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HEALTHY SECULARITY.

JOSEPH RATZINGER ON THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

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Abstract: In the interpretation of Joseph Ratzinger, the identity of Jesus Christ is important in determining the relationship between the Church and the state. Tempted at the beginning of his public activity, he does not reduce his mission to social or political activity. During the trial before Pilate, he confesses that His kingdom is not of this world, and is based on the power of truth. In accordance with the principle of religious-political dualism, religious and political authority must be distinguished. Nonetheless, the secular state needs the Church as a reservoir of values relevant to the public order, which for centuries matured on the basis of the Christian faith. Thus, healthy secularity manifests itself in the separation of the state and the Church, and at the same time within religious freedom and the presence of the Church in the public sphere of life.

Key words: Ratzinger; healthy secularity; Church; state; religion; truth; justice.

Joseph Ratzinger is a theologian exploring the mystery of God and the Church. At the same time, he is an insightful observer of the modern world. A significant part of his teaching is devoted to matters concerning the presence of Christianity and the Church in the public sphere, and to the relationship between the Church and the state, more broadly - between politics and faith. In the analysis of these issues, the Cardinal, later Pope Benedict XVI, proposes a model that can be described as healthy secularity (Szulist 2016, 328-342). In the context of the constantly up to date discussion on the relationship between the two communities, it is worth addressing this subject by referring to the teaching of Joseph Ratzinger who devoted much space to these issues in his theological and socio-ethical reflection. The themes relevant to this issue are first the identity of Jesus Christ made visible during the temptation in the desert and the trial before Pilate; then the identity of the Church, including the principle of religious-political dualism established by Christ, along with the teaching and practice of the Church of the apostolic times. Furthermore, the analysis will cover contemporary relations between the Church and the state, together with the autonomy of political and religious order as well as the presence of the Church and religion in the public sphere of life.

1. Identity and Mission of Jesus Christ

Joseph Ratzinger usually starts from a certain truth that is carried by the Word of God, and subsequently tries to indicate its consequences for the life of the Church and society. Priority is given to the biblical text, which is a model of all theological statements. The theologian removes himself to the background and makes God himself speak (Szymik 2017, 38). In the matter of interest to us regarding the relationship between the Church and the state, one should start from the basic truth about the identity of Jesus Christ and the nature of His mission. This is crucial for understanding the mission of the Church and its relation to the state. In searching for answers to questions with regard to the relationship between the two communities, the author points on two biblical images. One of them is the description of the temptation of Jesus in the desert (Matt 4:1-11), the other is the trial of Jesus before Pilate (18:33-40).

1.1. *Temptation of Jesus in the Desert*

The narrative about the temptation is closely related to the event of baptism that initiated Jesus' public activity. The evangelist Matthew

reports this event as follows: “And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. And behold, the heavens were opened and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and approaching Him. And a voice from heaven was saying: ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’ “ (Matt 3:16-17). The culmination of this scene is the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus and the voice of the Father proclaiming that He is the Son of God, the awaited Messiah – the Christ. This event is like an anointing, Jesus' formal investiture for office (Ratzinger 2011a, 37).

The public activity of Jesus of Nazareth is preceded by the going out into the desert, the internal focus and struggle for the task entrusted to him (Matt 4:1). The essence of the temptations which Jesus will be subjected to is the distortion of His mission, and showing this distortion as its proper implementation (Ratzinger 2011a, 38). At the beginning of his salvific activity, Jesus struggles for the proper shape of his vocation, which was proclaimed at baptism. It is characteristic that the first two temptations begin with the statement that questions the identity of Jesus of Nazareth: “If you are the Son of God ...” (Matt 4:3-6). Thus, the temptation contains a basic question: what should the Messiah do, what is the task of the savior of the world, what path should the Anointed of God follow? (Ratzinger 2011a, 38). Let us look at the essence of the temptations and the responses that Christ provides. In overcoming them, he points to his proper mission every time.

