

Article

In Search of Justice and Peace: Benedict XVI's Questions to the Cultures and Religions of the World

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Abstract: In a series of addresses, commencing with the Regensburg address in 2006, Benedict XVI engaged the cultures and religions of the world with perennial questions concerning the rationality of reason, the catalyst for culture, the ethical foundations of political decisions, and the legality of law. In the answers he provided, which emanate from the Christian tradition's equation of the God of Jesus Christ, the God of love, with the God of the philosophers—the *logos* (λόγος)—Benedict invited his audiences to reassess the rationality and reasonableness of reason. Illustrating the interlinked nature of reason and truth, Benedict details the horizon of reality opened by an expansive understanding of reason, that of creative eternal reason. He challenges others to reflect on the presuppositions and implications of their own understanding of reason. On what basis is reason rational? What makes an argument reasonable? Benedict forthrightly acknowledges that religions have been a source of violence which he sees as resulting from the absence of reason. He insists that it is a reason informed by the great religious traditions that forms the basis for dialogue among the cultures and religions of the world. In those dialogues, Benedict maintains that freedom of conscience and freedom of religion play an essential and indispensable role.

Keywords: Benedict XVI; cultures and religions; creative eternal reason; justice; ethics; law



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1. Introduction

Jürgen Habermas maintains that the philosophy of religion was born out of Kant's anthropocentric turn¹. The evolution of religious consciousness emerged from the line of thought from Duns Scotus through to nominalism and modern science. In becoming autonomous, reason and factual knowledge were no longer required to justify themselves. It was religion that was brought before the "bar of reason", and practical reason became the basis for an autonomous morality (Habermas 2008, pp. 209–11; 2010, p. 22). Habermas' own project is bound up with the integration of religious concepts into secular natural reason which he argues is accessible by all. That integration is described as "translation" and is meant—and depends on the ability of natural reason—to retain the meaning of those concepts without the need for the sacred.² In this way, Habermas contends that the impulses that religion so precisely expresses are salvaged from religion for modernity by natural reason (Habermas 2006, pp. 8–16; 2013, pp. 347–57, 371–77). Edith Stein saw this anthropocentric turn differently, necessitating scholars who follow this line of thought to identify and then justify their starting point. The theory of knowledge as a result is placed at the center of their philosophy. Conversely, for Stein, addressing the difficulties she found in phenomenology—and modern philosophy in general—the theocentric orientation presents God as the First Truth and the object of considerations placing the theory of knowledge within an overall ontology. God as truth is the Good, and the ultimate criterion against which to measure (Stein 2000, pp. 17–22).

Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, maintains that all enlightenment—whether emanating from religion or philosophy—points and moves toward Jesus Christ, in whom God self-revealed as love and *logos*. In Jesus Christ, humanity's origin and destiny are revealed, and the purpose and meaning of the earthly journey become apparent. As a

professor and outspoken Church leader, and later as Pope Benedict XVI, he saw the Kantian turn as an undue truncation of reason and, hence humanity. That truncation unreasonably narrowing the horizons of reality. Benedict XVI definitively answers yes to the question that he himself posed in the 2004 dialogue with Habermas: Is there an “effective ethical conviction . . . with sufficient motivation and vigour to answer the challenges” the world faces today? (Ratzinger 2006, p. 66). That answer is not based on the Kantian turn, but emanates from creative eternal reason.

This paper considers a series of five addresses (2006–2011) in which Benedict XVI outlines perennial questions related to the rationality of reason and to the ethical foundations of political decisions and law. What makes reason rational? What makes an argument reasonable, on what basis are political decisions to be considered ethical? How is law legal and not simply arbitrary actions of the powerful? He contends these questions form the basis for collaborative engagement among all cultures and religions to work toward justice and peace. Immediately prior to considering these five addresses, a brief outline of Benedict XVI’s theological thought is provided. By establishing the context from which Benedict engages with the cultures and religions of the world, the series of addresses under consideration are positioned appropriately within his wider thought.

The latter sections of this paper consider responses to Benedict’s addresses. Firstly, from scholars including Jürgen Habermas and Muslim scholars. Secondly, the question as to what value there is for a non-Catholic or non-Christian to engage with such a line of thought is explored. To conclude, consideration is given to the potential trajectories that may be generated from such dialogue among the cultures and religions of the world. The intent of this paper is to provide those unfamiliar with Benedict’s thought with an introductory guide to his engagement with the secular world and the cultures and world religions. It is hoped that this all-too-brief introduction to a critical series of addresses that Benedict presented as pope, which outline his central arguments and his challenges to the world, will provide clarity on his specific arguments. The reader will then have solid initial foundations from which to engage with Benedict’s overall thought.

2. Benedict XVI as a Theologian and Pope

Benedict XVI holds a unique place in the Catholic theology of the 20th and 21st centuries. His active years as a theologian ran from the mid-1950s to his papacy as Benedict XVI (2005–2013). Initially viewed as a reformer due to his critique of the influence of neo-scholasticism on Catholic theology, he was later criticised as a conservative reactionary. It is his faith in the person of Jesus Christ, as fully human and fully divine, and his associated ecclesiology that defines his theological thinking. Protecting this faith motivated his theological zeal throughout his life (Ratzinger 1994, pp. 113–14). As a university professor, Joseph Ratzinger played an influential role at the Second Vatican Council, both among the German-speaking bishops, and within the council’s wider proceedings. His role, initially as an informal advisor, and later as an official advisor (*peritus*) to Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, meant that his theological thinking was given a voice unprecedented for a 34-year-old theologian (Ratzinger 1966). In the decades after the council, Ratzinger actively and robustly engaged in a battle for its legacy. His guiding principle was: “To make clear what we really want and what we don’t want. That is the task I have undertaken since 1965” (Seewald 2020, p. 463). He called the Church back time and again to the documents of the council as the true source of the council’s meaning. He insisted that the council’s documents be read as a whole, rejecting any notion of a subsequent and separate “spirit of the council” (Ratzinger and Messori 1985; Ratzinger 1987, p. 390; 1992). It is no wonder, then, that he became a highly controversial figure during this time.

Tracey Rowland identifies Ratzinger as part of the *Communio* school of Catholic theology. The *Communio* school is one of four groupings she identifies as making up the major strands of Catholic theology in the 20th century. The defining element of the four schools is their different accounts of the relationship between nature, grace, and history. Answers to these questions fundamentally impact on the theological vision presented, with the choices

underpinning approaches to fundamental theology—especially eschatology—leading to different solutions to the ideology of secularism. The three other schools Rowland identifies are (1) various species of Thomism, (2) *Concilium*, and (3) liberation theology and Pope Francis. The *Communio* school, of which Ratzinger is a leading member, pursues a “hermeneutic of reform” approach to interpreting the Second Vatican Council. Rowland argues that this school of thought sees the council “as an event that emphasized the importance of Christocentrism and therefore the renewal of theological anthropology and Trinitarian theology”. This approach is in contrast to the *Concilium* school, which interprets the council as a call to read the signs of the times and seeks to engage “the world on the world’s terms”. The *Communio* school is not associated with one Church figure (like the Thomists), nor is it “tightly systematic”. Instead, the *Communio* school of theologians draws upon the whole intellectual patrimony of the Church so that, for example, Aquinas is the “great synthesizer of the patristic heritage”, rather than the theologian (Rowland 2017, pp. 1–5, 94).

