

ST. BENEDICT: A RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF FAITH AND CULTURE IN EUROPE ACCORDING TO POPE BENEDICT XVI

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Summary

Toward the end of Cardinal Ratzinger's mandate as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he reflected upon the crisis of faith and culture in Europe and its causes, particularly the refusal by European Union ruling classes to put God's name in the new European Constitution or acknowledge Europe's Christian roots. Moreover, his writings reveal a personal and thoughtful approach to Benedictine monasticism and St. Benedict as a model for the spiritual renewal of Europe. The aim of this paper is to analyze places in Joseph Ratzinger's works as a theologian, and later as Pope Benedict XVI, on the importance of imitating St. Benedict and studying his testimonies in response to Europe's current crisis of faith and culture. Analyzing the Enlightenment culture that led to the secularist understanding of a Europe in which the place for faith is only found through political compromise and a tolerance of faith as long as it remains on the margins of social action, rather than serving as the spiritual driving force, Pope Benedict sees Europe's fundamental disorder in the reductionism of the Enlightenment, in which reason is limited to empirical positivism. The ultimate consequence is the loss of the foundations of public morality, the negation of human dignity and the loss of freedom in a dictatorship of relativism that contradicts the fundamental starting points of the Enlightenment—namely, the desire for open-mindedness to the whole of reality in which God is encountered as the basis of all that exists, true humanity, open to

true freedom through obedience to the Word of God, and the restoration of the foundation of democracy.

Keywords: *St. Benedict, Pope Benedict XVI, Europe, Enlightenment, pray and work, faith and culture, identity crisis*

INTRODUCTION

The old Latin saying *nomen est omen* applies to Ratzinger's selection of the name Benedict for his pontificate, and personal affinity to St. Benedict of Nursia even before his election as the Roman pontifex in April 2005. Moreover, the choice of this name and the direction of his pontificate heralded a renewal of Europe through a journey back to its Christian roots according to the Rule of St. Benedict, where God is at the heart of all human activity that restores true dignity to all.

In this paper, places in the works of Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, are analyzed where the author reflects upon various passages in the Rule of St. Benedict, the saint's missionary work in the Christianization of Europe and his mystical experience, as recounted by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Life of Benedict*. By comparing the situation of a Europe devastated by the influx of barbaric peoples and the collapse of the Roman Empire to the crisis of faith and Christian culture in contemporary Europe due to the Enlightenment secularist culture, Benedict XVI portrays the character and work of St. Benedict as a source of fresh spiritual inspiration toward the restoration of faith and culture.

The reasons why Pope Benedict XVI refers to Benedict XV and St. Benedict of Nursia as inspirations for choosing his papal name are explored herein. Certain parallels from Joseph Ratzinger's childhood, family life and upbringing with Benedictine spirituality are noted, as well as the influence of monks on his spiritual growth and development. In the years leading up to the end of his mandate as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger became increasingly interested in Benedictine monasticism, spiritually and intellectually. On the very eve of his election as pope, he gave an important lecture in Subiaco, analyzing why God's name and the Christian roots of Europe were not included in the Constitution of the European Union and proposing St. Benedict as a role model for responding to the crisis of faith and culture in Europe.

1. REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE NAME BENEDICT

On April 19, 2005, Cardinal Jorge Medina Estévez, proto-deacon of the College of Cardinals, announced the election of the new

pope from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, as follows: *Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum; habemus Papam: Eminentissimum ac Reverendissimum Dominum, Dominum Josephum Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Cardinalem Ratzinger qui sibi nomen imposuit Benedictum XVI.*

1.1. Servant of peace and reconciliation according to the model of Pope Benedict XV

Many then asked why the new pope took the name Benedict XVI. The pope himself would answer this question at the first General Audience after his election, on April 27, 2005. He wanted to connect in spirit with his predecessor Pope Benedict XV, who led the Church during World War I and strove to be a courageous and authentic witness of peace, before and after the war. Benedict XVI hoped to follow the model of his predecessor as a servant of peace and reconciliation among peoples and nations, with a profound awareness that peace is, above all, God's precious but fragile gift to be prayed for, safeguarded and built up.¹

1.2. Christ at the center of everything according to St. Benedict

Then the pope explained the second reason why he took the name Benedict, in homage to the magnificent "father of Western monasticism," St. Benedict of Nursia, who, through his Order, had a great influence on the spread of Christianity throughout the European continent and, therefore, is highly venerated in Germany, especially Ratzinger's native Bavaria. For Pope Benedict XVI, St. Benedict is a fundamental paragon of Europe's unity and a powerful reminder of the undeniable Christian roots of European culture and civilization. The pope quoted a stern admonition from St. Benedict to his monks in his Rule: "Let nothing be more important to them than Christ" (72:11; cf. 4:21). At the beginning of his papal ministry, he invoked the intercession of St. Benedict to help us so that Christ would always be at the center of our lives, in our minds and in every action.²

¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *General audience* (April 27, 2005), https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/hr/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20050427.html (February 17, 2020).

