

Many commentators have remarked on the confusing nature of the post-abdication status and behavior of Benedict XVI. Although not possible under the constitution of the Church, we witness the contradictory appearance of two popes. We see two bishops dressed in white and using a form of the title “pope” (“emeritus” in the case of Benedict XVI). This confusing contradiction has become even more striking now that Benedict XVI has broken his almost complete six-year silence by issuing [a statement concerning the sexual abuse scandal in the clergy](#), a roughly 6,000-word essay divided into three parts. This statement of Benedict XVI presents a startling contrast to Francis’ words and actions for the past six years.

Although Benedict’s new text contains many positive aspects and stands in many ways as an apparent accusation of his successor (more on this later), like so many post-conciliar documents it is also a mixed bag. Unlike the [mixed bag of Francis’ recent exhortation on youth](#), however, Benedict’s bag is mixed with much more good than bad. Before turning to the good, I will note the bad.

The document is in many ways an attempt to exonerate the papacy of John Paul II, under whom Benedict, as Cardinal Ratzinger, acted as collaborator and closest advisor. Benedict makes many excuses for the failure of John Paul II to deal with the emerging sexual perversion in seminaries and the clergy. He rightly notes the deficiencies of canon law that hampered the Church’s ability to punish and quarantine this perversion. The revolutionary post-conciliar canon law was imbued with a liberal spirit that seeks to protect disproportionately the rights of the accused without balancing the rights of the Faith. Benedict notes that the 1983 Code “did not seem sufficient” for dealing with sexual crimes of clerics because the Code was “deliberately loosely constructed criminal law.”

The irony, however, is that he acts as if he and John Paul II were victims of this legal insufficiency when it was John Paul II *himself* who promulgated this new code of canon law, which radically altered 2,000 years of ecclesiastical jurisprudence for the sake of “updating” it to conform to the spirit of the Council. (“Therefore the Code, not only because of its content but also because of its very origin, manifests the spirit of this Council.” — Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges* for the Promulgation of the New Code Of Canon Law) Benedict scrupulously avoids laying the blame for this legal failure at the feet of John Paul II (to whom he never refers as “Saint”, interestingly). In addition, although Benedict reiterates his previous criticism of contemporary liturgy as destroying the “greatness of the Mystery” leading to a decline in Mass attendance and loss of respect for Christ’s Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, he exonerates the Council and still clings to the myth that it was successful. He clearly cannot see the contradiction in noting the great loss of respect for the Real Presence as evidenced by Catholics seeing its reception as a mere “ceremonial gesture” and the following statement: “The Second Vatican Council was rightly focused on

returning this sacrament of the Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, of the Presence of His Person, of His Passion, Death and Resurrection, to the center of Christian life and the very existence of the Church. In part, this really has come about, and we should be most grateful to the Lord for it.”

Nevertheless, having dropped these grains of incense on the altar of Vatican II, the vast majority of Benedict’s document is a frank and honest assessment of the decomposition of the clergy due largely to the abandonment of traditional moral theology. Let us now examine his diagnosis.

## Abuse Crisis: Three Main Causes

In Parts I and II, the former pontiff identifies what he sees as the three primary causes of the abuse crisis. First, he notes the sexual revolution of the 1960s which fought for “all-out sexual freedom, one which no longer conceded any norms.” Citing examples of a growing acceptance of sexual perversions such as pedophilia as “normal” and the introduction of pornographic materials into state-mandated sex “education” programs, Benedict clearly understands that this great cultural revolution inevitably had an effect on priests and candidates for the priesthood in the decades that followed. He notes: “Part of the physiognomy of the Revolution of ’68 was that pedophilia was then also diagnosed as allowed and appropriate.”

Later, he observes that this revolution of moral laxity infiltrated the seminaries, making two very important statements. First, he admits that Vatican II and its rejection of traditional seminary formation and the traditional process for selecting bishops are responsible for the problem of pedophilia. “Indeed, in many parts of the Church, **conciliar attitudes** were understood to mean having a critical or negative attitude towards the hitherto existing tradition [of seminary formation], which was now to be replaced by a new, radically open relationship with the world. One bishop, who had previously been seminary rector, had arranged for the seminarians to be shown pornographic films, allegedly with the intention of thus making them resistant to behavior contrary to the faith” (emphasis added). Likewise, he has the following to say about the selection of the bishops who would preside over the cover-up of the abuse: “As the criteria for the selection and appointment of bishops had also been changed after the Second Vatican Council, the relationship of bishops to their seminaries was very different, too. Above all, a criterion for the appointment of new bishops was now their ‘conciliarity,’ which of course could be understood to mean rather different things.” These are not surprising observations to anyone who has been in the Traditionalist movement for years, but they are virtually unprecedented for a post-conciliar pope to utter.

Even more significant, Benedict has the courage to say what everyone knows to be true but which Francis and his cabal of revolutionaries refuse to admit: “In various seminaries homosexual cliques were established, which acted more or less openly and significantly changed the climate in the seminaries.” Francis has scrupulously avoided admitting that this homosexual takeover of the seminaries is at the root of an abuse crisis perpetrated overwhelmingly on boys and young men (over 80 percent of cases, according to the famous [John Jay College Study](#) released in 2004). Again, for all of his failings, at least Benedict is willing candidly to state the root cause of the abuse crisis, whereas Francis refuses to admit the obvious. Admitting the true nature of a problem is the essential first step to resolving it, which is why as long as Francis refuses to acknowledge this reality, nothing will change.

