

Edward Cardinal Egan Lecture 2017

Union League Club, New York City,
April 29, 2017

— Introduction —
Romanus Cessario, O.P.,
Chairman, MAGNIFICAT FOUNDATION

On behalf of the MAGNIFICAT FOUNDATION, I welcome you to the 5th *Edward Cardinal Egan Lecture*. The MAGNIFICAT FOUNDATION takes its inspiration from the worship aid that is familiar to many of you. Like it, the FOUNDATION seeks to accomplish three objectives under the general heading of the evangelization of peoples.

1. *Intellectual Formation*

Up to now, the *Egan Lecture Series* has served this goal. This fall we will launch a new initiative also named in honor of the late Archbishop of New York, Edward Cardinal Egan. The *Egan Forum* will address in symposium, not lecture, format important issues that affect Catholic life. The first *Forum*, to be held in September, will honor the late cardinal's support of Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of New York.

2. *Faith and Sacramental Formation*

Our highly esteemed *Magnificat Days* afford the opportunity to discover the beauty of Catholic prayer and sacramental practice within the context of a day-long retreat program that includes well-known speakers. In 2018, we'll hold the next *Magnificat Day* in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York.

3. *Liturgical Formation*

The FOUNDATION aids projects that include liturgical actions, such as the communal praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic adoration and processions, and the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Our next project unfolds within the context of the major gathering of Church leaders to be held in Orlando, Florida, in July 2017.

To accomplish these good works, the MAGNIFICAT FOUNDATION requires the financial assistance of as many generous donors as possible. Small and large donations are welcome and tax deductible, as indicated on the insert you received in your welcome bag.

The 5th Edward Cardinal Egan Lecturer requires little introduction. George Weigel occupies a place in the minds of everyone interested in the progress of the Catholic Church throughout the centuries. The Distinguished Senior Fellow and holder of the William E. Simon Chair in Catholic Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center has devoted his professional life to the work of evangelization through media. His passionate involvement in the affairs of both Church and world has brought him into contact with political and cultural leaders as well as those who govern the Church.

Fortunately, his Wikipedia page provides a full bibliography as well as an account of his biography. It remains for me, then, to recall only the debt of gratitude that the Catholic world owes to Mr. Weigel for his providing us with the standard biography of Pope Saint John Paul II.

Both MAGNIFICAT and the MAGNIFICAT FOUNDATION owe their existence to the dedication of lay Catholics. I can think of no Catholic layman whom the FOUNDATION could better welcome for its first meeting at the Union League Club than tonight's speaker, Mr. George Weigel.

IRONIES IN THE FIRE:

Catholicism and Modernity



By George Weigel



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Those of you of a certain age will remember the most famous segment on the *Smothers Brothers* television show: Mason Williams' instrumental masterpiece "Classical Gas," during which some 2,500 works of art flashed on the screen in three minutes. That's a rough analogy to what I shall offer you this evening: a "Classical Gas" rapid re-reading of modern Catholic history. However rapid, though, I hope these remarks shed some light, not only on our Catholic past, but on our 21st-century Catholic situation.

In considering how the Catholic Church has wrestled over the past two centuries with the challenges posed by modernity and its principal social expression, pluralism—aptly described by Peter Berger as "the coexistence of different worldviews and value systems within the same society"—it will be helpful at the beginning to clarify some terms.

By "Catholic Church," I mean here the teaching authority of Catholicism as embodied in the Bishop of Rome as universal pastor of the Church—and, at one significant moment, the bishops of the Church gathered in ecumenical council with and under the Bishop of Rome. This by no means exhausts what "the Catholic Church" means. But given the unique authority structure of Catholicism, this definition provides a manageable focus for considering the question of Catholicism and modernity.

By "modernity," I mean societies characterized by the decline of aristocracy (inherited power and wealth); the desacralization of power by the sharp differentiation of religious and political authority,

and the dominance of the latter in the public sphere; social mobility combined with urbanization and mass education; popular participation in governance; the rationalization and bureaucratization of virtually every aspect of life; great improvements in nutrition and medicine, with a concomitant rise in life expectancy; and the vast expansion of the leisure time available to everyone—societies in which the scientific method provides the primary paradigm for human knowledge, neither faith nor religious "knowledge" is taken for granted, and tensions exist, to one degree or another, between believers (individually and corporately) and the ambient public culture.

