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It is also a Tagalog word which may refer to both the place and the process of purifying precious metals so that they may become *lantay* (pure), consequently rendering them more valuable. By extending its meaning we can say that **lantayan** is the place and process whereby something becomes definitive, something that was initially uncertain reaches relative surety and acceptability – and something good is transformed into something better.

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*“He will sit refining and purifying (silver),
and he will purify the sons of Levi,
refining them like gold or like silver
that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord.”*

(Malachi 3:3)

FOREWORD

Varied are the reasons for calling something special. We have four for naming this sixth volume of **Lantayan** a special one.

First, it is a commemorative issue. It ushers in the Silver Jubilee celebration of the existence of Don Bosco Center of Studies as a School of Theology. Initially established in 1973 as a residence for Salesian students of Theology who frequented the Ecclesiastical Faculties of the University of Santo Tomas, starting from the schoolyear of 1983-1984 the Center took the daunting task of teaching theology to the Salesian students of the Philippine Province, and four years later opened its doors to other Religious Congregations for men and women and to the laity.

Second, the content of this issue is quite special. It has a singular focus on the choice of articles, that is, the recent writings of the eminent theologian Joseph Ratzinger, now the Church's Supreme Pontiff, Benedict XVI. These are : *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007), *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007) and *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007).

A third reason is that, unlike the ten previous issues, the three major articles found in this present journal are the published versions of the three main conferences dealt during the theological symposium entitled *Up Close and Personal*. This was held before an audience of nearly one thousand and three hundred participants at the St John Bosco Parish Church in Makati last September 25, 2007. Before this printed publication, an audio-video version was put on sale by the Daughters of St Paul last December 30, 2007.

The fourth and most important reason is the roster of the three authors of the major articles found here. Fr Catalino Arévalo SJ, Fr Savio Hon Tai-Fai SDB and Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle DD hold a common link with the present Pontiff. They all served in the International Theological Commission of the Holy See when Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and, thus, the *ex-officio* head of this august theological body. These eminent theologians discussed the Church's concerns in matters of the faith under the guidance and direction of Joseph Ratzinger. In the true sense of the phrase that was used for

the theological symposium, they know the theological mind, heart and vision of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *up close and personal*.

Joining them are two other articles on the writings of Benedict XVI. These are reflections of two professors of the Don Bosco Center of Studies, Fr Alfred Maravilla SDB and Sister Ma. Cecilia Payawal PDDM. Both hold a licentiate degree in Theology, the former with a specialization in Missiology and the latter with a specialization in Sacred Liturgy. Fr Maravilla re-reads *Jesus of Nazareth* from his study-desk in Rome as he is currently doing his doctoral studies in Systematic Theology at the Gregorian University, whereas Sister Payawal considers the encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* and the theme of Christian Hope from her perspective as a liturgist.

The Editor

JESUS OF NAZARETH: THE CHRISTOLOGY OF JOSEPH RATZINGER/POPE BENEDICT XVI

An Introduction and Some Reflections

Fr Catalino G. Arévalo, SJ SThD
Loyola School of Theology

By Way of Prenote: the present SDB symposium.

I. Introduction: Some Prenotes to Joseph Ratzinger's Christology.

- Why Christology at the center of Joseph Ratzinger's (JR) pontificate?

Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte.

- JR and the "doing" of theology.
- Theology and the faith of the "simple faithful".
- JR's "traditional theology".
Scripture-based, Tradition-based theology
- The historico-critical method; the "historical Jesus".

II. Joseph Ratzinger's Christology: One Basic Approach: "The Son"

• From *Introduction to Christianity* (1967) to *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007): consistency, continuity.

• The Son: the communion, communication between the Father and Jesus; the prayer of Jesus, root and source of the identity of Jesus.

• The *Person* of the Son, wholly relational, *a Patre, ad Patrem, pro nobis*.

Unity of being and mission, Incarnation and Cross/Resurrection.

III. “Principles of Christ’s Existence and of Christianity”

- Formulation of “the essence/spirit” of Christianity: principles of Christ’s existence and of Christian existence.

(cf. Aidan Nichols)

- The “principle of being-for” Jesus on the Cross
- The “principle of excess”.
- The third principle: “primacy of receiving, of acceptance”
- Thus, the unity of the law of incarnation and the law of cross-and-resurrection.

IV. JR’s Soteriology (Cf. James Corkery)

- The principles given above, summed up by James Corkery in the principle of “love – to – the – end”
- “Love to the end” and the continuity/integration of being and doing, of incarnation and cross/resurrection.

V. Theology of Holy Week and Easter

- Interconnection between Last Supper, Cross and Resurrection

1. Last Supper and Cross
2. Words of Jesus on the Cross
3. Resurrection and Second Coming
4. The Paschal Mystery and the Eucharist
5. The Pierced Side

VI. By Way of Excursus: The “Pierced Side”

- John 19, 37-39
- On the Heart of Jesus (“*Haurietis Aquas*”)

VII. Conclusion: *Auf Christus schauen*

BY WAY OF PRENOTE

Congratulations and gratitude to Don Bosco Center of Studies (DBCS) on the beginning of their celebration of 25 years as a center of theological studies with an ever increasing number of students, both for the ecclesiastical courses and the catechesis for laypeople.

The Vice Provincial, Fr Danny Torres, the President and the Rector, Fr Eligio Santos and his faculty, and the creative organizer *nonpareil* of this symposium, Fr Francis Gustilo, OIC for formation of the Salesians in this part of the world, who even got the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone to endorse this symposium! To them all, congratulations!

We ask the intercession of St. John Bosco, that very great saint whose gift to the Church “grows greater every year”.

Each one of us speakers has been given a bit more than an hour, but to even “touch briefly” on Joseph Ratzinger’s (JR) main points under each theme is “just too much”. Just last week an Italian journal said the sum-total of major works, books, booklets JR has authored, comes to 84 volumes; articles of all diverse kinds, before his election to the Papacy, was just a bit less than 600, mostly on the Church, *ad intra* and *ad extra*. That’s why the theme “Church” was given to Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle, who is a “good friend” and knows him well. Next in number are writings on Liturgy (one of JR’s great interests), Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Christology comes third, his early (1967) book having much of it (*Introduction to Christianity*), and his latest book is *Jesus of Nazareth*.

What has struck me is his (JR’s) *remarkable consistency* in his Christology, from 1967 to 2007, and a certain simplicity, concentration, focus on “more or less one deep line” – one vision of “the core, the center, *der Mitte*”, so that over the years he comes back to the same themes, the same texts of Scripture, the same emphases, always in search of the “face of Jesus” and the core of his message. I will try to give this clearly, but you will find I will repeat myself because JR does – always in search of the center, which is the face/the heart of Jesus, and the final word of Jesus’ Gospel.

Our *purpose* here this morning is simply to “present”, and present with clarity and hopefully with some enthusiasm. It is *not* primarily to criticize and find difficulties. Other seminars, presented by other theological schools, can do that, if they wish. Not our task today. JR’s theological views *de facto* are *not* much known locally. (Just his positions regarding liturgy? The other positions known are simply the same as the present teaching of the Church.)

I. INTRODUCTION: SOME PRENOTES TO JOSEPH RATZINGER'S CHRISTOLOGY

From the beginning of his pontificate, not few commentators (e.g., and most notably – John Allen of *The National Catholic Reporter*, who had written a very critical portrait of Joseph Ratzinger (JR) as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith), had expected that “Christology would be at the center of this pontificate.”¹

Why? Throughout his life, JR has seen his task as *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*. It is his own doctoral mentorees who made that the title of their collection of JR’s writings. JR has always seen himself as a “theologian of the basics”.

More than once in the first few months of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI – so some of his commentators have pointed out – has indicated that, teaching-wise, he intends to be “a Pope of the basics” of the Catholic faith. This has been, in a true sense and consistently, the program of his whole life as theologian and teacher.

My basic impulse was always to free up the authentic kernel of the faith from encrustations and to give this kernel strength and dynamism. This impulse is the constant of my life.... I have never deviated from this constant, which from

¹ Excerpt from John L. Allen, NCR *All Things Catholic* 27 April 2007, “Why the subject of Christology, and why now?” (Why not on liturgy, with which JR is fascinated, has been fascinated?) What seems clear is that emerging as the core doctrinal concern of this pontificate is Christology. Benedict XVI’s thesis: “There can be no humane social order, nor true moral progress apart from a right relationship with God. Try as it might, a world organized *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God did not exist) will be dysfunctional and ultimately inhumane. Jesus Christ, Benedict XVI insists, is “the sign of God for humanity”. *Presenting humanity with the proper teaching about Jesus is, therefore* (according to Benedict XVI) *the highest form of public service the Church has to offer.*

Only a renewed focus *on Christ as Son of God*, and on the plan for human life marked out in the example of Christ (and the message of his Gospel), Benedict XVI believes, offers hope of a lasting cure for the woundedness of the human family. According to Benedict XVI, efforts to cut corners, to recast Christ in ways that seemingly promote “progress” more directly, always ends in ruin.

At the annual Rector’s dinner at the North American College in Rome, a Vatican official said to me, “For this Pope, Christology is the key.” (J. Allen)

my childhood has molded my life, and I have remained true to it as the basic direction of my life.²

In the new preface he wrote for the 2000 reprint of his *Introduction to Christianity*, he returns to the insistence that “to understand the Christian faith and to enter more deeply into this understanding, exploring the question of God and the question of Christ” is his central endeavor. The question of the God-man, the oneness of God and man in Jesus - the meaning of this - is for us the central mystery and the central truth. In his book (first published in 1968), his fundamental approach was “that I put the question of God and the question of Christ in the very center, which then leads to a narrative Christology and demonstrates that the place for faith is in the Church. This basic orientation was, I think, correct.” In other words, “Christology is the center of Christianity.”³

It is Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, I believe, who wrote that Pope Benedict’s book, the first one he published as Pope, on Jesus of Nazareth, was the first book on Jesus any Pope we know of has ever written.

The greatest gift, the greatest service the Church can give to the world at any time, is “the true knowledge and friendship of Jesus Christ.” (George Weigel). But this knowledge and this friendship have been seriously threatened, since the sixties and the seventies, by much of the so-called “scientific historico-critical research” which has sown an extensive and serious distrust of the Scriptures, the Gospels, and has created images of Jesus which have turned their backs on the Jesus the Church has given us in the last two thousand years. Much of this “so called scientific scholarship” has dissected and dissected the Bible, till it has lost authentic unity and focus, till it can no longer give us the Jesus the Church has taught

² David Gibson, *The Rule of Benedict. Pope Benedict XVI and His Battle with the Modern World.*, New York, Harper One/ Harper Collins, 2004, 218.

³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*. Translated by J. R. Foster, with a new Preface, “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” translated by Michael J. Miller (11-29), 2000. Rome. Communio Books, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004 – This new preface is “must reading”; it sheds much light on the thinking of the present Pontiff regarding the proclamation of Jesus Christ today.

and proclaimed even in these last two hundred years. A split, even a gorge, has been created between “the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith.” Scientific history (we are told) has given us the only authentic Jesus as he was in his lifetime, and this Jesus has come to be portrayed in the most diverse ways: e.g., the itinerant moral guru who came to teach us his own morality, (and not much more), or the apocalyptic prophet of the kingdom of God, announcing the soon-to-come breakthrough of God’s kingdom (of a this-worldly kind).

To unite again, firmly and faithfully, the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith” is a task that must be done, for Christians as well as all those who seek the truth about Jesus, as well as those who, like the Greeks on Palm Sunday in the Fourth Gospel, tell Philip and Andrew, “We wish to see Jesus.” (George Weigel) Hence, once more, the urgent need of the Christological task in our time. ⁴

JR on the “doing” of theology

It is rather important for us to grasp Ratzinger’s understanding of the nature of theology and the task of the theologian. To begin with, theology cannot be done without faith, and this faith is at base *the faith of the Church*: both as a graced way of knowing which is the gift of the Spirit, and as a “content” which is a participation in the mind of Christ in the Spirit. Therefore theology begins with a *receiving*, a receiving in faith, a receiving of the truth given by God to, with, and in the faith of this Church. Thus, theology can only be done within the faith of the Church, received by the theologian, and done within the Faith of the one Body of Christ, constantly drawn on in true theological knowing. The receiving subject and acting subject of theology is the whole

⁴ From George Weigel, Newsweek May 21 2007: “*A Jesus Beyond Politics*”. “Everything in Christianity, ancient or modern, depends on building an *intimate friendship with Jesus*” Pope Benedict writes. Given the modern critical methods of scholarship, two centuries of “dissecting” the Bible, ... amid all the [new] information, false or true, the guess-work gained in the Biblical dissecting room, and the Jesus of the Gospel tends to disappear. And that makes ‘intimate friendship with Jesus’ much more difficult, not only for scholars, but for everyone.

Church. Individual theologians can only be theologians within that living faith of the Church, “operating” always within that faith.⁵

Reflect therefore on the difference between *scientia* and *sapientia* in Augustine, and Bonaventure. Hence the necessity of prayer (*betende Theologie*) as theology is a faith-search for a sharing of God’s mind, for his wisdom.⁶

Anselm of Canterbury’s “definition” of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking to understand, then means that this faith which seeks deeper understanding is the faith of the Church which is the gift of the Spirit. (Thus theological labor must be done under the guidance of the Spirit and with the Spirit’s grace.)

If that faith is the faith of the Church, and Church is made up primarily of “the simple faithful”, then the constant proclamation of that faith, the “keeping of the faith” for the life of the Church is the first task of bishops and of theologians as well. Theology is secondary to proclamation, is for the sake of proclamation, *for the sake of growing* in the living out of the faith of the Church. Hence this is the primary concern of theologians (with the pastors) as well.⁷

⁵ Cf. in *Joseph Ratzinger, Life in the Church and Living Theology*, by Maximilian H. Heim (trans. by Michael J Miller), San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2007. Part Two, Chapter One, “The Church as the Locus of Faith,” 147 ff. and the references to JR’s texts on Church, faith and theology.

⁶ “Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Theology,” Cardinal Ratzinger’s funeral homily (in *Communio* 15/1988, 512-516), “Balthasar coined the expression, *betende Theologie*, theology on its knees. He knew that theology is suspended between the abysses of adoring obedience and of humble love. He knew that theology can come into action only at the touch of the living God, which happens in prayer. Precisely because he knew that God is greater than all our thoughts and our hearts, he submitted himself to the concreteness of God, who, in the human face of Jesus Christ, looks at us in greater and more infinite measure than in all the negations of an unformed mysticism which remains, finally, within the person alone. Because he lived out of obedience [that obedience of thought which allows itself to be led only by the mind and will of God], it was at once obvious to him that theology does not live from what one thinks [out of his own mind only] but from what he receives. Therefore in the deepest sense of the word, he was a man of the Church.”

⁷ Michael Fahey, in *Concilium*, 3, 141, 78-79.

Theology and faith of the “the simple faithful”

Regarding Ratzinger’s typical concern which remained constant in his pastoral ministry, namely the commitment to protect simple believers: in the epilogue to his commentary on Vatican II, JR says: “In the final analysis, the Church lives, in sad as well as in joyous times, from the faith of those who are simple of heart. The simple people are the ones who exercise the true mission of the Church: prayer, bearing daily life with patience, always listening to the word of God.”⁸

In a sermon given on 31 December 1979, following the outcry caused by the silencing of Hans Küng, he stated: “The Christian believer is a simple person; bishops should protect the faith of these little people against the power of intellectuals [theologians].” Hans Jürgen Verweyen, author of a new study of JR’s life and thought writes: “In contrast with other theologians who are his contemporaries, from the very beginnings of his teaching career, JR has held the principle that he would not give a public dimension to anything that would contribute to confusion with regard to the doctrine preached by the Church as binding all believers (the simple faithful)”⁹

JR’s “traditional” theology

JR’s theology is traditional, then; traditional, in perhaps the best sense of that term, extremely rich because filled with the content of the Tradition. But this theology, in JR, is not neo-scholastic, with its often arid conceptualism. Also, perhaps surprisingly to many, it is not Thomist or thomistic. In his book of memories, 1927-1977, he writes:

By contrast [with the writings of Martin Buber and St. Augustine], I had difficulties in penetrating the thought of

⁸ cf. Michael Fahey, *ibid.*

⁹ Hans Jürgen Verweyen, Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Die entwicklung Seines Denkens*, Primus Verlag, Darmstadt 2007 (82-83); cf. *Il Regno Attualità* 15 June 2007 (422)

St. Thomas Aquinas whose crystal-clear logic seemed to me too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made. This may also have had something to do with fact that Arnold Wilmsen, the philosopher who taught us Thomas, presented us with a rigid neoscholastic Thomism that was simply too far afield from my own questions.¹⁰

Further prenotes to JR's Christology

Before we enter, properly speaking, into JR's Christological construction, let us lay down a few more, hopefully useful, prenotes.

