

WE SHOULD FEAR FOR THE SOUL OF POPE BENEDICT

“We may not look at our pleasures to go to heaven in feather beds; it is not the way, for our Lord Himself went thither with great pain, and by many tribulations... and the servant may not look to be in better case than his Master.”

St Thomas More to his wife & children¹

Five years after his abdication, Josef Ratzinger, the ‘Pope Emeritus’ Benedict XVI, lives in comfort and the esteem of his fellow cardinals, enjoying retirement while his successor, sworn to uphold the faith of Jesus Christ labours to destroy it. And never a word of opposition to Pope Francis’s depredations do we hear from him. To the contrary, he has publicly assured the Pope, “Your goodness is the place where I dwell : I feel protected.”

In a recent article for the traditionalist journal, *The Remnant*, Hilary White reminded us of Josef Ratzinger’s provenance as a *peritus* of Vatican II, one who led the work of destruction of the Holy Office under Cardinal Ottaviani, one who, notwithstanding their conformity with the demands in *Pastor Aeternus* for a pope’s teaching to be infallible, rejected Pius IX’s denunciations in the *Syllabus of Errors*. Others have remarked Ratzinger’s refusal to acknowledge the binding nature of the rulings of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, notwithstanding the express order to that effect of Pius X. This insouciance of the Church’s received teaching, part of her tradition which did not suit him, shared by many others in the advice given the Council’s bishops, and aided by Paul VI’s example, was at the heart of the bishops’ embrace of the Protestant and the secular in Council documents, as of their rejection of the Church’s infallible teaching against ‘religious freedom’ in *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Despite the hopes of large numbers of the Catholic faithful on his accession to the papal throne, Josef Ratzinger was never a champion of Catholic orthodoxy, never the solution to the problems we faced. He was always a part of them.

He proved this when, adopting the secular stance of ‘retirement’, he abjured his oath of office as Pope. Had he never read St Paul’s teaching in *Ephesians* 5 ? What husband may retire from his marriage, or abandon his children ? If a husband and father is bound by a permanent sacramental bond—of which bond the Pope is the guardian—how could he whose very title means ‘father’ think he was free to abandon his office ? Had he no trust in the Holy Spirit to support him ?

A quote from Hilary White’s paper is to the point.

How ironic it must have seemed to those who remembered this history that Ratzinger would himself be given the office he had “destroyed” and would gain the media-generated reputation as an “arch-conservative”. And it starts to suggest an answer, or at least a line of inquiry, about why so little was actually accomplished in his long tenure. With the

¹ William Roper, *Life of Sir Thomas More*, p. 14

“arch-conservative” “Rottweiler” Ratzinger in the CDF, why do we have the situation we have today? What did he do to stop the explosion of neo-modernism – that burned like an unchecked wildfire throughout the Catholic world through the reign of John Paul II?

What did the “silencing” by Ratzinger’s CDF do to stop Hans Küng becoming a celebrity “priest-theologian”, courted by the media for his loathing of Catholicism—Küng, who was never removed from the priesthood despite his manifest heresy? Can we think of any other names who were corrected even to this degree? Precious few.

But we can certainly think of many, many who spent their lives and vocations blatantly denying and undermining the Catholic Faith – academic theologians, religious, priests, bishops and cardinals around the world – with never a peep of protest from Rome. Moreover, the scandalous pack of frauds we currently have in the episcopate is entirely the product of the “arch-conservative” John Paul II and the “Rottweiler” Benedict XVI pontificates.

Why did we think that Ratzinger, in this crucial role of CDF prefect, was a bulwark of orthodoxy? Is it simply that we have moved so far away from the ancient Faith that we no longer have a realistic notion of the Faith ourselves to make a comparison, to make an objective judgement? The “progressive” destroyer of Ottaviani inheriting his office and the epithet “arch-conservative”...

