

Cooperation, pluralism, and tolerance are some of the criteria that the book demands, so that subsidiarity becomes a tool for good governance, within a delimited state, to reach peace and social friendship—a principle with repercussions for every society.

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Liberation Ecclesiology? The Quest for Authentic Freedom in Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of the Church

Seán Corkery

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A Liberation Ecclesiology? is an important study of a central idea in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), namely, freedom. The author of this extensive study is Fr. Seán Corkery, a priest of the Diocese of Cloyne, Ireland, who completed his doctoral studies in systematic theology at the Pontifical University, St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, Ireland.

Father Corkery's book is especially concerned with Ratzinger's understanding of freedom as it relates to ecclesiology. The topics covered, however, go beyond the theology of the Church. In the introduction, Corkery not only explains the theme and focus of his study; he also provides an extensive overview of recent books that discuss Ratzinger's ecclesiology. Here he displays a familiarity not only with published works by H. Verweyen, P. Hoffmann, G. Mannion, M. Volf, and E. De Gáal but also with doctoral theses such as that of (now Bishop) James Massa who wrote on the theme of communion in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger (Fordham, 1996).

The book is divided into three sections and nine chapters, with chapter 9 being a concluding evaluation. Section 1 (chapters 1–2) deals with the formative influences on the thought of Joseph Ratzinger with a special focus on how these influences shaped his understanding of freedom. As is well-known, Ratzinger grew up in a twentieth-century Europe marked by the rise and fall of “Nazi and Communist supremacy” (41). The twelve years of Nazi rule had a “permanent impact on the future theologian” (43). The young Ratzinger saw the Catholic Church as a true alternative to the destructive ideology of Nazism. After the war, Ratzinger became a priest and theologian who attended the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) as the theological *peritus* (expert) of Josef Cardinal Frings of Cologne. The theological hopes of authentic religious freedom envisioned by the Council, however, were soon overshadowed by the Marxist-inspired student revolts of the late 1960s. In this regard, Corkery cites the observation of John Thornton who describes Ratzinger's way of life as “having survived the horrors of Nazi Germany and the turbulence of the Marxist revolutions of the sixties, always serving the Church he loves with unwavering will, profound intelligence, and great heart and soul, in a life marked by joy and gratitude” (46).

In addition to the false ideologies of the Nazis and the Marxists, Ratzinger also developed his insights on authentic freedom in dialogue with (and opposition to) the one-sided views of freedom expressed by Luther, the philosophers of the Enlightenment (Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel), and Sartre who professed a type of “anarchic freedom” (112). Ratzinger found a deeper and more authentic view of freedom in the biblical message as interpreted by Augustine, Bonaventure, and the Catholic Church. Authentic freedom must move beyond individualist concepts to a more community-supported understanding. In this regard, however, Ratzinger believes that civil society is not sufficient. Authentic human freedom must be nurtured within the community of the Church, which provides a true understanding of the human person as directed toward Christ and divinization.

In section 2 (chapters 3–5), Fr. Corkery explores the theological foundations of Ratzinger’s “ecclesiology of liberation,” which is not the same as the various “theologies of liberation” that arose in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, the term *liberation ecclesiology* was first used by the Mexican Jesuit, Alvaro Quiroz Magaña (b. 1942) in 1996 “to describe the Church as the sacrament of historical liberation, and the sign and servant of the Reign of God” (6). As Corkery shows, Ratzinger develops his own “liberation ecclesiology” in response to: (1) the human thirst for freedom, (2) modern rationalism, (3) the reawakening of the reality of God, (4) the orientation of the Church in contemporary society, and (5) the need to reclaim a sense of interiority (147–51).

