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Natural Law within the Political Teachings of Benedict XVI

Introduction

The title of my discourse is *Natural Law Within the Political Teachings of Benedict XVI*. Joseph Ratzinger who then became Benedict XVI is a theologian and not a political scientist. What then would be the link? Before I begin, I would like to start with a passage from Benedict's Angelus message of 24 July 2011.

The Pontiff spoke of the Old Testament account from the Book of 1 Kings when God “appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and promised to grant him what he asked in prayer”. And here we see the greatness of Solomon's soul. He did not ask for a long life, nor wealth, nor the elimination of his enemies; instead he said to the Lord: “Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.” Therefore, he prayed God to grant him ‘an understanding heart’. What do these words mean? In Solomon's case, the request was motivated by the responsibility of leading a nation, Israel, the people whom God chose to show the world his plan of salvation. The King of Israel, therefore, had to try always to be in tune with God, listening to word, in order to guide the people on the paths of the Lord, the path of justice and of peace (BENEDICT XVI 2011a).

God did not, subsequently, infuse Solomon with political knowledge. Rather, He inspired, if not guided him to seek knowledge and wisdom by listening to, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux would instruct his brethren, the voice of God that “speaks in the silence of our hearts”.

It is this innate voice, that natural capacity from God to decipher good from evil that Ratzinger reminds us about in his numerous speeches, homilies and writings on natural law. His teachings are not a mere spiritual or philosophical reflection. Rather, they are an invocation to the individual person to ponder

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on God's unwritten law inscribed in his or her heart so that they may better contribute to the common good of society.

Benedict's purpose in promoting natural law in the body politic reflects what Thomas Jefferson wrote in the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It is to make evident to rulers that if "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them" with authority to rule, they have to therefore recognise "...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".

This is why in his 2005 Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (*God is Love*), Benedict stated: "The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics... [it is based on] reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being" (BENEDICT XVI 2005).

Today, however, there has been a complete rupture from natural law in both private and public sectors. This has brought about, what then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger coined, a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognise anything as definitive and whose ultimate standard consists solely of one's own ego and desires. As a result, acts that directly contradict the laws of nature, such as abortion, euthanasia, sexual exploitation – same-sex unions, transgenderism and the renting of the uterus – are not only deemed natural, but they are imposed on society as human rights by state legislatures, judicial sentences, the European Council and non-governmental organisations, such as the United Nations.

Unlike human law, which St. Thomas Aquinas defined as "an ordinance of reason for the common good"² and needs to be continually adapted in order to confront new and spontaneous predicaments in society, natural law is *unchangeable*. This has always been accepted from Antiquity right through the Middle Ages. For Ratzinger, there is no departure in the matter.

Natural law or the law of nature as defined by *Black's Law Dictionary* is a "philosophical system of legal and moral principles purportedly deriving from a universalised conception of human nature of divine justice rather than from legislative or judicial action" (GARNER 2009: 1127).

The term *natural* in natural law refers to the concept that every human being is a participant in a common moral order, i.e. in accord with the regular course of things in the universe and without accidental or purposeful interference. In other words, the voice that speaks in the silence of our hearts St. Bernard spoke of is not a mere emotion. It is rather, our conscience, i.e. our sound judgement

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicæ* I, IIæ, 90, a. 4.

guided by faith and reason. Yet for lack of a clear and unified expression over the past few centuries as a result of subjective interpretation and fluctuation on natural law, it has been ambiguous, if not altogether difficult to define, which is why Ratzinger has tried to set it straight.

In order to comprehend Benedict XVI's teaching on the matter, it serves first to briefly go over some key historical phases, or rather, individuals who contributed to the development of the notion natural law. Here we shall look at Cicero and St. Thomas Aquinas for their classical contribution; third Hugo Grotius, who inadvertently, at least changed the view of the law of nature. I shall then discuss Benedict's understanding of natural law, the link between natural law and his political teachings, and lastly his reason for restoring natural law in society, specifically the body politic.

Historical development of natural law

The concept of a (natural) law based on man's rationality Ratzinger talks about can be traced back to Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 536–470 BC). He taught that there was an eternal and harmonious norm, which is immutable for which there was a fundamental law, i.e. a divine *logos*, which for him is the principle order of knowledge.³ Cicero (106–43 BC), however, whom I identify as a synthetic political philosopher more than an orator, did not just speak of this natural capacity, he made it into a point of reference for the body politic of his time.