In the first temptation, the proof of the divinity of Jesus is the transformation of stones into bread (Matt 4:3). According to Ratzinger, the temptation of God in every age is achieved by accusing Him of unfair social conditions. Can faith in a good and almighty God be reconciled with the hunger experienced by so many people? It seems that solving the problem of poverty and feeding all hungry would be the best proof of the divinity of Jesus. The temptation to turn stones into bread is to reduce His mission to the dimension of a social reformer. In this temptation the solution to social problems is raised to the rank of the ultimate status of salvation, the actual test of divinity (Ratzinger 2011a, 41-42, 2016c, 66). The tempted Jesus answers: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). In referring to this temptation, Joseph Ratzinger teaches: “It's about the primacy of God, it's about acknowledging His reality without which nothing else can be good. History cannot be rearranged by denying God simply by building material structures. If the heart of man is not good, then nothing else can become good. Ultimately, the goodness of heart can only come from He who is Goodness – good alone. [...] We must acknowledge that we do not live by bread alone, but above all, by the obedience to the Word of God. And only where this obedience becomes the reality of our lives that a way of thinking arises, capable of delivering bread to all” (2011a, 44). Christ overcomes this temptation and remains faithful to his saving mission. In later activities, he will perform the miracle of multiplying the bread and

feeding the crowd gathered around him (John 6:1-15). However, he will never reduce his mission to the level of struggle for better social conditions.

In the second attempt, the tempter placed Jesus on the corner of the temple saying: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written: He will give his angels charge of you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matt 4:6-7). This temptation is an attempt to make God the object of experimentation. Jesus should be put to the test, tried and checked to see if he indeed is God. This attitude is a negation of the absolute priority of God, and then the elevation of man to the rank of the absolute (Ratzinger 2011a, 46-47). Indirectly, this temptation can also be interpreted in terms of using God and religion for temporal purposes, including political ones. In answering the tempter Christ reminds us, that he really is a God who is entitled to absolute precedence (Ratzinger 2011a, 52).

In the third temptation all the kingdoms of the earth are shown to Christ. If the Savior worships the tempter, then satan will give him dominion over the whole world (Matt 4:8-9). Christ responds: "Begone, Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve" (Matt 4:10). The tempter in his deception does not directly urge to adore him. But rather presents a certain semblance of good which full authority is. The essence of temptation is the presumption that perhaps the Messiah should establish a theocratic state full of justice and peace and gather all people in it. Meanwhile, the purpose of Christ's mission is to be raised on the tree of the cross. This is how His Passover will take place, which will culminate in the resurrection. The tempter seeks to convince Jesus, to let His work take the form of a political kingdom, so that the powerlessness of faith and truth, which he proclaims, be supported by political power. Strengthening faith with temporal authority, however, leads to the submission to the service of power. Faith in such an arrangement threatens to be suffocated in a powerful embrace of temporal authority. The "altar" always loses on alliance with the "throne." The tempter wants Jesus to abandon the path marked by the cross and the loss of himself (Ratzinger 2011a, 52). Christ rejects this temptation. After all, He is the Messiah who came to earth to give people God revealing Himself throughout the history of salvation. The fullness of this revelation is being accomplished in His Person. Only His power is real and permanent, as evidenced by the history of so many earthly powers that have passed away. Therefore, only God should be worshiped. His absolute precedence ensures that likewise human affairs, including social issues, can be ordered properly (Ratzinger 2011a, 52-53).

The tempter seeks to reduce Christ's mission to a horizontal dimension only. His mission, in the tempter's mind, was to be limited to solving social problems, seeking power, or using God to accomplish only

temporal purposes. The essence of temptation is to abandon God as someone insignificant, ineffective, someone who is merely an illusion. The tempter prompts to devote ourselves to effective actions and take on the real improvement of the world according to human projects (Ratzinger 2011a, 40). Christ rejects these temptations and retains his identity and mission of the Messiah who gives God to people. Therefore, Christ does not implement a secular, or even more political project. He accomplishes the goal of salvation. The same mission is fulfilled by His Church. The identity of Jesus determines the proper mission of His Church.