Rowland endorses Ratzinger’s diagnosis of the crisis of current theology—that it emanates from attempts to understand “the mediation of history in the realm of ontology”. Or, in other words, the crisis is one about the relationship between history and faith. Rowland notes that Ratzinger’s specific response to Kantian rationality is engagement with the theological virtues (i.e., faith, hope, and love). These virtues inform his theological work, most evidently in his thought on revelation, scripture, and tradition. Here, the role of the memory of the Church and the Church as the subject of tradition are essential components (Rowland 2008, pp. 58–61; 2017, pp. 121–23). D. Vincent Twomey—a doctoral student of Ratzinger’s—argues that it is the virtue of love, love of God, and love of neighbor, that is “the core of his universal teaching” (Twomey 2007, p. 17). Twomey contends that it is conscience that links Ratzinger as a human being with his theology. This places the truth, and the personal search for truth, at the center of Ratzinger’s theology—a search that involves a theologian’s relationship both with God and God’s friends (Twomey 2007, p. 22).

More critical assessments of Ratzinger do not argue for an alternative set of consistent principles that define his theology. It is those principles that are in question. In particular, it is their perceived closedness to the world and their pessimistic attitude to anthropology that is called out by Thomas Rausch and James Corkey (Rausch 2009, pp. 57, 63, 150, 155; Corkery 2009, pp. 49–51, 68, 74, 80, 86, 92). Such arguments do not take into account the central place of salvation history in Ratzinger’s thought. The consequences of the Fall on created humanity, and God’s subsequent actions in salvation history, determine his anthropology. Adam, the human being, is to be interpreted through the new Adam, Jesus Christ. Anthony J. Godzieba dismisses Ratzinger’s theology as failed and troubled, arguing that Ratzinger’s “ordered” and “ethereal Neo-Platonic/Augustinian worldview” was unable to deal with the “plurality of truths outside of the Vatican” (Godzieba 2013, pp. iv–vi, v). This again misses the central role played in this theology by the theological notion of person, and his own contribution to the development of a positive definition of it. Ultimately, as Lieven Boeve sees it, Ratzinger abandoned his modern reformist position to defend the Catholic faith from modernity. Claiming that Ratzinger deliberately articulated his arguments polemically in a sharp and radical manner, Boeve contends that this style precipitated a transformation of his position on ecclesiology. This transformation manifested itself in terms of governance, structures, and authority (Boeve and Mannion 2010, p. 12; Scantena et al. 2012). For Ratzinger the core issue is that the Church is not made, but received as a grace from God. It is God’s Church, and it is not humanity’s to construct.³

3. Benedict XVI and the Cultures and Religions of the World

Benedict acknowledges the specific and important role that the philosophy of religion holds. For him what is crucial are questions on the application of religious and philosophical traditions to practical human matters—specifically in the pursuit of justice and peace. It is not a case of religion or philosophy; he insists that only when acting together can each free the other of the pathologies that plague them, releasing the best that both have to offer.⁴ The context from which Benedict speaks in the five addresses is as the leader of the Catholic

Church. He provides answers to the questions that he himself poses based on the tradition of the Church. His answers are intended to be both comprehensible by and challenging to modern society, even if not embraced or endorsed. Benedict contends that Jesus Christ, in whom God self-revealed as love and *logos*, is the culmination of and fulfilment of not just Israel's faith, but of all religious and philosophical enlightenment. God, Father Almighty, through the power of the Holy Spirit, brought about the incarnation of the *Logos*—God become human—through Mary of Nazareth. Her response, Mary's Yes to God, is a critical element of the Incarnation: "Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:37-38). Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine, without mixture or confusion of natures, but also without their separation. This belief is not some static concept that he seeks to uncritically repeat. For Benedict, there is a cultural dynamism generated from the search for the God who is love and *logos*, which infuses the very fiber of that culture. For in the reality of God as a person who is love and *logos*, true freedom exists. Based on this context, the reader might wonder what Benedict could say or ask that would be of genuine interest to other cultures and religions beyond Catholic or Christian audiences.

The assertion that Jesus Christ is the truth is not to exclude, nor to claim truth for his own. Benedict XVI is clear that it is not we who grasp or possess truth, but truth that grasps and possesses us (Francis 2013, no. 34)⁵. The assertion is a statement about the full salvation of humanity. Through the incarnation Jesus takes upon himself the sins of the world, healing what is assumed (humanity), and through the resurrection overcomes death, being a living presence with us now. Benedict's approach reflects the twofold attitude of scripture: a preparation for Jesus Christ, and a decided no to what is not divine. Importantly for our purposes, this is far from a closed door. In this Yes/No duality towards the cultures and religions of the world, Benedict is not proselytizing, nor is he intent on a monologue. In his five addresses, Benedict seeks dialogue partners who search out the ultimate and true—the Good—with whom to work together for justice and peace. Benedict is not offering ready-made solutions. Solutions are to be achieved by communities taking up his questions and applying them to contemporary issues at both local and international levels. Benedict disregards philosophical and theological trends to challenge each "worldview", including the Christian and the secular democratic constitutional society perspectives, with perennial questions on what is true and what is good.

In reaching out to those who seek enlightenment, whether religious or philosophical, Benedict's hope is to collaboratively address the challenges of today. At the core of those solutions would be the dignity of the human being, guaranteed in the God who is person. In awakening or reawakening a sensitivity to truth—a term taken up from Habermas' 2007 address to the Jesuit School of Philosophy in Munich—he hopes that the search for truth and a listening for it again become integral to civil society in terms of universities, political debate, and the formation of law. At stake for Benedict in reawakening a sensitivity for truth is the human being, which is for him the question of God, our origins, our destination, and the meaning and purpose of our earthly journey. In these addresses, Benedict reaches out to four dialogue partners: modern Western society, monotheistic faiths or religions of revelation, Eastern mysticism, and agnostics and atheists who search for truth and meaning. Needless to say, there are many nuances within each group identified; nevertheless, these groupings capture the worldviews involved in the dialogue of cultures and religions.