² Cf. *Ibid.*

The pope's brother, Georg, also testifies about the reasons for choosing the name Benedict. He recalls how he once spoke about papal names to his brother, who simply told him, in a very general conversation, that it did not concern him personally but that Benedict was a beautiful name. He thought that this name was appropriate for a pope because it sounds beautiful and means "blessed," which is also a blessing for others. Georg testifies that the pope greatly appreciates St. Benedict. Although Benedict XIV and Benedict XV were also great popes, Benedict XVI never mentioned them, Georg recalls. Therefore, he is of the opinion that St. Benedict of Nursia, apart from the aesthetics of the name and etymological reasons, was the main inspiration for the pope's choice of the name Benedict XVI.³

1.3. The battle for the soul of Europe

From the aforementioned, it is evident that Pope Ratzinger did not put his personal preferences ahead of the ministry of the Roman pontifex and wished to fulfill his papal mandate as a humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord. Although throughout his life, especially toward the end of his prefecture in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he became increasingly closer to Benedictine spirituality and its founder, he placed his predecessors in Peter's ministry before his life's experience.

Nevertheless, the program of his pontificate is also manifested in his name in the battle for the soul of the West. As a Western European, he saw the rise and fall of fascism and communism, and now witnessed the fall of Europe under the influence of materialistic consumerism—the dictatorship of relativism, i.e., the solitary subjectivism of an individual without moral truth or divine hope, an even greater enemy against whom only the Church can offer a genuine alternative to the moral stagnation of modern consumerist society. By choosing the name Benedict, Ratzinger signaled the continuation of the mission and vision of John Paul II through personal devotion to St. Benedict and his own spiritual priority of preserving the best of the legacy that a patron saint of Europe left to the old continent.⁴

³ Cf. Georg RATZINGER – Michael HESEMANN, *My Brother, The Pope*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2011, 235.

⁴ Cf. Matthew E. BUNSON, *We have a Pope! Benedict XVI*, Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, Indiana, 2005, 13–14.

2. LINKS TO ST. BENEDICT

Some links to St. Benedict can already be found from Ratzinger's childhood in his native Bavaria. The pope's mother, Maria, was a cook but also a very versatile and hardworking woman with a "warm heart," unlike his father, who, as a Bavarian policeman was rational, strict and just. Ratzinger recalls feeling that his father's kindness led him to be strict. In addition to regular jobs, his mother earned money as a seasonal worker on a farm in Reit im Winkel. She saved wherever she could and lived simply, never spending more than she had and using her resources prudently, in keeping with the Rule of St. Benedict. This spirit of renunciation created "internal solidarity" in her family and the children took pleasure "even in the smallest things."⁵ Ratzinger's father and mother assumed roles in the family similar to those prescribed in the Rule of St. Benedict, who teaches that the abbot must, as recommended by St. Paul to Timothy, admonish, advise and rebuke, mingling gentleness and severity, according to the circumstances (cf. *Rule*, 2, 23–25).

In addition to Ratzinger's keenness of understanding, as a believer, he had a distinct mystical consciousness that imparted a prophetic quality to his statements, although this was often concealed by his intellectual brilliance. His confessor, the Benedictine monk Frumentius Renner from the Bavarian abbey of St. Ottilien on Ammersee, played a major role in Ratzinger's introduction to the world of mysticism. Cardinal Ratzinger visited the monk from time to time, even when he was officiating in Rome. Frumentius, a wise monk, penetrated deeply into the secrets of the Rule of St. Benedict. The integrity of his life and faith was not limited to the rationalism of our time, as he was also involved with astrology, natural healing, and the influence of evil and good forces. It was said of him, as also said of St. Benedict, that he could not only penetrate people's souls and know people completely but also heal them, body and soul, through prayer and blessings. His obituary shows similarities between the confessor Frumentius and the penitent Ratzinger. *He looked very much like the first Christians who saw in all the blows of earthly fate and all historical changes the heralds of the end times. In this advent attitude he lived, always relaxed, never fanatical or doctrinaire, but with eyes alert for anything threatening in the Church or the world.*⁶

⁵ Cf. Peter SEEWALD, *Pope Benedict XVI: Servant of the Truth*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2006, 36.

⁶ Cf. Peter SEEWALD, *Benedict XVI: An Intimate Portrait*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2008, 22–23.

