

Joseph Ratzinger: Faith and Reason. A Tale of two Texts: a Homily and a suppressed Lecture

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We gather for a most felicitous occasion: to celebrate the publication of a book both excellent and beautiful: *The Theology of Benedict XVI, A Protestant Appreciation*, edited by Tim Perry¹. No less than 15 scholars open for us 15 different vignettes into Joseph Ratzinger's rich theological legacy. This precious collection is dedicated to the memory of an esteemed fellow scholar and faithful Anglican minister, the Reverend Professor Dr. Daniel Westberg (1949-2017) of Nashotah House, Wisconsin who had also been invited to contribute to this volume. Sadly, he had passed away while sailing on a picturesque lake next to Nashotah House. I have had the privilege of personally meeting him twice at Nashotah House. He was a disciple of Our Lord, a serious scholar and someone deeply concerned to keep the crucial connection between the Christian Creed, the ethical message of the New Testament and moral conduct alive².

The rapid ascendance of the MINT³ disciplines and Stanford University's rather prominent professor of literature Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht's recent eulogy on the humanities in general would suggest that faith, along with history, poetry and allied areas are irrevocably fated to irrelevance⁴.

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- 1 T. PERRY (ed.), *The Theology of Benedict XVI. A Protestant Appreciation*, Bellingham 2019, 272 pp.
- 2 This paper was delivered at the occasion of the American Academy of Religion's annual conference in San Diego, California in November 2019 for the *Joseph Ratzinger Society*.
- 3 MINT is an acronym for Mathematics, Internet, Natural sciences and Technology; cfr. STEM.
- 4 A. KABLITZ, *Geisteswissenschaften am Ende? Apokalyptiker und Alimentierte*, in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wissen/geist-soziales/hans-ulrich-gumbrecht-und-die-geisteswissenschaften-16469039.html> (accessed 11/9/2019).

This rather dire forecast notwithstanding, one of the numerous interlocutors of Pope Benedict, the German philosopher of the influential Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas (1929-) just published a two-volume survey of the history of philosophy⁵. Though not a believer himself, he there again restates his firm conviction that the confrontation of Greek rationality with the two Jerusalem-based religions claiming positive revelation as objectively true, serves as the *point d'appui* for the genius of European culture to come about in the first place and for that culture to reflect since in a sustained manner on the relationship between faith and reason as no other civilization had done before. With the author of *Il Principe*, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Habermas believes that an epochal separation of faith and reason begins in the West. Habermas recognizes the cultural relevance of a religious consciousness as expressed in the liturgies of local Christian parishes. But he stops short of accepting either the human being as created in the image and likeness of the triune God (Gen 1:26) or in the incarnation of the second person of the Blessed Trinity (Lk 2:1-20). As a result, he does not countenance the possibility of divine grace expanding or correcting the secular understanding of human freedom and rationality. Logically it then follows, that it must be Habermas' undiminished ambition to promote with yet greater verve the, in his estimation as of yet incomplete Enlightenment project – *sapere aude à la Kant!*

This is where Ratzinger's contributions to the mutually necessary and reciprocally enriching interplay of faith and reason come to bear. He affirms nothing short of a mutual interdependence of both – grounded in the overarching divine Logos' *philanthropia*.

1. A University Homily delivered at the Aftermath of World War II (1946)

However, what are the factors that have given Ratzinger the ability to speak so eloquently to this germane issue? One of them is the Cologne priest and theologian Gottlieb Söhngen (1892-1971). He had been the director of both Ratzinger's dissertation and habilitation at Munich University. One year after Ratzinger had defended his award-winning dissertation on *The House and People of God*⁶ – that will correspond somehow to the tenor for the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution

⁵ J. HABERMAS, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2 vols., Berlin 2019, 1752 pp.

⁶ J. RATZINGER, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, in J. RATZINGER/ BENEDIKT XVI, *Gesammelte Schriften. Die Dissertation und weitere Schriften zur Theologie der Kirchenväter*, Bd. 1, Freiburg i. Br. 2011. No English translation is available.

on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which will thematize the concept «People of God»⁷. Söhngen published a number of his essays in a rather thick tome with the title *Die Einheit der Theologie (The Unity of Theology)*⁸. This title was inspired by the celebrated study by the Tübingen School theologian Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) *The Unity of the Church*⁹.

