

# Wilhelm Ketteler and the Birth of Modern Catholic Social Thought

A Catholic Manifesto in Revolutionary 1848

von  
Martin O'Malley

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A Catholic Manifesto  
in Revolutionary 1848

*Martin O'Malley*



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*herausgegeben durch*

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# 1 Table of Contents

Preface.....	5
1 A Manifesto with Modern Rights Language in Revolutionary 1848 .....	9
1.1 A Catholic Manifesto on the Social Question.....	9
1.2 The Term ‘Right’ and the Concept of Subjective Rights in Ketteler’s Writing.....	13
1.3 Ketteler’s Innovative Mix of Thomistic and Romantic Political Theories.....	18
2 The 1848 Frankfurt Parliament: .....	25
2.1 Political Catholicism in Revolutionary 1848 Germany: ....	25
2.2 The German Catholic Context: Distinct from both Liberal.....	31
2.3 Church and State in 1848: Election to the Frankfurt Parliament after the Revolutions.....	35
2.4 Decisive Step into Modernity: The Catholic Caucus .....	45
2.5 In the Parliament, Ketteler Performatively Affirmed Representational Politics in his Subsidiary Defense of the Organic Model.....	55
2.6 Ketteler’s Graveside Oration and Catholic Day Address: The Need for Christ in the Context of Conflict .....	59
3 The 1848 Advent Sermons: A “Catholic Manifesto” on the Social Question.....	65

3.1	The Sermons Use a Rights Discourse within a Thomistic Natural Law Social Philosophy.....	65
	<i>The Christian Vision of Freedom and the Romantic Organic Analogy.....</i>	68
	<i>Church, State and Society in the Rechtsstaat.....</i>	72
3.2	Outline of Sermons: Social Theory and Rights Language with a Christological Foundation.....	76
	<i>Society's Pillars as Outlined in the Sermons.....</i>	83
4	The First Sermon on Justice: Catholic Social Principles in a Modern Rights Language .....	91
4.1	Justice Is 'To Each His Own,' but in a Christ-Centered Context.....	91
4.2	Private Property Is the Pivotal Social Theory Concept....	95
4.3	Rejecting the Communist Threat to Private Property Rights with Thomas Aquinas.....	99
4.4	Examining Ketteler's Interpretation of Thomas Aquinas.....	105
	<i>Ketteler's Modern Rights Language Is a Development of Aquinas' Principle of Practical Reason from His Discussion on Justice .....</i>	105
	<i>A 'Right' Is the Sovereign's Prudence Applied to Society's Proper Ordering: the Common Good .....</i>	110
	<i>Absolute Rights Violate the 'Golden Mean' of the Virtues and Endanger Social Flourishing.....</i>	112
4.5	A 'Social Imagination' Rooted in Faith and Preached in the New Romantic Manner.....	116
4.6	Critiquing Communism with 'Prudent' Rights .....	121
	<i>Ketteler's Early Response to Poverty: Protecting Human Dignity and Christian Charity.....</i>	128
5	Love and Courage in Changing Times .....	131

5.1	Second Sermon: The ‘Times’ Reveal that Christian Charity (Liebe) Is Needed to Reconcile Destructive Social Indifference.....	131
	<i>Signs of the Times: The Pressing Social Problems and the Moral Poverty that Causes Them.....</i>	<i>133</i>
5.2	Third Sermon: The ‘Fortitude’ of Christian Freedom in God’s Law vs. Rationalist Law of ‘Ungläubige’ .....	140
	<i>Natural Law Applied to Social Evolution and Historical Development .....</i>	<i>145</i>
	<i>Foundations of Human Society Depend upon Faith that Reveals True Human Freedom and Rights within the Context of Social Relationships, Not in the Individual Per Se.....</i>	<i>147</i>
6	The Pillars of Hope and Temperance .....	155
6.1	Fourth Sermon on Hope: Our Destination Is with God – or Not .....	155
6.2	Fifth Sermon on Temperance: Sustaining Society, the Family, Women, and the Person.....	158
7	Final Sermon on Faith: Religious and Public Authority .....	163
7.1	Faith, Authority and Reason in Möhler’s Sacramental Philosophy .....	163
7.2	Christmas Present: Challenge to Absolutism Inspired by the Incarnation .....	170
7.3	Respect for the Person Is Distinctly Modern and Instituted in Law as Rights .....	173
	Conclusion .....	179
8	Bibliography .....	187

