

Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of Political Ethics

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Cardinal Ratzinger has brought out an essay collection whose third and most substantial part is devoted to what can be called the theological foundation of political ethics.¹ These essays are worth examining, not only for their own conceptual merits, but also for the light they throw on the criticism of liberation theology which has come from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under his leadership,² as indeed on the interventions in favour of human rights made by Rome during the time of John Paul II.³

What emerges from the analytic summary which is offered in this article is, I believe, a twofold conclusion. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is headed by a powerful and original theological mind. That mind is, however, alien to the philosophical and theological tradition which has provided the customary idiom for the magisterial interventions of the popes in both dogmatic and ethical issues for the last hundred years. Almost no trace of Christian Scholasticism in its Thomist-Aristotelian form can be found in these writings. Rather do they draw for their inspiration on a variety of sources rarely tapped by figures in the Cardinal's position: Christian Platonism in its various historic manifestations; the Catholic Tübingen school of the early nineteenth century, which worked out an account of the relation between revelation and reason in the light of Kant's critique of human understanding; and, not least, the voices of European literature. Given that, as is evident from these essays, this *personal* synthesis has affected the *official* criticism of liberation theology to be found in the two Roman documents on the subject, *Libertatis nuntius* (1984) and *Libertatis conscientia* (1986), something needs to be said about the principles involved here, and I shall briefly attempt to say it at the conclusion of this article.

The summary

From the essays I wish to draw out six themes in what seems to be a coherent conceptual order. First, Ratzinger offers a picture of the relation between theology, the magisterium of Pope and bishops, and

political activity. Secondly, he considers how such activity stands in relation to eschatology: this is crucial for his estimate of liberation theology, and also helps to 'place' politics within the human and divine scheme as a whole. Thirdly, he stresses the vital role of the concept of conscience in the Christian practice of politics. This brings us to, fourthly, the question of what service Christian witness has to offer in the pluralist democracies of the West, under whose régime he, the author of this article and doubtless the majority of its readers happen to live. In connection with this we shall note, fifthly, the special weight he attaches to the historic destiny of Europe. Finally, as that destiny is, for Ratzinger, bound up with the idea of freedom, we can consider more explicitly, by way of conclusion, what he takes authentic freedom (or liberation) to consist in.

1 *General principles*

St John's declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is self-identical with the divine Logos may be taken as expressing the Church's fundamental conviction that in faith what is manifested is the rational. The foundation of being is Reason: the world is not, therefore, a 'casual side-product' thrown up from the 'ocean of the irrational'.⁴ As Ratzinger puts it, in a formulation indebted to the fundamental theology of two Tübingen masters, Johann Sebastian Drey and his younger contemporary, Franz Anton Staudenmaier, since reason is manifested in Christian faith, faith naturally seeks its own reason, and in that reason the very rationality of the real. Conversely, faith entrusts to reason the philosophical task of recognising in faith the condition of possibility for its own activity. Reason must not so press its claims to totality as to deny this. Though such a self-limitation of reason might look at first pre-critical, it provides the heart of the critique of modern European philosophy offered by those entirely unclerical figures, the Frankfurt School of critical sociology. They pointed out that the Enlightenment contained within itself the seeds of its own downfall.⁵ Enlightenment depends upon a conviction of the 'absoluteness' or 'divinity' of truth. Should it call into question this presupposition of truth, it will end up by justifying the irrational, as has happened in the work of the philosopher-biologist Jacques Monod. Moreover, the more the Enlightenment movement advanced in history, the more it tended to whittle down the concept of reason which was its foundation. The rational becomes the reproducible (in a laboratory). Reason undergoes a positivist fall. People renounce the search for truth and replace it by a concern with what can be done with things: a theme dear to Ratzinger as early as his *Einleitung in das Christentum* of 1968.⁶ This degeneration of the Enlightenment (which in itself, we should recall, was not anti-Christian or anti-clerical in German-speaking lands) Ratzinger finds reflected in the fate of the

universities, and particularly in the student revolt of the later 1960's. Now, it is sometimes alleged that the Cardinal's objections to liberation theology (in some, at any rate, of its forms) derive from the trauma induced by the events of May 1968, when he was himself a university professor at Tübingen. In what follows we discover how in fact he sees those events in their wider context.

