

PURIFIER OF REASON OR PUBLIC RELIGION? A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RATZINGER'S POLITICAL THOUGHT VIS-A-VIS CASANOVA'S NOTION OF PUBLIC RELIGION

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A number of literature that discuss the role of religion in a secular world have been written in recent years. From Harvey Cox *The Secular City* to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* – social scientists and philosopher have been rethinking the Enlightenment prophecy of, to use Per Berger's words, the “supernatural's departure from the modern world.” What role does religion have in a secular (or secularizing) society?

Engaged in the religion-secularization debate is no less than Joseph Ratzinger (a.k.a. Benedict XVI) whose political thought, taken as a whole, provides a conceptual framework of a particular model of State and Church relations. The Church (and as may be applied to religion), according to him, is a purifier of reason yet it must not take into its hands the political battle in order to achieve the most just society possible. Not without critics, the German pope's political thought has been considered by some as a retrogressive view of religion in a modern age.² In contrast, Jose Casanova, a sociologist from Georgetown University, contends that the secular world has been a witness to the deprivatization of religions and their continual engagement with the public sphere. Why this choice of key thinkers

and why such a subject matter? Perhaps, the brief situationer below would help.

DISCURSIVE DETOUR OR PASTORAL PRUDENCE?

At the height of massive calls for then President Gloria Arroyo to resign in 2005, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines called for adherence to the constitutionally mandated processes in order to settle the political crisis. The statement, compared to previous ones, seemed sober and prudent-sounding—an atypical response from the influential bishops. Citing Pope Benedict XVI, Archbishop Fernando Capalla, then president of the country's Bishops' conference, explained CBCP's position as "non-intrusion" in the realm of politics. Those who are familiar with State and Church relations in the Philippines would not find it difficult to spot the apparent shift in the Philippine Bishops' stance towards politics.³ An astute reading of the pastoral letter would all the more highlight how different the hierarchy's political stance was, not to mention the way it played its cards, in the political arena; the words, as the thought of the whole letter shows, were prudently chosen. The letter was pastoral in nature but actually politically safe. Now accused of electoral fraud and plunder, former President Arroyo managed to stay in power vis-à-vis unsuccessful calls for her resignation. Some analysts believe that the lack of collective support from the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines for the movements that called for her ouster was a factor of her survival in the presidency up to its last term in 2010.

Our focus is not on Arroyo or the social movements and their capacity for mobilization. Rather it is on the kind of political thought that found its way into the discourse of the Bishops. As the interest of this paper, the horizon of understanding that served as a framework of the Bishops' decision is what is important for discussion. Apparently, the Philippine Bishops' statement in 2005 as well as the subsequent and related letters issued did not develop in a vacuum. For, its backdrop was Benedict XVI's model of Church-State relations, a view which can be traced back to his days as Ratzinger the theologian. As an influential theologian and as the head of the Catholic Church, his ideas on the nature and limitation of the role proper to the Church, does have some bearing in terms of the

Philippine Bishops' collective action and pronouncements in many issues. Evidences of this are their nuanced and qualified political positioning and participation in specific issues and events in the country.

The discursive influence of Ratzinger could be determined in terms of the reception of the Philippine Bishops' conference and how the hierarchy appropriated the pope's perspectives in their reading of the signs of the times. The so-called prophetic dialogue of the Church however with the public sphere has lots of bearings in positioning in matters that are socio-political and economic.

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

(A) *Problem.* This paper embarks on an exposition and critique of Ratzinger's political thought, specifically those that were articulated in *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate*, in the light of Jose Casanova's notion of the deprivatization of religion. This overarching endeavor will be carried out in three strokes in the succeeding chapters: first, it presents Casanova's notion of public religions and deprivatization; second, it exposes Ratzinger's political thought particularly those that are articulated in two of his papal documents (as earlier mentioned).⁴ Lastly, it presents a critical reading of Ratzinger's political thought in the light of Casanova's sociology of religion.