Scripture-based, Tradition-based Theology

JR's Christology is decisively Scripture-based, Tradition-based.

Scripture based: JR follows the tradition of the Fathers of the Church, the monastic theologians, and the early Scholastics as well, who called themselves *magistri sacrae paginae*. In the 1940s and 1950s, a number of Catholic theologians, advocating a return to the biblical

¹⁰ *Milestones. Memories 1927–1977*, San Francisco, 1998, Ignatius, 44. JR's earliest major work, *Introduction to Christianity* (1967) does not have any references to Aquinas, nor does his latest, *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007).

As to his own theology's relationship with the work of Karl Rahner, JR's book, *Milestones*, on pages 128-129, says that "Rahner and I lived on two different theological planets." "Rahner's was a speculative and philosophical theology in which Scripture and the Fathers in the end did not play an important role and in which the historical dimension was really of little significance. For my part, my whole intellectual formation had been shaped by Scripture and the Fathers and profoundly historical thinking." Rahner's defenders believe JR's evaluation of Rahner's theology falls wide off the mark and is quite unjust. (cf. Herbert Vorgrimler, Spanish translation of the revised edition of his book on Karl Rahner: "Leaving to one side the first sentence, according to which Rahner and he lived on two different theological planets, a statement which in some way negative (regarding Rahner): the remarks which follow by Ratzinger really set up a uniquely false interpretation, of a rather grotesque kind. Only someone who has never read Rahner or who wishes to consciously attack (*polemizar*) Rahner can affirm that his theology is totally shaped by the tradition of Suarezian scholasticism, a tradition which Rahner expressly rejected, placing the original Thomas Aquinas in its place. When Ratzinger says later that in the philosophical theology of Rahner, Scripture and the Fathers did not play any important function, this judgement in fact is to be collocated, with its harshness, at the border of calumny." (159) Herbert Vorgrimler, ("Karl Rahner" in *Sal Terrae*, Santander, 2004, 159.)

and patristic sources, revived the “spiritual exegesis” of the Greek Fathers and (as noted above) the monastic theologians. Avery Dulles lists names: Louis Bouyer, Henri de Lubac, Celestine Charlier and, somewhat closer to our time, Yves Congar and Hans urs von Balthasar.

Here, one “searches the Scriptures” to discover God’s thoughts and designs for himself and his own life. “For de Lubac, this point of view is not a matter of private devotion or spirituality, but of theology properly so-called. In patristic times, de Lubac contends, the so-called mystical meaning was always considered the doctrinal meaning par excellence.” Hence, “narrative scriptural theology” and “spiritual exegesis” are themselves genuine theology. One might keep this in mind when reading a book like JR’s *Jesus of Nazareth*.¹¹

What we call academic theology, too, should not be looked on as complete theology by itself, but with its pastoral reflection, preaching, spirituality, prayer shade off into each other.

Hence the constant reference to Tradition is necessary. The Fathers once again, the Councils, the Church teaching throughout her history, the Church’s liturgy (the liturgy is of profound importance!), the saints, their lives and teaching, all these elements are dimensions of theology.

Consequent on this, we see why Augustine and Bonaventure are JR’s great masters, and why the books of Karl Adam and Romano Guardini (Guardini’s *The Lord* specially) served as models and inspiration.¹²

¹¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology. From Symbol to System*, New York, Crossroad, new expanded edition, 1955, Chapter 5, “The Uses of Scripture in Theology,” 69-86, at 74.

¹² Cf. *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI. His Central Writings and Speeches*. Ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, Harper San Francisco 2007, “Guardini on Christ in our Century,” 53-55. Cf the “final note” I have appended at the end of these footnotes.

Historico-critical method: “the historical Jesus”

In our SDB symposium, I did not take up a topic which now I believe we must (even if just briefly) address. (In so doing we must also pay more attention to JR’s book, *Jesus of Nazareth*.) This is the question of the use of the historico-critical method in exegesis, in Christology especially, and in connection with this, the question of the so-called historical Jesus. We know that the first topic for the Bishops’ Synod which Benedict XVI himself has chosen is that of “the Scripture in the Church”. This issue has taken up JR’s attention and concern for many decades now.¹³

JR never questions the legitimacy and relevance of critical historical research in the study of the Scriptures, but he is amazed by the recklessness of many of its practitioners. Their so-called ‘scientific investigation’ so often ends up by ‘discovering’ nothing else but the very thinking and the pet ideas and the biases of their own time, of the *Zeitgeist* around them.

In fact, JR criticizes historico-critical exegesis with less acerbity than others and with more nuance. He tells us its principles and procedures are in themselves valid and useful, even at times necessary, and the figures of Jesus they produce are not “false, but quite incomplete and hemmed in by bounds of immanence,” within an only ‘this-world’ horizon, tied down by the “good intention of humanizing Jesus”. In this process, Jesus has been stripped of his proper originality and identity, stripped of his transcendence: that he is the Son, the unique revealer of God the Father.¹⁴

JR thus clearly refuses to be held back by the procedures and conclusions of the historico-critical method; he frees himself from the method’s narrow domination. He takes the Gospels and

¹³ *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, above. Cf. “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis,” 243-258. cf. *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, English translation, “The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church,” edited by R. J. Neuhaus, Michigan 1989, 1-23. Francis Martin, “Joseph Ratzinger on Biblical Interpretation: Two Principles,” in *Nova et Vetera* (English), Vol. 5, 2007, 285-314.

¹⁴ Foreword, xi-xxiv, of *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, trans. Adrian J. Walker, New York, Doubleday, 2007, and note 13 (above). Also, the annotated bibliography, 365 ff.

the entire New Testament as credible and reliable witness. “The Gospels can be trusted.” Thus in them, Jesus is the unique revealer of God, and Jesus is the Son of God. The Gospels and the New Testament give us a developing understanding of Jesus’ transcendent identity, and we learn that assuming this transcendent identity, in his own historical context, brought him his condemnation and his death (Claude Geffré).¹⁵

To illustrate some of JR’s thinking (*negative thinking*) with regard to some of the concrete use of the historico-critical method, there are a couple of pages in his *Jesus of Nazareth* which are rather striking. Discussing the temptations of Jesus in the desert, JR writes:

The whole conversation of the second temptation takes the form of a dispute between two bible scholars... Joachim Gnilka says that the devil presents himself here as a theologian. The Russian writer Vladimir Soloviev took up this motif in his short story “The Antichrist.”

Soloviev’s portrayal of the Antichrist forcefully expresses his skepticism regarding a certain type of scholarly exegesis current at the time. This is not a rejection of scholarly biblical interpretation as such, but an eminently salutary and necessary warning against its possible aberrations. The fact is that scripture exegesis can become tool of the Antichrist. Soloviev is not the first person to tell us that; it is a deeper point of the temptation story itself. The alleged findings of scholarly exegesis have been used to put together the most dreadful books that destroy the figure of Jesus and dismantle the faith.

The common practice today is to measure the Bible against the so-called modern worldview, whose fundamental dogma is that God cannot act in history – that everything to do with God is to be relegated to the domain of subjectivity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Claude Geffré OP, “A propos du Jésus de Benoit XVI.” in *Lumière et Vie*, no. 275, 2007, 101-109. Cf. also the excellent study by Gabino Urbarri, “Mirar al Jesús real,” *Razón y Fe*, sept-oct 2007, 123-140. (Urbarri’s article is excellent on JR and the “historical Jesus”.) Paolo Gamberini, “Il Gesù di Ratzinger,” *Rivista di Teologia*, 48 (2007) 592-622.

¹⁶ JR, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 35-36.

II. JR'S CHRISTOLOGY: ONE BASIC APPROACH: "THE SON"

In the time given us, allow me to try to set up some few points which enter into one approach that has been present in JR's work from the 1967 *Introduction to Christianity* to his *Jesus of Nazareth*, 40 years later, in 2007.¹⁷

In JR's image of Jesus, as we said earlier, we may not in truth set aside our Faith as we look on the [so-called] historical Jesus. *We take the Gospels as worthy of trust.*¹⁸ So the first concern is to focus on what is at the center of the life and person of Jesus, as the Gospels reveal him. And that is, his constant oneness in communication and communion with the Father. In our time we speak of his "Abba experience": that is what is at his core; it constitutes his identity.

The center of the life and person of Jesus,
according to the testimony of Holy Scripture,
in his constant communication with the Father.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. JR's first published Christological synthesis, in *Introduction to Christianity*, is its second part (193 ff.) in the 2000 reprinting by Ignatius Press (Communio Books, San Francisco). It is indicative of JR's consistency even of presentation, that the book was reprinted without any changes, but with only a new twenty-page preface, where JR described the new context in which a re-edition of his 1969 text would appear and the changes in the presentation in this new context would call for. Cf. also The International Theological Commission's Christological paper, "*Quaestiones selectae de Christologia, relatio conclusiva*", 1979. *Gregorianum* 61/1980, 280-286, and in English translation, in Texts and Documents of the ITC. International Theology Commission (ITC), *Texts and Documents*, 1969-1985. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1989. "Select Questions on Christology," 1979, and "Theology, Christology, Anthropology," 1981. A third document, "The Consciousness of Christ concerning Himself and His Mission," 1985. The influence of JR and his thought is evident throughout. In fact, one could say much of the content of these documents are summaries of JR's christological writings.

Cf. also his presentation of Christology in "Jesus Christ," chapter 2 of *The God of Jesus Christ. Meditation on God in the Trinity* (trans. *Der Gott Jesus Christi*, 1976), Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1979, 49-94.

The same basic themes are also developed more fully in JR's *Jesus of Nazareth* New York, Doubleday, 2007.

¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York, Doubleday, 2007, xxi. The foreword, if perhaps difficult for some, presents methodological points which guide him in this book. "I feel that I owe the reader these remarks about methodology because they govern my interpretation of the figure of Jesus in the New Testament. The main implication of this for my portrayal of Jesus is that I trust the Gospels."

¹⁹ Cf. Thesis 1 in "Taking Bearings in Christology," first presented at the CELAM Christology seminar, Rio de Janeiro, 1982. In English, *Behold the Pierced One*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1986, 15 ff.

The contemporaries of the earthly Jesus, asking themselves Jesus' own question, "Who do you say I am?" sought to name him from categories which they drew from their own experience and culture. He was referred to as "prophet, priest, advocate, angel, messiah, son of God, etc." These names and titles were sifted through, inter-related, arranged in some proper order. At work was a process of concentration, simplification. Remaining, as the process developed, were "Messiah, Christ" (and hence Jesus the Christ), "Kyrios, Lord", and the names Jesus used of himself, "Son of man, Son" (in all simplicity, *sine addito*), and the "I am" sayings.²⁰

Finally, the one, only, wholly comprehensive designation for Jesus was, quite simply, "Son". Everything is found in it, derives from it. It is in Peter's confession at Galilee (Mt 16:16) that is found (for JR) the final form, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Son" is thus the comprehensive interpretative category which is itself the true key to the interpretation for the figure of Jesus. It in fact arises from "the basic historical experience of those who had been with Jesus, eyewitnesses, who had seen and heard and touched him. All the Gospels bear common testimony that everything in Jesus flowed from within him, his most intimate communion with the Father and thus from his *Abba* experience, from his dialogue – *face-to-face* – with his Father, from his prayer."²¹

JR, time and time again, returns to this baseline theme. In both his Introduction, in homilies, in papers read in various congresses, in the International Theological Commission texts, in the 2007 *Jesus of Nazareth*, he goes back repeatedly to the Lucan passages on the calling of the Twelve (the beginning of the Church); Peter the Rock's confession of faith; the Transfiguration at Tabor; the agony at the Mount of Olives; Jesus' address to his Father as *Abba* and its prolongation in the Our Father; his last words when nailed to the Cross. No doubt can possibly be raised against it. The Christian confession of faith, then and now, is rooted in the prayer of Jesus and flows out from it. It is a sharing in what is most personal, most intimate, most central, deepest in him.

²⁰ Cf. the superb chapter 10, "Jesus declares His Identity", in *Jesus of Nazareth*, 319 ff., where JR develops his reflection on "Son of Man, Son, and 'I am'."

²¹ *Jesus of Nazareth*, 335-355.

Only by entering into the solitude and prayer of Jesus, his communion and communication with his Father, can we see Jesus' most personal reality, can we penetrate his identity. Only in this participation in the mind, heart and prayer of Jesus can we truly understand him, come to really know, follow him in truth. All this yields itself to us in prayer and only through prayer. (Lk 9, 18-29; Mt 16, 13-20)

One of JR's summative sentences runs: "... the whole of Christology, our speaking of Christ, is nothing other than the interpretation of his prayer: the entire person of Jesus is contained in his prayer - his prayer to his Father, his communion and communication with him, his oneness with him."²²

And so, JR insists, this is quite literally what is at the core of Jesus' being and mind and heart; he is the Son. That he can say, again quite simply, Abba when he turns to his Father, in a way nobody else could ever do.²³

From this, the *homo-ousios* [consubstantial, of one substance] of the Councils emerged: this is not hellenization (*non aristotelice, sed piscatorie*), just quite simply the reality. The Father and Jesus Christ are one. Jesus is truly one with the Father, not only as divine, but as human.²⁴

The Trinitarian understanding of person thus arises from revelation, not from Greek philosophy. The person, in the Trinity, in Jesus, is wholly relational. Relational is at the peak of being, just as "high" as substance. Person is understood from God's revelation: person as relation, as relatedness. (We repeat: this is not Greek philosophy; it derives from the Word of God.)

²² *Behold the Pierced One*, 13-46, at 19.

²³ And yet, that very relationship is designed to include others incorporated into itself. So Jesus teaches his disciples "that with him they too can say 'Abba' to God, - just as he does. Jesus wants to take his own into that intimacy and sonship which is in him. - Thus they can pray "Our Father" (*fili in Filio*).

²⁴ *Behold the Pierced One*, Theses 5 and 6, 32-42, and *The God of Jesus Christ*, "One in Being with the Father," 77-84. on "piscatorie, non aristotelice," from the Codex Encyclius, cf. 70, 84.

To ontologize more widely (so to speak): this which we learned from Revelation is to speak of the persons of the Trinity, as also of the Person who is Jesus Christ. It is from Revelation, it is from the Trinity as revealed to us, it is from the Incarnation as made known to us that we know what a person is – not from philosophy, not from the metaphysics of the Greeks. Revelation tells us there are “three” – Three *Persons*, the Councils tell us – within the One God. And the Incarnation tells us that the Second Person, Jesus Christ, is the divine Person of the Son. And the Person of the Son (as we said above), is totally relational, totally related, to the Father and to us. The Son is wholly *a Patre et ad Patrem*; he is wholly *ad nos, pro nobis*. So the *Person* is *relation*, is wholly relational in the Blessed Trinity. JR says, Greek metaphysics placed *substance*, so to speak, at the top of the pyramid of being. From the Christian Faith, we know *relation* is (if you wish) “even higher” than substance or nature, because in the Trinity, one nature is shared by Three, and the final instance is Person, is Relation; in Jesus, he is *Son*.

Going further than the merely ontological, JR states that in the dogmas of Nicea and Chalcedon (and Constantinople III) a true identity of service and being, of function and ontology, the fuller content of the ‘*Abba*’ experience of Jesus are brought to light. The polarity between incarnation and cross-resurrection, between the Johannine model and the Pauline model is to be overcome. The being of Christ (incarnation/Christology) is a continuous *exodus* (cf. in Luke 9, 28 ff., the Transfiguration): the permanent act of being son and servant is supremely manifest on the cross, which is “doing”, but also “being.”²⁵

This continuity and identity will be taken up in the pages which follow.