The Catholic Church's wrestling with the profound changes through which humanity has passed since the rise of the scientific method, the triumph of the Industrial Revolution, and the overthrow of traditional political orders has evolved over time. Although the story is more complex than typically rendered by historians with a secularist cast of mind, it is not too great an exaggeration to suggest that Catholicism-and-modernity began with a papal preview of Nancy Reagan's anti-drug campaign: "Just say 'No.'" This was followed by a period of exploration and a search for a reasonable accommodation with modernity, which caused considerable internal ecclesiastical quarreling (and elbow-throwing) before the accommodationist forces prevailed; their triumph reached a high-water mark at the Second Vatican Council, whose Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) not only embraced modernity but celebrated crucial aspects of it. Then, as modernity gave way to post-modernity, two popes of genius began to articulate a deep critique of modernity from within, in striking contrast to the "Just say 'No'" critique from without. Now, as the Church enters more deeply into its third millennium, Catholicism has squarely faced the fact that, however its relationship to post-modernity and the contest of worldviews within it evolves, the Catholic future depends on proclamation and evangelization—that is, the Church's future, like religious conviction itself, can no longer be a taken-for-granted thing, but has to be effected.

Let me explore each of these phases in turn, albeit with far more brevity and concision than the complexities of the historical record would warrant in a more extended study.

I. GREGORY XVI AND PIUS IX: CATHOLICISM AGAINST MODERNITY

The problem of Catholicism and modernity can be subdivided along several lines of analysis: the Church's relationship to the passing of the traditional political order and the rise of new forms of government; the Church's relationship to the passing of the traditional cultural order and the displacement of metaphysics at the center of the Western intellectual project; and the Church's relationship to the passing of traditional society and the rise of new forms of community, including new forms of economic life. But however we subdivide the question, the overall problem of Catholicism and modernity in the 19th century was inextricably bound up with the fact that the pope was the sovereign head of a Class C European power: the pope ruled the Papal States, which at various moments meant that the pope was politically sovereign over as much as one-third of the Italian peninsula. Cultural and intellectual modernity certainly challenged the then-regnant forms of Catholic intellectual life; social modernity, in the form of the "social question" posed by the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of an urban proletariat, eventually compelled an entirely new Catholic appraisal of modern economic life and its impacts on society. But it was the challenge of political modernity that was the immediate and urgent question for Pope Gregory XVI (1832–1846) and Pope Pius IX (1846–78), because political modernity threatened the very existence of the papacy as they understood it—and by threatening the papacy as they understood it, political modernity threatened the Catholic Church as they understood it.

The Holy See—the embodiment of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome as universal pastor of the Catholic Church—had been recognized for centuries as having juridical, and thus diplomatic, personality; the Holy See exchanged embassies and other forms of diplomatic representation with other sovereign actors long before the modern state existed. As subsequent history proved, the Holy See could exercise its unique form of sovereignty—and thus the pope could maintain his essential independence from all earthly sovereignties—from a tiny parcel of land. Yet that was not how Gregory XVI and Pius IX saw things. The origin of the Papal States in the Donation of Pepin, the ratification of that donation by Charlemagne, and the complex history of the Papal States within the shifting alliances of European politics need not detain us. The point is that both Gregory XVI and Pius IX saw in

political modernity a threat—first to their authority within the Papal States, and later to the existence of the Papal States themselves—a threat they understood to be fraught with implications for the Church, beyond the questions of their position within Italy.

There were other issues at play here, of course. The Catholic Church of the 19th century (and the first half of the 20th, for that matter) paid very little heed to the Anglosphere, and to the ways in which the English and Scottish Enlightenments led to forms of modernity that were not identical to those that emerged from the French or Continental Enlightenment. Thus from the point of view of Gregory XVI and Pius IX, "the Enlightenment" primarily meant the French Revolution, which meant the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, which meant the subordination of the Church to the French regime, which meant the Terror, the suppression of the Vendée, the martyrdoms memorialized in Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, and all the rest of that bloody business. "Enlightenment" also meant the kidnapping of Pius VI and his death while under arrest by French revolutionary troops, and the kidnapping and detainment at Fontainebleau of his successor, Pius VII, a broad-minded man who might have effected a new Catholic dialogue with modernity had he not been constantly badgered (and worse) by Napoleon.

