



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ® ✱ Knights of Malta ✱

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Chancellor's Update

A Thought...

"For Tyconius, the city of the devil exists both outside the Church and inside the Church not only among the pagans but also among impostor Christians." -The central idea of the early Church theologian Tyconius (he was like St. Augustine, from North Africa; he lived from about 379 to 423 A.D.)

Tuesday, February, 20, 2024 - For some time now, as I prepare these magazines and write my "Moynihan Letters," I have been attempting to understand more deeply the events I have been seeing with my own eyes, including Pope Benedict XVI's announcement, on February 11, 2013, that he was resigning from the office of the papacy, and the now more than 11 years of the pontificate of Pope Francis, who in December turned 87.

A year ago, in my Letter #18 of 2023, sent out on Monday, January 16, 2023, I drew on material published on September 8, 2022 on the website of my Italian colleague Marco Tosatti under the title "Ratzinger, Tyconius and Fatima: An Interpretive Key for the End Times."

This essay contains information and arguments which may help to clarify Pope Benedict XVI's reasons for resigning his papacy, and also may help to give us a better understanding of our own present predicament.

When he was a young man in his 30s, the late Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI, who died a little more than a year ago, on the last day of 2022, December 31), studied the early Church theologian Tyconius closely.

Tyconius's best known work was his commentary on the Book of Revelation, which he interpreted, somewhat like Origen, almost entirely in a spiritual sense.

He asserted that Revelation depicts the spiritual controversy over the kingdom of God. This means that all of the plagues and famines and pale horses did not need to be interpreted as actual physical historical events, but as spiritual realities which occurred in the life of individual souls, and in the Church as a whole. Ratzinger even wrote a 12-page article about Tyconius's theology when he was not yet 30, in 1956, mentioning that scholars thought of Tyconius as an "Augustine before Augustine" and saying that study of Tyconius is always closely connected to study of Augustine.

Of course, Ratzinger had written his doctoral dissertation on "the People of God" and the "House of God" in St. Augustine's thought, so it seems clear that by immersing himself in Augustine, he had also come to know Tyconius well. Suffice it to say that Ratzinger knew Tyconius' thought well.

Fifty-three years later, as Pope Benedict XVI, Benedict cited Tyconius in a catechesis at his Wednesday, April 22, 2009, General Audience. Strikingly, this was just seven days before he went to Aquila, Italy, on April 29, 2009 and left his pallium on the tomb of Pope Celestine V who had resigned the papacy in 1294.

Here is that April 22, 2009, citation by Pope Benedict:

"Tyconius, an African who lived a generation before St Augustine...was not a Catholic; he belonged to the schismatic Donatist Church, yet he was a great theologian. In his commentary

he sees the Apocalypse above all as a reflection of the mystery of the Church. Tyconius had reached the conviction that the Church was a bipartite body: on the one hand, he says, she belongs to Christ, but there is another part of the Church that belongs to the devil. Augustine read this commentary and profited from it but strongly emphasized that the Church is in Christ's hands, that she remains His Body, forming one with Him, sharing in the mediation of grace. He therefore stresses that the Church can never be separated from Jesus Christ."

About one year later, Pope Benedict XVI, in May 2010, on his trip to Fatima, in response to a journalist's question, said: " Attacks on the Pope and the Church come not only from without, but the sufferings of the Church come precisely from within the Church, from the sin existing within the Church. This too is something that we have always known, but today we are seeing it in a really terrifying way: that the greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church."

So Tyconius believed that the world was not divided into just two – "the followers of Christ" (His "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" Church) and "the followers of the devil" (the world, unbelievers) - but that the Church herself was divided into true and false believers, faithful disciples and impostors.

Was Benedict's thought intently fixed on discerning between good and evil, between truth and lies, between sincere and false believers?

In fact, Joseph Ratzinger had spent his entire youth under the shadow of National Socialism, and of the 1939-1945 war. He had seen World War II close-up (though he never saw actual combat)- even today regarded as the greatest war our world has ever seen.

He then decided to study for the priesthood (he was ordained in 1951 at age 24), then to become a theologian, arguably to understand and make sense of our fallen world, of the conflict between good and evil in our world.

Did he understand the world as "tripartite" with the Church divided into a false part and a true one?

If this were so, is it conceivable that his resignation was a type of theological statement: that he remained inside the Church - as all who wish to be saved must remain - but nevertheless "withdrew" from the worldly or apostate Church, not denouncing it, but merely praying for it - having denounced it ferociously just before being named Pope - seemingly realizing that his strength was insufficient to effectively fight against it?

Meaning that, in the September 8, 2022 essay on Tyconius, we may have a key to understanding Benedict's decision to resign - unless this essay is a mis-reading, or a forced reading, of these events, and of the late Pope's mind.

Of course, it is not given to any man to know "the day or the hour" of "the Lord's return." We must live in the same expectation that all who have lived before us have lived in, attempting with the grace we are given to redeem the time we now have.

What do you think?

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