# Preface

Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler responded to the vacuum of social consensus in 1848 with a series of six sermons, the *Advent Sermons*, and thereby laid the theoretical groundwork for “Modern Catholic Social Thought”. It was a ‘manifesto’ delivered within a year of Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engel’s famous *Communist Manifesto*. Yet, Ketteler’s achievement was one that remained essentially rooted in Catholic traditions as he articulating his forward-looking social theory, used a modern language of subjective rights, and ‘performatively’ acknowledged the value of representational politics. He did this while rejecting the individualism and atomism often associated with liberalism, rights, and democracy.

Ketteler’s *Advent Sermons* declared the social principles, concerns and goals for Roman Catholicism as the church confronted both the opportunities and dangers of modern secular politics. The *Sermons* outlined principles that articulated timeless Christian beliefs for a world dealing with revolutionary changes. Ketteler read the signs of the times with remarkable clarity and saw the danger posed by radical social solutions such as communism. And his response was distinctively modern in that he refused to hide behind a defensive or nostalgic rejection of representational politics or the emerging democratic institutions. He addressed the public sphere in a way that recognized that governments rule legitimately only if they represent the will and interests of the people. And further, he used a language of rights that recognized the claims of the church and of individuals in a way that was clearly modern. He set forth the principles, concerns and goals that created a template for the church regarding the ‘Social Question.’ And thus it is fitting to call the sermons a Catholic manifesto and to understand this moment as the birth of modern Catholic Social Thought.



My own study of Ketteler and 19<sup>th</sup> century German Romanticism began while I was finishing doctoral coursework at Boston College under the direction of David Hollenbach, SJ. I was interested in contemporary rights discourse and the debate regarding whether that discourse was entirely dependent upon a single philosophical history. My own reading of such authors as Brian Tierney had convinced me that rights language has a medieval tradition and does not necessarily carry with it the baggage of modern liberal philosophy. A friend of mine, Tom Lynch, was doing doctoral work at Catholic University in church history and he pointed me in the direction of Ketteler as a figure whose relevance for Catholic thought was little understood in the United States. I owe a great deal of gratitude to Tom because his advice led to my doctoral dissertation topic and to the appreciation of the debt that Catholic Social Thought owes to Ketteler and the 19<sup>th</sup> century German Catholic Church. The following work is a revised section from the dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Boston College PhD (May, 2007). The PhD dissertation is titled: “Catholic rights discourse in nineteenth-century Germany: Bishop Ketteler protected religious and social freedoms from the equal threats of secularizing liberalism and anti-catholic absolutism.”

This work is the fruit of many years of research and writing and my debts of gratitude have accumulated over those years. I thank David Hollenbach, SJ for his wisdom, expertise, and extraordinary generosity in reading and correcting my drafts. Donald Dietrich kept me on track while I delved into the mysterious depths of nineteenth-century German history and jurisprudence. Norbert Brieskorn, SJ read a draft of the dissertation and gave me quite helpful corrections and suggestions. Nikolas Knoepffler provided me with a place of work, funding, and supported the present publication in the “*ta ethika*” series of publications in ethics, for which he is the editor. I thank my parents, sisters and brother for their patience and support. And a special thanks goes to my wife Simone, who read and corrected many drafts, translations and wild ideas. She kept me sane and happy during the

difficult times and she made it possible to celebrate the wonderful times. We have dedicated this book to our little Eva Aine. I extend my gratitude to all. Naturally, any errors remaining in the text are my own responsibility.