3. APPROACHING BENEDICTINE MONASTICISM

With the beginning of the new millennium, Ratzinger was gradually approaching monasticism, as evident from his increasingly frequent visits to monasteries, which surprisingly coincided with the choice being posed to the member states of the European Union and decisive encounters in his life. In fact, the cardinal chose Montecassino as his sanctuary, where he gave an interview to the journalist Peter Seewald that would later be published as a book entitled *God and the World*. He returned to the same monastery in 2004 to preside over a session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. On the eve of his election as pope, he visited Subiaco on April 1, 2005, to receive the St. Benedict Award for the promotion of human life and family in Europe, where he also gave an important lecture.⁷

Guerrero cites four reasons that prompted the cardinal's growing interest in Benedictine monasticism: the harmonious celebration of the liturgy by the monks and the faithful, the dignity of man fostered in the shadow of the monastery, monastic democracy and the centrality of Christ in the Rule of St. Benedict.⁸

3.1. The harmonious celebration of the liturgy in the lives of monks and the faithful

The liturgy is the center of the monastic life around which it is organized and shaped according to the Rule, which says: "Let nothing be preferred to the celebration of the liturgy." Ratzinger is a very realistic person and certainly does not think that the life of believers can literally follow the rhythm of monastic life, but he has witnessed that participation in the liturgy can impart a harmonious equilibrium to human life. Liturgical prayer leaves room for the wishes of the individual and the ecclesial-dogmatic truth. After the Second Vatican Council, when a certain intoxication with novelties prevailed, the time came to return to this equilibrium. Spontaneity can dominate the life and devotion of the individual, although not in the liturgy, and therefore it is necessary to follow the liturgical order. Finally, the love of talking to God in the prayer of the heart opens the way for Gregorian chant. For Ratzinger, liturgical singing is not only an ornament or a concession to decadent aesthetics

⁷ Cf. Elio GUERRIERO, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thoughts*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2018, 440.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 440–441.

but an attempt to shape one's own life according to the order of the universe and heavenly harmony, which is why he proposes monastic life as a source of harmony and peace for the lives of Christians and the entire Church.⁹

3.2. The dignity of man developed in the shadow of the monastery

The maxim "Pray and work," which we do not find in the Rule itself, is a common description of monastic life. After giving the appropriate rules for prayer, St. Benedict also carefully opposes idleness in the scheduling of the rhythm of life in the monastery. It was manual work that sparked the meeting of nations in the West, which began the notion of Europe according to Ratzinger. Europe is not so much determined by geography as by a beloved common culture. Europe is shaped by foundries, oil mills, glass processing, breweries and tanneries, and a related administration that has developed in monasteries and expanded into transcription, miniaturist and archival work. These were the preconditions for the development of the monastic humanism that prepared the way for *the univertitas studiorum*—the center of research and deeper study that contributed decisively to the physiognomy of Europe.¹⁰

3.3. St. Benedict: Father of Western democracy

St. Benedict, is considered the father of Western democracy. The monk is obliged to obey but, at the same time, his life is guided by the Rule, which is in the domain of law. Moreover, he is invited to participate in the most important decisions concerning his life in the monastery and choose the abbot. The historian Léo Moulin¹¹ believes that the word parliament is derived from the word *parliamentum*, which in the twelfth century denoted a council of monks that helped the general abbot of the Cistercites in the management of the Order. It can, therefore, be said that monks stand at the beginning of a democracy that is admittedly not only the rule of the

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 441.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 441 – 442.

¹¹ Cf. Léo MOULIN, *La vie bénédictine quotidienne hier et aujourd'hui, Saint Benoît père de l'Occident*, Anvers: Fonds Mercator, 1980, 412. The volume was published to celebrate the fifteen anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict. Quoted according to: Elio GUERRIERO, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thoughts*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2018, 442.

majority but also respects the attitudes of the minority, because otherwise democracy degenerates into arrogance. Ratzinger presents this fact to all those who are called to vote on the most insignificant things until the important elections of a bishop or the pope himself. Even more important than the opinions of the majority or the minority is the fact that the legislation and life of the monks took place, so to speak, in the sight of God, which as a system was preserved in Europe until the French Revolution. Acknowledging the inviolability of human dignity guaranteed by God allowed Europeans to overcome enormous difficulties in times of crisis, and then it was all forgotten. The cardinal wonders whether it is appropriate at the beginning of the third millennium, when Europe is threatened by terrorism that targets the destruction of its democracy and very existence, to return to such thoughts.¹² He answers this question in the conclusion of his speech in Subiaco, *Europe in the crisis of cultures*, which is analyzed in this paper.

3.4. Christ at the center of Christian life in the Rule of St. Benedict

Ratzinger believes that it is necessary to return Christ to the center of Christian life in accordance with St Benedict's recommendation to his brethren, "to prefer nothing to the love Christ." The Church's most urgent task after two thousand years is to restore Christ to the center of ecclesial and Christian life. Guerriero testifies that Ratzinger personally confirmed this to him during a conversation in early 2005, when he sought to encourage him to complete his autobiography, which, in addition to the beauty of the text itself, could provide compelling answers to the many misconceptions that were circulating about him. Although the cardinal usually took the editor's suggestions well and kindly, this time he was firmer than ever in his reply: "I cannot; I must work on my *Jesus*," Guerriero testifies. As a scientist and man of the Church, Ratzinger wanted to dedicate his efforts to the book about "his Jesus." In his reflections on monasticism, he must have been thinking about the contribution he could still make to the harmony of Christian life. At the same time, he also considered conforming his life to the monastic model in his retirement that he expected but did not happen, which offered him guidance for his pontificate as well.¹³

¹² Cf. Elio GUERRIERO, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thoughts*, 442–443.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 443–444.

