

## Quotes from Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI (1927 – 2022)

*Ratzinger invites all human beings into the existential drama set by the inability of reason to offer an autonomous account for itself and its relationship to the truth, and by our need, therefore, to decide about 'the ground' upon which we will stand (Grundentscheidung). In this way, he mirrors (albeit more pastorally) the first two quotes from Nietzsche about the superficiality of modern technological man.*

“Just as we have already recognized that the believer does not live immune to doubt but is always threatened by the plunge into the void, so now we can discern the entangled nature of human destinies and say that the nonbeliever does not lead a sealed-off, self-sufficient life, either. However vigorously he may assert that he is a pure positivist, who has long left behind him supernatural temptations and weaknesses and now accepts only what is immediately certain, he will never be free of the secret uncertainty about whether positivism really has the last word. [...] Just as the believer knows himself to be constantly threatened by unbelief, which he must experience as a continual temptation, so for the unbeliever faith remains a temptation and a threat to his apparently permanently closed world. In short, there is no escape from the dilemma of being a man. [...] No one can lay God and his Kingdom on the table before another man; even the believer cannot do it for himself. But however strongly unbelief may feel justified thereby, it cannot forget the eerie feeling induced by the words ‘Yet perhaps it is true.’ [...] In other words, both the believer and the unbeliever share, each in his own way, doubt *and* belief, if they do not hide from themselves and from the truth of their being. [...] It is the basic pattern of man’s destiny only to be allowed to find the finality of his existence in this unceasing rivalry between doubt and belief, temptation and certainty. Perhaps in precisely this way doubt, which saves both sides from being shut up in their own worlds, could become the avenue of communication. It prevents both from enjoying complete self-satisfaction; it opens up the believer to the doubter and the doubter to the believer; for one, it is his share in the fate of the unbeliever; for the other, the form in which belief remains nevertheless a challenge to him.” (*Introduction to Christianity* [Ignatius Press, 2004], 44-47).

*Like Nietzsche, Ratzinger exhorts us all to face the existential question of truth. Unlike Nietzsche, he invites us to face this question with the courage provided by Christian hope (rather than with the resignation of amor fati and the pride of 'the overman'); that is, he enlivens our reason by encouraging us to entrust ourselves to a comprehensive logos that precedes us and thus establishes us in relation to truth.*

“What is belief really? We can now reply like this: It is a human way of taking up a stand in the totality of reality, a way that cannot be reduced to knowledge and is incommensurable with knowledge; it is the bestowal of meaning without which the totality of man would remain homeless, on which man’s calculations and actions are based, and without which in the last resort he could not calculate and act, because he can only do this in the context of a meaning that bears him up. [...] Without the word, without meaning, without love he falls into the situation of no longer being able to live, even when earthly comfort is present in abundance. Everyone knows how sharply the situation of ‘not being able to go on any more’ can arise in the midst of outward abundance. [...] No one can pull himself up out of the bog of uncertainty, of not being able to live, by his own exertions; nor can we pull ourselves up, as Descartes still thought we could, by a *cogito ergo sum*, by a series of intellectual deductions. Meaning that is self-made is in the last analysis no meaning. Meaning, that is, the ground on which our existence as a totality can stand and live, cannot be made but only received. ¶ [...] [W]e have arrived directly at the Christian mode of belief. For to believe as a Christian means in fact entrusting oneself to the meaning that upholds me and the world; taking it as the firm ground on which I can stand fearlessly. Using rather more traditional language, we could say that to believe as a Christian means understanding our existence as a response to the word, the *logos*, that upholds and maintains all things.” (*Introduction*, 72-73).

*This faith of which Ratzinger speaks is not, as many atheists imagine, arbitrary belief in one god out of countless candidates (such that the non-believer would be like a believer who simply subtracts one more god from the pantheon). What he means by belief is connected to the ground of reason – to a logos that encompasses us, granting objectivity and thus 'true' meaning by acknowledging what we have not made. Christian faith, crucially, identifies this Logos not with a de-personalizing formula but with indomitable (or divine) Love.*

“Christian faith is more than the option in favor of a spiritual ground to the world; its central formula is not ‘I believe in something’, but ‘I believe in you.’ It is the encounter with the man Jesus, and in this encounter it experiences the meaning of the world as a person. In Jesus’ life from the Father, in the immediacy and intensity of his converse with him in prayer and, indeed, face to face, he is God’s witness, through whom the intangible has become tangible, the distant has drawn near. [...] In his life, in the unconditional devotion of himself to men, the meaning of the world is present before us; it vouchsafes itself to us as love that loves even me and makes life worth living by this incomprehensible gift of a love free from any threat of fading away or any tinge of egoism. The meaning of the world is the ‘you’, though only the one that is not itself an open question but rather the ground of all, which needs no other ground. [...] Christian faith lives on the discovery that not only is there such a thing as objective meaning but that this meaning knows me and loves me, that I can entrust myself to it like the child who knows that everything he may be wondering about is safe in the ‘you’ of his mother.” (*Introduction*, 79-80).