The origins of the European universities lie, as is well-known, in the mediaeval epoch, when faith declared possible the search for truth. This search eventually extended to all the principal areas of human knowledge, thus generating the various academic faculties. All were sustained by a common adhesion to the question of truth, whose own possibility was guarded by the faculty of theology. When this Christian context dissolved, a crisis was inevitable. In that the universities fell under a law of positivism, the accusations of 'irrelevance' hurled by the student radicals of 1968 at their mentors were by no means out of place. The radical resurrection of concern with the 'origin and purpose of the whole' was in itself perfectly legitimate.⁷ Unfortunately, in taking the form of Marxism, it walked straight down a cul-de-sac, considers the Cardinal. For, despite appearances, Marxism was a criticism immanent to the system which had brought about the crisis. Like positivism, Marxism rejects the primacy of *logos*. It sees reason as generated 'dialectically' by matter, by the irrational, and must, therefore, regard truth as simply a human postulation.

And, just as the degeneration of Enlightenment reason is reproduced in the culture of the universities, so does it find a final expression in the fate of theology itself. Many academic theologians, the Cardinal complains, hope to acquire parity with their non-theological colleagues by being as good positivists, methodologically speaking, as the next man (or woman). Rather than seeking truth itself in their authoritative sources, they confine themselves to an historicist reconstruction of an original meaning to their texts. Unfortunately this involves the renouncing of the most distinctive task of theology: the quest for the whole, as something beyond, though not unmanifested in, the various academic disciplines. No wonder, Ratzinger comments, that students look elsewhere for a truer theology: finding theology in the practical action of an option for a better world-future, on the principle that orthopraxy precedes orthodoxy. Here we see the last bitter fruit of the truth that reason, in subverting faith, undermines its own foundations.

So much for theology. What of the Church's magisterium in this regard? In the affirmations made about reason above, Ratzinger is not presupposing a purely abstract reason which works suspended in noetic air. The idea of reason has its own historical and social conditions of emergence and flourishing, and if these are not acknowledged it is

vulnerable to the charge of being a 'bourgeois' fiction. Precisely because reason needs such conditions, the community of faith—the Church, with its organs of authority—belongs to the Christian concept not only of faith but also of rationality.

In defending the role of the ecclesial magisterium today one faces, Ratzinger alleges, challenges both from the New Right and from the Left. In the opinion of the New Right, the relationship of Christian understanding to the Church's magisterium is open to criticism on the grounds of its similarity to the relationship of knowledge to the determinations of the Communist Party in Marxism-Leninism. The magisterium offers a party-line which constricts knowledge in a papal or episcopal bear-hug, forcing science to submit to the higher jurisdiction of an extra-scientific court. In the opinion of the Left, the magisterium provides the nucleus of a reactionary realisation of the Church locked in a death-struggle with a new Church wherein Christianity is 'understood as Marxism' (to quote Fr Ernesto Cardenal's phrase).⁸ In this new Church which is coming to be, Christianity becomes an instrument of liberation, stimulated by the humanistic impulses of Marxism, and seeks the new society which it calls the Kingdom of God. Between theology as reflection on the praxis of this transformatory movement, and the magisterium which is the protective guardian of the reactionary Church that resists re-birth into the image of the new, there can be no peace.

What answer does Ratzinger give to these criticisms of Right and Left? He responds first to the voices coming from the Right. While there is always a temptation for those who bear the duty of authoritative teaching in the Church to behave like a party, the crucial difference between the party and the magisterium lies in the question of truth, and, more specifically, in the relation of orthodoxy to orthopraxy. Wherever orthodoxy is regarded as the product of orthopraxy, even if it be recognised that some kind of theological reflection necessarily precedes practice, truth will finally depend on the position of the party. But for the Church, man is essentially not the *constructor* of truth but its *receiver*. The Church does not posit truth: she is herself posited by it. Since the whole Church is ordered to the truth, theology and magisterium take the form of irreducibly distinct and mutually necessary kinds of service to that truth. The magisterium traces the boundaries which theology must not transgress if it is to maintain its place in that 'space' of truth which is the Church. Only by obedience to the authentic magisterium can theology preserve the conditions of its own enlightenment. Conversely, the magisterium must allow theology its own freedom by renouncing any attempt to prescribe what should be a theology's content or method—over and above the fundamental structure of faith itself.