4. SPEECH IN SUBIACO ON EUROPE IN THE CRISIS OF CULTURES

Ratzinger's speech in Subiaco on April 1, 2005, occurred between two important events, one concerning the future of Europe and the other his personal future. The impetus for this speech was that there was no mention in the Constitution of the European Union of God or acknowledgement of the Christian roots of European culture and civilization. This speech took place the day before the death of Pope John Paul II and the rushed conclaves in which Ratzinger was elected Pope Benedict XVI. Therefore, in a way this speech became the program of his pontificate.

4.1. Technology weakens morality and reduces it to the subjective realm of political moralism

In the first part of his speech, Ratzinger considers of man's problems arising from his mastery of the world and technological developments, but also the threats that arise as unintended consequences, such as, among other things, inequality in the distribution of the world's goods; growing poverty, indeed, impoverishment; the exploitation of the earth and its resources; hunger; diseases that threaten the whole world; the clash of cultures. All of this shows that the growth of our possibilities is not matched by an equal development of our moral energy. The power of morality has not kept pace with the growth of science, indeed, it has rather diminished. This is because the technological mindset confines morality to the subjective sphere, whereas what we need is precisely a public morality, a morality that can respond to the threats that cast their shadows over everyone's existence. The true, and gravest, danger we face in the present moment is just this disequilibrium between technical capacities and moral energy. The solution is not a political morality that not only does not pave the way for renewal but blocks it as much as possible. The same goes for Christianity and a theology that reduces the essence of Jesus' message, the "kingdom of God," to the "values of the kingdom," by identifying these values with the main slogans of political moralism, which it proclaims as a synthesis of all religions, while forgetting about God, who is the subject and cause of the kingdom of God. What is left in his place are big words (and values) that are open to every kind of abuse.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, Europe in the Crisis of Cultures, *Communio* 32 (2005) 2, 345-347.

4.2. Scientific rationality as a functional rationality toward consequential morality

Furthermore, Ratzinger correlates the situation of Christianity today and the foundations of Europe, which was once the Christian continent, and which has developed a scientific rationality since the Renaissance through the Enlightenment that is a kind of reduction of the world to uniformity. “And, in the wake of this form of rationality, Europe has developed a culture that, in a way hitherto unknown to humanity, excludes God from public consciousness, whether he is totally denied or whether his existence is judged to be indemonstrable, uncertain, and so is relegated to the domain of subjective choices, as something in any case irrelevant for public life.”¹⁵ Ratzinger calls this kind of rationality a functional rationality that is completely new to existing cultures because it claims that only what is experimentally demonstrable is rational. Since morality belongs to a completely different sphere, it disappears as a category in its own right and reappears as consequential morality. Formerly Christian Europe has developed a culture that is most radically at odds, not only with Christianity, but also with the religious and moral traditions of humanity. Ratzinger believes that the debate on defining Europe is not solely about the issue of its new political form or some nostalgic return to the past, but that this debate concerns responsibility for the whole of humanity today.¹⁶

4.3. Enlightenment culture at the root of a new Europe devoid of any relation to God

The contrast between the culture at the root of Europe and the current culture that dominates Europe is evident in the absence of any mention of God or Christian roots in the European Constitution. The Church’s activities in European life are relegated to the realm of political compromise, without any formative role in Europe’s fundamental self-understanding. The superficial reason for supposed tolerance toward other religions conceals the real reason for avoiding the moral direction that the mention of the Christian roots of Europe’s identity entails, which ultimately means trying to build a human community without any relation to God.¹⁷

The deeper reasons for the double “no” to God and Christian roots in the Constitution of the European Union are hidden in the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 347–348.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 348–349.

idea that only a radical Enlightenment culture can define European culture and different religious cultures can only coexist with the culture of the Enlightenment as long as it is respected and they subordinate themselves to its criteria. This culture is substantially determined by the right to freedom, which is misdefined or not defined at all and inevitably contains internal contradictions. It is obvious that the use of such a notion of radical freedom entails limitations on freedom that were unthinkable only a generation ago and, thus, the confusing ideology of such freedom leads to a dogmatism that is ultimately increasingly hostile to freedom. This is a culture in which reason has supposedly achieved full self-consciousness and, of course, lays claim to universality and imagines that it is complete in itself, without the need to be complemented by any other cultural factor. The norms and content of this culture of the Enlightenment are the only prerequisites to define a European identity, which means that any state that adopts these criteria can belong to Europe, and God must have nothing to do with public life or the foundations of the state.¹⁸