*To believe with Christian faith is to think and will within the horizon of personal and divine love – the only truly comprehensive logos for all creation since divine love alone can imbue even human freedom and history with intelligibility.*

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (*Deus Caritas est* §1)

*Both Pope Benedict XI and Nietzsche affirm the “necessity” of existence: but the nature of that necessity is different. For Nietzsche, it is impersonal (cf. “The Four Great Errors” below); for the Pope, it is personal in the way the beloved is “necessary” to the lover.*

“We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.” (*Homily*, April 24, 2005)

## Quotes from Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900)

*Nietzsche mocks the self-satisfied modern who has no real or creative questions and who thinks he can guarantee his happiness through technology and autonomous processes of self-optimization.*

“They have something of which they are proud. And what do they call that which makes them proud? Education they call it, it distinguishes them from goatherds. For that reason they hate to hear the word ‘contempt’ applied to them. [...] Beware! The time of the most contemptible human is coming, the one who can no longer have contempt for himself. Behold I show you *the last human being*. ‘What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?’ – thus asks the last human being, blinking. Then the earth has become small, and on it hops the last human being, who makes everything small. His kind is ineradicable, like the flea beetle; the last human being lives longest. ‘We invented happiness’ – say the last human beings, blinking. [...] No shepherd and one herd! Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the insane asylum. ‘Formerly the whole world was insane’ – the finest ones say, blinking.” (“Zarathustra’s Prologue” in Part I of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [Cambridge, 2006], 9-10).

*He mocks the modern, superficial atheist as a dishonest, sterile and unoriginal relic of former faiths rather than – what would be nobler – an honest believer or true creator of value.*

“For you speak thus: ‘We are real entirely, and without beliefs and superstition.’ Thus you stick out your chests – alas, even without chests! Indeed, how should you be *capable* of believing, you color-splattered ones – you who are paintings of everything that has ever been believed! Rambling refutations of belief itself are you, and the limb-fracturing of every thought. *Unbelievable* is what I call you, you so-called real ones! All ages prattle against each other in your minds; and the dreams and prattling of all ages were more real than even your waking is! You are sterile: *therefore* you lack beliefs. But whoever had to create also always had his prophetic dreams and astrological signs – and believed in believing! You are half-open gates, at which the gravediggers wait. And this is *your* reality. ‘Everything deserves to perish.’ Oh how you stand there, you sterile ones, how skinny in the ribs! And some one of you probably realized this on his own.” (“On the Land of Education” in Part II of *TSZ*, 94).

*He describes something like a Darwinian origin to logic and therefore declares that the category of substance is a fiction for survival.*

“§111. [...] How did logic come into existence in man’s head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is ‘equal’ as regards both nourishment and hostile animals – those, in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously – were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal. The dominant tendency, however, to treat as equal what is merely similar – an illogical tendency, for nothing is really equal – is what first created any basis for logic. ¶ In order that the concept of substance could originate – which is indispensable for logic although in the strictest sense nothing real corresponds to it – it was likewise necessary that for a long time one did not see nor perceive the changes in things. The beings that did not see so precisely had an advantage over those that saw everything ‘in flux.’ [...] The course of logical ideas and inferences in our brain today corresponds to a process and a struggle among impulses that are, taken singly, very illogical and unjust. We generally experience only the result of this struggle because this primeval mechanism now runs its course so quickly and is so well concealed.” (*The Gay Science* [Vintage Books, 1974], 171-172).

*He sees any transcendent logos as a spider’s web – a snare. There is no way to reconcile absolute and contingent reason/freedom.*

“Truly it is a blessing and no blasphemy when I teach: ‘Over all things stands the sky accident, the sky innocence, the sky chance, the sky mischief.’ ‘By chance’ – that is the oldest nobility in the world, I gave it back to all things, I redeemed them from their servitude under purpose. This freedom and cheerfulness of the sky I placed like an azure bell over all things when I taught that over them and through them no ‘eternal will’ – wills. This mischief and this folly I placed in place of that will when I taught: ‘With all things one thing is impossible – rationality!’ *A bit* of reason to be sure, a seed of wisdom sprinkled from star to star – this sourdough is mixed into all things: for the sake of folly, wisdom is mixed into all things! A bit of wisdom is indeed possible; but I found this blessed certainty in all things: that on the feet of accident they would rather – *dance*. Oh sky above me, you pure, you exalted one! This your purity is to me now, that there is no eternal spider and spider web of reason: – that you are my dance floor for divine accident, that you are my gods’ table for divine dice throws and dice players!” (“Before Sunrise” in Part III of *TSZ*, 132).

*He identifies atheism with fatalism and independence. Contingency does not lead him to seek meaning in some stability beyond ourselves. To the contrary, he identifies meaning with impersonal accident, precisely because it is independent and without responsibility.*

“What can be *our* doctrine alone? – That nobody *gives* human beings their qualities, neither God, nor society, nor their parents and ancestors, nor *they themselves* [...]. *Nobody* is responsible for being here in the first place, for being constituted in such and such a way, for being in these circumstances, in this environment. The fatality of our essence cannot be separated from the fatality of all that was and will be. We are *not* the consequence of a special intention, a will, a goal; we are *not* being used in an attempt to reach an ‘ideal of humanity,’ or an ‘ideal of happiness,’ or an ‘ideal of morality’ – it is absurd to want to *divert* our essence towards some goal. *We* have invented the concept ‘goal’: in reality, goals are absent... ¶ One is necessary, one is a piece of destiny, one belongs to the whole, one *is* in the whole. – There is nothing that could rule, measure, compare, judge our being, for that would mean ruling, measuring, comparing, or judging the whole... *But there is nothing besides the whole!* – That nobody is made responsible anymore, that no way of being may be traced back to a *causa prima* [first cause], that the world is not a unity either as a sensorium or as ‘spirit,’ *only this is the great liberation* – in this way only, the *innocence* of becoming is restored... The concept ‘God’ was up to now the greatest *objection* against existence... We deny God, and in denying God we deny responsibility: only *thus* do we redeem the world.” (“The Four Great Errors” §8 in *Twilight of the Idols* [Hackett, 1997], 36-37).