



The Road to Rome The Education of Joseph A. Ratzinger

With the death of Pope John Paul II on April 2, 2005, the Catholic Church entered the choppy waters of unpredictability. John Paul was such a popular world figure that no successor would be able to match him in charisma or personal charm. Yet God works through the Holy Spirit in mysterious ways. The signs are already emerging that Benedict XVI will continue the historic direction of his predecessor.

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE THEOLOGIAN

John Paul II is the proverbial *tough act to follow*. He was a people-loving, energetic Pope whose youthful exuberance lighted up every room or stadium he visited. Though his theological approach was simplified to a belief that *Christ is the Answer*, he more frequently resorted to philosophical arguments to counter the claims of Marxism, materialist evolutionism, and other anti-religious systems of thought.

Pope Benedict sometimes appears shy and aloof. In private he often exudes a joyous demeanor, the product of his deep faith and his fondness for the music of Mozart. Writing in the July 25th issue of *The New Yorker*, Anthony Grafton states how *young Catholics describe with phosphorescent enthusiasm the delicacy and devotion with which Ratzinger celebrates Mass*. As a thinker Pope Benedict seems preoccupied by his incessant struggle against moral depravity and evil that is universal to mankind. While not averse to philosophical reasoning, it is his encyclopedic knowledge of two millennia of theology and Western cultural history that gives construct to his formidable intellect.

While both men shared a profound intellectual kinship, John Paul, the philosopher, was a dedicated personalist who saw every issue in terms of its effect on people. This thinking permeated his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). His concern for human life from conception through natural death exuded a boundless love for his fellowman that had been unparalleled in Church history. Benedict, on the other hand, is a theologian who encountered the love of Christ through the doctrines of the Church and its moral duty to lead all men to God.

While John Paul left a library of writings that will take decades to fully assess, Pope Benedict has his own treasure

trove of writings and interviews on the deepest mysteries of the Catholic faith. With true Christian charity and humility, he presents opposing views in the best possible light, answering their strongest possible challenges and assuming their noblest motives.

NOMINAL IMPORTANCE

Though there would be no radical departure from the directions of his predecessor, Benedict made it clear with his papal name that he would not be a John Paul III. He offered two reasons for his choice. The first Benedict was a 6th century saint who is credited with the preservation of Western civilization. St. Benedict was a monk who lived (480-547) just after the fall of the Roman Empire and the closing of Plato's Academy in Athens. To fill this intellectual void, he founded the Benedictine Order which established monasteries all across Europe, sparking a religious revival that led to a flourishing of Christian culture. The Benedictines became the principal guardians of learning and literature in Western Europe during the centuries that followed, giving lie to the nomenclatural *Dark Ages*. In a time when Europe is in the beginning throes of demographic suicide, Pope Benedict XVI may serve as a rallying point for European unity and a reminder of its Christian cultural roots.

The new pope also recognized Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) who guided the Church through the turbulent times of World War I. He was a *courageous prophet of peace*, who valiantly tried to mediate a world intent on destroying itself. Following in these footsteps, Benedict XVI said *I wish to offer my ministry as a service of reconciliation and harmony among people and nations*.

ENCHANTED BAVARIAN ROOTS

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger's road to Rome began on Holy Saturday, April 16, 1927 in the town of Marktl am Inn in Southern Bavaria, where he was born to Joseph and Maria Ratzinger. According to George Weigel's recent biography, *God's Choice*, Benedict is a *man of the land Bayern*. His Bavarian roots, anchored and nurtured in the teachings of the Church and the love of his family, insulated him from the

deadly attractions of the Third Reich. His father was an anti-Nazi policeman who attended three Masses every Sunday. His older brother, Georg, became a priest and went on to conduct a famous choir at Regensburg Cathedral. His sister, Maria, became his longtime secretary and an inspiration to him because of her simple faith.

As a young boy, the future Pope was forced to join the Hitler Youth, though he never attended a meeting. He was later drafted into an anti-tank aircraft battery (FLAK) where he never fired a shot or even loaded a weapon. After having deserted twice, he was captured by the Allies and spent a short time in a POW camp.

From his early days he loved the moving ceremonies of the Church's liturgy. *New Yorker Magazine* writer Anthony Grafton stated that the future pope *lived most intensely in a world of his own, an enchanted castle of Latin song and prayer, incense and sacraments, which he has spent the rest of his life exploring*. On June 29, 1951, Cardinal Faulhaber ordained him in the Freising Cathedral, along with 40 others, including his older brother Georg. He received his doctorate two years later with his proud parents in attendance.

AUGUSTINIAN ALIENS

It is impossible for one to understand the mind of Benedict XVI without first investigating his deep love for the writings of St. Augustine. While researching his doctoral dissertation, *The House and the People of God*, Father Ratzinger realized that he could only understand Augustine amid the backdrop of his North African pagan culture. His work sparkled with insight into the world of the early Church. Father Ratzinger concluded that Augustine's *People of God* consisted *not of any single congregation or building but of a spiritual body united by liturgy and sacrament*.