Cicero's discourse on natural law

Man, according to Cicero, has an inborn concept of what is right and what is wrong. There is a natural concept in law in that it rests upon nature itself, not on the arbitrary rule of a ruler or the laws of the many. This is because man is naturally born free. Therefore, the right to be treated with justice under the law of nature is not founded on man's opinion but upon nature. This is, as can be seen in his Oration *For Titus Annius Milo*, an unwritten law in the heart of man that comes from the God of Reason:

³ "What is Logos According to Heraclitus", in *Freefall into Reality* (<https://freefallintoreality.com/2013/04/30/what-is-logos-according-to-heraclitus-of-ephesus-c-535-c-475-bce/>).

“This, therefore, is a law, O judges, (*non scripta sed nata lex*) not written, but born with us, which we have not learnt, or received by tradition, or read, but which we have taken and sucked in and imbibed from nature herself; a law which we were not taught, but to which we were made, which we were not trained in, but which is ingrained in us...” (CICERO 1911).

It is, as he says in his *Republic*, “one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge” (CICERO 1928).

Cicero, as can be seen, distinguished and placed natural law as the supreme law above all others. Accordingly, it is communitarian because it brings humanity together through justice and happiness into a common spirit – the task of what every politician is expected to do. This commonly shared morale is tied to a want and search for both wisdom and knowledge on the part of the individual, which is manifested through the inherent common gift of reason that comes from God: “There is nothing better than reason, and reason is present in both man and God, there is a primordial partnership in reason between man and God” (PHILLIPS 2018).

The salient contribution of Cicero is that in what was a watershed moment, he linked the law of nature to civil norms. He was the first to say it, because man had a natural right to possess material things, government was justified as a means of protecting private property. Essentially, he laid out a socio-political blueprint with natural law as the point of reference.

Aquinas's discourse on natural law

Natural law for the Angelic Doctor is fundamentally tied to his political theory. The law of nature is the substratum for the individual who is preordained by God's divine Providence, i.e. those (good) things pre-existing in the mind of God that are governed by Him and directed toward their end.

He thus associates natural law to eternal law, which is the Supreme reason that governs the world and is unchangeable. It is the understanding in the mind of God of all that created things in their diversity outside his divine nature. It is promulgated because the Divine Word, i.e. God himself, is eternal – distinct from divine law, i.e. the norms found in the Old and New Testaments.

Natural law is therefore “the law that is in a person in so far as he partakes of the rule and measure of things”.⁴ Man partakes in the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted in his nature. The *raison d’être* of a ruler, for Aquinas, is to assure that man can arrive at this. Inadvertently, Aquinas speaks of natural rights, although he does not classify them as such, that need to be safeguarded. One can then conclude that this is the underpinning duty of the government when he says that a ruler is entrusted with the care of governing not for his personal aggrandisement, let alone for his benefit, but rather for those who are ruled.

Hugo Grotius and the disavowal of natural law

The classical understanding of natural law and its relation to the State and its citizenry that began with Cicero was ultimately challenged and eventually disavowed in the beginning of the Modern Era with the advent of the Dutch scholar and jurist Hugo de Groot, better known as Hugo Grotius (1538–1645). Recognised as the *Father of Modern Natural Law*, Grotius remoulded the universally held concept of man’s participation in the *logos* when he said the law of nature would still exist *etiamsi daremus Deum non esse* (even if we were to say there is no God). In essence, it was theoretically possible for man to infer between good and evil without God’s assistance.

Cardinal Ratzinger, in his 2005 discourse on “Europe’s Crisis of Culture”, touched upon this revolutionary notion. Ironically, he singled it out as an achievement, at least in this respect:

“In the opposition of the confessions and in the pending crisis of the image of God, an attempt was made to keep the essential values of morality outside the contradictions and to seek for them an evidence that would render them independent of the many divisions and uncertainties of the different philosophies and confessions. In this way, [Grotius] wanted to ensure the basis of coexistence and, in general, the foundations of humanity” (RATZINGER 2006).

