviews, personal and, for many, unbelievably open, give an insight into how Joseph Ratzinger sees the Church and the world interact. While often his dogmatic theology and exegesis can be challenging for the layperson, when he enters into discussion on the place of the Church in the world, but also the world in the Church, the ideas and thinking of this deep mind come alive. Indeed, even in coming to the conclusion to resign, the decision was made not so much through theological reasoning but from a physical inability, where the mind desires but the body refuses, reflecting the rejection of the cerebral Church in the fleshly modern world against which Joseph Ratzinger so greatly fought.

In his interview with Peter Seewald in 2010, Pope Benedict gave an insight into his future decision to resign and the rationale behind it, paving the way for his explanations that followed in 2013. This prophetic discussion indicates that his resignation was not coerced in any way but was surprising given that it was hundreds of years since the last resignation of a Pope. It is possible that the final years of Pope John Paul’s life prompted some thinking—and possibly discussion—with his closest aide and ally.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 205

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 98

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 209

<sup>8</sup> *God and the World*, with *Peter Seewald*, 2002, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 120

“When the danger is great one must not run away. For that reason, now is certainly not the time to resign. Precisely at a time like this one must stand fast and endure the difficult situation.”<sup>9</sup>

As he later stated when he resigned, as he pre-empted his reasoning himself in 2010, that if a Pope *is no longer physically, psychologically, and spiritually capable of handling the duties of his office* he has the right and possibly the obligation to resign. In 2016, again with Peter Seewald, released as *Last Testament*, the Pope Emeritus repeats almost verbatim his 2010 preparatory rationalization, underlining strongly, with perhaps too much zeal, that he was in no way forced from Office. The interview with Seewald in 2016 provided a human insight into how the decision to resign came to be:

“Otherwise I would have had to try holding out until 2014. But I knew that I could no longer manage it ... You talk about it extensively with the loving God ... I wasn't fearful because I had an inner certainty that it had to be done, and that isn't something you can be talked out of ... But I had wrestled with it inwardly the whole time, so my inward self was to some extent already weathered.”<sup>10</sup>

The frankness and humanity of his discussion contrasts with the reasoning provided in his official capacity in 2013: *“In these last months I have felt my energies declining, and I have asked God insistently in prayer to grant me his light and to help me make the right decision, not for my own good, but for the good of the Church. I have taken this step with full awareness of its gravity and even its novelty, but with profound interior serenity.”*<sup>11</sup>

The decision of Pope Benedict XVI to resign, yielding to the demands of the body, may harshly be considered to reflect the Papacy of this great theologian: while fighting valiantly, time and tide wait for no man, as the ‘dictatorship of relativism’ can be seen to gain the upper hand with great acceleration in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While it may be argued, and Joseph Ratzinger himself would argue, that a smaller church is now what is needed, his writings over the course of his life provide the necessary intellectual fuel for the “small Church” to renew its place in the world in the coming years.

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<sup>9</sup> Light of the World, with *Peter Seewald*, 2010, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 29

<sup>10</sup> Last Testament, with *Peter Seewald*, 2016, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 15

<sup>11</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. General Audience of His Holiness Benedict XVI, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20130227.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130227.html).

The arguments articulated by Joseph Ratzinger as to how the sacred and the earthly interact, the political and religious, the Church and State, the dialectics of secularisation, will enable future Catholics to engage in the discourse of life without yielding to a naked public square. In taking his positions and engaging in that public square Joseph Ratzinger developed a body of thinking that deserves to be anthologised and studied, shared and developed. While not a completed political theory or a fully articulated theology, the leaves and the branches are already in place—only the architecture is missing. While developing this body of thought, Joseph Ratzinger, as both Pope, Cardinal and Theologian, did not avoid controversies, did not shy away from difficult positions, and was regularly in the spotlight. While the controversies tended to overshadow the depth of his writing, they need to be quickly addressed and then put aside before looking at the profundity of his works lest they detract, and distract as often intended, from the strength of his message to the world.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PAPAL CONTROVERSIES IN THE WORLD

As the Pope engaged with the world on a daily basis, surprisingly, given his outspoken nature and characterisation as a controversialist as Cardinal, only a handful of instances during the papacy created any great controversy. His Regensburg address signalled the end of what many felt was his honeymoon period; the remission of the excommunication of the bishops of the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) and in particular Bishop Williamson was profoundly upsetting for the Pope as he felt ill-informed by his subordinates; his response to a question from a journalist on a plane in relation to the morality of condoms was seized upon by the secular press; and the *Motu Proprio* on the Roman Liturgy “*Summorum Pontificum*” was manufactured as turning the clock back to the dark ages. All of these ‘scandals’ were blown out of proportion and exaggerated to a greater or lesser degree in order to manufacture a certain level of outrage and controversy against the Pope.

