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DIOCESAN CIRCULAR – November 2011



Speaking Neatly
ROGER SCRUTON

American speech, like English speech, used to sparkle.

The focus of our educational systems on popular culture, political correctness, and the cult of self-esteem has had two consequences for everyday speech. First, young people prefer to remain silent rather than risk an opinion. Secondly, when they do talk, it is in an outpouring, in the belief that one person's language is as good as any other's. Bon mots, aphorisms, insightful quotations, nuggets of wisdom, or even ordinary apt remarks form only a tiny part of their conversation.

American speech, like English speech, used to sparkle. The dialogues invented by Henry James are scintillating, alert to implications, never redundant or blunt. Their stylized air is exaggerated, if at all, only in the cause of art. The dialogues of the old Hollywood movies, like the lyrics of the Broadway musicals, are masterpieces of apt condensation, in which every word and every feeling counts. The aphorisms of Groucho Marx, the repartee of Tony Curtis, the lyrics of Cole Porter and Oscar Hammerstein, have an immediacy that has impressed them on the hearts and minds of educated Americans to this day. A foreigner, coming for the first time to the great American novelists and playwrights, the great Hollywood movies, or the *Great American Songbook*, would quickly come to believe that American culture is a culture of the aphorism, and that the principal delight of Americans in every walk of life is to condense thought and emotion into a nugget of wisdom or a stinging phrase.

But what exactly is an aphorism, and what distinguishes the good from the bad example? Aphorisms are like stock cubes. They are dry, salty, compact; and they are intended, when dissolved in thought, to be nourishing. But not all aphorisms are of equal value. There are true aphorisms and false ones, witty aphorisms and dull ones. True wit, Pope said, "is Nature to advantage dressed, /What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." That characterizes one kind of aphorism – the true and commonsensical kind, of which Pope himself was a master, as in "fools rush in, where angels fear to tread." There are also aphorisms that capture a truth that never was thought until so well expressed. Such is La Rochefoucauld's maxim that "hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue." Is he praising hypocrisy or condemning it? Asking that question reveals the depth and originality of La Rochefoucauld's insight.

Some of the greatest aphorisms are American – notably those of Ambrose Bierce in *The Devil's Dictionary*, to whom we owe a definition of the brain ("an apparatus with which we think we think") that ought to be inscribed



above the entrance to every department of neuroscience. There is no more useful definition of Puritanism than that given by H. L. Mencken: "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, might be happy," and never has the paradox of social mobility been better captured than by Groucho Marx's famous aphorism: "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member" – surely the equal of La Rochefoucauld's insight into the real meaning of hypocrisy.

But there are false, unfunny, and eccentric aphorisms too, and they are just as likely to have a far-reaching influence as the true and the witty. Oscar Wilde shaped his many *bons mots* in ways that sweetened the pill of unwelcome truth: for instance "in matters of the greatest importance it is style and not sincerity that counts," and "it is only a very shallow person who does not judge by appearances": aphorisms that have some of the depth and density of La Rochefoucauld's. But Wilde's much quoted dismissal of foxhunting, as "the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable," is an instance of a false aphorism. False at both ends, and monstrously unfunny to those who have knowledge of the matter.

False aphorisms are not as rare as one might think. More significant than Wilde's, on account of its influence, is Marx's dismissal of religion as "the opium of the people." For this implies that religion is adopted purely for its ability to soothe the wounds of society, and that there is some other condition to which humanity might advance in which religion would no longer be needed. Both those implications are false, but they are boiled into a stock cube as tasty as any that has been seen on the intellectual menu. How many would-be intellectuals have dissolved this cube into their prose and given their thought, in the manner of Christopher Hitchens, a specious air of wisdom?

Marx's writings contain an elaborate attempt at a system: but the system was refuted and Marx survived. We know Marx instead as the author of famous phrases: alienated labor, surplus value, the fetishism of commodities, wage slavery, the crisis of capitalism, and a thousand more. He told the workers of the world to unite, since they had nothing to lose but their chains – and the chains of aphorisms that subsequently bound them proved to be stronger than any chains of steel. In one of the aphorisms contained in *The German Ideology*, the workers were promised hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, and literary criticism after dinner – and, apart from the absence of game, fish, and literature, not to speak of dinner, that was what they got.

