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BOOK REVIEWS

Gediminas T. Jankunas, *The Dictatorship of Relativism: Pope Benedict XVI's Response*, New York: St Paul's Publications/Alba House, 2011. pp. XV+336, ISBN 10: 0-8189-1316-9, ISBN 13: 978-0-8189-1316-7

Pope Benedict XVI, previously known as Joseph Ratzinger, who surprised the world through his unexpected resignation, and whom his predecessor John Paul II described as a "church-man of exceptional theological competence," is perhaps the greatest theologian Pope of the modern times and one of the most prolific writers in the contemporary intellectual world. While his predecessor, Saint John Paul II, commanded the admiration of the whole world through his international journeys and at the end through his suffering, and his successor Pope Francis through his simplicity and pastoral approach, the hall mark of Benedict XVI's papacy was his theological teachings and excellent doctrinal expositions which came out not only through his famous encyclicals like *Deus caritas est* and the like, but also through his books like *Jesus of Nazareth* and his interviews like *Salt of the Earth*. However, he is also to be remembered in a special way for his unrelenting fight against relativism, which he started at least in 1968 with the publication of his classic book *Introduction to Christianity*. With the declaration *Dominus Jesus* [AAS 92 (2000) 742-765], of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith under Cardinal Ratzinger, on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, this fight against relativism reached a notably higher level in the ecclesiastical magisterium. However, this fight became all the more famous through his well articulated homily *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontefice*, which he delivered, as the Dean of the College of Cardinals, to the Cardinals before they entered the conclave that elected him as pope. In that homily, he said: "We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires."

Gediminas T. Jankunas from Lithuania who teaches Christology at the Kaunas Theological Seminary presents, in the book *The Dictatorship of Relativism: Pope Benedict XVI's Response*, this story of unrelenting fight of Benedict XVI against relativism in the Catholic theological circles and its manifold manifestations and ramifications elsewhere. This book consists of nine chapters. The first chapter entitled "An Overview of Relativism," begins with an attempt to define 'relativism' by expounding authors like Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Maria Baghramian and Maurice Mandelbaum and thereafter gives a very useful historical survey of it, which the author starts with presenting Protagoras of Abdera (481-420 BC) as the father of relativism. This survey proceeds through Xenophanes (c. 570-475 BC) who argued that human knowledge of the Divine is relative, Sextus Empiricus (c. 160-210 AD) whose view was known as Pyrrhonian skepticism, to Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) who cited evidence from ongoing scientific revolution to support relativism. The author thereafter presents Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) who insisted that a society of atheists could be more moral than a society of Christians. This chapter also analyses the philosophy of René Descartes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud to show how the relativist position was further reinforced through the writings of such authors. The author then presents in the same chapter the "Scripture and Magisterium on Relativism." This section contains an excellent exposition of earlier dogmatic pronouncements against relativism that are found in the teachings of Popes Pius X, Pius XII, Paul VI and John Paul II.

In the second chapter with the title "Ratzinger's Biographical Background and His Early Opposition to Relativism," we have a very useful description of how Benedict XVI grew as a young boy in Germany during the period of *National Socialism* of Hitler and about his seminary formation and the interim period of military service from 1944-1945. This chapter describes the various influences Joseph Ratzinger had in the seminary and it also sheds light on the faith foundation he acquired during that period. Cardinal Faulhaber, Alfred Delp and Hermann Joseph Wehrle who conflicted with the Third Reich, could make lasting imprints on the young seminarian Ratzinger. This chapter is also invaluable because of its presentation of Ratzinger's relationship with the *Munich School* and his earlier works on St Augustine and Bonaventure as part of his doctoral and *habilitation* work.