A month after he presented the last of the five addresses, Benedict hosted representatives from the cultures and religions of the world at a meeting in Assisi in October 2011. The theme was Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace. The meeting marked the 25th anniversary of the meeting that John Paul II called for world religions to pray for peace. In his address to this gathering, Benedict forthrightly acknowledged that religions have been a source of violence, expressing his shame for these events. Noting that adherents of religions, in the manner they live their religion, can conceal God and act as barriers to God for others, he also insisted that violence is against the true nature of religion; such behavior is, in fact, a source of religion's destruction. In modern society's denial of God and the worship of possessions, he points to the generation of violence—for example, in drug dependency.

Furthermore, he perceives in the directionless freedom emanating from the denial of God the prevalence of force that takes as its only criterion what humanity demands of itself. As he puts it: “the denial of God corrupts man, robs him of his criteria and leads him to violence”. For Benedict, those who search for truth and meaning hold a special place. They are open to God, and look for answers, which is a challenge to the religious and atheists alike. For Benedict, the 2011 Assisi meeting and the wider engagement between cultures and religions is not one step along the journey to a single religion. The religions of the world are not all ultimately the same. The engagement speaks to cultures and religions “being together on a journey towards truth, a case of taking a decisive stand for human dignity and a case of common engagement for peace against every form of destructive force” ([Benedict XVI 2011b](#)).⁶

4. Five Addresses on Reason, Culture, Politics, and Law

In the five addresses presented between September 2006 and September 2011, beginning with the Regensburg address, Benedict XVI posed essential questions to civic, political, and legal communities. In so doing, the limitations of modern thought and approaches became apparent. Benedict XVI’s intent is not to wind back the clock to some supposed but fictional time when a perfect society existed or was under construction; he has long maintained that a perfect society in the here and now does not nor ever will exist. His view is that to attempt to achieve such as thing would ask too much of humanity and reason. Hope in divine things in such attempts is misdirected into things of this world, both distorting the divine and potentially becoming demonic in this world. Benedict XVI’s aim is to foster continued search for the real, the true, and the Good, so that when justice and peace are spoken of there are objective criteria with which to measure them. Those objective criteria are set against the potential vagaries of social consensus. He presents multiple questions aimed at justice and peace, some of which overlap one another, reflecting their multiple dimensions. These questions are uncompromising in their trajectory towards the Truth and the Good which, for Benedict, are the ultimate criteria of what is true and good. These concepts are theocentric, with God as their ultimate object, through whom the fullness of humanity becomes apparent. Equally, this dialogue is meant to produce decisive and effective action for justice and peace. The tipping point that Kant initiated is questioned. The modern secular worldview, for Benedict, remains only one—albeit an important one—of the many worldviews to engage with in the common search for justice and peace.

The five addresses follow a specific plan, each building upon the specifics of the prior addresses.⁷ While each address can be engaged with as a standalone presentation, such an approach would fail to engage with the overall intent. The five addresses to be considered are the meetings with academia at the University of Regensburg in 2006 and at La Sapienza University in Rome in 2008—the latter was not in fact presented, due to protests; the meeting with representatives of culture at the College des Bernardins, Paris, in 2008; the meeting with representatives of British society at Westminster Hall, London, in 2010; and the meeting with lawmakers at the Reichstag, Berlin, in 2011. While speaking to European audiences, Benedict nevertheless invited the full breadth of the international community to reconsider essential perennial questions that confront humanity, along with the efficacy and implications of the options available to answer them. Ultimately, these five talks, when considered as one, invite a reassessment of the meaning and implications of the search for the full grandeur of reason, and a plea for humanity to remain ever sensitive to the truth and to heed its voice. Each address is now considered in turn—specifically, the questions that Benedict raises, and why—so that the overall intent of this series of addresses can be made clear.

4.1. Regensburg University—On the Rationality of Creative Eternal Reason

The Regensburg address ([Benedict XVI 2006](#)) was one of Benedict’s first major addresses as pope. It was also a personal one, as a former professor of the university. In

combination with the address that was to be presented to La Sapienza University (Benedict XVI 2008a), Benedict discussed the question of reason and how it relates to truth, and the result if truth is separated from philosophy and theology. At Regensburg, in a critique of modern reason, he asked whether the conviction that acting unreasonably contradicts God's nature was merely a Greek idea, or if it was always and intrinsically true. Aware of the fatigue associated with these essential pivotal questions, Benedict quoted Socrates in the *Phaedo*. In so doing Benedict embedded his line of thought in those original questions of truth. Socrates is sympathetic to the frustration and anger to which multiple contradictory answers about being and existence can give rise. But he warns that if in response one would disregard them, "he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss" (Plato 90 c–d). Benedict, in turn, and in the specific context of his time, invites a reengagement—or, indeed, simply an engagement—with the underlying rationality of the various concepts of reason. This is a question that he posed in different forms prior to his election as pope: on what basis does rationality take precedence over irrationality? (Ratzinger 2004, pp. 150–59, 179–83).

Benedict notes that the Catholic Christian tradition understands *logos* to mean "both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason". John equates the *logos* of the God of the philosophers with the God of faith in the prologue of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the *logos* (λόγος), and the *logos* is God". In this way, the "I am" of existence (of the burning bush) is equated with the eternal rationality perceived by ancient Greek philosophy. This reflects the "profound harmony" of biblical faith and the best of Greek thought—a mutual enrichment long in development, most evidently manifested in the translation of the *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Old Testament undertaken in Alexandria). Benedict perceives this encounter of faith and Greek philosophical inquiry to be of absolute importance not just for Christianity or the history of religions, but for world history. This line continued through the tradition that developed from Augustine and Aquinas. Another line emerged from Duns Scotus—that of voluntarism, which understands God's freedom to mean that God "could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done". If this were so, Benedict notes, human reason no longer mirrors God's reason, and God's "deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions". Benedict, building upon Paul and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), instead insists that although humanity's unlikeness to God remains infinitely greater than our likeness, there is a real analogy between God, the *logos* and eternal Creator Spiritus, and human reason. There is choice to be made between the God of the eternal Creator Spiritus who is love and the God of the *voluntas ordinata*. That choice is between a God who is and who is not bound to truth and goodness. Such a choice has profound implications for humanity's access to reality and to God.

The journey to the modern concept of reason, Benedict contends, commenced with the Reformation and the principle of sola scriptura. In perceiving metaphysics as something from another source that wrongly conditioned faith, faith was separated from that eternal reason. Kant, Benedict argues, radicalized this separation, placing faith solely in practical reason and, hence, "denying it access to reality as a whole". This development was further radicalized by modern science, which he describes as "a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism) and empiricism, a synthesis confirmed by the success of technology". Benedict contends that modern science moves between two poles. One of these is the given of the rational structure of matter. That rational structure is expressed in mathematics, which is necessary in order to understand how it works and how it is efficiently utilized. The other pole is the exploitation of nature, which requires the certainty of experimental verification. The result is that science is understood via mathematics and empiricism, excluding any question of God. If the question of God is no longer capable of being asked, it is humanity that suffers and is reduced. Questions about the truth of the human being—questions of ethics—are no longer scientific but are now relegated to the subjective. The result is that the ability to create community evaporates. Ethics are then constructed via means such as evolution, psychology, and sociology, which are inappropriate for the task. What is described

disparagingly as Hellenization, for Benedict, reflects the best of Greek philosophy's insight into ultimate reality; faith and reason—creative eternal reason—are of the same source, and human reason is rightly used to understand faith.