Ratzinger's response to critics of the Left is found in the rest of the

essay I have been expounding. His reply begins from Matthew 22, 21, the saying of Jesus about rendering to God and Caesar what is, respectively, theirs. He sees this as the end of the axiomatic assumption that politics as such is holy. The Roman imperial state tolerated local religions, but only because it regarded itself as the bearer of a higher sacrality. By contrast, the separation of State authority from sacral authority, found in essence in the teaching of Jesus, represents the beginning of the Western idea of freedom. The State no longer carries a religious authority reaching into the most hidden corners of the soul. Rather does it point for its ethical foundation to an institution beyond itself. The *Church* is the State's final ethical court of appeal, though it is itself a voluntary association with merely spiritual penalties at its disposal. Although this equilibrium was profoundly disturbed at many points in Christian history, freedom depends upon it. Where the State comes to reject the Church as a publically relevant *Inстанz*, or court of appeal, it reclaims the foundation of ethics in the form of ideology. Attempts to export the Western recipe for free institutions, for instance to the Islamic world, come to grief because an idea dependent on the Christian Gospel cannot simply be transplanted to any soil whatever. Or, in Ratzinger's lapidary formula, 'where there is no dualism there is totalitarianism'.⁹

2 *Politics and eschatology*

This raises the question of the relation of politics to eschatology, since it is characteristic of liberation theology both to deny the dualism the Cardinal is speaking of, and to propose a new relation of political endeavour to the Christian sense of ultimate concern. Ratzinger considers that the two principal concepts that have informed all attempts to relate Christian faith to political life are eschatology and utopia. The idea of utopia, which emerged explicitly in the Renaissance humanism of More, belongs to a longer tradition of political philosophy uniting Christian and Platonist elements. Its relation to concrete states of affairs is comparable to the relation of mathematical forms to their empirical exemplification. The aim of utopian thinking is the measuring of actual politics by the highest criteria available, rather than the pursuit of ideal aspirations for the future. Such thinking only became connected with a philosophy of history in the modern period, when Ernst Bloch lit upon it as a possible revolutionary stimulus. Eschatology, on the other hand, is a reflection on the revelation of a divine future for man. Since it concerns man as the receiver of a divine gift, a new earth not made by human hands, it brings in its train a major problem: how can such a divine gift become a practical principle, a source of action, and thus enter into relation with man's *practical* reason, just as in theology faith enters into relation with his *pure*, or speculative, reason?

Ratzinger considers four models of how this is to be done. Two of

these, Chiliasm and the theology of evolution found in Teilhard de Chardin, he rejects. Chiliasm (of which he sees Marxism to be a form) is an essentially irrational attempt to fuse inner-historical and meta-historical categories; it is the expectation of an inner-historical condition of salvation that transcends the possibilities of political action and yet has to be realised by political means. Teilhardism is a marriage of eschatology with evolution which lacks a political programme, putting in its place a faith in science that assumes 'mythical proportions'. The two other 'models', regarded more benignly by the Cardinal, are what he terms the mainstream union of eschatological and utopian approaches in Church tradition, and, in the microcosmic image of this macrocosm, the monastic community or *civitas*.

The eschatological orthodoxy of the Church has found its principal dialogue-partner not in a philosophy of history but in Platonist-Aristotelian ontology. Since Hellenic ethics was above all an exposition of the criteria which should govern life in the polis, it proved capable of complementing Christian eschatology. In the ensuing 'co-ordination', three elements stand out. First, in maintaining the impossibility of any internal fulfilment of the world, eschatology confirms what reason would in any case suggest. For such a fulfilment would ill accord with man's 'open' freedom, which includes 'openness to failure! Orthodox eschatology accords with Greek ethics in denying that human moral effort can be bypassed in favour of 'the orchestration of plannable mechanisms': this remains the permanently valuable nugget in the Church's rejection of Chiliasm. Secondly, and more positively, orthodox eschatology, in affirming that the possibilities of history will nevertheless be fulfilled metaphysically, guarantees the reign of meaning in history. In so doing, it warrants the use of utopian 'model-ideas' for the maximising of human justice, raising such models to the level of genuine works of political reason. Here faith provides the ultimate foundation for practical reason in its political mode, just as, Ratzinger has argued, it does for pure reason in its enlightened self-awareness in epistemology and metaphysics. Thirdly, and finally, this eschatology finds its own basis not in a particular philosophy of religion but in Christian ontology: in the Christian doctrine of God, as taking concrete form in a Christology which has transformed Jewish eschatology by assuming it into itself. The actual effects which this vision of reality can bring about may be seen in miniature in the communities of Christian monasticism at its finest. As Ratzinger approvingly cites Cyril of Scythopolis, the monks have made the desert a *civitas*, and the non-world a world.¹¹ In this pneumatic revolution, his heroes include, inevitably, St Benedict, but also the early Franciscans, whose Third Order ideal enabled the monastic 'city' to embrace those engaged in secular vocations in the wider world.