²⁵ Much of the content of the preceding pages we have drawn from Aidan Nichols OP, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1988, to which we shall refer at length in the pages to follow. Cf. specially 125-127. Reprinted 2005, under the title, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, Burns Oates, Continuum, London/ New York.

On the transfiguration, cf. JR’s superb chapter on the mystery in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Chapter 9, 302-319. This meditation, along with the one on Jesus’ Baptism, gives us JR at his best as spiritual theologian and exegete.

III. “Principles of Christ’s Existence and of Christianity”

As underlying principles of Christology, JR has lined up “six principles” of understanding the meaning of Jesus Christ and thus of Christianity itself. JR speaks of “summarizing [here] the basic content of Christianity.”²⁶

Fr Aidan Nichols, whose work on Ratzinger’s theology has been generally received as excellent, takes up only three of these principles as sufficient:

- (1) the principle of “being for” (pro-Existenz);
- (2) the principle of “excess”;
- (3) and the principle of “receiving”, of “acceptance”.

Fr Jim Corkery, whose thesis on JR’s theology of human salvation is more detailed and developed than Nichols’, posits the

²⁶ For this entire section on “the principles of Christ’s existence and of Christianity,” may I simply give an overall set of references, since all I am doing here is summarizing pages of JR in *Introduction to Christianity*, and also summarizing the commentary on those pages by Aidan Nichols OP in his *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger (The Thought of Benedict XVI)* and by James Corkery SJ in his doctoral dissertation and his articles on the thought of Benedict XVI., in *Doctrine and Life*, 2006-2007.

· JR, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster, New York, Seabury Press, 1969; Revised edition, with a new foreword by JR, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004.”Excursus: Christian structures, “ 243-270. see esp. 251-254, 257-262, 266-270.

· Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 125-130, where he reduces the six Principles to the principle of ‘being for ‘ (126-128); the principle of excess (128) and the principle of receiving, of the primacy of acceptance (129).

· James Corkery, *The Relationship between Human Existence and Christian Salvation in The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 1991 (U. M. I., Ann Arbor MI) It is Corkery who most fully develops JR’s thinking on “ being a receiver” (280 ff.) “Receiving: a constant theme” (284); “... to be a Christian is first and foremost to be a receiver” (280); on the principle of excess’ (280) “An excess of generosity has been bestowed on human beings by God, both in creation and in the history of salvation” “All is Received,” (334 ff.)

Read J. Corkery’s articles for *Doctrine and Life*, 2006, February, April, September, December, and 2007, January, July,-August, and November.

An excellent presentation of redemption/salvation in the theology of JR is given in Corkery’s dissertation. Basically, Corkery develops “love to the end” as JR’s fundamental principle in his redemption theology which is (as is true of much of JR’s thought) in a way quite “simple”, but richly and beautifully developed. (cf. sections on JR’s soteriology which follow.)

principle of receiving as a kind of necessary premise, and then sums up the two others as the one principle of “love-to-the-end”: John 13, 1’s statement, “he loved his own unto the end.” (Allow me to remember that the Ronald Knox’s translation says, “he loved them to the uttermost limits of loving.”)

JR himself describes his six principles as an attempt to set down the blueprint of Christ’s existence, and thus the blueprint of Christian existence tout court, a formulation of the “essence/spirit of Christianity”. The six principles finally coalesce into the one principle of love [Corkery: “love-to-the-end”]. This is the centre; everything finally comes down to this. (Hence the first encyclical of his pontificate, “*Deus caritas est*”, God is love.)

Let me try to spell out briefly what JR is telling us as the core-meaning of Jesus, and thus the core-meaning of Christian existence. Perhaps not surprisingly, JR comes back to the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” again and again. His first published book, a series of Advent sermons (1965), focuses on that one theme throughout, *Vom Sinn des Christeins*, just republished unchanged the year he was elected Pope, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” In other words, “What does Jesus Christ finally mean to us and the world?”

The principle of “being for” (from *Sabbath of History*).

As seen in Christ’s entire existence, “he did not close himself in the egotism of wanting to live only for himself, and did not put self-preservation above everything else, but rather opened himself in order to go out of himself and be there for others; for this reason he reaches beyond himself into all times. ... Christ is the one who is there for others.”

Jesus was and is indeed *not* “being in and for himself.” For higher than being able to be in himself, is the not being able, and not wanting to remain in himself, the going forth from himself and from his Father-God to others. Jesus is, as it were, the movement away from himself to the Father and to men. And for this reason he is Son of God and Son of Man because he has broken through the vicious cycle of self-pre-occupation. Since he is entirely for others, he is entirely himself and the goal of true humanity.

Becoming Christian (for us, then) means becoming authentically man, entering into true humanity, being from God and being for others.

Jesus on the Cross. This is how the Fathers of the Church interpreted the arms of the Lord outstretched on the cross. The arms of the crucified Christ show him to be the worshipper, but at the same time they also add a new dimension to worship, a dimension which forms the specifically Christian element in the glorification of God: these open arms are also the expression of worship because they express complete devotion to men, because they are a gesture of embrace, of full and undivided brotherliness.

On the cross: the theology of the Fathers found symbolically depicted in the Christian gesture of prayer the coincidence of worship and brotherliness, and indivisibility of service for man and the glorification of God. Being a Christian means essentially changing over from being for oneself and being for one another. ... God's choice of us, [his] election for us to be Christians, does not mean ... leaving the individual undisturbed in himself and thus divided from the others. It means rather entrance into the common task [of the whole, the existence for each other in unity, solidarity, service and love]. [Gal 6, 2] "Let everyone carry each other's burdens, and so will you fulfill the law of Christ."

Accordingly the basic Christian decision signifies the assent to being Christian, the abandonment of self-centredness and accession to Jesus Christ's existence with its concentration on the whole. All the great images of the history of salvation, which represent at the same time the great basic forms of Christian religion, are expressions of this *principle of "For"*: the exodus of Abraham, of the Paschal Mystery of passion, death and resurrection, the image of the grain of wheat in John, "Unless a grain of wheat ..." (John 12, 24). In creation, in nature, on our earth, the law holds good that life comes only through death, through loss of the self. What is thus hinted at in the creation is fulfilled in man, and finally in the man par excellence, ... Jesus Christ: by embracing the fate of the grain of wheat, by going through the process of being sacrificed, by letting himself be broken down and by losing himself, opens access to true life. "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in

this world for my sake will keep it for everlasting life." (John 12, 24; cf. Mark 8, 35 et par.)

The second principle, the "*principle of excess*"

Once again, this principle in Christ's existence and life is hinted at and (we might say) rooted in the cosmic creation, where life, in vegetation, in plant life, in animals is in excess: nature "squanders a million seeds in order to save even one living one." Scripture passages to refer to: the miracle of Cana, the multiplication of bread, et al. JR writes that excess is the real foundation and the form of the history of salvation, which in the last analysis is nothing other than the truly breathtaking fact that God, in an incredible outpouring of himself, expends not only a universe but his own self, in order to lead man, a speck of dust, to salvation.

"Only a lover can understand the folly a love to which prodigality is a law and excess alone is sufficient." (Nichols) When we reflect on human loving, when we see it realized in people around us, for lovers "excess is, paradoxically, a necessity." There is never an "enough" in the giving of true love.

In the divine "being-for" we see in Christ, we see the principle of excess, of the principle of "love-given-to the end, love given to its uttermost limits".

The third principle of Christian existence, of the meaning of Christianity, is "*the primacy of receiving, the primacy of acceptance.*"

Man comes to himself and his fulfillment not through what he makes, not through what he does, but through what he accepts as gift. For JR this principle, as operative in the world of Christian faith and life, has absolute primacy. All of JR's commentators stress this principle in all his thinking: man cannot "make" his identity, growth in grace-life, his salvation, his coming to true humanity: all must be received, all is to be accepted as gift - "*tout est grace*". "All is grace!" (Bernanos and Therese of Lisieux). Love, for instance, is always freely given, "from outside us" and always to be gratefully accepted "from outside". There is then the primacy of receptivity,

of acceptance (positivity). "To come to true humanness, all is gift, received from outside us. In our relation with God, in the word of grace and salvation, all is 'from above', all is gratuitous love-gift."

Law of incarnation and law of cross and resurrection.

It is in these principles that we see the basic meaning of being, existence and life in Christ, and so in ourselves. "Being for", "excess", "receiving" – the pattern is operative in Jesus; it is the law of his own life, as it is of ours.

From all this we see that the law of incarnation and the law of cross and resurrection are interconnected at the deepest level; Christology and soteriology are, at bottom, part of the one pattern of life, part of one movement, one plan (if you will). Being and task are one in Jesus; incarnation, Christology, and cross and resurrection, soteriology are ultimately at one.²⁷

IV. JR'S SOTERIOLOGY

With these principles (just discussed) in mind, we see the basic underlying structure of JR's theology of redemption, his soteriology. Again we point out: JR's Christology, in its groundlines, is already a soteriology; his Christological thought has a continuity, an admirable simplicity and seamlessness which have been constant from his earliest writings to his latest.²⁸

²⁷ These themes, inserted into the wider corpus of JR's theology, are well presented by Jim Corkery in his series, "Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas." in *Doctrine and Life*, 2006 and 2007. Here, cf. specially "2. The Facial Features of a Theology Corpus," (April 2006) and "3. On Being Human," (September 2006).

²⁸ Rarely has the continuity of Incarnation and Redemption been so integrally conceptualized as in JR, in many texts. E. g., in *The God of Jesus Christ*, Chicago, 1978, "He came down from Heaven, " 58-61. Taking off from Hebrews 10, and commenting of Psalm 39, 7-9 cited in Heb 10, 5-9, JR gives the transformed meaning of sacrifice in the NT: not material sacrifices, but obedience, or the "ear" of the person praying to God; this hearing of the ear is transformed into the total obedience of the entire person, his entering into the will of God (the Christian notion of sacrifice). "A body thou has fitted for me" – the obedience becomes Incarnation, embodiment of obedience; from the dialogue within the Trinity, into humanity and creation, into humanity and history.

Western atonement or redemption theology (both Catholic and Protestant) has largely been built, from the eleventh century almost to our own, on Anselmian satisfaction theology, more often (as JR says) in its coarsened forms.²⁹

JR praises Anselm's theory for "taking account of crucial biblical and human perceptions regarding the redemption wrought by Christ." Anselm's was "an attempt to synthesize the individual elements in the biblical evidence in one great all embracing system". But, (JR goes on) so much theology rooted in Anselmian theory

The Son's very nature is to give himself freely, which (in Phil. 2, 8) becomes the self-giving obedience of Jesus on the cross and his obedient self-giving to us, *pro nobis*. Thus, the Son "comes down from the height of the mystery to penetrate within us" through his body (his humanity). From the Son's total self-giving in his body, we can enter into him and into his body, the Body of Christ. When we receive him, "by giving each day our body to him," we walk after him and with him in our own lives. This is divinization realized in us and our lives.

²⁹ *Introduction to Christianity*, 230-243, 281-293. JR's reflection on the redemption has remained consistent through the years. I have summed it up (in a textbook for a brief course on the Redemption) in this way:

Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster, London, Search, 1971, 171-174: on Anselmian satisfaction theology:

exposition, summarized, 173

comment: 173: its impact: "put a decisive stamp on the second millennium of Western Christianity, which takes it for granted that Christ *had to die* on the cross in order to make good the infinite offense which had been committed and in this way to restore the damaged order of things."

positive: "takes account of crucial biblical and human perceptions ... an attempt to synthesize the individual elements in the biblical evidence in one great all embracing system" (174)

negative: "distorts the perspectives and with its rigid logic can make the image of God appear in a sinister light"

on 213: "One gives first secretly with the left hand what one takes back again ceremonially with right. The "infinite expiation" [for the infinite offense] on which God insists thus moves into a doubly sinister light ... Many devotional texts actually force one to think that Christian faith in the cross visualizes a God whose unrelenting righteousness demanded a human sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own Son, and one turns away in horror from a righteousness whose sinister wrath makes the image of love incredible." "This picture is as false as it is widespread." (Excellent paragraphs, 214-215 follow, on the New Testament understanding, radically diverse from non-Christian 'expiation' understanding of redemption. Worth reflecting on.) "Christian sacrifice does *not* consist in giving of what God would not have without us but in our becoming totally receptive and letting ourselves be completely taken over by him. Letting God act us – *that is Christian sacrifice*." (215) - This passage is worth repeated meditation.

“distorts those perspectives and with its rigid logic can make the image of God appear in a sinister light”. Some texts “actually force one to think that Christian faith on the cross visualizes a God whose unrelenting righteousness demanded a human sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own Son, and one turns away in horror from the righteousness whose sinister wrath makes the image of love incredible.” “This picture is as false,” JR says, “as it is widespread.” The expiation theme in non-Christian religions (often wrongly brought into Christian redemption theory) is radically diverse from the New Testament understanding. No, there is no revenge-demanding Moloch, no angry deity seeking to be appeased by human sacrifice and blood-letting in passion and cross. The New Testament tells us that our redemption was wholly “from above”, pure gift from a loving and forgiving Father; that behind it was, in Jesus and the Father, self-giving love, excess of love, love-to-the-end. For “God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved by him.” (John 3, 15)

How then is our salvation accomplished by God in Jesus? Through the actualization, the realization in the concrete of the principles we have lined up above:

- love, from above, in pure and unconditional gift (principle of accepting, of receiving);
- the principle of being-for, for that is the rockbottom meaning of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, the being-for of God for us;
- and the principle of “excess”, for that is what the Cross expresses: the excess that is the mode of God’s being-for, the mode of God’s love from above-for us.³⁰

³⁰ The first two chapters in James Corkery’s doctoral dissertation, *The Relation between Human Existence and Christian Salvation*, (12-145) spells out JR’s theology of salvation more fully; we can only urge that the thesis be published soon. Cf. the notion of “existence for” as the key idea of JR’s soteriology, and “the love-to-the-end of Jesus” which saves humanity as its concrete expression. (See pp.65-70, and “What is the effect of being saved through Christ,” from page 100 to the end of the chapter.) The theme of “divinization” leads us to the final meaning of the Redemption and plays a major part in JR’s redemption theology. We cannot develop it here, unfortunately.

Once again (citing James Corkery verbatim) for JR “the Cross is above all the expression of love: God’s love giving itself completely for humanity. It is not the expression of a divine attitude that insists on infinite satisfaction because it has suffered infinite offense. God is not some Shylock demanding his pound of flesh in precise balance with the pound of injury done to him. Such a coarsened version of Anselmian atonement theology must be rejected. The cross is first and foremost seen in a movement from above: it is the actualization of that foolish love of God which gives itself away in lowliness in order to save us, to take us up into the primordial design of sharing God’s own life.”³¹

No doubt there are some New Testament texts in which the sacrifice of Calvary appears as the upward movement of humankind to God, but primarily, decisively, the New Testament’s presentation of Christ’s redemption is as a movement in the other direction.

In the Bible the cross does not appear as part of a mechanism of injured right; on the contrary, in the Bible the cross is quite the reverse; it is the expression of the radical nature of the love which gives itself completely, of the process in which one is what one does, and does what one is; it is the expression of a life that is completely “being for others.”³²

Perhaps I may be forgiven if I reproduce here somewhat fully several paragraphs from James Corkery’s splendid dissertation on JR’s theology of human salvation. These are passages where he summarizes the integrated soteriology which links JR’s being-Christology with event-Christology, Incarnation and Paschal Mystery in a true sense seamlessly bound together, and the soteriological schema reaching its term in resurrection/divinization. I do not think I can do better than cite here Corkery’s own presentation.³³

³¹ J. Corkery, *The Relation* ...cf. above, footnote 30, 60-62.

³² J. Corkery, *ibid.* (at 61)

³³ J. Corkery, *ibid.* (62-65)

Ratzinger points to two lines of thought that are helpful overcoming the opposition between a theology of an incarnation and a theology of the cross. The first is the patristic (Athanasian) understanding of the incarnation that is expressed in the salvation-historical guiding principle that God has become human in order that humans might become divine. Behind this idea is the picture from Philippians (2: 6-11) that sees in the lowliness and obedience of the Incarnate One the overcoming of the *hybris* that has distorted human nature and that underlies "unsalvation". For it is through his act of ultimate self-humbling that the Incarnate One renovates and mediates back to God a human nature distorted by *hybris* (the opposite of self-humbling). And this is what becoming human means for the Incarnate one:

(His) being human is not a static condition of being, but a living reality that desires to be actualized sufferingly and lovingly. If this is seen, then the opposition between ontological theology and theology of the cross, between ontological and actualistic thought, becomes superfluous.