1.1. Trial of Jesus before Pilate

The second biblical image relevant to determining the identity of Jesus is his trial before Pilate. The Sanhedrin hearing ended with the recognition that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. In Jewish law only Pilate, a representative of the temporal authority, could sentence Him to the death penalty for this crime. Another political aspect of Jesus' guilt was that he declared claims to royal dignity, and this was a political crime for which the Roman authorities had to punish Him (Ratzinger 2011b, 197-198, 204). When Pilate asked what Jesus had done, that the high priests and other representatives of His nation handed him over to him, Jesus replied: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I may not be handed over to the Jews. Now my kingdom is not from here." Pilate then said to him: "So you are a king?" Jesus answered: "Yes, I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). Ratzinger comments on this confession of Jesus, by writing: "The accused claims the right to the reign and kingdom (*basileia*), but emphasizes the completely different nature of this reign [...] No one is fighting for this kingdom. [...] This kingdom is powerless. It has no divisions" (2011b, 205). Thus, the kingdom of Jesus is not based on temporal force. It does not have the means of coercion. Its foundation is truth, which is the king that gives all reality splendor and greatness. To bear witness to the truth signifies to make God the measure of being towards the world, to contribute to His reign, to make creation a clear, logical, orderly work of the Divine Logos. This creative reason gives meaning to all reality. This testimony is also intended to make the great and powerful of this world discover the truth of creation. Jesus' kingdom is based on truth, yet it is powerless just as the crucified Jesus was powerless. Paradoxically, its strength is revealed precisely on the cross (Ratzinger 2011b, 208-210). Christ reigns from the cross. His enthronement takes place on Good Friday when he is exalted on Calvary (Mazurkiewicz 2012, 6). God does not come as a force full of violence. His symbol is not a lion, bull or wolf. He stands between people as a lamb to be sacrificed (Ratzinger 2012a, 604). His reign is full of love. The king "reigns, entering among us, loving us, suffering with us and for us" (Ratzinger 2012c, 706).

Therefore Jesus is not someone like Spartacus or Ben Barkohba. He is not a revolutionary gathering supporters to bring about change in authority, social structures or to regain independence by Jews (Ratzinger 2005a, 69). He came to bear witness to the Truth, which is the real sovereign of His Kingdom.

1.3. Religious-political Dualism

The presentation of the divine identity of Jesus of Nazareth and the proper shape of His kingdom leads to an important issue of the relationship between the spiritual and secular authority, between the Church and the state. Christ's words on paying taxes, spoken during the dialogue with the Pharisees, have a crucial significance here. Wanting to put Him to the test and catch Him on a word they pose a trick question about whether to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Jesus said, "Bring me a denarius, I want to see." They brought it and He asked them: "Whose image and inscription is this?" They answered Him: "Caesar's." Then Jesus said to them: "Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and God what belongs to God" (Mark 12:13-17). In saying these words, Christ established the principle consisting in the separation of the religious and political dimension (Ratzinger 2018, 36). In referring to this point, Ratzinger states that Jesus "distributes the power of the emperor from the power of God. Thus, extracts *ius sacrum* from *ius publicum*, cutting the basic system of the ancient and pre-Christian world in general. [...] Creates an area of freedom of conscience, at the borders of which all power of the Roman god - Caesar, who becomes an ordinary man - caesar, comes to an end" (Ratzinger 1990d, 2019-2020). Christian religious-political dualism is the opposite of pagan monism identifying spiritual and secular power. Obligations towards God are different from those towards Caesar. Secular authority does not identify with spiritual authority. The secular and ecclesial community remain relative to each other in a relationship of autonomy and independence (Krukowski 2000, 16-17). After all, the purpose of Jesus' mission was to save and found the Church, not the state (Utz 2005, 166).

