



Why is it that you like the theological writing of Dr Joseph Ratzinger, aka Pope Benedict XVI, and have bought all of his currently available books for the Parish Library? Not only is he not an Anglican theologian, but for years he was head of the Vatican's autocratic, repressive, and reactionary theology enforcement office—the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in the past known as the Holy Office and in the longer past the Roman Inquisition—and is now head of the Roman Catholic Church, not ours.

Forty years ago when I was a Postulant for Holy Orders and a student at The General Theological Seminary (the Episcopal Church's national seminary in New York City... and yes, the "T" is capitalized), the Dean, the Very Rev. Samuel Wylie (later Bishop of Michigan's Upper Peninsula) and the Professor of Apologetics (explaining the Faith to the lay world), the Rev. Robert Terwilliger, Ph.D. (later Suffragan Bishop of Dallas) traveled quite frequently to Europe where they maintained close personal contact with Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops (including the Roman Pontiff) and prominent theologians in those heady years immediately following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Every summer Father Wylie took a group of seminarians to Europe to meet in England with the Most Rev. Michael Ramsey, the renowned 20th century Anglican theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury and Father (later Bishop) Michael Marshall, a cutting-edge London Anglo-Catholic parish priest. On the continent there were meetings with Frère Roger Schultz, founder and Prior of the Taizé Community and a number of the principal figures of Vatican II, including Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Willebrands of the Vatican then-Secretariat for Christian Unity, Cardinal Suenens, Primate of Belgium, and Cardinal Marty, Primate of France.

As a part of the required introductory Apologetics course all seminarians had to read the Rev. Dr Joseph Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*; and Father Terwilliger, quite prophetically, said that this brilliant, progressive, cutting-edge, young German theology professor, who had been a *peritus* (official expert consultant) at the Second Vatican Council, was someone whose work all Anglican clergy should follow and whose books they should read as they were published throughout the coming years.

My seminary class was taught Dogmatic Theology by the Rev. John Macquarrie, Ph.D., generally regarded as the leading Anglican theologian of the second half of the 20th century. In addition, the Very Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, one of the most distinguished 20th century Eastern Orthodox theologians and Dean of St Vladimir's O.C.A. Seminary, taught Liturgical Theology. Thus, during my seminary years (1969-1972) we were immersed in the teaching of the very best contemporary Catholic theologians in Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy world-wide, a pantheon that included Professor Joseph Ratzinger.

Like the late Dr John Macquarrie, Dr Joseph Ratzinger has a superb gift for presenting clearly and reasonably the fundamental tenets of Catholic theology, which are held in common by all Catholics, in a way that speaks persuasively to Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, and Old Catholics alike.

Anglicans especially can appreciate Dr Ratzinger's theology because it is rooted in those elements that are so important in the Anglican/Benedictine tradition: the Patristic (Early Christian) Church and its theology; the liturgy and Liturgical

Theology; viewing the Church basically “through the lens of history”; a Eucharistic ecclesiology (understanding the Church using the Eucharist as a paradigm); the importance of Catholic culture; and a deep pastoral sense (as “a warm, soft-spoken pastor” who listens very well).

In 1981 Pope John Paul II appointed Joseph Ratzinger to be Prefect (head) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican’s “theology department” which is responsible for ensuring (in my own opinion, quite necessarily) in a very complex Church with over one billion members that the many thousands of official spokespersons accurately present the Church’s positions. This was a job which then-Cardinal Ratzinger neither sought nor wanted, but obediently accepted, though more than once through the years of John Paul II’s pontificate from which he asked to be relieved.

This was clearly a politically astute appointment because not only was the compassionate Dr Ratzinger a brilliant theologian, but he had been one of the open, generous, and progressive voices at the Second Vatican Council, the very opposite of a common stereotype of CDF. As one Vatican “insider” told me, “His job was to be ‘bad cop’ to John Paul’s ‘good cop,’ to say the things John Paul wanted said but didn’t want to have to take the heat for. Only now [that he is Pope] are you seeing the real Joseph Ratzinger, and you will notice that his first encyclical was on love and his second was on hope.”