The now infamous *Regensburg Address* (Munich, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006) was probably the first time those less than amenable to the Pope were given an opportunity to express outrage at a perceived *faux pas*. As he addressed the issue of violent extremism—and the arguments against it—he was adjudged to have accused Islam of violence using the quotation: “*Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.*” What the commentators who jumped on the bandwagon to denounce this apparent attempt at division and denigration of Islam failed to realise or point out was that this was an excerpt from a 14<sup>th</sup> Century document which focussed on why spreading the faith through violence was incompatible with the nature of God and with reason. Ignored completely was the Pope’s citation of the Koranic verse (*Surah 2,256*) which states “*There is no compulsion in religion.*”

The wider paragraph provides clarity for anyone willing to read with a fair spirit and at seeking to take the Pope face value, although the complexity of the discussion may provide a mitigating argument for some:

“It is not my intention to discuss this question in the present lecture; here I would like to discuss only one point—itsself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole—which, in the context of the issue of ‘faith and reason’, I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue. In the seventh conversation (διάλεξις—controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2,256 reads: ‘There is no compulsion in religion’. According to some of the experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur’an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the ‘Book’ and the ‘infidels’, he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: ‘Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.’ The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. ‘God’, he says, ‘is not pleased by blood—and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God’s nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats ... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death ...’ The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God’s nature. The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality.”<sup>12</sup>

The Pope in both his official speeches, and in his interviews with Peter Seewald, attempted to explain his point over and over: the manufactured outrage at what he was saying obviously a source of great distress for himself. In 2007, he attempted the following clarification:

“But on the other, the doctrine of evolution does not answer every query, especially the great philosophical question: where does everything come from? And how did everything start which ultimately led to man? I believe

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<sup>12</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Lecture of His Holiness Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html).

this is of the utmost importance. This is what I wanted to say in my lecture at Regensburg: that reason should be more open, that it should indeed perceive these facts but also realise that they are not enough to explain all of reality. They are insufficient. Our reason is broader and can also see that our reason is not basically something irrational, a product of irrationality, but that reason, creative reason, precedes everything and we are truly the reflection of creative reason.”<sup>13</sup>

However, in both *Light of the World*, and *Last Testament*, the Pope addressed the controversy more from a personal perspective rather than a theological one. His reason for exploring the issue comes from an intellectual and historico-religious curiosity, outlining how he merely, naively, thought referring to the dialogue of *Palaiologos* would have been interesting, while underestimating the political implications of the event.<sup>14</sup>

He admits his regret at the Regensburg fallout but feels that it ultimately had a positive effect—allowing him to visit Turkey, and engage in dialogue with Islam—in what he feels was a more vigorous dialogue than would have occurred without the controversy. Despite the curiosity that he claims led to his speech, the Pope touched on an element often unstated, that Islam has yet to go through the maturation which the Christian denominations have had to face through the enlightenment—and has yet to address its relation to violence and to reason. He is hopeful that his interjection has catalysed these necessary conversations.<sup>15</sup>

The issue of the *Society of Saint Pius X* and the remission of the excommunication of its Bishops triggered a fanfare because of the reaction to the belated revelation that Bishop Williamson may have been a *Holocaust* denier. This was one occasion where the Pope in an official communication—a Letter on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2009 to all Catholic Bishops on the subject—responded with emotion and evident personal disappointment.

“I have been told that consulting the information available on the internet would have made it possible to perceive the problem early on. I have learned the lesson that in the future in the Holy See we will have to pay greater attention to that source of news. I was saddened by the fact that even Catholics who, after all, might have had a better knowledge of the situation,

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<sup>13</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Meeting of the His Holiness Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Dioceses of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/speeches/2007/july/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070724\\_clero-cadore.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/speeches/2007/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070724_clero-cadore.html).