That Christ not only does, but is, self-giving, that he thus also does not reserve a region of being for himself but altogether is the act of giving himself over to the Father, all of this lays bare the deepest essence of Christ's mediatorship, in which the problem of ontology and actualism, of being and history, is overcome. His being is act, and his act is being, and each gets its real depth and dignity from the other.

A second line of thought that indicates how the opposition between theology of the incarnation and theology of the cross can be overcome has its basis in the Letter to the Hebrews. There the crucified Christ is presented as priest and sacrifice together. He does not simply offer "something" for sacrifice; he offers himself. His human being is, as such, the act of self-surrender, of being-for-others. It is passing over, the *pascha* that forms the fundamental law of biblical revelation. Joseph Ratzinger writes:

The way in which the lines of thought drawing on Philippians and Hebrews respectively unite ontological and historical thinking reveals the heart of Joseph Ratzinger's soteriology. For it shows that his is a soteriology that does not confine the salvific significance of Christ to his death on the cross - even if this death most manifests who he is as

the One who “loves to the end” – any more than it restricts his salvific significance to his life in a way that obscures the central importance of the death. Rather, because it sees Jesus’s love-to-the-end, a love that is evident in his whole life and that reaches its high point in his death, as the true means of our salvation, it is able to accord to both his life and his death their proper place in the whole saving movement from God to humanity. Love become human in Incarnation, love poured out on the Cross, and love made victorious in the Resurrection: all three point to the soteriological significance of the love that gives itself completely. It is through this love, love-to-the-end, that God saves humanity.

V. THE THEOLOGY OF HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

For a synthetic view of JR’s Easter triduum theology, perhaps the two readiest sources are Chapter IV: The Paschal Mystery, in *Journey towards Easter*, the text of the Lenten retreat JR preached before John Paul II and the members of the Roman Curia in 1983, and the conference gathered under the title *The Sabbath of History*, originally *Meditationen zur Karwoche*, first published in Freising, 1969. In *Journey towards Easter*, there is a section which explicitly spells out “the connection between the Last Supper, the Cross and the Resurrection.” Because even in these two references JR already tries to develop briefly this Easter triduum theology, the presentation here given will be rather schematic, almost in outline form.³⁴

Interconnection between Last Supper, Cross and Resurrection

Jesus died praying. In line with the ontological Christology where the identity of Jesus is derived from the prayer of Jesus, his

³⁴ In this section the footnotes have been deliberately kept to a minimum. These pages merely summarize the two works named: *The Sabbath of History*, trans. John Rock, William G. Congdon Foundation, Washington D.C., 2000. from *Meditationen zur Karwoche*, Kyrios Verlag, Freising, 1969, *Journey towards Easter*, trans. Mary Groves, London, 1987, St. Paul Publications. From *Il Cammino Pasquale*, Milano, 1985, Ancora. Vid. Also Pope Benedict XVI, *Way of the Cross*, Libreria Editrice Vatican (LEV), 2006 Philippine edition, CBCP/Assisi Foundation, Manila.

constant communion with the Father. In that prayer we find also the meaning and mission of Jesus; unity of Christology and soteriology, of being and doing, are rooted in the interiority and prayer of Jesus.

1. *The Last Supper and the Cross.* Jesus, giving himself, his body and blood, his total self in the Supper, the Eucharist, accepted his death in anticipation (placed it, already, so to speak, within the Eucharist). Jesus' death was an act of prayer, an act of worship, an act of filial obedience and love: John 10.17-18. *"The Father loves me because I lay down my life, to receive it back again. No one has taken it from me; I am laying it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to receive it back again. This is the charge I have received from my Father."*

The link between the Father and Jesus' freedom in laying down his life is once more expressed in Jesus obedience and love. Read the rather enigmatic text, John 10, 14-15: "I know my own sheep and my sheep know me - as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and *I lay down my life for my sheep. But there are other sheep of mine.* (Explicit link is here laid down between Father/Son relationship and his mission, his laying down his life for his sheep and other sheep.)

2. *The words of Jesus on the cross* manifest his constant prayer to his Father. Different gospels cite different words, but all gospels agree he died in prayer. A key text: Mk 15, 34: Mt 27,46: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" This is messianic prayer (Ps 21) Lk 23,46; Ps 68 in Jn 19, 28ff, calling to his Father, his continuing dialogue with the Father on the cross.

By his prayer Jesus transforms his death (an act of outward violence, "from outside him") into an act of worship, obedience and love, thus transforming death, the end of word, the end of communication into the source of communion, of communication; in the Eucharist "it bears much fruit" (John 12,24).

Thus, we have here the inner connection between Jesus' dying and his giving of himself in the Eucharist. The reality of his death is inseparably joined to the reality of the Last Supper, the reality of the Eucharist. The giving (sharing out) of his body and

blood is the sign/sacrament of his death. (Paul: “you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes”, 1,Cor 11,26)

At the Last Supper Jesus adds, in the giving of bread and wine, words stemming from the theology of worship of Israel, phrases of prophetic origin, “given for you”, “poured out for many for the remission of sins” from the Songs of the Servant of God in Isaiah (Isaiah, 52ff). By applying to the last Supper these words about the Servant of God, Jesus says: “I am this Servant of God. My passion and death are that definitive liturgy – that worship, that sacrifice – that glorification of God which is the light and salvation of all humankind and the world. (Cf also Jeremiah, 31,31)

3. *The Resurrection and Second Coming.* The Last Supper also anticipates the Resurrection. Within the Supper is present enduringly, love stronger than death, Jesus’ sacrifice, his total opening of himself to the life/love of the Father, and this is the radical transformation of death, the transubstantiation of death.

“*They shall look on him whom they have pierced.*” (John 19,34) JR says: “The power of the Resurrection is already present” within that act of dying in obedience and love: “The image of the pierced side, wellspring (fountainhead) of water and blood, is also the image of the Resurrection, the image of love stronger than death.”

4. *“In the Eucharist we receive the true life, the medicine of immortality,”* the sharing of life everlasting. “Within the act of dying, the self-offering/sacrifice of Jesus, his “always being with the Father” goes on in his deepest heart, in the Person of Son. This is the “interior theological dimension of his death”.

Because the dialogue with the Father is also the fixed in the humanity of Jesus, his humanity is in a true way within the intra-Trinitarian exchange of eternal love. And so, from within, Jesus’ humanity is ever “fixed on the rock is everlasting love”. Thus it has to rise again (receive life) from death, to resume its human totality, the indivisible oneness of soul and body of his humanity.

5. *The New Adam.* John 19, 37 tells us that from the pierced side “*flowed out blood and water...*” Jesus is now fully the new Adam, the Body of Christ, “in whom dwells the fullness of the divinity” into which we are inserted (Baptism, grace) and sustained, renewed

(the Eucharist). Jesus now remains forever as man, as the new Adam. This he remains forever. Humanity through him has been made to enter into the very nature of God, the very life of God; this is “the fruit of his death. We ourselves, inserted into his body, are within God.” This is the hope and joy of humankind; this is the joy and hope of Christian being; this is the Gospel.

God has so loved us: God loves us, God has loved us to such a point that Love has been made flesh and remains forever flesh. Incarnation, Paschal mystery, our Divinization flow into each other. Thus, we have in the crucified and risen Jesus the most explosive force of truth, and hope, and promise for all humanity, until the end of time. Thus, in the paschal mystery, God reveals himself, his love, his power, power greater than death: our new life, our salvation.

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.³⁵

We might note, as we end this section, that once again, the entire “Christ-event” is here seen as one remarkable unity: this is a Christology/Soteriology/Divinization schema with an almost breathtaking integration, rooted in a Pauline/Johannine mystique. The theology of the Paschal Mystery is here almost wholly identical with the theology of the Eucharist.³⁶

³⁵ Cf. JR, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco, 2000, Ignatius Press, 132-133. JR develops this theme; “The icon of Christ is the center of sacred iconography. The center of the icon of Christ is the Paschal Mystery. Christ is presented as the Crucified, the risen Lord, the One who will come again and who here and now hiddenly reigns over all.” (Please look it up.) I read this passage in full at our Don Bosco seminar in September 25, 2007, and this passage elicited considerable reaction from listeners afterwards.

³⁶ JR, *Gott ist uns nah*, English trans. *God is near Us. The Eucharist, Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor, San Francisco, 2003, Ignatius Press. The first three chapters give us a Theology of the Eucharist which is itself the theology of the Paschal Mystery: we understand the Paschal Mystery in and through the Eucharist.

That is why JR's *Gott ist uns nah, God is near* is in a true sense also a full theology of redemption, the paschal mystery and the Eucharist.³⁷

VI. EXCURSUS: THE "PIERCED SIDE" (JOHN 19, 37)³⁸

For our last image of Jesus, we should surely have the Risen Christ, the strong figure of the Risen Lord which looms large behind Pope Benedict when he speaks from his window during the Easter season.

But for one point of focus, let me cite one Gospel text which Joseph Ratzinger refers to, again and again, from his earliest writings to his latest, John 19, 37 which he says "sums up all of the Paschal Mystery": "*They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.*" (John 19, 34ff.)

From the early pages in *Introduction to Christianity* (1967), when JR spells out explicitly soteriological development, it is John 19, 37 which moves invariably to "front and center", as point of climax.

The earliest major work *Introduction to Christianity* (1967) as JR takes the theme of Christ, "the last man", the new Adam, he

³⁷ Cf. "God's Yes and His love are maintained even in Death," is a homily on the origin of the Eucharist in the Paschal Mystery; JR has one of his summative statements encapsulating this whole theology on page 39, "Thus we see ..." – I do not think this fact has been given enough attention. JR's theology of the Paschal Mystery is strikingly attractive: we understand the Paschal Mystery in and through the Eucharist. I submit that instead of a theology of satisfaction (now increasingly rejected), this theology of redemption will prove much more acceptable and moving to those now seeking a theology to replace the defective, non-tenable theology of satisfaction of "olden days".

³⁸ Cf. *Introduction to Christianity*, 240,241,242. In *Sabbath of History*, two entire Good Friday meditations develop this text, 25-35. Also, in *God is near Us*, 42-55

From *Behold the Pierced One*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1986, "Mystery of Easter, Substance and Foundation of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart," 47-69.

Deus Caritas est, Vatican City, LEV (Libreria Editrice Vaticana), numbers 12, 19. Also, by Pope Benedict XVI, On the 50th anniversary of "Haurietis Aquas," Letter addressed to Peter Hans Kolvenbach SJ, 15 May 2006. (The entire letter reflects on this text.)

Letter for Lent 2007 also takes up John 19, 37 as its theme.

returns to the mystery of the Cross and Easter, the Paschal Mystery. "John", JR says, concludes his portrait of the earthly Jesus with "the image of an existence whose walls are torn down, which ... is [now] essentially openness. *One of the soldiers thrust a lance into his side and immediately blood and water came out* (John 19, 34)." For John, "the picture of the pierced side forms the climax not only of the crucifixion scene, but of the whole story of Jesus. Now, after the lance-thrust that ends his earthly life, his existence is completely open. Now he is entirely "for", now he is no longer a single individual but Adam, from whose side Eve, a new humankind, is formed. ... The open side of the new Adam repeats the creative mystery of the "open side" of man, [the First Adam], in which John points to the basic sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and through them to the Church as the sign of the new community of men. The fully opened Christ, who completes the transformation of being into reception and transmission, is thus visible as what at the deepest level he always was: as "Son". So Jesus on the cross has truly entered on his *hour*, as once again John says." And then, JR goes on to posit that the very meaning and the law of man and human living follow from this man with the open side, this man who is totally given for others. "To be the man for others, the man whose heart is open and thereby opens up a new beginning, means being the man-in-sacrifice, the sacrificed man. The future of man hangs on the cross - the redemption of man is the cross.

In the 1969 *Meditationen zur Karwoche*, the two Good Friday meditations focus wholly on John 19, 37. JR links this time the first chapter of Revelation, 1,7, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him, and among them those who pierced him..." The whole story - the "secret revelation" - extends between these prophetic words from the old Covenant, between the crucifixion and the second coming of the Lord.

"They will look upon him whom they have pierced." JR says "the whole of John's Gospel is fundamentally nothing but the realization of these words, nothing but the effort to direct our eyes and hearts to gaze on him. And the liturgy of the Church is nothing more than looking at the pierced one whose hidden countenance the priest reveals to the eyes of the Church and the world, in the liturgy of Good Friday, the high point of the Church's year. "Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the savior of the world!"

John is at pains to tell us, JR says, how weighty, how meaningful this event is. It tells us that Jesus is the true paschal lamb in whom the meaning of all worship and ritual is finally fulfilled. This event tells us that the Church originates from the opened side of the Christ on the cross.

To jump to 1978 when JR was already Archbishop of Munich, four conferences on the Eucharist as heart of the Church include an entire chapter, which has John 19, 37 as main reference point in meditating on the Paschal Mystery and the Eucharist: “John commands us to look upon the one whom we have pierced” now, so that judgement for us may be turned to salvation. *They shall look on him whom they have pierced.* This (JR says) might be a description of the inner direction of our Christian life, our learning ever more truly to look upon him, to keep the eyes of our heart turned upon him, to see him, and thereby “to grow to follow him, to become truly his disciples.”³⁹

Explicitly JR takes up again the Johannine text when he writes an entire conference on the devotion to (or the spirituality of) the Heart of Jesus.⁴⁰

Following Pope Pius XII in “Haurietis Aquas” (Pius XII here in turn follows Hugo Rahner’s studies in the Church Fathers’ reflections on this text.) JR sees the pierced side of Jesus on the Cross as the primary biblical icon of the Heart of Jesus, and thus the foundational image for the Sacred Heart devotion. In a rather lengthily developed reflection, JR spells out the theology of the pierced side of the Redeemer.

With the Fathers of the Church, two Johannine texts, *John 7, 37 ff.* and *John 19, 34 ff* are taken together. Both texts deal with the open side of Jesus on the Cross, and the blood and water which flow from that side. Both texts speak of the paschal mystery. The grain of wheat which dies becomes the full head of wheat (John 12, 24); through the centuries, it bears the fruit that is the living Church.

³⁹ *God is Near Us*, 42-55, at 55.

⁴⁰ “The Mystery of Easter, Substance and Foundation of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart,” in *Behold the Pierced One*, 47-69.

Here pneumatology meets Christology too: the water flowing from Christ's side represents the Holy Spirit (John 7, 34 ff). The Spirit, given to us by Christ, fashions humankind into the one Body of Christ, "the organism of love of Christ Jesus" in the Spirit. Christology, pneumatology are all brought together by the symbol of the pierced side, the pierced Heart of Jesus of the Cross.

So Hugo Rahner, reflecting on the Fathers' writings, concludes that the so called devotion to the Sacred Heart is itself nothing other than a turning to the Easter mystery, the paschal mystery. Thus that devotion bears a direct relationship with the core of the Christian faith, The Church's liturgy too finds itself linked with the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus devotion.

The symbol of the pierced side, and within that, the pierced heart, speaks to us of the deepest meaning of the Incarnation: God takes up everything that is ours, so that he might share with us all that is his, his divine life and nature, in so far as we can *modo nostro* share it. "Ye shall be as gods." God takes up even the consequences of human sin, suffering, pain and death, our passion and our passions unto himself, so that he might heal all of it in himself, 'touch it, penetrate it' with his godhead, and thus bring it to salvation, divinization, within his own Trinitarian life.

The text on the pierced side makes it altogether clear what is here meant: the same word in *Genesis* which is used of Adam's opened side for the creation of Eve (from the side of the sleeping Adam) is used here to tell us, that in the death of the Lord, that radicality of a love that moves to self-gift, self-surrender, has established its fruitfulness. Jesus did not close himself into the egoism of wanting to live only for himself ("he that shall keep his life"); since Jesus opened himself in order to go out of himself, to be given for others, he moves forth beyond himself, to all people, to all times. The opened side of Christ thus tells us that he is the *new Adam*, the man totally given for others, given to the uttermost limits of love.