(B) *Framework.* The choice for Ratzinger and Casanova is in no way arbitrary. Their commonalities provide the reasons for their selection. Foremost, both of them believe that religion (the Church specifically for Ratzinger) still has a vital role to play in contemporary secular society. Ratzinger believes that the Church is a purifier of reason while Casanova has focused his research on the role of public religions and their deprivatization. Second, their critiques of secularization are directed against a radical view of the Enlightenment, the initial spirit of which envisioned the marginalization (if not obliteration) of the importance of religion. Yet one cannot just marry, simplistically, the ideas of the German pope and the sociologist from Georgetown University. On the one hand Ratzinger comes from a tradition that is anchored on a philosophy that understands the ontology of institutions in the light of faith and

reason while Casanova is a sociologist whose findings are based on the actual dynamics of institutions.

CASANOVA: PUBLIC RELIGIONS AND THE DEPRIVATIZATION OF RELIGION

A Critique of Secularization

Perhaps a brief introduction about Casanova would not be impertinent. He teaches sociology of religion and is a Senior Fellow at the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Primarily known as a sociologist of religion in the United States, his interest in religion would expand to a global context after 9/11. More than a decade ago he wrote *Public Religions in the Modern World*, which holds that the modern world has been witnessing the deprivatization of religion, that is, the refusal of religions to accept the marginal and privatized role(s) which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them (p. 5). He cited how widespread and simultaneous in the 80s the refusal of religions to be restricted in the private sphere.

Without denying its importance, Casanova simply wants us to rethink our notion of secularization that was largely inherited from the Enlightenment. He argues that there are not many believers anymore in the myth of secularization and majority of the sociologists of religion have abandoned the paradigm with the same uncritical haste with which they previously embraced it (p. 11).

This seeming change in perspective among sociologists or reversal, as he calls it, is not because reality has changed. Instead, it is the change in perception typical to the Kuhnian revolution in scientific paradigms (p. 11) which enabled contemporary sociological analysis to abandon the view of secularization as religious-free. Casanova contends that the failure of secularization to go full swing, as it was envisioned by its founding fathers may be explained if we rethink our concepts of the secular and secularization itself (p. 12). Given the fact that religious movements compose themselves vis-à-vis State power, there seems to be a fallacy in the secularization theory (cf. p. 19): theorists of secularization confused the historical processes of

secularization proper with the alleged and anticipated consequences which those processes were supposed to have upon religion (p. 19).

To rectify the said fallacy, the author contends that the concept and the theory of secularization must be distinguished. There is thus a need to analyze carefully and consequently review the secularization theory, which accordingly has three connected theses. In his own words: “[o]nly if we separate these three theses analytically can we fully make sense of the complexity of modern historical reality” (p. 20).

Main Thesis: The core and the central thesis of the theory of secularization is:

- the conceptualization of the process of societal modernization as a process of: functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres primarily the state, the economy, and science – from the religious sphere, and
- the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere

Sub-theses

- Sub-thesis 1: The Decline-of-religious thesis postulated that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the progressive shrinkage and decline of religion, until some extreme versions added, it eventually disappeared.
- Sub-thesis 2: The privatization thesis postulated that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the privatization and, some added, the marginalization of religion in the modern world.

Thus, “secularization as a concept refers to the actual historical process whereby the dualist system within the world and the sacramental structures of mediation between this world and the other world progressively break down until the entire medieval system of classification disappears, to be replaced by new systems of spatial structuration of the spheres” (p. 15). Let it be warned for the reader that Casanova does not intend to debunk secularization as a factual process. Neither does his thesis argue against the changes

that have happened to the spheres of modernity whether physical-spatial, structural or conceptual. Indeed religion has been interrogated and limited as regards the scope of its influence as a consequence of functional differentiations. On the contrary, it is the contention that religion would retreat to solitude, lose relevance – never be heard of, and eventually disappear – that our sociologist considers contentious and/or inaccurate.