Nor was the Church's experience in France unique, for throughout continental Europe, the formation of the modern nation-state was typically undertaken *against* the Catholic Church (a pattern first set in Tudor England in the 16th century and replicated a century later in the Tokugawa shogunate in Japan). Here two principal examples were the Italian *Risorgimento*, a deeply anticlerical affair, and the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf*, an attack on the Church that went (iron-fisted) hand in glove with the Iron Chancellor's assembly of the Second Reich and his early management of the new imperial Germany. And as if that were not enough, there was the Catholic experience of "enlightened" monarchy in the Habsburg lands (where Emperor Joseph tried to turn the Church into a "department of the police," as he famously put it); there were recurrent anti-clerical agitations in Spain and Portugal; and the 1834 *Articles of Baden* attempted to divide Swiss Catholics from the authority of Rome. Above all, and always lurking in the background, there was the threat to the Papal States.

That threat was realized, in the worst form papal nightmares could imagine, in the 1870 absorption of Rome into the Kingdom of Italy, after which Pius IX withdrew inside the Leonine Wall and declared himself the “prisoner of the Vatican” —and not a small amount of elite public opinion throughout Europe pronounced the papacy and the Catholic Church finished as a force in human affairs.

Gregory XVI’s stance toward modernity was that of an unblushing and candid reactionary, a kind of papal Metternich. To be sure, he was not monochromatic: he had genuine artistic and intellectual interests; he was the pope who condemned slavery and the slave trade; he insisted on fostering a native clergy and building native hierarchies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, thus ringing the changes on colonialism and its claims to ecclesiastical as well as political hegemony. Yet, convinced as he was that the modern liberal political order was grounded in a religious indifferentism that, more often than not, took the form of hostility to faith, he condemned the efforts of French Catholics like Lamennais, Lacordaire, and Montalembert to find a rapprochement with the new liberal politics. And he denounced freedom of conscience and the press, and Church-state separation, in the 1832 encyclical *Mirari vos* and the 1834 encyclical *Singulari nos* — which, at that point, represented the high-water mark of the Catholic rejection of political modernity and the institutional pluralism (especially on matters of Church and state) built into it.

Papal historian J.N.D. Kelly does not exaggerate when he writes that that Gregory XVI left his successor a “grievous legacy.” That successor, Pius IX, initially attempted something of a course reversal, initiating administrative and legislative reforms in the Papal States and making positive gestures toward resurgent Italian nationalism. But the experience of the revolutions of 1848, when he was temporarily driven out of Rome, turned him toward the rejectionist stance of Gregory XVI, after which the pontiff mocked as “Pio No-No” set his teeth against further reform in his own domain, and stoutly (if futilely) resisted Cavour and the forces of Italian unification. In the order of ideas, this papal rejectionism reached a new plateau in 1864 with the encyclical *Quanta cura* and its attached “Syllabus of Errors”: a root-and-branch rejection of modernity in virtually all its forms, which ended with the famous condemnation of the notion that the Roman Pontiff “can or should reconcile himself to, or agree with, progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.”

Yet even amidst this robust rejectionism, Pius IX paradoxically set in motion dynamics that would lead to the modernization of the papacy itself. He was immensely popular. As his political authority diminished, his spiritual authority increased exponentially, hinting at forms of political and diplomatic influence he could not imagine, but which others of his successors deployed to considerable effect. And while it would not be right to give him full marks or sole credit for this, the fact is that European Catholicism during his lengthy pontificate (the longest in reliably recorded papal history) was renewed and regenerated, not least in reaction to the political antipathies that Pius IX aroused and against which he contended so fruitlessly, both in terms of his own political position and that of many of his brother bishops (a lot of whom, in Bismarck’s Germany, were in jail or in exile when Pius IX died in 1878).

II. FROM LEO XIII THROUGH PIUS XII: CATHOLICISM EXPLORING MODERNITY

On February 20, 1878, less than two weeks after the death of Pius IX, sixty-eight-year-old Gioacchino Vincenzo Pecci was elected pope as a place-keeper, the thinking being that he would keep the Chair of Peter warm for a few years —as the cardinals evidently did not want to repeat the previous three-decade-long pontificate. Assuming the regnal name Leo XIII, he proceeded to confound the expectations of those who elected him by enjoying the second-longest reign in reliably recorded papal history (until topped by John Paul II). More to the point, he took, at the outset of his pontificate, a bold, grand-strategic decision that is nicely captured in his funerary monument, to the left of the apse in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. In that sculpture by Giulio Tadolini, Leo is not depicted in a typical papal funerary pose, lying “asleep” on his back with his hands piously folded on his chest (as is his 13th-century predecessor, Innocent III, who rests to the right of the apse). Rather, Leo XIII is depicted standing, the tiara on his head, his right foot thrust forward, and his right hand raised and extended in what has the appearance of a gesture of invitation: as if he were saying to modernity, “We have something to talk about; we have a proposal to make.”

