



This editorial which has just been published in ARCC Light is a devastatingly blunt appraisal of the Pontifical style of Pope Benedict and might be read as indicating that the goodwill that the more Vatican II-inspired elements in the Church had extended to our new Pope have now been completely exhausted. Is the honeymoon over for Pope Benedict?

A very blunt critique of the Pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI...

We are now almost two full years into the papacy of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, a/k/a/ Benedict XVI, and we are seeing his true colors more and more, almost day by day.

I must be honest: when I learned Ratzinger had been elected Pope, after almost 27 years of John Paul II, I felt as if I had been punched in the stomach. Then, since I still believe in God/de and that S/He cares about Jesus' webegotten church, I tried very hard to look at things positively. Surely, Pope Ratzinger's education and erudition would provide some safeguards? Surely, JPII had subjected us to enough whittling down of the legacy of Vatican II? Surely, Benedict's removal of papal protection of the notorious pedophile founder of the Legionnaires of Christ was a sign of greater honesty from the Vatican. Surely, this smiling little man who joked that his would not be a long papacy had mellowed from the Enforcer of the previous reign. Right? Wrong!



Is the honeymoon over for Pope Benedict?

One should always give a new pope the benefit of the doubt, a chance to show his best before criticizing him too strongly, but I don't think we should let such good intentions blind us to the absolutely dizzying power that canon law and Catholic passivity have given to the pope. Having absolute power to set everything "right" is a dream as old as humankind. It is an especially tempting dream to a devout, rigid, authoritarian, book-loving but temperamentally timid cleric who fears the world around him has gone mad. Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI is such a man.

This reading of BXVI, past and present, is not necessarily as far-fetched as it seems. Ratzinger was born in a lower-middle class, religious family (the 2 sons became priests and their sister became their housekeeper) in a small village in Bavaria. He entered the seminary at 12, but his seminary was closed when the war required resources and draftees. He was a very reluctant Hitler Youth for two years and when he was drafted into the army, he claimed he never loaded his gun and soon deserted his unit for home. Ratzinger went back to his seminary in the Fall of 1945 and was ordained in 1951. Ratzinger's world was home, religion and study. When the Nazis upset that world, he tried hard to avoid them, and then he ran for home, for his familiar world. This is a pattern I see

repeated all through his life.

John Allen, Ratzinger's biographer, describes these years charitably but then adds a telling summary of his view of the National Socialism episode: "...Ratzinger understands the twelve years of the Third Reich as a trial by fire for the Catholic church, in which the church was triumphantly vindicated." This is consistent with Allen's analysis of the mature Cardinal: "Having seen fascism in action, Ratzinger today believes that the best antidote to political totalitarianism is ecclesial totalitarianism." Rather frightening but probably fairly accurate on the whole.

It's well-known that Ratzinger was Cardinal Joseph Frings' *peritus* at Vatican II, and some Catholics think this means he was a liberal young reformer. Vatican II was doubtless an exciting forum for an ambitious 35 year old theologian, but it is crucial for an understanding of Ratzinger to keep in mind that his Vatican II was the early council, with its emphasis on *ressourcement*, a return to the sources of Catholicism. The mature Council's liberalism, culminating in *Gaudium et Spes*, frightened him and he fought it in word and print.

However, Ratzinger also happily furthered his academic career, progressing from Bonn to Munster to Tubingen during and immediately after the Council, bringing personal good out of seeming professional backpedalling. Ironically, the last move, to Tubingen, was largely due to the good offices of Hans Kung. But these were the turbulent '60's. Kung was not afraid of lively give and take with his students and colleagues, but Ratzinger was. The student unrest and increasing radicalization of his fellow faculty in 1968 disturbed him to the point that, in 1969 he left Tubingen, the most prestigious and erudite university in Germany, and went to Regensburg, a new university he had just helped establish to create a new generation of docile, orthodox theologians. Once again, when his beliefs and now his authority were challenged, rather than dialoguing, he ran to what was secure and controllable.

The Vatican, and especially Pope John Paul II, continued to favor Ratzinger and he gave them loyal service, including rallying the German bishops around JP II's decision to strip Hans Kung, his former friend and benefactor, of the right to teach as a recognized Catholic theologian. Ratzinger also began the attack on liberation theology and its theologians which he continued through the 1980's. Thus, when John Paul named Cardinal Ratzinger head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981, Ratzinger was a known entity — a rock-solid, ultra-Catholic, brilliant, hard-working, and single-minded, perhaps even ruthless, defender of his vision of the Church — which coincided with John Paul's vision quite well.