DEPRIVATIZATION OF RELIGION

In the light of the theses on secularization, Casanova believes that religion in the current secular landscape is not absolutely privatized despite the differentiations that shaped as a consequence of modernization. Thus, in contrast to what used to be attributed to religion as a characteristic within the context of modernity, i.e., “a private affair,” he contends that it has been undergoing the process of “deprivatization” instead. Accordingly, the deprivatization of modern religion is “the process whereby religion abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society to take part in the ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation and redrawing of the boundaries” (pp. 65 – 66). In this sense, he refuses to be aligned to either Durkheim’s functionalist perspective of social integration or Weber’s phenomenological perspective of salvational meaning (p. 216). In his own words, “religion always transcends any privatistic, autistic reality” (Ibid.).

WHAT IS PUBLIC RELIGION?

The idea of a public religion comes from the notion of deprivatization. It is the effect of religion’s abandonment of its assigned place in the private sphere, thereby entering into the public sphere of social and political contestation. There is a more nuanced explanation however for the usage of the term public with reference to religion. Particularly as explained in *Public Religions and the Modern World*, it is not just a matter of accepting that religion has a role of critiquing the blind spots of the public, the secular, rather the idea of the “public–private” divide must itself be rethought. Furthermore, Casanova argues that he has not found any compelling reason, on

wither democratic or liberal grounds, to banish in principle religion from the public democratic sphere.

Casanova's reminder is that such binary categories may not truly be the case of society in reality: "social reality itself is not dichotomous" (p. 43). Three perspectives of religious differentiation are commonly known among sociologists: (a) distinction between individual and group religiosity; (b) distinction between cults and religious communities; (c) distinction between religion and the world (pp. 44 – 51). Largely, these conceptual differentiations contribute to the perspective that religion is a private affair—and to some extent should not have anything to do in and with the public sphere (Casanova 1994, 20).

In trying to argue for religion's public relevance in modern societies, Casanova uses Jeff Weintraub's four major ways of distinguishing (cf. Table 1) the public from the private, as it is (commonly) done in social analysis in order to reframe the perspectives of religious dichotomy. On the basis of the said fourfold distinction, he further came up with four binary combinations of public religions and private religions (p. 51).

These fourfold distinctions simply underscore what is phenomenologically observable, i.e., religions differ in their engagement in the public sphere.

Synthesis of Weintraub and Casanova's Conception of the Public (Table 1.)

Weintraub's Distinction		Casanova's Corresponding Categorization
Liberal-economistic	Distinction between state administration and the market economy	Individual Mysticism versus Denominationalism
Republican-virtue approach	Public is seen in terms of political community and	Established versus Disestablished

	citizenship v. the market and administrative state	
Social history and Anthropology, i.e. Aries	Public realm as a sphere of fluid and polymorphous sociability	Public Civil Religions versus Private Religious Communities
Tendency in economic history and feminist analysis	Public as associated with the market economy – distinguished from the family	Home versus Work: The Private Feminine Sphere of Religion and Morality versus the Public Masculine Sphere of Work and Legality

Excursus 1

Casanova's sociology of religion, at least as articulated in *Public Religions*, contends that religion has a public dimension. This contention is empirically evidenced by how religions compose themselves vis-à-vis secular societies, although the contexts, styles, and effects (of religious engagement) vary from one situation to another.

From the above framework, we partially conclude for this part of the paper that the role of religion in society may not be homogenously described because realities differ from one life-world to another. Furthermore the public sphere which is the socio-economic-politico-spatial matrix of religion varies: the levels of the state, political society and civil society.

RATZINGER: BACKGROUND, SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT⁵

Like Jose Casanova, Ratzinger argues that the Church (and by extension religion) has a role in the public sphere. Ratzinger, who is now Benedict XVI, is not new to the politics-religion discourse, although in recent years his political thought attracted some attention after the separate publications of his two encyclicals: *Deus*

Caritas Est and *Caritas in Veritate*. More particularly because of the first one, the German pope would draw criticisms from those who found his perspective on Church and State relations (articulated in the said documents) reminiscent of his strong antagonism to Marxism. His perspective on the role of the Church (or religion) gained more prominence due to his upfront and incisive views on the extent and limitations of the Church's role in social and political life. When he became pope, his ideas and discourses would be amplified. Their credibility would have the weight of the institution they represent whose traditional and ideological capital has been around for more than 2,000 years.