Leo XIII’s grand strategic decision was to eschew both the rejectionism of his two immediate predecessors and the supine accommodation to

modernity characteristic of a lot of 19th-century liberal Protestantism, and to substitute for these two impossible strategies (as he thought of them) a third option: a Catholic engagement with modernity conducted with explicitly Catholic tools, newly sharpened for the task. The Leonine Revolution he created took several forms, the effects of which are still being felt in world Catholicism today.

It was Leo XIII who energized modern Catholic intellectual life, with the 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which mandated a close study of Thomas Aquinas in the original texts (i.e., unfiltered by centuries of commentators); Thomas' brilliant appropriation of the New Learning of his day (especially the rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle) suggested to Leo that Aquinas was an especially apt guide for Catholic intellectuals seeking a critical engagement with modern science, modern philosophy, and modern theology. Moreover, Leo named as cardinal in 1879 John Henry Newman, one of 19th-century Catholicism's most imaginative thinkers; that Leo would go out of his way to honor a man whose distinctive style and theological method could not be fit into any one methodological box suggested that Leo, for all that he was a dedicated Thomist, was also something of a pluralist in terms of intellectual method.

It was Leo XIII who opened the Vatican Secret Archives to qualified researchers of all faiths (and no faith), thereby inaugurating the modern Catholic study of Catholic history: which led to the inevitable discovery that the Church did, indeed, change over time, the claims of anti-modern rejectionists notwithstanding.

It was Leo XIII who launched the first modern Vatican Observatory and supported studies in astronomy and other natural sciences at the Vatican, thus beginning a rapprochement between Catholicism and modern science.

It was Leo XIII who initiated the modern Catholic study of the Bible (an enterprise already into its dissecting/deconstructive phase in liberal Protestantism) by creating the École Biblique in Jerusalem in 1892, issuing the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893 (on the new higher criticism of the Bible), and founding the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1902.

It was Leo XIII who, with the 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, became the founding father of modern Catholic social doctrine: that distinctive Catholic philosophical and theological reflection on society, economy, culture, and polity under the conditions of modernity that has continued to this day.

And it was Leo XIII who, in his 1895 letter to the Catholic bishops of the United States, *Longinqua oceani*, taught that the liberal American political arrangement—the constitutional separation of the institutions of Church and state—*tolerari potest* (“could be tolerated”), thus opening the door to what would become, in time, the Catholic human rights revolution, the Catholic defense of religious freedom for all, and the Catholic role in what Samuel P. Huntington dubbed the “Third Wave” of democratic revolutions.

Leo XIII died in 1903 at age 93, and it is no distortion of the record to suggest that the next five and a half decades of Catholic history were a contest, sometimes bitter, over the Leonine Revolution and its attempt to engage modernity with distinctively Catholic tools. Leo's opponents generally won the day during the pontificate of Pius X (1903–1914), but the Leonine party had its innings again during the pontificate of Benedict XV (1914–1922). Benedict's successor, Pius XI (1922–1939), extended Leo's Catholic social doctrine, and his 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, with its principle of “subsidiarity,” underscored the importance of the plural institutions of civil society, both in themselves and as a barrier against the totalitarian temptation to which secular political modernity seemed to be succumbing in that low decade, the 1930s: a lethal development he sharply criticized in a trifecta of encyclicals he issued in March 1937—*Mit brennender Sorge* on German National Socialism, *Divini Redemptoris* on communism, and *Nov es muy conocida* on religious persecution in Mexico. His successor, the much-maligned Pius XII (1939–1958), actively fostered Christian Democratic parties in post-war Europe. And in his teachings on Catholic worship, the Bible, and the nature of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (rather than as the *societas perfecta* beloved by Catholic anti-modern rejectionists), Pius XII helped prepare the theological foundations for the Second Vatican Council, in whose documents his magisterium would be the second-most-frequently cited source, after the Bible.

Thus was the stage set, by Leo XIII and the battle over his legacy, for the next phase of the drama of Catholicism and modernity.