If you lived through the '60s, as I did, you would have no doubt, today, of the power of aphorisms. And I blame our educational system for the fact that, in their hunger for witty phrases, and finding nothing of use in the pronouncements of the politicians of the day, the young people of the '60s took their aphorisms from the store of falsehoods accumulated by the Marxists. Overnight the facetious leftisms rose up and seized control of the intellectual economy. The French situationists made some nice additions – "It is forbidden to forbid," for example – and a few crept in from the *Little Red Book* of Chairman Mao, such as "no army can resist an idea whose time has come" (which lacks the wit of Voltaire's sarcastic aphorism about the big battalions). However, it was the aphorisms of Marx that set the intellectual agenda. "Hitherto philosophers have interpreted the world; but the point is to change it." "Consciousness does not determine life but life determines consciousness." "The history of all previously existing societies is the history of class struggles." And so on.

Take a look at *The Communist Manifesto* and you will encounter one of the most influential sequences of aphorisms in history. And most of them are false. Why, then, were they so successful? I think the reason is this. It is in the nature of an aphorism to aim at success – to present a complex nugget of intellectual flavor that makes the brain water in the way that the mouth waters when touched by monosodium glutamate. And success comes more easily for the one who promises power than for the one who offers only truth. Wilde's aphorism about hunting made its mark because it was a weapon in a battle – indeed in one of the few "class struggles" that the English have known in recent times. And the same is true of *The Communist Manifesto*. People have only a circumscribed interest in truth. But their interest in power is insatiable. Falsehoods that give confidence or amplify power will, in the moment of contest, eclipse those paltry truths that warn us to hold on a moment and be careful. The point was made by another great aphorist among 19th-century philosophers, Nietzsche. And Nietzsche's popularity today is owing to the same feature that explains Marx's popularity in the '60s: the promise of power.

Marx and Nietzsche don't do much, to my way of thinking, by way of justifying the philosophical aphorism. The element of surprise is achieved too easily, and by recruiting our knee-jerk resentments. There is a refusal to face the difficult questions concerning our relations with others and our knowledge of the world. Their power-

directed aphorisms are more like spells than statements. They are designed, as Marx rightly said, not to interpret the world but to change it – and to change it purely by being repeated again and again. Which is, in Marx's case, exactly what happened. And the world was changed for the worse, as everybody knows who saw those aphorisms used and abused across the Soviet Empire: hitched on the roofs of city buildings, spread in red letters over shop fronts, inscribed on plates of alloy and hung in heavy frames on the walls of lecture halls. Orwell, who saw this with penetrating insight, wrote two great works that are not so much novels as tracts against the aphorism. "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others" (*Animal Farm*); "who controls the present controls the past, and who controls the past controls the future" (1984) – aphorisms that go one stage further than the Communist slogans they satirize.

Orwell was documenting the decline of the aphorism, its abuse as an instrument of oppression and an assault on the sovereignty of truth. But the thing that was abused by Marx and the Marxists is also a necessary part of speaking properly and to good effect. How are we to recapture the forgotten ways of wit, and the use of aphorisms in the cause of truth? It seems to me that this is something that we ought to be teaching in our universities. A degree in the humanities should have something of the ancient study of rhetoric. It should be equipping students to persuade, to use language gracefully and succinctly, and to speak and write with style. Persuasion comes not through statistics and theories, but through the artful aphorism that summarizes, in the heart of the listeners, the things that they suspect but don't yet know. The educational challenge then becomes that of teaching students not only to think and speak in witty phrases, but at the same time to be guided by the truth. Can it be done? To that question I answer: we can but try.

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Evangelizing the Self-Satisfied Secularist

By David G. Bonagura, Jr.

A high school student told me recently that he does not attend Mass on Sunday. I tried to engage him by asking, first, why he attends school each day. "Because if I don't come to school," he answered, "I will get in trouble. If I miss Mass, nothing happens. I have everything I want right now, so why should I bother going to church?"