# 1 A Manifesto with Modern Rights Language in Revolutionary 1848

## 1.1 *A Catholic Manifesto on the Social Question*

The *Advent Sermons* preceded the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) by over 40 years and marked a turning point in the Roman Catholic approach to modernity. Wilhelm von Ketteler insured the continuing relevance of the church's voice in an increasingly secular public sphere through both his words and his actions, i. e., linguistically and performatively. Ketteler was a pioneer in terms of his words: The sermons' theological and philosophical arguments utilized a distinctly modern 'rights language' that framed freedoms for individual persons, i. e. subjective rights. Though his rights language was modern, the future bishop and social reformer was applying longstanding principles and practices even as he was adapting to his present circumstances. Further, despite the fact that the language of rights was often associated with liberal movements, Ketteler unambiguously disassociated himself from the anthropological suppositions of liberal philosophy as it existed in mid-nineteenth century Germany. He was also a pioneer in terms of his actions: He was not merely reacting to democratic and participatory governments, but was a willing and active participant in the political process and the emerging modern public sphere.

The experience of the German church in 1848 remains crucially important for understanding the development of Catholic Social Thought. Bishops and priests not only publicly approved of the (more or less) democratic elections for the Frankfurt Parliament, they were also candidates and subsequently members of that parliament. By participating in the political process, the church performatively accepted the democratically elected parliament's legitimacy and the rights it sought to articulate. This context forced the German Catho-

lic Church, and Ketteler with it, to abandon its previous unconditional allegiance with the delegitimized monarchy. This practical effect had a corresponding theoretical implication for increasingly obsolete medieval social models. In the emerging modern nation-state, the church could no longer see itself as a ‘perfect society’ on equal terms with the secular government, and sought to establish itself as a corporate body in need of legal protections provided by a constitution. This transition was indeed accomplished under the pressure of specific historical circumstances, but leaders like Ketteler sought to understand the transition according to rational principles rooted in Catholic tradition.

The *Advent Sermons* were written over a decade after the Cologne Conflict (1837) motivated Ketteler to abandon his legal career and to immerse himself in the Romantic Catholic theology of Munich with Görres, Döllinger, and Baader.<sup>1</sup> Yet the *Sermons*, together with his contemporaneous political speeches and letters, bear the mark of his university preparation to be a lawyer. Under the influence of the ‘Historical School’ of jurisprudence, Ketteler’s knowledge of legal history, philosophy, and forms of argumentation informed his language of rights in the modern democratic parliamentary forum, in the halls of the 1848 Catholic political caucuses, and in the pulpit of a great German cathedral.

<sup>1</sup> The archbishop of Cologne, Clemens August Freiherr von Droste-Vischering, was jailed for refusing to recognize Prussian directives regarding mixed marriages and the education of children from such marriages. Response to this action marked the great awakening of Catholic political activity in Germany. Görres’ *Athanasius* (1838) was the author’s famous response that articulated the principles of that movement in defending the rights of the church. See: Martin J. O’Malley, “Catholic Rights Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Bishop Ketteler Protected Religious and Social Freedoms from the Equal Threats of Secularizing Liberalism and Anti-Catholic Absolutism” (Doctoral Dissertation, Boston College, 2007), Chapter 4, as well as Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte Seit 1789*, Dritte wesentlich überarbeitete Auflage ed., 6 vols., vol. 2. *Der Kampf um Einheit und Freiheit 1830 bis 1850* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH., 1988), 2:239,50. Sheehan deals with the topic in James J. Sheehan, *German History, 1770–1866*, *Oxford History of Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 618.