Benedict's purpose at Regensburg and La Sapienza was to question the Kantian contraction of reason, along with the relegation of what does not fit within it to the status of pre-scientific or pre-modern. Benedict is far from rejecting the goods bequeathed by the Enlightenment; it is a broader understanding of reason that he seeks. For Benedict, the scientific ethos is obedient to the truth and, as such, is in harmony with the Christian faith. It is only with this broad conception of reason that true dialogue is possible among the cultures and religions of the world. Benedict asserts that the exclusion of religion from the universities and from the universality of reason is "an attack on their {religions'} most profound convictions". Moreover, he contends, that the methods of modernity—of science and reason—in their acceptance of the given of the rational structure of matter and its correspondence with the human spirit, mean those methods point beyond themselves. Why this must be so is a question that Benedict insists that the natural sciences must leave to philosophy and theology. In this way, knowledge from the experience and insights of the great religious traditions—in particular, those of the Christian faith—finds its rightful place both in reason and in the universities. At La Sapienza, Benedict considers the specific questions that emerge when this is the case.

4.2. *La Sapienza University—On Establishing the Reasonableness of Ethical Decisions and Choices*

In the La Sapienza address, Benedict sought to speak as pope to a university founded by a pope—Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303)—but which now is an institution of the Italian state. The topic was the establishment of the reasonableness of an argument—particularly of the arguments that underpin moral norms. In the address that he planned to present to the university, Benedict follows up on the fundamental question that he asked in Regensburg: is God always and intrinsically rational? He asks multiple interconnected questions: What is reason? What are the criteria that make an argument reasonable? What is truth? What is the nature of the university? His starting point is that the authority of the truth, free of political and ecclesiastical interference, is both the nature and the function of universities. This function Benedict argues is a service to society. In the university's function, reason and truth are interlinked. Benedict is specifically concerned with the question "how can one demonstrate that an assertion—especially a moral norm—is 'reasonable'?" To answer this question, he gives consideration to the origins of universities. Benedict argues that the thirst for knowledge of what is true, reflected in Socratic questioning, is the true origin of Western universities. In the manner of Socrates, the search for what is true is a deeply religious impulse that rejects religious myths and customs. The search for what is true is the search for God that ultimately leads to a search for the true nature and meaning of the human being. Benedict asserts that knowledge of the truth in this regard is not this fact or that: "the purpose of knowing the truth is to know the good". The Christian faith, through God's self-revelation as the *logos* and the Good in Jesus Christ, can state that the "truth makes us good and the true is the good".

Noting that the "process of argumentation" in the formation of opinion and will in democratic constitutional secular societies is led in large measure by political parties, Benedict contends that the outcomes "almost inevitably" reflect the interests of particular groups. This leads him to refine the question of how the reasonableness of an argument is demonstrated. Benedict refines it to: "How can a juridical body of norms be established that serves as an ordering of freedom, of human dignity and human rights?" Benedict proceeds to establish how this can be done by returning to Pilate's rhetorical question (John 18:38): "What is truth?" How is reason shown and recognized to be true? Taking up Habermas' insistence on a "sensitivity to the truth" as an essential aspect of the formation of democratic will, Benedict argues Habermas in doing so reintroduces truth to philosophical and political debates. Moreover, he maintains that being sensitive to the truth is the role of philosophy and theology properly understood. That role is the role of studying the human

being in its totality. Benedict remarks that there are no answers to these questions that can be perennially applied. Answers must be developed to suit the particular circumstance, underlining the necessity to continually search for and ask after the Truth and the Good. Such searching is to be undertaken in dialogue with the great minds of history who have searched for truth in response to the questions of their time, and whose answers always point beyond themselves.

Benedict illustrates the necessity of an ongoing search for the Truth and the Good by elucidating the history of Christian thought on the relationship of philosophy and theology. The Church Fathers, distancing themselves from neo-Platonic philosophies, presented faith as the yes to truth that “fulfils the demands of reason in search of truth”. In the Middle Ages with the emergence of Aristotle’s full works within Christendom, along with associated Jewish and Arab commentaries, Thomas Aquinas further developed that understanding. Aquinas’ development established the freedom and responsibility of philosophy and reason vis à vis theology. Benedict describes this development in the manner of Chalcedonian Christology—without confusion, and without separation. Philosophy occurs in dialogue with the wisdom of the great religious traditions, while theology draws upon knowledge from outside its ken to comprehend Christian faith. Each must preserve its own identity and maintain its own freedom in relation to the other. The Christian faith is a purifier of reason and an impulse to truth, playing an essential role vis-a-vis power and interest. If humanity were to give up on the truth, Benedict argues, reason would then become prey to the criteria of utility and power interests. As a pope speaking to academia and society at large, he comments that all he can do is to offer the invitation to humanity to commence ever anew the search for what is true and good. It is Benedict’s desire that those who search for the truth discern the illuminating light of history, Jesus Christ, who points to the future.

4.3. *College des Bernardins—On the Culture Emanating from the Search for God, and Creative Eternal Reason*

Having laid the groundwork for the reasonableness of a creative eternal reason that exponentially expands the understanding of reason beyond the bounds ascribed to it by modernity, Benedict speaks to the cultural dynamic created by monasticism’s search for God—for the *Creator Spiritus*. At the site of one of these monastic communities, Benedict asked whether monasticism is a relic of the past, or whether it has something to say to contemporary society, and if so, how, and why? (Benedict XVI 2008b) His answer is that European culture emerged without conscious intent from the nascent monastic communities. It emerged so through the monastic life lived in the light of and dedicated to the search for the true and real—the *logos* who speaks to humanity through scripture and through people. The monastic search for God, from Benedict’s perspective, is the search for the definitive and essential behind the provisional. This search was not an aimless wondering in darkness; God, in his word through scripture, provided a path and signposts for this search. The path was his Word, so the search for the God of scripture created a culture of the Word. To be comprehended, the language of God found in scripture requires a love of letters and education. The task of comprehending God’s Word in scripture is a communal activity, where the word is read by individuals in a corporate manner. In comprehending the scriptural word, humanity is also taught by God how to speak to God—most readily through the Psalms.