Two reasons are here considered in relation to the significance of the discussing and analysis of Ratzinger's political thought. First, his idea represents a model that is acknowledged (though not officially applied) in the Philippines by the Catholic hierarchy. Its theoretical evaluation may then help us understand and analyze the political dynamics and behavior of a religious-interest-group. Moreover, this inquiry allows us to engage beyond the surfaces of the arguments related to issues between the Church and State thereby deepening the level of discourse.

Another equally important reason for the choice of this current topic is the global significance of Ratzinger himself. Even before his election to the papacy, Ratzinger was already known for his firm stance on matters of politics and religion. Despite being labeled conservative by many, he was engaged in discussions, most of which have been controversial. Francis Schussler Fiorenza of Harvard Divinity School described his former mentor as a man who actually enters into a dialogue while ensuring that a vision is brought into any discussion of such a dialogue. Among the German pope's interlocutors were Jurgen Habermas whom he had an encounter in 2004 upon the invitation of the Catholic University of Bavaria. Their discussion would later on be published with the title *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*.⁶

Thus, this paper argues that while one would first get an impression that his words are nothing but hortatory discourses for Roman Catholics to internalize, a closer examination of it in the light of his background and philosophical and theological orientations

would reveal a specific political thought, a non-value free idea in itself which if applied or carried out in systemic terms (in the name of religion) may have serious political consequences. Ratzinger's ideas are therefore worth the intellectual exploration for anyone who wants to understand a different view on secularization and the post-secular age. It is an interrogation of a theory in the social sciences that one day religion would have to go away in order to give way to philosophy and science, a theory which up to now has hardly been proven to be feasible. Yet, for the same reason, there is a need to subject his ideas to a healthy critique while putting in brackets the infallibility attributed to him by a multitude of believers. For while the pope from Bavaria is a contemporary interlocutor of contemporary scholars of secularization and post-secular thought, one cannot be too dogmatic and adherent to all of his views: hook, line and sinker.

ST. AUGUSTINE: A FRAMEWORK FOR CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS

A closer look at Ratzinger's political thought would reveal the influence of St. Augustine on his views.⁷ Since his student days in Munich where he wrote a dissertation on the Church Father entitled "People and House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church." The future pope would interrogate secularization and the secular world coming from a framework that clearly demarcates the limitations of the *Civitas Terrena* from the *Civitas Dei*. Thus what would further evidence the Augustinian underpinnings in his political thought is the dualistic framework through which he understands the relation between the State and Church or how both institutions should be structured.

Anyone who is familiar with Augustinian political thought knows that St. Augustine believed that the State was a product of original sin and man is a political animal only and insofar as his nature is fallen. In the original plan of God, man was not supposed to be subject to the command of another because dominion was a relationship that would be between humanity over other created creatures. In the pre-lapsarian condition, man and woman were believed to have lived a life that was without the problems of this world in its present form. Coming from Augustine, politics would seem to be related to almost

all if not all the evils of the world: war, murder, deceit, slavery, oppression, and all others. Yet politics is all the more needed as an effect of original sin because of the need to curb the always strong inclination of humanity to sinfulness. Authority and dominion are needed to direct man once more to his natural goodness. Put conversely, therefore, there would be no need for man to be subjected to the authority of another whether legitimate or not were it not for the fallen nature that was the consequence of the primordial breach of the creator's law in paradise. One can understand in this light why St. Augustine would believe in the Church's privileged (higher) status over the State. For while in no way should the latter's temporal power be arrogated unto the former, there is no way for the latter to be the end in itself.