His view is probably the same as the growing number of Americans who identify themselves as atheist, agnostic, or not religious. They are satisfied with the immanent in the imminent moment. They see no need for God or any transcendent meaning for their existence. They therefore live secular lives, concerned only with this world. This attitude has contributed to forming a culture that is fundamentally agnostic in its consciousness.

Like this student, God and religion simply do not appear on the cultural radar for society at large. For such people, there are far more pressing, immediate things to worry about.

How can the new evangelization open up the happy, self-satisfied secularist to God? In the nineteenth century, rational arguments were often advanced to convince doubters of the need for faith. But with morality and religion now confined as prisoners of the dictatorship of relativism, today such arguments are dismissed at best, simply ignored at worst.

In the twentieth century, thinkers such as Maurice Blondel and the Transcendental Thomists made an existential appeal to the depths of human being, inviting us to see God as the answer to the ultimate longings of the human heart. This has been the preferred approach of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI who have repeatedly challenged us to listen for the voice of God within our souls.

This existential appeal has become more difficult today, however, because of our agnostic culture's discouragement of meaningful reflection. Reality no longer seems to exceed the stomach, the checkbook, or the smart phone, and the constant presence of electronic distractions makes self-introspection as difficult as a journey to the center of the earth. What is tangible and natural is what matters; what is invisible and supernatural is irrelevant.



St. Augustine:

“our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.”

Liturgical experiments intended to make the Mass more relevant to young people are a particularly unfortunate example of this wrongheaded approach. Faith morphs into what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called “religious entertainment” whose “attraction fades quickly.” It cannot compete in the marketplace of leisure pursuits, a marketplace that increasingly incorporates various forms of “religious titillation.” Faith reduced to worldly concerns and rhythms is no faith at all.

In an address on evangelization to the Roman Ecclesial Conference, Benedict XVI proposed steps for the new evangelization: faith lived by believers sincerely from the heart; the proclamation of God present and near us in the incarnation of Jesus Christ; parents who raise their children in the faith; community support from the Church; creative catechesis that extends sacramental life beyond the walls of the church building; setting aside time for silence and interiority; employing beauty in the form of art and architecture to inspire faith.

At the minimum these initiatives show the self-satisfied secularist that believers too are satisfied – indeed, satisfied is far too weak a term – but with a joy that lies outside of their control and beyond the secularist’s imagining.

It is not a very effective strategy for believers to tell the self-satisfied secularist that he is really unsatisfied, just not aware of it. It is far better to appeal to the unstable nature of human satisfaction, and the consequent human tendency to always yearn for more, even when we feel satisfied. Existential theism of that kind reaches back to St. Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.

Believers know well the injunction that it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world but lose his soul. This means little to the self-satisfied secularist who acknowledges only the world. But if he can come to see that even the roots of his self-satisfaction lie beyond the visible realm – the satisfactions of love, friendships, esteem of others, security, and even the contentment he feels as he relaxes on the sofa – then he may be able to glimpse the invisible source of these invisible realities.

Introspection is a necessary element of the new evangelization, even if it is a rare commodity these days. Somehow, someday, the secularist's sights must be set beyond himself to see that there is more to his satisfaction than meets the eye. There is no magic move on our part to lead to that. We do well to start with the initiatives Benedict proposed, but we must also have confidence that, since the desire for God is written in the heart of every human being, at some point the self-satisfied secularist can realize that there is a greater satisfaction transcending this world – and He invites everyone into His company.

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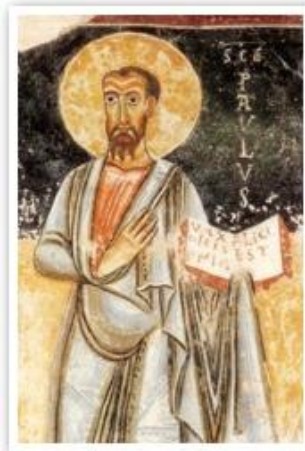
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On editing, and editing the Bible
FATHER GEORGE W. RUTLER

Few tensions are as taut and bitter as that between a writer and his editor.