The following are excerpts from *10 Things Pope Benedict XVI Wants You to Know*, John L. Allen, Jr’s booklet that succinctly summarizes Dr Joseph Ratzinger’s theology.

1. **God Is Love**

Strip everything else away, and the core of the Christian message is that God is love. The ultimate reality in the universe, the one which created it and sustains it, is love. In faith, we call that personal love God. Since that’s the point upon which everything else in Christianity pivots, it’s no surprise that Pope Benedict chose to title his very first encyclical, the most important form of papal teaching, *Deus Caritas Est*—precisely, “God Is Love.”

2. **Jesus Is Lord**

...Benedict wants to assure his readers that the gospels are reliable witnesses to Jesus. They teach us that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same figure: the Living Son of God, made flesh. Placing Christ at the center is Benedict’s *modus operandi* and proper “Christology,” meaning teaching about Christ, is the dominant doctrinal concern of his papacy.

3. **Truth and Freedom Are Two Sides of the Same Coin**

If one were looking for a single word to sum up Benedict XVI’s message to the men and women of his time, it might well be “truth.” His motto as a bishop is *Cooperatores veritatis*: ‘coworkers of the truth.’ ...in April 2005, then-Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger memorably defined the chief challenge facing the [Western] Catholic Church as a “dictatorship of relativism.” By that, he meant the way in which denial of objective truth—of truths independent of time and culture, binding everywhere and for everyone—has become conventional wisdom.

Benedict realizes that many people unconsciously endorse this “dictatorship of relativism” because they want to be free, meaning that they don’t want to live on the basis of someone else’s truths. But Benedict believes that such a desire reflects a flawed understanding of what freedom entails. Freedom, he believes,

is not the absence of restraint on our behavior, but rather the capacity to become the kind of person God calls us to be. That doesn't mean doing whatever we want; it means doing what we should. ... Truth and freedom are thus not opposed, but interdependent.

4. **Faith and Reason Need One Another**

...God is *Logos*, creative reason itself. Thus, "not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature." Christianity presupposes the rationality of God, and on the basis of that conviction Christianity itself must be reasonable. Shutting down the exercise of human reason, turning Christianity into a form of religious fundamentalism, would be inconsistent with the rational character of God himself. ... Reason without faith, [Benedict] believes, becomes skepticism, cynicism, and ultimately nihilism, leading to despair. Faith without reason, on the other hand, becomes fundamentalism, extremism, and sometimes violence.

5. **The Eucharist Is the Heart of the Christian Life**

"To use an image well known to us today, [consecrating the Eucharist] is like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being—the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death. Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world. All other changes remain superficial and cannot save." Taken seriously, Benedict argues, the Eucharist can change the world—indeed, it's the only thing that can.

6. **Christianity Is a Positive Message**

One of the most striking aspects of Benedict XVI's papacy has been how determined he is to phrase his message in a positive key. [During a visit to Spain in 2006] many people expected fire and brimstone from the pope. Instead he was doggedly positive, concentrating on the Christian fundamentals, never directly engaging any of the issues that have divided Church and state. "Christianity, Catholicism," he has said, "isn't a collection of prohibitions: it's a positive option. It's very important that we look at it again because this idea has almost completely disappeared today. We've heard so much about what is not allowed that now it's time to say: we have a positive idea to offer...."

During his May 2007 trip to Brazil, Benedict XVI put the same point a different way when he said: "The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by 'attraction': just as Christ 'draws all to himself' by the power of his love, culminating in the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Church fulfils her mission to the extent that, in union with Christ, she accomplishes every one of her works in spiritual and practical imitation of the love of her Lord." In other words, the pope wants Christians to let the "good news" of their faith shine through their own lives, so that its inner beauty can again become clear in a world accustomed to thinking of Christianity as little more than a fussy legal system. That does not make the law less important or valid, but Benedict realizes that one doesn't stir hearts with law, but with love.

7. **The Church Forms Consciences but Stays Out of Politics**

Over the course of his career as a theologian and a Church official, Benedict XVI has resisted any attempt to turn Christianity into a political party. That doesn't mean, however, that faith lacks consequences for politics. "Justice," he has written, "is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics." According to the moral vision of Benedict XVI, a Christian must work toward a just social order, which among other things implies a special concern for the poor. ...

