

build upon their arguments, strategies, and successes in changing the mindsets of Americans.

ARLAND THORNTON
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures. By Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2006. 116 pp. \$14.95.

Values in a Time of Upheaval. By Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2006. 172 pp. \$19.95.

The "crisis" or "upheaval" envisioned in the titles of these two short books of collected essays is not merely terrorism or political or environmental upheaval. These words are symptomatic of what Ratzinger, writing in his personal capacity before being elected pope, identifies as the root problem of the West, which is the crisis of reason. Human reason, reduced in the post-Enlightenment era to empirical rationality (the "ratio" of Aristotle, or what Weber, in a similar critique, termed "technical rationality"), has forgotten what it means to be human, with pathological results. No longer capable of perceiving the good, morality is reduced to relativism, a utilitarian calculus of consequences in which "good" means only "better than" (VTU, p. 110).

Human worth has become unrecognizable, resulting in totalitarian ideologies that brutalize entire peoples and in biological interventions that discard undesirable persons—the handicapped, aged and unborn—and attempt to technologically "produce" desirable ones. Law has become an assertion of majority power, and religion a private feeling that can become destructive fanaticism. The state, secular and relativistic regarding ultimate values, attempts to safeguard individual freedom on the basis of democratic procedure. But in the absence of a common understanding of the good that is not subject to political alteration, individual freedom becomes meaningless in practice, descending into material comfort or anarchic violence.

Since reason, as empirical rationality, cannot apprehend truth that transcends the senses, where the meaning of the person and the state are concerned, to employ reason alone is irrational. The truth of the person, as of the state, must come from outside itself, from the universal truths of human nature, which religion affirms, and particularly from the truth of God as revealed in Christ. Reason, then, must look to faith, and the state to the church, to learn the truths by which reason can function properly. For the West, the Christian revelation has been uniquely formative, providing the basis for "the legal enactment of the value and dignity of man, of freedom, equality and solidarity, together with the fundamental principles of democracy and of the rule of law in society" (VTU, p. 147). The Church, therefore, must assert its own truths to call the West back to itself, even, and even in the face of intellectual hostility.

In particular, Ratzinger argues, the Church must remind the state that human rights are absolute; that is, antecedent to and above the law of the state, and that monogamous marriage is essential for the construction of civic society. Most importantly, the Church must insist on respect for God even by nonbelievers. Ratzinger proposes that the Enlightenment project, which attempted to establish for the faithful truths that would be valid *etsi Deus non daretur* (even if God did not exist), should be reversed. Those who no longer believe in God today should, for their own good and the good of the state, reason and live *veluti si Deus daretur* (as if God did indeed exist) (CCC, pp. 50-51).

Clearly apologetic, Ratzinger's books present a rationale for the Christian faith that seeks to convince nonbelievers. Though the arguments apply generally to Western culture, they are clearly addressed to the European context; the original title of the shorter book was *The Europe of Benedict and the Crisis of Cultures*. Written with perception, insight, and creativity, the language is often direct and provocative, even blunt, in contrast to the irenic tone and content of Benedict's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* ("God is Love"). Primarily written for occasional or pastoral purposes, the writings are generally accessible at a popular level, but those looking for a systematic argument will be disappointed. Though there is a lot of overlap, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, a somewhat fragmentary collection of articles and addresses, deals generally with public reason and the state, while *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* focuses, in a more sustained treatment, on the crisis of personal meaning.

Echoing Pascal's wager, Ratzinger proposes that nonbelievers should adopt elements of the Christian faith hypothetically, as a position that produces a better outcome than the alternative. But while Pascal, perhaps ironically, justified the benefits of Christianity by reference to the next life, Ratzinger sincerely proposes that the person and the state are better here and now for wagering that God exists. A believer may wonder whether such a utilitarian appeal has not conceded too much to the very values of modernity it attempts to counter. A skeptic may conclude that evidence is thin for the superior humanity and purpose of Christian states and persons. Both may question the authenticity of a faith motivated by such an appeal. Indeed, Ratzinger seems at times to be arguing, not for the faith of the Church and the Bible, but simply for the operation of a nominal "civic religion"; in this regard, he compares the American model of church and state favorably to that of Europe.

Taken together, these books provide valuable insight into the thinking of one of the most original and influential minds of our time. More importantly, they present a rationale well worth considering in a world without gods, and

why, for the good of church and state, we might live as if God did indeed exist.

PAUL SULLINS
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Willing the Good: Jesus, Dissent, and Desire. By Paula M. Cooley.
Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006. 220pp. \$20.00.

Dissent has been a generative force within Christianity since its earliest days, Paula M. Cooley argues. The contemporary challenge of secularism, "a human-generated system of thought, institutions, and practices that produce and sustain national identity for the nation-state" (p. 127), calls for Christians to embrace anew the tradition of dissent. In particular, Christians must reject secularism's assumption of an "economy of scarcity," in which a perceived shortage of material resources is used to justify a western capitalist economy, an economy that itself promotes nationalistic, not global, interests. Christians should instead practice an "economy of grace" that "operates outside scarcity, greed, and insatiable lust" (p. 171).

Cooley effectively demonstrates the historical interrelationship between dissent and Christology. She outlines the ways in which Christian individuals and groups have differed in regard to Jesus's identity, comparing the ancient Christologies of the apostle Paul, the Gnostics, the Manichees, and Augustine and the sixteenth-century conflicts between Erasmus and Luther, Calvin and Servetus, and Anabaptists and other Christians. Gnostic belief in Jesus as the revealer of salvific knowledge with non-Gnostic beliefs in Jesus the crucified redeemer, and Anabaptist emphasis on Jesus the pacifist are contrasted with the use of violence by other Christian groups to maintain the authority of the state.

Secularism's co-opting of Christology to serve the interests of nationalism and capitalism prompts the need for contemporary Christian dissent. This co-opting is exemplified by Christian allusions in President Bush's rhetoric and by the conjunction of marketing, media, imperialism, apocalyptic struggle, and nationalism in the fictional *Left Behind* novels. For Cooley, the Pledge of Allegiance, prayers at legislative sessions, nationalistic holidays, and patriotic songs all encourage secularism and its "economy of scarcity." Those practices should be countered with others that cultivate dispositions that foster an "economy of grace" based on the "ongoing, boundless self-giving love of God that makes things be what they are in their goodness" (p. 170). Such dissent should be grounded in a Christology based on the "other-shaped face of Jesus," the face of the poor, the powerless, the marginalized, and the dispossessed. Seeking Jesus in the faces of others will help shift personal and communal desires toward the goal of "willing the good" for all humanity and creation.

Cooley largely succeeds in her primary goals. She demonstrates the

Copyright of Journal of Church & State is the property of JM Dawson Inst of Church State Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.