Today, Ratzinger considers, we are halfway between an irration-

alistic Chiasm (namely, Marxism) and a hopeless positivism. In this situation, the Church's main task will be a renewing of the functioning of the Platonist-Christian-Humanist utopia. By expanding the concept of reason in this context, the Church can encourage governors and governed to put the right questions about the values that are to regulate the empirical realm.

3 *The role of conscience*

This relation between the grid of values which utopian thought highlights and the messy day-to-day pressures in which political life is embedded leads on naturally to Ratzinger's discussion of conscience. He reminds us of Hitler's notorious promise, issued to the president of the senate of the Freistadt Danzig, Herman Rauschning, that National Socialism will liberate man from conscience.¹² For Ratzinger, the affirmation of the 'absoluteness' of conscience is the true antidote to tyranny. The enslavement of man on the pretext of his liberation is an ever-recurring danger. Thus the anatomy of totalitarianism and its cures is a perennial need. Ratzinger sees numerous similarities between the present period and the years which witnessed the rise of Nazism, for in both revolution has been held to be in itself salvation, and the negation of order is sought for its own sake. This makes our age one when conscience is especially needed, and justifies looking for inspiration to those classics which have registered its significance.

Ratzinger thus turns to the German man of letters, Reinhold Schneider.¹³ Schneider defined conscience as the awareness of our responsibility before the whole of creation and Him who created it. Our idea of what conscience is is in need of constant purification. It can be twisted into that of the super-ego, or the reflection of social convention. It can be made an alibi for obstinacy and egoism. But these manifold ways of abusing the concept of conscience cannot annul its greatness. In his novel based on the life of the Spanish Dominican defender of the Indians, Bartolomeo de Las Casas, Schneider presents conscience in three forms. In Las Casas himself, we see 'prophetic conscience'. Though the *Brevissima Relación de la destrucción de las Indias Occidentales* was partial and exaggerated, nevertheless the crimes committed against the native population of the Americas were horrific enough. Prophetic conscience is conscience gone missionary. Such conscience 'locates itself with serenity among thrones', and never ceases to disturb the peace of those whose power is exercised at the expense of the rights of others. That such conscience had its effect may be seen in the modification of the laws of the Indies, as between the first laws of Isabella la Católica and the 'New Laws' of 1542. Indeed, for Schneider, prophetic conscience must awaken a second mode of conscience, 'governing conscience', which in his novel is embodied in the emperor

Charles V. This is the conscience of one who is entrusted with power and must exercise it responsibly. Ratzinger sees it exemplified in De Gaulle's decision to let Algeria go, as described by the writer-minister André Malraux. Nevertheless, for Schneider, as echoed by Ratzinger, the supreme form of conscience is 'suffering conscience', represented in the Las Casas story by a nameless girl of the Lucayos tribe. In the last analysis, injustice can be rooted out of the human heart only by the cathartic perception of the voluntary suffering of those who are faithful to conscience. Only as the vehicle for the power of the Cross does conscience redeem.

4 The Church and the pluralist democracies

From the role of the Church in the Spanish America of the *conquistadores* we turn to her role in the pluralist democracies of today. After the war, Ratzinger points out, the advent of democracy was greeted with quasi-religious enthusiasm in liberated Europe and elsewhere. Today the position is much more ambiguous. Characteristically, Third World countries with Marxist governments are regarded as having reached a condition of order which should not be disturbed, whereas those that vacillate between dictatorship and democracy are recommended Marxian ideals of liberation. In this uncertainty of political judgment on the affairs of other peoples we can see, Ratzinger suggests, our more painful and intimate uncertainty about our own. Frankly, pluralist democracy has not shown itself capable of uniting citizens in a deep-rooted adhesion to a common form of life. Economic crises bring it to a precipice; shifts in the life of the spirit threaten to remove the ground from beneath its feet. Ratzinger finds that the menace to democracy lies chiefly in an unwillingness to accept the intrinsic imperfection of everything human.