At the same time, Benedict is clear that the role of the Church is to hold up moral values, not to provide a specific political blueprint for translating those values into political choices. “If the church were to start transforming herself into a directly political subject, she would do less, not more, for the poor and for justice,” the pope said during his trip to Brazil, “because she would lose her independence and her moral authority, identifying herself with a single political path and with debatable partisan positions. ... Only by remaining independent can she teach the great criteria and inalienable values, guide consciences, and offer a life choice that goes beyond the political sphere.”

8. The Importance of Catholic Identity

...the overall goal of Benedict’s papacy is to defend authentic Christian identity [culture] in a world marked by religious relativism. ... In the West today, religion is often seen as a purely private matter, and religious people feel pressure to either downplay or abandon those aspects of their faith that don’t “fit” with the values of enlightened modern culture. ... The time has come, Benedict believes, to recover a strong sense of what makes Catholics different.

Benedict XVI comes out of the *Communio* school in Catholic theology, associated above all with the great twentieth-century Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Its key figures accent the need for the Church to speak its own language, premised on the conviction that Christianity is itself a culture, often at odds with the prevailing worldview of modernity. In that light, Pope Benedict is less immediately concerned with numbers, such as Mass attendance or turnout at papal events, than with fostering a deep sense of Catholic distinctiveness, however few those who embrace such a spirit may be. “Today more than ever,” he has said, “the Christian must be aware that he is in opposition to everything that appears good, obvious, and logical to the ‘spirit of the world,’ as the New Testament calls it. Among the most urgent tasks facing Christians is that of regaining the capacity of non-conformism, i.e. the capacity to oppose many developments of the surrounding culture.” That doesn’t mean, of course, that Benedict wants Christians to cut themselves off from the world, retreating into a Catholic ghetto. Rather, he wants them to be *in* the world but not *of* it—to find, as he once memorably put it, “that none-too-easy balance between a proper incarnation in history, and the indispensable tension toward eternity.”

9. Christ and the Church Are Inseparable

Any attempt to say “yes” to Jesus but “no” to the Church, Benedict says, ultimately falls apart, because Jesus’ message was intended precisely “to gather and to save” a people, which is the Church. Benedict is well aware that for many contemporary men and women, Jesus of Nazareth remains a fascinating figure, but they often struggle with aspects of institutional religion. The natural temptation, therefore, is to opt for Jesus without the “intermediary” of the Church. In the end, however, one cannot truly love Jesus or follow his teachings, Benedict asserts, without taking one’s place in the family of faith that Jesus called into being. Being part of that family comes with no guarantees of perfect contentment; like any family, the Church has its ups and downs, its moments of disappointment and heartache. But just as one does not walk away from a family when things get rough, similarly a disciple of Jesus does not walk away from his or her Church. ... “Yes to Jesus *means* Yes to the Church.”

10. The Virtue of Patience

Probably without being conscious of it, Pope Benedict XVI is teaching the world something through his own behavior. He is exceedingly humble and gentle, which stands in stark contrast to the bluster and braggadocio often associated with global titans in the worlds of politics, finance, and culture. He is living proof that one does not have to be an exhibitionist to lead and to inspire. Benedict is a man of deep faith, which means he realizes that, ultimately, the vicissitudes of the Church and of the world are in God’s hands, not his. There’s a serenity about him, a lack of what the Germans call *angst*, rooted in his belief

that the final act of the story in which all of us are involved has already been written, and it ends well. ... He understands better than most the complexities of [the Church's] problems, both intellectually and pastorally, and he also grasps the importance of thinking carefully before taking steps that may have unforeseen consequences. In an impatient world, Benedict XVI is a very patient man.

Father Thomas Rausch, SJ has written in his *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* that in a world deeply divided by a vicious culture war between those who look to traditional sources of authority for guidance and those who ultimately reject any authority external to themselves, Benedict XVI's "mission is to keep the Church faithful to the tradition it has received from the Apostles." Thus he is an important theologian and teacher for all Anglicans everywhere.