Authors find it difficult to be objective about their writing and tend to react to edits like a parent whose baby is not adored by a third party. Few tensions are as taut and bitter as that between a writer and his editor. Mark Twain said "I am not the editor of a newspaper and shall always try to do right and be good so that God will not make me one." There are calmer writers who would quietly agree with Adlai Stevenson's definition of an editor: "One who separates the wheat from the chaff and keeps the chaff." For all his monumental flaws, Pontius Pilate did one good thing when he refused to let the mob edit the sign he had posted over Christ on the Cross. "Quod scripsi, scripsi." "What I have written, I have written." What he wrote was: "Jesus of Nazareth – King of the Jews."



In 1818, an English physician named Thomas Bowdler unwisely decided to operate on Shakespeare by removing the unseemly parts of the plays to produce "The Family Shakespeare" suitable, as they say in Hollywood, for "General Audiences." Ophelia accidentally drowns instead of committing suicide, and Lady Macbeth does not use cuss words. The eponym "bowdlerize" is not generally received today as a compliment.

If editors are not sent from God, they sometimes do a godly work, like sports coaches and dieticians, even if their advice is as unwelcome as it is prudent. But that prudence has its limits when it involves cherry-picking the Author of all things. Thomas Jefferson did a fine job with the Declaration of Independence, whose draft copy was only lightly edited (he should have heeded Adams' advice not to call the King a tyrant), but he was out of his realm when he bowdlerized the New Testament, leaving out the bits he thought unacceptable to eighteenth-century men who had learned about gravity and oxygen. In this he was like twenty-first-century legislators who would delete the adverb "not" as an inconvenient interpolation in some of the Ten Commandments.

I have noticed that when the present Lectionary occasionally proposes a "Shorter Form" for one of the Gospel readings, the lines edited are something Our Lord said that comfortable people would rather He had not said. The "Shorter From" of the Parable of the Wedding Garment remarkably leaves out the wedding garment. It is like dropping the last chapter of an Agatha Christie novel. I cannot imagine how any congregation would be so rushed that it could not find time for the thirty seconds it takes to read that warning about coming to the nuptial feast of the Eucharist unclothed in baptismal virtue, without sins confessed. If that is not suitable for the general audience, there is something wrong with the general audience.

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Father George William Rutler. "On editing, and editing the Bible." *From the Pastor* (October 16, 2011). Reprinted with permission of Father George W. Rutler.

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Since 1988 his weekly television program has been broadcast worldwide on EWTN. Father Rutler has published 17 books, including: *Cloud of Witnesses - Dead People I Knew When They Were Alive*, *Coincidentally: Unserious Reflections on Trivial Connections*, *A Crisis of Saints: Essays on People and Principles*, *Brightest and Best*, *Saint John Vianney: The Cure D'Ars Today*, *Crisis in Culture*, and *Adam Danced: The Cross and the Seven Deadly Sins*.

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DIOCESAN NOTES AND NEWS

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- The Ordo 2012, including the Oremus (weekly prayer intentions), is almost ready for distribution. The cost is \$10.00 per copy, plus postage. To order copies, please contact Sister Lea Davis, e-mail leadavis@telusplanet.net, or by mail at 2326 - 22 Ave SW, Calgary, AB, T2T 0S8. Your invoice for the final cost including postage will be sent by e-mail if possible, otherwise it will be enclosed in your package.



FROM MAGGIE'S KITCHEN



The Spanish and French, in the past at least, have had a habit of attaching “Maria” or “Marie” to their sons’ given names: “José Maria”, “Jean-Marie”. Nowadays, even girls are unlikely to be named for the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. So it was a delight to have a “Mary” appear in grade one of the little school where I more or less teach music. Especially this Mary, a lively, smiling, interested-in-everything child with many brothers and sisters. Since there are at least two in her family younger than she, one might expect her to have been overlooked. Indeed, she arrived in September without many of the skills she might have acquired had she gone to kindergarten, but she is now quickly outstripping her classmates, and was

obviously in no way neglected physically, emotionally or spiritually, whatever her lack of academic preparation. I think of her as our “Little Mary Sunshine”.