Joseph Ratzinger also refers to the teaching and practice of the Church of the apostolic times. It is clearly the implementation of the religious-political dualism defined by Christ. St. Paul teaches in the Letter to the Romans that "there is no authority that does not come from God" (Rom. 13:1). Temporal authority belongs to the order of creation, is a consequence of social human nature and is necessary for the realization of the good of individuals and communities. It is an indication of God's order, an instrument of God's providence in the realization of goodness and justice. The apostle Paul commands prayer for those in authority (Tim. 2:2). Believers pray for the representatives of authority so that they will be able to properly carry out their tasks. Likewise St. Peter commands Christians to obey the temporal authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). The apostles

recognize and respect the temporal social order. On the other hand, they do not idolize state structures. Their value is relativised by the fact that all legal norms have their origin in God. Temporal authority is not everything because it is liable to the law of God. If it had misappropriated its moral calling and constituted unjust laws, offended dignity and violated human rights, it would lose the right to oblige citizens to obey. Thus, obedience to the temporal authority is neither unconditional nor boundless. Its boundaries are determined by an objective moral order rooted in God. (Ratzinger 2005c, 53; Püttman, 2009, 337; Giostra 2019, 99).

2. Consequences of Religious-political Dualism for the State and the Church

The separation of both orders is the source of the Western idea of freedom. The state is no longer a religious authority, it does not reach the depths of human conscience (Ratzinger 1990c, 209). Christianity is a guarantee of freedom here. The principle of religious-political dualism marks the moral boundaries of all earthly authority (Ratzinger 1990d, 219-220). The Church, on the other hand, by imitating its Founder, accomplishes salvific goals. The issues raised are worth developing and asking about the consequences of the Christian message, for both the state and the Church.

2.1. Consequences for the State

The separation of Church and state primarily brings desacralization into the political sphere. It belongs to the secular sphere and is not interpreted in a theocratic way (Ratzinger 2009b, 175, Utz, 165). Even if the state is governed by Christian rulers, or is inhabited mostly by Christians, it will remain an earthly state and cannot become anything else (Ratzinger 1990a, 71). According to Joseph Ratzinger, “no kingdom of this world is the kingdom of God [...] The kingdom of men remains the kingdom of men and whoever claims that he can save the world, upholds the deceit of satan, renders the world to him” (2011a, 52). The world which we live in will always remain a human world with all its consequences. No political structure can usurp the right to eternity or divinity (Ratzinger 2005a, 123). It will always remain imperfect, not entirely satisfying, it will remain in the profane sphere (Ratzinger 1990b, 197).

The consequence of religious-political dualism is also the opposition to all forms of totalitarian state. The state is a particularistic reality, it does not cover the whole of human existence. Man, on the other hand, carries hope that goes beyond the framework of politics and the state community (Ratzinger 1990b, 197; Węgrzecki 2019, 133). In the moral dimension, man maintains sovereignty in relation to it. “Caesar”, in the

sense of political power, is a guarantor of the law and can enforce obedience to his ordinances. However, the power of obliging citizens is limited by “what belongs to God.” Therefore, power cannot be totalitarian in nature (Ratzinger 2005c, 54). A well-read Christian message carries the principle of freedom in this regard. Still, wherever the Christian faith is eroded, the myth of the divine nature of the state, power and political structures returns (Ratzinger 1990b, 197). The re-sacralisation of the political reality always carries the threat of establishing totalitarian power. A headship, that claims theocratic competences enters the area of truth, moral norms, human rights and freedom of man, that by breaking them inevitably becomes an apocalyptic beast drunk with the blood of martyrs (Rev 13:1-18). By becoming a dishonorable authority, it loses the right to enforce obedience to those who are subject to it.