Benedict notes that the book—scripture—that is the basis for the culture of the Word is a collection of texts that were redacted over thousands of years. That one book’s inner unity is not immediately apprehended but, rather, manifests in “visible tensions between them”. The inner unity and harmony of scripture becomes apparent for Christians through the hermeneutical key of Christ. The Old Testament for Christians is a journey to the New Testament. The multiple texts are “the Scriptures” in which God’s Word and action are revealed in the words and the history of human beings. The one Word of God comes to humanity through human words, and in the humanity and history of the authors. Again, underscoring that the divine aspect in scripture is not self-evident. This means that a purely

historical approach to scripture is incapable of discerning the Word of God. Only through Christological and Pneumatological exegesis does God's Word become apparent. To release the various layers of meaning, scripture requires both exegesis and a community in which it comes into existence and is lived. The *logos* can be discerned in the words of scripture, yet it is not simply the letter of the text; the letter is understood through the whole of scripture, such that the one book emerges from the many books.

The spur for the monastic search for God is God's self who set out towards humanity so humanity could come to God. Proclamation of God's Word was an inner necessity for the Christian faith. God as the Truth concerns all people equally. Benedict sees parallels to Christianity's earliest times in the current situation. When Paul preached at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:18)—the court of justice for religious matters—he spoke to those present of an altar with the inscription “to an unknown god”. Paul declared that he was proclaiming this unknown god. Benedict interprets this as Paul proclaiming the God who is not known, yet known and unrecognizable, contending that “the deepest layer of human thinking and feeling somehow knows that he must exist”. The novelty of Christianity is not a philosophy but the deed of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. “God has revealed himself. Yet this is no blind deed, but one which is itself *Logos*—the presence of eternal reason in our flesh”. Today, the absence of God in the cities reflects the many images of gods in ancient Athens; God for many is the great unknown, yet in that absence the question of God still presents itself. “*Quaerere Deum*—to seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is no less necessary than in former times”.

4.4. Westminster Hall—On the Ethical Foundations of Political Decisions

In iconic spaces of democracy, Benedict, building upon his addresses at Regensburg and La Sapienza universities and at the College des Bernardins, explores the perennial question as to the proper place of religious belief within the political process. Or in other words, what is owed to Caesar and, separately, to God. At the place of Thomas More's trial, when the statesman chose to follow his conscience against the sovereign's orders, resulting in his execution, Benedict discussed questions on the ethical foundations of political choices (Benedict XVI 2010). Policy choices have profound ethical consequences, so how is a “genuine balance between the legitimate claims of government and the rights of those subject to it” to be achieved? Specifically, the questions that must be answered to adequately respond to this ever-evolving challenge are: “What are the requirements that governments may reasonably impose upon citizens, and how far do they extend? By appeal to what authority can moral dilemmas be resolved?” Regarding fundamental issues related to the human being, Benedict rejects two possible approaches: that of social consensus, and that of pragmatic short-term solutions. Instead, as the approach he commends, Benedict cited the example of the abolition of the slave trade by the Westminster Parliament. The impetus for which, he notes, arose from the ethical principles of natural law.

The role of religion in political debate, as understood by the Catholic tradition, is not to provide a set of predefined laws; reason is capable of establishing “objective norms governing right action”, and the role of religion in this process is as a corrective, “to purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles”. Benedict acknowledges that distortions of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, have created and continue to create social problems. This, from his perspective, arises due to the absence of the purifying and structuring role of reason. Equally, reason has been and can be distorted into ideologies where the full dignity of the human being fails to be taken into account. Again, this arises due to a deficiency of religion's corrective role within reason, as evident in the slave trade and the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Consequently, religion, far from being a problem to which democracy must find a solution, is a “vital contributor to the national conversation”. Reason and religion need one another, so that through the purification, structuring, and correction that each gives to the other, both can fully become themselves.

Benedict warns against action to eliminate discrimination or offence that would silence religious voices, or would require Christians to act against their conscience. He argues that such attempts fail to appreciate the legitimate role of religion in the public square. Such moves would negatively impact not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the ability to turn solidarity into effective action. To achieve these outcomes reflective of shared core values, the state must collaborate with religious bodies such as the Catholic Church in a manner that respects the freedom to act in accordance with the convictions and teachings of faith. This means that the guarantees of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of association are essential elements that support ongoing dialogue within secular democratic societies. Such dialogue, Benedict insists, should occur at every level of society—not just in political debate and in the public square of the formation of opinion and will.

4.5. Reichstag—On the Legality of Law as a Basis for Justice and Peace

In the Reichstag in Berlin, Benedict spoke to the legality of the law in a free and democratic state. He raised questions on justice as a precondition for peace—specifically, how law is to be just, and not the arbitrary dispensation of power (Benedict XVI 2011a). Benedict took up Solomon’s answer to God upon his accession to the throne. Solomon asked God for “a listening heart so that he may govern God’s people, and discern between good and evil” (1 Kg 3:9). Benedict expounds upon the questions of justice and of what is right, and how they provide the guard rails of power. The task of the politician is to “serve right and to fight against the dominion of wrong” which, he acknowledges, is an ever more complicated task given the unprecedented technological capability at humanity’s disposal. Benedict asks “How do we recognize what is right? How can we discern between good and evil, between what is truly right and what may appear right?” Benedict again rejects the use of majorities for deciding upon fundamental issues such as human dignity, despite this being a reasonable criterion for most legal matters. For as Benedict notes, it is possible and has been the case—most notably in Germany during the Nazi period—that the law has been unlawful, based as it was on arbitrary law divorced from justice and right.

Historically, Benedict remarked, religion has been the basis for legal systems with law determined by reference to the divine. Christianity broke with this practice. Revelation did not determine law; instead, law was determined by the application of objective and subjective reason—both of which were rooted in the creative reason of God—upon nature. In taking up the philosophical and juridical movement that commenced in the second century B.C. when the Stoic social natural law encountered Roman law, Christianity aligned with philosophy against religious law. As a result, Christianity identifies the interplay of reason and nature as the universal valid source of law. Paul articulated this view when he stated: “When Gentiles who have not the Law [the Torah of Israel] do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves . . . they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness . . . ” (Rom 2:14f.). Here, conscience, Benedict explains, is to be understood via Solomon’s listening heart. This concept of law continued right up to the formation of the German Basic Law of 1949. Now natural law is no longer understood in such a way, being viewed simply as a part of the Catholic tradition.

Benedict argues that the idea that “an unbridgeable gulf exists between ‘is’ and ‘ought’” emerged because modern reason deemed them to exist on different planes. Such a view developed due to the predominance of the positivist understanding of nature, which perceives nature solely in a functional manner. Nature then reflects data in which cause and effect play out, which has nothing to say to humanity about ethics, justice, or just law. The change in how nature is understood reflects that of reason, which is scientific so long as it is positivist in the sense of verifiability. Ethics and religion are then aspects of the subjective field, sitting outside the realm of reason. This change means that the classical sources of ethics and law likewise sit beyond the bounds of reason. Here, Benedict is not rejecting positivism. He seeks to highlight its proper role so that it functions appropriately within

a broader concept of reason. Otherwise, positivism will create a “windowless concrete bunker” of culturelessness that is incapable of engaging the human dimension. In this vacuum, extremism and radicalism will emerge. Nevertheless, Benedict contends that even today such approaches are “still covertly drawing upon God’s raw materials, which we refashion into our own products”.

