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What did ancient Christians and pagans believe makes for the unity of the nations? Just as he began serving as a major adviser at the Second Vatican Council in 1962, Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) studied this question in lectures delivered at Austria's University of Salzburg. These lectures, originally published in German, are now made available in English in this volume.

Ratzinger explores the writings of early Church fathers, including Origen and Augustine, as well as that of other authors from the ancient world such as Plato. He argues that Christian belief took up political ideas from pagan Rome but revolutionized them by insisting that it was not the empire, but the presence of God through the Church, that is the true "cosmopolis" that can unify divided humanity.

This book showcases the development of Ratzinger's theology, including that have informed his life's work such as how God's transcendence and the doctrine of creation inform a Christian worldview and the central role of the Incarnation in understanding how the Church relates to the world