

This work is a dissertation. It is well written, but its point of view is so thoroughly secular that it does not allow any historical memory. The author's argument about legal equality and state neutrality takes for granted that in the long run the United States and European countries can exist without an underlying network of customs, habits, and modes of behavior that are rooted in their Christian past (and, in some cases, present). No set of secular laws and no imaginary social contract could make life bearable, let alone pleasant, for citizens if they do not continuously hear echoes of those ancient teachings about loving one's neighbor as oneself. Of course most of us do not do it, but we are constrained in our behavior and in our laws by this powerful echo. Without it, why even bother to make our neighbor's life bearable?

***Martha* [1873]**

**Eliza Orzeszkowa's *roman à thèse*
(excerpts)**

**Translated by Anna Gąsienica Byrcyn
and Stephanie Kraft**

Editor's Note: *Martha* (*Marta*) is Eliza Orzeszkowa's most didactic novel. From the point of view of twenty-first-century skepticism, it may sound like a caricature: surely no one is so unable to take care of oneself as Martha, the novel's heroine. She is left penniless after her husband's sudden death. Orzeszkowa was a passionate spokesperson for the rights of women—not just the right to vote, but the right to be treated seriously in the public sphere and the right of women to utilize education as offering the means to compete for a job, should it become necessary. Her novel uses abbreviations and shortcuts as well as a very peculiar omniscient narrator in order to persuade the reader that the problem of single women with children in urbanized society is urgent and requires instant remedies.

On a beautiful autumn day not many years ago the Graniczna Street, a lively thoroughfare in Warsaw, was filled with people. They were walking and riding, hurrying as business or pleasure dictated, without glancing to the left or the right—without paying any attention at all to what was happening in one

of the adjacent courtyards. The place was clean and quite large, surrounded by tall brick buildings on all sides. The building farthest from the street was the smallest, yet its large windows and wide entrance, set off by a handsome porch, suggested that the dwelling inside was comfortable and attractively decorated.

A young woman with a pale face, dressed in mourning, stood on the porch. She was not wringing her hands, but they dangled helplessly, as if she were profoundly sad and distressed. A four-year-old girl, equally pale and also in mourning, clung to them.

Over the wide and clean stairs leading to the upper floors of the building, people in heavy clothes, and heavy and dusty shoes descended continuously. They were porters carrying furnishings from a residence that was not large or lavish, but certainly pleasant and tastefully appointed. There were mahogany beds, couches and armchairs covered in crimson woolen damask, graceful wardrobes and chests, even several consoles inlaid with marble, a few large mirrors, two enormous oleander trees in pots, and a datura on whose branches a few white blossoms still hung like chalices. The porters carried all these things down the stairs, passing the woman on the porch. They arranged them on the pavement of the courtyard, placed them in the two wagons standing near the gate, or carried them out to the street. The woman stood motionless, glancing at every piece of furniture that was being taken from her. It was clear that the objects she was leaving behind had not only material value for her; she parted with them as with the still-visible signs of the vanished and irretrievable past, the mute witnesses of lost happiness. The pale, dark-eyed child pulled harder at her mother's dress.

"Mama!" she whispered. "Look! Papa's desk!"

The porters carried a large, "masculine" desk down the stairs and put it on a wagon. It was handsomely carved, adorned with a gallery back, with the top covered in green cloth. The woman in mourning looked for a long time at the piece of furniture to which the child pointed with a thin finger.

"Mama!" whispered the girl. "Do you see that big black stain on father's desk? I remember how it got there. Father was sitting in front of the desk

holding me on his knees, and you, mama, came in and wanted to take me away from him. He laughed and did not hand me to you. I was playing and spilled the ink. Father was not angry. He was good. He was never angry at me or at you.”