<sup>14</sup> *Last Testament*, with *Peter Seewald*, 2016, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 196

<sup>15</sup> *Light of the World*, with *Peter Seewald*, 2010, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 98

thought they had to attack me with open hostility. Precisely for this reason I thank all the more our Jewish friends, who quickly helped to clear up the misunderstanding and to restore the atmosphere of friendship and trust which—as in the days of Pope John Paul II—has also existed throughout my pontificate and, thank God, continues to exist.”<sup>16</sup>

In his interview with Peter Seewald he was even more forthright, speaking in an unofficial capacity in a manner reminiscent of Cardinal Ratzinger as Prefect of the CDF—particularly in relation to theologians. Feeling possibly aggrieved at how he was mistreated, he accuses even trained theologians of circulating an incredible amount of nonsense, perpetuating a mistaken perception that the bishops were excommunicated for their attitude to the Vatican rather than the issue being manner they were episcopally ordained—illicitly. He admits also that the Vatican’s public relations work was a complete failure on this issue—and particularly in explaining why it was obliged that the bishops be allowed back into communion with the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Another issue that resulted in a rather more drawn-out discussion, if not outright controversy, was the *Motu Proprio on the Roman Liturgy* “*Summorum Pontificum*”, as the Pope sought to reverse some of the ‘progressive’ changes that had affected the Liturgy after Vatican II. The reaction was not surprising given the antipathy in certain circles toward any steps that would be viewed as ‘regressive’ in terms of liturgical changes, framed as moving from the accessible language of the proletariat to the elevated affectations of the educated *bourgeoisie*.

For Pope Benedict, this was not the case at all, and much of his thoughts were outlined over the course of his many writings prior to this on the *Liturgy*, but also in a lengthy Letter to Bishops in July 2007, accompanying the Apostolic Letter, in order to address the confusion—or anger—manufactured in response to *Summorum Pontificum*.

“[T]he fear was expressed in discussions about the awaited *Motu Proprio*, that the possibility of a wider use of the 1962 Missal would lead to disarray or even divisions within parish communities. This fear also strikes me as quite unfounded. The use of the old Missal presupposes a certain degree of liturgical formation and some knowledge of the Latin language; neither of

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<sup>16</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Letter of the His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2009. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20090310\\_remissione-scomunica.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090310_remissione-scomunica.html).

<sup>17</sup> Light of the World, with *Peter Seewald*, 2010, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 22

these is found very often ... It is true that there have been exaggerations and at times social aspects unduly linked to the attitude of the faithful attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition. Your charity and pastoral prudence will be an incentive and guide for improving these ... I now come to the positive reason which motivated my decision to issue this *Motu Proprio* updating that of 1988. It is a matter of coming to an interior reconciliation in the heart of the Church. Looking back over the past, to the divisions which in the course of the centuries have rent the Body of Christ, one continually has the impression that, at critical moments when divisions were coming about, not enough was done by the Church's leaders to maintain or regain reconciliation and unity. One has the impression that omissions on the part of the Church have had their share of blame for the fact that these divisions were able to harden. This glance at the past imposes an obligation on us today: to make every effort to enable for all those who truly desire unity to remain in that unity or to attain it anew ... There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the Liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place."<sup>18</sup>

The position of the Pope was not unexpected and indeed something he had expressed frequently in many of his previous writings. The most famous and celebrated of these is *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1999) where Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger expounds his thoughts on the beauty and sacral nature of the Liturgy and its contents, its form and its emphasis, as well as his thoughts on the new Missal. He is clearly, which he admitted, influenced by Romano Guardini, who published a famous book on the Liturgy in 1918, which Ratzinger's is very much building on. At the time of Guardini's book, he says the Liturgy was like an old fresco—undamaged but overlaid by whitewash as time went by. The Liturgical Movement, and also Vatican II, revealed the beauty of the fresco again—but only briefly, as it has since been threatened by restorations and reconstruction—and is near destroyed, in urgent need of repair and saving.<sup>19</sup>

These thoughts build on much earlier pronouncements from the Cardinal on this sensitive subject which was a very visible manifestation of the battle at the heart of the Church in the aftermath of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. Joseph

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<sup>18</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops on the occasion of the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum*, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070707\\_lettera-vescovi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070707_lettera-vescovi.html).

<sup>19</sup> *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 2000, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 7

Ratzinger, personally and as Prefect of the CDF, was caught in the centre of this debate, where he attempted, albeit with difficulty, to present his position as both pragmatic and conciliatory, with objectors to his position on both sides of the argument.

“Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me add that as far as its content is concerned (apart from a few criticisms), I am very grateful for the new Missal, for the way it has enriched the treasury of prayers and prefaces, for the new Eucharistic prayers and the increased number of texts for use on weekdays, etc., quite apart from the availability of the vernacular. But I do regard it as unfortunate that we have been presented with the idea of a new book rather than with that of continuity within a single liturgical history.”<sup>20</sup>

The writings of the Joseph Ratzinger over the course of 50 years prior to assuming the Papacy demonstrate a clear preference for accommodation of the beauty of the Liturgy focusing, as was his perspective in the aftermath of Vatican II, on continuity rather than rupture, and a concern that the Liturgy is reduced to “*something embarrassingly cobbled together*.”<sup>21</sup>

The *Motu Proprio* addressed much more than the Tridentine Rite, and although the issue was partly about language it ran much deeper than that, both for the Pope and his detractors. What was at stake was the deeper issue of form, but also the relationship of man, and the Church, with the past. It was, he said “*a crisis of sacred art, but a crisis of art in general ... a symptom of the crisis of man's very existence*.”<sup>22</sup>

The writings of the Cardinal Ratzinger linked the Liturgy with the broader issues of life, existence and man's relationship with the universe, moving far from the challenge posed by the question of accessibility to the common man. He took a much more forthright tone on the subject as Prefect and theologian than was possible later as Pope, but left no doubt to anyone interested in understanding, from where the Pope was coming from in the Apostolic Letter. Sternly, he looks at modern art, which is infiltrating the Church and stresses that while it has to do with freedom, this type of art is an empty freedom, close to despair, that should have no place in the Liturgy. The Liturgy is not something that is created in the mind or imagination of man, but is “*is God's descent upon our world, the source of real liberation*.”<sup>23</sup> The erosion of the Liturgy is a consequence of man wanting

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<sup>20</sup> The Feast of Faith, 1986, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 87

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 147

<sup>22</sup> Spirit of the Liturgy, 2000, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 130

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 168

to bring God down to his world where worship no longer rises up and elevates.<sup>24</sup>

The Cardinal did not just address the deeper existential issues facing the Liturgy, he also focused on many of the important earthy and practical challenges (art, music, orientation, popular piety, dance) claimed as part of its ‘renewal’ post-Vatican II. Some of these he highlighted as patently absurd, such as turning it into “*dancing pantomimes ... end[ing] with applause.*” He pointedly notes that where “*applause breaks out in the Liturgy ... it is a sure sign that the essence of Liturgy has totally disappeared.*”<sup>25</sup>

One issue which had caused much consternation among the changes brought about by the Pope was the adjustment to language at various stages in Liturgy. One of these being a small, but to some important, change in the Creed. ‘One being’ was replaced with ‘consubstantial’, which for some was unnecessarily complicated language, but a question addressed previously by Cardinal Ratzinger in 1986, highlighting the complex reasoning in hermeneutics, theology and philosophy, underlining the importance of the issue, less clearly expressed when he was Pope.

“At one point in its Creed, as is well known, the Council of Nicaea clearly went beyond the language of Scripture, in describing Jesus as ‘of one substance with the Father’. Both in ancient and modern times the presence in the Creed of this philosophical term, ‘of one substance’, has given rise to major disputes. Again and again it has been suggested that it indicates a serious departure not only from the language but also from the thought of the Bible. We can only answer this charge if we ascertain precisely what it actually says. What does ‘of one substance’ really mean? The answer is this: the term is used solely as a translation of the word ‘Son’ into philosophical language. And what is it necessary to translate it? Well, whenever faith begins to reflect, the question arises as to what, in reality, the word ‘Son’ might mean as applied to Jesus. The word is very familiar in the language of the religions, and so people cannot avoid asking what it means in this particular case. Is it a metaphor, as is commonly found in the history of religion, or does it mean more? The council of Nicaea, in interpreting the word ‘Son’ philosophically by means of the concept ‘of one substance’ is saying that ‘Son’ is to be understood here, not in the sense of religious metaphor, but in the most real and correct sense of the word. The central word of the New Testament, the word ‘Son’, is to be understood literally.”<sup>26</sup>

The last of the Papal scandals resulting from the words of Pope Benedict XVI came from something he said in his interview with Peter Seewald on

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 198

<sup>26</sup> Behold the Pierced One, 1986, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 36

the subject of HIV/AIDs and condoms, where he was interpreted as possibly taking the first steps of a Papal approval of the moral licitness of contraception.<sup>27</sup> This of course was not a case at all of Pope Benedict XVI suggesting that the use of condoms was a licit moral choice, but his words—philosophical rather than theological musings—caused more than a little consternation amongst his own supporters, and some excitement among those usually less favourably disposed.

