

The World in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI

Tracey Rowland

A TABLOID CARICATURE OF Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is that he has imbibed too much of the thought of St. Augustine, leaving him with a neo-Manichean stance of hostility to the world. A related caricature draws Catholics into two camps: the camp of the grace sniffers and the camp of the heresy sniffers, with the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith presented as the captain of the latter. A third caricature is that Joseph Ratzinger was so shocked by the student demonstrations at the University of Tübingen in 1968 that he has developed a pathological fear of “the world” ever since. These various caricatures are not only simplistic, but they fail to engage with Ratzinger/Benedict’s actual academic work on the issue of the relationship between the church and the world, and the church and the cultures of modernity and post-modernity. Contrary to these caricatures, a number of scholars who are not necessarily in agreement with Ratzinger’s general theological framework, nonetheless agree that Ratzinger’s theology does exhibit a quality of consistency over the decades and is not reacting one way or another to events in world history. In other words, the argument is that Ratzinger/Benedict’s theology is *not* driven by his emotional response to world events. Joseph A. Komonchak, for example, has written that “from Ratzinger’s *Introduction to Christianity* (1968) down to the homily he delivered on his installation as Pope Benedict XVI, a distinctive and consistent approach has been visible.”¹ Similarly, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, a former student of Ratzinger, wrote at the time of Ratzinger’s election to the papacy, that “the negative slogans are wrong, the personal descriptions are true, and the biographical explanations are, in general, misleading. They overlook that Ratzinger has from early days had a consistent theological vision.”² Finally, Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion have

¹ Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Church in Crisis: Pope Benedict’s Theological Vision,” *Commonweal* (3 June 2005): 11-14. Note: This paper was submitted to the editor in the final week of the papacy of Benedict XVI.

² Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “From Theologian to Pope: A Personal View Back, Past and Public Portrayals,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 33 (2005).

concluded that “Ratzinger’s theological insights have not fundamentally changed, but have rather demonstrated a firm internal consistency throughout more than fifty years.”³

The purpose of this article is, therefore, to situate the work of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI in the context of early twentieth century German Augustinian studies, which was far removed from earlier German Protestant appropriations of the thought of St. Augustine. Further, the article presents a summary of Ratzinger’s theological understanding of the concept “the world” in the context of rival interpretations of *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World.

The young Joseph Ratzinger’s appropriation of the thought of St. Augustine was mediated through the scholarship of Fritz Hofmann, Erich Przywara, Romano Guardini, Gottlieb Söhngen and Henri de Lubac.⁴ Hofmann was a professor of Theology at the University of Würzburg, and in 1933 he published a seminal work on the ecclesiology of St. Augustine which the young Ratzinger read in preparation for his own doctoral dissertation on the concepts of the People of God and the House of God in the works of St. Augustine. In this publication, Hofmann paid particular attention to the role of grace and the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. Hofmann’s treatment of Augustinian ecclesiology was followed in 1940 by another Augustinian reflection, this time the “God is Love” theme, which was later to become the title of Benedict XVI’s first encyclical.⁵

In the inter-bellum period, the Jesuit Erich Przywara (1889-1972) was also publishing material on Augustine and was one of the most influential German-speaking Jesuits of the twentieth century. He was a teacher of both Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar and a spiritual director of the Carmelite-martyr, Jewish-convert, and philosopher, Edith Stein. Przywara was also for a time the editor of the influential journal *Stimmen der Zeit* and one of those responsible for having the works of John Henry Newman translated into German. In all, he wrote some 60 books and 600 articles including *Crucis myste-*

³ Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion, ed., *The Ratzinger Reader* (London: Continuum, 2010), 12. Nonetheless, Boeve and Mannion do observe that Ratzinger’s *tone of writing* became more polemical after 1968.

⁴ Erich Przywara, “St. Augustine in the Modern World,” in *A Monument to Saint Augustine*, ed. Martin D’Arcy (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1930); Fritz Hofmann, *Der Kirchenbegriff des hl. Augustinus in seinen Grundlagen und in seiner Entwicklung* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1933); Gottlieb Söhngen, “Wissenschaft und Weisheit im augustiniischen Gedankengefüge,” *Einheit in der Theologie* (München: Verlag, 1952); Romano Guardini, *Die Bekehrung des Aurelius Augustinus: Der innere Vorgang in seinen Bekenntnissen* (München: Grünewald, 1945), published in English translation as *The Conversion of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1966); Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L’Eucharistie et l’Église au moyen âge* (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

⁵ Fritz Hofmann, *Gott ist die Liebe: die Predigten des. Hl. Augustinus über den 1. Johannesbrief* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1940).

rium: Das christliche Heute (1939), a work which was later praised by Ratzinger, and *Humanitas: der Mensch Gestern und Morgan* (1952). For Przywara, the most perfect reincarnation of Augustinianism in the modern world was to be found in the writing of John Henry Newman. Przywara concluded that Newman “settles accounts with the Reformation more thoroughly than Hegel and Kierkegaard,” and “he prophetically anticipated the conviction, born of the fiascos of Lausanne, Stockholm and Malines, that the Reformation cannot be overcome by ‘negotiations’ of any kind, but only by a thoroughgoing reversal of ‘first principles’.”⁶ There was, in short, nothing remotely Protestant about Przywara’s appropriation of Augustine.

The same can also be said of the Augustinian appropriations of Romano Guardini (1885-1968) who was a professor at the University of Munich from 1948-1962 and thus an important figure during the years when Ratzinger was a seminarian. Karl Rahner described Guardini as a “Christian humanist who led Germany’s Catholics out of an intellectual and cultural ghetto and into the contemporary world.”⁷ Von Balthasar said of Guardini that he believed that “it is not Christ who is in the world, but the world is in Christ” and further that the “immensity of this reversal” was “the very basis” of Guardini’s thought.⁸ Guardini was also highly critical of the extrinsicist account of the relationship between nature and grace. In his 1939 work *Welt und Person*, which predated Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* by seven years, he wrote:

Seen in the fullness of its energy as Paul proclaimed it and Augustine unfolded it, grace means something that is, not added on to the nature of man for his perfection, but rather the form that man definitely is. Of course, this presupposes that we understand by the term “man” what once again Paul and Augustine mean: not some being artificially let loose in a “pure nature,” but rather that human being whom God intends and of whom Scripture speaks.⁹

In his later work *Freedom, Grace and Destiny*, Guardini suggested that the ultimate character of the world is not “Nature” but “History.”¹⁰ Since it proceeds from an act of God, nature exists *within* the world; it is a reality constructed in accordance with certain principles without consciousness or liberty, which has to operate in conformity

⁶ Erich Przywara, “St Augustine and the Modern World,” in *A Monument to Saint Augustine*, 280.

