

Turning Point for Europe

Reviewed and refuted by Arif Humayun

In his book, *The Turning Point for Europe?*, Joseph Ratzinger, or Pope Benedict XVI, considers Europe to have midwived the development of the current secular political system which then propagated around the world. He feels that religion did not form part of that system and cites that as the reason for its collapse. His prescription is to first reintroduce religion to Europe, which would result in the development of a more sustainable system of governance and would consequently propagate to other parts of the world. Acknowledging that Europeans considered religion to be an impediment to achieving peace, prosperity, and worldly happiness, they developed two main political systems – Marxism and liberal capitalism – based solely on “technological rationalism”, and devoid of religion. Marxism has since collapsed and liberal capitalism appears to be on the verge of crumbling. He identifies three historical markers that have changed the structure and life in Europe and the world. Furthermore, he recognizes that the reintroduction of religion in Europe will be the way to develop a new, sustainable world order.

The first historical marker was World War I, which resulted in the collapse of monarchies in central Europe, as well as the end of Czarist Russia. It restructured Europe along nationalist principles. This geographical rearrangement “proved externally impracticable and inherently insufficient as the foundation of a new order of peace”. The second marker was World War II, which segregated Europe and the world into two mutually opposed power blocs: the Marxist and the liberal capitalist. This realignment was again unstable as both models were based on material foundations. The third marker was the implosion of the Marxist model which totally rejected religion and relied strictly on human intellect. Its implosion was rather quick and was not caused by external aggression. Benedict highlights the inherent weaknesses of the liberal capitalist model and cautions that any model devoid of faith in God is incapable of shaping a successful system of governance for the world. He chides past church leaders as being accomplices to accommodate religion with modernity; the Church was often presented as simply an ecclesial version of modernity.

Pope Benedict asserts that after the disintegration of Marxism, the weaknesses of the liberal capitalist model have become obvious with its maturation. Aware that this system is also being strained to its limits, people have discovered religion “anew as an ineradicable force both of individual and of social living” as the alternate system. He

sees a definite and increasing role of religion in shaping the new 'world order' because he rightly believes that the future of humankind cannot be shaped without religion.

This is where Pope Benedict sees "hope" and "special responsibility" for the Church to help build a new foundation for the successful society based on Christian faith. He acknowledges, however, that the Christian (Roman Catholic) Church is "still very far from meeting the challenge" for reforming the world order along the lines of Christian faith. He cautions that while this process gives comfort to faith, religion can be exploited and abused as an instrument to serve political ideas. With this warning, he reminds theologians and the clergy about their obligation to prevent the politicization of religion and to explain its correct role in shaping the future world order.

The Pope cites the resurgence of Islam in Europe as a major threat to Christianity and candidly confirms that "Islam that is sure of itself has to a large extent a greater fascination for the Third World than a Christianity that is in a state of inner decay".

As already stated, Ratzinger's prescription to "save" the world from "absence of religion" is to save Europe by reintroducing the Christian faith among Europeans. Asserting that modern politics is corrupted at its very core by promising something it cannot deliver, Benedict acknowledges that modern European philosophy has failed to replace the Christian understanding of human's transcendent destiny with a utopian ideal. He strongly believes that modern European philosophy itself has Christian roots. In other words, he urges Europeans to justify and correlate the principles and logic of modernity with Christian ideals because he further believes that Christian revelations addressed itself not to myth but to the philosophers. Benedict XVI's primary goal is to reestablish the place of Christian ethics and politics in the world in such a way as to acknowledge the worthiness of life in this world, while also recognizing the world as the arena in which our eternal destiny is worked out. It is only if and when Europe turns back to its origins that Ratzinger can begin to address his further agenda of the relation of reason, in its classic sense, to the other largely un-evangelized sectors of the world.

Essentially, Benedict is challenging Europeans to repackage Christianity – which will be another human effort – and accept it as a religion of reason, of logos. This is a very worthy approach which requires a solid foundation on which to build the edifice. The Bible fails to provide that solid foundation because that scripture itself is actually a human effort to reproduce divine commandments. No known versions of the original New Testament in the language that Jesus spoke are extant. *Gospel Parallels*¹ acknowledges this fact that "... none of the manuscripts of the New Testament have survived nor, presumably, any direct copies of the direct manuscripts. What we have are copies of copies. Into these copies crept errors; moreover, additions and

¹ *Gospel Parallels* Fifth Ed, Edited by Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., ISBN 0-8407-7484-2, Pub. Thomas Nelson, Inc p xii

“corrections” were sometimes made by the copyist, for the only Bible of the early church was the Old Testament, and it was not imperative to copy the gospels and epistles – still “uncanonized” – exactly word for word. ... The chief value of the majority of manuscripts is not their approximation of the original text of the New Testament but their support for one or another in these groups of families.”