In my reading, Ratzinger, like Augustine, seriously believes that the Church still has an irreplaceable role to play, without which the foundations of society would crumble. The Church's role, though not the same with the State and society's role, should necessarily inform the latter. For Ratzinger, a State or society that proceeds on its own without taking into account faith or religion would run the risk of creating its own pathologies or oppressive structures. As he said in reply to Jurgen Habermas:

... [W]e also have seen in the course of our reflections that there are also pathologies of reason, although mankind in general is not conscious of this fact today. There is a hubris of reason that is no less dangerous. Indeed, bearing in mind its potential effects, it poses an even greater threat.... This is why reason too must learn a willingness to listen to the great religious traditions of mankind. If it cuts itself completely adrift and rejects this willingness to learn, this relatedness, reason becomes destructive (p. 78).

Ratzinger's arguments thus impress a post-secular position on the role of the Church or religion in society in the sense that they interrogate the deeply rooted convictions of the enlightenment that envisioned a world that would eventually be free of religion. Yet Ratzinger's post-secular discourse, if we may call it, is not a departure (or a going beyond) from the entire linear development of Western

thought. It is simply a re-sourcement or a contemporary revival of a position that was long held by St. Augustine.

CHURCH AND STATE IN DCE AND CV

An overarching discussion in this section is Ratzinger's view of Church and State relations. How should the Church relate with the State and vice versa? What principles will guide the engagement (or separation, if any) of the Church and the State and, extended to a broader context, between Religion and Politics? His answer[s] to this is not found in just one material yet one helpful starting point for an exploration of his perspective is *Deus Caritas Est*. It is, according to one writer, "in a sense, a masterful synthesis of his dogmatic theology and his theology of politics" (Twomey, xxxvii).

For the relationship between the State and the Church to be clarified the nature and end of each institution should first be distinguished. In my understanding of Ratzinger, a confusion would arise if one does not truly understand that the sphere of politics and the sphere of faith are visible and tangible in two institutions that are essentially different in many profound aspects.

According to Ratzinger the State exists for the purpose of providing and achieving justice. Citing St. Augustine, he argues that "the just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics" (DCE 28a). Those who are familiar with Augustine know very well what he said in *The City of God*, about a State which is not governed according to justice is not different from robbery.⁸ For the said purpose, justice is "both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics" (Ibid.). On the basis of the State's fundamental criterion of achievement, we can say further that such a *locus politicos* has the proper function not just of building structures and creating systems merely on the pretext of human advancement. "Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life" (Ibid.).

A common theme in some of Ratzinger's writings however contends that despite the huge, important and irreplaceable task of the State, it cannot claim to be the terminal of humanity's hopes and longings, such that even if justice should be humanity's achievement in the temporal sphere, it could not be of human effort alone. The State is and cannot be the end-all and be-all of humanity because

justice alone is not enough in any aspect of human reality. This does not mean that justice is not important; it is just that justice is not only “not enough” but also unachievable without the other necessary virtues. According to one commentator of Ratzinger, “[j]ustice cannot be achieved in a society simply by changing the structures of society... It is, rather, the temporary result of continued imperfect efforts by society’s members” (Twomey, xxxv). The view that the political sphere has the propensity to fall short of its task is not new to our thinker. In 1988, he wrote in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* what he believed to be the limitation of the State’s proper function. The context of his statement is that there must be a separation of the Church and State and one can reasonably understand it in the light of the limitation of each institution’s task, thus:

At the same time it must be said that it is precisely this separation of the authority of the state and sacral authority, the new dualism that this contains, that represents the origin and the permanent foundation of the western idea of freedom. From now on there were two societies related to each other but not identical with each other, neither of which had this character of totality. The state is no longer itself the bearer of a religious authority that reaches into the ultimate depths of conscience, but for its moral basis refers beyond itself to another community. This community in its turn, the Church, understands itself as a final moral authority which however depends on voluntary adherence and is entitled only to spiritual but not to civil penalties, precisely because it does not have the status the state has of being accepted by all as something given in advance.⁹