November 1 is, of course, All Saints’ Day, the Feast of All Hallows. I had no idea until I opened *Butler’s Lives* that there were any other commemorations on that day. I knew that All Saints’ Day began its existence as the Feast of All Martyrs, honouring all martyrs, whether known or known only to God. As All Saints’ Day, it is even more inclusive. The Church, like little Mary’s mother, is eager not to let any of her children be neglected or forgotten, whatever deficiencies there may be in hard biographical data.

Among such potentially-overlooked November 1 Saints are several martyrs, logically enough. And among them is a Mary: St Mary, Virgin & Martyr of (possibly) the fourth century. Although (as is so often the case) virtually nothing is known for certain about her, a footnote in *Butler’s Lives* notes that two eminent scholars were “inclined to believe that some traces of an authentic story are preserved in the *passio* of this martyr.”

Stripped of obviously over-the-top content, we are left with a Mary who was a cradle Christian, slave to a Roman official. Her constant prayers and frequent fasts annoyed her mistress. On the other hand, she was valued as a devoted and hard-working servant. To protect her from persecution her master tried to shake her faith, but got nowhere. He even whipped her severely, and when that failed he hid her in a dark room. Ultimately, she was found anyway and her master, charged with concealing a Christian, handed her over to the authorities. In court, she acknowledged Christ, so enraging those gathered there that they demanded that she be burnt alive. To the judge, Mary said, "The God whom I serve is with me. I fear not your torments, which can only take away a life that I am ready to lay down for Jesus Christ." She was forthwith subjected to torture so cruel that the spectators changed their tune, begging instead that she be released. The judge would have none of it, but the soldier to whom he delivered her took pity on her and allowed her to escape.

The really believable part of the story is that she eventually died a natural death. I can't think of any other examples of *passios*, made-up or otherwise, that end that way. She is honoured as a *martyr* not because she actually died for Christ, but because she witnessed to Him in her sufferings for Him.

I expect that our little Mary will also witness to our Lord in her life -- though I pray that she be spared the other Mary's sufferings.

For All Saints' Day, allow me to repeat from an earlier November a traditional Catalan recipe:

PANELLETS

Peel and quarter a medium potato; boil until cooked. Drain, then mash with a fork and set aside. Grate the zest of one lemon. Set aside. Place 2-1/2 cups sugar in a saucepan with 1-1/2 cups water; stir to dissolve, then bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring often. Add 3 or 4 drops lemon juice, reduce the heat, and simmer till it becomes a thick syrup. Remove from heat. Gradually stir in 1 lb ground almonds, the mashed potato, and the lemon zest. Cool to room temperature, then refrigerate overnight.

The next day, pre-heat oven to just over 375 degrees. Grease cookie sheets (better yet, use parchment paper). Roll dough into small balls (about 32), brush with beaten egg white, and roll each ball in pine nuts. (Be sure the pine nuts are fresh-smelling and not rancid with age!) Bake cookies just long enough to brown the pine nuts, about 4 minutes. Remove from pan immediately, before the cookies cool. Cool on wire racks.

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Pope Benedict Speaks Truth to Power

George Weigel

<http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/278487/pope-benedict-speaks-truth-power-george-weigel>

The German pope tells his countrymen some home truths.

Americans exhausted by adolescent chants of "Pass this bill!" and the rest of the rhetorical detritus of the 2012 pre-campaign might go to the Vatican web site, click on Pope Benedict XVI, and spend a half-hour reading through the texts of the Holy Father's recent visit to his German homeland. It's amazing how refreshing it can be to listen to an intelligent and compassionate adult after weeks slogging through the slough of sound-bites crafted from focus-group hissy fits.

For, despite the fact that a lot of the mainstream media long ago decided that Benedict XVI was a non-story (save for when he was being accused, ludicrously, of responsibility for the sexual abuse of the young), the 84-year-old pope has, in six years, established himself as perhaps the world's premier adult, at least among major international figures. He tells the truth to the roiled worlds of Islam about the imperative of finding Islamic warrants for religious freedom and the separation of religious and political power in a just state. He tells the truth to the United Nations about the irreducible moral core of world politics and economics. He tells the truth to Great Britain about the necessity of nurturing the human ecology that makes democracy possible (and does so in the place where Thomas More was condemned).