III. VATICAN II: THE CATHOLIC EMBRACE OF MODERNITY

Leo's fifth successor, John XXIII, was elected on October 28, 1958, as another elderly placeholder—and in this case, the expectations of the conclave were met by a short pontificate of some four and a half years. But, like Leo, John XXIII took a bold strategic decision at the outset of his papacy, announcing in January 1959 that he intended to summon the twenty-first ecumenical council in the history of the Church, which would be known formally as the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and informally as Vatican II. In a wide-ranging ecclesiastical career prior to his election as successor to Pius XII, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli had experienced no small amount of the ecclesiastical air turbulence generated by the Leonine Revolution and the sometimes-harsh reactions to it from anti-modern Catholic rejectionists. But while he was a man of quite traditional piety, Roncalli was also a trained and accomplished historian, and his diplomatic activity in Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, and France had given him a good understanding of the turmoil of the mid-20th century. Thus he understood that the dynamics of engagement with modernity that Leo had set in motion had somehow to be gathered together and focused, so that the Church might approach the third millennium of Christian history with renewed energy and a positive program capable of responding to cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances that had changed vastly during his lifetime.

John XXIII only lived to see the first session of his Council, in the fall of 1962, before dying in June 1963. But his example and leadership set a tone for the Council that lasted throughout its four years of annual fall sessions. By the time the Council met for its fourth and final period in the fall of 1965, the party of rejectionism—the party that traced its ancestry to those who had resisted the Leonine Revolution—had been decisively, well rejected: and the Council was prepared to consider, and then pass, its most distinctive document, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, known by the first words of its Latin text as *Gaudium et spes*.

Unlike other Vatican II documents—indeed, unlike any previous conciliar document—*Gaudium et spes* was an invitation to a conversation: or, in the favorite trope of the day, to “dialogue.” In the Pastoral Constitution, the Church sought, not passive and obedient students, but active conversation partners with divergent and different worldviews. Thus

Gaudium et spes was an unprecedented attempt to meet “the modern world” on the modern world’s own terms, accepting ungrudgingly the dramatic cultural, social, economic, and political changes that had characterized the past two centuries of human history, and finding in those changes far more light than darkness.

Yet for all that it seemed to presage a new moment in the old drama of Catholicism and modernity, *Gaudium et spes* seems, in the retrospect of fifty years, a remarkably time-bound document.

The Pastoral Constitution suggested, for example, that the two great challenges to biblical religion in the modern world were Marxism and Sartrean existentialism, neither of which has, to put it gently, a lot of traction today. The document recognized that women’s roles had changed under the conditions of modernity; but it seems, in retrospect, oblivious to the tidal wave of ideological feminism that was about to wash over the Western world. The Pastoral Constitution noted the impact of the splitting of the atom, but it had virtually nothing to say about the two other world-changing scientific developments of the modern world: the unraveling of the DNA double helix (and the new genetics it made possible) and the invention of the oral contraceptive pill.

Gaudium et spes sympathetically explored the modern crisis of faith and suggested, correctly, that the Church’s own failures had to be taken into full account when measuring the advances of agnosticism and atheism. But, most strikingly for our purposes, there is not the slightest hint in the Pastoral Constitution that the world just might become *more* religious under the conditions of late modernity, and that revitalized religious conviction could play a determinative role in world politics. In other words, if Vatican II in its embrace of modernity did not imagine designer babies, gene therapy, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Europe’s demographic winter, neither did it imagine the Solidarity movement, the Moral Majority, the entrepreneurial Protestantism of Latin America, the house churches of China, or, in a less admirable vein, Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s Islamic State.

Neither did the Fathers of Vatican II imagine that, in the Church’s European heartland, the greatest challenge to the religious worldview would not be atheism (of either the Marxist or Sartrean variant), but massive religious indifference: what David

Bentley Hart has usefully described as “metaphysical boredom.” *Gaudium et spes* anticipated with seeming relish a new, respectful conversation between belief and unbelief; the Pastoral Constitution completely failed to anticipate the barely-stifled yawn of indifference with which such proposals for dialogue would be received in the high culture of western Europe within a few years after *Gaudium et spes* was published. This failure to anticipate the religious ennui that would characterize Europe after the social upheavals of 1968 is one of the most striking features of the Pastoral Constitution, read in the retrospect of a half-century. And it suggests that the Council Fathers embraced modernity just on the cusp of its turn into post-modernity, in which the “truth” the Council Fathers sought to explore in dialogue with nonbelievers of goodwill would be held to be either a chimera or a cultural construct.