The child whispered these words with her face hidden in the folds of her mother’s mourning dress and her tiny body huddling up to the woman’s knees. It was evident that memories were exerting their power over her heart, wrenching it with pain of which she was not fully aware. Two large tears fell from the woman’s eyes, which had been dry until now; her child’s words had evoked the memory of a moment once lost among millions of similar everyday moments. Now she smiled at the unhappy child—smiled with a mixture of delight and bitterness at the thought of that lost paradise. It may even have occurred to her that the freedom and joy of that moment were being paid for today with the last crumbs of bread that were left for her and her child, and would be paid for tomorrow with hunger; the ink stain that had appeared amid the laughter of the child and the kisses of her parents would lower the value of the desk by more than a dozen *złoties*.

After the desk, a Krall piano appeared in the courtyard, but the woman in mourning looked at it indifferently. Probably she was not a musician, and the instrument awakened few regrets and memories. But when a small mahogany bed with a colorful yarn quilt was taken out of the house and put on a wagon, her eyes were riveted to it, and the child burst into tears.

“My bed, mama!” she cried. “Those people are taking my bed and the coverlet you made for me! I do not want them to take it! Mama, take my bed and my coverlet back from them!”

The woman’s only reply was to press the head of the crying child more firmly to her knees. Her beautiful black, deep-set eyes were dry again and her pale, delicate lips were pursed and silent.

The child’s pretty bed was the last piece of furniture to be taken out. The gate was open wide; the wagons filled with furniture were driven out into the street, followed by porters carrying the remaining items on their shoulders. Behind the windows of neighboring houses the heads of people who had been looking curiously at the courtyard vanished.

A young woman in a coat and hat came down the stairs and stood in front of the woman in mourning.

“Madam,” she said, “I took care of everything. I paid those who were supposed to be paid. Here is the rest of the money.”

And she handed the woman a small roll of banknotes.

The woman slowly turned her head toward her.

“Thank you, Zofia,” she said quietly. “You have been very good to me.”

“Madame, you were always good to me!” the girl cried. “I’ve worked for you for four years and no place was ever better, or ever will be better, than with you.”

She rubbed her wet eyes with a hand on which the marks of the needle and the iron were visible, but the woman seized her rough hand and pressed it firmly between her own small white ones.

“And now, Sophy,” she said, “be well.”

“Madame, I will go with you to the new apartment,” the girl exclaimed. “I will call a cab.”

A quarter of an hour later the two women and the child got out of the cab in front of a building on Piwna Street. The three-story house was narrow in front, but tall. It looked old and sad. Little Jasia stared at its walls and windows with wide eyes.

“Mama, will we live here?”

“Here, my child,” the woman in mourning replied in a voice that was always quiet. She turned to the concierge who was standing in the gateway.

“Please give me the key to the apartment that I rented two days ago.”

“Ah! In the attic, surely,” the concierge replied. “Please follow me upstairs, madame. I will open it right away.”

The small, square courtyard was surrounded by a blind wall of brick red on two sides and, on the other two, by old woodsheds and granaries. The woman and the child went into the building and started up the narrow, dark, and dirty stairs. The younger woman took the child in her arms and went ahead; the woman in mourning followed her.

The room whose door the concierge opened was quite large, but low and dark, and poorly lit by one

small window in the roof. The walls, which smelled of dampness from a fresh covering of whitewash, seemed to contract under the slanted ceiling.

In the corner next to the simple brick cooking stove was a small chimney. A chest of drawers of modest size stood in front of one wall. There was a bed without a frame, a couch covered with torn calico, a table painted black, and several yellow chairs with sagging rush seats that were partly ripped away.

The woman in mourning stopped for a moment on the threshold, surveyed the room with a long, slow glance, then took a few steps forward and sank down on the couch. The child stood motionless and pale next to her mother, and gazed around with surprise and fear in her eyes.

The younger woman dismissed the driver, who had brought two small bundles from the carriage. She bustled about, taking things out of the bundles and arranging them. There were not many things, and it took only a short time to put them in order. Without taking off her coat and hat, she put a few dresses and some underclothing in one of the bundles, then moved the other one, which was empty, to the corner of the room. She made the bed with two pillows and a woolen coverlet and hung a white curtain on the window. She put several plates and cups, a clay water pitcher and a large bowl, a brass candleholder and a small samovar into the cupboard. Then she took a bundle of wood from behind the stove and made a cheerful fire in the fireplace.