St. Augustine wrote more than a 1,000 works, including 242 books, the most famous of which is *The City of God*. Father Ratzinger focused on its salient idea that the Church is superior and essentially alien to its earthly surroundings. This is in sharp contrast to St. Thomas Aquinas whose metaphysics taught that natural law enabled Christians to enjoy a sensible engagement with the world, a theology that gave hope to Catholic social activists and ecumenists.

The future pope prefers the mystical clarity of Augustine to Aquinas' complex nuances. Augustine thought in Biblical terms while Aquinas drew inferences from the classical philosophers of Greek antiquity, namely Socrates, Plato, and especially Aristotle. For the future pope, the writings of Augustine *were a spiritual experience that left an essential mark*.

SECOND THOUGHTS

Father Ratzinger had to prepare a *habilitation* or a second dissertation so as to be admitted to the university as a professor. His studies of Revelation revolved around the thinking of St. Bonaventure, a 13th century Franciscan. In his

Theology of Revelation, later published as the *Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, Father Ratzinger theorized that Revelation was not the Bible itself, but the act of God revealing Himself through the Bible. Like Bonaventure he maintained that Revelation was something greater than what is merely written down. His thesis offended one of the members of his habilitation committee and his dissertation was rejected. This could have been a fatal blow to his promising teaching career.

Father Ratzinger adopted a more historical approach and he was finally granted his habilitation in 1957. This theological dispute marked him as a progressive, giving rise to a meteoric advancement through the university ranks. At age 35, Father Ratzinger received an extraordinary offer to serve as *peritus* or theological expert for Cologne's powerful Joseph Cardinal Frings at the Second Vatican Council in 1962. The Cardinal's spirited condemnation of the 16th century Inquisition created a popular reaction, further linking the future pope with the progressive wing of the councilor culture.

Professor Ratzinger had a Pauline epiphany while teaching at the University of Tübingen where he held a chair in dogmatic theology. The student rebellions of the sixties hit West Germany with full force. The university became a hotbed of Marxist conflict. The future Pope started to reassess much of his reformist thinking. He had been nurtured and raised in the cloistered Catholic worlds of his Bavarian upbringing and seminary life. There he had felt secure enough to champion reform. *This opening to the left* led him to conclude that Catholics had already taken reform too far, jeopardizing the rich orthodoxy of its long heritage. He returned to the friendly atmosphere of University at Regensburg in 1969.

SEARCHLIGHT OF ORTHODOXY

His illuminative experience at Tübingen influenced his Prefecture at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), which he assumed in 1981. As the prime defender of orthodoxy, it was his responsibility to shine the *searchlight of orthodoxy* to illuminate error and heresy. He was well aware that ever since Pope Paul II had established the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition in 1542, it had been a center of controversy. Pope Paul VI's change of its name to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith did little to diminish the office's position as a firestorm of theological controversy.

Cardinal Ratzinger was the first head of the Vatican's doctrinal office who had not taken St. Thomas Aquinas as his philosophical mentor. The Cardinal perceived moral relativism and its spiritual stepsister, religious indifferentism, as the central threats to the Faith. He coined the compelling term, the *dictatorship of relativism*. In this pernicious dictatorship, *truth becomes arbitrary and faith in Christ meaningless*. He believed that relativism is even more insidious when it teams up with the philosophical and religious intuitions of Asia, particularly those of the Indian subcontinent. Similarly

pluralism is a religious relativism, which leads to the false belief that all religions are equal. It holds that there is no binding or valid truth in the figure of Jesus Christ. This reduces the Catholic Church to mere fundamentalism.

TRUTH IN ADVERTISING

Several other issues plagued his long tenure at the CDF. In 1984 he observed that Europeans had descended to a Catholicism that was marked by an *uncritical openness to the world*. He saw this as a dangerous way of thinking that emphasized a radical ideology of individualistic rationalism, which was hedonistic in character.

Cardinal Ratzinger was especially concerned about the state of Catholic education on the university campus. He was fearful that many professors had departed from the coherent vision of the old catechism in an attempt to make the Church more acceptable to churches outside the Faith. According to David Scott in the May 8th *Our Sunday Visitor*, Pope Benedict's job in the CDF had been *to ensure truth in advertising*. Many Catholic parents have sent their children to Catholic colleges and universities with the expectation that the tenets of the Faith would be taught, only to find that their children had received nothing more than a hedonistic exercise in moral relativism.

The Cardinal also believed that many of Vatican II's liturgical reforms resulted in the loss of reverence for *the encounter with the mystery that is not our own product but rather our origin and the source of our life*. The liturgy is not to provide entertainment for a bored congregation but to inspire them to greater heights of personal spirituality. Rock music used at Masses to attract teens to the Church is *pure folly* and risks alienating them from the true meaning of the Mass.