In the third chapter, "From Augustine to Bonaventure," the author explains in detail the two-fold influence on the theologian Ratzinger, namely, the writings of St Augustine and the 13th century Italian Franciscan Cardinal Bonaventure. "Augustine's ideas of the relationship between faith and reason, which were interconnected with the centrality of God's love" was the basis of Ratzinger's theology (p. 45). This chapter contains also an interesting section on Ratzinger's friendship with the Indologist Paul Hacker as he was ordinary professor of fundamental theology in Bonn. Though Ratzinger attributed certain Indian influence to the growth of relativism in the West (p. 67), the author states that some students said during that period: "Ratzinger is totally absorbed in Hinduism, he talks to us only of Rama and of Krishna and we can't take it anymore" (p.68).

The fourth chapter, entitled "Against Relativism at Vatican II," presents the role Ratzinger played in the Second Vatican Council, first as the theological advisor of cardinal Frings of Cologne and later as a *peritus*. His emphasis of Christ as the measure of renewal in the Church and his vision of continuity in the Church even through the Council, and his setting limits to what could be done, which the contemporary relativistic mindset could not like, have received enough attention of the author in this chapter. The author observes that Ratzinger "sensed the possible dangers of relativism if progressiveness were to be overemphasized" (p. 73) in the Council in the name of being 'pastoral' and 'ecumenical.' For Ratzinger, "willingness to welcome change and innovation, but always in keeping with the continuity of history" (p. 74) was the guiding principle throughout Vatican II and thereafter, and for him *aggiornamento* had to be balanced with *ressourcement* (p. 89).

In the fifth chapter, "Ratzinger Bringing Relativism into the Open," the author begins the discussion with the subsection 'Liberation Theology and Relativism.' Thereafter this chapter discusses in detail John Hick's 'Attenuation of Christology,' after his one year in India, by stating that "Jesus of Nazareth could not have been the only true representation of the living God, but in reality was only one religious leader among others;" (p. 116) and goes further in expounding the relativistic position regarding the interreligious dialogue that "dialogue must be an exchange between positions that have fundamentally the same rank and therefore are mutually relative," (p. 118) and thus sets the stage for the discussion on the declaration of *Dominus Jesus* and the response of Ratzinger to such positions. This chapter gives an excellent summary of the theological positions taken

by Raimundo Panikkar, Tissa Balasurya, Paul Knitter, etc. and how Ratzinger countered their arguments.

The sixth chapter entitled "Responding to the Challenge of Truth in *Truth and Tolerance* and *Without Roots*" analyses in detail the two works of Ratzinger mentioned in the title. In the seventh chapter, the author gives the response of the intellectual world to Ratzinger's homily in which he spoke about the dictatorship of relativism. The eighth chapter, "Ratzinger's Proposals to Overcome Relativism" summarizes this great theologian's response to relativists which includes the tip to "Relativize the Relativizers." In the ninth (and final) chapter (pp. 232-260), the author summarizes the whole discussion under the title "Benedict XVI and Relativism." This is followed by a short general 'Conclusion' (pp. 261-267) and an essential Bibliography of two pages.

To conclude, one can affirm without any doubt that this book is an excellent resource book in understanding one of the greatest theologians of all times, namely Ratzinger, and at the same time to know the various ramifications of the relativistic positions and the official teaching of the Catholic Church against such tendencies. This work is well written, logically presented and excellently documented with 961 end notes. It deserves a place in the libraries of theological and philosophical studies and it constitutes an essential reading for every catholic theologian.

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Georges Ruysen, ed., *La disciplina della penitenza nelle Chiese orientali, Acts of the Symposium held at Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, 3-5 June 2011, Kanonika 19, Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2013. Pages 399, ISBN 978-88- 7210-385-2*

This book, entitled *The Penitential Discipline in the Oriental Churches*, and edited by Professor Georges-Henri Ruysen SJ, contains the Acts of the Symposium held at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome. It is the second in the series of Symposia on sacramental discipline, the previous being *The Holy Eucharist in Eastern Canon Law* (Kanonika 16) by the same editor and published in the year 2010. Unlike Kanonika 16, the present volume does not have the title in English together with the Italian one, though this book contains two of the entries in the English language.