And he does all of this without hectoring and without scolding. Rather, this elderly Bavarian, who is indisputably one of the most learned men on the planet, draws upon a deep and broad knowledge of the taproots of Western civilization, which he deploys rhetorically through the skills of a master-teacher in order to invite others into a deeper apprehension of the truth.

It's not snap, crackle, and pop; it's something far more nourishing. And it draws. Benedict XVI drew somewhere between (1 and) 1.5 million young people to Madrid in August for World Youth Day, a massive event that got precious little media attention, especially when compared to the slavish coverage of a few thousand young hellions trashing the streets of Britain earlier in the month. And he drew large and receptive crowds in his native Germany this past week, despite the carping of such disgruntled former colleagues as Prof. Hans Küng, who told *Der Spiegel* that Benedict was responsible for the "Putinization of the Catholic Church", which was rather thick, coming as it did from the Aaron Burr of the Catholic revolution that never was.

But I digress.

In the Bundestag

In his September 22 address to the Bundestag, Benedict spoke some home truths to his countrymen who, like many of their European Union compatriots, have forgotten a great deal about the cultural foundations of the West - foundations that are essential in supporting the political edifice of human rights and the rule of law. Contemporary Europe imagines that it can sustain its democratic politics with resources drawn from the continental Enlightenment and its intellectual heirs; Benedict XVI takes a longer and deeper view. And in a setting that inevitably conjures up memories of the vile anti-Semitism that led to the Shoah of European Jewry, Joseph Ratzinger boldly reached back into the Hebrew Bible to teach a lesson to politicians about their vocation:

In the First Books of Kings, it is recounted that God invited the young King Solomon, on his accession to the throne, to make a request. What will the young ruler ask for at this important moment? Success - wealth - long life - destruction of his enemies? He chooses none of these things. Instead he asks for a listening heart so that he may . . . discern between good and evil (cf. 1 Kings 3.9). Through this story, the Bible wants to tell us what should ultimately matter for a politician. His fundamental criterion and the motivation for his work . . . must not be success, and certainly not material gain. Politics must be a striving for justice. . . . Naturally a politician will seek success, without which he would have no opportunity for effective political action at all. Yet success [must be] subordinated to the criterion of justice, to the will to do what is right, and to the understanding of what is right . . . "Without justice, what else is the State but a great band of robbers?" as Saint Augustine once said . . .

And from that patristic vantage point in 5th-century North Africa, Benedict did not hesitate to connect the dots to the bloody 20th-century drama in which he and so many of his audience were caught up: "We Germans know from our own experience that these words are no empty specter. We have seen how power became divorced from right, how power opposed right and crushed it, so that the State became an instrument for destroying right - a highly organized band of robbers, capable of threatening the whole world and driving it to the edge of the abyss."

As for those who would respond, "well, that was then and this is now," Benedict made another crucial point - that behind the black-letter law of the statute books there had better be an understanding of the moral law that is built into the world and into human beings: the moral law that can be known by reason and that judges the justice of all statutory law. Fitting legislation to that moral law is no easy business, the pope readily conceded. But there are resources at hand for undertaking that hard and essential work of justice, and they reside, not in religious obiter dicta, but in the exercise of the arts of reason. Indeed, the pope reminded those determined to drive Christianity out of the European public square for being divisive and "sectarian" that the uniqueness of Christianity among the great world religions is precisely that it does not propose "a revealed law to the State and society . . . a juridical order derived from revelation." Rather, Christian theologians "pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law." And when these early Christian thinkers adopted the natural law teaching of the Stoics from the leading exponents of Roman law, "the juridical culture of the West was born, which was and is of key significance for the juridical culture of mankind." Here, and nowhere else, are the deepest taproots of the Western political tradition.