⁷ Robert A. Krieg, *Romano Guardini: The Precursor of Vatican II* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1997).

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 330.

⁹ Romano Guardini, *Welt und Person* (Würzburg: Werkbund, 1939), 186-7.

¹⁰ Romano Guardini, *Freedom, Grace, Destiny* (London: Harvill, 1961), 120-1.

with these principles. But nature is not synonymous with the world.¹¹ Moreover, Guardini wrote:

The God of revelation is the same God who created the world and therefore the relation between revelation and the world is not merely one of difference. The Creator ordained the world towards revelation, and this fundamental reality of existence has not been suppressed by sin. Scattered throughout the world are premonitions from which, in themselves, no single detail of revelation could be deduced but, once revelation has taken place, the Logos, as John declares, “without whom was made nothing that was made” comes “unto his own” and created being remains His property, even though it has turned against Him in sin and “his own received Him not” (John 1, 3-11). Thus a light is cast by revelation also on the things of the world. The paradox is in fact true that the real significance of these worldly things issues not from the things themselves but in the first instance, from revelation.¹²

Alongside Guardini, another prominent teacher of the young Joseph Ratzinger was Gottlieb Söhngen (1892-1971). Söhngen was a professor of fundamental theology at the University of Munich who supervised both of Ratzinger’s theses, the doctoral dissertation on Augustine’s ecclesiology and the *habilitationsschrift* on St. Bonaventure’s theology of history. It was also under Söhngen that Ratzinger studied Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*. Söhngen’s rise to academic prominence was boosted by his publication of a two volume work on the *analogia fidei* in 1934, which was favourably reviewed by Karl Barth, although Barth doubted that Söhngen’s approach was strongly representative of the Catholic position. It was nonetheless a position which was more Augustinian in the priority it gave to faith than some of the more rationalist currents which Barth detected in the typical Catholic theology of the era. Ratzinger’s former Prefect of Studies, Alfred Läßle, said of Söhngen:

[He] usually never gave damning judgments on any author. He never refused *a priori* any contribution, from wherever it came. His method was to pick up and improve the good that could be found in any author and in every theological perspective, to weave the new things into the Tradition and then go ahead, indicating the further development that could follow.... [I]n Söhngen Ratzinger also saw a willingness to rediscover Tradition understood as the theology of the Fathers. And a willingness to do theology by going back to the great

¹¹ Guardini, *Freedom, Grace, Destiny*, 121.

¹² Guardini, *Freedom, Grace, Destiny*, 101.

sources: from Plato to Newman, via Thomas, Bonaventure, Luther, and obviously Saint Augustine.¹³

At Söhngen's funeral, Ratzinger described his former teacher as "a radical and critical thinker" and a "radical believer."¹⁴

While a student at the Theology Faculty in Munich, Alfred Läßle also introduced the young Ratzinger to the works of Henri de Lubac, including his *Catholicism* of which Ratzinger was later to write that it was perhaps de Lubac's most significant work. Ratzinger also described *Catholicism* as "a key reading event" which gave him "not only a new and deeper connection with the thought of the Fathers but also a new way of looking at theology and faith as such."¹⁵ Following *Catholicism*, Ratzinger read de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum*, which helped him to "enter into the required dialogue with Augustine."¹⁶

The significant point about this genealogy from Hofmann, through Pryzwara, Guardini and Söhngen to de Lubac is that not one of these authors who had engaged with the thought of St. Augustine in the first half of the twentieth century had neo-Manichean, Lutheran or Calvinist inclinations or otherwise negative attitudes to the "world." Their fundamental dispositions were toward some form of Christian humanism, and they were all enlisting St. Augustine in this enterprise because of the value of his theological anthropology. Augustine wrestled with themes which were resurfacing among the early to mid-twentieth century existentialist philosophers. As Ratzinger has remarked, in the works of St. Augustine, "the passionate, suffering, questioning man is always right there, and one can identify with him."¹⁷

An extensive analysis of the various theological treatments of the concept of the "world" can be found in an essay by Cardinal Charles Journet, entitled "Les trois cités: celle de Dieu, celle de l'homme, celle du diable."¹⁸ Journet sub-divides his presentation into the treatments of the concept in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the works of St. Augustine. In the section on the New Testament meanings, he cites Jacques Maritain's observation that the world cannot be

¹³ Alfred Läßle, "That New Beginning that Bloomed Among the Ruins," *30 Days* (January 2, 2006): www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_10125_13.htm.

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Beim Requiem in Köln am 19. November, 1971*. "Söhngen war ein radikal und kritisch Fragender. Auch heute kann man nicht radikaler fragen, als er es getan hat. Aber zugleich war er ein radikal Glaubender."

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 98.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 98.

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 61.

¹⁸ Charles Journet, "Les trois cités: celle de Dieu, celle de l'homme, celle du diable," *Nova et Vetera* 33 (1958): 25-48.

neutral in relation to the kingdom of God. Either the world aspires to be the kingdom of God and is vivified by it, or it fights against it and exists in a relation of separation and of conflict.¹⁹ The world is thus simultaneously an object of redemption and a city of evil. In his treatment of the concept in Augustine, Journet not only cites Augustine's comment in the *City of God* that the universe is more admirable than miracles, but he also draws attention to a lesser known statement from St. Augustine to the effect that the world is for God a kind of vast poem whose beauty unravels like a grandiose song. Journet also noted that one of St. Augustine's pastoral outreach audiences, the Donatists, did not want the world to include the church. However, contrary to the Donatists, Augustine was of the view that to say that the world can be reconciled to God and saved by Christ is to say that the world means the church, who alone, reconciled to God by Christ, is saved.²⁰ Journet sums up the position with the statement: "The damned world persecutes; the reconciled world is persecuted, it is the Church, *mundus damnatus, quidquid praeter Ecclesiam; mundus reconciliatus, Ecclesia.*"²¹ With reference to the same phrase, Ernest Fortin, in his Saint Augustine Lecture of 1971, wrote: "The Church is not an entity distinct from the world but the world reconciled unto itself and unto God: *mundus reconciliatus ecclesia.*"²²

This way of understanding the church-world relationship is also evident in von Balthasar's exegesis on Christ's words: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you into the world." Von Balthasar wrote:

As Christ fulfils the will of the Father precisely by going away from the Father and so remains one with the Father, so too the Church fulfils the will of Christ in her going into the world and so remains one with Him. Indeed, this "going away" has its ultimate source and justification in the intra-divine "going away" of the Son from the Father himself, in the eternal *missio* in which all missions in salvation history are rooted.²³

As a consequence of this reading, von Balthasar observes that the church, in her being sent out to the world, "is herself fundamentally a part of the world, just as Christ as man was a part of the world."²⁴ Moreover, "the Church walks in the path of redemption by plunging

¹⁹ Jacques Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History* (New York: Scribner, 1957), 136.