What Ratzinger essentially contends is much deeper, that is, the temporal sphere and the political dimension, in particular, is finite and cannot in any way offer the most profound longings of man such as justice and peace. This view apparently reflects an Augustinian bias, the dualism of the African bishop that consequently regards this-worldly matters as finite and fleeting. This is a conviction of the pope

that is evident in his second encyclical letter *Spe Salvi*—on Christian hope. In this letter, the pope reminds his reader of what he thinks is the distinctiveness of the Christian paradigm, particularly its eschatological vision of a life hereafter. Yet, he does not merely argue in the same writing for a sheer belief that borders fanaticism; instead, he departs from the fact that human society for all its promises and attempts, has never and can never offer the hope which only the creator can give. Practically, as Ratzinger suggests, modernity needs self-critique and this means “dialogue with Christianity and its concept of hope” (SS, 22). He further adds (in the same paragraph) that we must ask ourselves “what does ‘progress’ really mean; what does it promise and what does it not promise” (Ibid.).

As he points out in *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, it is not just the State or the political sphere which the pope describes as wanting but secular society as a whole. Speaking about the condition of Europe in contemporary time, he believes that the gravest danger is the imbalance between technological possibilities and moral energy (p. 27). To speak about justice only as a matter of new moralism [or secular moralism if I may call it] is not only lacking but dangerous. The danger comes from being lost in the mazes of partisanship and individualism. “For what does justice mean? Who defines it? What promotes peace” (p. 28)? These are questions Ratzinger asks – basically pushing in the issue that the State–Society–the Secular sphere cannot do away with the Church–Religion–Faith.

STATE AS AN AGENCY OF JUSTICE AND CHARITY AS THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

A practical application of Ratzinger’s political thought and ecclesiology would yield a specific model of Church and State relation that privileges the spiritual sphere and, as a consequence, shuns endeavors that would require the Church to *directly* involve itself in politics. Ratzinger speaks of the Church’s involvement in politics as limited to the purification of reason. Since the Church or religion is in the realm of faith it must serve as a purifying force for reason itself (DCE 28a). Yet, what does this mean? Here we must avoid a possible misinterpretation, that is, to conclude coming from a half-reading of DCE: that the Church should in no way participate in politics and

therefore leave anything temporal to society and anything political to the State. The corrective response to this construal is found in the last paragraph of DCE 28a:

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.

If the Church cannot and must not replace the State yet she cannot and must not remain in the sidelines of society, how then should she perform her task of being the leaven of society – as a salt of the earth and the light of the world? Can she be political and non-political at the same time? To theoretically answer these questions, we need to at least review the framework within which Ratzinger's thought operates. Foremost, coming from Augustine, he does not consider the Church as a mere human institution, i.e., a social construction or a political organization standing on the basis of nationalist loyalties or juridical obligations. The Church, as he says in an essay that commemorated Hans Urs von Balthasar, "is not a sociological quantity." The second point therefore is: the Church's role in political life must be understood in the light of her being a community of believers. Further, the pope's notion of State and Church dynamics is not a matter of State and Civil Society dynamics. His understanding in no way reduces the Church to a civil society or a pressure group, as she always is a community that is ontologically distinct from the world or any State for that matter. In the light of the above points, one should understand why he contends that the Church's role is the purification of reason.

What does purification of reason mean? Ratzinger, unfortunately, does not give a categorical definition of his own jargon nor is there any practical suggestion in DCE as to how this purification of reason must be carried out. Some statements however give us

some ideas on how the matter may be interpreted: (1) in 28b of the same document where he points out that “no ordering of the State [can be] so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love... There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help.” Secondly, he underscores the role of lay people who as citizens of the State have the direct duty to take part in public life in their personal capacity (DCE 29).