## 2 The 1848 Frankfurt Parliament: The Emergence of a Unified Catholic Position in a Modern Representational Forum

### *2.1 Political Catholicism in Revolutionary 1848 Germany: Critique of Modernity and Hope for New Social Order*

Ketteler's *Advent Sermons* were delivered in Mainz at the end of 1848 – a year of revolution in Germany that followed a series of catastrophic events for the entire population.<sup>27</sup> Three successive years of crop failures and related market problems led to concurrent famines, unemployment, inflation, and widespread bankruptcy in Germany and much of Europe. These hardships were felt both in the countryside and in towns and people were reduced to desperate measures. The “psychological impact of the economic double crisis” of falling food supply and rising costs contributed to the ensuing social unrest.<sup>28</sup>

The crisis of 1848 was brought on by material shortages, of course, but equally important was the scarcity of political legitimation, that is, the political order's disassociation with the consensus of the social order. Ketteler shared this dual perception of political illegitimacy and expectation for a new order – a new order he hoped to shape with his Thomistic social theory. His sermons called for re-structuring the social order upon broad Christian principles that were accessible to

27 A dependable historical reference for the Revolutions in English is Jonathan Sperber, *Revolutionary Europe: 1780–1850*, *Longman History of Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 2000).

28 David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140.

reasonable people of good will. The revolutions were remarkable for three reasons according to Blackbourn: They spread very quickly across Germany; they were relatively bloodless; and though spurred by general hardship, the revolutions were focused in the major cities.<sup>29</sup> The material destructiveness of the revolutions was limited, but the political results were significant as rulers quickly responded with concessions that only supplied further revolutionary momentum.

Though the revolutions were limited, there were avenues for people to act in politically relevant but non-threatening ways. Associations (*Vereine*) sprung up across Germany, providing some avenue for the expression of peoples' strivings. These were formed along interest-lines and Roman Catholics associated themselves with 'Pius Associations' in great numbers.<sup>30</sup> Though the Pius Associations incorporated elements of 'piety' and were named after the pope, they were unmistakably political organizations with close ties to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Among other achievements, they presented their political concerns with petitions signed by over 250,000 members.<sup>31</sup> In such ways, the frustration of economic hardships and social decay gave way to great expectations for a new order emerging from the confounded political system.

The 'German Confederation' was the anemic and illiberal political structure that existed in the time between the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the March Revolution (1848). Blackbourn describes Germany during this time as "in transition"<sup>32</sup> and "marked by ambiguous,

29 Ibid., 143.

30 Sperber argues that in the period leading up to 1848, Catholic associations were in a period of decline. "Chaotic" in 1820s, they became increasingly secular afterwards. Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 30–38.

31 Blackbourn, *Long Nineteenth Century*, 147–8.

32 Ibid., 91. This is the title of Blackbourn's Chapter 2. Both Hahn and Siemann made similar points regarding Germany in transition in terms of political, social, and intellectual categories. Hans J. Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe*,

### 3 The 1848 Advent Sermons: A “Catholic Manifesto” on the Social Question

#### *3.1 The Sermons Use a Rights Discourse within a Thomistic Natural Law Social Philosophy*

“The Great Social Questions of the Present” are Advent sermons – meaning that they were preached to a community preparing for the celebration of the Christian mystery of God’s incarnation in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Each of the six sermons begins with a careful reflection on scripture itself before applying its lesson to a specific concern of contemporary life. Ketteler first related the message to the lives of his congregation and then extended the Advent message to the church and the world. The sermons insisted upon the importance of God’s incarnation, exhorting the congregation to recognize ‘God in their midst’ and to act in accordance with their religious convictions.

Like the *Leichenrede*, the sermons were also unmistakably political in their focus, intent, and structure. Ketteler marshaled systematic arguments. He gave history lessons and he roused the congregation to defend the church in the political forum. The structure and content of the sermons, individually and as a group, reflected the Catholic Church’s long tradition of natural law theory and moral catechesis. What made Ketteler a pioneer of Catholic Social Thought, however, was his practical application of the church’s tradition. It required insight into his social situation, imagination to discern a path for the church in modern politics, and courage to step out from behind a defensive posture to voice his ideas.