Over the course of his pontificate Pope Benedict XVI did not catalyse the level of contention or consternation he inspired as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, both inside the Church, and in its interaction with the world yet the few times he did cause controversy he became global news.

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<sup>27</sup> Light of the World, with *Peter Seewald*, 2010, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 118

## CHAPTER TWO

### CARDINAL CONTROVERSIES OF THE WORLD

The life of Pope Benedict prior to his Papacy elicited more controversy but also probably deeper thinking and analysis than the demands of leading the Church on Earth allowed once he had assumed the See of Peter. Indeed, some may say that with a 2019 letter/essay from the Pope Emeritus on the Church and the scandal of sexual abuse aroused more of a response than most of what he said during his Papacy. Again once freed from the restrictions of the Papacy he arises as a sign of contradiction in an age where the Church and the theology of Joseph Ratzinger in particular is increasingly portrayed as reactionary, right-wing and regressive—such characterisation being both relative to the *zeitgeist* and also to the preferences of some within the Church today.

In his 2019 letter, stating that “*Catholic moral theology suffered a collapse that rendered the Church defenseless against these changes in society*”<sup>28</sup> would inevitably incense many in the post-Vatican II era who remain disappointed that the social Church they sought has not materialised, stymied as many of them see by none other than Cardinal Ratzinger and Pope Benedict for more than thirty years. And here he is again. Raising the spectre of the dictatorship of relativism he so warned about prior to the election of the successor to John Paul II, he harks back to *Veritatis Splendor*, one of the finest encyclicals of the John Paul II papacy and one that no doubt had the imprint of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

“The pope was fully aware of the importance of this decision at that moment and for this part of his text, he had once again consulted leading specialists who did not take part in the editing of the encyclical. He knew that he must leave no doubt about the fact that the moral calculus involved in balancing goods must respect a final limit. There are goods that are never subject to trade-offs ... There are values which must never be abandoned for a greater

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<sup>28</sup> Catholic News Agency, Full text of Benedict XVI essay: *The Church and the scandal of sexual abuse*, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2019. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvi-the-church-and-the-scandal-of-sexual-abuse-59639>.

value and even surpass the preservation of physical life. There is martyrdom. God is (about) more than mere physical survival. A life that would be bought by the denial of God, a life that is based on a final lie, is a non-life.”<sup>29</sup>

If nothing else, the writing and work of Joseph Ratzinger, shaped by the battle against cultural relativism, the social and sexual revolutions of 1968 to which he was first hand witness, as well as being the battering ram on the frontline against *liberation theology*, became primarily concerned with the existence of an absolute, leading to his coinage of possibly his most lasting phrase, the *dictatorship of relativism*:

“How many winds of doctrine we have known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking? The small boat of thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves, thrown from one extreme to the other: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism: from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism; and so forth. Every day new sects are created and what St. Paul says about human trickery comes true, with cunning that tries to draw those into error (cf. Eph 4:14). Having a clear faith, based on the Creed of the Church, is often labelled today as a fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, which is letting oneself be tossed and ‘swept along by every wind of teaching,’ looks like the only attitude (acceptable) to today’s standards. We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism, which does not recognise anything as certain and which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.”<sup>30</sup>

Words are important, and Cardinal Ratzinger understood the importance of using words to help understand and frame what is happening in the world today. Words also give solace in understanding, and the introduction of the phrase *dictatorship of relativism* gave meaning and shelter to many in the challenges brought by the apparent benign rationality that is pushed on believers—and society—with the language of tolerance and liberalism, which is ultimately neither tolerant nor liberal when the absolute truths of Theism are posited.

It is often forgotten that while he was often referred to as ‘God’s Rottweiler’ or the ‘Pope’s Enforcer’ as Prefect of the CDF, Cardinal Ratzinger engaged in theological, philosophical and political discussions and dialogue of the highest order. Much of Cardinal Ratzinger’s correspondence, even in

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Homily of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger 18<sup>th</sup> April 2005. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2005  
<http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendopontifice20050418.en.html>.

the engagement with dissident clerics, was in the form of dialogue rather than edict and denunciation.