4.4. The illusion of the religious neutrality of the state and Enlightenment reductionism leading to a loss of freedom

Intellectual knowledge of universal value, such as the insight that the state cannot impose religion but it can only be freely accepted, respect for fundamental human rights for all, and the separation of powers and their control, cannot be achieved in the same way in every historical context. Not every society has the sociological presuppositions for the type of parliamentary democracy that exists in the West. It is an illusion to think that the complete religious neutrality of the state is possible in most historical contexts. Enlightenment positivism, with its anti-metaphysical attitude, does not leave room for God but rather limits positive reason, which is adequate for technical fields but when generalized leads to the crippling of man. Enlightenment philosophy, with its proper culture, is incomplete. It consciously cuts off its own cultural roots, thereby depriving itself of the original forces from which it emerged, which is the fundamental memory of humanity without which reason loses its compass. Since the principle that man is the measure of all things applies, he knows and can do what he is allowed to do and prohibition would be a negation of the freedom that is the supreme and absolute value, so that freedom becomes a destructive force.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 349–350.

Ultimately, according to spokespeople of the natural sciences, man does not have freedom, which is in stark contrast to the initial position of the Enlightenment. Moreover, man is nothing special among other creatures and should be treated equally. Thus, complete severance from the roots of humanity's historical memory occurred.¹⁹

4.5. The radical emancipation of man from God and relativistic dogmatism

Ratzinger, therefore, concludes that such a philosophy does not express human reason in its fullness but cripples it and cannot be considered rational. At the same time, it is incomplete and can only be healed by reconnecting it with its roots because the rootless tree withers. Nonetheless, Ratzinger does not deny all positive sides of the Enlightenment culture. The European denial of Christian roots is not a reflection of a high tolerance that respects all cultures equally, without a privileged one, but rather an absolutization of a way of thinking and living in radical contrast to the historical cultures of humanity. The real antithesis is not between different religious cultures but between the radical emancipation of man from God, from the root of life, on the one hand, and the great religious cultures on the other. This consists of a real clash of cultures, according to Ratzinger. Relativism as the starting point of all that is said becomes dogmatism that believes it possesses definitive knowledge of reason and the right to consider everything else as just one stage in the development of humanity that is fundamentally overcome and should be treated as pure relativity. Ratzinger, therefore, believes that we need roots to survive and must not lose sight of God, so as not to lose our human dignity.²⁰

4.6. The right path is creative reason expressed in the love of the Crucified

Ratzinger's solution is not to reject the Enlightenment and modernity, because Christianity is a religion of *logos*. As a universal religion that reaches above and across states and peoples, it denies the state the right to hold religion as part of its own order and, thus, demands freedom of religion and equal dignity of every person, who is in the image of God. Therefore, the Enlightenment has Christian roots. It is no coincidence that it originated precise-

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 351–352.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 352–353.

ly and exclusively within the realm of the Christian faith. It is also true that within this realm, Christianity has, unfortunately, contradicted its very nature by becoming a state tradition and state religion, so that the voice of reason has been eclipsed. This renewed insistence on restoring voice to reason is a merit of the Enlightenment. Therefore, correction on both sides is required. The question is whether the world was born of the irrational, with reason a mere byproduct, or does the world come from reason as its criterion and goal. According to Ratzinger, only creative reason, which has manifested itself as love in the crucified God, can show us the way.²¹

4.7. The challenge of living as though God exists according to Pascal's proposition for a new Europe

In addition to a call for dialogue, Ratzinger proposes to the secularists, after it is evident that their attempt to define essential norms of morality that would be valid even if God did not exist (*etsi Deus non daretur*) has failed, that they try to live as if God exists (*veluti si Deus daretur*), even though they are not ready to accept him personally. Ratzinger offers Pascal's advice to those who do not believe, thereby not limiting their freedom, but in fact all humanity gains secure support, which is essential today.²²

"What we most need at this moment of history are men who make God visible in this world through their enlightened and lived faith. The negative witness of Christians who spoke of God but lived against him obscured his image and opened the door to unbelief. We need men who have their eyes fixed straight on God, and who learn from him what true humanity is. We need men whose intellects have been enlightened by the light of God and whose hearts have been opened by God, so that their intellects can speak to others' intellects and their hearts can open others' hearts. God returns among men only through men who are touched by God. We need men like Benedict of Nursia."²³

After analyzing the state of the prevailing European Enlightenment spirit and the double refusal to recognize the Christian roots and place of God in the Constitution of the European Union, with its implications, Ratzinger offers a solution for the future of Europe and its endangered survival in the person of St. Benedict. He compares the present moment of Europe to the time when St. Benedict

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 353–354.

²² Cf. *Ibid.*, 354–355.

