

God and Europe

Joseph Ratzinger often refers to the spirit of thought of the brilliant St. Augustine. In the case of volume 3 of *Omnia Opera* “God of faith and God of philosophers” this thought concerns the theology of state. St. Augustine distinguishes in it: *civitas Dei* – God’s state, *civitas terrena* – earthly state and *regnum diaboli* which was dominating *civitas terrena*. “Two loves therefore – St. Augustine writes – have given original to these two cities: self-love in contempt of God unto the earthly, love of God in contempt of one’s self to the heavenly.”¹ Augustine refers here to previous catechetical traditions of Christianity, which perceive the whole history as a struggle of two states, two communities. The history of humanity constitutes a struggle between two loves: man’s love for God and man’s love for himself. Thus, Augustine presents history as a drama of struggle between faith and unbelief.²

Nowadays, the situation of this historical struggle is expressed in the relationship: God – the world, God’s life – temporal life, and in our case of the presentation of the volume of *Omnia Opera* – in the relationship God – Europe. Ratzinger conceives of this relationship in the Chalcedonian Christological scheme: two different natures but in one and the same person. And thus the kingdom of man – *civitas terrena* and the kingdom of God – *civitas Dei* are not identical³ and do not merge into one kingdom but are mutually conditioned and united in one and the same person who transposes the values of the one kingdom into the values of the other and unites them in one sense, always, of course, with the primacy of the kingdom of God.

With the view to showing this primacy of *civitas Dei*, Ratzinger reaches for the ontology of God Himself: one God in three Persons expresses the specific nature of the Christian faith (part A). While the universal requirement of this faith is contained in the now famous thesis that the God of faith is the God of philosophers (part B). Therefore, one faith is possible in a multitude of cultures (part C).

Contemporary *civitas terrena* is, in turn, today’s Europe, understood not as a single state but as a community of independent states. Ratzinger first reflects on the culture and identity of Europe (part D). Here, he presents the fundamentals of the relationship God – the world, he makes diagnoses and prognoses for the future as well as emphasises Europe’s Christian and cultural heritage. At the same time, he addresses the significance of the issue of God in politics, law and morality (part E).

According to Ratzinger, these two communities – *civitas dei et civitas terrena* – should interpenetrate one another. Each of them has a different essence. Basically, the Church is not a copy of a state, Europe, the less so of the world. Neither is the Church a self-governing body “which comes forward with an offer of specific services. Above all, the Church must live what is not man-made, live faithfully, dynamically. By virtue of this the Church gives to all humanity

¹ Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the pagans*. transl. Marcus Dods vol. 2, pub. 1913 by Edinburgh T. & T. Clark (*De civitate Dei*, XIV, 28). cf. also J. Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia* vol. 1: *Lud i dom Boży w nauce św. Augustyna o Kościele*, [People and House of God in Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church] p. 344.

² J. Ratzinger, *Opera omnia*, vol. 13/1: *Im Gespräch mit der Zeit*, p. 457ff. The idea was also taken up by J. W. Goethe who said that history was a struggle between faith and unbelief.

³ *En in Ps 51 3 4 6*; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1: *Lud i dom Boży w nauce św. Augustyna o Kościele*, [People and House of God in Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church] p. 344 ff.: a state, also a Christian one, is called *civitas terrena*, and the Church *civitas Dei*. Here, there is mention of the shuffling of the two states.

something that it cannot provide for itself by its decisions. The Church cannot give orders to the world, but she can, in moments of its helplessness, suggest answers.”⁴

And this is probably the answer which the presented volume of *Opera omnia* entitled “God of faith and God of philosophers” wants to provide. The title itself refers to what is divine, to *civitas Dei*. Whereas the subtitle “Philosophical Reason – Culture – Europe – Society” expresses the *civitas terrena* of Europe. Ratzinger ties these two communities in a coherent thesis that “accountability before God is an indispensable force for the formation of Europe.” And even though the contents of these *civitates* were outlined by Ratzinger a few decades ago, they have not lost their relevance and validity, but they show us today a vision of a prophecy being fulfilled. For Ratzinger is concerned to express the truth of the only God and at the same time his concern for a true Europe.

The truth about the God of Christians is framed in terms of the question of the proper connection in the early church between biblical faith and Greek thought, that is, the connection between metaphysics (the God of the philosophers) and faith (the God of faith), Greek thought about the Absolute and the message of biblical Revelation about God. This connection shows that logos – reason justifies faith, or biblical hope, and that faith at the same time orients reason towards truth. This ultimately expresses the essence of Christianity as a true religion that is based on God’s Revelation but also involves philosophy.