Ordained only four years previously, Ketteler was still a young man of 37 years when he stepped up to the pulpit in December, 1848. In a way, the *Sermons* completed a trajectory of his early priestly and political careers – really two aspects of a single vocation. His legal training and ensuing career in the Prussian bureaucratic system had given him a sense of professional competency, and the Cologne Conflict triggered the series of events that steered that competency and interest into service for the church. His very vocation was politically inspired and it matured in the context of ardent opposition between the interests of the church and the state. He thrived in the atmosphere of conflict and the *Sermons* are charged with a sense of urgency inspired by the threat of opposition. Even as a young priest, he seemed destined for higher ecclesiastical office. This career path was helped by his noble status (*Stand*), but he demonstrated sufficient leadership as a pastor to justify increasing responsibilities. His election and tenure in the Frankfurt Parliament fortified his capacity for resolute competence as a representative for the church. However, it was the delivery of the *Sermons* that finally established him as a national figure and a Catholic leader in German politics. His consecration as bishop of Mainz less than two years later in 1850 was the confirmation and institutionalization of this fact.

What is it that makes the *Sermons* a manifesto of Catholic Social Thought? There is a consensus among biographers that they are not themselves very original theologically, sociologically, philosophically, or politically. “Regarding a technical or practical solution to the social question, it is true that Ketteler’s *Sermons* in Mainz’s cathedral broke no new intellectual grounds, and they offered no new approach for legislation.”<sup>108</sup> There is also consensus, however, that when they were delivered, there was no single Catholic approach to the growing social crisis that had sparked the 1848 revolutions. By so successfully and convincingly summing up what was already theoretically available, the *Sermons* substantiated and legitimated a coherent position for the

108 Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte, Und Politik Der Deutschen Zentrumsparthei*, 2:58.



## 4 The First Sermon on Justice: Catholic Social Principles in a Modern Rights Language

### *4.1 Justice Is 'To Each His Own,' but in a Christ-Centered Context*

The sermons' location in Mainz is essential to understanding Ketteler's rhetorical argument and style.<sup>138</sup> Mainz was not a large city even in terms of nineteenth-century Europe before the rise of the great industrial urban centers. It had, however, a symbolic importance in the German Catholic mind. Before the apostle to Germany, Boniface, was bishop there in the eighth century, it was already an old Roman city. After Boniface, the city continued to hold a place of honor among the German churches and it built a cathedral to match its importance in the twelfth century. Ketteler preached his six Advent sermons in that cathedral, the first of which was delivered on the feast of the dedication of Mainz's diocesan church of St. Peter. St. Peter's parish was almost a thousand years old when Ketteler stepped to the pulpit to address a Catholic congregation hungry for some meaning in their Christmas season after the year's economic, political, and social tumult.

138 Bolton, probably following Lenhart, writes that the first Sermon was actually preached in St. Peter's Church on the feast of its 'installation,' which would strengthen Ketteler's analogies between the physical and spiritual church. Ludwig Lenhart, *Bischof Ketteler: Staatspolitiker, Sozialpolitiker, Kirchenpolitiker*, 3 vols. (Mainz: v. Hase u. Koehler, 1966), 1:38n32. I have found no other reference to the separate location of the first sermon and most references to the sermons in German and English refer to them simply as the Advent Sermons in the Mainz Cathedral. The point of the analogy stands in either case. The 1977 collected works (*SWB*) footnote the dedication of the Cathedral on November 10 and make no mention of St. Peter's Church. This is not a major point.