²³ *Ibid.*, 355.

began spiritual renewal, became a city on the hill and, like Abraham, became the father of many nations. Finally, he proposes Chapter 72 of the Rule as a program, which culminates in the admonition not to put anything before Christ, in whom there is eternal life.²⁴

5. *MENS CONCORDET VOCI* —HARMONIZING THE SPIRIT WITH
THE VOICE IN THE WORK OF GOD (RULE, 19:7)

Ratzinger sees the way to a restored Christian Europe in a return to true prayer and a properly celebrated liturgy. Central to this endeavor are St. Benedict's two principles that nothing should be preferred to the liturgy and our spirit must be harmonious with the voice in the liturgy.

5.1. Christian mysticism is not immersion in the depths
of oneself but an encounter with God in the Word

In praying the Psalms, our spirit must be in accord with our voice. According to Ratzinger, St. Benedict teaches us that the words of the Psalm must precede our thoughts, although this usually does not happen because first we think and then we put what we have thought into words. In the liturgy, the opposite is true: the words come first. God gives us His Word in the liturgy, which we must enter, receive its meaning and align ourselves with in order to become His children. Because we do not know what and how to pray (cf. Rom 8:26), God comes to our aid by suggesting prayers and teaching us to pray the Psalms and, even more so, *The Lord's Prayer*, which we pray in the words God himself has given us in order to come to Him, along with our brothers and sisters in the Holy Spirit whom He has given us. Here, Benedict XVI believes that what is essential to Christian mysticism is not primarily immersion in oneself but an encounter with the Spirit of God in the words that precede us, a union with the living God who is always in us and above us.²⁵ The primary element in our dialogue with God in the liturgy is the accord between what we say with our lips and what we carry in our hearts. The conformation of the spirit with these words affords us the opportunity to speak with God. The exhortation of the Eucharistic Prayer *Sursum Corda* shows us the fundamental disposition of the heart in the liturgy, which rises above the

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 355–356.

²⁵ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Isus iz Nazareta*, I, Verbum, Split, 2007, 144.

confusion of our reflections, desires and distractions toward opening ourselves to the docility of the Word of God that leads us to the Lord, who is present in our midst.²⁶

5.2. The Church is not a party but the Body of Christ that Christ builds with the Word and the Sacraments

From this primacy of the Word and liturgy comes the true understanding of the Church, which is not a party, club or religious state but the Body of Christ that Christ builds when he cleanses us with the Word and the Sacraments, and leads us to the heart of the Church, which is actualized in the Eucharistic sacrifice, when the Church fulfills her mission of the adoration of the Triune God. Therefore, according to Ratzinger, it is understandable that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy took priority at the Second Vatican Council because worship determines the entire architecture of the Council. It comes first because God comes first. St. Benedict said in his Rule that nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God—*Opera Dei nihil praeponatur*.²⁷

Ratzinger believes that monasticism has been understood from the beginning as living like angels, in the sense that angels praise God according to the images of the heavenly liturgy in John's *Book of Revelation*. To transform life into worship is to enter into an angelic way of life. Therefore, the liturgy is the center of monasticism, which makes the meaning of Christian existence visible to everyone. St. Benedict, therefore, reminds his fellow brothers to sing in the sight of the angels and to ponder how they should conduct themselves in the sight of God and his angels (cf. *Rule* 19). They do not come up with what to sing, but the song comes to them from the angels with whom their hearts ascend to be in harmony with the music that comes to them. Monks do not create a liturgy; it pre-exists them. They enter the eternal celestial liturgy and our earthly liturgy joins to what is already under way, the greater reality of the heavenly liturgy.²⁸ That is why, in the matter of liturgical renewal, Ratzinger calls for the cultivation of the spirit of listening as recommended by St. Benedict ("listen, my son"), and for us to consid-

²⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *A School of Prayer: The Saints Show Us How to Pray*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2013, 275.

²⁷ Cf. Maximilian Heinrich HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, 268.

²⁸ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Collected Works: Theology of the Liturgy*, II, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2014, 461–462.

er ourselves less as doers and more as the recipients of the liturgy, thereby eliminating the danger of manipulating what has been given to us and precedes us.²⁹

5.3. Creation for worship, which is the center and strength of the cosmos

Discussing the relationship between creation and cult, Ratzinger sees the rhythm of creation as directed toward the Sabbath, that is, creation is so structured that it is directed toward the hour of worship. Ratzinger views St. Benedict's exhortation *Opera Dei nihil praeponatur* as a pure and sober translation of the creation account and its message for our lives, not as an expression of excessive piety. Worship is the real center and power that drives us from the inside and orders the correct rhythm of the stars and our lives that occurs when it is imbued with worship.³⁰ For interfaith dialogue, Ratzinger believes that is important that other cultures and religions also acknowledge the reason for creation in the celebration of God. Here one can appreciate the deep unity between the great traditions of the peoples and the biblical belief in creation with the primordial human knowledge that is open to Christ. Nevertheless, one should be aware that it is distorted in many ways by the misconception that through worship man gives the gods something they themselves need.³¹

6. RESTORATION OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY ACCORDING TO THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

Ratzinger believes that Europe, after two tragic wars and the collapse of great ideologies that were tragic utopias, is searching for its own identity. Ethical and spiritual renewal to draw strength from the Christian roots of the continent is necessary for Europe's survival. Otherwise, Europe will be non-renewable, tempted to be its own deliverer—a utopia that will lead Europe into an unprecedented decline. Therefore, for real progress Pope Benedict proposes the *Rule of St. Benedict* as a light on our way because St. Benedict remains a teacher of the art of authentic humanism.³²

²⁹ Joseph RATZINGER, *Bog i svijet*, Mozaik knjiga, Zagreb, 2005, 344–346.