The question he poses as a result is how can the grandeur of reason be rediscovered so that its directives, demands, and true depths may be perceived in a convincing manner? Benedict sees parallels in the emergence of the ecological movement. In realizing that something is wrong with our relationship with nature—with reality—young people have recognized that the Earth has its own dignity, of which we should be mindful. This situation requires reflection, and raises questions about culture. It necessitates that we “listen to the language of nature and we must answer accordingly”. Just as there is an environmental ecology, so too Benedict contends that there is an ecology of man reflected in nature, which must be respected, and to which we must listen. “Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled”. This ecology of man is embedded in the conviction that there is a Creator God from whom objective reason manifests itself in nature. It is this conviction, Benedict insists, from which the ideas of human rights, the equal dignity of all people before the law, the inviolability of human dignity, and the recognition of responsibility for one’s actions emanate. This European culture emerged from the encounter of Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, from Israel’s monotheism, the philosophical reason of the Greeks, and Roman law. It is this three-way encounter that established the criteria of the law. Benedict concludes his address to the Reichstag by answering the question that God posed to Solomon: “even today, there is ultimately nothing else we could wish for but a listening heart—the capacity to discern between good and evil, and thus to establish true law, to serve justice and peace”.

5. A Vision of Humanity in Five Parts

How do we ensure that humanity retains access to the widest and fullest self-understanding. How do we ensure such a wide and full understanding of humanity forms the basis for communities worldwide to engage with one another? Benedict is well aware that such self-understanding is dependent on a certain understanding of reason that modernity as a whole questions, if not outright rejects. How, then, is the concept of reason as creative and eternal to be once again convincing to those who follow the lines of empiricism and post-metaphysics? What Benedict attempts to do in his five addresses is catalyze reflection on the efficacy of these options as the basis for considering the totality of existence, or the totality of what humanity can perceive. Asking questions that get to the heart of the perennial issues that confront humanity, but which to his mind have been inadequately addressed, is the approach he takes. Is God—and, hence, reality—intrinsically rational? Must science, as an intrinsic aspect of its methodology, accept the rational nature of matter? If so, why does this not apply to the whole of reality—to the human aspect of reality beyond matter? Underpinning these questions is the fundamental question as to what determines or makes an argument reasonable.

While he outlines answers to these questions based on the Catholic tradition—in which the God of Love, Jesus Christ, is equated with the *logos*, the God of the philosophers—these answers are meant as a catalyst for dialogue. This dialogue is not intended to be simply a series of polite encounters. Benedict means to generate respectful and robust discussions whose goal is twofold: first, an ever-deeper understanding of God and the world, and second, an ever-evolving attempt to construct just political and social solutions at every level of society. Benedict seeks neither a debating society nor a series of prepackaged speeches, but encounters where real listening occurs, and where each worldview is challenged on its shortcomings, or where it has inadequately addressed open issues. Benedict is confident that as the world’s cultures and religions journey along this path, real progress

will be achieved. If the insights that each worldview has managed to capture—insights that glimpse the truth of existence, of nature, of matter, and of the human being—inform such dialogue, a continually deepened understanding will flow. Benedict’s proposal for dialogue and its goal is a task of monumental proportions, but one that is achievable if guided by the Chinese insights that chaos includes opportunities, and that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step (and, I would add, continues one step at a time).

The series of addresses illustrate the fundamental role that reason plays in all aspects of humanity’s self-understanding, and access to wider reality. The thread that runs through the five addresses is the challenge to each worldview—particularly modernity’s rejection of creative eternal reason—to justify the rationality underpinning their understanding of reason. Benedict is playing the role of Socrates, asking questions that get to the heart of the assertions of his interlocutors. Benedict seeks clarifications as to the meanings, implications, and applications of those assertions. These questions are intended to clarify as a prelude to generating further insights. Benedict’s fundamental question of reason leads to his request for each worldview to clarify the meanings of truth, freedom, conscience, and law. Equally, Benedict seeks to highlight the culture that each concept of reason catalyzes—what is searched for and, hence, what guides how we live. Conscious that religion can play a domineering, suffocating role, and has been a source—but not *the* source—of violence, Benedict is clear that religion absolutely needs reason to enable it to avoid dangerous pathologies. But first and foremost, religion needs reason to release the best of what it can offer humanity: a window into the divine—to humanity’s origin and destiny. Equally, reason absolutely needs dialogue with the great religious traditions, for otherwise it too—without a guide to what is good and true—can fall into the pathologies of ideologies and oppression. Reason is in need of engagement with the wisdom of the great religious traditions, and vice versa. In that engagement each plays the role of guardian to the other, prodding the other to remain within its competence and to listen to the voice of its counterpart. Benedict exhorts contemporary society to continue the line of enquiry demonstrated by Socrates, and to remain ever sensitive to the voice of truth in all aspects of life. Only then can the fullness of humanity become apparent, a fullness that should act as guide for collaborative action for justice and peace.

6. Responses to Benedict XVI’s Series of Addresses

Benedict’s understanding of Jesus Christ’s place in the cultures and religions of the world has been criticized within Catholic theology as disrespectful in its claim that other religions fall short of full salvation. Gerard Mannion argues that it entails an assertion of superiority of Christianity over other religions (Boeve and Mannion 2010, pp. 139–49, 154, 172–74). In response to such criticism, Benedict, as Ratzinger, argues that he is speaking of the positive meaning of religion, and is seeking the truth (Ratzinger 2004, pp. 9–11). The Regensburg address attracted international attention arising from the quote on Islam from “the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus”. This quote is thought to have been written down by the emperor during the siege of Constantinople (1394–1402). In response, a month after the Regensburg address, 38 Muslim scholars issued an open letter to Benedict XVI. A year later this letter was followed up by a more substantial letter to Christian leaders signed by 138 Muslim scholars entitled, “A Common Word Between Us and You” (A Common Word 2007). This response underscores the one God that Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship, and the two commandments of love: love of God and love of neighbor. In particular, the letter outlines the Qur’an’s understanding of human intelligence, will, and sentiment, stating that:

Souls are depicted in the Holy Qur’an as having three main faculties: the mind or the intelligence, which is made for comprehending the truth; the will which is made for freedom of choice, and sentiment which is made for loving the good and the beautiful. Put in another way, we could say that man’s soul knows through understanding the truth, through willing the good, and through virtuous emotions and feeling love for God. Love of God in Islam . . . demands a love in which

the innermost spiritual heart and the whole of the soul—with its intelligence, will and feeling—participate through devotion⁸.