²⁰ St. Augustine, *Ad donatistas post collationem*, ch. VIII.11, cited in Journet, "Les trois cités," 44 n. 4.

²¹ Journet, "Les trois cités," 45.

²² Ernest Fortin, "Political Realism and Christianity in the Thought of St. Augustine," *The Saint Augustine Lecture 1971* (Villanova University, 1972), 25.

²³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Father, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," *Communio* 24 (Summer 1997): 362.

²⁴ Balthasar, "The Father," 363.

with determination into the world and becoming herself the tool of this redemption, the *instrumentum redemptionis*.²⁵

The contrary tendency to think of the church and the world dualistically has arisen apace with the emergence of the concept of the “secular” as a distinct ontological realm. Several authors have mapped this development, including Oliver O’Donovan and John Milbank. They both make the observation that initially the concept of the *saeculum* or secular order referred to time, not space. The *saeculum* was the time between Christ’s resurrection and return in glory; it had nothing to do with social spheres.²⁶ As S. Joel Garver has explained the notion:

Ecclesial order and civil order do not occupy two different spaces, but two different times: the church having an eternal end, rooted in God’s past saving acts in Christ, made present now in word and sacrament; the civil order having a temporal function within the present *saeculum*, ordained to continually pass away, though its treasures are carried in the bosom of the church into the eternal kingdom.²⁷

However, an Augustinian understanding of the relationship between the church and the world, such as it was expressed in von Balthasar’s exegesis above, did not provide the theological infrastructure for *Gaudium et spes*. The infrastructure was the subject of much discussion and debate and the inevitable compromises which follow when there is little consensus about the best way to proceed.

In his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, first published in 1982, Ratzinger lamented that “despite many attempts to clarify it in section two of *Gaudium et spes*, [the concept of the world] continues to be used in a pre-theological stage.”

By “world” the Council means the counterpart of the Church. The purpose of the text is to bring the two into a relationship of cooperation, the goal of which is the “reconstruction of the ‘world’.” The Church cooperates with the world in order to build up the world—it is thus that we might characterise the vision that informs the text. It is not clear, however, whether the world that cooperates and the world that is to be built up are one and the same world; it is not clear what meaning is intended by the word “world” in every instance. In any event, we can be sure that the authors, who were aware that they spoke for the Church, acted on the assumption that they themselves were not the world but its counterpart and that they had up to then

²⁵ Balthasar, “The Father,” 363.

²⁶ Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations- Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

²⁷ Joel S. Garver, “There is another King: Gospel as Politics,” www.joelgarver.com/writ/phil/politics.htm.

had a relationship to it that was, in fact, unsatisfactory where it existed at all. To that extent, we must admit, the text represents a kind of ghetto mentality. The Church is understood as a closed entity, but she is striving to remedy the situation. By “world”, it would seem, the document understands the whole scientific and technical reality of the present and all those who are responsible for it or who are at home in its mentality.²⁸

Thus defined, the “world” comes across as a concept embracing all those social institutions in which the church has little or no influence, and the document sounds like a plea from the ghetto to be offered the occasional invitation into the hallowed halls of secular academies. As E. Michael Jones remarked, the Council occurred at the high noon of the Catholic inferiority complex. It occurred at a moment in history when Catholic intellectuals, tired of being regarded as reactionary and anti-intellectual, “lusted after modernity.”²⁹

Operating within the church-world dualism in *Gaudium et spes* there was also a church-humanity dualism. Ratzinger lamented the use of the term *genus humanum* to refer to the church’s dialogue partner in the modern world. The church herself, he claimed, was part of the *genus humanum* and cannot be contradistinguished from it:

The Church meets its *vis-a-vis* in the human race.... But it cannot exclude itself from the human race and then artificially create a solidarity which in any case is the Church’s lot. The lack of understanding shown in this matter by those who drafted the text can probably only be attributed to the deeply-rooted extrinsicism of ecclesiastical thought, to long acquaintance with the Church’s exclusion from the general course of development and to a retreat into a special little ecclesiastical world from which an attempt is then made to the speak to the rest of the world.³⁰

At the foundation of the “deeply-rooted extrinsicism” was a tendency to think of the church canonically or bureaucratically, not mystically—to presume an ecclesiology based more on the Tridentine era theology of St. Robert Bellarmine than the multi-dimensional outlook one finds in de Lubac and von Balthasar and upon which the post-Conciliar *Communio* theology was built. Both de Lubac and von Balthasar tried to steer away from a narrowly juridical ecclesiol-

²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 379-80.

²⁹ E. Michael Jones, *Living Machines: Bauhaus Architecture as Sexual Ideology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 42.

³⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Commentary on the Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 119.

ogy and instead presented the church as a symphonic interplay of different spiritual missions and relationships. The relations within the Trinity were of primary importance, but also important were the typological relationships found in the Scriptures, the sacramental relationships and the historical relationships between the Old and New Testaments.

With reference to the typographical relationships, de Lubac pointed out that the church is at once Mt. Sion (St. Basil), Noah's Ark (St. Augustine), the paradise in the midst of which Christ, the Tree of Life, is planted (St. Irenaeus), and a foreigner, a slave and even a harlot. On the one hand, we see "an assembly of sinners, a mixed herd, wheat gathered with the straw... on the other, the unspotted virgin, mother of saints, born on Calvary from the pierced side of Christ."³¹

In his treatment of typology, von Balthasar referred to a "Christological constellation" of characters, each representing a different spiritual mission in the life of the church. For example, the Johannine mission (typified by St. John) is one of contemplative love and prayer; the Jacobite mission (typified by St. James) is one of preserving the tradition uncorrupted; the Petrine mission (typified by St. Peter) is one of ecclesial governance, and the Pauline mission (typified by St. Paul) is one of prophetic movement and utterance. Each mission is dependent on the others and operates in a symphonic harmony.

With reference to the notion of sacramental relations, de Lubac emphasised that the sacramental form of relationality is one that ties together the church, as the mystical body of Christ, with the church as the historical people of God. The church not only links the visible with the invisible, time with eternity, but also the universal and the particular, the Old and New Covenants. This link between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the church as the sacrament of salvation.

The conclusion to be drawn from this *Communio ecclesiology*, which Ratzinger has long argued was one of the great advances of the Second Vatican Council, is that any assessment of the relationship between the church and the world requires something much more theologically complex than a merely juridical understanding of the church and a merely sociological understanding of the world. In the early years of the 1960s, however, the *Communio ecclesiology* was still in its infancy and those responsible for drafting *Gaudium et spes* struggled to articulate a coherent analytical framework for a subject as large and complex as the church's relationship to the world.