³⁰ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *U početku stvori Bog*, Verbum, Split, 2008, 39 – 40.

³¹ Cf. Maximilian Heinrich HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, 371.

³² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Učitelji – Oci i pisci prvog tisućljeća*, Verbum, Split, 2011, 22.

Ratzinger describes how the separation of reason from the mystical capacity of the human mind has resulted in the self-limitation of reason, which is contrary to the discipline of scientific method and turns into an amputated reason that leaves important issues in life to the feelings, separated from reason, which leads to man's disintegration and pathological forms of religion and science. The urgent task is to re-expand the scope of the reason found in the prison of natural science and recognize "forms in which the whole of man comes into play."³³

Ratzinger illustrates this with a historical experience related by Pope Gregory the Great (+604) in his *Dialogues*, concerning the last weeks in the life of St. Benedict. The saint had gone to bed in the upper part of a tower, which could be reached by a "vertical ladder." Before the time for the night prayers, he stood up to keep a vigil. Standing by the window, he prayed to almighty God. Looking out at the dark night, he saw a light that poured down from above and dispelled all the darkness of the night. All the world appeared before his eyes, as if coalesced in a single ray of the sunshine. Gregory's response to an interlocutor's remark that it is not possible to observe the entire world as a whole was that when St. Benedict saw the world as one before him, it was not that the heavens and the earth became narrower but that the soul of the visionary became so wide. In the symbolic imagery of the night, tower, stairs, upper room, standing and window, Ratzinger recognizes Benedict's life's journey of ascent on a long and arduous path to the place where the wall of the world has been opened up and he can gaze into the open. His expanded soul, no longer absorbed in the particular, could see the whole as he looked at it from on high because he had grown inwardly great.³⁴ Ratzinger considers St. Benedict to be a great man and a pathfinder for the centuries, still relevant today because he and other great men "show us how light may be found even in the night and how we can meet the threats that rise up from the abysses of human existence and can meet the future as men who hope."³⁵

It is hard to escape the impression that there is a certain similarity between the last days of St. Benedict's life and the last days of Pope Benedict XVI's Petrine ministry. The latter, like his namesake on the Vatican hill, cast the inner gaze of his spirit on the high ground of the Monastery of the Mother Church after he no longer

³³ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Vjera — istina — tolerancija*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 2004, 140-143.

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 143 – 145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

had the energy to continue the ministry of the Roman Pontifex. At his final audience in St. Peter's Square, he quotes St. Benedict to describe his new role: "I am not abandoning the cross but remaining in a new way at the side of the crucified Lord. I no longer bear the power of office for the governance of the Church, but in the service of prayer I remain, so to speak, in the enclosure of Saint Peter. Saint Benedict, whose name I bear as Pope, will be a great example for me in this. He showed us the way for a life which, whether active or passive, is completely given over to the work of God."³⁶

The legacy of St. Benedict, whose tradition Pope Benedict XVI continues in trying to provide answers to the current crisis of Christian Europe, remains a signpost to help future generations of believers determine which path to take in returning Europe to its roots for its survival and future.

CONCLUSION

By choosing the name of Benedict, Pope Benedict XVI declared to the Church and the world that he intended to be a brave and authentic witness of peace and reconciliation among nations, modelled after his predecessor Pope Benedict XV. Nevertheless, he places more emphasis on the character and work of St. Benedict of Nursia, the great "father of Western monasticism," in which he sees a stronghold of the unity of a Europe built on the Christian faith and culture, which is presently in an identity crisis. In this call for the imitation of St. Benedict, Pope Benedict XVI also presented the program for his pontificate, the struggle for the soul of the West, which, after the devastation caused by totalitarian ideologies, fell into materialistic consumerism all the way to the dictatorship of relativism, in which authentic freedom and human dignity are lost.

In the Work of God, the liturgy, to which nothing should be preferred, Pope Benedict XVI sees a possibility for rediscovering the harmonious equilibrium of human life as directed by Christ, who is at the heart of all action. Thus, complete harmony would be established among creatures and the universe, for which monastic life is a source and model for Christians and the entire Church, as embodied in the monastic rule of "pray and work."