"Ah, yes," she said, rising from her knees and turning her face, which was rosy from starting the fire, to the motionless woman. "I have made the fire and you will soon have warmth and light in here. Behind the stove you will find enough wood for about two weeks. The dresses and underclothes are in the bundle. The kitchen crockery and dining dishes are in the cupboard, and a candle in a holder is there as well."

The honest servant forced herself to speak cheerfully, but the smile was vanishing from her lips and her eyes were filling with tears.

"And now" – she said more quietly, folding her hands – "and now, my dear lady, I must go!"

The woman in mourning lifted her head.

"You must go Sophy," she repeated. "Indeed you must." Glancing through the window, she added, "It is growing dark. You will be afraid to walk through the city at night."

"Oh, no, my dear lady!" the girl exclaimed. "I would walk to the end of the world in the darkest night for you. But my new employers leave Warsaw very early in the morning, and they ordered me to return before nightfall. I have to go because they will need me this evening." With those words the young servant bent down, took the woman's pale hand and would have raised it to her lips. But the woman suddenly rose and threw both her arms around the girl's neck. They wept. The child also burst into tears and seized the servant's linen coat.

"Do not go, Sophy!" she wailed. "Do not go! It is so horrible here! It is so dreary!"

The girl kissed her former employer's hands and cuddled the child to her breast.

"I must go. I must!" she repeated, sobbing. "My mother is poor and I have little sisters. I have to work for them."

The woman in mourning raised her white face and straightened her thin figure.

"Sophy, I will also work," she said in a more assured voice than before. "I have a child and I should work for her."

"May God not abandon you, and may He bless you, dear, kind lady!" the servant girl cried, once again kissing the hands of the mother and the tearful face of the child. She ran out of the room without looking back.

After the girl's departure, a deep silence filled the room. It was interrupted only by the crackling of the fire and the dull, indistinct street noise that reached the attic. The woman in mourning sat on the couch. The child cried at first, then nestled quietly on the mother's bosom and fell asleep. The woman rested her head on her hand; her arm embraced the tiny figure sleeping on her knees and her motionless eyes stared at the flickering light of the flame.

Now that her faithful, devoted servant had departed, she would not see again the face of the last human being who had been a witness to her past—the last support that had remained for her after the disappearance of everything that had

sustained her, that furnished her with help and comfort. Now she was alone, subject to the power of fate and the hardships of a lonely destiny, dependent on the strength of her own hands and brain. Her only companion was this small, weak being who found rest on no bosom but hers, demanded kisses from her lips, and expected nourishment from her hand. Her house, which her loving husband had once provided for her and which she had now been forced to abandon, was welcoming new residents within its walls. The kind, beloved man who had surrounded her with love and prosperity was resting in his grave.

Everything had passed: love, prosperity, peace, the joy of life. The only traces of this unhappy woman's past, now vanishing like a dream, were her painful memories and this pale, thin child who now opened her eyes after a short sleep, threw her arms around the woman's neck and, touching her face with her little lips, whispered:

"Mama! Give me something to eat!"

Her request did not yet arouse fear or sadness in the mother's heart. The widow reached into her pocket and took out a purse containing several banknotes—the only fortune left to the mother and her daughter. She threw a shawl around her shoulders, told the child to wait calmly for her return, and left the room.

Halfway down the stairs she met the concierge, who was carrying a bundle of wood to one of the apartments on the second floor.

"Dear sir," the widow said politely and timidly, "could you bring some milk and rolls for my child from a nearby store?"

The concierge listened without stopping, then turned his head and replied with barely concealed unwillingness:

"And who has the time now to go for milk and rolls? It is not my job here to bring food to the tenants."

He vanished behind the curve of the wall. The widow made her way down the stairs.