Grotius had the best of intentions, specifically to furnish a peaceful resolution to the wars that the Christian absolute monarch states were carrying out among themselves. As a devout Arminian, he never refuted the existence of God, but wanted to dispel the belief that emerged when John Calvin’s teachings became

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* I, IIæ, Q. 91, a. 2. See also I, IIæ Q. 99, a. 2, ad. 1 and 2.

prevalent, particularly the tenet that God only renders justice by an ‘absolute decree’, which in turn leaves no room for free will. In fact, Grotius’s religious writings emphasised that the truths of Christianity, which were held in common by Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans and Arminians, were fundamentally more important than the peripheral points on which they felt they differed.

Francis Russell Hittinger, Warren Chair of Catholic Studies and Research Professor of Law at the University of Tulsa, parallels Ratzinger’s positive outlook on Grotius’ dictum with his view of the Enlightenment, which was not in itself atheistic in its early stages. Historically, some *philosophes* sought to not just break away from the precepts of the absolute monarch, but to depart from the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* as the exclusive moral guide. They insisted the use of reason had to come into play – there is a reflection here on Catholic teaching that faith alone is not sufficient, but as St. James wrote in his epistle (James 2:24), it needs to be accompanied by good works; this is something Protestants still have an issue with. The point of no return occurred when “faith” was equated to subjective experience, thereby reducing “knowledge” to what is empirically verifiable. This is the secularism that became associated with the Enlightenment; it came afterwards when the *philosophes* abandoned all reference to the *logos*. According to Ratzinger, Grotius never perceived excluding God from natural law.

Men, however, like Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) would go onto exploit the notion of *etiamsi daremus Deum non esse* and eschew any appeal to God or His divine mandates as a point of reference for the welfare of society and of the individual person by sustaining that natural law does not extend beyond the limits of this life. They and others would altogether eradicate the *logos* from man’s capacity to reason, and thus an absolute concept of natural law, *as if God did not exist*, would become prevalent.

By the 20th century, in what would be defined as positivism – the idea that all knowledge is based on the “positive” data of experience – the jurist Hans Kelsen, who was a fierce opponent of natural law, held that a law could never be morally justified. He taught that in a democracy laws are directed most fundamentally at officials of the legal system, such as judges, telling them what sanctions to apply to citizens on the basis of the latter’s conduct. Therefore, laws had to be obeyed simply because they were authoritative (KELSEN 1967: 10–11).

This, together with the Darwinian doctrine of “survival of the fittest”, became the *natural law* and the cornerstone for the National Socialists and the Fascists during the 1930s and 1940s, and of course, the former Soviet Union. I personally hold that this is a prime reason why, unlike the United States which in theory

interprets and applies its Constitution via the *the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God* from the Declaration of Independence, there is no European country that makes any reference to natural law in its written constitution.

It was such anti-Christian and positivist notions that crept into the constitutions of European countries through the craftiness of the United Nations, and likewise propagated by the European Union. And this is what we Christians in today's pluralistic democracy are challenged with.

"The idea of natural law", as Benedict XVI said during his 2011 visit to the *Budenstag*, "is today [regrettably] viewed as a specifically Catholic doctrine, not worth bringing into the discussion in a non-Catholic environment, so that one feels almost ashamed even to mention the term" (BENEDICT XVI 2011b). However, the exclusion of natural law is not just a malady in civil society but in the Church, too.

As recent as 2019, in his essay *The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse*, the Pontiff Emeritus recalled the error of the Church, and consequently, that of society in rejecting natural law as a point of reference for our moral guidance:

"Until the Second Vatican Council [1962–1965], Catholic moral theology was largely founded on natural law, while Sacred Scripture was only cited for background or substantiation. In the Council's struggle for a new understanding of Revelation, the natural law option was largely abandoned, and a moral theology based entirely on the Bible was demanded" (BENEDICT XVI 2019).

Benedict was not suggesting that the Holy Writ was to play a secondary role to natural law. On the contrary, he was pointing to the inconsistency or the lack of harmony between the use of both divine Revelation and natural law that led to its exclusion of the *logos* in both the ecclesial and socio-political realms.

Benedict's understanding of natural law

Benedict's teaching on natural law, as already discussed, has always been expressed in terms of its rapport between moral truths and the State, namely the formulation of positive norms. He made this clear during his General Audience of 16 December 2009, when he stressed there exists "an objective and immutable truth, the origin of which is in God, a truth accessible to human reason and which concerns practical and social activities. This is a natural law from which human legislation, and political and religious authorities, must draw inspiration in order to promote the common good" (BENEDICT XVI 2009).