Amidst the crisis of democracy in a Europe threatened by terrorism at the beginning of the third millennium, Pope Benedict

³⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *General audience*, (February 27, 2013), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/hr/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130227.html (April 9, 2020.)

brings us back to the original meaning of democracy, which has its root in *parliamentum*, a council of monks that helped the General Abbot of the Cistercites in the governance of the Order. Democracy is not simply the rule of the majority but also respects the views of a minority, lest it devolve into arrogance. More importantly, however, is that the laws governing a society should be created in the sight of God. Only such laws and such democracy can preserve the inviolability of human dignity, expand the space of true freedom and overcome difficulties during the current crisis. After all, the values of parliamentary democracy that exists in the West have Christian roots. Without them, Europe is in danger of plummeting into various forms of dictatorship.

In Cardinal Ratzinger's speech in Subiaco, he described the state of mind in Europe, starting from the Enlightenment to the refusal to recognize Europe's Christian roots in the Constitution of the European Union, which does not invoke God or mention His name. Many of the problems facing today's world stem from the rejection of public morality, which has its basis in religion. Technical progress is not accompanied by the development of our moral forces, but degenerates into a political morality that is based on pure subjectivity and leads to consequential morality. Pope Benedict also sees the cause for this in scientific rationality, which has reduced reason within the framework of empirical positivism and, thus, lost the fundamental memory of humanity, without which reason loses its direction. In such a Europe, the Church's activities are placed in the realm of political compromise and play no formative role in the fundamental self-understanding of Europe, which has become a human community without any relation to God. European secularists believe that only a radical Enlightenment culture can define European culture, and various religions can only coexist with it while subordinating themselves to its criteria. The undefined and contradictory understanding of radical freedom in such a Europe leads to its limitations, producing a confusing ideology of freedom that is actually dogmatism, which is the enemy of freedom, and the total determinism of the natural sciences to a total determinism that denies the existence of any freedom—thus contradicting the Enlightenment's initial position of the affirmation of freedom.

Pope Benedict identifies the cause for such a reversal in the "reduction of reason", resulting from the radical emancipation of man from God. The demise of Enlightenment philosophy is due to the fact that its initial relativism devolved into dogmatism and the living of life as though God did not exist. To those who are not ready

to accept God personally, the pope proposes that they try to live as though God does exist. Today's Europe needs people who make God visible through their enlightened faith. The pope recommends that people emulate St. Benedict, whose eyes were directly focused on God, in order to learn true humanity. God only returns among people through those he has touched. In the wisdom of St. Benedict, Pope Benedict XVI sees hope for the survival and future of Europe.

SV. BENEDIKT - ODGOVOR NA KRIZU VJERE I KULTURE U EUROPI PREMA BENEDIKTU XVI.

Sažetak

Kardinal Ratzinger pred kraj svoga službovanja na čelu Kongregacije za nauk vjere sve više promišlja o krizi vjere i kulture u Europi i njezinim uzrocima, osobito potaknut odbijanjem vladajućih u Europskoj uniji da stave Božje ime ili da priznaju kršćanske korijene Europe u novom europskom Ustavu. Usporedo s tim događa se i njihovo osobno i misaono približavanje benediktinskom monaštvu i isticanje lika sv. Benedikta kao uzora duhovnoj obnovi Europe. Cilj ovoga rada jest analizirati sva ona mjesta u djelima teologa Josepha Ratzingera i kasnije pape Benedikta XVI. u kojima razmatra važnost sv. Benedikta u kriznim vremenima u kojima se Europa našla u njegovo vrijeme i mogućnosti da se u svjedočenju i uzoru za nasljeđivanje istoga sveca pronađe odgovor i na sadašnju krizu vjere i kulture u današnjoj Europi. Analizirajući prosvjetiteljsku kulturu koja je dovela do sekularističkog shvaćanja Europe u kojoj se mjesto za vjeru nalazi samo kroz politički kompromis i toleranciju vjere koja ostaje na margini društvenoga djelovanja, a ne smije biti duhovna pokretačka snaga europskoga društvenog života, papa Benedikt vidi temeljnu bolest Europe u prosvjetiteljskom redukcionizmu u kojem se razum ograničava samo na prostor empirijskog pozitivizma. Krajnja posljedica je gubitak temelja za javni moral, negacija ljudskoga dostojanstva osobe i gubitak slobode u diktaturi relativizma koji protuslovi temeljnoj polazišnoj točki prosvjetiteljstva - naime, htjenju za apsolutnom slobodom koja nije jasno definirana. Papa stoga predlaže sv. Benedikta kao živi primjer otvorenosti uma za cijelu stvarnost u kojem se susreće Boga kao temelj svega što postoji, uči pravost čovječnosti, otvara istinskoj slobodi kroz poslušnost Riječi Božjoj, a demokraciji vraća njezin temelj.

Ključne riječi: sv. Benedikt, papa Benedikt XVI., Europa, prosvjetiteljstvo, moli i radi, vjera i kultura, kriza identiteta.