In his introduction to his commentary on *Gaudium et spes* published in 1969, Ratzinger noted that Article 2 of the Zurich text of the document had attempted to justify the whole notion of the church's

³¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 69.

dialogue with “the world” by means of the scriptural reference to reading the signs of the times (Matt 16:3 and Luke 12:56). This earlier draft regarded epochs as a sign and a voice to the extent that they involve God’s presence or absence; and consequently it was argued that the voice of the age must be regarded as the voice of God. However, Ratzinger observed that this idea was, quite correctly, criticized:

To link the Roman proverb on time as the voice of God with Jesus’ eschatological warning against the blindness of his nation which, though on the look-out for signs, was not able to interpret him, God’s eschatological sign to that age, or his message, was considered not only exegetically unacceptable but of doubtful validity in itself. Since Christ is the real “sign of the time,” is he not the actual antithesis to the authority of *chronos* expressed in the proverb “*vox temporis vox Dei*”?³²

The idea that “Christ is the sign of the time” and that Christ is the “Light of the Nations,” and thus that the Conciliar documents should be read with a Christocentric accent, was not the dominant reading of the documents in the 1960s. Instead the central message of the Council was often taken to be a general “openness to the world,” however defined. This openness was then taken up by the correlationist theologians, of whom Edward Schillebeeckx was the most prominent, who sought to correlate the faith to the culture of the times. The correlationists also gave priority to the first sections of *Gaudium et spes* which were addressed to people of good will or “the world” at large. Walter Kasper and others have noted that there is a tension between the first sections of the document which are merely theistically hued and were directed to all peoples of good will regardless of faith traditions and the later sections which foster a Trinitarian Christocentric anthropology and thereby presuppose belief in Christian revelation.³³

Ratzinger agrees with Kasper that a major problem with *Gaudium et spes* is that those responsible for its drafting never resolved the inherent tension between a merely theistically hued account of the human person and an explicitly Trinitarian account. The Trinitarian account, he said, “fell victim to the tendency to simplify.”³⁴ Speaking directly of the treatment of human person in Article 12, Ratzinger complained that “there was not a radical enough rejection of a doctrine of man divided into philosophy and theology.” The text was “still based on a schematic representation of nature and the super-

³² Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 115.

³³ Walter Kasper, “The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et spes*,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 129-40; David L. Schindler, “Christology and the Imago Dei: Interpreting *Gaudium et spes*,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 156-84.

³⁴ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 116.

natural viewed far too much as merely juxtaposed.” To the mind of the critics of Article 12, it “took as its starting-point the fiction that it is possible to construct a rational philosophical picture of man intelligible to all and on which all men of goodwill can agree, the actual Christian doctrines being added to this as a sort of crowning conclusion. The latter then tends to appear as a sort of special possession of Christians, which others ought not to make a bone of contention but which at bottom can be ignored.”³⁵ This approach thereby prompted the question of “why exactly the reasonable and perfectly free human being described in the first articles was suddenly burdened with the story of Christ.”³⁶ Ratzinger went on to say that this criticism (the idea that the first section of *Gaudium et spes* seems to imply that the second section is a mere optional extra for Catholics who want to take it) was the basis of the protest against the “optimism” of the schema, not some “pessimistic view of man” or “an exaggerated theology of sin” more typically Lutheran than Catholic.³⁷

At the end of this analysis Ratzinger noted that at the foundation of the *Gaudium et spes* conundrum was not only the relationship between nature and supernature but also the relationship between faith and understanding. He was then critical of the habit of positing a strong division between philosophy and theology, a habit he associated with the Thomist tradition, though without naming any particular branches of the tradition or acknowledging the internal debates within that tradition that had, for example, flared in French Thomist circles in the 1940s.³⁸ He merely concluded that the juxtaposition had gradually been established but “no longer appears adequate” and that “there is, and must be, a human reason in faith; yet, conversely, every human reason is conditioned by a historical standpoint so that reason pure and simple does not exist.”³⁹ In other words, he was critical of the tendency to read “reason” as Kantian reason.

Lest this statement be discredited as the “low point” of Ratzinger’s “theological teenager” period, he reiterated his stance against “pure reason” in his 1996 address to the bishops of Mexico. In that address

³⁵ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 119.

³⁶ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 120.

³⁷ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 120.

³⁸ For an account of these debates see: Gregory B. Sadler ed./trans., *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2011). This book sets out the players in the 1930s Christian Philosophy debates in France and places them into the categories of: Neo-Thomist Opponents of Christian Philosophy, Thomist Proponents of Christian Philosophy, and Non-Thomist Proponents of Christian Philosophy. For a more general account of the different approaches to the relationship between faith and reason in the Thomist tradition which is not restricted to the French contributions to the debate, see Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

³⁹ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 120.

he said that “neo-scholastic rationalism failed in its attempts to reconstruct the *preambula fidei* with wholly independent reasoning, with pure rational certainty.”⁴⁰ Karl Barth, he said, was “right to reject philosophy as the foundation of faith, independent of faith,” since if that were so, “our faith would be dependent from the beginning to the end on changing philosophical theories.”⁴¹ Nonetheless he rejected Barth’s idea of faith as a pure paradox that can only exist against reason and totally independent of it. As Aidan Nichols has argued, Ratzinger/Benedict’s account of the faith and reason relationship sounds “highly Gilsonian” (according to whom the relationship is intrinsic), and it also “made *some* movement towards *bauintainisme*, which, owing to its inheritance from traditionalism, considered faith to be an indispensable auxiliary to reason if reason were ever to attain fundamental truths.”⁴² Nichols also draws attention to affinities between Ratzinger’s account of the faith and reason relationship and that of Franz Jacob Clemens and Paul Tillich. In general, Nichols observes that Benedict tends to unite “philosophy and theology in a single, internally differentiated but also internally cohesive, intellectual act,” and thus, what one finds in Benedict’s many publications is a “convergence of the mainly philosophical disclosure of logos with the chiefly theological revelation of love.”⁴³ “Love and Reason,” Benedict writes, are the “twin pillars” of reality. This in turn gives rise to a quintessentially Augustinian theological anthropology which pays equal attention to the head and the heart, to objectivity and affectivity. As Paige E. Hochschild observed in her work *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology*, for St. Augustine, “the two problems of knowledge and love cannot be separated, given that one determines the object for the other.”⁴⁴

At the time of the drafting of *Gaudium et spes*, however, there was still a strong habit of thinking of faith and reason extrinsically. This was due, at least in part, to the influence of the first paragraph of Chapter Two of the document *Dei Filius* of Vatican I. The much quoted “anathema” sentence reads:

If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason, let him be anathema.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Current Situation of Faith and Theology,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (November 6, 1996): 6.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, “The Current Situation,” 6.