Prominent among the (perhaps unwitting) enemies of democracy are those who hold that, in a liberated society, the good will be irrevocably sustained by structures. For those who think thus, a State supported merely by ethics is likely to be imperfect and so must be rejected. Ratzinger sees in this approach the very essence of materialism, itself more an anthropological programme than the denial of a non-material sphere of reality for its own sake. A 'liberation' founded on the marginalisation of ethics, and so of responsibility and conscience, involves a perfectionism of an intrinsically immoral kind. Moreover, this attempt to render the ethical dimension superfluous by resort to a quasi-mechanical guarantee of social justice reflects that truncated concept of reason which Bacon and Comte bequeathed to European thought. In a human physics, ethics is reduced to a calculation of advantages and disadvantages, and the good *in se* is lost to view. Ratzinger mentions a recent civil case in Bavaria where charges of sacrilege were dismissed on

the grounds that they constituted no threat to the public peace. Here a good which law should protect is laid aside by a judicial practice that simply seeks to avoid clashes between opposed interests. For the survival of society and the State, some deeper moral consensus than this must be reconstructed.

The third and final source of the acid corroding pluralist democracy that Ratzinger identifies is flight from transcendence. Where the possibilities of life in this world are taken to be the totality of life, they come to seem vacuous. Marx taught that we must eradicate the sense of transcendence so that man, once cured of false consolations, might construct a perfect world. Today, we know that man needs transcendence so that he can build up a necessarily imperfect world in a way which will enable people to live together in a humane fashion.

Ratzinger concludes that a pluralist democracy for its own survival and flourishing must draw on sources of spiritual power beyond itself. Might Christianity be such a potential aid? *Prima facie*, the suggestion is not plausible given the Church's track record, which reveals: messianic perfectionism, leading to an anarchistic approach to the State; the denial of the relevance of the works of justice to grace-sustained righteousness, manifested in Augustine's almost demonic concept of the *civitas terrena*; and the tendency of Christian monotheism, with its claims to an exclusive truth, to breed political intolerance. Nevertheless, Ratzinger believes that the Christian Church can and must be the kind of resource for the State which he deems needful. The foundational act in the development of society is moral education. In the West, ethics lives through the posthumous influence of Christendom, which gave it the basis of its rationality and internal structure. When Christian revelation is relegated to the status of what a man does with his solitude, being inserted into the 'pantheon of all possible value-systems', the ethos which that revelation sustained begins to decompose. Thus, for instance, the denial of the bond of marriage as the fundamental form of relations between the sexes leads to a degradation of sexual life, to a struggle of the sexes and of the generations with each other, and a rupture between spirit and matter. The churches, in preferring to see themselves simply as 'social forces', are guilty of retracting those claims to a wider truth which should render them precious to the State. In effect, Ratzinger presents a difficulty—an *aporia*: if the Church renounces her claim to teach both truth and values with authority then she ceases to be able to offer to the State what the State needs from her. If, on the other hand, the State accepts her claim in an unconditional fashion, it eliminates itself as a pluralist reality and even as a reality distinct from the Church. Today, however, the second danger is so minimal that it can safely be ignored. The State must recognise once again in the Church a fount of value and truth which can render consensus possible.

5 *The contribution of Europe*

Looking at Europe in particular, Ratzinger hopes that the idea of Europe can offer a viable synthesis of political reality and moral idealism. He points out the Christian significance of the concept of Europe: the very word entered the popular vernaculars in the early modern period not just because of the influence of classical humanistic thought but through reaction to the threat from Islam in the shape of the Turks. However, the spiritual capital of the concept of Europe has been squandered. In the Great Revolution of the West, God was dethroned as the public *summum bonum* and replaced by the nation. After 1848, the socialist tradition replaced the nation here by the proletarian revolution. Meanwhile its capitalist alternative found yet another idol, creating the consumerist dystopia in which 'their God is their stomach'. The retrieval of the idea of Europe will involve drawing on both the classical and the Christian heritage. From the Greek background, we must recover the relation between government and *eunomia*, a justice that cannot be manipulated because it stands over power, limiting and controlling it and preserving its 'transparency' to value. But this fundamental connection of law with moral norms that are both common and binding for all citizens cannot be re-established without appeal to the supernatural, to the lost *summum bonum* of Christendom. Though the rights of non-believers must be at all times zealously preserved, Europe can be saved from the fissiparous forces of nationalism, and from an international economic and administrative technocracy careless of the cry of the world's poor at its gates, only by restoring the public relevance of Christian doctrine. It is here that, for Ratzinger, ecumenism has its greatest relevance, since Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed could work together for the re-creation of a 'eunomic' Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals.