Under the title «Der Geist des Glaubens und der Geist der Wissenschaft» (The Spirit or Essence of Faith and the Spirit of Scholarship) Söhngen delivered a homily at the aftermath of World War II at the occasion of the solemn opening of the new academic year for the University of Bonn in 1946¹⁰.

Very much in the tradition of St. John Henry Newman (1801-1890), he delivered this homily with a weighty theological content to the teaching faculty and students. There he argues on the assumption that there is a philosophical differentiation (*eine weltanschauliche Unterscheidung*), but also an interior relatedness between the endogenic and exogenic bases for any kind of scholarly work in every academic discipline¹¹.

This homily was delivered in St. Elisabeth Church in Bonn on November 10th, 1946. In the opening he prays «Holy Spirit, Spirit of Truth, enter our hearts and illuminate us with the light of your truth and with the clarity of your light!»¹². He calls down upon the academic congregation God's creative spirit. For Söhngen reminds his audience: «God's spirit hovered over the chaos of the primordial floods»¹³. The homilist consoles his audience, only gradually recovering from the horrors of the Second World War, that the Lord's spirit filled the world then and He continues to keep the universe together and knows of every sound therein. He asks God for the spiritual gifts of scholarship, of reason and of wisdom. «The spiritual countenance of Germany is covered by rubble and many a thought-façade is now revealed as interiorly hollow from its own mad fires»¹⁴, he poetically observes. Having banished Christ and Christian faith from public life for long twelve years, many people in Germany

⁷ Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, esp. 9-17.

⁸ G. SÖHNGEN, *Die Einheit der Theologie. Gesammelte Abhandlungen, Aufsätze, Vorträge*, München 1952.

⁹ J. A. MÖHLER, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism*, Washington 1996. Originally: *Die Einheit in der Kirche: oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, Tübingen 1825.

¹⁰ In SÖHNGEN, *Die Einheit der Theologie*, 393-404; there: «Der Geist des Glaubens und der Geist der Wissenschaft (eine Universitätspredigt)».

¹¹ *Ibid.*, v.

¹² *Ibid.*, 395. As is fitting for homilies, no references are listed here, but can be found in *ibid.*, 24-62.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 396.

now call for a rebirth of «the German soul» from the thoughts and resources of Christianity. A similar call had been expressed by Catholic academicians already at the aftermath of World War I, but then it had gone terribly unheeded.

Solipsistically, in the days of the Third Reich human reason had deemed itself autarkic. The necessary and salutary recovery of the underlying, critical nexus between faith and scholarship must now not lead to a naïve overreaction to the other extreme, he warns, conflating Christian faith and reason in favor of the former. «Insofar as it intends remaining academic, scholarship must be pursued on its own foundations and on the basis of its own powers» Söhngen cautions his audience¹⁵. Every discipline operates on its own, «pure and objective» assumptions resulting from its specific object. Certainly all sciences share in common principles, such as the principle of contradiction and the principle of sufficient cause. In fact, such exogenetic presuppositions are constitutive for every discipline. There is an overarching rationality to which every discipline naturally adheres to. He admits that this also applies to theology. As regards theology, its inherent object is lived Christian faith. This is theology's very own endogenous principle. It is the task of the, then still new academic discipline of fundamental theology to secure theology's scientific and reasonable dimensions. Worldviews – nota bene not ideologies – can never replace or complement a discipline's principles. They can, however, serve as «regulative ideas» – a term he borrows from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)¹⁶. Thus, quite naturally, the scholar brings to bear his dispositions and orientations in this qualified sense. Söhngen emphasizes that «it belongs to the inalienable legacy of occidental academics, that scholarship asserts vis-à-vis any worldview the right... to adjudicate its scientific validity»¹⁷.

The term *Weltanschauung* includes both religions and worldviews. National-socialism is categorized as an unscientific worldview since it did not «dare» confront scientific scrutiny. Untethered from an awareness of and reverence for the numinous, it succumbed to the temptation of being a mere ideology. Therefore, invariably it had to resort to violence in order to assert itself vis-à-vis the overarching rationality of being.

It holds: the borders between faith and scholarship must be clearly defined and respected by both religion and the sciences. Nevertheless, a Christian scholar is mindful of the epistemic singularity and novelty of Christianity. This statement he further develops.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁶ I. KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), New York 1965, A 3/b 7.