Christianity’s conflict with science and technology became evident when Europe attempted to emerge as the global power. Early attempts to reconcile modernity with Biblical principles, during the Reformation and Renaissance periods, disintegrated Christianity into several sects and forced Europeans to shun religion and devise alternate systems of governance based on human intellect to launch the industrial revolution. The Christian Church rejected scientific developments. Galileo’s condemnation by the Church in the 17th century is a well-documented example of the Church’s rejection of scientific discoveries. Galileo was the famous Italian physicist, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher, who played a major role in the Scientific Revolution in Europe. His rejection of the geocentric view and support for the heliocentric model led him to the Roman Inquisition which found him "vehemently suspect of heresy." He was forced to recant the heliocentric view, and spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

Even today, Christianity is at odds with the fundamental question of creation vs. evolution, in spite of scientific evidence that the world evolved from simple building blocks created by God who guided their development through an evolutionary process. The Church continues to deny overwhelming scientific data that human inhabited this earth millions of years earlier than the Church’s dating of about 6,000 years ago. Christianity similarly refuses to accept scientific explanations for “miracles” like the virgin birth which can be explained by the processes of parthenogenesis; the Church continues to insist that Jesus was the biological son of God. Other fundamental beliefs like Jesus’ Crucifixion, Ascension, and Second Coming etc., are not fully explained by Christianity and are at odds with science. Such dogmatic explanations simply open the fundamentals to ridicule and rejection that Jesus was divine; such explanations fail miserably on scientific scrutiny. With such fundamental distortions between the Christian belief and scientific data, any reconciliation between the two, in this era of heightened scientific and technological development, seems unlikely.

The Pope’s prescription for reforming the world order by introducing God and morality is correct and commendable. However, the only possible way to implement the Pope’s prescription is to fully understand the evolution of religions and move further along that path to discover Islam as the next stage in this process. Strangely, the Pope has chosen to mention Islam only as a threat to Europe; he has deliberately ignored any positive reference to Islam as the solution towards the fulfillment of his own prescription.

Unlike the Bible, the Qur'anic text in Arabic has no variants and is undisputed. Qur'anic teachings are fully supportive of science; one third of the Qur'an actually urges people to observe and reflect – scientific principles – and challenges them to find an error in its commandments. Several scientists can testify that their research is inspired or supported by the Qur'an. The Qur'an further challenges that the knowledge contained within it is inexhaustible. These assertions need to be fully established by intellectuals. The Qur'an claims its teachings are in consonance with human intellect and do not rely on dogma or supernatural phenomenon.

Early Muslims followed Qur'anic prescriptions and developed a progressive system of governance which enabled them to excel in sciences, commerce and industry. All this was done when the global economic base was agrarian. With the advent of the industrial revolution, driven by Europe in the 18th century, the global economic base was transformed to industrial and the Muslims failed to accept and adapt to the changed economic foundation. The industrial revolution replaced Arabic – which had been the international language of science for 700 years² – with European languages. The advent of the industrial revolution also enabled the Europeans to defeat the Muslim Empires and colonize their lands. In that defeatist mindset, Muslims refused to learn European languages and adapt to the changed global environment. Thus the Muslims' decline was not caused by scriptural limitations but by their own shortcomings and refusal to accept change.

Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an does not claim to monopolize truth. In addition to accepting divine origins of earlier religions, including Christianity, it accepts that God's bestows his Grace on pious and honest people. Moreover, the Qur'an defines comprehensive principles based on equality, justice and peace. It encourages people develop systems of governance around these principles which can be applied locally, nationally and internationally. Human Rights are considered important in Islam so much so that the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights is fully consistent with the Qur'an.

The Pope Benedict's prescription for reforming the world order around religion is a noble cause. The Pope must realize that reforming Christianity will be a human effort which, like Marxism and liberal capitalism, is bound to fail. As a religious scholar and the leader of the world's largest faith, it behooves the Pope to acknowledge facts and understand how Islam can help achieve his objective. After all, Islam is not a new religion; it is the next evolutionary stage of the divine religion which started with Adam and contains within its DNA more than 124,000 prophets like Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, David, Jesus, and Mohammad (peace be on all prophets). Christianity is like an island in this ocean of evolution and, by itself, is unable to accomplish the pope's objective.

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/sep/26/baghdad-centre-of-scientific-world>