6 *The task of freedom*

Ratzinger's reflections come to their climax in his account of freedom, a term which entered into the titles of both the 'negative' and the 'positive' documents on liberation theology issued by his Congregation. He points out the curious tendency of the pursuit of freedom to throw up fresh forms of constriction. The revolutions of the past transferred power from persons to institutions so as to secure objectivity in the exercise of power, but they all too often produced a grey bureaucratic uniformity of the sort described in Kafka's novels. The Enlightenment set aside the multiple organic forms of traditional society (which themselves enshrined inherited liberties of various limited kinds) in the name of the uniquely binding force of reason. But since all men are not, in practice, reasonable, it found itself obliged to make the absolute monarch into the organ of a higher liberty. And so forth. From the ambiguous concept of

freedom in the Enlightenment, there come down to us two lines of development: one finds freedom through the apparatus of the democratic State, the other through the 'logic of history'. The former sub-tradition, which we can label 'Rousseauesque', conceives of citizens as passing from a state of being governed by others to one of self-government through democratic participation. But it leaves unresolved the problem of whether a majority voice must necessarily incarnate a higher reason. The alternative sub-tradition, that which passes through Hegel, understands all history as a history of freedom which advances not least through the challenges offered by what is opposed to freedom. But here freedom becomes lost in a sea of infinitude: a man emancipated not only from tradition and authority but from his own created essence enters a 'vacuum without meaning and without light'.¹⁶

In each case, what is omitted is the central fact that man is the bearer of rights, and that his freedom exists only where these rights are fostered by the rule of law. Freedom is a condition of being where the nexus of rights that reflect man's essence with all its inherent possibilities is efficaciously defended. The Exodus, so dear to liberation-theological exegesis, cannot be sundered from the gift of the Torah on Sinai: liberating ordinances which provide an orientation for the life-pattern of a community. Though this community, now universalised in the Church of Christ, is not a State-community, the Word of God it bears within it offers an ethical direction for the State to follow. If we follow the cue of liberation theology at its best, and reintegrate the tradition of Catholic social doctrine into dogmatics as a whole, we find that every attempt to establish an arbitrary absolute power, whether that of a majority or that of a party, is contradicted by the fundamental Christian revelation of God. The God of absolute power is an idol; whereas the true God, being in himself the relationality of triune Love, is perfect freedom. Here, Ratzinger implies in concluding this collection, the future of a purified liberation theology must be found: in the working out of the Trinitarian and Christological preconditions of Catholic social doctrine, which work will give those who seek to realise that doctrine new inspiration and motivating power.

Conclusion

As I suggested at the beginning of this article, this sequence of essays constitutes a deeply impressive reading of the signifi- cance, and the limitations, of politics, from a Christian theological perspective. Its author's thinking in this area is clearly far more subtle than is popularly presented. At the same time, what he is saying raises questions—as it is doubtless intended to. Is he right in his belief that the proper way to confront Chiliasm and positivism lies, at least in part, in reviving

390

Platonist utopian thought? Other models of human flourishing, such as those suggested by Jacques Maritain or N.A. Berdyaev, would seem to have at least an equivalent claim on the attention of Christian humanists. And, while Ratzinger puts very cogently the case for the need to reassert the public relevance of Christian doctrine, in Western society's own interests, we might wonder how convincing in the wider society his assessment of pluralism is likely to be.

But there is not the space to handle these questions here. Rather will I limit myself to considering briefly what relation Ratzinger's thought has to the more established Catholic tradition of reflection on these issues as found in the chosen idiom of the papal social teaching of the last hundred years.