Liberation Theology was another dangerous novelty that Cardinal Ratzinger addressed at the CDF. It is a derivative of the *dictatorship of relativism*, clothed in the materialistic robes of Karl Marx. It promoted the idea that Christ's kingdom can be fully realized in this world through social action. In his recent book, *Benedict XVI: The Man Who was Ratzinger*, Michael Rose quotes the Cardinal as having criticized theologians who preached Marxist ideology as guilty of *reducing salvation to liberation of the poor from worldly oppressors rather than liberation from 'radical sin.'* The Cardinal saw it as the personification of the *City of Man*, in mortal conflict with the *City of God*.

A FISHER OF MEN

The secular world wailed loudly when Pope Benedict assumed the papacy in April of 2005. It was hoping and even praying for a pope who would repeal the tenets of Catholic orthodoxy that have sent tremors of guilt flowing through the ranks of liberal Catholics and their humanist allies. Such thinking is nothing new for Benedict. The animus of the left has followed him since he left Tübingen in 1969. His critics have calumniated him with derisive names, such as John Paul's

enforcer, chief inquisitor, and Der Panzerkardinal and God's rottweiler. They have satirized him as the *Grand Inquisitor* or an *Orthodox Ceberus*, the three-headed dog that ironically guarded the entrance to Hades.

The Pope's detractors want the Church to conform to their doctrines of moral relativism and sexual license that have launched the world into the deadly waters of abortion, euthanasia, pornography, and sexual promiscuity, or perish in the process. They seek a total surrender and an annihilation of the dogma of faith so that there is little difference between their beliefs and what the Church will teach. According to George Weigel, the left wants the Church to *follow the path taken by virtually every other non-fundamentalist Western Civilization community over the past century*.

While he blanched at the Church's radical turn in the years following Vatican II, the Pope envisions no radical return to the pre-councilor status quo. To the contrary his idea of reform is wedded to the true spirit of Vatican II. It is what he calls *ressourcement* or a return to the sources of Catholic theology in the Bible. While the Pope was whole-heartedly in favor of *aggiornamento* or modernizing the Church, it had to be accomplished with the living Christ at the center of this reform, that is, an equal union of *ressourcement* with *aggiornamento*.

In his homily at his Mass of Inauguration on April 24, 2005, Benedict characterized his papal mission as a *fisher of men*. He astutely realized that Catholics were living *in the salt waters of suffering and death*. It fell to the *net of the Gospel* to pull them *out of the waters of death and bring us into the splendor of God's light, into true life*. . . These words promise hope for a world that is spiritually bored and on the verge of internal self-mutilation. Catholics must not forget that Joseph Ratzinger was *God's Choice* for this most crucial moment in Church history.

William A. Borst, Feature Editor, is the author of Liberalism: Fatal Consequences and The Scorpion and the Frog: A Natural Conspiracy available from the author at PO Box 16271, St. Louis, MO 63105.

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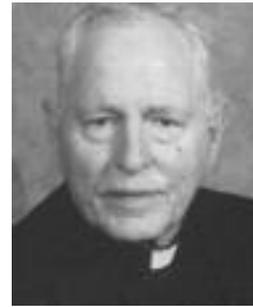
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R.I.P Reverend Gerald J. Brown, C.M.



CMF Council Member, Reverend Gerald J. Brown, C.M. age 78, died Wednesday, November 2, 2005, in Perryville, MO at St. Mary's Vincentian Seminary.

A native of St. Louis, Fr. Brown was ordained to the priesthood by Cardinal Joseph E. Ritter in Perryville, MO in 1957. In preparation for pastoral work, he received a master's degree in Spanish from the University of Mexico in 1962.

His most important activity was his missionary work in the South American country of Chile. He did God's work there from 1964 to 1998. His firsthand knowledge of harsh conditions under the Marxist regime in Chile, followed by a change in government, made him an on-the-spot advisor for CMF in our educational work, combating atheistic Communism with knowledge and facts.

Upon return to the Vincentian's St. Louis office, he was assigned pastor at St. Henry Church in Charleston, MO for five years. Beginning in 2003, Fr. Brown retired to the Vincentian's senior residence in St. Louis which gave him more time to see his family, to assist at Spanish speaking Masses and visit the CMF office.

Fr. Brown fulfilled his priestly duties throughout his full life. He will be dearly missed.

May he rest in peace

Happy New Year

PRAYERFUL THANKS to each CMFer who offered prayers, greetings and gave donations to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation during the recent Christmas season.

We are very grateful! We ask God to send you and yours many graces, good health and happiness in the New Year. CMF will confidently persevere in its apostolate of defending our faith, family life and freedom, following the example of our saintly patron Cardinal Mindszenty.