Cardinal Ratzinger did not just debate with those inside the Church and he was not limited to debating solely within the bounds of theological concepts and on issues related to dogma. The Cardinal was very capable of stepping outside the confines of the ecclesiological and to enter into the secular intellectual sphere. In 2004, Cardinal Ratzinger engaged world renowned philosopher Jürgen Habermas in what have become known as the Dialectics of Secularisation or simply, the Ratzinger-Habermas debate on the "*Pre-political moral foundations in the construction of a free civil society, with specific reference to the democratic constitutional state.*"

One might think that such a profound but worldly question would have put the Priest, the Bishop and the Cardinal, ever pre-occupied with maintaining global Church discipline, at a disadvantage against the professional academic philosopher and political theorist, but that is to forget that Ratzinger himself was an academic first and foremost for over 20 years in Germany. He taught at the universities of Bonn, Münster, Tübingen, and Regensburg, and he was also one of the co-founders of the extremely important quarterly theological journal *Communio*. Ratzinger was no stranger to debate and while they were unable to find agreement, they shared language and concepts at an intellectual level that few others would have been able to maintain, both defending their respective spheres with tenacity, but also respect.

“If we have noted the urgent question of whether religion is truly a positive force, so we must now doubt the reliability of reason. For in the last analysis, even the atomic bomb is a product of reason; in the last analysis, the breeding and election of human beings is something thought up by reason. Does this then mean that it is reason that ought to be placed under guardianship? But by whom or by what? Or should perhaps religion and reason restrict each other and remind each other where their limits are, thereby encouraging a positive path? Once we are confronted with the question how—in a global society with its mechanisms of power and its uncontrolled forces and its varying views of what constitutes law and morality—an effective ethical conviction can be found with sufficient motivation and vigour to answer the challenges I have outlined here and to help us meet these tests.”<sup>31</sup>

This debate took place in 2004, one year before Cardinal Ratzinger was elected to the See of Peter, indicating a man, a theologian, and faithful servant to God, at the height of his intellectual powers. Some may argue, and wonder, whether the diplomacy and restrictions (self-)enforced by the

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<sup>31</sup> Dialectics of Secularisation, 2006, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 64

Papacy robbed the world of even greater intellectual debates. Looking back, it feels like the early years of the new millennia were the high points of Joseph Ratzinger's public engagement, where he had developed, but not elaborated, his thinking in an area where he was most likely to have produced his deepest impact—in political philosophy.

Indeed, this probably reached a crescendo in his speech on April 18<sup>th</sup> 2005 to the College of Cardinals, shortly prior to his election, indicating the promise of the yet unconfirmed Papacy, but at the same time hinting at the lost potential to come. This is not compare the responsibilities, achievements and work that Joseph Ratzinger carried out as Pope, as the successor of Peter and the Vicar of Christ, with potential writings and thinking that would translate into the secular and political realm, but to acknowledge what may have been sacrificed when he accepted God's call. In his first message as Pope, he said:

“In choosing me as Bishop of Rome, the Lord wanted me to be his Vicar, he wanted me to be the ‘rock’ on which we can all safely stand. I ask him to compensate for my limitations so that I may be a courageous and faithful Pastor of his flock, ever docile to the promptings of his Spirit. I am preparing to undertake this special ministry, the ‘Petrine’ ministry at the service of the universal Church, with humble abandonment into the hands of God's Providence. I first of all renew my total and confident loyalty to Christ: ‘*In Te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum!*’”<sup>32</sup>

The years prior to his election had seen Ratzinger compose a vast series of writings and thoughts that moved from his early focus on theology where he initially gained fame with *Introduction to Christianity*, to be then moulded by his divergence from the *Concilium* group spearheaded by Hans Küng and his battle with the many who favoured a worldly church in the years after the Second Vatican Council, and then his battles on *liberation theology* in the years after that. It was these years where the young Ratzinger, previously considered to be one of the progressive young Turks of the Council era, quickly realised the distortion of the message of the Council. Initially retreating to gather himself he returned strong though the establishment of the journal *Communio* before eventually, much later, taking on the role of Prefect of the CDF and joining Pope John Paul II in the Vatican on the third calling.

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<sup>32</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. First Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at the end of the Eucharistic Concelebration, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2005. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20050420\\_missa-pro-ecclesia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20050420_missa-pro-ecclesia.html).