I'm sure I'm not the only Catholic observer who has wondered increasingly over these past few years if Ratzinger was not, in fact, the "brains" behind the Wojtyla papacy. Karol Wojtyla was certainly very intellectually gifted but the extent of his intellectual achievements has just as certainly been inflated by his admirers, the authors of the legend of "John Paul the Great". This supposed genius failed to receive a doctorate in Rome and had to return to his Poland to secure it. He was allowed to travel freely outside Poland cultivating contacts during a period when no one who did not supply information to the Communist Secret Police ever received permission to travel, and he is said to have — humbly — brought a recent EKG to the second 1978 conclave to demonstrate that he wouldn't die within a month like Luciani! One cannot deny that Wojtyla and Ratzinger made an excellent "Mutt and Jeff" team, allowing John Paul II to lyrically proclaim at the Wailing Wall: "We are deeply saddened by the behaviour of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer and, asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the covenant." while Ratzinger railed "The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify

religious pluralism," (Dominus Iesus). Although Wojtyla and Ratzinger were similar in many ways – arrogant, narrow Catholics, authoritarian, intolerant, convinced of their absolute rightness, xenophobic – there were differences between them. Wojtyla was slightly less pedestrian than Ratzinger, had a bit more of the Romantic and the dreamer, a bit more vision and empathy for the suffering, especially as he weakened and suffered toward the end of his life. He lived a bit more by emotion, and so, whether he realized it or not, having an absolutely implacable "Enforcer" allowed Wojtyla to give rein to his more "liberal" side, especially toward the Jews and the "Separated Brethren," without worrying that the Church would be weakened while he focused on that. And so during the JPII Papacy, we have him announcing that the subject of women priests is closed — it may not even be discussed, and Ratzinger chiming in with "And that's infallible". Wojtyla the Bishop may have signed *Gaudium et Spes* at the Council but Ratzinger the Enforcer distorts that same document to justify *Dominus Iesus*. And on and on.

The "great hope of the anti-Vatican II factions"...

This raises a small but fascinating question: was Ratzinger John Paul's designated successor? Some months before the Conclave, at least one elector voiced to John Allen the thought that Ratzinger was probably best suited to the job, and Allen is convinced many others had the same opinion. The massive demonstrations of grief at the death of John Paul II, and the very carefully staged "santo subito" manifestations doubtless had an effect on the Electors, convincing them that they had better find someone associated with John Paul who would continue his policies. After almost twenty-five years of faithful collaboration, Ratzinger certainly fit that bill. He was intelligent, experienced, he had been present at the great events of his time, he was the great hope of the anti-Vatican II factions everywhere, and was expected to continue the reversal of the reforms of that Council. As pointed out in Ingrid Shafer's brilliant essay, *The Genie is Out of the Bottle*, in the July 2007 issue of *ARCC Light* (see arcc-catholic-rights.net/arcc_light_29_3.pdf), as soon as it became likely that Ratzinger would be the next pope, restorationist groups began to prepare for the liturgical and other changes they knew he would make. It is not unlikely that this process began even before the death of the Pope.

One finds startling substantiation for this view in a fascinating letter from Cardinal Ratzinger to Dr. Heinz-Lothar Barth, dated June 23, 2003, which was recently posted on the site of Prof. Joseph O'Leary of Sophia University, Tokyo. It reads in relevant part:

To Dr. HeinzLothar Barth, 23 June 2003

Dear Dr. Barth,

...You are asking me to act for a broader availability of the old Roman rite. Actually, you know yourself that I have no deaf ears towards such a request. My work on behalf of this cause is meanwhile generally known.

Whether the Holy See will "admit the old rite again for every place and without restrictions" as you desire and have heard it rumored cannot be simply answered or confirmed without further ado. Still too great is the aversion of many Catholics, instilled in them over many

years, against the traditional liturgy which they scornfully call "preconciliar". Also one would have to reckon with considerable

resistance on the part of many bishops against a general readmission.

Things look different, however, if one thinks about a limited readmission. The demand for the old liturgy is limited, too. I know that its worth, of course, does not depend upon the demand for it, but the question of the number of interested priests and laypeople, nevertheless, plays a certain role. Besides, such a measure can now, only some 30 years after the liturgy reform of Paul VI, be implemented only stepwise. Any new hurry would surely not be a good thing.

I believe, though, that in the long term the Roman Church must have again a single Roman rite. The existence of two official rites is for bishops and priests difficult to "manage" in practice. The Roman rite of the future should be a single rite, celebrated in Latin or in the vernacular, but standing completely in the tradition of the rite that has been handed down. It could take up some new elements which have proven themselves, like new feasts, some new prefaces in the Mass, an expanded lectionary more choice than earlier, but not too much, an "oratio fidelium", i.e., a fixed litany of intercessions following the Oremus before the offertory where it had its place earlier.