The sermons address the very specific dangers to the church posed by the 1848 revolutions and the range of ideologies associated with them, but Ketteler identifies these dangers with the whole history of opposition from the time of early church persecutions through to his present. In the midst of these dangers he tapped into Möhler's insights in *Symbolik* to brace his congregation with a vision of the church's unchanging nature surviving the havoc of history. "[The church] possesses a heritage of unchangeable truth more lofty than any imaginable cultural accomplishment of the human spirit. It enjoys a vitality more dynamic than any conceivable ebb and flow of human life."<sup>139</sup> He quotes the Passion narratives of Matthew's Gospel as well as Tertullian to compare the persecutions of Jesus and the early church with his nineteenth-century German church, beset by the forces of revolution on the one hand and by the ideology of liberalism on the other. Tertullian, the second-century lawyer turned Christian apologist and defender of the faith against persecution, was someone with whom Ketteler could readily identify. Yet unlike Tertullian, who feared the influence of 'Athens' (philosophy or reason) upon 'Jerusalem' (faith), Ketteler was fully confident that reasonable persons of good will could be brought together upon the common plains of natural law. The 'cities' to be feared are the rationalist, revolutionary Paris and the absolutist, Catholic-wary Berlin.

The first sermon was delivered on November 19<sup>th</sup> on the Feast of the Dedication of St. Peter's Church in Mainz, and its message flowed from the historical circumstances of the parish church located near the cathedral. Ketteler used the physical structure of St. Peter's as a case study for his ecclesiological argument. The parish church, named after the saint peculiarly identified with papal authority vested in Rome, was first established in the tenth century and was rebuilt in the eighteenth century in Rococo splendor. It was secularized by the French in the early nineteenth century and then served as a stable for the revolutionary forces – the symbolism of French horses of war

139 *SWB I*, 1:24.

## 5 Love and Courage in Changing Times

### *5.1 Second Sermon: The 'Times' Reveal that Christian Charity (Liebe) Is Needed to Reconcile Destructive Social Indifference*

The argument of the *Second Sermon* has essentially three phases. The first phase identifies the pressing social problems as the 'signs of the times' and makes a case that they are indications of not only material deprivation, but more fundamentally of moral failings. The second phase then recalls the essential argument from the first sermon – that God is the creator and primary possessor all goods of the earth. Humans have rights only in terms of that fundamental fact. "The person has a right only insofar as it is granted by God."<sup>204</sup> Therefore, the right to possession is *usufructus* – the right to use. And the third phase makes the case that the only effective means of curing the identified social problems is a change of heart. It is an argument that state-implemented social techniques would be ineffective.

Whoever accepts that God is the Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth, and whoever agrees further that nature is destined for the support of all mankind, he would have to agree with the teaching which I have put forth here whether he is Christian or just simply a reasonable person. These two teachings are both

204 *SWB I*, 1:35. From the second sermon. "*Der Mensch hat nur in sofern ein Recht, als Gott es ihm einräumt.*"

products of natural revelation, i.e., they are ascertainable by human reason – since only the fool says in his heart, there is no God! [Ps 14,1].<sup>205</sup>

The rhetorical force of the second sermon draws from St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "So that we will recognize the time, because now the hour is here to wake up from our sleep [Rom 13,11]."<sup>206</sup> The scriptural passage brings urgency to the social question that, Ketteler insisted, hinges upon a fundamental choice between believing in God and not believing. This is rhetorically rendered as believing in Christ or remaining asleep, i.e., remaining unconscious of the dire reality of present social conditions. With images worthy of the Romantic landscape painting of his contemporaries, Ketteler alluded to storm clouds gathering to emphasize the dangers facing society. True to its context in the cathedral during Advent, the sermon was delivered to inspire faith. What is interesting in terms of the theme here, however, is the connection drawn between faith and the social realm, and the further development from the first sermon of the natural law underpinning social flourishing. Referring back to the chart of Ketteler's organic social structure, charity supports social flourishing by directing the intentionality of a people. *Laissez faire* liberalism, in contrast, crumbles the pillars (*Pfeiler*) of society by diffusing people's intentionality; the public's desires are debased by egoistic models of happiness that crumble the cement of social bonds. Ketteler explicitly argued that this is a point that can be made in terms of human reason from the natural law – charity is not simply a divine precept. In fact, he argued, it is the consciousness of the social situation itself that will lead to a faith. "We should, first, truly recognize the time in which we are living. This recognition should motivate us, second, to abandon that previous life without Christ and to begin a new life in Christ."<sup>207</sup> Therefore, in addition to being a proclamation of faith, the second

205 *SWB I*, 1:35. From the second sermon, translation: *Ederer*, 23.