Why don't we get this today, the pope then asked? He might have said, rightly, that we don't get this because Christophobia is a major defect of 21st-century European high culture - an irrational refusal to concede to Christianity any nurturing role in building a Europe of civility, tolerance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Rather, Professor Ratzinger took a more academic tack and noted that the 21st-century West is still paralyzed by what we assume to be "the unbridgeable gulf . . . between 'is' and 'ought'" as defined by Immanuel Kant and, above all, David Hume. This bifurcation leads to a thoroughly positivistic ['positivism' recognizes

only positive facts and observable phenomena, rejecting both metaphysics and theism] notion of reason and to a thoroughly positivistic notion of law: The only reason that counts is scientific reason, and the only law that matters is black-letter law. But this amounts to an enormous impoverishment of human understanding, and a very brittle, indeed dangerous, notion of law, Benedict suggested. Against this self-demeaning positivism, "the windows must be flung open again," so that "reason . . . can rediscover its true greatness" and human beings can learn once again that "man is not self-creating freedom."

Benedict reminded the Bundestag that the great modern European exponent of legal positivism, Hans Kelsen, "at the age of 84 - in 1965 - abandoned the dualism of 'is' and 'ought'" - and immediately softened what might have seemed a "gotcha" moment by stating, almost whimsically, that "I find it comforting that rational thought is evidently still possible at age 84!" But then he concluded with another history lesson for a continent that has largely abandoned its history:

The conviction that there is a Creator God is what gave rise to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person, and the awareness of people's responsibility for their actions. Our cultural memory is shaped by these rational insights. To ignore it or dismiss it as a thing of the past would be to dismember our culture totally and rob it of its completeness. The culture of Europe arose from the encounter between Jerusalem, Athens and Rome - from the encounter between Israel's monotheism, the philosophical reason of the Greeks, and Roman law. This three-way encounter has shaped the inner identity of Europe. In the awareness of man's responsibility before God and in the acknowledgment of the inviolable dignity of every single human person, it has established criteria of law: It is these criteria that we are called upon to defend at this moment in our history.

A Call to Conversion

Europe is dying, and Benedict knows it. It is dying demographically, which is one root of its current fiscal and political mess. But self-destructive birthrates do not just happen, absent wars, plagues, and natural disasters; Europe's self-destruction is a by-product of a deep spiritual malaise that has led to both demographic winter and cultural crisis. Thus Benedict XVI in Germany intended to be far more than Professor Ratzinger, teaching a needed lesson in cultural history. He was also the pastor, speaking to what he described to seminarians in Freiburg im Breisgau on September 24 as a "poverty in human relations and poverty in the religious sphere" in a country of great material abundance.

That abundance, he suggested, had corrupted the Church and weakened its evangelical edge: "The Church in Germany is superbly organized. But behind the structures, is there also a corresponding spiritual strength, the strength of faith in the living God? We must honestly admit that we have more than enough by way of structure but not enough by way of Spirit . . . [for] the real crisis facing the Church in the Western world is a crisis of faith." And the only answer to that is evangelization: The Church in Germany and elsewhere in Europe must "resolutely . . . set aside her worldliness," as Benedict put it the next day to a mixed group of clerical and lay Catholic activists, and take up once again the task of becoming a community that offers the "nourishment of love [in] concrete friendship with others and with the Lord" - an evangelical task that can only be accomplished by regular worship in the Sunday Eucharist (which some 7 percent of urban Germans attend).

The future of Europe, in other words, depends on whether Europe becomes, once again, a continent of saints. It may seem a quaint, even quixotic, notion. But as the pope put it to a large gathering of young people, it's wrong to think of saints as "remote from the world, naïve and joyless," men and women of impossibly great "ascetic and moral achievements . . . who could never be imitated in our own lives." This is a wrongheaded view of sanctity, for "Christ is not so much interested in how often in our lives we stumble and fall, as in how often with his help we pick ourselves up again. He does not demand glittering achievements . . . but [rather] wants to make you his friends," who can be holy "if we allow his grace to work in us."

Any Future?

It is, of course, unclear whether that call to friendship with the Lord Jesus will lead to the reconversion of Germany. What does seem clear is that this unapologetically evangelical appeal has more chance of success than Hans Küng's tattered summons to a Protestantized Catholicism, indistinguishable in any essential sense from the Lutheranism that has been thoroughly marginalized in post-modern Germany and from which no new evangelical energy can be expected. Benedict spent time with the Lutheran leaders of his homeland during his

apostolic visit, but he cannot imagine that, in their present, moribund condition, they will make strong ecumenical partners in reconstructing the Christian foundations of the keystone in the arch of the European Union.



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