Underscoring the importance of the Muslim–Christian relationship, the letter argues that ecumenical dialogue must be about finding common grounds between the two religions as a critical factor enabling world peace. The open letter does not take up Benedict’s central question as to the intrinsic rationality of God and the role that such reason plays in protecting religions from pathologies and embracing violence. This was Benedict’s core message at Regensburg—the accessibility of ultimate reality to humanity, and how answers to this question shape the understanding of humanity and create culture. In the official text of the address, Benedict clarified his use of the quotation:

In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur’an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic ([Benedict XVI 2006](#), note 3).

The open letter “A Common Word Between Us and You”, endorsed widely across cultures and religions, has generated significant engagement between Christianity and Islam.⁹ It would be Benedict’s hope that his central question as to the intrinsic rationality of God, and what that means for humanity and human reason, becomes a central focus of this ongoing engagement.

Jürgen Habermas, in an address to the Jesuit School of Philosophy in Munich in February 2007, responded to Benedict’s Regensburg address. Habermas criticizes Benedict’s refusal to accept Kant’s transcendental turn, with its critique of the proofs of God’s existence and its concept of the autonomy that underpins modernity’s self-understanding of law and democracy. Habermas here views the three stages of de-Hellenization that contributed to modernity’s self-understanding of reason as a reality or fact. He argues that it is unhelpful to ignore this de-Hellenization in the search for “the ‘shared reason’ of people of faith, unbelievers, and members of different religions”. Habermas here glosses over Benedict’s challenge as to the intrinsic rationality of reality, and why modernity and the methods of modern science accept such rationality in matter as a given, but not in ethics. Habermas claims that historicism is compatible with reason, rejecting the notion that it necessarily implies a relativistic self-denial of reason. Habermas contends that historicism “makes us sensitive to cultural differences and prevents us from over-generalising context-dependent judgements”. He also implies that Benedict does not welcome challenge over the “rational core of faith” ([Habermas 2010](#), pp. 22–23). The preceding discussion makes it clear that Benedict is requesting just such challenge and dialogue over the rational core of faith, but also that of reason. Such a challenge and dialogue on the rationality of modern reason is not one in which Habermas wholeheartedly engages. Instead, he maintains that religions must accept the authority of fallible modern reason and the translation of religious concepts into secular reason, with a neutral worldview, if those concepts are to be acceptable in the process of the formation of opinion and will. Such a position is foremost to protect democratic secular societies from the “militant powers” of belief ([Habermas 2013](#), p. 374; [2006](#), pp. 1–4). From Benedict’s perspective, he is still waiting for an answer from modernity to the fundamental question: In a worldview in which “reality originated on the basis of chance and necessity (or, as Popper says, in agreement with Butler, on the basis of luck and cunning), and, thus, from what is irrational . . . being a chance by-product of irrationality”, why does rationality take precedence over irrationality? ([Ratzinger 2004](#), p. 181).

In response to Habermas’ critique of Benedict’s Regensburg address, members of the Jesuit School of Philosophy in Munich offered diverging reactions. Josef Schmidt argued that Habermas’ theory of communicative reason offers a standard of which Catholicism

should not be afraid (Schmidt 2010, pp. 59, 69–70). Friedo Ricken cautioned against the abandonment of the Christian self-understanding facilitated by Greek philosophy. Ricken insisted that the replacement of Greek concepts could only be countenanced so long as the new concepts were proven to fully express the provocativeness of the biblical message (Ricken 2010, pp. 58). John Milbank takes up Benedict's Regensburg address in his own critique of the role Habermas advocates for religion in the public square. He argues that Habermas has not demonstrated that the premodern model of the mediation of faith and reason is untenable. Milbank contends that Ratzinger's central argument on the idea of creative rational reason "alone rendered reason coterminous with being itself and suggested an unlimited diversity and scope for its reach" (Milbank 2013, p. 327). James V. Schall likewise endorses the central thesis of the Regensburg address which, unfortunately, is set in the context of a wider polemic assessment of Islam. Schall's concern is to highlight the negative impact of Islam's contention that to argue that God is intrinsically rational would wrongly limit the unlimited power of God (Schall 2008, pp. 93–98). It is this very point that Benedict hopes will become a critical theme of the dialogue among the cultures and religions of the world: Is God truly limited in being intrinsically rational? What are the consequences for God, humanity and the universe if God, or ultimate reality, is not intrinsically rational?

7. Collaboration and Dialogue among the Cultures and Religions of the World

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of the paper. Answers are now offered to the various questions. What value is there for a non-Catholic or non-Christian to engage with Benedict's line of thought—a line of thought that can appear so alien to what is considered modern? What is the potential trajectory that may be generated from collaboration and dialogue among the cultures and religions of the world? While Benedict agrees with Habermas on the essential need for reason and religion to engage in a collaborative learning process, Benedict would not agree with Habermas' premise that it must take place through the methodology of modern reason (Ratzinger 2006, pp. 48–52, 77). Reason and religion have their own sphere that must be respected if the value that each offers the other is to be secured. What Benedict offers with his line of thought is an approach to generate practical solutions in the service of justice and peace that can be applied in the social, political, and legal spheres across the world. It is from the knowledge of the natural law held in the hearts of all humanity, "Jew and gentiles alike", and exhibited through conscience, that he hopes to receive a response. Thus, while the cultures and religions of the world have expressed these sentiments in various ways, which can appear at times to be contradictory, there is a basis for collaborative dialogue through the common language and law of humanity.

The challenge lies in working through the accidental or the contextual to get to the essential. Such a path will no doubt be one on which real substantive disagreements will be encountered. It will also no doubt require participants from all sides to answer difficult questions from within their own tradition which have yet to be confronted. It will therefore entail collaborative dialogue that, at least at times, will be very uncomfortable. Participants must seek to find adequate responses to challenges old and new. Travelling along this journey will be a process of mutual purification and correction. It is a journey that has the potential to build from and upon the truth and goodness that each culture and religion has discerned. That ongoing discernment would then inform an ever more expansive appreciation of ultimate reality, and of humanity. This is the prize that Benedict offers the participants—real mutual enrichment of the cultures and religions of the world.