Section 2 provides a survey of the Christological, anthropological, and ecclesiological contours of Ratzinger’s theology of freedom. Of special note here is Ratzinger’s analysis of freedom in light of human finitude (“creatureliness”) and dependence, which correspond to the truth of human existence. Freedom can only be realized through the recognition of a “free, rational, and loving Creator” (137). Knowing such a loving Creator “liberates us from the need to revolt against the ‘that’ of created existence” (137). Dependency is not a limitation on human freedom but the recognition that “the human person can only live from others and by trust” (238). The Christian synthesis of human freedom highlights the cooperation of “thinking, willing, and feeling in faith [*denken, wollen und fühlen*]” (255). Ultimately, “the Christian philosophy of freedom is a reality born of faith” (255). Faith in Christ shows us that freedom is to be found “in the route of love rather than power” (264). The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross teaches us that “dependence is freedom rooted in truth and love” (264). The ecclesiological expression of authentic freedom is grounded in the Trinitarian *communio* as “the primordial basis for unity” (344). Through its liturgy and its whole life, the Church becomes “the custodian of the ecclesio-knowledge that enables humanity [to] achieve its full potential” (348). By upholding the truth of the human person and human dignity, the Church becomes “the sphere of growth in authentic freedom for the benefit of the world to which it ministers” (348).

Section 3 (chapters 6–8) investigates the ways in which the Church manifests its role as the true *Raum der Freiheit* (sphere or space of freedom). The three chapters in this section take up the manifestations of the Church at worship (chapter 6), the Church and the office of *episkopos* or oversight (chapter 7), and the Church as witness to human freedom in the world (chapter 8). For Catholics concerned with questions of magisterial

authority and freedom, chapter 7 will be of special interest. Here it is clear that episcopal authority is not intended to suppress authentic freedom but to ensure that freedom is rooted in truth. Episcopal authority is not an expression of power for the sake of power but an authority animated by love. Those who oppose the institutional authority of the Magisterium have “too little confidence in the victorious power of the truth that lives in faith” (418). A bishop, according to Ratzinger, must be motivated by love and be willing “to suffer for the truth” (420) even to the point of enduring ridicule (414).

Chapter 8 takes up the theme of the Church as witness to freedom in the world. In this chapter, Corkery refers frequently to two works by Ratzinger: *On Conscience* (2007) and *A Turning Point for Europe?* (German, 1991; English, 2010). Ratzinger sees the dangers of a conscience that becomes overly subjective and “self-referential” (429). A self-referential type of conscience is often linked to the temptation of modern rationalism, which believes that “freedom, like reason, is a by-product of the self-construction of the world” (434). For Ratzinger, a truly free conscience must mature “in a life of interiority, whereby subjectivity and truth mutually interpret and purify each other” (439).

With regard to the political sphere, Ratzinger notes that “the Church must accept that it is not the sole arbitrator of political reason” and “the autonomy of political reasoning is to be respected” (443). The Church, however, has the responsibility to point people to the truth, especially through the witness of saints and martyrs. Ratzinger opposes all “promises of inner-worldly realizations of perfect liberation” (445). In this context, the witness of holiness is all-important because from the lives of the saints there emerges the “principal source of inspiration whereby the Church can authentically reside in the civic space” (448).

In the concluding evaluation (chapter 9), Corkery summarizes the key points of Ratzinger’s liberation ecclesiology. In the final analysis, the role of the Church is to liberate human beings from finitude, insecurity, and loneliness. Because of original sin, true happiness and freedom can never be found in any “temporal collective to which humanity belongs” (530). The Church exists as a counterpoint to “the drive towards individualistic humanism” (531). The Church, though, is nothing without Christ and his mediation. Christ is the answer to the human aspirations for meaning, love, communion, and freedom.

A Liberation Theology? is one of the most thorough and expansive studies of Ratzinger’s ecclesiology in English. It will certainly be of interest to teachers and students of Catholic theology—though it might be a bit overwhelming to those wishing for a more concise synthesis. Father Corkery’s book will also appeal to those looking for a critique of modern rationalism expressed in a “Mozart-like tone” (19). Ratzinger provides a vision of human liberation that appeals to all people “who tend toward an ontological or universalist vision of the Christian mystery” (19). For those who see the Catholic Church as an enemy of freedom, this book is the perfect challenge.

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