In point of fact, these essays are disconcertingly empty of reference to the terms in which modern papal teaching, utilising the concepts of classical Thomism, has articulated social doctrine on behalf of the Church. Ideas such as natural law and common good are conspicuous by their absence, and the fundamental relationship of reason to revelation is conceptualised in a manner foreign to Thomism and perhaps incompatible with it. Although *Libertatis nuntius* and *Libertatis conscientia* draw more freely on the old lingua franca of Thomist Scholasticism than do these essays, the mode of thinking found in the essays has left its mark on those documents. This is especially so in the affirmation that, whereas there can be in the Church a theologically founded political ethics, there cannot be a political theology as such.¹⁷ For Ratzinger, a sound political ethics has necessary pre-conditions in the Christian doctrine of salvation. But that doctrine cannot itself take a political form. This is so even if such a political soteriology were willing to affirm the desirability of other complementary forms of soteriology (such as the Athanasian, or the Anselmian) co-existing with it in the bosom of the Church. Although Ratzingerian theology is in some ways better placed for dialogue with liberation theology than is Thomism, because of the more intimate, reciprocally enabling character of the reason-revelation relationship which it has inherited from its Tübingen predecessors, its presence in such official documents of the Roman magisterium naturally raises the question, By what authority?

In one sense, the answer to this question is obvious. The documents concerned are issued with the authority of the Pope, exercising his ordinary magisterium as chief pastor and doctor. But if we are not to make the mistake of seeing magisterial authority in what the Cardinal, elsewhere in this collection, stigmatises as 'illuminist' and 'voluntarist' terms, that is, as able to dream up whatever ideas it wishes and impose them on the rest of the Church, we need to know in what manner the Church's tradition has entered into such pronouncements, which are essentially interpretations of that tradition and not creation *ex nihilo*.

All doctrine, once it is expressed in something more than the most rudimentary form, requires a theological vehicle. The strength of Christian Scholasticism as a vehicle for the doctrinal interventions of the magisterium lay in its claim to represent the 'common teaching' of the Schools: in other words, its fundamental concepts were in sufficiently wide currency for their doctrinal bearing to be gauged readily and with security. However, the *religiosum obsequium* asked of the rest of the Church for such interventions was directed not to the *concepts*, but to the *judgments* expressed by means of those concepts. It is this distinction, I believe, which enables us to locate the difference between the personal theological vision found in these essays and the partial employment of their distinctive categories in the official documents. In being invited to 'receive' those documents as an articulation of the Church's faith, the members of the Church are not being asked to underwrite the personal theology of Cardinal Ratzinger, persuasive though this undoubtedly is, but to answer the question whether the judgments conveyed through the concepts employed in the documents genuinely correspond to the fundamental form of the Church's faith as found in her historic tradition.

- 1 J. Ratzinger, *Kirche, Ökumene und Politik* (Einsiedeln 1987): cited henceforth as KÖP.
- 2 R. Gibellini, *Il dibattito sulla teologia della liberazione* (Brescia 1986) is perhaps the best account of these documents in context.
- 3 M. Walsh and B. Davies, *Proclaiming Justice and Peace. Documents from John XXIII to John Paul II* (London 1984); F. Biffi, 'Diritti umani da Leone XIII a Giovanni Paolo II', in G. Concetti (ed.), *I diritti umani. Dottrina e prassi* (Rome 1982), pp. 199–243.
- 4 KÖP p. 142.
- 5 Notably T.W. Adorno's *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt 1966).
- 6 J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (ET London 1969), pp. 30–39.
- 7 KÖP p. 145: the term I have paraphrased as 'irrelevance' is *Fachidiotie*: 'specialisation lunacy'.
- 8 KÖP p. 148.
- 9 *Ibid.* p. 151.
- 10 *Ibid.* p. 224.
- 11 Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* c. 15, cited KÖP, p. 222.
- 12 T. Schieder, *Hermann Rauschnings 'Gespräche mit Hitler' als Geschichtsquelle* (Opladen 1972), p. 19, cited KÖP, p. 153.
- 13 On Schneider, whose writing was banned under the Third Reich, see H.U. von Balthasar's study, *Reinhold Schneider. Sein Weg und sein Werk* (Cologne 1953).
- 14 *Las Casas vor Karl V. Szenen aus der Konquistadorenzeit* (1938).
- 15 KÖP p. 195.
- 16 Cited after the (simultaneously published) Italian version, *Chiesa, ecumenismo e politica* (Milan 1987), p. 180.
- 17 *cf. Libertatis conscientia* 23.