Benedict seeks the future, and this future must be built by the efforts of humanity. If the future is to reflect the full humanity of the human being, it must be one whose goals are conditioned by the knowledge of the Truth and the Good. Yes, there is analogy or likeness between the reason of God and human reason, even if the dissimilarity of God and humanity remains ever greater. This analogy of reason enables humanity to reflect the God in whose likeness we are created. This likeness is not one of nature, but of person—of a

subject who transcends themselves by living their life in relation to God without reserve (Ratzinger 1990, pp. 451–53). The human being then provides God—notwithstanding their fallen nature—with a place to inhabit this world (Ratzinger 1989, pp. 58, 63). In never ceasing to search for the ultimate and the Good, and in allowing that pursuit to shape an expansive understanding of humanity and existence, the cultures and religions of the world open themselves to the truly human. The truly human reflects the demands of freedom, which is responsibility conditioned by the truth (Ratzinger 1996, p. 28). Such an approach will not create the perfect society, nor Heaven on Earth. But if guided by Benedict’s encouragement to his doctoral students to have the courage to be imperfect, a human society will emerge (Twomey 2007, p. 11).¹⁰

8. Shared Challenges and a Common Approach: In Search of Justice and Peace

There is a basis for common or world ethics, but it is not the lowest common denominator shared among the cultures and religions world. Nor is it a profane translation of sacred concepts into secular “natural reason”. For Benedict, it emerges at least in part from the symbiosis of Greek philosophy, the faith of Israel, and Roman Law—creative reason, natural law, and faith in the *logos* who is love. Benedict seeks to place this symbiosis once again at the disposal of humanity. Some who take up that symbiosis will encounter it as new. His hope is that sparks emerge in those encounters that serve as a basis for collaboration in the pursuit of justice and peace. Equally, he hopes for a continued deepening of the tradition from which he speaks. To reintroduce such a symbiosis, Benedict must demonstrate the reasonableness of faith and metaphysics, which remains open to the constructive contribution from other worldviews. It is his view that what is at stake in the determination of the reasonableness of faith and metaphysics is the rationality of our whole existence. The rationality of existence for Benedict is the true source of the inviolability of the dignity of the human being. The reasonableness of Catholic Christian faith, for Benedict, is demonstrated by the equation of the God who is love with the God of creative eternal reason. The Catholic faith demonstrates the reasonableness of faith in the priority of rationality, love, and freedom in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Those who insist upon the truth and incessantly search for ultimate reality can be ridiculed for their impracticality—for looking for things that are useless for getting on with life, and are a potential barrier for “doing well in the world”. Socrates was the butt of many jokes, ridiculed by contemporary playwrights such as Aristophanes, for example in *The Clouds*. Immediacy, however, is transcended by the perennial. For while poetry and tragedy can certainly portray the depths of human experience—and indeed have at times sought to create culture. It is a philosophy informed and shaped by the great religious traditions that can offer enlightenment that heals, because it is touched by the divine. When Benedict invites his listeners and readers to remain sensitive to the truth, and urges them once again to give consideration to the expansive concept of “creative eternal reason,” it is this encounter of philosophy and religion that he urges his audience to take up. Moreover, that sensitivity to the truth should inform dialogue at every level of society. Conscience is the shared language of humanity, which is an indispensable element in the pursuit of justice and peace. In the Catholic tradition, conscience is construed of two things: an orientation that informs what is good—the Good—and subsequent action, informed by the Good, taken in particular circumstances¹¹. It is this common language and law of humanity, known by Jews and Gentiles alike, that Benedict, in his five addresses, calls upon the cultures and religions of the world to embrace.

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Notes

- ¹ This paper addresses open questions in my two forthcoming articles included in Alejandro Sala ed. *Joseph Ratzinger in Dialogue with Philosophical Traditions: from Plato to Vattimo*. These articles consider Joseph Ratzinger's 2004 debate with Jürgen Habermas (McKenna forthcoming a), and separately consider Ratzinger's thought on faith in relation to those of Edith Stein (McKenna forthcoming b). In addition, this article builds upon two other articles I have published (McKenna forthcoming c). First, my 2019 consideration of Habermas, Ratzinger, and Alasdair MacIntyre's idea of Europe (McKenna 2018). Second, my 2018 consideration of Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment in relation to Ratzinger idea of freedom (McKenna 2019).
- ² I critically critique Habermas' "translation proviso" in my unpublished article, "On Translating Humanity as created in the Image of God into the Profane: Perspectives from Habermas, Ratzinger and MacIntyre".
- ³ This theme has long been critical for Ratzinger theological approach. See (Ratzinger 1958).
- ⁴ In this section I draw from Ratzinger personal theological views on Christianity's place and role in the cultures and religions of the world from Ratzinger (2004).
- ⁵ Francis makes clear that his predecessor, Benedict XVI, penned this encyclical, and that he taking up this work "added a few contributions of my own" (Francis 2013, no. 7).
- ⁶ Benedict as Joseph Ratzinger was critical of the original Assisi meeting hosted by Pope John Paul II in 1986. His criticism was that prayer requires a personal God, to which many attendees did not subscribe—e.g., Asiatic mystics—and for those who do believe in a God of revelation, prayer is understood in different ways. As a result, he goes as far as saying that such "shared prayer would be a fiction, far from the truth" (Ratzinger 2004, p. 106).
- ⁷ Two additional addresses could be considered alongside those explored in this paper: his April 2008 addresses at the White House and at the UN. These speak to the themes of freedom and responsibility.
- ⁸ Note 10 of A Common Word Between Us and You (2007) states: "Thus God in the Holy Qur'an tells human being to believe in Him and call on Him (thereby using the intelligence) with fear (which motivates the will) and with hope (and thus with sentiment): Only those believe in Our revelations who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate and hymn the praise of their Lord, and they are not scornful,/Who forsake their beds to cry unto their Lord in fear and hope, and spend of that We have bestowed on them./No soul knoweth what is kept hid for them of joy, as a reward for what they used to do. (Al-Sajdah, 32:15–17) (O mankind!) Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Lo! He loveth not aggressors./Work not confusion in the earth after the fair ordering (thereof), and call on Him in fear and hope. Lo! the mercy of God is near unto the virtuous. (Al-A'raf, 7:55–56) Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad ρ himself is described in terms which manifest knowledge (and hence the intelligence), eliciting hope (and hence sentiment) and instilling fear (and hence motivating the will): O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. (Al-Ahzab, 33:45) Lo! We have sent thee (O Muhammad) as a witness and a bearer of good tidings and a warner, (Al-Fath, 48:8)".
- ⁹ See the multiple responses, engagements and conferences detailed in the A Common Word Between Us and You on initiative website.
- ¹⁰ Fr Vincent Twomey fondly recalls this encounter. "Once he asked me gently about the progress of my thesis. It was about high time, as I had been working on it for some seven years. I told him that I thought there was some more work to be done. He turned to me with those piercing but kindly eyes, saying with a smile: 'Nur Mut zur Lücke' ('Have the courage to leave some gaps'). In other words, be courageous enough to be imperfect". (Twomey 2007, pp. 11–35, 16).
- ¹¹ See Twomey's consideration of Ratzinger's thought on conscience in (Twomey 2007).

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