⁴² Aidan Nichols, *Faith and Reason: From Hermes to Benedict XVI* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2009), 228-30.

⁴³ Nichols, *Faith and Reason*, 228, 193.

⁴⁴ Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology* (New York: Oxford University, 2012), 139.

That particular paragraph was drafted at a moment in time when the Catholic Church was under attack from rationalist philosophers and thus her champions were focused on defending the rationality of the faith.

Precisely how it is to be interpreted in the light of later debates and magisterial documents, especially the “Catholic philosophy” debates of the 1940s, the Conciliar document *Dei Verbum*, and John Paul II’s encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (which scholars have argued was at least implicitly Gilsonian), remains a subject of academic dispute.⁴⁵ Fergus Kerr has noted that “it remained unsettled at Vatican I whether the natural light by which reason can attain knowledge of God should be equated with the prelapsarian light enjoyed by Adam in the Garden of Eden or the light in which someone in a state of grace might exercise his reasoning powers, or the light which someone might supposedly have independently of the effects of sin and grace.”⁴⁶ Moreover, Kerr observes that, while the First Vatican Council (1869-70) decreed that for Catholics it is a dogma of faith that we can have certain knowledge of God by the natural light of reason, it was only in the Anti-Modernist Oath (1910) that this knowledge was defined as rationally demonstrable by cosmological arguments.

Similarly, Noel O’Sullivan has suggested that what is interesting about *Dei Filius* is “not so much what it says but rather what it doesn’t say,” and in particular “one is struck by the absence of a Trinitarian dimension in the definition of 1870.”⁴⁷ In a manner which is consonant with Ratzinger’s criticisms, O’Sullivan observes:

The key difficulty that arises from this overly rationalistic approach is that a separation arises between creation and salvation. In this perspective creation is seen as primarily concerned with the world and the universe, while the human being is only considered on a secondary level, as a being in the world. The human is treated as of primary concern only in the context of salvation. The act of creation is antecedent to humanity and is of no significance where revelation and salvation history is concerned. Creation is just a neutral shell where salvation history is acted out. Even God is looked on differently, depending on whether the perspective is that of creation or salvation. From the perspective of creation taken in isolation, God is the first cause of everything that exists: there is an immensurable gap between Creator and creature. From the perspective of salvation alone,

⁴⁵ Kenneth L Schmitz reads *Fides et Ratio* as implicitly Gilsonian, and John Milbank has suggested that *Fides et ratio* is at least open to a Gilsonian interpretation even though other interpretations are also possible.

⁴⁵ Fergus Kerr, “Knowing God by Reason Alone: What Vatican I Never Said,” *New Blackfriars* 91 (May 2010): 222.

⁴⁶ Kerr, “Knowing God by Reason Alone,” 222.

⁴⁷ Noel O’Sullivan, *Christ and Creation: Christology as the Key to Interpreting the Theology of Creation in the Works of Henri Lubac* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 139.

God is a personal being in relationship with humanity. As a result of this manner of viewing creation and salvation in such distinct categories, an opposition between faith and reason develops. Faith is seen as concerned with the salvific action of God and not connected to the creative action of God.⁴⁸

On Ratzinger's reading, Article 21 of *Gaudium et spes* represents a kind of immature compromise between the rationalist interpretation of *Dei Filius* and some of the criticisms of extrinsicism which began in the works of Maurice Blondel and flowed into the French Thomist debates in the 1940s. Thus he wrote:

The term "ratio" was simply meant to recall in abbreviated form the well-known definitions of Vatican I, and by the addition or retention of "*experientia*" the aim was to limit the neo-scholastic rationalism contained in the formula of 1870 and to place its over-static idea of "*ratio naturalis*" in a more historical perspective. The text dictates... that the possibilities of reason in regard to knowledge of God should be thought of less in the form of a non-historical syllogism of the *philosophia perennis* than simply as the concrete fact that man throughout his whole history has known himself confronted with God and consequently in virtue of his own history finds himself in relation with God as an inescapable feature of his own existence.⁴⁹

The Conciliar document that dealt with these issues more to Ratzinger's liking was *Dei Verbum*. As Gregory Baum has argued, while *Dei Filius* did not address the issue of *how* knowledge of the true God based on human reason is related to the saving actions of God revealed in Christ, the "profounder understanding of revelation" offered by *Dei Verbum* "introduces a new theological epistemology."⁵⁰ Baum summarises this epistemology in the following paragraph:

Vatican I affirms that "God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason." In accordance with Vatican II, we can now say that if God allows Himself to be found – across whatever distance – through the works of His creation as understood by human reason, this does not take place because of an independent or sovereign act of man, but rather because of the appeal which the gracious God through His creation makes to the mind and heart of men. The "natural" knowledge of God is related to the history of salvation appointed for the whole human family, which is revealed once and for all in Jesus Christ.⁵¹

⁴⁸ O'Sullivan, *Christ and Creation*, 139-40.

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 153.

⁵⁰ Gregory Baum, "Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation: History and Interpretation," *Theological Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1967): 62.

⁵¹ Baum, "Vatican II's Constitution," 64.

In short, *Dei Verbum* emphasises that the structure of revelation is Trinitarian, and this “profounder understanding” is something of a solvent for rationalist interpretations of *Dei Filius*. This deeper theological epistemology was not however integrated into *Gaudium et spes*, and notwithstanding the addition of the concept of “experiential” which was a move in an anti-rationalist direction, Ratzinger regarded Article 21 as an inadequate response to atheism.

He suggested that in order to address the concerns of atheists, God’s invisibility is something that has to be taken into account:

[Christianity] cannot be taken seriously if it acts as if reason and revelation present a smooth, plain certainty accessible to everyone; in that case atheism could only be a matter of evil will. In that case, too, the atheist could not consider that he was being taken seriously. He would feel little inclination to engage in discussion when his cause is declared from the start to be contrary to plain reason and he is treated merely as a sick man worthy of pity, the causes of whose malady are being inquired into so that he may be cured.⁵²

Taken as a whole, Ratzinger regarded Article 21 as offering no advance in regard to the problem raised at Vatican I.

He thought the mere addition of “*experientia*” to “*ratio*” would not solve the problems and that the whole article fails to engage with contemporary theological reflections, especially those fostered by Karl Barth’s criticisms of the doctrine of the *analogia entis*:

The Council passed over the essentials of the *theologia negativa*. It took no account of Augustine’s epistemology, which is much deeper than that of Aquinas, for it is well aware that the organ by which God can be seen cannot be a non-historical “*ratio naturalis*” which just does not exist, but only the *ratio pura*, ie. *purificata* or, as Augustine expresses it echoing the gospel, the *cor purum* (“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”). Augustine also knows that the necessary purification of sight takes place through faith (Acts 15:9) and through love, at all events not as a result of reflection alone and not at all by man’s own power. By ignoring these approaches, the opportunity was lost of manifesting the positive service to faith performed by atheism.⁵³

Against Barth however, Ratzinger applauded the fact that the article does at least emphasise that faith “cannot remain inaccessible to a reason which is ready to listen.”⁵⁴ Ratzinger is not a Barthian, but he

⁵² Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 154-5.