2.2. Consequences for the Church

The separation of the divine from the imperial carries important consequences for the Church as well. The community of faith follows the path marked by Christ who rejected the path of political theocracy. His kingdom “does not exist and cannot exist on earth as a political reality, but makes itself present through faith, hope and love, fulfilling its mission of changing the world from within” (Ratzinger 2005c, 97). The Church does not separate itself from the world. On the contrary, it is sent to the world. However, it is not oriented on the world of politics and state structures. Rather, it focuses on the society and on influencing human consciences. As Ratzinger indicates, Jesus “initiated the non-political kingdom of the Messiah and began to separate these two inseparable realities. Nevertheless, this division of politics and faith, the people of God and politics, belonging to the essence of his message, was ultimately possible only through the Cross. Only by the truly total loss of all external authority, by radically stripping the Cross” (2018, 37). The Cross is the ultimate confirmation of His salvific mission. Therefore, the consequence of the separation of both political and religious orders is the renunciation of temporal authority by the Church. In its activity, the Church pursues salvific goals and can apply only spiritual rules and sanctions. It is a religious and moral instance, not political (Ratzinger 1990c, 209).

3. The Church Present in the Public Sphere

Joseph Ratzinger, describing the relationship of the Church to the world, notes that the upper room in which Christ consumed the Last Supper with his disciples is a room upstairs or on an upper floor (Mark 14:15). This formulation symbolically describes the relationship of the Church to the world (2009a, 34). The Church does not directly engage in

the various areas of temporality. Nor does it refer to strictly political or economic matters in its teaching. It works on a different plane. Focuses on the ethical aspect of these issues. It is in this area that the Church plays an important public role.

The state needs morality for proper functioning. The political community is based on social consensus in the sphere of fundamental values (It is not self-sufficient in this regard. The state is not a perfect society (*societas perfecta*), which has all the means to achieve its goals. In seeking moral foundations of public order, it is compelled to turn to other forces (Böckenförde 1994, 86). They will be found primarily in the Church, which is something external to the state. However, the political reason seeking the proper order of human affairs, matured in the cultural context of the Christian faith (Ratzinger 1994, 194, Węgrzecki 2019, 150). This is also how the democratic state, the law and the idea of human rights were shaped. The secular state therefore needs the Church and religion as the disposer and relay of values that maintain social order (Ratzinger 2005a, 126-127).

J. Ratzinger refers to these issues extensively: “A political community cannot exist unless it is based on common, constitutive values, recognized by all, which are binding to all, whom everyone refers to, and which we all try to implement. [...] The condition for the existence of a political community is a living sense of justice, striving for consent, tolerance, the ability to compromise and honest relations. Justice cannot exist if there are no righteous people. And again, the roots from which we draw strength to be righteous go deeper than our thoughts and deeds, to the law and the truth that the Creator himself instilled in creation” (2016b, 39-40). The path of faith leads to a high standard of humanity. A good life full of love requires effort, formation, upbringing. By promoting these values, religion brings peace, justice and solidarity between people (Ratzinger 2016b, 51-52). According to Ratzinger, “wherever God is, there is humanity, warmth, home, family and community” (2016d, 77). For that reason, Christianity plays an important role in the humanization of social life. It is the carrier of many important values for it (Łużyński 2018, 1066-1069, 2019, 316).

Ratzinger warns against a purely functional interpretation of social reality. He perceives the importance of social institutions, but does not overestimate them, and even less absolutize them. Nevertheless, he points out that they cannot survive and function properly without a community of ethical beliefs (Ratzinger 2005b, 81). The purely empirical reason cannot be their source. In defining these beliefs one should refer to the “basic resources of humanity”, to the convictions concerning good and evil maturing for centuries on the basis of Christian faith. Moral values and norms must be protected as an essential element of the common good. By cutting off from these important ethical forces present in faith, a democratic state would commit suicide (Ratzinger 1999, 20-21, 1994, 95,

Utz 2005, 175). The political sphere must be subordinated to ethical norms, and these are rooted in religion (Ratzinger 2009b, 175).

The Church is a depositary of values and norms creating the axiological context of social and, above all, political life. The issue of understanding dignity and human rights, its relation to the community, the concept of the state and its responsibility for the fate of citizens, the servitude of authority and its relationship to society, the understanding of justice - these are not issues that can be reduced to the level of private thoughts, opinions, personal views. The listed values are of public nature. They are the foundation of social and political life. Thus, the community that mediates their transmission cannot be confined to the private sphere alone. The public nature of the Church and religion is revealed precisely in its responsibility for the axiological foundations of social life (Ratzinger 2012b, 267). Faith illuminates and helps to better understand the principles of natural ethics available to all (Utz, 169). The Church, with its salvific but also moral message, hence plays the role of a “public conscience” (Böckenförde 1994, 90; Wanat 2019, 164-182).