LIMITATION OF THE CHURCH’ ROLE IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF JUSTICE

The statements above, from DCE 28b and 29, tell us one important thing which could be the answer to the question regarding how the Church may purify reason. Practically, the first statement is another way of saying that the temporal world is not all that it is. The world is capable of achieving justice and so are States, but if ever they can achieve one it is not absolute enough so as to eliminate all the wants and longings of humanity. Whatever is this-worldly can never be the end-in-itself, it could only be the approximation or the best possible achievement human beings could arrive at. This truth therefore is what the Church should teach, and this is what she should teach to human organization and societies in order to purify reason. Why? Because out of humanity’s longing for justice and peace States and societies resort to ideologies that could be the causes of social pathologies. In *Spe Salvi*, the pope specifically underscores Marxism as a kind of modern ideology that seeks to offer hope which nevertheless eventually failed:

Together with the victory of the revolution, though, Marx’s fundamental error also became evident. He showed precisely how to overthrow the existing order, but he did not say how matters should proceed thereafter.

So while the Church does not have the ordinary function of arranging institutions let alone run them all for an assured social justice and peace, she does have the competence to teach and correct the ideologies of the State that may lend to the formation and emergence of totalitarianism in different forms. Purification of reason

then means teaching the truth, as he says in *Caritas in Veritate*: [t]ruth needs to be sought, found and expressed within the “economy” of charity, but charity in turn needs to be understood, confirmed, and practiced in the light of truth (CV 2).

Within the context of the foregoing interpretation of Ratzinger’s political thought, we may now add that the Church’s mission to charity should not be understood in minimalist or philanthropic terms. As he says in the same encyclical, “I am aware of the ways in which charity has been and continues to be misconstrued and emptied of meaning, which the consequent risk of being misinterpreted, detached from ethical living and, in any event, undervalued. In the social, juridical, cultural, political and economic fields—the contexts, in other words, that are most exposed to this danger—charity is easily dismissed as irrelevant for interpreting and giving direction to moral responsibility” (CV 2). Here we may now relate the role of the lay people for it is they who can directly participate in the political life of the State; it is they who must carry out the Church’s paradigm in order to renew society. Through them, the Church may indirectly transform society.

EXCURSUS 2

Ratzinger’s political thought comes from his orientation in philosophy and theology; thus, it carries normative elements in its view of political life. This further means that his political thought is slanted towards the “ought” on the part of the Church rather than the “is” of its contemporary dynamics with politics. Unless one privileges philosophical and theological discourses over those in the political and social sciences, there would be no need to question the validity of Ratzinger’s ideas. But because we live in a society where apparent discourses clash each other, it is but fair to open this discussion by looking into a possible critique of the German pope’s ideas.

CONCLUSION: PURIFIER OF REASON OR PUBLIC RELIGION?

We will, at this juncture, synthesize Casanova and Ratzinger’s ideas. Fundamentally similar between the two is the belief that religion (the Church in the latter’s idea) has a role in society. Both,

thus, disagree to that puritan secularized mentality that argues for the exclusion of religion in the public sphere. Both have also pointed out the pathologies that would arise from the insistence for religion's exclusion and the possibility of the same as a consequence of religion's own ideological excesses.

What cannot be disregarded also, despite the similarities, are apparent differences such as the respective points of departure, the ontology behind the analysis as well as methodologies. This is precisely the reason why we may not just accept Ratzinger's words as dogmatically unquestionable (despite the value it offers). He is a theologian (a pope in fact) and his ideas concern much on the "ought" of things rather than the "is." This is not to say that his political thought is not practical (it need not be) but any idea for that matter must also be tested. Christianity, Catholicism for that matter, exists in the facticity (to use Heidegger's term) of a society full of contestations. Confronting concrete realities, a Christian who is at the same time a "political animal" cannot just switch from the spiritual to the political mode in order to address a concern. Thus, the very problem here identified is Ratzinger's dualism coming from Augustine, clearly expressed in his insistence that charity and not justice is the primary concern of the Church. What of local Churches who need to confront the warlords of their town or the oppressive landlords of their place?