God, in His divine plan, created us with the capacity to naturally discern how to act, whether we are aware of His Commandments or not, as can be seen in the Genesis story of Cain and Abel.

After Cain murdered his brother, “the Lord said to Cain, ‘*Where is your brother Abel?*’ Cain replied, ‘*I don’t know [...]. Am I my brother’s keeper?*’” (Gen. 4: 9).

The context of this passage indicates that Cain, like Adam and Eve after committing original sin, hid himself from God since he knew he had violated His precept, even though God had not yet given the Decalogue to Moses – the Commandment ‘Thou shall not kill’ had not yet been given to man. Cain naturally knew the truth, though he did not want to embrace it.

The discernment of “truth, or rather any claim to know the truth, is, [that] there must be law that derives from the nature, from the very being, of man himself” (RATZINGER 2007), not in the sense that man is the creator of his own moral tenets, but that they are innate to his human nature.

Perhaps the best understanding of Benedict’s teaching of natural law can be seen in his 2007 address to the participants of the International Congress on Natural Moral Law:

“The capacity to see the laws of material being makes us incapable of seeing the ethical message contained in being, a message that tradition calls (*lex naturalis*) natural moral law [...]. From it flows the other more particular principles that regulate ethical justice on the rights and duties of everyone. So does the principle of respect for human life from its conception to its natural end, because this good of life is not man’s property, but the free gift of God. Besides this is the duty to seek the truth as the necessary presupposition of every authentic personal maturation. Another fundamental application of the subject is freedom. Human freedom is always a freedom shared with others. It is clear that the harmony of freedom can be found only in what is common to all: the truth of the human being, the fundamental message of being itself, exactly the *lex naturalis* [natural moral law]” (BENEDICT XVI 2007).

Two points to be immediately looked at. First, the Pontiff’s use of the term *lex* and not *ius*. While both terms are parallel, they are nevertheless distinct:

Ius (law, right), stems from the root verb *iungere*, to join; it is law in the abstract that refers to a *right* rather than a statute. It denotes an entire body of principles, rules – established and authoritative standards – and statutes, whether written or unwritten, by which the public and the private rights, the duties and

the obligations of men, as members of a community, are defined, inculcated, protected and enforced.⁵

Lex (law) is statutory law or positive law. It refers to rules or norms enforced by a head of state or legislature and are binding for its citizens and those within the confines of a State. Of course, it is understood that those who promulgate laws are invested to do so by the people under their jurisdiction or those who are found within it.⁶

Ius was the preferred term for church jurists right through the Middle Ages so as to separate it from the arbitrariness of human law. According to the medieval historian Kenneth Pennington, Benedict separated and obfuscated the two traditions of *ius naturale* and *lex naturale* when he mentioned that particular principles flow from the *law of nature (lex naturalis)*.

This does not disqualify Ratzinger's teaching on natural law, especially since in continental Europe both *ius* and *lex* are synonymous, just as *diritto* and *legge* are in Italy. The argument here is not necessarily one of juristic semantics.

Pennington holds that modern thinkers (not just Benedict) have embraced positivistic sets of rules, prohibitions, and norms, shaped, and fashioned according to each of their belief systems, that are and always have been the defining feature of *lex* (PENNINGTON 2008: 591). Medieval and early modern jurists, instead, understood *ius naturale* as a set of precepts, rights, and duties that were engulfed in *ius*. Benedict, I believe, was merely following the juridical concept of St. Thomas Aquinas who opts for *lex naturalis*, as opposed to *ius*.

The second point to be looked at in Benedict's address at the International Congress on Natural Moral Law is that he does not just say "natural law" but "moral natural law". This is the heart of his intention in promoting it in the political world.

Natural law expresses the fact that nature itself conveys a moral message. The spiritual content of creation is not merely mathematical and mechanical. That is the dimension which natural science emphasises in the laws of nature. But there is more spiritual content, more "laws of nature" in creation. It bears within itself an inner order and even shows it to us.

Advocates of natural law hold that it is an entity of norms which offers to analyse and guard against positions made in the discourse of moral argument,

⁵ "Iūs (for iurs, from iuro), iūris" in *Lexicon of the Latin Language*, ed. F. P. Leverett. Boston: Wilkins, Carter, & Co., 1850, 466. See also *Black's Law Dictionary*, 936.