So on the cross, the Crucified One, the man with the pierced side, call us and summons our deepest faith. He is the new Adam, the "new Man": the normative man; if we are to come to the true

fulfillment of our humanity, we must become like him. "All humanity must approach this 'new man' in order to come to its own, to come to the fullness of authentic humanity. Jesus the new man has gone forth from himself, forth from God his father, to go to us. Jesus, as it were, is himself an *exodus* (cf. Luke 9, 31, the Transfiguration!) . And it is this precisely which makes him Son of Man and Son of God: he is entirely for his Father, he is entirely from his Father for us. He is entirely for others; his entire *Existenz* is *pro-Existenz*.

Thus JR can conclude: Becoming a Christian means becoming truly man, entering into true human-ness, which means, *being from God*, and *being for others*. The opened side of the crucified, that deadly wound in the side of the new Adam, is itself the point of departure, the wellspring (if you will) of authentic human existence. "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

CONCLUSION: AUF CHRISTUS SHAUEN

As we come to our ending, we recall what the Vatican deskman of NCR said in our introduction: Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate will have a Christological focus. In an article in the NCR (11 January 2008), John L. Allen lists among the "Top ten neglected Vatican stories of 2007":

Christ at the core. For Benedict XVI, 2007 was clearly a Christological year. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, in his speeches in Brazil, in the Vatican's notice on Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino, in *Spe Salvi* and in countless other venues, Benedict hammered home his core message to the modern world: A society cannot be built without reference to God, and only in Christ is the full reality of God made clear. Preaching Christ is thus not a distraction from building a better world. Perhaps that's why Benedict was often invisible to global newspapers; a pope talking about Christ may seem the ultimate in 'dog bites man' stories, but it was nonetheless Benedict's clear *idée fixe*.⁴¹

⁴¹ National Catholic Reporter, 11 January 2008, 21.

When Cardinal Ratzinger was asked by the *Communione e liberazione* community in Italy to preach a retreat for them in Summer 1986, JR's conferences were centred on the theme, *To Look on Christ (Auf Christus schauen)*, *Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love*. It will be recalled that an earlier book on Christology, published in German in 1984, was entitled *Schauen auf den Durchborten* (in English, *Behold the Pierced One*).⁴² For Pope Benedict XVI's first "pastoral visit" outside Italy, made to Austria in September 2007, the overall theme chosen was also "Auf Christus schauen", to look on Christ.⁴³

The focus-point of Benedict XVI's pontificate is thus *Auf Christus schauen*, to look on Christ. John 19, 37, we have noted earlier, JR has many times pointed to this text as a veritable summing-up of all of Christian faith and (if you will) spirituality: "They shall look on him, whom they have pierced."

JR's Christology is truly a looking on Christ. In his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, he writes: "...this book is in no way an exercise of the magisterium, but is solely an expression of my personal search 'for the face of the Lord' (Ps. 27, 8)."⁴⁴ And this searching for Christ is above all a looking on Christ on the cross with his pierced open side, his pierced open heart.

We await with anticipation the second volume of Pope Benedict's book on Jesus, which will take up the mysteries of Jesus' infancy and more importantly, the Paschal Mystery of his passion,

⁴² *To look on Christ. Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love*, Crossroad, New York, 1991. *Schauen auf den durchborten*, , Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln, 1984. *Behold the Pierced One*, San Francisco, Ignatius, 1986.

⁴³ Cardinal Christopher Schönborn of Vienna, writing on this visit to Austria, says: "Pope Benedict XVI has effectively made Austria his first pastoral visit since up till now all the other journeys of his pontificate have arisen out of particular occasions and celebrations." *Thirty Days*, 2007, 39,26. Vid. "Papal Apostolic Visit to Austria, 7-9 September. Look to Christ, life and hope." *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 12 September 2008. The logo of the official theme, "Auf Christus schauen", is reproduced on many pages of this issue.

⁴⁴ *Jesus of Nazareth*, xxiii

death and resurrection, a “beholding of the pierced one”. We trust that as in his first volume, Pope Benedict will in his own profound and moving way lead us to him “to whom we must go, to hear the words of everlasting life.”

At the conclusion of *Deus Caritas est*, Benedict XVI tells us that it is Mary, better than anyone else, who can truly “give us Jesus”, who can lead us unfailingly to the heart of her Son.⁴⁵

As we come to the term of this hasty presentation, it will only be right, as JR himself does, to bring everything to an end by invoking the one who has given, and gives Jesus to us – his Mother. JR writes somewhere that Jesus took from her something that he has kept ever for himself, and has never given back: his humanity, his being the man Jesus, his flesh, the blood which even now runs in the veins of his body, the whole of his human self. She gave God, once and forever, what makes God one with us - humanity, human flesh and human spirit. And so there is no one who can teach us Jesus better than she, who can lead us to his *within*, his heart, to the deepest in him, than she.

As JR ends his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, we may repeat with him its final prayer:⁴⁶

**Holy Mary, Mother of God,
 You have given the world its true light,
 Jesus your Son – the Son of God.
 You abandoned yourself completely
 To God’s call and thus became a wellspring
 of the goodness which flows forth from him.
 Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
 Teach us to know and love him,**

⁴⁵ *Deus Caritas est*, LEV, Vatican City, 2006, #41, 88-92

⁴⁶ Conclusion of *Deus Caritas est*, 92

**So that we too, can become
Capable of true love,
And be fountains of living water
In the midst of a thirsting world.⁴⁷**

⁴⁷ The various homilies and addresses given at World Youth Day in Cologne in August 2005 give us encapsulated presentations of JR's theology of the Paschal Mystery and the Eucharist, brief christologies, so to speak. For instance, the homily at the closing Mass, 21, August, on "the hour" of Jesus, *God's Revolution*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2006, 56-62. In the presentation I gave at the September symposium at Don Bosco, Makati, I developed two texts which seem to me sum up JR's Christology-cum-soteriology, John 19,37 and John 12, 24. At the end of his address at the World Youth Day 2005 vigil in Cologne, he says; "The [Epiphany story] is not a distant story that took place a long time ago. It is with us now. Here in the Sacred Host he is present and in our midst. As at the time, so now he is mysteriously veiled in a sacred silence; as at the time, it is here that the true face of God is revealed. For us he became a grain of wheat that falls on the ground and dies and bears fruit until the end of the world." (John 12,24) *Ibid.*,55.

A FINAL NOTE

One point I would have wanted to develop in my presentation of JR's Christology was this: Gabino Uribarri cites A. Cardovilla as saying that "the book of Benedict XVI (Jesus of Nazareth) resembles the theology of the mysteries of Christ, rather than a historicist reconstruction of the person of Jesus." This is not strange, if we consider, first, that the book which inspired it, Romano Guardini's *The Lord*, is situated in that horizon; the chapters are meditations, as Guardini's subtitle says. Secondly, for Joseph Ratzinger, "The theology of the mysteries is perhaps the most fruitful idea in the theology of our century." He refers to Dom Odo Casel. (JR, *Die sacramentale Begründung christlichen Existenz*, Meitingen, Freising, 1973). G. Uribarri, " Mirar al Jesus real," in *Razon y Fe*, September-October 2007, 123-140, at 140. It will repay study to see the implicit presence of the image (not unlike in St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* "composition of place") and the presence of the mystery in the Eucharistic liturgy.

THE EUCHARIST AND GOD'S LOVE IN THE HEART OF JOSEPH RATZINGER

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Benedict XVI has his way of doing theology. This presentation attempts to explain it with reference to *Deus Caritas Est* (=DCE), and *Sacramentum Caritatis* (=SCa). DCE is his first Encyclical where he speaks of the love “which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others” (DCE 1). *Sacramentum Caritatis* (SCa) is a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. The document seeks to take up the rich reflections from the recent Synod (October 2 - 23. 2005) and to offer some basic directions.

The essay is articulated in four parts. The first is about what theology is for the Pope. Both the second and third parts are meant as examples to demonstrate his way of doing theology. Some remarks are made in the fourth part.

I. THE ANALOGY OF THE STONE SCULPTURE

What is theology for Benedict XVI? To this question, he tried to give an answer in quite a number of times. Allow me to quote some thoughts from the closing speech of the plenary session of the International Theological Commission (*Allocutio in conclusione sessionis plenariae Commissionis theologiae internationalis* 8. X. 2004).

The context is like this. Since in that plenary session of the Commission the majority of the members selected the question “what theology is, to what aim and in what way it may be constructed”, Cardinal Ratzinger chose to recall some ideas from Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas about the nature of sacred theology.¹

¹ *Argumentum a maiori parte sodalium electum fuit quaestio, quid sit teologia, ad quem finem et quo modo construenda sit. Hac in occasione in mentem mihi venerunt labores temporis iuventutis meae, in quibus notionem theologiae apud quosdam theologos medii aevi, imprimis apud Sanctum Bonaventuram et Sanctum Thomam de Aquino studui. Forsan non penitus inutile est quaedam elementa recordari, quae quoad naturam sacrae theologiae in operibus istorum magnorum doctorum inveniuntur.*

Pope Benedict is very much inspired by Augustine in his theology. He adopted the Augustinian vision that all human beings are by nature attracted to God's Truth and Love. This attraction grows stronger when God's splendor is made manifest through the incarnation of the Son. In him the mystery has been revealed. What then is theology? He answered this in seven statements.

1. God is the subject of theology. This is defined by Thomas Aquinas. If God is made the object of theology, then in no way can we come to the certainty of any knowledge of God.² Historically, this point of view comes principally from the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius (6th century). In his work *De nominibus divinis*, he took the term "theology" to indicate Sacred Scripture in which God himself speaks to us. The subject of Scripture is the speaking God himself.³

2. A human theologian is one who listens to God. In the strictest sense of the word, theology means exclusively Scripture, because it contains the Word of God. A true theologian does not speak in his name. His noble ministry is to open the interior ears so that the speaking God may be heard.⁴

3. A theologian is one who makes use of reason on matters of faith. Unlike Thomas, Bonaventure explicitly distinguishes Scripture from theology (the writings of the great masters). Faith is given to us through grace. To this faith, Scripture adds the

² *Primum elementum, quod multo me cogitare fecit, consistit in facto, quod uterque hic magister Deum non ut obiectum, sed ut subiectum sacrae scientiae definit. Non ipse theologus est subiectum theologiae, sed Deus, et Deus numquam fit obiectum.*

³ *Qui Deum ut obiectum considerare vult, eius veritatem nullo modo cognoscere potest. Hic modus videndi historice principaliter e theologia Dionysii Areopagitae profluit, in cuius operibus verbum "theologia" Sacram Scripturam indicat, in qua Deus ipse nobis loquitur et cuius subiectum loquens Deus ipse est.*

⁴ *Theologia sensu stricto igitur sola Scriptura sacra, verbum Dei est, magister autem "theologiae" imprimis auditor verbi esse debet, non suam ipsius sapientiam et intelligentiam super candelabrum ponens, sed Deo loquenti locum dare debet. Verus theologus non ex seipso et in proprio nomine loquitur; eius nobile ministerium est, aures interiores aperire, ut Deus loquens audiri possit. Sed quomodo haec apertio aurium evenire potest? Qualis actio et qualis passio a theologo humano perpetranda est?*

“authority”. To the faith and authority of Scripture, theology adds the reason, namely the proof, demonstration, and argument. Scripture is about the faith as believable (*credibile*), and theology is about the faith as intelligible (*intelligibile*).⁵ The believable can be transformed into the domain of the intelligible, and this happens by the addition of reason.⁶

4. It is legitimate to use human reason. Bonaventure speaks of the legitimacy of the addition of reason. If no reasoning is added, then Scripture is believed by the fishermen and not by the dialecticians who seek the understanding of faith. Bonaventure employed the stone sculpture analogy (in his *collatione in Hexaemeron*) to explain this. The sculptor does not add anything to the figure hidden in the stone, but by way of reason (as a tool) he cuts the stone so as to make the noble figure appear.⁷ The legitimacy consists in making the truth manifest, not in inventing any truth.

5. It is the duty of a theologian to avoid the violence of reason while respecting all the creativity of reason. The “cutting” is a delicate art-work and it may spoil the figure. There is a constant risk of the violence of reason⁸, as affirmed by Bonaventure. The

⁵ *Dum in Sancto Thoma explicitam distinctionem inter theologiam veram, i.e. Sacram Scripturam, et theologiam subordinatam, i.e. opera theologorum humanorum non inveni, Sanctus Bonaventura distinguit explicite Scripturam de “hoc libro” de suo labore humano, et definit differentiam amborum hisce verbis: “Scriptura est de credibili ut credibili, hic (i.e. opus magistri) est de credibili ut facto intelligibili” (In Sent prooem. q. 2 ad 4).*

⁶ See Bonaventure, *In I Sent. prol., q. 1 conclusio, ed. Quaracchi I 7b*: “*prout tamen credibile transit in rationem intelligibilis, et hoc perditionem rationis.*”

⁷ *Paulum antea dixerat de labore theologico quod in ipso “credibile... transit in rationem intelligibilis, et hoc per additionem rationis” (ibid. q. 1 resp). Hic Sanctus Bonaventura loquitur de additione rationis, quam theologus operatur, sed melius mihi placet alia omparatio, qua in collationibus de Hexaë meron utitur, in quibus loquitur de sculptore, qui ad lapidem nihil addit, sed ablatione nobilem figuram apparere facit, quae in lapide iam abscondita eius operationem expectaverat.*

⁸ *Aliam quamdam considerationem Sancti Bonaventurae addere velim, quae mihi non pauci momenti esse videtur. In Prooemio Commentarii ad libros sententiarum Petri Lombardi sanctus doctor etiam de elementis ex traditione Patrum disputat, in quibus dubia moventur, utrum licitum sit quasi cum malleo rationis Sacram Scripturam tractare.*

violence occurs when the reason goes against the dignity of Scripture in which God speaks to us.

6. A theologian who wants to make good use of reason should first have the experience of conversion. Paul understood this very well and expressed it in the analogy of a veil in his second letter to the Corinthians. The unconverted hearts are like those of the Jews. When they read the Old Testament (OT), there is a veil that covers their heart and hides the glory of Christ. In our conversion to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Then we may look at the Lord's glory revealed to our face (2 Cor 3:18). How do we know we are making good use of reason and not doing violence? Paul would say: when gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18).⁹ In this sense, theology is like a conversation with the speaking God in the Scriptures. The veil is taken away and the mind is purified so that the glory of God is made visible in our hearts. The process from reading of the Scriptures to seeing is a conversion of the heart in which we let God bring us into the enclosed garden of his Word, into his beauty and intelligibility that reflects the light of the eternal reason as in a mirror. Gradually, God makes us find that light and enables us to give reason to our hope (1 Pt 3:15).¹⁰

7. Then, doing theology is a matter of love. Ultimately a believing theologian submits himself to faith because of love rather than reason. In other words, when out of love he strives to

⁹ *Simili modo Sanctus Paulus in sua secunda epistula ad Corinthios de velamine loquitur, quod in lectione Veteris Testamenti positum super cor hominum gloriam Christi in eo praesentem abscondit et in conversione auferatur ita ut gloriam Domini revelata facie speculemur et in eandem imaginem transformemur "a claritate in claritatem" (2 Cor 3,17-18).*

¹⁰ *Hic processus et progressus de lectione ad visionem non solum ad Iudaeos spectat sed etiam Christiani egent purificatione oculorum, egent conversione, ut velamen auferatur et gloria Domini visibilis fiat cordibus nostris. Hoc sensu theologia ut colloquium cum Deo in Sacris Scripturis loquente debet esse processus purificationis rationis, qui nos intrare facit in "hortum conclusum" verbi Dei, eiusque pulchritudinem eiusque intelligibilitatem quae lucem aeternae rationis quasi in speculo reflectit, paulatim invenire facit, capaces nos faciens rationem reddere de spe, quae in nobis est (1 Petr 3,15).*

understand faith by reason, his effort will not go in vain. He shall be much consoled by God with a better understanding of faith.¹¹

Thus, while doing theology, a theologian is getting into a movement of love to seek the face of the Lord, so that he may be loved more and better. In such a way he may proclaim more and better the only One God towards whom the restless hearts of all people tend. A theologian has to be always attentive so as not to fall into the violence of reason which finds only the letter that kills, but he should act out of the reason of love that opens the eyes so as to see.¹² In order that the reason can be attuned to the listening to the Word, constant reference to Tradition and respect for the Magisterium is always needed. This is the principle of *Sentire cum Ecclesia*. The heart has its reason of which the reason knows nothing. Doing theology is likened to the effort of seeking the face of God, as the Psalmist says, “Come,” says my heart, “seek God’s face”; your face, Lord, do I seek! (Ps 27: 28).¹³

Two remarks can be made here. First, my way of presentation is similar to the one who can see from a certain viewpoint but is “blind” to something else. In a presentation like this, depth of knowledge and breadth of perspective are considered almost as mutually exclusive. In short, completeness and exhaustiveness are not intended here. Second, any theology must be done with the eyes of faith and the eyes of reason.