Indeed, Ratzinger himself maintained that he had never changed his theological opinions. He was to say that it was his old academic colleagues like Küng and Kasper who had moved further to the ideological “left” after the 1960s while he stayed in place. Perhaps now, as an answer that fits our apparently contradictory puzzle pieces, we can finally accept his word on this. Perhaps the world of Catholic academic theology had become so corrupted that a man called “progressive” in 1963, but whose ideas remained the same, would look like a “champion of traditional Catholic orthodoxy” by 2005.

Is this why he resigned? Is it simply that his conception of the Church, of the papacy, was never what Catholics believed about it?

We can thank the former Pope for the good things he did, as we wonder over the good things he did not. He has not ceased to be a bishop and he is bound, as a descendant of the Apostles, to correct his superior. It is a work of mercy.

“[I]f the faith [be] endangered, a subject ought to rebuke his prelate even publicly. Hence Paul, who was Peter’s subject, rebuked him in public on account of the imminent danger of scandal concerning the faith...” (II-II, q.33, a.4)

There are those in the blogosphere who would canonize Benedict XVI even before his death. They are misguided. Tenure of office is no guarantee of salvation. Consider the many cardinals, archbishops and bishops who have thought work for the secular arm more important than their duty to Christ and His Church. Consider Cardinal Wolsey’s remorse, if not contrition, on his deathbed.² And corruption of the faith is a greater evil than negligence in proclaiming it.

The canon lawyer and Master General of the Dominican Order, St Raymond of Penãfort, was more trenchant than England’s celebrated martyr about the duties of

² Reported in Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* as, *Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies.* (Act III, sc. 2)

Christians. He remarked our obligations in the event of persecution over spiritual things, asserting that “the most serious wounds are those dealt by friends.”

“If the preacher of truth is really not deceiving us when he says that all who want to live godly lives in Christ will suffer persecution, then no one, I think, is exempted from this general rule... Their homes are peaceful and complacent. They live in security and never feel the touch of the Lord’s rod. They pass their days in plenty and in the end go straight to hell...”³

Qui tacet consentire. We should pray for the former Pope that he may come, and soon, to a realization of the perils to his soul of remaining silent over the current persecution of the faithful and Christ’s Church, not from without but from within.

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“Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone through to the highest heaven, we must never let go of the faith that we have professed. For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; rather we have one who has been tempted in every way we are, though he is without sin...”⁴

Holy Week, and in the mirror of the sufferings and death of Our Blessed Lord we may contemplate Hell, eternal damnation, our just desert had not Christ redeemed us, made us sons of God by adoption, and extended us His ineffable forgiveness through the sacraments. Nothing is more salutary than to ponder the reality of eternal damnation, the loss of that *perfectly satiative good of an intellectual nature* for which we were made, *union with God*, not for an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year, or even a lifetime—but forever ; loss without the possibility of remission—ever.

“The floor of hell,” St Athanasius is reported to have said, “is paved with the skulls of bishops”. What, we may ask, is the fate of the bishops who worked so assiduously at the Second Vatican Council to destroy the reign of Christ’s Church in the world; bishops like Frings and Bea, Alfrink and Suenens, Döpfner and Lercaro, and the devious de Smedt who twisted the words of the popes to argue the Masonic thesis of ‘religious freedom’ ? What is the fate of *periti* like De Lubac and Congar, of Baum and Courtney Murray, of Schillebeeckx and Rahner, of those among them especially who confirmed their heresy and hatred of God by indulgence in moral evil?

What harm they produced, these bishops and *periti*, in loss of vocations, in loss of faith and the loss, perhaps, of eternal salvation for millions ! Are they damned forever for the evils at which they connived ? Or have one or more embraced, through the mercy of God, Whose will is salvific for all men *etiam episvopi et theologi*, conversion and contrition at the brink?

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31st March 2018—*Holy Saturday*

³ *Mon OP Hist* 6,2 ; pp. 84-5; cf. *Office of Readings*, 7th January, Memorial of St Raymond

⁴ *Hebrews* 4 : 14, 15