Admittedly, as B. Pascal noted, the God of faith (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) differs from the God of philosophers and scholars because we are dealing here with the experience of the living (real) God in Christian faith and the theoretical God in philosophical thought (e.g. Descartes’ mathematical abstraction). This distinction is caused by a different approach to metaphysics, which led to the opposition between the God of faith and the God of philosophers (I. Kant).

Joseph Ratzinger, however, believes that this distinction is inappropriate and emphatically shows that there is only one God, which means that the God of faith is also the God of philosophers. Thus, the connection established by the Church Fathers between the God of faith and the God of philosophers is not only legitimate but even necessary for Christian monotheism, which thus overcame polytheism. According to Ratzinger, St. Augustine expressed this in a vivid way: “the silent and inaccessible God of the philosophers in Jesus Christ became a speaking and hearing God” (vol. 3/1, p. 163). The identification of the Absolute as the God of the philosophers with the God turned towards man in Christ thus became the essence of revealed faith. In speaking of God as the absolute basis of the world, the Bible expresses the remarkability of the God of Israel, who is one as the Absolute, but turned towards people. To better understand this message of God, which is addressed not only to Israel but to all people, it is necessary to translate it into the common language of human reason. This is the connection between revealed faith and the humanly formed concept of the Absolute.

Ratzinger’s concern for the true Europe, on the other hand, was born out of the perspective of the historical time of change for our continent after two cruel world wars and two systems of communism and liberalism fighting each other. A positive symptom of the rebirth of Europe seemed to be the acceptance by the ‘founding fathers’ of European integration of the principle of nation states and the recognition of religion as an indispensable force in individual and social life. The questions of peace, justice, responsibility and reconciliation, to which the Christian faith points, have been revived, at the same time indicating hope for shaping anew the Christian and cultural heritage of Europe. Also in this part of the volume, Joseph Ratzinger proves to be

⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Opera omnia*, vol. 13/1: *Im Gespräch mit der Zeit*, p. 448.

a great prophet who not only sensibly diagnoses reality, but equally accurately outlines the future of relations between faith and politics, the Church and state, the Church and law – always taking into account the priority of faith in one God: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the God of philosophers and scholars.

Perhaps it is this message of Joseph Ratzinger that will reach the leaders of today's Europe and show them anew what constitutes its essence and identity, what is positive and necessary, and what is a mistake and abuse. Europe has been shaped, among other things, by the idea of God and this has proved to be its strength, but today Europe needs to return to those beginnings – to those foundations of Athens, Jerusalem and Rome – to become strong again, not only economically, but above all spiritually. For today two aspects of the phenomenon of Europe are emerging: as an idea and a power of reconciliation which opens itself up to a new model of community of nations and as an aspiration to rule, and as an economic power which diminishes or even destroys the rights of others and their own way of life. "Europe moves between these two poles. It must learn to distinguish its danger from its true greatness: this determines the fact whether Europe becomes a blessing or a curse" (vol. 3/2, p. 559). For Europe and European culture can fall (cf. vol. 3/2, p. 569). But it must be remembered and kept in mind that "the greatness of Europe is based on a wisdom in which reason, beyond all knowledge and skill, does not forget what is greatest for it: to let the eternal be heard, to be an organ for God" (vol. 3/2, p. 574). This is what Joseph Ratzinger reminds the leaders of Europe. He wants, as if to say anew, that "Europe has found in the Christian faith the values on which it is founded and which, beyond the particular history of Europe, constitute the basis of the human dignity of all people" (vol. 3/2, p. 602). But when Europe attempts to step out of its own history and declare itself neutral towards the Christian faith and even towards faith in God, this action leads inevitably to self-destruction. That is why Europe today needs a new self-acceptance in order to recover the best of its heritage and to serve all of humanity with it (cf. vol. 3/2, p. 647).

Benedict XVI tried to remind us of this again in 2012 when he spoke about the problem of Europe's identity. This problem lies in the fact that in Europe we have two souls. One is abstract and ahistorical reason, which wants to rule over everything because it considers itself superior to all cultures. The other is the Christian soul, which opens itself to all that is rational, a soul that has created the courage of reason and the freedom of critical reason, but remains further rooted in the great values of the Christian faith that were at the origin of Europe. What is needed, therefore, is a synthesis of Europe indicated by the Christian soul in ecumenical dialogue and in intercultural dialogue with abstract reason, in order to embark on the path of a new humanism, growing out of the idea of man created in the image and likeness of God.⁵

⁵ Cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *La vera Europa. Identità e missione*, eds P. Azzaro and C. Granados, Siena 2021, p. 259.