¹⁷ SÖHNGEN, *Die Einheit der Theologie*, 400. «Und es gehört zum unveräußerlichen Erbgut abendländischer Wissenschaft, daß die Wissenschaft gegenüber aller Weltanschauung einen Anspruch erhebt, und zwar den Anspruch, jede Weltanschauung auf ihre wissenschaftliche Gültigkeit hin zu beurteilen».

Söhngen underscores that when the terms of Greek philosophy such «*logos* or word, *gnosis* or science, *sophia* or wisdom, *nous* or reason, *pneuma* or spirit, *aletheia* or truth, *photismos* or illumination» are used by Paul or John, Christianity substantially enlarges and to a degree transforms their content from how Plato and Aristotle had employed them centuries earlier¹⁸. There is a major difference, but nevertheless also a profound relatedness between the *logos* of academia and the *Logos* of Christian revelation.

As so well expanded upon by Thomas Aquinas, with the incarnation as sure basis, theology proceeds from faith, while the secular sciences proceed from their own respective bases and powers using natural reasoning and sense experience. Methodological independence is essential for all sciences vis-à-vis any worldview – be it philosophical or religious – in order to have the achievements or insights of a particular discipline develop and flourish.

The exhilarating experience of «*eine innere Freiheit der Seele*», of «an interior freedom of the soul» comes about in every discovery – no matter what discipline¹⁹. This phenomenon signals a certain congeniality between the Creator, the created order and the human mind. Ultimately the indwelling intentionality of this Platonic understanding of scientific inquiry is congruent with Christian faith. There is no contradiction between the eternal *Logos* and the created *logoi*. Succinctly he informs his congregation:

«The inner norm of our knowledge and research remains the *Logos* or the Truth; for the *Logos* is the truth, hidden in the things as their *Gestalt* (form) and order and it becomes visible to the [human] spirit (intellect) discovering [something]. But *eros* [a capability common to all human beings] opens the gate to the *Logos*; and *eros* is this particular *seelische Aufschwung* (uplift of the soul), that occurs through ethical purification and intellectual self-liberation of the human being»²⁰.

This statement he qualifies by pointing out that Christian *agape* is radically different from Plato's understanding of *eros*. The truth Plato had inchoately sought becomes tangible in the divine-human *Logos*. The reality Plato describes, is not idiosyncratic or specific to the Greek culture alone, but a universal constitution of every human being *qua homo*. The Christian truth as captured in the term *Logos*, likewise makes free and veracious, though in a qualitatively different manner. When *pistis* and *agape* are combined in Christian existence a fresh interiority and a deeper sense of authentic veracity are gained. Thus, a certain and necessary congruence between the secular discipline of philosophy and the supernatural discipline of theology is stated.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 402.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Christian freedom is granted in the strength of the gospel – it is not achieved by philosophical inquiry alone, but one is prepared towards this freedom by philosophy's disposition towards an all-encompassing truth not of its own making.

As Plato had so well done as a pagan, so also Augustine (354-430) and Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) point to the ethical preparation required for insight into sublime truth to come about. «Such faith must purify our spirit and strengthen it, so that it is healthy and strong for beholding truth»²¹. Along with Augustine and Anselm, Söhngen believes such virtue-oriented purification must occur in every academic discipline, be it a natural science or one of the humanities – not only in theology.

The «pathology» reason devolves into, when severed from faith (Ratzinger), as manifested during the Third Reich, is for Söhngen reason to call upon his congregation to renew the sciences from Christian faith, following the thoughts of Anselm. A Christian is acutely mindful that no contingent human truth can be the final word on a matter. The Christian believer will always strive to enable truth in its comprehensive meaning to come to bear, rather than permit the self-enamored Nietzschean «will to power»²² to govern the search for truth, let alone to define truth – as had happened during the reign of the benighted Third Reich. Then indeed reason on its own can exercise its faculties without facing encumbrance or perversion. On the contrary, then it will contribute to civility in public discourse. Faith protects human reason from absolutizing itself and thereby degenerating into a violent ideology.

Such healthy correlation between faith and reason is an important *conditio sine qua non* for preventing a repetition of a dehumanizing dictatorship of an ideology. A human being bound to the divine Word will not send people of different races or nationalities «into the febrile barrack of a *völkische Wissenschaft* (of a nationalistic science)»²³, but rather discover and honor the truth common to all people and peoples and found in every human person.