206 *SWB I*, 1:35. From the second sermon.

207 *SWB I*, 1:34. From the second sermon.

## 6 The Pillars of Hope and Temperance

### 6.1 *Fourth Sermon on Hope: Our Destination Is with God – or Not*

The final sermons were delivered in successive nights beginning on the Sunday before Christmas, December 17, 1848. The sermons' themes are successively more similar and inter-related, with their analysis of the pillars of fortitude (treated above), hope, temperance, and faith, respectively. The present analysis of the sermons in terms of the virtues makes the most sense of the themes he chose. The fourth sermon begins with a summary of the third, in which he reiterated the need to remain steadfast against the dangerous workings of the *Ungläubige*. He even adds a layer of further emphasis by identifying Rousseau, the author of *die soziale Politik*, among those who were undermining society by their rejection of a personal transcendent God while trying to establish a social system upon purely human foundations. Rousseau is an example of the danger that must be defended against with the virtue fortitude. The main argument then begins with the existential question: Why are we here? "It is amazing, in fact, how anyone can go through life without ever seriously asking themselves the question: 'Why am I on earth?'"<sup>238</sup>

The turn here from danger to expectation is precisely the difference between the virtues of fortitude and hope in the Christian tradition as outlined in the *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas describes hope, like the other virtues, as that which is in accord with reason and which makes the actor good. Fortitude achieves this by maintaining reason in the face of danger. Hope, however, is the expectation of the attainment of God. Ketteler even uses the distinctive Thomistic concept of

238 *SWB I*, 1:57. From the third sermon.

attaining God himself, “*in dem Besitze Gottes selbst*,”<sup>239</sup> to describe the *telos* of hope. Aquinas treats this in the first article of his first question in his section on hope:

According to the Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 6) “the virtue of a thing is that which makes its subject good, and its work good likewise.” Consequently wherever we find a good human act, it must correspond to some human virtue. Now in all things measured and ruled, the good is that which attains its proper rule... Now the act of hope, whereof we speak now, attains God. For, as we have already stated [I–II, Q40, art 1], when we were treating of the passion of hope, the object of hope is a future good, difficult but possible to obtain.<sup>240</sup>

This virtue is differentiated from charity in that hope is the expectation of union with God, while charity describes the state of being in a loving relationship with God as treated in the discussion of the second sermon. The rest of the fourth sermon draws out this perspective with a discussion of the role of the virtue ‘hope’ in society. Hope is by its very definition a teleological concept – it is the object of hope that draws the person, and by analogy society, towards their ends. Once this is grasped, the argument is simple. Without hope there is no final end, no expectations, no reason to act one way as opposed to another; therefore society falls into chaos. It is the claim of social nihilism that the prescient Baader had predicted.

Two things bear special notice here. First is the ever-present imprint of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius that is more than simply a stylistic or rhetorical approach. All six of Ketteler’s sermons bear the marks of the *Exercises*, but here there is a distinctive stamp of St. Ignatius’ leading the retreatant to make a life-determining choice.

239 *SWB I*, 1:65. From the fourth sermon.

240 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. II–II “Treatise on the Theological Virtues,” Question 17, “Of Hope, Considered In Itself,” art. 1, “Whether hope is a virtue?”

## 7 Final Sermon on Faith: Religious and Public Authority

### 7.1 *Faith, Authority and Reason in Möhler's Sacramental Philosophy*

Ketteler's sixth and final sermon relies upon Möhler's *Symbolik* to address the implications of his position for faith itself, for authority in the public realm, and for the concept of reason. The sermon begins with a quote from Matthew's Gospel that sets the tone for his discussion on authority and the church. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs." (Mt 5:3–4) Taking an existential approach, faith in God is the most central and pivotal human 'claim' or identity. This separates him from the rationalists on a fundamental level and frames the debate as an opposition between liberal egoism and Catholic sacramentality. Liberals are egoists and unbelievers (*Ungläubige*) who deny all authority external to their own exercise of reason. In opposition, the Catholic sacramental vision insists on the connection between political authority as based on reasonable discourse, and religious faith. Faith is not a purely private matter.