"He did not want to help me," she thought, "because he thinks I'm poor. He was carrying a heavy load of wood to those he expected to pay him for it."

She went to the courtyard and looked around.

"And why is madame looking around?" someone said in a hoarse, unpleasant voice very near her.

The widow saw a woman whom she could not recognize in the darkness standing before a low door near the gate. A short skirt, a large linen cap and a thick scarf thrown askew on her back, together with the sound of her voice and the tone of her speech, showed that she was a woman from the countryside. The widow guessed that she was the concierge's wife.

"My kind lady," she said, "will I find anyone here who would bring me milk and rolls?"

The woman thought for a moment.

"On which floor do you live?" she asked. "Somehow I do not know you."

"I moved to the attic today."

"To the attic! Then why is my ladybird babbling about bringing her something? Can you not go to town yourself?"

"I would pay someone for the trouble," whispered the widow, but the concierge's wife did not hear, or pretended not to. She wrapped her scarf more snugly around her and vanished behind the small door.

The widow stood motionless for a moment, not knowing what to do or whom to turn to. She sighed and let her hands fall helplessly. After a while, however, she raised her head, approached the gateway and opened the wicket leading to the street.

It was not late evening yet, but it was quite dark. The narrow thoroughfare, filled with crowds of people, was poorly lit by a few street lamps. Wide spaces on the sidewalks lay in total darkness. A wave of chilly autumn wind blew into the gateway through the open wicket, flying into the widow's face and rippling the ends of her black shawl. The rumble of carriages and the clamor of mingled conversations deafened her; the shadows filling the sidewalks frightened her. She took a few steps back in through the gate and stood there for a while with her head down.

Suddenly she stood up straight and walked forward. Perhaps she remembered her child, who was waiting for the food; perhaps she was conscious that she must now muster her will and

courage to obtain what previously had been freely available to her every day and hour. She threw her scarf over her head and walked through the gate. She did not know which direction to take to find a grocery store. She walked a long way, looking carefully at window displays; she passed a few cigar distributors, a café and a fabric store, and then turned back, not daring to go further or ask for information.

She went in a different direction. After a quarter of an hour she returned, carrying several rolls in a white handkerchief. She brought no milk, for there was none at the store where she found the rolls. She did not want to go on searching; she could not look for a shop any longer. She was worried about her child. She returned quickly, almost running. She was few steps from the gate when she heard a man's voice behind her, singing a song:

"Stop, wait, my dear—from where have you marched on your pretty little feet?"

She tried to convince herself that he was not singing to her. She walked faster and her hand was on the gate when the singing changed to speaking:

"Where are you going so quickly? Where to? The evening is so lovely! Perhaps we could go for a stroll!"

Breathless and shaking with fear and indignation, the young widow darted through the gate and slammed it behind her. A few minutes later Jasia saw her entering the room. She ran toward her and nestled in her embrace.

"You did not return for so long, mama!" she cried. Suddenly she went quiet and looked at her mother. "Mama," she said, "you are crying again, and you look the way you looked when they carried father in the coffin from our house."

Indeed the young woman was trembling all over, and large tears were running down her flushed cheeks. She was shaken deeply by her short excursion into town—by her struggle with her own fear, her rapid walk over slippery streets amid crowds and cold winds, and, above all, the insult of being accosted by an unknown man for the first time in her life. But she evidently made up her mind to overcome her feelings, for she quickly

calmed down, wiped away her tears and kissed the child. As she stirred up the fire, she said:

"I have brought you some rolls, Jasia, and now I will set out the samovar and make some tea."

She took the clay pitcher from the cabinet and, ordering the child to be careful of the fire, went down to the well in the courtyard. Soon she returned breathless and exhausted, with one arm bent from the weight of the pitcher filled with water. But without resting even for a moment, she began to set out the samovar.

She was doing this for the first time in her life, and with great difficulty. In less than an hour, however, the tea was drunk and Jasia was undressed and asleep. Her quiet, even breath showed that she was sleeping peacefully. The traces of tears shed abundantly all day had vanished from her face.