¹¹ *Sanctus Bonaventura citat sanctum Ambrosium dicentem: “Tolle argumenta, cum de fide agitur. Piscatoribus creditur, non dialecticis” (De fide I,13, n. 84). Magister noster respondit: Existit revera violentia rationis, quae dignitati Sacrae Scripturae, in qua Deus nobis loquitur, contraria est. “Sed quando fides non assentit propter rationem, sed propter amorem eius, cui assentit, desiderat habere rationes: tunc non evacuat ratio humana meritum, sed auget solatium” (q. 2 ad 6). Aliis verbis: teologia quaerit ex amore, quia illum magis et melius conoscere vult, quem amat.*

¹² *Theologia recta est motus amoris, qui faciem Domini quaerit, ut magis et melius amari possit et magis et melius eum annuntiare possimus, ad quem inquietudo cordis omnium hominum tendit. Theologus semper attentus esse debet, ne cadat in violentiam rationis, quae solum litteram invenit, quae occidit (2 Cor 3,6) sed ex ratione amoris agat, quae videre facit.*

¹³ See J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday 2006) xxiii.

The effort of seeking the face of God implies a certain courage for ascent, purification, and renunciation. The path of theology is indicated by the saying, "*Credo ut intelligam*" — a constant hearing of and conversation with the speaking Father through his Son in the Spirit.

Theology is likened to a stone sculpture. The theologian-sculptor is not to create an image of his own out of the stone but to free and make manifest the image already hidden in the stone. There is an interaction between the image hidden in the stone and the heart of the sculptor.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF LOVE

The encyclical DCE expresses the Pope's wish to promote the Mission of the Church in his service of love (DCE 42). The document is divided into two parts. The first part is a theology of love; the second is on the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbor.

"God is Love" (1 Jn 4:16) This Love constitutes the centre of Christian faith. To understand love, one needs experience. In fact, whether in ancient times or in the modern period, different attempts have been made to articulate what love is. The Christians, enlightened by the Incarnation of the word, have experienced love in a unique way. They have formed a totally a new vision of love and wanted to share it with the World. Benedict XVI in this encyclical tries to show the splendor of the truth of love. His way of doing theology, as revealed in this document, deserves our attention. In particular, I would like to present two points.

The first is to show how love is misunderstood in the modern world. This gives rise to some serious challenges. The second is to show how love is conceived and experienced in Christ, then in the Church.

2.1 Inadequate Understanding and Challenges

The word "love" has a vast range of meanings. One in particular stands out: the love between man and woman. Love of this kind involves at least two distinct elements: *eros* and *agape*. These

two should be well united and complemented. However, some inadequate understandings of love give rise to the view that *eros* could be separated from *agape*.

The Greeks considered *eros* principally as a kind of overpowering of reason by a “divine madness” which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him to experience supreme happiness (DCE 4). Virgil in his *Bucolics*, held that *Omnia vincit amor (...) et nos cedamus amori* – let us, too, yield to love. In some ancient religions or fertility cults, *eros* was celebrated as a divine power, as a fellowship with the Divine. The so-called sacred prostitution in the temples was an expression of it. However, “an intoxicated and undisciplined *eros*, then, is not an ascent in ‘ecstasy’ towards the Divine, but a fall” (DCE 4).

Two important things emerge. The first is about the close relationship between love and the Divine: love points to a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence. The way to attain this goal is not simply by following the instincts. Thus, the second is about the necessity of discipline. *Eros* as a special power needs to be purified. The OT opposes this form of religion because of the monotheistic faith that it proclaims, not because it rejects *eros*. (DCE 5)

Regarding the relationship between love and the Divine, the Greek philosophy as represented by Aristotle excludes the possibility of God’s love. God is the source of everything. In his very self he lacks nothing. He can only be the object of desire and of love. If he loves, then his Divinity is at stake. Should eternity be involved in the stream of time, it would lose its nature of being eternal. God cannot love. This is Aristotle’s position. (DCE 9) But Aristotle, of course, has not attained faith in the Trinity. God, first of all, can love. His love is Trinitarian, Circular (or Perichoretic) among the three persons. When the incarnation of the Son took place, his divinity did not cease. God’s love is so powerful that when eternity enters upon time, time cannot destroy eternity.

As for the rejection of *eros*, it arises from a philosophical dualism that does not give due importance to the unity between body and soul. Plato, for example, described the attraction between man and woman by way of a myth, and projected a blissful view of Platonic love while projecting a pessimistic view of the body (DCE

11). Descartes holds a similar position (DCE 5). It is admitted that Christianity in the past had a certain tendency to be opposed to the body. However, the encyclical re-affirms the importance of holding the body-soul unity. Should man “aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity” (DCE 5).

Of all the challenges, two are most prominent and deserve our attention. The first is to claim that Christian love cannot be genuine because it excludes the bodily enjoyment (*eros*) from love (*agape*). This accusation is represented by Friedrich Nietzsche who held that Christianity had poisoned *eros* (DCE 3). His philosophy has been strengthened by the secularism, liberalism, and individualism that set God aside. On the other hand, the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. “*Eros*, reduced to pure ‘sex’, has become a commodity, a mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold, or rather man himself becomes a commodity” (DCE 5).

The second challenge is represented by Marxism. The so-called Christian charity is counter productive for the construction of justice. The poor – it is claimed – do not need charity, but justice. Works of charity are a way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their right (DCE 26).

Contemporary Christians are often at sea without an anchor tossed from one extreme to an other; from Marxism to liberalism, from collectivism to radical individualism.¹⁴ Taking this into account, we may now move on to the response from the Christian faith.

2.2 Christian Responses

As stated in the first section, theology is a delicate work and should not fall into the “rational violence” while listening to the Scriptures. DCE here presents a *Summa* of Love.

The first striking image of God’s love is found in the *Shema* (Dt 6:4). “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord”. There is

¹⁴ See Ratzinger’s Homily in the Mass *pro eligendo papa* April 18, 2005.

only one God, the creator of heaven and earth. Since he is the only source, he relates himself to all creatures. This God who revealed himself to Israel loves man. The prophets, in particular, Hosea and Ezekiel, described God's love and passion for his people using boldly erotic images. (DCE 9)

It is precisely at this point that God is revealed to be God and not man: "O Israel! ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, (...) for I am God and not man" (*Hos* 11:8-9). God's passionate love for his people – for humanity – is at the same time a forgiving love. (DCE 10)

Interestingly the DCE points out that the love of God turns against the justice of God. Both love (*hesed*) and justice (*'emet*) are the distinctive qualities of God

It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. Here Christians can see a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love. (DCE 10)

His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. (DCE 12)

In the book of the *Song of Songs*, two Hebrew words are used to indicate "love". One is *dodim* another is *ahabà*. The *dodim* is in a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. When love comes to a mature state, it is replaced by the word *ahabà*, which the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding *agape*. This becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, "searching" love *dodim*, this word *ahabà* expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice. (DCE 6)

Furthermore, *eros* is deeply rooted in human nature as shown in the Bible when it speaks of the solitude of Adam. Adam was seeking his "helper". God created woman from the rib of man and brought her to him. Adam exclaimed, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23). This primordial solitude is not a form of punishment as suggested by Plato. The solitude points to the idea that man is incomplete and that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become "complete" (DCE 11). In this sense, Adam is a seeker who "abandons his mother and father" in order to find woman. *Eros*, thus, directs man towards marriage, to a bond that makes the two one flesh. (DCE 11)

True love is in search of the union with another "helper". The union points to the ever-growing unity between possessive love (*eros* ascending) and oblation love (*agape* descending). It was only at a later stage that the distinction between the *eros* and *agape* two was taken as antithesis. To polarize the two is to impoverish love. God loves. His love is totally *eros*, and totally *agape*. Thus *eros* is supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape*. (DCE 10)

However, God does not have a body. How can he love with flesh and blood? All these erotic images of God's love presented in OT would have remained enigmatic, if the incarnation of the Logos had not taken place. Indeed, it is Christ who gives flesh and blood to those images and concepts of love. His death reveals the divine Love in its radical form. Now people can really feel God's love in flesh and blood. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (Jn 19:37), one may have a glimpse of this Love. By receiving the Holy Spirit that Christ imparted at his death (Jn 19:30), one may grasp the truth of the Love. (DCE 12)

The Incarnate Logos realized this in his paschal event and gave this oblation love an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He washed the feet of the disciples, made himself truly food for them, and laid the new commandment, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn13:34). The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-donation. We enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized. Through the sharing in Jesus' self-gift, man enters into the union with God (DCE 13).

The mysticism of Christ's Love has always a social dimension. Union with Christ means union with all those to whom he gives himself. Love of God and love of neighbor are united: God in his incarnation draws all to himself. *Agape* becomes a liturgical term for the Eucharist. There God's own *agape* comes to us bodily in order to continue this work in us and through us. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Love can be "commanded" because it has first been given. (DCE 14)

This principle throws light on the parables of Jesus. The rich man (Lk 16:19-31) who cries from his place of torment is a warning for all those who ignore the people in need. The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) offers two clarifications. First, "anyone who needs me, whom I can help, is my neighbor" (DCE 15). The concept of neighbor has a universal import. All the boundaries of nations, races, and cultures are to be abolished. All mankind is one big family in which everyone should treat another as "neighbor". Second, this consequently calls for my own practical commitments to help out. The great parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) teaches that love of God and love of neighbor become one: "in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God". (DCE 15)

"He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). This should be interpreted to mean that love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to one's neighbor also blinds us to God (DCE 16).

Though we do not see God as he is, yet he makes himself tangible in a number of ways.

In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of his heart on the Cross, to his appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, he guided the nascent Church along its path. Nor has the Lord been absent from subsequent Church history: he encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. (DCE 17)

However, in the gradual encounter, love is not merely a matter of sentiment which can be a very good start. God wants the love that we experience to grow just as the *eros* has to grow into its own fullness through a process of purification and maturation. This process is open-ended. It leads to a "communion of will" as Jesus' prayer in the Gethsemane "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." (Mk 14:16). "*Idem velle atque idem nolle* – love is to want the same thing and to reject the same thing". (DCE 17) Man's love for God consists in this communion of will. God is no longer an alien will (something imposed on me from without by the commandments), but is now my own will and love and, in fact, more deeply present to me than I am to myself. (DCE 17)

In God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. I learn to look at them with the eyes of Christ, namely, I treat others with the same sentiments and mind of Christ. I love God because I am ready to give up something in order to become part of God, in conformity with his will. I love others, because I follow the will of God. My love for others is genuine, because I am ready to give up something for the benefits of others. (DCE 18) The love of God and the love of others are so related that without God I cannot love others genuinely. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which promotes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter. (DCE 25)

An objection by Marxism has been raised against the Church's charitable activity. The poor need justice but not charity. To this objection, DCE gives two responses. The first is that a just society must be the achievement of politics, and not of the Church.

The Church, on the basis of reason and natural law, can lay down guidelines that are valid beyond the visible confines of the Church. With these guidelines, the Church wishes to help form consciences and stimulate a greater insight of justice. Of course, the Church promotes faith—an encounter with the living God. Faith enlightens and purifies reason so as to enable it to understand the requirements of justice and to achieve them politically.

We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives

arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. (DCE 27)

The second response is that the Church has the duty to do the charitable work. The fact is that there is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. (DCE 27)

The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support.

Both challenges as presented by Individualism and Collectivism have been met by the Christian responses in the DEC. At this point let us turn to another Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (=SCa).

III. THE THEOLOGY OF BEAUTY IN THE EUCHARIST

The document has a twofold purpose. One is to deepen the understanding of the relationship between the *Eucharistic mystery*, the *liturgical action*, and the *new spiritual worship*. This was the wish of the Synod Fathers. Another is to the relationship between the Eucharist and Christian love. The Pope wishes to set the present Exhortation alongside his first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, in which he frequently mentioned the sacrament of the Eucharist and stressed its relationship to Christian love, both love of God and love of neighbor: "God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily in order to continue his work in us and through us". (DCE 12 and SCa 5)

The document SCa is divided into three parts. All are centered on the Eucharist yet from a threefold perspective, namely "a mystery to be believed", "a mystery to be celebrated", and "a mystery to be lived". Part One presents, in a form of a *Summa*, the Eucharist as the mystery of faith in relation to the Blessed Trinity, Jesus the true sacrificial lamb, the Holy Spirit, the Church, sacraments, Eschatology, and the Virgin Mary. Part Two presents the Eucharist in terms of the liturgical action. There is an intrinsic link between the Eucharistic faith and the Eucharistic celebration.

Such a link finds its source in Christ and is expressed in the close relationship between two laws, namely the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*. The balanced use of the two laws is to allow the beauty (*veritatis splendor*) of the same Eucharistic mystery to shine through the richness of liturgical signs, celebration structure, active participation, and proper devotion. Part Three points to the spiritual flow from the Eucharistic celebration to the daily life. The Eucharistic love permeates all the aspects Christian life and turns it into a spiritual worship. This part touches upon the issues of the Sunday obligation, Eucharistic spirituality, evangelization of cultures, and the Church's mission to the World.

When the mystery flows from faith to celebration, the Church has to bear in mind two criteria. One is the correspondence between the Eucharistic faith and the liturgical action; another is the beauty that emerges concomitantly from such a correspondence. The logic is simple. The Holy Eucharist is about the mystery of God's Love. The liturgical celebration is the most important form of perpetuating the Eucharistic mystery in the Church. Since the truest and brightest beauty is the Love of God, the same beauty should be maintained as much as possible in every liturgical celebration. This essay would focus more particularly on the aspect of beauty.¹⁵

3.1 The Originating Beauty revealed in the History of Salvation

The most important element of Eucharistic faith is the very mystery of God, that is, the Trinitarian Love (SCa 7). It is out of this Love that the world was created. Christ came to save the world, the Spirit was sent, the Church was founded, and the sacraments were instituted. Above all, with great beauty, God's Love is to be perpetuated in the Church through the Eucharistic Form.

“Christ's death is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form (DCE 12). (...) Christ is the true sacrificial lamb who gave himself in sacrifice for

¹⁵ In this document, the word “beauty” is used 24 times, “beautiful” 5 times, “wonder” 6 times, “splendor” 5 times.

us, and thus brought about the new and eternal covenant. The Eucharist contains this radical newness, which is offered to us again at every celebration" (SCa 9).

By a happy intuition, Rublëv's celebrated icon of the Trinity clearly places the Eucharist at the centre of the life of the Trinity (*Mane Nobiscum Domine* 11). It is a piece of art that expresses eloquently the primordial beauty of God's love. It is this beauty that makes the salvation-history beautiful. It can be understood in three senses. First, the world is created in beauty and harmony because it originated from God's nature (cf Wis 13:5; Rom 1:19-20). Second, the beauty of God's love is shown to the Chosen People through many great signs. However, these signs are "pre-figurative" because they point to an even greater forthcoming wonder. Third, the epiphany of this beauty reaches definitive fulfillment in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. (DV 2, 4)

Christ is the full manifestation of the glory of God. In the glorification of the Son, the Father's glory shines forth and is communicated (cf. Jn 1:14; 8:54; 12:28; 17:1). Yet this beauty is not simply a harmony of proportion and form; "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45[44]:3) is also, mysteriously, the one "who had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Is 53:2). Jesus Christ shows us how the truth of love can transform even the dark mystery of death into the radiant light of the resurrection. Here the splendor of God's glory surpasses all worldly beauty. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery. (SCa 35)

The highest beauty found in the suffering Christ does not only surpass all the worldly beauty in terms of the external harmony and comeliness, but also transforms the frightening darkness of death into the radiant light of the resurrection. In any event, whenever God's Love is involved, there is always beauty. That is why, St Bonaventure would say: in Jesus we contemplate beauty and splendor at their source (SCa 35). The highest point of Jesus' life is the Paschal Mystery. Thus, the beauty of the liturgy is part of this Mystery. It is this Mystery that renders every liturgical action beautiful.