In closing, he reminds the still traumatized faculty and student body that one must call down ever again the Holy Spirit. One can only give the sciences their due fully if one grants God and His grace space in one's thought and existence.

2. A Lecture never delivered (2008)

There exist speeches and lectures deeply etched in our collective memory, such as Marc Antony's fictitious oration on Julius Caesar's dead body in Shakespeare's play

²¹ *Ibid.*, 403.

²² Cfr. F. NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, London 2017.

²³ SÖHNGEN, *Die Einheit der Theologie*, 404.

*Julius Caesar*²⁴ or Alexander Solzhenitsyn's acceptance speech of the literary Nobel Prize (1970)²⁵ he had been deprived from delivering in person.

Perhaps Pope Benedict XVI's lecture at the Roman university La Sapienza will one day be counted among the great speeches. He should have delivered this lecture on January 17, 2008, but protests by students and faculty alike had prevented Benedict XVI from holding it. The university had been founded in 1303 by Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303). After the reunification of Italy it had become a public university, with a secular mindset part of its genetic code ever since.

The title of Benedict XVI's lecture had been «The Truth makes us good and Goodness is God». He begins by affirming the need of institutions of higher learning to be independent «from political and ecclesiastical authorities...»²⁶. Then he delineates the nature of the episcopal office. The bishop as shepherd is «the one who cares for [t]his community; he is the one who keeps it united on the way towards God»²⁷. This path is Jesus Christ. Following this Christocentric introduction, he then asks the question as regards the nature of reason. He reminds his academic listeners that the noted liberal American moral and political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002) believed religious doctrines have a significant role to play as «‘non-public’ reason»²⁸. Rawls held that religious doctrines are the outgrowth of a well-developed rational tradition, just as any academic discipline, but paradoxically denied them any relevance in public discourse. Thus, Benedict sees also Rawls defending a form of religious rationality that is historically grown. While Benedict admits there is something like «a-historical rationality», he cautions «– the wisdom of the great religious traditions – should be valued as a heritage that cannot be cast with impunity into the dustbin of the history of ideas»²⁹.

It is precisely as representative of such historical reason that the pontiff addresses the members of La Sapienza University. He points out that already Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro* searched for a God beyond myth. In the example of Socrates he makes out the quintessential human orientation towards «the true God, the God who is

²⁴ Accessed 20/11/2019: <https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=juliuscaesar>.

²⁵ Accessed 20/11/2019: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1970/solzhenitsyn/lecture/>.

²⁶ *Lecture by the Holy Father Benedict XVI at the University of Rome «La Sapienza»*, 2. Accessed 13/11/2019: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080117_la-sapienza.html. Nota bene this title is not mentioned on the Vatican website. Cfr. S. AHRENS, *Die Rede vom 17. Januar fällt aus*, accessed 13/11/2019: <https://www.die-tagespost.de/gesellschaft/feuilleton/Die-Rede-vom-17-Januar-faellt-aus;art310.184974>.

²⁷ *Lecture by the Holy Father Benedict XVI at the University of Rome «La Sapienza»*, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

creative Reason, God who is Reason-Love»³⁰. The universal, indwelling entelechy of the human mind that points to and moves towards the Christian faith – no matter what the person's point of departure may be. This is the mysterious, ineluctable facticity of human existence. This universal habitus of the human soul the Greek mind spells out for humankind. Such rational sobriety is achieved through intellectual discipline. This yearning for *theoria*, finds its corresponding concretion in Augustine's distinction between *scientia* (knowledge) and *tristitia* (sadness). Thereby, the African Church Father argues that any kind of rationality closed unto itself will ultimately grow malcontent and sad. The world calls for a comprehensive reason, dare one say logosity.

In God's incarnation God is revealed as both true and good – and indeed as Goodness itself. It is this reality that ennobles every form of human existence beyond compare. In the university, the pontiff continues, human rationality is cultivated and thus also healing occurs, as human beings gradually move away from myth and magic. It is in this open-ended ambience, which does not absolutize finite reason, that finds theory and praxis related to one another. Here the nature of justice and freedom are explored and the conditions for good behavior are discussed. It is in such a unique forum, that Jürgen Habermas for instance, Ratzinger's interlocutor of 2004 sees «a process of argumentation sensitive to the truth (*wahrheitssensibles Argumentationsverfahren*)»³¹ lived that is beneficial to the development of a nation's constitution and for social well-being in general. It is a truth that is not *a priori* defined, but somehow placed on a higher pedestal than particular interests, that allows political discourse to be mindful and respectful of all members of the body politic.