But the young mother did not sleep. She sat motionless before the fading fire in her mourning dress, her hair falling in loose black braids. She was resting her head on her hand, thinking.

At first, her white forehead was wrinkled deeply with pain. Her eyes were filled with tears and her bosom rose with a heavy sigh. After a while, however, she shook her head as if to chase away her overwhelming sorrows and fears. She rose, stood erect and said quietly:

"A new life!"

Indeed, this woman, young, beautiful, with white hands and a slender waist, was entering a new life. For her this day was the beginning of a future as yet unknown.

What had her past been like? Martha Świcka's past was short because of her age and simple because of events. Martha was born in a manor house that was neither splendid nor very affluent, but charming and comfortable. Her father's estate was several miles away from Warsaw, and it comprised a couple of hundred acres of fertile land, meadows, a lovely birch grove that furnished wood for the winter and room for romantic strolls during the summer, a large orchard, and an attractive house with six front windows looking out on a circular lawn. It had cheerful-looking green blinds and a porch with lavender morning glory. Beams with scarlet blossoms entwined its four columns.

Over Martha's cradle larks sang and old lindens waved with dignified gravity. Roses blossomed and ripening wheat formed waves of gold. The lovely face of her mother leaned over her and her little head, with its black hair, was covered with kisses. Martha's mother was a beautiful and kind woman, and her father was a good man with a fine education. She grew up as an only child amid people who doted on her. The first pain that darkened the cloudless life of the beautiful, cheerful, blooming girl was the loss of her mother. Martha was sixteen years old at the time. She despaired for a while; she yearned for her mother for a long time, but youth placed a healing balm on the first wound of her heart. Her face regained its rosy color, and joy, hope, and dreams returned.

But other calamities soon followed. Martha's father, partly because of his own imprudence but mainly owing to economic changes that had taken place in the country, found himself in danger of losing his estate. His health weakened and he saw that he was facing both the collapse of his fortune and the rapid approach of death. At that moment, however, Martha's future seemed to be secure: she met a man she loved and was loved back.

Jan Świcki, a young official occupying a high position in one of Warsaw's administrative offices, fell in love with the beautiful dark-eyed girl, and awakened in her similar feelings of respect and love. Martha's wedding took place only a few weeks before her father's death. The ruined aristocrat, who perhaps once dreamed of a splendid future for his only daughter, joyfully placed her hand in that of a man with no fortune but with a capacity for hard work. He died peacefully, believing that at the altar Martha's future had been thoroughly safeguarded from the unhappiness of a lonely life and the danger of poverty.

For the second time in her life Martha experienced great pain, but this time she was not only healed by her youth, but by her affection for her husband and, in time, their child. Her beautiful family estate had been lost forever and passed to the hands of strangers, but her beloved and loving husband created a soft, warm, comfortable nest amid the hubbub of the city. The silvery voice of a child added to the charm of his home. Five years passed happily and quickly for the young woman amid the comforts and duties of family life.

Jan Świcki worked hard and successfully. He received a good salary, sufficient to surround the wife he loved with everything she was used to from her cradle, everything that lent charm to every moment and peace to each coming day. To each? No, only to the next. Jan Świcki did not have the foresight to think of the distant future at the expense of the present. Young, strong, hard-working, he counted on his youth, strength, and industriousness, never dreaming that these treasures would be depleted. But they were, and too quickly. He was taken with a sudden, serious illness from which neither his doctors' advice nor his frantic wife's efforts could save him. He died. His death not only put an end to Martha's domestic happiness, but pulled from under her the base of her material welfare. Thus the marriage altar did not render the young woman forever immune to the misery of loneliness and the hazards of poverty. The axiom, old as the world, which states that there is nothing permanent in the world proved itself all too true in her case.