Dear Dr. Barth, if you commit yourself to work for the cause of the liturgy in this way, you will surely not stand alone, and you will prepare "public opinion in the Church" for eventual measures in favor of an expanded use of the earlier liturgical books. One should be cautious, however, about awakening too high or maximum expectations among the traditional faithful. ...

sincerely yours

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

http://josephsoleary.typepad.com/my_weblog

One could not ask for a better explanation of the liturgical edicts of the past year. They are not meant to lure **the Society of St Pius X** back into the Church, although certainly Benedict would like to reunite these traditionalists so close to his heart to the Church. **They are meant to bring Catholic liturgy back to Benedict's comfort level.** Pope Ratzinger is running absolutely true to form: he dislikes modern music and loves old sacred music: now, therefore, the Church "discourages" the use of modern music and establishes a special Curial department to make sure it is not used. Pope Ratzinger loves the **Tridentine Mass**: now, therefore, a pastor may not refuse the Tridentine Mass to a "stable" (but no mention of how large or small) group that requests it. No bishop's permission is needed and those refused will be heard in Rome. The next step, presumably, will be the "Roman rite of the future" mentioned in Cardinal Ratzinger's letter, which sounds very much like the Tridentine Mass with a slightly larger lectionary and a few new prefaces. Even if Ratzinger's jocular line on being elected – "this won't be a long pontificate" – proves true, he is trying to assure the continuation of his version of Catholicism in the next reign or two by regularly appointing Cardinals to keep the Electoral College at its maximum number of 120. He has already named a quarter of the College in just two years!

These liturgical reversions are perfectly in keeping with Benedict's theology. So was one of his Curial cardinals suggesting recently that tabernacles be moved back to the center of churches. So was his saying some of the proper prayers at Christmas Mass in Rome in Latin rather than understandable Italian. So was his recently saying Mass for the Vatican's staff in the Sistine Chapel with his back to the congregation. Pope Ratzinger certainly sees the priesthood as cultic, separate from the "faithful", uniquely enabled to offer worship to God, but it is deeper than that: as early as 1968, in an article on the Early Fathers of the Church, he described the core of Catholicism as "episcopal, sacramental, and liturgical." (Allen, 98) His view had not changed in 1979, when he defended the silencing of Kung in a homily saying "The Christian believer is a simple person: bishops should protect the faith of these little people against the power of intellectuals." (Allen, 130) Ratzinger has always seen cultural relativism as the greatest danger to the faith. Something is either true or not: relativism puts that into doubt and is especially dangerous when combined with appealing Eastern philosophies. As Allen puts it very astutely: "Rooted in an Augustinian/Bonaventurian outlook, Ratzinger has always stressed the critical distance that must separate the church from the culture." (Allen, 90) So, Pope Ratzinger is not "The Servant of the Servants of God" to use one of the oldest titles of the Pope: he is the Fuhrer, because ecclesial totalitarianism is safe.

It is safe and it is what Ratzinger feels comfortable with – and that's what this papacy is all about. Ratzinger is determined to use all the power of the papacy to set the Catholic world aright, to re-evangelize it, meaning correct it from Vatican II and modernism. The Church will return to the simple, obedient, trusting body it always was. People, especially intellectuals, will conform or leave. It will be a smaller, purer Church, more true to the strict message of God's love — or else.

Unfortunately, Ratzinger's theology was already passe in the 1930's when he first learned it. The age of the infantilized Catholic laity is past; the day of the deified clergy is past, except in the factories cranking out Legionnaires and OD'ers; the day of loving Fascisti popes is over — their death-knell was the eighteenth-century *Enlightenment*.

In a way, the most symbolic expression of this papacy's mind-set is the recent comment by a Curial minion that respect for the sacred started to diminish when Communion began to be given in the hand and so a solution would be to once again give it on the tongue. Only a priest is holy enough to touch the sacred species. What about the priesthood of all believers taught by Vatican II? The truth is Ratzinger & Co. never accepted it and now he is using the biggest religious bully-pulpit in the world, the Papacy, to remove the traces of Vatican II, bit by bit by bit. One of the Medici popes is reputed to have said "Since it has pleased God to make us pope, let us enjoy it." Pope Ratzinger's variation on that might be "Since it has pleased God to make us pope, let us use it" - to undo all the liberal mistakes of the last forty years and restore the Church to its pristine purity. Those who don't like it can leave.

In Pope Benedict's imagined scenario, the bishops, priests, and laity meekly accept the will of his magisterium. That was barely true even in the late 1930's of his childhood in Bavaria. Now, it's well on its way to being only a memory. Sorry, Pope Ratzinger: your small, if vocal, groups of supporters notwithstanding, you are two centuries too late!

Christine M. Roussel



"In Pope Benedict's imagined scenario, the bishops, priests, and laity meekly accept the will of his magisterium. That was barely true even in the late 1930's of his childhood in Bavaria. Now, it's well on its way to being only a memory. Sorry, Pope Ratzinger: your small, if vocal, groups of supporters notwithstanding, you are two centuries too late!" ...[Dr Christine Rousset](#)