According to Ratzinger, morality must not be left to the logic of a changing public opinion or to the principle of a democratic majority. The law cannot be derived from statistics, dependent on social sentiment or shaped in consonance with public opinion. History teaches us that a democratic state bereaved of justice can degrade itself to a large “gang of robbers.” Lawmaking should be based on values and norms that are not subject to our manipulation (Ratzinger 2005a, 137). Otherwise, it is not the strength of the rational argument that will prevail, but the argument of strength and, consequently, the law must be trampled upon. A clear example of such logic is the attitude of Pilate who distances himself from the category of truth, and leaves the verdict to the will of the majority. In this way the Righteous is convicted (John 18:38). Therefore, if truth and morality were to become a product of politics, the democratic majority would turn into something like a deity whose will cannot be opposed in any way. Relativism must necessarily lead to totalitarianism (Ratzinger 1999, 74-75, 81; Szulist 2018, 136, 143).

The Church directs its message not only inwards, but is responsible for the whole, for the fate of society in which it is rooted. In its religious and ethical mission it goes beyond its own borders (Ratzinger 2012b, 267). Co-responsible for the common good it turns to the public sphere, and wants to actively participate in the discussion on the ethical foundations of the political order (Ratzinger 1999, 20-21). The public task of the Church is to educate, shape conscience, sensitize to the truth, add courage so that man would be able to recognize the truth and goodness, and shape his life according to them. Faith contains an important element of social responsibility. Nevertheless, it does not take the shape of a specific party, system or political agenda. This is an ethical responsibility. The Church has no political revelation, but the very sources of law in the form of

fundamental ethical distinctions and values have been entrusted to its care (Ratzinger 2005a, 48-50, 69, Łużyński, Szymczak 2019, 257). This is its significant contribution to political, economic and cultural life (Ratzinger 2009a, 92). Thus, the competences of the Church can be described as “non-political politics” (Mazurkiewicz 2012, 5). Its activity at the starting point is not political. However, in its further consequences it has political results (Dylus 2012, 25).

4. Conclusion

When searching an answer to the question about the relationship between the Church and the state in the interpretation of Joseph Ratzinger, attention should be paid first to the identity of Jesus Christ. The theologian, in analyzing the scene of the temptation of Jesus in the desert, emphasizes the divine character of His person and the salvific dimension of His mission. The tempter seeks to reduce His mission to social or political activity. This means distorting its essence. Jesus overcomes these temptations and remains faithful to his saving mission of the Son of God. During the trial before Pilate, Jesus accentuates that he is King, however, His kingdom is not of this world. It is politically powerless. It is based on the power of truth. It is in this powerlessness that His true authority to give all reality greatness and meaning is revealed. The principle that Jesus establishes in the sphere of the relationship between spiritual and secular authorities is the religious-political dualism. The principle of giving Caesar what is imperial and God what is divine indicates that both authorities and communities should remain autonomous with each other. This is also the teaching and practice of the Church of the apostolic times. Christians pray for the ruler but do not kneel before him. The separation of these two spheres has important consequences for both the state and the Church. The state ceases to be a sacred reality. It remains in the profane sphere. Caesar discontinues to be a deity and becomes a caesar – the man. However, the Church has no political resources. The Kingdom of God makes itself present through faith, hope and love. This is its essence. Nonetheless, the Church should be present in the public sphere of life because of its axiological potential. The state needs ethical foundations for its functioning. The Church can guarantee them by offering values, norms and ethical convictions that have matured in it for centuries. Thus, healthy secularity manifests itself in the separation of the state and the Church, and at the same time within religious freedom and the presence of the Church in the public sphere of life.

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