While we do see the point of the pope's concern particularly of religion's existential dimension (the very reason for his argument that the Church's calling is primarily charity and not justice) but should its engagement with the public sphere be limited to the purification of reason? If ever this is the case, how does it purify reason? In the light of Casanova, one can easily point out that unreached by Ratzinger's view is the fact that the Church also confronts different realities and problems. His views clearly come from a Eurocentric (and also Anglo-American) understanding of institutions, where the Church deals with a state that underwent a linear and progressive political development. The Church in Europe has outlived feudalism, thereby not concerned anymore with local bosses and warlords. What of a setting where justice is the real issue—and not merely defined and understood in the metaphysical sense as a virtue of the soul? Should

the Church not be at the forefront in the fight for justice if it is clear that injustice is structural and not just conceptual? How would the Church exercise its being a purifier of reason in the face of a predatory state – to use the very same words of Augustine, amidst the robbers themselves? Johan Verstraeten points out the danger of Ratzinger’s thought in DCE: “[s]uch a focus on charity, when detached from its dialectics with justice, risks to become the ally of the libertarian reduction of justice which advocates for a free and paternalistic transfer of goods from the benevolent wealthy to the poor who have to simply depend on the free will of donors” (p. 17).

Ratzinger’s political thought is clearly relevant and applicable in societies where political institutions are strong so that the Church or religion may engage with it in a manner where diplomatic purification of reason could be possible. This may not be the case if the social condition is that of a political entity where the State has failed or its democracy is a failure, where the law that is supposed to deliver justice has been controlled by the predatory interests of some oligarchs. In this case, it would be difficult for a community of believers to just conservatively fight for justice via the purification of reason. Apparently, there can be no charity (which is the maximum) without justice (the minimum). In the said case, there is a need, first, to lay the foundations of just society before any talk of justice would make sense.

Here Casanova’s sociological analysis may come in. There is no quarrel between Ratzinger and the sociologist with regard to the Church’s place in society, but in the light of the latter, apparently lacking in the former’s political thought is the sensitivity to the fact of Christianity in local contexts. That religion or the Church for that matter may still be a purifier of reason, but the strategy or approach for such a calling to be carried out must differ depending on the confronted political situation and the political personalities involved.

There is no question that with Ratzinger’s brilliance, depth has been provided by his political thought. Yet the reflexive and meta-philosophical nature of his political thought cannot be used as an absolute universal model for Church and State relations. Casanova’s sociological analysis would then supplement: religion has a public

role, and in specific instances it must take bolder steps beyond the mere purification of reason, whatever that means.

ENDNOTES

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² For the critics of Ratzinger’s political thought cf. Johan Verstraeten, “Religion and Politics: Revisiting an Old Problem in Light of Different Models of Thought” in *Hapag* 7, no. 1 (2010): 13 – 36. Also, Stephen J. Pope, “Benedict XVI’s Deus Caritas Est: An Ethical Analysis” in Linda Hogan, *Applied Ethics in a Word Church, The Padua Conference* (New York: Orbis, 2008), 271 – 277.

³ For a more detailed discussion on this, cf. Rhoderick John S. Abellanosa, “The CBCP and Philippine Politics: 2005 and After” in *Asia Pacific Social Science Review* vol. 8 (no. 1): 73 – 88.

⁴ This is without disregard of the other (landmark) writings such as *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures, The Dialectics of Secularization* (with Jurgen Habermas), *Communio: A Program*, among many others.

⁵ For more references on Ratzinger’s thought and writings cf. Aidan Nichols, OP, *The Thought of Benedict XVI* (New York: Burns and Oates, 2005). Also, John Thornton and Susan Varenne, *The Essential Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches* (New York: Harper, 2007).

⁶ Jurgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005).

⁷ Because this paper is not intended to comprehensively present Ratzinger’s Augustinian background and influence, the following readings are suggested for cross-referencing in addition to that of Nichols, O.P. (2005), Verstraeten (2010) and Thornton and Varenne (2008): Vincent Twomey, “The Theological Genius of Joseph Ratzinger” retrieved from: http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2007/vtomey_interview_jun07.asp