Everything that comes to a person from the outside passes by, changing him or her a bit. Thousands of currents become entangled as they move forward, currents in which social relationships and laws take form. All these are subject to frequent intervention of what is the most terrible force of all, because it is unpredictable and impossible to figure into one's calculations: blind chance. Yet man's destiny on this earth would indeed be regrettable if all his strength, his inner riches and his truth resided only in those external influences, changeable and fleeting as waves governed by wind. Indeed, there is nothing permanent on this earth besides what a man possesses in his heart and head: knowledge that shows him his paths and how to walk in them, work that brightens solitude and keeps poverty at bay, experience that teaches him, and elevated feelings that shelter him from evil. This permanence is often relative and may be broken by the sullen, unyielding power of illness and death. But as long as the process of movement, thought and feeling called life continues and develops soundly and durably, a human being does not lose himself but provides for himself, helps himself, supports himself with what he managed to accumulate in the past. It serves him as a weapon in his struggle with the complications

of life, the fickleness of fate, and the cruelty of reality.

All the external forces that had befriended and sheltered Martha until now had failed her, leaving her abandoned. But her fate was not altogether exceptional. Her misfortune was not caused by some bizarre adventure or astonishing disaster rare in the annals of human history. Financial ruin and death had destroyed her peace and happiness. What is more common everywhere in our society than the first? What is more inevitable, more frequent and inescapable—than the second?

Martha had found herself face to face with what happens to millions of people, millions of women. Who has not met, many times in life, people weeping by the waters of Babylon in which the ruins of a lost fortune are floating? Who counts how many times he has seen widows' mourning clothes, pale faces, and orphans' eyes wearied with tears?

Everything that had been part of the young woman's life had been taken from her, had disappeared, but she still had herself. Who could she be just for herself? What had she managed to accumulate for herself in the past? What tools of knowledge, will power, and experience could serve her in the struggle with complicated social issues, poverty, chance, and loneliness? Among these questions lay the enigma of her future, the issue of her life and death—and not only hers, but her child's. The young mother had no material wealth, or almost none. Her entire fortune consisted of a few hundred zlotys from the sale of her furniture after the payment of some small debts and the costs of her husband's funeral, some linen, and a few dresses. She has never had any expensive jewelry, and what she had she sold during her husband's illness to pay for worthless medical advice and equally worthless medicines. Even the cheap furniture that filled her new residence did not belong to her. She rented it together with the room in the attic, and was obliged to pay for it on the first of each month. Such was the sad, unvarnished reality of the present; but it was clearly defined. The future remained undefined. One had to take possession of it—almost to create it. Did the young, beautiful woman with white hands and silky raven hair have the strength to conquer? Had she taken anything from her past that would enable her to create her future?

She thought about this as she sat on a low wooden stool by the glowing coals in the fire. Her eyes, filled with a look of unspeakable love, were fixed on the face of her child, who was sleeping peacefully among white pillows. "For her, she said after a while, "for myself, for bread, peace and a roof over our heads, I will work!"

She stood in front of the window. The night was dark. She did not see anything: neither the steep roofs bristling below the high attic with all its stairs and landings, nor the dark smoke-stained chimneys on the protruding roofs, nor the street lanterns whose blurred light did not reach her little window. She did not even see the sky because it was covered with clouds and no star was shining. But the noise of the great city reached her ears incessantly; even the nocturnal noise was deafening, though it was muffled by distance. It was not late; on the wide, splendid boulevards and in the narrow, dark alleys people still walked, drove, and ran about in the pursuit of pleasure or the search for profit—ran where curiosity, some desire of the heart or hope of gain called them. Martha lowered her head onto her clasped hands and closed her eyes. She listened to the thousand voices merged into one enormous voice that was unclear and monotonous and yet full of feverish outbursts, sudden silences, dull shouts, and mysterious murmurs. In her imagination the great city assumed the form of a huge hive in which a multitude of human beings moved, surging with life and joining in the chase. Each one had his own place for work and for rest, his own goals to reach, and his own tools to forge a way through the crowd. What sort of place for work and rest would there be for her, a woman who was poor and lost at a boundless sea of loneliness? Where would tools be found to pave the way for a penniless woman? How would those human beings treat her, those people who chatted endlessly on the streets, who exhaled this feverish murmur, rising and falling like waves, in which she immersed her hearing? Would they be just or cruel to her, compassionate or merciful? Would those tightly closed phalanxes that were crowding toward happiness and wealth open before her? Or would they shut even more tightly, so the newcomer's arrival would not leave less room for others, would not forestall them in this strenuous race?

