

2007

Benedict XVI: The Regensburg Lecture Study Guide

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Recommended Citation

Samson, Steven Alan, "Benedict XVI: The Regensburg Lecture Study Guide" (2007). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 178.
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BENEDICT XVI: THE REGENSBURG LECTURE

STUDY GUIDE, 2007

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12 September 2006

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html

Source: James V. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007).

Study Questions

1. What were some of the characteristics of the University of Bonn as an academic institution? What was the nature of the discussion between the 14C Byzantine emperor and an educated Persian that had been published in a scholarly edition edited by Professor Khoury? (#2-10)
2. The Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus noticed a contradiction between the injunction in the Qur'an that "there is no compulsion in religion" and the instructions concerning holy war. What did he regard as the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general? Why is spreading the faith through violence unreasonable? His commentator, Theodore Khoury, contrasted the view of Greek philosophy, for which this is self-evident, with Muslim teaching that God is absolutely transcendent (and whose will is unrestrained). Why does this latter view create difficulty for reasoned discussion? (#11-15)
3. What unavoidable dilemma arises from this issue? How does the opening of the Book of John resolve the issue "reasonably?" Is the encounter (and the compatibility) between the Biblical message and Greek philosophy a mere accident? What new understanding of God emerged during the Exile? What made the Hellenistic period important for the Biblical faith? (#16-24)
4. What trends in medieval theology would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit? What is the meaning and challenge posed by **voluntarism**? [cf. Ibn Hazm in #15]. The issues are: 1) Whether voluntarism is made the basis of reality; 2) The intellectual affinities between Islamic voluntarism and modern relativism; 3) Whether God's power is unlimited so that, in principle, anything could be otherwise. Here is the subtext of the Pope's remarks about religion and violence.

The implication, according to Father Schall, is that "reality becomes both enormously mysterious and intrinsically arbitrary." [Ibn Hazm's position at #15 may also be compared with that of the late Scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus at #25]. The issue is the reasonableness of the voluntarist conception of God and, thus, the reasonableness of the imposition of religion by force and the use of terrorism. "This remark about absolute obedience to a voluntarist God [see #15], however, is one reason I am reluctant to condemn the 'terrorist' on the grounds of theories arising out of Western political science. . . . Here lies the real root of terrorism. This is the Allah who wills that all the world be submitted to the rites, principles, and law that are set down in the Koran. Such a voluntarist Allah sees no problem with the use of violence in achieving this purpose. Such a god, in the Christian view, cannot be reasonable. Indeed, he cannot be God. That is why Islam, Judaism, and Christianity must decide whether in fact they do worship the same One God *that is*. Certainly, if the voluntarist Allah is the true conception of Allah, then Christians do not worship the same God." [Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, pp. 45-46]

Most of the lecture, however, is devoted to the undercutting of the Christian faith in the West due to “the exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason” in the modern positivist world view (#58). What view was set forth by the Fourth Lateran Council? What does it mean to say that love transcends knowledge? What is meant by an inner *rapprochement* between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry? What are the fruits by which we know it? (#25-30)

5. If the High Middle Ages was marked by “a critically purified Greek heritage,” what is the dominant trend in modern theological discussions? What are the three stages of **dehellenization**? Why did the Protestant Reformers object to the tradition of scholastic philosophy? What was the objection to metaphysics? Discuss how the relation between faith and reason become a matter of dispute? What did Immanuel Kant, who distinguished pure reason from practical reason, hold about faith? (#31-35)
6. What was **Adolf von Harnack**’s central idea? “Humanitarian” has a dual meaning here. The common sense is similar to philanthropist: a lover of mankind. The theological sense is similar to Unitarian: its emphasis is on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His deity. This is true of theological liberalism generally. [See J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*]. Why could theology now be restored to the university, as it had been in Luther’s day? What is the basis of the modern concept of reason? [The German idealist Kant wrote that reading the English empiricist Hume awakened him from his “dogmatic slumber”]. (#36-43)
7. What two principles arose from this new synthesis? The result of the two has been called “reductionism.” How do the reduction of “the radius of science and reason,” along with the reduction of Christianity “to a fragment of its former self,” lead to a reduction of man himself? What issues are now cast out of the temple of science (and placed effectively “beyond the Pale”)? What do ethics and religion lose as a result? What pathologies result (see below)? (#44-49)
8. What is false and even coarse about the thesis of cultural pluralism and its denigration and relativization of the earlier synthesis of the Christian faith with Hellenism? Why cannot the Greek elements be discarded? (#50-53)
9. How should the scientific ethos be refined or reformed? What is the danger of western positivism? Can it enter the dialogue of cultures? What kind of courage is needed? (#54-63)

“When violent action is a product of thought, it is time to examine the thought. . . Wars are not caused by arms and we, including religious people, should stop saying they are. They are ultimately caused by persons with ideas, wrong ideas. The Pope was right to call our attention, intellectually, to just why certain well-articulated ideas are a problem. . . . The principle at issue is clear even if spoken by an Emperor to a Persian gentleman and recalled by a Pope. What is being invited is a ‘dialogue of cultures.’” [Schall, pp. 127-28]

Review

Manuel II Paleologus
voluntarism
Adolf von Harnack
reductionism

religion and violence
Fourth Lateran Council
Platonism (Descartes)
positivism

Hellenistic period
dehellenization
empiricism