This can be put in another, parallel way: *Gaudium et spes* affirmed what one of its subsections styled the “rightful autonomy of earthly affairs,” and acknowledged that the methods proper to the modern scientific exploration of nature are “at once the claim of modern man and the desire of the Creator.” But while the Pastoral Constitution did caution that, “once God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well,” the Council Fathers did not seem to anticipate (save in its Communist form) what Charles Taylor has dubbed “exclusivist humanism”: an aggressive secularism that denies, not merely revelation, but even transcendent moral reference points for the ordering of social life. Thus while the Pastoral Constitution usefully distinguished the three interlocking sectors of a modern society—the cultural, the economic, and the political—it did not wrestle at any length with the ways in which the deterioration of the cultural sphere under the impacts of epistemological skepticism, moral relativism, and metaphysical nihilism could do grave damage to both free economics and free politics; that analytic task would be left to one of the principal authors of *Gaudium et spes*, the Polish professor-bishop Karol Wojtyła, when he became Pope John Paul II.

Vatican II sought to solve the problem of Catholicism and modernity through an embrace of a normative, not merely descriptive, concept of pluralism that ran parallel to the American Jesuit scholar John Courtney Murray’s description of pluralism as “creeds intelligibly in conflict.” Plurality—difference—had been written into the script of history, Murray wrote; indeed, it seemed to have been written into history by the Creator, so it was fruitless to bang one’s head (or one’s tiara) against the fact of difference, in a

vain search for a uniformity of worldview, a monism, imagined to have characterized the pre-modern world. The real task, Murray suggested, was to transform the social fact of plurality (meaning difference) into the social accomplishment of pluralism: an orderly conversation about the common good in all its aspects, made possible by commonly shared moral reference points that could be known by reason. That, too, seemed Vatican II’s hope: that the Church could make its proper contribution to the human conversation about the human future as one interlocutor among a plurality of interlocutors, made into a community of conversation by a common commitment to a stable intellectual and moral framework for debate and dialogue.

Yet it is precisely that stable framework that post-modernity—which at best can concede “your truth” and “my truth” but nothing properly describable as “the truth”—seems determined to deny. Thus it might be said that Catholicism, at Vatican II, embraced modernity and pluralism just as modernity was beginning to decompose into post-modernity, and just as the pluralism of contrasting worldviews in a mutually enriching encounter with each other was being deconstructed back into mere plurality. The stage was thereby set for the contributions of two men who had had significant impact on the deliberations of Vatican II, but who had come to understand that its reading of the “signs of the times” was both shallow and ecclesially disorienting.

IV. JOHN PAUL II AND BENEDICT XVI: AN INTERNAL CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

In terms of the question of Catholicism and modernity, and indeed in several other respects, the pontificates of John Paul II (1978–2005) and Benedict XVI (2005–2013) should be considered as a single moment of intellectual engagement with the cultural crisis of late modernity and the emergence of a post-modern world that is both robustly religious (everywhere but in modernity’s European heartland) and deeply conflicted about both its luxuriant plurality and the meaning of pluralism. Gregory XVI and Pius IX had mounted a critique of modernity from the outside, so to speak; John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both modern intellectuals with distinguished pre-papal academic careers, offered a critique of late modernity and the emerging post-modern world from “within”:

a critique that began, not with rejection, but with a broad acceptance of the accomplishments of modernity, before turning to a critique of what both popes perceived as the danger of the late-modern/post-modern's world's self-deconstruction into incoherence.

That internal line of critique was developed in several notable intellectual exercises: among these may be cited John Paul II's encyclicals *Redemptor hominis* (1979), *Centesimus annus* (1991), *Veritatis splendor* (1993), and *Evangelium vitae* (1995), and his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (2003); and Benedict XVI's "September addresses" to the University of Regensburg in 2006, at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris in 2008, at Westminster Hall in London in 2010, and in the German Bundestag in 2011. This extensive body of material can best be summarized and brought into focus by thinking back on a drama that unfolded in the last years of John Paul II.

In 2003, a new constitutional treaty was being drafted for the about-to-be-expanded European Union; and while the Euro-Constitution was a very lengthy affair indeed (topping out at some 400 pages), the most rhetorically violent arguments over its drafting and ratification had to do with whether a single word would appear in its preamble: in listing the sources of 21st-century European commitments to civility, tolerance, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, would the framework document of the new Europe cite Christianity—or, more broadly, the biblical tradition? For the draft constitution's text had assiduously ignored Christianity, finding the cultural roots of the new Europe's commitments to democratic values and norms in the classical tradition, the Enlightenment, and modern thought. (As I wrote at the time, this would seem to mean that nothing of positive consequence for 21st-century European public life had happened between Marcus Aurelius and Descartes, which was an awfully long time for nothing to have happened.) But amidst the maelstrom of controversy over this question (which the international constitutional scholar J.H.H. Weiler, an Orthodox Jew, described as a by-product of European "Christophobia"), the issue that engaged John Paul II and Benedict XVI was given concise formulation in a widely-translated and published op-ed article by two paladins of European post-modern thought, Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, who argued that the new Europe must be "neutral between worldviews."