⁵³ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 155.

⁵⁴ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 155.

shares Barth's aversion to rationalism and Barth's linkage of rationalism with secularism.

Notwithstanding his specific judgements about the inadequacy of the Conciliar engagement with the phenomenon of atheism, Ratzinger nonetheless approved of the general orientation of a small sub-commission consisting of Cardinal König, Cardinal Šeper, Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou which decided to deal with the question of atheism as an anthropological (not a narrowly epistemological) issue. These committee members understood that atheism "does not simply express a metaphysical failure or a breakdown in epistemology, but draws its inspiration from an authentic desire for a true humanism."⁵⁵ Further, Ratzinger asserted that "atheism is a question which can only be understood on the level of existence; a philosophy of pure essences cannot cope with it."⁵⁶ He suggested that the fundamental question is: Is God merely a projection of man or is it God who makes it possible for man to be human?⁵⁷

The language used by Ratzinger for describing how to combat atheism was that of "showing the face of God to the world." This he said had nothing to do with a "one-sided activism." Rather, an important component of it is "participation in the spirituality of the Cross," and indeed, Ratzinger noted that martyrdom is the clearest exposition of the face of God. He concluded:

The real answer to atheism is the life of the Church, which must manifest the face of God by showing its own face of unity and love. Conversely this includes the admission that the disunity of Christians and their consent to systems of social injustice, hide the face of God. It also implies the realisation that knowing God is not a question of pure reason alone, that there is an obscuration of God in the world produced by guilt, which can only be removed by penance and conversion.⁵⁸

Reading this passage in the first week of Lent 2013, that is, during the final week of the pontificate of Benedict XVI, is quite a sobering exercise. One senses that Ratzinger/Benedict's decision to resign from the papacy represents an exchange of a Petrine mission for a Johannine mission. Jean Daniélou, one of those *periti* Ratzinger praised for understanding that atheism is fundamentally an anthropological rather than epistemological issue (although he would no doubt agree that there is an epistemological dimension to the anthropological problem), wrote the following words:

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 146

⁵⁶ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 146.

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 146.

⁵⁸ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 157.

Our Lord has told us that souls are to be won away from the Devil first by fasting and vigils, and that the great battle is fought in the heart of the desert, in the depth of solitude, on the summit of Carmel, before it is fought through the ministry of preachers, on the great highways and in the villages.... We must tear souls away from Satan first of all through prayer, penance and sacrifice.⁵⁹

Benedict XVI's decision to retire and pray for the church appears to have been the adoption of precisely this approach to the problem of contemporary unbelief, both within and without the church. Just as John Paul II died on the stage of the world bearing witness to a Christian understanding of death with dignity, Benedict XVI leaves the stage of the world bearing witness to the truth that prayer and fasting is sometimes the only way to triumph over extreme evil.

A core element of any anthropology is that of its understanding of freedom. Here it is highly significant that of all Ratzinger's criticisms of *Gaudium et spes*, his most acidic comments are directed against the treatment of freedom in Article 17. It was "one of the least satisfactory of the whole document;" it "cannot stand up to either theological or philosophical criticism;" philosophically, "it by-passes the whole modern discussion of freedom;" it "shut itself out from the factual situation of man whose freedom only comes into effect through a lattice of determining factors, theologically speaking it leaves aside the whole complex of problems which Luther, with polemical one sidedness, comprised in the term '*servum arbitrium*'." Moreover, "the whole text gives scarcely a hint of the discord which runs through man and which is described so dramatically in Rom 7:13-25. It even falls into downright Pelagian terminology when it speaks of man '*sese ab omni passionum captivitate liberans finem suum persequitur et apta subsidia... procurat*'."⁶⁰ He concluded:

If optimism in John XXIII's sense means readiness for today and tomorrow, if it means abandoning nostalgia for the past for a spirituality of hope in the midst of each particular present moment, then it does not in any way impose the platitudes of an ethics modeled on that of the Stoa. Here it would have been possible to learn from Marxism about the extent of human alienation and decadence. Not to take them seriously does not mean to think highly of man, but to deceive him about the gravity of his situation.⁶¹

Positively, however, Ratzinger noted that the Council Fathers were keen to affirm man's freedom against the variety of determinisms which so characterized early twentieth century history. Although no

⁵⁹ Jean Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, trans. Angeline Bouchard (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950), 43.

⁶⁰ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 138.

⁶¹ Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 138.

specific examples were given, the racist determinism of the Nazi ideology, the class determinism of the Marxist ideology, and the hormonal or sex-drive determinism of Freudian psychology were all likely to have been in the thoughts of the Council Fathers.

While the Council Fathers may have been so focused on rejecting these various determinisms that they failed to analyze in any depth the limitations on human freedom, the whole pontificate of John Paul II can be read as a theo-dramatic study on this very topic. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, many of John Paul II's publications dealt with critiques of Pelagian-liberal conceptions of freedom on the one side and Marxist conceptions on the other. As he remarked in an address to the scholars of Lublin University in 1987 in the dying days of the Communist regime, "the human person must stave off a double-temptation: the temptation to make the truth about himself subordinate to his freedom and the temptation to subordinate himself to the world of objects: he has to refuse to succumb to the temptation of both self-idolatry and of self-subjectification."⁶² The first temptation is the liberal temptation; the second is the Marxist. Both are erroneous because, as he was later to express the problem poetically, "the human person is a pillar that has a crack to be sealed within."⁶³ Only grace can seal the crack, and grace is not part of the conceptual framework of the liberal or the Marxist.

In addition to the lack of clarity regarding the relationship of anthropology to Christology or, more specifically, of a merely theistically coloured account of creation to an explicitly Trinitarian account, there is the further problem of the interpretation of Article 36 of *Gaudium et spes*. This article speaks of a *terrenarum rerum autonomia*, which is normally rendered in English (including in the official Holy See English translation) as "the legitimate autonomy of earthly affairs." With reference to this particular phrase David L. Schindler has argued that "the root meaning of the '*legitima autonomia*' finds its proper meaning in an analogy of being based on the descent of God into the world" and, further, that "the organic relation between the Trinity and the creature established in Jesus Christ does not reduce creaturely autonomy but rather grants it a new and expanded meaning."⁶⁴ The paragraph is capable of a non-secularising interpretation, especially if it is read by persons who have studied theology. However a "plain person" reading the phrase "a legitimate autonomy of earthly affairs" is likely to interpret the expression quite differently

⁶² Karol Wojtyła, "Address to the Scholars of Lublin University," *Christian Life in Poland* (November 1987), 51.