Pilate asks the ageless question «What is truth? And how can it be recognized?» (cfr. John 18:38) without *ab initio* delimiting it. Rawls speaks of «public reason» and thereby introduces a supposed bifurcation of reason that stands in glaring opposition to the medieval university's understanding of truth. All faculties at that time honored a truth not of their own making and promoted the public search for it. For this «reason» (pun intended) theology had then been considered the indispensable (first) discipline – for the well-being of the whole academic enterprise. In fact, «Theology and philosophy ... [are] a strange pair of twins, in which neither of the two can be totally separated from the other, and yet each must preserve its own task and its own identity»³². While in Platonic thought there existed an intimate relation between philosophy and religion, the Church Fathers will emphasize a distance between Christian faith and Neo-Platonic philosophy by defining the Christian statement as «true

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³² *Ibid.*

philosophy». They had insisted that this novel faith is *the fulfillment par excellence* of any philosophical search for truth.

The pope then relates the different context of the medieval universities, when pagan thought had receded into distant memory. This was the opportunity to restate the necessary «specific responsibility of reason, which is not absorbed by faith»³³. Enlarged by Jewish and Arab philosophers, the inalienable right of philosophy to be «an autonomous partner of theology and the faith» was then rediscovered. Pope Benedict summarizes this new valorization:

«Saint Thomas's idea concerning the relationship between philosophy and theology could be expressed using the formula that the Council of Chalcedon adopted for Christology: philosophy and theology must be interrelated “without confusion and without separation”. “Without confusion” means that each of the two must preserve its own identity. Philosophy must truly remain a quest conducted by reason with freedom and responsibility; it must recognize its limits and likewise its greatness and immensity»³⁴.

In the dogmatic definition of Jesus Christ at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Benedict XVI makes out an axiom applicable to the relationship between faith and reason: the two are distinct, i.e. «without confusion» and «without separation», related and indebted to one another in such a way that both enable reciprocal flourishing. There is no gainsaying, he observes, that in history reason often corrected some statements made by theologians or «ecclesiastical authorities». But Rawls' attempt to isolate or privatize religious rationality is unrealistic. As Christian faith is not self-standing, but grounded in created human rationality, religious doctrine «is a purifying force for reason»³⁵. The implication is that all rationality finds its ultimate origin in the *Logos*, in Jesus Christ.

The modesty created, though engraced Christian rationality exercises vis-a-vis the Christ mystery, should be an invitation for secular rationality likewise not to lose sight of the fact that it cannot absolutize itself, but must remain mindful of its own contingent range and critical of its competence as well. This becomes a special challenge in an age of a veritable inflation of information, which offers the prospect of immense power «available to humanity» unprecedented in history. Such exponential growth in knowledge may distract from the indispensable task to restate for every age afresh the required self-limitation of reason. Indirectly reminding one of Söhngen's words of 1946, Ratzinger cautions his addressees that reason bereft of an outside corrective, can turn awfully totalitarian – as had occurred when Italy had been ruled by fascism

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

(1922-1943). Left to its own devices, reason «dwindles» to «positivism» while faith, reduced to piety, becomes «private».

In our age and time, Pope Benedict considers the following to be the challenge:

«Yet if reason, out of concern for its alleged purity, becomes deaf to the great message that comes to it from Christian faith and wisdom, then it withers like a tree whose roots can no longer reach the waters that give it life. It loses the courage for truth and thus becomes not greater but smaller. Applied to our European culture, this means: if our culture seeks only to build itself on the basis of the circle of its own argumentation, on what convinces it at the time, and if – anxious to preserve its secularism – it detaches itself from its life-giving roots, then it will not become more reasonable or purer, but will fall apart and disintegrate»³⁶.

As Vicar of Christ, of the Logos on earth, it is the noble task of a pope to keep the tension between faith and reason alive.