That, it seemed to both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, utterly begged the question: How could there be genuine pluralism—"creeds intelligibly

in conflict"—if there were no normative framework of agreed reference points to guide the conversation? Here was Richard John Neuhaus's "naked public square" raised to a first principle of constitutional order and made into the official European public ideology. How any of this comported with "pluralism" was quite unclear; indeed, the Habermas/Derrida proposal seemed to flatten out the landscape of the late-modern and post-modern world, forcing the rich plurality of European worldviews onto a Procrustean bed that seemed constructed from Charles Taylor's "exclusive humanism." Indeed, the Habermas/Derrida proposal amounted to a bizarre, hyper-secularized form of the old altar-and-throne alliances of the days of absolutism: state-sanctioned monism, in which both E.U. and national law enforced an extreme, monotonal *laïcité*—putatively in the name of social comity; in fact, in the name of epistemological skepticism.

Put another way, the architects of the E.U. naked public square seemed to imagine that democracy and the free economy—those distinctive expressions of modernity in the spheres of political and economic life—were machines that could run by themselves, were the apparatus of governance, production, and exchange properly designed. John Paul II, in *Centesimus annus*, had explained in some detail why that was impossible. Yes, the machinery was important, and modernity had done a good job of building political and economic systems for self-governance, and for productivity and prosperity. But it takes a certain kind of people, he argued, living certain virtues, to make the machinery of the free economy and the free society work so that the net result is human flourishing. The formation of those virtues, and the mature, modern men and women who lived them in a public atmosphere of civility and tolerance, was the task of the third part of the triad of the free society—the moral-cultural sector. And it was the vitality of that sector (often described as "civil society") that would tell the tale on the vitality of democracy and the free economy—and that would make possible a genuine pluralism, understood as "creeds intelligibly in conflict."

Benedict XVI deepened the Catholic engagement with, and critique of, late modernity and post-modernity in four important lectures. The first, delivered at his old university, Regensburg, in September 2006, frankly recognized the accomplishments of modernity in distinguishing religious and political authority

in society and in defending religious freedom and freedom of conscience as fundamental human rights. At Regensburg, the former Professor Joseph Ratzinger also celebrated what he termed the providential encounter of biblical wisdom with Greek philosophy while affirming that human reason was a reflection of the Λόγος, the divine reason. He also acknowledged that faith must be purified by reason lest faith become superstition, and suggested that faith unpurified by reason was one cause of the religiously legitimated violence that was rocking the early 21st-century world.

If the Regensburg lecture was a reminder that, in the Catholic view of things, faith must be reasonable, Benedict XVI's lecture at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris in September 2008 reversed the polarities and cautioned against a too-narrow understanding of reason, suggesting that positivism was the "capitulation of reason" and that a culture that deliberately cut itself off from the things of the spirit would become dull and eventually dehumanizing.

In an address at Westminster Hall in September 2010, the German pope who had previously thanked the British people for winning the Battle of Britain in 1940 reminded his audience of parliamentarians and other distinguished Britons (gathered in the very place where Thomas More had been found guilty and condemned to death) that law descends into tyranny when positive law is detached from the moral law that provides a kind of grammar for intelligible public discourse in a plural world. The pope reiterated that theme in a different key a year later when, addressing the German Bundestag in September 2011, he reminded his listeners of Augustine's 5th-century question—"Without justice, what else is the state but a great band of robbers?"—and explicitly linked the lesson embedded in that question to the German experience of power divorced from right under National Socialism. Then, while speaking near the ruins of the *Führerbunker* from which the world had, in his lifetime, been driven to "the edge of the abyss," he returned to a theme he had previously articulated in Paris and suggested that a public intellectual climate dominated by positivism was a bunker of the human spirit in which the new Europe risked suffocating; should that positivism snuff out the robust dialogue of worldviews that could, as Murray might have put it, turn the mere fact of plurality into the social accomplishment of pluralism.