Which laws and customs would be favorable to her, and which would be adverse? Would there be more of the former or the latter? Above, all, would she be able to overcome hostile elements and exploit friendly ones every moment, with every heartbeat, with every passing thought? Would she be able to consolidate every vibrant fiber of her being into wise, persevering, steady strength that would ward off poverty, preserve her dignity in the face of humiliation, and shield her from fruitless pain, despair, and starvation?

Martha's soul was fixed on these questions. Memories that were both delightful and agonizing, memories of a woman who had once been a carefree, radiant girl walking lightly through the fresh grass and colorful flowers of her family's rural home, then spent joyful days, free of worry and sadness, at her beloved husband's side, and now stood in a widow's gown near a small window in this attic with her pale forehead lowered onto her tightly clasped hands—through all this day these memories had been swarming around her like phantoms ready to leave her torn and bleeding. Now they flew away before the stern, mysterious, but tangible reality of the present. This reality absorbed her thoughts, but did not seem to frighten her. Did she draw courage from the maternal love that filled her heart? Did she have the pride that despises fear? Or was she ignorant of the world and herself?

She was not afraid. When she lifted her face, there were traces of tears shed profusely for several days, and there was a look of sorrow and longing, but there was no fear or doubt.

Visions

The West and the Rest

A brief account

Jacek Koronacki

The West as a social entity that accepts its intellectual Christian heritage does not exist anymore.

The West as a sociopolitical entity based on the ideology of liberal democracy is a specter; see Alain Besançon's analysis of Russia and its lack of any ontological foundation (just like evil which is the absence of good) It was founded on

philosophical negation of the West, which in the meantime has become a specter itself. Liberal democracy is void of any ontological foundation, and hence cannot provide legitimacy to a societal organization, whether to a state or to its laws. By the same token, the term "the democratic state of law" is an oxymoron. Those who claim that liberal democracy can refer to, or find its foundation in, a Christian order (or any other order, for that matter) are "good-natured idiots" – regardless of whether the claim has its origin in their goodwill or alleged cleverness in fooling the liberal system. Interestingly and importantly, their IQs may be the highest: decades ago, such were those eminent and honest scientists and philosophers who, like Professor Andrzej Grzegorzczak or Rev. Józef Tischner in Poland, encouraged dialogue with Marxism and communism. Today, they include some Catholic researchers who urge democracy to Christianize itself, i.e., make democracy accept Christianity as its founding principle.

It is the task of the elite and of the university to be the medium that transmits a sense of order, but the elite and the university have opted for a revolutionary way to change society, starting with the Enlightenment and the ensuing progressivism. And so they died, along with their belief in Enlightenment and progress. On its deathbed, whether by a deliberate decision or through naiveté, the elite accepted the philosophy of the end of history. In this way they brought death to themselves and to the university.

Western Catholicism has no place to develop and grow. This is why Pope Benedict XVI resigned. While he does not have to explain the situation to the knowledgeable Remnant, he has no common ground with the contemporary West at large. The West does not understand his language any more.

This is not the end of the world: Catholicism will survive, but it will be a new Catholicism, a "pre-Western" one, the one of non-Western peoples, mostly pagan until their recent conversion. Pope Francis is the first pope of that new Catholicism. It is not unlikely that the new Catholicism will be professed almost all over the world in a matter of a hundred or a few hundred years.

Politically, we are at a turning point. It is a time of changing and uncertain alliances; local wars, whether hot, cold, or hybrid; rebuilding the Middle East and the Arab world; flooding Europe