⁶³ See the poem *La Libertá* written by John Paul II and recorded as a song by Plácido Domingo.

⁶⁴ David L. Schindler, "Trinity, Creation and the Order of Intelligence in the Modern Academy," *Communio* 28 (Fall 2001): 407.

from a professional theologian. Cardinal Angelo Scola has noted that there is a “latent ambiguity” around the interpretation of the principle of the autonomy of earthly affairs.⁶⁵ Scola reads Article 36 as an acknowledgement that there is a realm of life which is the responsibility of the laity. He does not read it as authority for the proposition that there might be aspects of life which have no intrinsic relationship to the Creator and thus that there might be social provinces in which theological insight has nothing to contribute.

Consistent with such an interpretation, in an essay on the contributions of Cardinal Joseph Frings to the Conciliar debates, Ratzinger drew attention to Frings’ speech of October 27, 1964 in which he warned that earthly advances do not transfer directly to the kingdom of God. As Ratzinger expressed his argument:

The three stages of creation, incarnation, and Passover must be seen each in their dynamic relation, each with its own weight and each in relation to the others. Literally, his [Frings’] formulation was, “For the Christian life in the world three revealed truths are always to be kept before us: creation, which teaches us to love the things of the world as God’s work; the Incarnation, which spurs us on to dedicate to God all the things of the world; cross and resurrection, which leads us in the imitation of Christ to sacrifice and continence with regard to the things of the world.”⁶⁶

What Scola identified as a latent ambiguity in *Gaudium et spes* 36 may be identified as a concrete example of the problems which arise when interpreters of the Conciliar documents approach them with a lopsided focus on creation at the expense of the incarnation and Paschal mysteries.

Writing in 1965 but without directly mentioning the recently promulgated *Gaudium et spes*, Romano Guardini observed that “the whole modern view of the autonomy of the world and of man... seem to rest ultimately on the notion which made of God the ‘other’.”⁶⁷ The end result of this mentality is that the world becomes an idol. Guardini concluded that this concept of autonomy “is a kind of tetanus in which the world suffocates.”⁶⁸ One of Guardini’s colleagues at the University of Munich, Michael Schmaus, who was actually Ratzinger’s adversary when it came to the presentation of his *habilitationsschrift*, was equally critical of the notion of the world’s autonomy understood in any popular or plain-meaning sense. Refer-

⁶⁵ Angelo Scola, “El Peligro de una Falsa ‘Autonomía,’” *Humanitas: Revista de Antropología y Cultura Christianas* 66 (Otono 2012): 299.

⁶⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches during the Second Vatican Council: Apropos of A. Muggeridge’s *The Desolate City*,” *Communio* 15, no. 1 (1988): 143-4.

⁶⁷ Guardini, *The World and the Person*, 204.

⁶⁸ Guardini, *The World and the Person*, 204.

ring to St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, he noted that when Paul speaks of our having "being" because of Christ, he implies that nature is something given as a gift:

That we even exist at all is based on Christ, since we could only exist as people who are called in Christ to be saved and healed. He is the One from whom and toward whom the universe exists at all...The world, accordingly, does not possess a completely autonomous order that is ultimately self-subsistent and self-sufficient. Its order is in fact taken up into that order whose ground is Christ.⁶⁹

In addition to all these various problems of interpretation relating to theological anthropology and the church-world relationship, there is the problem (more of a linguistic and sociological nature) that although there are many references to the modern world and modern man to be found in *Gaudium et spes*, at the time of the document's drafting by predominately Francophone theologians, there was very little scholarship available on "modernity as a cultural formation" (aside from a few scattered works in German and English).

The Canadian philosopher Kenneth Schmitz has observed that in the 1960s very few Catholic scholars had any understanding of what sociologists now mean by the concept of modernity:

Had we been more perceptive we might have guessed that the foundations of modernity were beginning to crack under an increasingly incisive attack. But we had no such cultural concept as modernity: all we had instead was the historical category: modern philosophy.⁷⁰

In his autobiographical work, *A Theologian's Journey*, Thomas F. O'Meara suggested that "much conflict would have been avoided if [Romano Guardini's] perspectives on modernity had been read by the Vatican."⁷¹ That they were not was probably due to the rigidity of the seminary curricula of the time which was not designed for the kind of inter-disciplinary analysis required of what is now called the theology of culture. Pre-Conciliar Thomism prided itself on being "above history," not on its intellectual analysis of transient historical cultural phenomena. It is striking that those Catholic scholars who were interested in modernity as a cultural formation were predominately members of the laity, for example, Georges Bernanos and Christopher Dawson.

⁶⁹ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik II*, 4th ed. (München: Verlag, 1949), 52, cited in Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 331.

⁷⁰ Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Postmodernism and the Catholic Tradition," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXIII.2 (1999): 235.

⁷¹ Thomas F. O'Meara, *A Theologian's Journey* (Boston: Paulist, 2002), 218.

Today, however, some five decades later, most post-Conciliar generation scholars are familiar with the many critiques of modernity from theological and sociological perspectives. There is, for example, the Alasdair MacIntyre reading of modernity as the *severance* of the classical-theistic synthesis, the Charles Taylor reading as a *mutation* of the same synthesis, the Hans Blumenberg reading as the *re-occupation* of defunct Christian concepts with a new non-Christian substance, the Eric Voegelin thesis of modernity as *neo-gnosticism*, and the “Radical Orthodoxy” reading represented by Catherine Pickstock and John Milbank, as the *heretical re-construction* of the classical-theistic synthesis. Regardless of the differences in nuance between severance, mutation, re-occupation, neo-gnosticism, and heretical reconstruction, in each of these accounts of the culture of modernity there is a common agreement that this culture developed in opposition to the medieval theological (especially Thomistic) synthesis and the culture which embodied its principles. Theologians such as von Balthasar would add that the severance of the relationship between the true, the beautiful, and the good was a central pathological feature of the new culture.

Tragically, in the 1960s and beyond, Catholic theologians who interpreted the Council, especially *Gaudium et spes*, as a call to make the Catholic faith more compatible with the culture of modernity were often unaware of just how far *behind the times* such thinking really was. As Augustine Di Noia has noted: “The Post-Conciliar interpretation of John XXIII’s vision of *aggiornamento* as updating theology is, from the perspective of post-modern eyes, a project which has never really caught up, while conceived more grandly as modernization, it is already far behind.”⁷²

The remedy of both Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI to the correlationist interpretations of *Gaudium et spes*, which often resulted in the teachings and practices of the church being expressed in the language of liberal modernity and which today now sound so dated as to be almost incomprehensible to those born after the 1970s, was to emphasise the Christocentric sections of the document, in particular Article 22. By making Article 22 the hermeneutical lens through which the rest of the document is read, many of the problems which Ratzinger, Kasper, Scola and others have identified, can be overcome.