Within a short time in this role he addressed the many challenges facing the Church in his own words directly, but also through the announcements and decisions of the Congregation, many of which are considered to be a presentation of the Cardinal's personal views. This is a charge which he denies, though sometimes this denial is difficult to uphold. In *Salt of the Earth*, he attempts to distinguish between his personal reactions and what the CDF did officially. Showing his humane side, he acknowledges that occasionally, personally, he does react too harshly, but he is of the view that he was measured in his official responses. Speaking of liberation theology, he feels a strong line was needed, both to help the bishops who were dealing with it locally but also because of the threat of partisan politicisation of the Church. He cites the impact of the CDF engagement, which he undertook personally, in dialogue with *Gustavo Gutiérrez* who is regarded as the creator of liberation theology, in that it helped the Church understand him better but also helped him come to a realisation of the one-sidedness of his work—which then led to a clearer and more suitable form of the theology of liberation.<sup>33</sup>

Several examples of occasions when the Cardinal and the Theologian overlapped while he was Prefect stand out. Cardinal Ratzinger, alongside Pope John Paul II, was at the forefront of the cultural, social and political—and some would say existential—battle with Marxism in all its forms. While many comment on, and often celebrate, the role of the Polish Pope in the fall of the Soviet Union and international Communism, the role of the Cardinal is less well-known or celebrated. Indeed, it is very difficult to separate the achievements of the Pope from those of his battering ram—his rottweiler. But where Cardinal Ratzinger was most visible, as Prefect and also in a personal capacity, was in the battle with theological Marxism in the form of *Liberation Theology*.

As Prefect, the Cardinal was the responsible person in preparing Congregation documents and decisions on liberation theology as well as disciplining its most vocal supporters within the Church. Leonardo Boff was possibly the most well-known of these though there are many others who felt the sting of the merciful rebuke of Ratzinger in the 1980s. Indian Jesuit Priest, Fr. Anthony De Mello, was one of these disciplined by the CDF and Cardinal Ratzinger: “*in order to protect the good of the Christian faithful, this Congregation declares that the above-mentioned positions are incompatible with the Catholic faith and can cause grave harm.*” However, the discipline did not come simply in the form of censure. Ratzinger was regularly willing to engage in dialogue but ultimately understood the responsibility of his position. The CDF wrote of De Mello:

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<sup>33</sup> *Salt of the Earth*, with *Peter Seewald*, 1997, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 94

“His works, which almost always take the form of brief stories, contain some valid elements of Oriental wisdom. These can be helpful in achieving self-mastery, in breaking the bonds and feelings that keep us from being free, and in approaching with serenity the various vicissitudes of life. But already in certain passages in these early works and to a greater degree in his later publications, one notices a progressive distancing from the essential contents of the Christian faith. In place of the revelation which has come in the person of Jesus Christ, he substitutes an intuition of God without form or image, to the point of speaking of God as a pure void.”<sup>34</sup>

Along with official statements and positions of the CDF on liberation theology such as *Libertatis Nuntias—Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation”* (1984) and *Libertatis Conscientia—Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (1986), Cardinal Ratzinger also issued a document in his private capacity on Liberation Theology in 1984 which preceded the official CDF *Instruction*. This causing even more debate than the CDF document itself but also elicited accusations that the Cardinal’s personal views excessively influenced his responsibilities. One thing that is evident is that the private views of the Cardinal are more clear and direct, unhindered by the requirements of his very public role that likely softened the argumentative private positions of Ratzinger on the threat of Marxism. Shortly after, in 1985, speaking to Vittorio Messori in the well-received *The Ratzinger Reader*, he explained his personal views on liberation theology as a reinterpretation of Christianity. He appreciated the appeal that it must have, particularly to the religious facing the problems of the Third World but he saw it as a radical interpretation of Christianity. The appeal of liberation replaces the call to evangelise the hearts and souls of all people, looking to overthrow with power rather than conviction, he considers an indication of a lack of conversion in the Church, a lack of radical faith.<sup>35</sup>

A second area of apparent controversy was in response to the CDF declaration *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, in 2000, which resulted in upset at the portrayal of the relationship between the Catholic Church and other religions, pulling the Church in the direction of evangelisation rather than the dialogue with other faiths. The accusation here was that the document reflected very

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<sup>34</sup> © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Notification concerning the writings of Fr. Anthony De Mello, SJ, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1998. Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19980624\\_demello\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19980624_demello_en.html).

<sup>35</sup> The Ratzinger Report, with *Vittorio Messori*, 1985, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 185