⁶ Lēx, lēgis in *Lexicon of the Latin Language*, 486. See also *Black's Law Dictionary*, 991.

politics and law. To quote a modern Islamic scholar, Ali Ezzati: “Natural law is natural because it is a system that challenges the systems which are not natural to man, such as positivism and scepticism” (EZZATI 2002: 12–13).

For the Pontiff Emeritus, natural law is not a *law in force*. Rather, it is a moral *lex* (or *ius*) that demonstrates that which is under the ethical-juridical aspect that can legitimately be a *law in force*. Accordingly, the juridical character of positive law, under an ethical component, depends on its agreement with natural law, which has been well-developed in the history of Western jurisprudence. Otherwise, as it happened in Germany under the National Socialists, the State [becomes] an instrument of destroying law (*ius*) and becomes itself the law.

The politics of Benedict and natural law

In his political teachings, as András Jancsó wrote in his article ‘*Theologians’ on Modern Politics: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict*’ “adopts an approach to the history of ideas that can be understood as a general critique of the modern period and progressive modernity” (JANCÓS 2021). They are based on the what is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mt. 22:21).

Ratzinger makes a point by saying that freedom of worship is the basis of all human rights and the ultimate obstacle to totalitarianism. This was essentially the unique contribution of the early martyrs to the progress of civilisation. “As a religion of the persecuted, and as a universal religion that was wider than any one state or people, [Christianity] denied the government the right to consider religion as part of the order of the state, thus stating the principle of the liberty of faith” (RATZINGER 2006). While the State may not impose religion, it must nevertheless guarantee its citizens and residents the freedom to worship, which along with freedom of speech, is the basis of our liberty.

Ratzinger highlights how fundamental is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God. This does not mean, however, that Caesar renders nothing to God – he must! Hence, as Jancsó stated in his article, Ratzinger’s “political thinking is also based [...] in the necessity of finding a connection between [faith and politics]” (JANCÓS 2021).

This, I hold, can be seen the Preamble of the new Hungarian Constitution, which not only declares itself to be Christian, but consequently seeks to safeguard the institution of the family. And this is a primordial duty of the State! If the

family is not protected by the State, society then collapses because as has always been recognised by the human race, the family provides both structure and civilisation to mankind.

Part of the link between faith and politics is reflected in the Church's socio-political teaching as Benedict says in *Deus Caritas Est*. He "argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being. It recognises that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life [...]. [Although] the Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible [and] cannot and must not replace the State, at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice" (BENEDICT XVI 2005: 28).

The task of the Church in the political sphere is to educate in order to "break open the prison of positivism and awaken man's receptivity to the truth, to God, and thus to the power of conscience". Otherwise, the moral relativism Ratzinger spoke about becomes a political moralism.

Political moralism, which pretentiously preaches universal peace, does not open the way to a regeneration of true peace, it impedes it. "The same is true", as Ratzinger said in 2005, "consequently, also for a Christianity and a theology that reduces the heart of Jesus' message, the 'kingdom of God,' to the 'values of the kingdom,' identifying these values with the great key words of political moralism, and proclaiming them, at the same time, as a synthesis of the religions" (RATZINGER 2006).

In the wake of this form of political rationale, "Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner unknown before now to humanity, excludes God from the public conscience, either by denying him altogether, or by judging that his existence is not demonstrable, uncertain and, therefore, belonging to the realm of subjective choices, something, in any case, irrelevant to public life" (RATZINGER 2006).

The fact that natural law in the political realm has become obsolete, divine law, which underlines man's ultimate goal, is subsequently altogether rejected. Other forms of beliefs or philosophies, like Buddhism are hailed over Christian virtues and are proposed as a solution for man's harmony.

Buddhism, for example, has relativised ethics with the cosmic, ethical and political worlds, thereby categorising the world as a cycle of suffering, where man's hope is not found in the cosmos, i.e. the heavens, but in his escape from it. Hence, life tends to be one in which inner peace can never be attained.