Ratzinger has suggested that the merit of *Gaudium et spes*, notwithstanding its unresolved inner tensions and tendency to use ambiguous language, is that it offered a “daring new theological anthropology,” albeit one that was not well expressed in the actual document. As he wrote:

⁷² Augustine Di Noia, “American Catholic Theology at Century’s End: Postconciliar, Postmodern and Post Thomistic,” *The Thomist* 54 (1990): 518.

Article 22 thus returns to the starting-point, Article 12, and presents Christ as the eschatological Adam to whom the first Adam already pointed; as the true image of God which transforms man once more into likeness to God. The attempt to pursue discussion with non-believers on the basis of the idea of “*humanitas*”, here culminates in the endeavour to interpret being human Christologically and so attain the “*resolutio in theologiam*” which, it is true, also means “*resolutio in hominem*” (provided the sense of “*homo*” is understood deeply enough). We are probably justified in saying that here for the first time in an official document of the magisterium, a new type of completely Christocentric theology appears.⁷³

In Article 22, the idea of the “*assumptio hominis*” is first touched upon in its full ontological depth. The human nature of all men is one; Christ’s taking to himself the one human nature of man is an event which affects every human being; consequently human nature in every human being is henceforward Christologically characterised... This outlook is probably also important because it opens a bridge between the theology of the incarnation and that of the cross. A theology of the incarnation situated too much on the level of essence, may be tempted to be satisfied with the ontological phenomenon: God’s being and man’s have been conjoined...But since it is made clear that man’s being is not that of a pure essence, and that he only attains his reality by his activity, it is at once evident that we cannot rest content with a purely essentialist outlook. Man’s being must therefore be examined precisely in its activities.⁷⁴

Herein lies an important point of convergence between Ratzinger/Benedict and Wojtyła/John Paul II. They are both interested in relationality or that dimension of the human person which is determined by their relations with other persons, including each of the Persons of the Trinity, in time and history. As Michael Schmaus expressed the principle: “Nature cannot come to its fulfilment in the antechambers of God’s love and glory, but only in the inner chamber of his Trinitarian divine life.”⁷⁵ Michael Hanby made the same point in his *Augustine and Modernity*, when he wrote that at issue within the culture of modernity is the Trinity itself and specifically whether the meaning of human nature and human agency are understood to occur within Christ’s mediation of the love and delight shared as *donum* between the Father and the Son, or beyond it.⁷⁶

Among Benedict’s many papal homilies and documents, one can find numerous criticisms of the culture of modernity from a Trinitarian Christocentric perspective. One of the most sustained criticisms

⁷³ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 159.

⁷⁴ Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 160.

⁷⁵ Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik II*, 200.

⁷⁶ Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 73.

is found in his second encyclical *Spe Salvi* which some commentators have described as his “antidote” to the secularist renderings of poorly drafted passages in *Gaudium et spes*. Although this is probably an accident (not something he intended), Article 22 of *Spe Salvi* resonates strongly with the Christocentrism of Article 22 of *Gaudium et spes*. Here he wrote:

A self-critique of modernity is needed in dialogue with Christianity and its concept of hope. In this dialogue Christians too, in the context of their knowledge and experience, must learn anew in what their hope truly consists, what they have to offer to the world and what they cannot offer. Flowing into this self-critique of the modern age there also has to be a self-critique of modern Christianity, which must constantly renew its self-understanding setting out from its roots. On this subject, all we can attempt here are a few brief observations. First we must ask ourselves: what does “progress” really mean; what does it promise and what does it not promise?...If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man’s ethical formation, in man’s inner growth (cf. Eph 3:16; 2 Cor 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world.

In the following paragraph, Pope Benedict was critical of notions of rationality “detached from God,” and he argued that “if progress, in order to be progress, needs moral growth on the part of humanity, then the reason behind action and capacity for action is likewise urgently in need of integration through reason’s openness to the saving forces of faith, to the differentiation between good and evil. Only thus does reason become truly human.”

This means that the great Enlightenment project, severing faith from reason and then, with a much reduced rational capacity, setting about building political utopias based on nothing more than this faith-less rationality, was not going to foster the very freedom it desired. Hence, there is Benedict’s judgment in *Spe salvi* 24 that “the right state of human affairs, the moral well-being of the world can never be guaranteed simply through structures alone, however good they are:”

Since man always remains free and since his freedom is always fragile, the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last for ever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good. Free assent to the good never exists simply by itself. If there were structures which could irrevocably guarantee a determined—good—state of the world, man’s freedom would be denied, and hence they would not be good structures at all.

Particularly in Article 25 of *Spe salvi*, Benedict concluded that Francis Bacon and those who followed in the intellectual current of modernity that he inspired were wrong to believe that man would be redeemed through science.

Nothing in these paragraphs however should be construed as a Christian call to withdraw from the world. Earlier in *Spe Salvi*, at Article 15, Benedict explicitly rejected the idea that the church's endorsement of the monastic vocation has something to do with a "contempt for the world" mentality. He suggested that if we take "a more or less randomly chosen episode from the Middle Ages," the monastic movement of St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Bernard was not encouraging youth to treat monasteries "as places of flight from the world (*contemptus mundi*) and of withdrawal from responsibility for the world, in search of private salvation." Rather, St. Bernard's monks were performing "a task for the whole church and hence also for the world."

In the later paragraphs of *Spe Salvi* (Arts. 34, 35 and 36), Benedict exhorted Catholics to "keep the world open to God":

We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good. This is what the saints did, those who, as "God's fellow workers", contributed to the world's salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Thess. 3:2). We can free our life and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy the present and the future. We can uncover the sources of creation and keep them unsullied, and in this way we can make a right use of creation, which comes to us as a gift, according to its intrinsic requirements and ultimate purpose....

We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to "take away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29) is present in the world. Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history.

In the final analysis, the conflict over the correct interpretation of the church's relationship to the world is not between grace sniffers and heresy sniffers, or between those who want to plunder the spoils of the Egyptians, the "open to the world" types, or those who want nothing whatsoever to do with Egyptians, the "closed to the world" types, but between those who think that human nature can or cannot come to fulfilment in the antechambers of God's love and glory. Ratzinger's Augustinianism was not a neo-Protestant Augustinianism fixated on the theology of the Cross, but a classically Catholic Trinitarian Christocentric Augustinianism for which the Incarnation is the fulcrum of history, presupposing creation and looking forward to the final renewal of the cosmos. **M**