The final cause identified by Benedict XVI is that “Catholic moral theology suffered a collapse that rendered the Church defenseless against these changes in society.” The reasons he cites for this collapse are very interesting. “Until the Second Vatican Council, Catholic moral theology was largely founded on natural law, while Sacred Scripture was only cited for background or substantiation. In the Council’s struggle for a new understanding of Revelation, the natural law option was largely abandoned, and a moral theology based entirely on the Bible was demanded.” Benedict notes that Vatican II (in a futile attempt at ecumenism with Protestants, I would add) abandoned the grounding of morality in natural law in favor of *sola scriptura*. Benedict rightly observes that this change destroys systematic morality. This fact should have been obvious to the Council Fathers, since we had the historical evidence of Protestantism, which went this route and ended up condoning contraception and other intrinsic evils.

## Naming the Council as a Culprit

This frank admission that the Council went wrong in abandoning natural law, although not startling to Traditionalists, is startling to hear from a post-conciliar pope. Abandoning natural law is significant because it leads to a rejection of the truth that there are intrinsically evil actions which are always and everywhere wrong and which can never be justified by a balancing of goods. Benedict states: “Consequently, there could no longer be anything that constituted an absolute good, any more than anything fundamentally evil; [there could be] only relative value judgments. There no longer was the [absolute] good, but only the relatively better, contingent on the moment and on circumstances.” Such a statement is clearly a refutation and rebuke of the entire agenda of Pope Francis, embodied most clearly in *Amoris Laetitia* (AL). Francis has continually argued that acts which intrinsically violate divine and natural law can be justified by a situation ethics that balances competing goods. He argues in AL, for example, that a couple could justifiably engage in adulterous intercourse if failing to do so would not be good for the already born children of

their adulterous union (cf. AL, n. 298, note 329). Francis’ entire approach to morality is summed up succinctly by Benedict XVI in his critique of the radical change in moral reasoning born of the Council that he rightly claims led to the abuse crisis.

Benedict also lays blame at the popular and erroneous theological opinion advanced in the decades after the Council which holds that the Church lacks authority on moral issues; in short, that infallibility only extends to matters of faith and not morals. Such an opinion is clearly heretical since Vatican I clearly included both faith and morals in its definition of papal infallibility (cf. *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 4). Francis himself appears to hold this erroneous opinion, considering his belief that the Church’s constant teaching on adultery—namely, that it is always and everywhere wrong—can now admit of exceptions (“the concrete complexity of one’s limits”, AL 303) in which God actually desires the adultery occur. He acts as if the Church needs to be educated by the world and young people about morality, rather than being an infallible source of it.

Finally, Benedict clearly, although not stating so explicitly, rejects the entire program of the papacy of Francis. The latter’s first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), was a manifesto for remaking the Church of Christ into an entirely new Church. He boldly states his goal as pope involves “transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world, rather than for her self-preservation” (EG, n. 27). After six years, we know he was serious since we have witnessed unending radical transformation of every aspect of the Church. In the final part of Benedict’s statement, he considers this possible response to the abuse crisis of changing everything: “Perhaps we should create another Church for things to work out?” but concludes, “that experiment **has already been undertaken** and has **already failed**” (emphasis added). Is it possible that the “experiment” already undertaken which he has in mind is the novel papacy of Francis? Later, he reinforces the conclusion: “it is rather obvious that we do not need another Church of our own design,” but this is exactly the goal towards which Francis is relentlessly working.

## Reading Between the Lines

There is admittedly one hitch in this theory of Benedict’s document being a cryptic censuring of Francis. Curiously, the former pontiff concludes his striking text, which gives several indications of being an indictment of his successor, by lavishing emphatic praise on none other than Francis: “At the end of my reflections I would like to thank Pope Francis for everything he does to show us, again and again, the light of God, which has not disappeared, even today. Thank you, Holy Father!” This seems to be a textbook example of a *non sequitur*, a conclusion that does not follow from the argument. Perhaps, however,

Benedict himself gives us a coded message on how to read this bizarre ending.

In the introduction to his text, he states that he is publishing it only after “[h]aving contacted the Secretary of State, Cardinal [Pietro] Parolin and the Holy Father [Pope Francis] himself...” Why did he need to tell us that he shared his text with the Secretary of State and the Pope before publishing it? Was this obeisance to Francis was required for him to be allowed to break his silence and not have to go into hiding like Archbishop Vigano? Perhaps someday we will learn the truth, as well as the truth of all the reasons which led to his abdication, especially in light of his [request for prayers at the beginning of his pontificate](#), lest he “flee for fear of the wolves.”

Overall, notwithstanding its attempts to whitewash his own and John Paul II’s responsibility for the crisis enveloping the Church, the document is mostly a clear assessment of reality. He goes further than any post-conciliar pope in admitting that Vatican II is not the solution but part of the problem. He stands virtually alone among the hierarchy as one who clearly identifies that the abuse crisis is the fruit of the infestation of homosexual culture in the seminaries. Even though unable or unwilling to state explicitly that he is doing so, all of the arguments of Benedict XVI are a condemnation of the moral errors being spread throughout the Church by the man who came to power by Benedict’s own abandonment of the Petrine office. Again, for all his faults, this fact must weigh heavy on his heart as he comes closer to his own judgement.

Let us pray that God will continue to open his eyes to the true causes of the crisis in the Church and that this text will open the eyes of more members of the hierarchy, spurring them to resist a pope who seems bent on destroying the true Church in a vain attempt to erect another church of his own making.