The memorial of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice contains something of that beauty which Peter, James and John beheld when

the Master, making his way to Jerusalem, was transfigured before their eyes (cf. Mk 9:2). Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. (SCa 35)

3.2 The Beauty of the Liturgy

The Exhortation points out the close connection between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*, which comes from the traditional epigram: *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. This principle (epigram) appeared a few times in a 6th-Century document called *Capitula pseudo-Caelestina* or *Indiculus* which reports that the epigram came from Pope Celestine I (+432). It is through the law of prayer that the law of faith is to be established. The law of prayer finds its biblical origin in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13) and the apostolic precept of prayer (1 Tm 2:1-6).

Paul urges prayers to be said by the faithful for everyone (vv 1-2). This is right in the sight of God, who desires the salvation of all and that they come to the knowledge of the truth (vv 3-4). There is only One God (...) One Christ, One Mediator, One Ransom (vv 5-6). Paul speaks as the teacher of faith and truth.

However, Pius XII in his *Mediator Dei* (1947) rejected the fallacious reasoning of the so-called modernism. One of its theological trends holds that the sentiment of faith prevails over the content of faith. Christian liturgy or prayer must be shaped in accordance with the sentiment rather than the faith-content. This trend based itself on the traditional epigram: the law of faith is to be established by the law of prayer. It was in this background that the MD reversed the epigram into this: *lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi* let the law of faith establish the law of prayer (MD 48). The reversal seemed to give more importance to *lex credendi*.

However, if we return to the origin of the epigram, then we find that the reversal is justified. The Lord's Prayer is the paradigm of all prayers. It was given to the apostles (Mt 6:9-13). From here the apostles found the law of prayer (1 Tm 2:1-6). In the Patristic Period, this law of prayer contains three important elements to shape the Christian liturgy, namely **transmitted by the apostles** (*ab apostolis tradita*), **all over whole world and in the entire Church** (*in toto mundo*)

atque in omni ecclesia), and **unanimously** (*uniformiter*). Actually these three elements correspond to the law for the transmission of faith. The correspondence is based on Christ. It is Christ who entrusted both “prayer” and “faith” to the Church. It is in Christ that the Church finds the intimate relationship between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. That is why the Church may form the epigram or reverse it without changing its fundamental meaning.¹⁶

However, the Synod of Bishops reflected at length on the connection between the rules and gave the primacy to the liturgical action, and consequently stressed the importance of *lex orandi*. (SCa 34) Thus, the *ars celebrandi* is the fruit of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness. (SCa 38)

The Eucharist should be experienced as a mystery of faith, celebrated authentically and with a clear awareness that the *intellectus fidei* has a primordial relationship to the Church’s liturgical action. (SCa 34)

In spite of this, Pope Benedict tries to maintain the balance between the two rules by saying that Christ is at the origin of both laws. No antithesis should be put in between.

Theological reflection in this area can never prescind from the sacramental order instituted by Christ himself. On the other hand, the liturgical action can never be considered generically, prescinding from the mystery of faith. Our faith and the eucharistic liturgy both have their source in the same event: Christ’s gift of himself in the Paschal Mystery. (SCa 34)

When Christ is at the origin of both rules, then the third rule *lex vivendi* comes into play. The faith is not only professed but must also be celebrated in liturgy, so that life may bear fruit. The term “Eucharistic form” used in SCa is precisely to express the shape according to which the Mystery believed and celebrated flows into the daily life.

¹⁶ See Declerck P., “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*“. *Sens originel et avatars historiques d’un adage équivoque* in *Questiones Liturgiques* 59(1978)193-212.

3.3 The Beauty revealed in the Active Participation in the Eucharist

The active participation (*partecipatio actuosa*) is one of the highlights of this Exhortation. It covers different areas, such as, the necessity of the priestly ministry in the Eucharistic celebration, proper personal conditions (fast and confession), the celebration of the Word, and reception of communion. It touches the question of the non-Catholic Christians, the sick, prisoners, immigrants, the broadcasting of Mass through communications media, and the celebrations in a small group or in a huge assembly.

Interestingly, SCa gives a mystagogical dimension to the participation in the Eucharist. The *ars celebrandi* is closely related to *actuosa participatio*. The liturgical action is likened to a door through which the participants are able to enter into the mystery. The liturgy itself, if well celebrated, becomes an effective mystagogical catechesis. A good design of the liturgical celebration facilitates the participation, as long as the design points to interpreting the rites against the salvation-history, presenting the meaning of the signs and gestures, and bringing out the significance of the celebration for the Christian life. The best catechesis of the Eucharist is to celebrate it well. (SCa 64)

The real sense of participation comes from the Last Supper during the feet-washing, when Jesus said to Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me (*ouk echei meros met' emou*)" (Jn 13:8). "To have part" has an ontological import. It is through Christ, the Mediator, that the participants are drawn into the union with God and each other. In this sense, the participants are chosen, elevated, and given the mediating power of Christ, to achieve the union with God. The same idea was found in Peter's letter, "so that you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4)

The ontological import of the participation is confirmed by the Augustinian principle of "exchange" (*commercium*): God became man so that man may become God. This exchange is based on the Incarnation and is to extend to the Eucharist. The Word is made flesh, and his flesh is made the Eucharistic bread. When the faithful eat the Eucharistic bread, they have part in Christ. It is the faithful

who by receiving the Holy Communion become Christ and not contrariwise.

Stressing the mysterious nature of this food, Augustine imagines the Lord saying to him: "I am the food of grown men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh, into yourself, but you shall be changed into me." (*Confessio* VII 10, 16) It is not the eucharistic food that is changed into us, but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it. Christ nourishes us by uniting us to himself; "he draws us into himself." (SCa 70)

However, this exchange is not achieved once in a life-time. It can become ever more perfect in terms of God-man union. Thus, the participation at once has a moral import. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). By learning and perfecting one's offering with that of Christ, one shapes the proper life with that of Christ by imitating him and following his steps. In this sense, the word "participation" does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. The external activity enjoys great importance because it should keep up with the ontological and moral participation.

The active participation called for by the Council must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life. (...) [The faithful] They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to make an offering of themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 48) (SCa 53).

Thus, the liturgical participation with its ontological and moral import entails the profound connection between beauty and the liturgy. "The 'subject' of the liturgy's intrinsic beauty is Christ himself". (SCa36) To receive the holy communion is to have part in Christ and to attain his beauty. Augustine would say, "If you receive them [body and blood] properly, you yourselves are what you have received" (*Sermo* 227 quoted in SCa 36). Beauty, which is an attribute of God, is shared by the participants of the Eucharist.

The offering of the faithful is valuable as long as it is offered in Christ who is both the priest and sacrifice. The beauty of the "liturgical participation" has a twofold sense: "Offering the immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to make an offering of themselves". (SCa 52). The "participation" enhances the Baptismal gifts, and the gifts adorn the life with the beauty of Christ (SCa 35). In this sense, the Eucharistic participation is closely related to the Eucharistic form of the Christian Life.

3.4 The Beauty of the Eucharistic Form of the Christian Life

The concept of the form is coined in a theology of the Eucharistic sacrifice. "This he [Christ the high priest] did once for all (*ephapax*) when he offered himself" (Heb 7:27). The OT rites and sacrifices as the pre-figurations of Christ's redeeming sacrifice were thus brought to fulfillment and surpassed by Christ in the Eucharist. As the Church Fathers rightly say, *figura transit in veritatem*: the pre-figuration has given way to the truth itself. (SCa 11) The Eucharist is the very sacrament by which Christ makes present his own self-giving love, namely the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection. The OT sacrifices had merely a pre-figurative function to keep people waiting for the fulfillment brought by Christ, whereas the Eucharist has the transformative power to turn humanity, and consequently the world, into Christ.

The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of "nuclear fission," to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). (SCa 11)

Thus, from here the meaning of the Eucharistic form emerges. It indicates both the innate power and the paradigm with which Christ realized the self-giving love in the paschal event and instituted the Eucharist to perpetuate that same love. The celebration of the Eucharist constitutes the "form" through which the Mystery of the same love flows into the life of all his members. In other words,

when we eat this bread, we are given now on earth the eternal life (Jn 6:51), though not yet in its fullness. However, in view of its fullness, the “form” together with its transformative power is endowed to shape the present life.

The Lord Jesus, who became for us the food of truth and love, speaks of the gift of his life and assures us that “if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever” (Jn 6:51). This “eternal life” begins in us even now, thanks to the transformation effected in us by the gift of the Eucharist: “He who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). These words of Jesus make us realize how the mystery “believed” and “celebrated” contains an innate power making it the principle of new life within us and the form of our Christian existence. By receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ we become sharers in the divine life in an ever more adult and conscious way. (SCa 70)

Thus, “the Eucharistic form of Christian life” means the grace deriving from the participation in the Eucharist by virtue of which human life is shaped according to God’s supreme Love for mankind and for its deliverance from evil.

Augustine has an interesting concept of beauty related to form. Every created thing comes into existence with a certain form (*forma*) having a particular nature (*speciem suam habere*), and is placed within a determined order. The two words *forma* and *species* in Latin point to *formosus* and *speciosus* meaning beautiful. Another similar word is mode. The actual mode (*modus*) of being determines the density of its beauty. When a horse has a leg crippled, its beauty is reduced in respect to a perfect horse. When applied to human beings, *modus* has not only a physical sense but also a moral dimension. The word *modestia* derives from *modus*. Where moderation and due proportion prevail, there is neither excess nor insufficiency. Just as the physical beauty of a person is perceived when the bodily proportion prevails, so the moral beauty is perceived when the virtue of modesty is practiced.¹⁷

¹⁷ See H. von Balthasar: *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics* in 7 volumes (English Translation first published in Great Britain by T. & T. Clark, in association with San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1982 - 89) vol II *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Style* (1984) 114–7.

When the concept of form is applied to the sacrament, it brings out the dimension of faith and piety. The sacramental efficacy (*virtus*) consists in the fact that the sign (*signum*) has a certain similarity with the sacred reality (*res*), and that the sacrament creates in the human soul a spiritual form (*forma spiritalis*). According to this form, God endows his grace to the soul in an abundant way. However, the recipient would receive it in the measure of his faith (*fides*) and piety (*pietas*).¹⁸ The beauty that God sees in man is precisely man's virtue of piety. Let there be first the piety in the believing soul, and the fruit will be borne in the understanding.¹⁹

Through this Eucharistic form one may achieve the beauty of the Christian life in all its aspects among which the first and foremost is the so-called spiritual worship (*logiké latreía*) (Rom 12:1). The new worship includes and transforms every aspect of life "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). This offering is pleasing to God because it is closely linked to the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ. If Christ's sacrifice is pleasing to God, then everything linked to his sacrifice is also acceptable to God. That is why it is important for Christians to take part actively in the Eucharist.

Through the active participation in the Eucharist the faithful obtain this power and form that turns Christian life into the spiritual worship.

"I appeal to you therefore, my brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). In these words the new worship appears as a total self-offering made in communion with the whole Church. The Apostle's insistence on the offering of our bodies emphasizes the concrete human reality of a worship which is anything but disincarnate. The Bishop of Hippo goes on to say that "this is the sacrifice of Christians: that we, though many, are one body in Christ. The Church celebrates this

¹⁸ An interesting summary of Augustinian reflection on this matter is in B. Neunheuser, *Baptism and Confirmation* (London 1964) 123.

¹⁹ "*Sit primo pietas in credente, et erit fructus in intellegente*" in *In Ev. Jo. Tracto* 8,6.

mystery in the sacrament of the altar, as the faithful know, and there she shows them clearly that in what is offered, she herself is offered.” (*De Civitate Dei* X 6) (SCa 70)

The Eucharistic form indicates the fellowship in the Holy Spirit giving glory to the Father through Christ (SCa 13). It calls for the renewal of heart and mind so that the faithful may not be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Rm 12:2, Eph 4:14; SCa 77). It marks, in particular, the spiritual life of the priest (SCa 80) as mentioned in DEC.

He [Pope Gregory the Great] also points to the example of Moses, who entered the tabernacle time and again, remaining in dialogue with God, so that when he emerged he could be at the service of his people. “Within [the tent] he is borne aloft through contemplation, while without he is completely engaged in helping those who suffer: *intus in contemplationem rapitur, foris infirmantium negotiis urgetur.*” (DEC 7).

The beauty of the “Eucharistic form” points to the moral energy which sustains the authentic freedom of God’s children (SCa 82), indicates a joy-filled path lead to the true discovery of love and freedom (SCa 82), fosters a greater configuration to Christ in the living witnesses (SCa 80), strengthens the evangelizing mission of the Church (SCa 84), motivates the Inculturation of faith (SCa52), heals the “brokenness” of the world with all its social implications (SCa 88), and radiates in the “Lord’s Day”²⁰ the beauty of the eternal life from the offering to the perfect union (SCa72-73).

IV. SOME FINAL REMARKS

The contemporary world unfortunately has inherited too much stress on reason. As a reaction, Post-modernity criticizes the rigid use of reason as conceived by the modernity, and leads to the claim that any truth from any religious belief or any type of reasoning

²⁰ “Speaking of the various dimensions of the Christian celebration of Sunday, he [John Paul II] said that it is *Dies Domini* with regard to the work of creation, *Dies Christi* as the day of the new creation and the Risen Lord’s gift of the Holy Spirit, *Dies Ecclesiae* as the day on which the Christian community gathers for the celebration, and *Dies hominis* as the day of joy, rest and fraternal charity” (SCa 73)

will do. This is to galvanize the hegemony of relativism, and ultimately, nihilism. The world suffers from the loss of true vision of love and hope.

God revealed the saving truth of his love to us through Jesus Christ. It is only by faith that such a revelation can be received and transmitted. Faith demands humility, listening, and obedience, whereas reason can contribute to the understanding of faith. What is credible can be transposed to the intelligible through the work of reason. However, there is a constant risk of the violence of reason, which may disfigure the content of faith. Thus, conversion to Christ is always needed for anyone who attempts a genuine work of theology. *Ubi Christus ibi Ecclesia*. Thus, *sentire cum ecclesia* (respect for Scripture and Tradition) is always indispensable for doing theology.

In DCE Pope Benedict XVI reminds us of the great truth of love and at the same time of certain improper use of reason that twists the meaning of love. The obvious challenges come from the so-called individualism and collectivism. Eloquently, the Pope defends the value of *eros* and stresses the need of its purification. It should not be separated from *agape*. Though no one has seen God as he is, yet he makes himself tangible in Christ. If we experience God, then we can receive tangibly his love and in turn love him. Love, more than mere sentiments, aims at the communion of wills, as Christ taught us at Gethsemane. The Cross manifests God's love in its radical form. This is a great lesson for the true disciples of Christ. The new commandment of Christ is to love others with the same sentiments of his. The Church follows his steps and carries out charitable work. "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14). While the ordering of society is a central responsibility of politics, the Church helps to form the conscience by teaching and doing charity work.

The love revealed in Christ shines out the beauty of the salvation-history. This love is perpetuated in the Holy Eucharist. In the second document SCa, Pope Benedict XVI speaks of a theology of beauty related to the Eucharist. The beauty flowing from the Mystery makes the liturgical action of the Eucharist shine. Here the *lex orandi* must be stressed but not to the detriment of its dynamics with the *lex credendi* and *lex vivendi*. The faithful adherence to the

liturgical norms is to pave way, mystagogically, to the active participation in the Eucharist. It enables the faithful to attain the beauty of the Mystery in their life which, in turn, becomes a new spiritual worship.

If as president of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith Cardinal Ratzinger wishes to accompany the world and the Church with the truth of Christian faith, now as Supreme Pontiff he wants to do the same but with the love of Christian faith. In his presidency he was concerned with the post-Vatican II liturgical renewal, and in particular, giving importance to a strict observation of the liturgical norms; now in his pontificate he would care more about the food of truth for a Eucharistic Spirituality.