If man is capable through reason to know the truth, and like Cain after he killed his brother Abel, knows that he knows, any faltering leads him to cede to the whims of empiricism and eventually sentimentalism as the basis to claim to know or not know the truth. Materialism and affective altruism logically become the goal of the individual, if not a precondition, for man's human harmony with his fellow man – God no longer is part of this. Hence, political moralism is presented under the banner of justice, peace and conservation of creation, and not an appeal to moral values which we are in real need. "But this moralism, Ratzinger says, "[is] vague and thus slides, almost inevitably, into the political-party sphere. It is above all a dictum addressed to others, and too little a personal duty of our daily life. In fact, what does justice mean? Who defines it? What serves towards peace?" (BENEDICT XVI 2005: 28).

Restoring natural law

In his Regensburg Address of 2006, which became famous for citing the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus's criticism of the prophet Muhammad, Benedict made an appeal to restore faith and reason in all fields of sciences.

His talk was aimed at the scientists at the University of Regensburg. And if I may be so bold, seeing the mission of the University of Public Service here in Hungary, I would make the same appeal to the faculty and student body of this university and all those who are involved in higher education.

The Pontiff acknowledged the university's traditional openness to approaching God through the use of reason. He went on to contrast this approach with the Islamic tenet that God transcends man so completely that "His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality" (BENEDICT XVI 2006).

According to this perspective, man can never seek to understand God, who is free to act in whatever way he chooses, for good or for evil, and is never bound to reveal the truth to man. The transcendence of Allah is rationalised via our state of imperfection. Since man is naturally humble, a trait the Islamic *god* cannot possess, man cannot claim transcendence, superiority, or exaltedness or dispute with the Creator over the exclusive characteristics of his divinity and lordship. In essence, Allah created man not because he loves his creation or wants to be a part of it, as Christians teach, but only because man must acknowledge that Allah exists and that he must be worshiped: "I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship me" (Sura 51:56).

Benedict explained how in this context, the Western synthesis between faith and reason is all the more important:

“The truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself, [as in the Prologue of the Gospel of John], as *logos* [...] and has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf [...]. Consequently, Christian worship is [...] worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason.” This convergence of faith and reason “created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe” (BENEDICT XVI 2006).

In like manner, the problem according to Ratzinger is that many who take pride in their reasonability “no longer offer any perspective on the fundamental questions of mankind”, such as his participation in the eternal law as St. Thomas Aquinas had taught. This is because such individuals cannot give an explanation, for example, from a scientific or economic point as to why we should find cures for diseases and eliminate poverty.

Ratzinger’s intention at Regensburg was not necessarily to consider the disparities between Christianity and Islam, let alone judge the individual Muslim. Instead, it was to re-awaken the sense of reason within the heart of ‘Western’ man himself. His teachings reflect a profound consciousness that Christianity took shape in the world because of the encounter between the faith of the prophets and apostles with all that was best and purest in the Socratic tradition – the desire to follow the argument wherever it leads in the light of reason. In this regard we are reminded of what Pope St. John XXIII said in his Apostolic Constitution *Veterum Sapientia*:

“The wisdom of the ancient world, enshrined in Greek and Roman literature, and the truly memorable teaching of ancient peoples, served, surely, to herald the dawn of the Gospel which God’s Son, ‘the judge and teacher of grace and truth, the light and guide of the human race’, proclaimed on earth” (JOHN XXIII 1962).

In Ratzinger’s mindset, *nature* is not a morally obligatory norm for knowing the Creator God, but rather it is the natural judgment of reason where the good is formulated, as well as its practical use of reason in relation to the good in itself that becomes morally obligatory.

In the evolution of history, as the State became more skeptical in the eyes of the Church, the acceptance of natural law was greatly emphasised as the foundation for developing norms that would serve the common good. In this sense, Benedict is convinced that there exist “true” and “just” moral norms for law and not mere opinion or question of the majority that would facilitate an external convenience. And this is also, where both “faith” and “reason” must

meet with “politics”. There is a Christian foundation that has furnished Europe, and the West, with a socio-political structure.

Faith without reason gives rises to fundamentalism. Reason without faith produces a secularism that cannot address the most fundamental of human questions about origin, destiny and meaning. And this is where we Christians find ourselves in today’s pluralistic democracy. “Not to act reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God” (BENEDICT XVI 2006) said Manuel II. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason Ratzinger invites all, us here today, to engage into a serious dialogue.

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