The key issue here is authority. The *Ungläubige* follow an essentially Kantian argument that legitimate authority must be based on reason – reason autonomously conceived. Ketteler deconstructs that view as hubris at best, and callously self-interested at worst. What is more interesting than his critique is the way he vindicates authority within a Catholic sacramental vision. The church's authority is related to its belief that God has revealed the truth of the human condition through the incarnation of Christ. This is not contrary to reason, but could hardly be proved by reason autonomously conceived. This is where Ketteler demonstrates his direct reliance upon Möhler's *Symbolik*, Chapter Five, "Differences with Respect to the Doctrine of

the Church.” The following quotation demonstrates how Möhler’s ecclesiology is a consequence of his Christology:

The Son of God, our Redeemer, is a distinct being: he is what he is, and none other, eternally like unto himself, constantly one and the same... As Christ, therefore, is one, and his work is one in itself, accordingly there is but one truth, and truth only maketh free, so he can have willed but one Church; for the Church rests on the basis of belief in him, and hath eternally to announce him and his work...

The end of revelation requires a Church, as the Catholic conceives it; that is, a Church one, and necessarily visible. The manifestation of the eternal Word in the flesh, had the acknowledged end to enable man, (who by his own resources was capable neither of obtaining, with full assurance, a true knowledge of God and of his own nature, nor of mastering that knowledge even with the aid of old surviving traditions, to enable man, we say, to penetrate with undoubting certainty into religious truths. For those truths, as we stated above, will then only give a vigorous and lasting impulse to the will in an upward direction, when they have first taken strong hold of the reason, whence they can exert their effects.<sup>254</sup>

In contrasting the Catholic view above with that of Luther, Möhler argued that the fundamental shift in Luther was not of doctrine but of authority. In fact, Luther’s theological positions were initially relatively orthodox. Even many of his later theological positions were consistent with Catholicism. His ecclesiology, however, suffered from the flaw that it reflected a movement to egoism.<sup>255</sup> Möhler locates the start of the Reformation as that precise moment when the question was put to Luther to choose between his own authority and that of

254 Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: An Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings*, trans. James Burton Robertson, 1997 edition with introduction by Michael J. Himes ed. (New York: A Crossroad Herder book, 1997 c1833), 258–59.

255 Ibid., 326.



## Conclusion

The *Advent Sermons* functioned as a manifesto because they articulated the principles, defined the terms, and set a course for Catholics to engage a modern world of representational politics governed by a constitution. Ketteler's performative use of rights continues to be important today because his successful negotiation of religious traditions, philosophical principles, political quagmires, and social needs reveals something about the political potential of rights in the public sphere for religious believers. Modern Catholic Social Thought was thus born with Ketteler's help in the midst of Germany's 1848 political crises, but it took decades for the larger Roman Catholic Church to recognize its value. In any case, Ketteler's social thought still possessed some characteristics of theoretical youth. With *Rerum Novarum*, modern Catholic Social Thought received its introduction to the whole world. However, a fully mature acceptance of democratic government was recognized by the church only in the Second Vatican Council document *Pacem in Terris*. Thus Ketteler's pioneering achievement is all the more remarkable and worthy of study.

His use of rights benefited from his legal and political background while being consistent with the tenets of his faith. His rights language did not jeopardize the basic principles of natural law, but instead revealed the relevance of those principles and the inherent strength of natural law's rationality. He came to appreciate the compelling critique of social systems *qua* systems from the German liberals' critiques of unjust political and economic structures. Later in his career, he recognized the validity of the socialists' call to protect the workers amassing in the urban centers. In this way, he recognized that Catholics shared political goals and political principles with liberals,

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