Immediately prior to his election as pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had preached a sermon to his fellow cardinals at the Mass *Pro eligendo Romano*

pontifice [For the Election of the Roman Pontiff], during which he warned against a rising "dictatorship of relativism" throughout the Western world: the use of coercive state power to impose on all of society a way of life determined by the post-modern canons of epistemological skepticism and moral relativism—the use of coercive state power, in other words, to eliminate the robust dialogue of worldviews in the public square in the name of a "tolerance" prepared to tolerate everything but normative worldviews, whether religiously or rationally derived. That warning, when read alongside the substantive analyses of the crisis of late modernity and emerging post-modernity articulated by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, suggests that, after two centuries of wrestling with modernity and its attendant plurality of worldviews, the Catholic Church found itself in the paradoxical position of defending modernity and genuine pluralism against the coercive efforts of post-modernity to flatten out the dialogue of worldviews in the name of a state-sanctioned monologue.

There are, as sociologist Peter H. Rossi used to say, many ironies in the fire.

V. CATHOLICISM IN POST-MODERNITY: THE RECOVERY OF THE EVANGELICAL IMPERATIVE

This brief sketch of the broad outlines of Catholicism and modernity from the point of view of papal teaching has necessarily skipped over many fascinating examples of what was happening on the ground, so to speak, while the drama of this papal and conciliar wrestling with modernity unfolded. I have barely hinted at the liberal Catholic opposition to the anti-modern rejectionism of Gregory XVI and Pius IX, an opposition involving such considerable figures as von Ketteler, Döllinger, and Acton. I have not explored how the American experience of Catholicism—the experience of a vibrant and growing Church under the conditions of political modernity—posed an important challenge to the Eurocentric papal understanding of Catholicism and modernity, conditioned as it was by the experience of what Owen Chadwick called the "secularization of the European mind." I haven't mentioned the temptation among some Catholic anti-modern rejectionists to find in fascism an antidote to modernity and its discontents: a blindness that resulted in both the sinister (the celebration of the early Third

Reich as the spiritual answer to Weimar's clash of worldviews by the abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach) and the bizarre (the "knight-monks" of Vichy France who imagined themselves training new cadres of a Catholic elite for a new France "beyond" modernity, secularism, and *laïcité*).

As for the present, while Catholicism has experienced the withering away of religious conviction predicted by classic secularization theory in what once seemed such impregnable Catholic redoubts as Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Québec, contemporary Catholicism has also experienced the empirical falsification of the classic secularization hypothesis through its explosive growth in Africa and its relatively robust position in the United States. And then there is the fascinating question of whether traditionally Catholic societies like Poland, Slovakia, and Lithuania—where the Faith was preserved, almost as if in amber, through the pressures of life under Communism—will, in the post-Communist world, follow the path trod by other European Catholic nations. All these phenomena, and more, would bear study in considering the question of Catholicism, modernity, and post-modernity, which I shall do in a forthcoming book.

Four years into the pontificate of Pope Francis, it seems unlikely that the Argentine pontiff will follow his two immediate predecessors in offering a detailed, internal line of critique of late modernity and the emerging post-modern world. Francis is not a scholar-pope; his reign is likely to be a brief one, as he himself has noted on several occasions; and his priorities lie elsewhere. But, like John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Francis understands what living in a world that has passed through the fiery brook of modernity means for the Catholic Church: it means that culturally "kept" religion has gone the way of legally established religion, and that the Church of the future must be a Church "permanently in mission," as Francis put it in what he still insists is the grand strategic document of his pontificate, the 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. That is, Francis understands that in the Catholicism of the future, no Catholic (or at least very few Catholics) will be able to say, "I am a Catholic because my great-grandmother was born in county Cork (or Kraków, or Guadalajara, or Munich, or Palermo, or Normandy, or the South End of Boston)." The Catholicism of the 21st century and the third millennium will be chosen, not inherited by ethnicity or absorbed by some other form of religious osmosis. And it will only be chosen because the encounter with

Jesus Christ, whose Mystical Body the Church is, has been embodied, offered, and proposed.

So we come to the deepest, and perhaps providential, paradox of the story of Catholicism and modernity: through its encounter with modernity, Catholicism has rediscovered the evangelical or missionary imperative from which it began, two millennia ago. Through an often-turbulent encounter with modernity, the living, dynamic parts of the Catholic Church have learned that the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20 is addressed to the Church of every time and all places, and that the measure of true discipleship is the measure in which the people of the Church offer to others the gift they were given in baptism. And in a paradox within that paradox, the flattening of the human experience by aggressive secular modernity has helped create a new openness to the Gospel among those for whom Peggy Lee's lament, "Is that all there is?" has become an antiphon to which the New Evangelization responds, like Peter at the first Pentecost, "Well, no, it's not. Not at all. May I introduce you to Jesus Christ?"

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