«Over and above his ministry as Shepherd of the Church, and on the basis of the intrinsic nature of this pastoral ministry, it is the Pope's task to safeguard sensibility to the truth; to invite reason to set out ever anew in search of what is true and good, in search of God; to urge reason, in the course of this search, to discern the illuminating lights that have emerged during the history of the Christian faith, and thus to recognize Jesus Christ as the Light that illuminates history and helps us find the path towards the future»³⁷.

3. A Constancy grounded in the organic Presence of the Logos in the Church

Benedict does not mention the German poet and playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), but one is inevitably reminded of the dissatisfied professor Faust in Goethe's masterpiece of the same name. While walking with a research assistant and a poodle on Heidelberg's *Philosophenweg* along the Neckar River in the first act, Faust is heavy-hearted for he cannot make a connection between his soul's search for knowledge and happiness. He had earned four doctoral hats and yet remains completely unfulfilled. Life offers nothing. He therefore resolves to commit suicide. Mysteriously to Faust, only the bells ringing at that moment on Easter Sunday keep him from following through. Virtually every German knows this episode and its charming location. When relating the interwovenness of the proprium of Christianity and that common to humankind, Söhngen does ponder Goethe's understanding of Christianity³⁸.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ SÖHNGEN, *Die Einheit der Theologie*, 372-392.

The Catholic mind is now well-equipped to address the connection between faith and reason, as it successfully navigated between the extremes of fideism (Augustin Bonnetty) and rationalism (Anselm Günther) in the 19th century, culminating in the dogmatic constitution on faith *Dei Filius* at Vatican I³⁹.

The tenor of Pope Benedict's lecture is at the same time disarmingly humble and sovereign; indeed, it is resolutely self-confident and prophetic. Pope Benedict demonstrates the inner rational relatedness of both human rationality and supernatural faith. Much like his professor Gottlieb Söhngen in his 1946 homily at the opening of the academic year at Bonn University, Pope Benedict XVI warns presciently again 62 years later the scholars and students, this time gathered at La Sapienza University in 2008 that a reason not mindful of faith as its necessary critical court of discernment can turn inhumane. The wholly unjustified protests against the pope is a telling indication of secular reason's febrile condition. The contemporary unchecked ascendancy of the MINT disciplines is most worrisome.

³⁹ H. DENZINGER, *Enchiridion symbolorum et definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. P. Hünermann, San Francisco 2012⁴³, 3000-3045.

Abstract

Faith and reason are two irreducible poles of the human mind. This essay attempts to relate two significant but as of yet little noticed texts to one another in the hope of thereby shedding light on 1. the Catholic correlation of faith and reason, and 2. the intellectual legacy of the priest and professor of fundamental theology at Munich University Gottlieb Söhngen (1892-1971) had bequeathed on his illustrious doctoral student Joseph Ratzinger (1927-). Söhngen's text is a homily he had delivered in the immediate aftermath of World War II in 1946 in front the professors and students of Bonn University at the inauguration of the academic year 1946/7. Many years later, Pope Benedict XVI had been scheduled in 2008 to deliver a lecture on this crucial issue at *La Sapienza* University, Rome. The dialogue between these two texts reveals 1. Ratzinger's debt to Söhngen, and 2. the remarkable consistency and coherence of Catholic thought on this topic throughout the centuries.

Riassunto

Fede e ragione sono i due poli irriducibili della mente umana. Questo articolo cerca di mettere in relazione due testi significativi ma ancora poco noti, nell'intento di far luce anzitutto sulla correlazione tra fede e ragione all'interno della fede cattolica e poi sull'eredità intellettuale che il sacerdote e professore di teologia fondamentale all'Università di Monaco Gottlieb Söhngen (1892-1971) aveva lasciato al suo illustre dottorando Joseph Ratzinger (1927-). Il testo di Söhngen è un'omelia pronunciata nell'immediato dopoguerra, precisamente nel 1946, davanti ai professori e agli studenti dell'Università di Bonn in occasione dell'inaugurazione dell'anno accademico 1946/47. Molti anni dopo, nel 2008, si sarebbe programmato che papa Benedetto XVI tenesse una conferenza su questo tema cruciale all'Università La Sapienza di Roma. Il confronto tra questi due testi rivela, da una parte, il debito di Ratzinger nei riguardi di Söhngen e, dall'altra, la notevole consistenza e coerenza del pensiero cattolico su questo argomento nel corso dei secoli..