In spite all the defects of the visible institutions or the personal shortcomings, the beauty of being Church consists in the fact that we are given the Divine love so as to share the same love with others. The freshness of the love of Christ, derived from the Holy Eucharist, enables us to use “words and deeds” that are capable of touching the hearts of those who seek the splendor of truth and the beauty of life.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the Holy Spirit kindle within us the same ardor experienced by the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35) and renew our “eucharistic wonder” through the splendor and beauty radiating from the liturgical rite, the efficacious sign of the infinite beauty of the holy mystery of God. (SCa 97)

**CHURCH FOR OUR TIME
IN THE MIND OF JOSEPH RATZINGER**
*Benedict XVI and his vision of the Church
in the Present and the Future*

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph Ratzinger is one person who is attentive to the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. He is ready to celebrate the signs of hope in the life and mission of the Church. Without denying the many signs of grace and hope in the Church, he also points to a crisis that threatens the edifice of the Catholic faith. According to him, the authentic Catholic understanding of the reality 'Church' is tacitly disappearing, while not explicitly being rejected. A good part of the errors that endanger theology and common Catholic opinion lies in a misunderstanding of the Church.

In the following pages, I would like to give a glimpse of how Ratzinger engages the different perceptions and understandings of the Church. I will begin by noting several currents of thought that threaten an authentic understanding of the Church. The next section will specifically look at the various misinterpretations of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, in particular the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). Following this is a short discussion of Ratzinger's critique of liberation theology; and then a discussion of how the Church can be truly the body of Christ. I end with some of my own observations and comments in the spirit of dialogue with Ratzinger the theologian. I would like to reiterate that what is presented here is only a glimpse and not a full analysis of his thought.

Some currents of thought that threaten the authentic Catholic meaning of 'Church'

1. The uncritical acceptance of the dominance of the “scientific and historical”. This is evidenced in the one-sided use of the historical-critical method in interpreting the Bible, which cuts off Scriptures from the Church and the Magisterium.

Ratzinger sees a fascination in the contemporary world for the scientific and historical. This fascination leads many people to accept only what is empirical and verifiable as truth. In other words, if something is not empirically tested and verified then it is not true. There seems to be a cult of the empirical and the scientific; and this dominance puts aside beauty, poetry, and mystery in life.

Ratzinger himself is very sensitive to the word of God and is quite sophisticated in his knowledge of exegesis. However, in the overly scientific approach to biblical interpretation, he senses that history becomes the only locus or place for empirical data. He considers this as an invasion of the cult of science and history into the mystery of the word of God. Maximilian Heinrich Heim, a Cistercian priest who wrote his dissertation on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology, observes that Ratzinger identifies the real crisis faced by the Church as christological and not an ecclesiological one:

He sees an initial root cause for it in the construction of a so-called *historical Jesus*, ‘behind the Jesus of the Gospels, which is distilled from the sources and contrary to the sources according to the standards of the so-called modern world view and of the mode of historiography that was inspired by the Enlightenment’. It builds on the premise that the only thing that can be historic is ‘that which is always possible as a matter of principle; [on] the presupposition that the normal causal connection is never interrupted and that anything that violates this familiar system of laws is therefore unhistorical.’¹

¹ Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger, Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), p. 262. Heim quotes Ratzinger’s “*Probleme von Glaubens- und Sittenlehre im europäischen Kontext*,” in *Zu Grundfragen der Theologie heute*, ed. Erzbischöfliches Generalvikariat Paderborn, Presse- und Informationsstelle (Paderborn, 1992), pp. 7-17, citation at 9.

Heim notes that Ratzinger does not promote the absolute rejection of the historical-critical method in theology because the historical-critical method itself is “determined ‘in a theologically legitimate way by the Christian concept of God, which is shaped by the idea of the Incarnation.’”² But theology cannot be reduced or restricted to the “historical” since this narrows theological investigation to what is “demonstrable”.³ Speaking on the topic with Vittorio Messori, Ratzinger says:

The historico-critical interpretation has certainly opened many and momentous possibilities for a better understanding of the biblical text. But by its very nature, it can illumine it only in its historical dimension and not explain it in its present-day claim on us. Where it forgets this limit it becomes illogical and therefore unscientific. But then one also forgets that the Bible as present and future can be understood only in a vital association with the Church.⁴

What do we do when even the exegetes themselves disagree over interpretation? Shall we wait for them to resolve their misunderstandings before we arrive at the certitude of faith? How can we be in communion with God if we let the historical-critical method be the sole determining factor our understanding of the Bible?

Ratzinger says we should liberate the word of God from the domination of the experts who refuse to see the life-giving word of God in favor of the scientific and historical:

² Ibid., p. 511, n. 36. Heim’s quote comes from Ratzinger’s “*Einleitung zur Dogmatischen Konstitutionen über die göttliche Offenbarung*,” in *LThK.E* 2 (1967): 498-503, citation at 499.

³ Ibid. Cf., Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp. 196-202. In this revised edition of Ratzinger’s 1968 classic, he discusses the dilemma of modern theology in its search for Jesus or Christ.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report, An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), p. 74.

“An exegesis in which the bible no longer lives and is understood within the living organism of the Church becomes archaeology: the dead bury their dead.” ...the last word about the Word of God as Word of God does not in this conception belong to the legitimate pastors, the Magisterium, but to the expert, the professor with his ever-provisional results always subject to revisions.”⁵

Another consequence of the one-sided scientific and historical interpretation of the Bible is the cutting off or the separation of the word of God from the living community, the Church, Tradition and Magisterium. Tracey Rowland, in her book *Ratzinger's Faith*, summarizes his basic stance as follows:

Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind, and with reference to the unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of Faith. Further, for a Christian, faith, reason, and Tradition do not work in a vacuum but are guided and in a sense guarded by the Holy Spirit, who is described in *Dei verbum* as the teacher of the ‘spouse of the incarnate Word.’⁶

More importantly, for the “ordinary Catholic” who wants to read or begin reading the Bible, Ratzinger says,

The rule of faith, yesterday as today, is not based on the discoveries (be they true or hypothetical) of biblical sources and layers but on the Bible *just as it is*, as it has been read in the Church since the time of the Fathers until now. It is precisely the fidelity to this reading of the Bible that has given us the saints, who were often uneducated and, at any rate, frequently knew nothing about exegetical contexts. Yet they were the ones who understood it best.⁷

⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

⁶ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith, The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 58.

⁷ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 76.

2. The anti-metaphysical tendency canonizes praxis apart from a fuller appreciation of truth. Relativism and subjectivism dominate. God's action is virtually eliminated. The Church becomes a purely human construct.

Heim notes that as early as 1975, Ratzinger became wary of the "amalgamation of truth with pragmatism."⁸ The idea is that praxis becomes the locus of truth. Something is true only when it is done. In other words, it is the doing that establishes something as true. You cannot pronounce truth if you do not first engage in praxis.

In his critique of the identification of the metaphysical category of "being" with time and logos as becoming itself only in history, Ratzinger says this can result in Catholics and Protestants having their own interpretation of the meaning of Christianity that is true in a particular historical moment, "but they can remain true only by being abandoned when their hour has come and assimilated into the newly developing whole."⁹ Ratzinger concludes that "truth becomes a function of time;" the true is not that which simply *is* true, for truth is not simply that which *is*; it is true for a time because it is part of the becoming of truth, which *is* by becoming."¹⁰ Therefore, boundary between true and untrue becomes tenuous and man's basic attitude toward reality and himself continues to alter or is marked by constant shifts.

But Ratzinger reminds us that truth is received and found; it is not created:

Christian faith measures itself instead in terms of the truth that already exists and thus becomes the crisis in every age. To that extent, there is no real temporality of truth, and, thus, neither is there any pluralism of truths, either in an

⁸ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p.189.

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology, Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

evolutionary or in a revolutionary scheme. There is, of course, the historical transmission of truth in the historical subject Church; both her past and also her waiting for the future fulfillment of the promise belong to that subject. Within the reality of this subject lies the real mediation between Being and Time, between the eternity and the historicity of truth.¹¹

God has revealed the fullness of truth in Jesus Christ, which is summed up in the classic confession, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved” (Rom 10: 9-10).

The moment praxis takes over we open Catholic truth to relativism and subjectivism. Relativism means using my point of view as the basis for truth. Each person must be tolerated; and in name of tolerance and respect, all worldviews become valid. But truth does not depend on our subjective world view. If relativism and subjectivism dominate then God’s action is eliminated. We, that is human beings, construct the truth and the Church. But the Church is God’s gift, God’s creation for us.

3. The mixture of Bible, politics, sociology, and other fields of study confuses the simple faith in the Church. Social project, democratization, management concerns and administration have replaced conversion. A facile accommodation of the “world” has become a fashionable “way for the Church”.

Social projects, democratization, and management or administrative concerns of the parish or diocese, even bureaucracy have replaced the core of the life of the Church. But the core life of the Church is conversion to Christ. Without this conversion, we do not become true to Jesus Christ. Not only that, but when biblical

¹¹ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 329. Heim quotes Ratzinger’s “Kommentar zur These I-VII,” in *Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theologische Pluralismus*, ed. Internationale Theologenkommission (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973), pp. , 17-51, citation at 36.

sophistication blends with political agenda and sociological expertise the simple faith of the people gets jarred.

Ratzinger identifies this preoccupation with an easy accommodation to the world which some people find as “the fashionable way for the Church.” Heim quotes Ratzinger from his *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* on individuals and the Church being “open to the world”:

One could say that the Council marks the transition from a conversationist to a missionary attitude, and the conciliar alternative to ‘conservative’ is not ‘progressive’, but rather ‘missionary’. In this antithesis is found basically the precise meaning of what conciliar ‘opening-up to the world’ means and what it does not mean. It does not provide the Christian with greater comfort by setting him free to conform to the world in a fashionable mass culture—the Council could never do that, because as a Christian event it was bound to the nonconformism of the Bible: ‘Do not be conformed to this world’ (Rom 12:2).¹²

According to Rowland, a member of the editorial board of the English language edition of *Communio*, “Ratzinger is emphatic that ‘evangelization is not simply adaptation to the culture, nor is it dressing up the gospel with elements of the culture, along the lines of a superficial notion of inculturation that supposes that, with modified figures of speech and a few new elements in the liturgy, the job is done.’”¹³

The Church has chosen a way which is more an accommodation of the world. Conversion is a narrow path whereas accommodation of the world is the road wide open.

¹² Ibid., p. 196. Heim quotes Ratzinger’s *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1977), p. 128.

¹³ Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, p.146.

4. Ultimately, Ratzinger sees the strong influence of European thought that has developed cut off from its spiritual roots in envisioning the faith and the Church.

Michael Fahey, in his assessment of Ratzinger as a theologian, describes him as well-versed in classical Western theology, defender of collegiality and liturgical reform, and having an openness to Eastern Orthodoxy.¹⁴ Fahey notes that Ratzinger believes that theology is closely related to preaching and the spiritual life:

Ratzinger once remarked that when Abelard transferred the teaching of theology from monastery or church to the lecture hall and a neutral university setting this was a mixed blessing. This made it possible especially in our own day today to do theology apart from spiritual practice and to create the impression that it might be taught as any purely academic topic which one might learn as a means of livelihood.¹⁵

In his reflection on the Temptation of Jesus from his latest book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger notes that even help offered by the Western world to developing countries if devoid of spirituality are not true sources of aid:

The aid offered by the West to developing countries has been purely technically and materially based, and not only has left God out of the picture, but has driven men away from God. And this aid, proudly claiming to 'know better,' is itself what first turned the "third world" into what we mean today by that term. It has thrust aside indigenous religious, ethical, and social structures and filled the resulting vacuum with its technocratic mind-set. The idea was that we could turn stones into bread; instead, our "aid" has only given stones in place of bread.¹⁶

¹⁴ Michael Fahey, "Joseph Ratzinger as Ecclesiologist and Pastor," *Concilium* 1 (1981): 76-83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 33.

The violence of reason, the violence that comes with the intellectual pursuit devoid of spiritual life.

A CASE IN POINT: MISINTERPRETATIONS OF THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF VATICAN II

1. The false dichotomy between Letter and the Spirit of Vatican II

With regards to the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger observes that there seems to be a false dichotomy put in place between the Letter (the text, the documents) and the Spirit of the Council. People who want to push their own agenda appeal to the “spirit” of Vatican II; and yet when you ask them where this spirit is in the documents, they will say that you cannot find it in any document. Often enough, this spirit becomes the “anti-spirit” of Vatican II.

In his dissertation, Heim notes that Ratzinger himself observed a change in the treatment of Vatican II documents sometime in 1973 when some theologians no longer considered them as “an obligatory point of reference, but only a ‘point of departure’, ‘the beginning of a beginning’, so as to ‘surpass’ the Council and to ‘move forward.’”¹⁷ Ratzinger cautions that such a perspective leads people to believe that the Church arrived at point zero with Vatican II. There is a fascination with the new and a disdain for the old. Anything before Vatican II could be eliminated and we start anew. And if you show any sign of the vestiges of the old, then you are considered against the spirit of Vatican II.

However, the spirit of the Second Vatican Council is only properly found in its documents. We should not blame Vatican II for the crisis after the Council; the crisis comes from misinterpretation of Vatican II and its documents. What needs to be done is a return to and a serious study of the documents of Vatican

¹⁷ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 187. Heim’s observations are based on *The Ratzinger Report*.

II. Can we reemphasize the doctrines stated in these documents in the fresh manner? Can we arrive at clarifications of different points of doctrine for our time? and with Vatican II, can we see how some teachings of the past have acquired a new development, a new fervour for our time?

The Church should not be made to choose between the letter and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. A Church constructed on the so-called spirit of Vatican II to the neglect of the documents of Vatican II itself will be clinging to a spirit that is nebulous and tenuous. As Ratzinger told Messori during their momentous 1985 interview:

To defend the true tradition of the Church today means to defend the Council. It is also our fault if we have at times provided a pretext (to the 'right' and 'left' alike) to view Vatican II as a 'break' and an abandonment of the tradition. There is, instead, a continuity that allows neither a return to the past nor a flight forward, neither anachronistic longings nor unjustified impatience. We must remain faithful to the *today* of the Church, not the *yesterday* or *tomorrow*. And this today of the Church is the documents of Vatican II, without *reservations* that amputate them and without *arbitrariness* that distorts them.¹⁸

2. The false schematization of a Pre- and Post-Vatican II in the history of the Church: not rupture but continuity.

Closely related to the previous point is the alleged discontinuity in the Church by identifying between a Pre- and Post-Vatican II Church. The so-called progressive wing of the Church wants to throw away anything before Vatican II; some even go to the extreme and posit that even Vatican II itself should be thrown away and we must move towards Vatican III. Meanwhile, the so-called conservatives say Vatican II was a decadent moment for the Church, a deterioration of faith; and it was not faithful to Trent and

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 31.

Vatican I. Messori quotes a 1975 assessment by Ratzinger of how Vatican II has been received by various sectors in the Church:

Vatican II today stands in a twilight. For a long time it has been regarded by the so-called progressive wing as completely surpassed and, consequently, as a thing of the past, no longer relevant to the present. By the opposite side, the 'conservative' wing, it is, conversely, viewed as the cause of the present decadence of the Catholic Church and even judged as an apostasy from Vatican I and from the Council of Trent. Consequently demands have been made for its retraction or for a revision that would be tantamount to a retraction.

... Over against both tendencies, before all else, it must be stated that Vatican II is upheld by the same authority as Vatican I and the Council of Trent, namely, the Pope and the College of Bishops in communion with him, and that also with regard to its contents, Vatican II is in the strictest continuity with both previous councils and incorporates their texts word for word in decisive points.¹⁹

If this is how we think, we are making a false choice for either a pre- or post-Vatican II Church. We are asked to make this false choice all the time. But there is continuity in the Church as exemplified by the same faith and the same authority of the pope in the Church (especially as exercise throughout the different Councils like Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II). If the task is to defend the Tradition of the Church, then that includes defending Vatican II. There is one Church. There is no pre- nor post-Vatican II Church. There is no rupture in the identity of the Church:

It is impossible ('for a Catholic') to take a position 'for or against Trent or Vatican I. Whoever accepts Vatican II, as it has clearly expressed and understood itself, at the same time accepts the whole binding tradition of the Catholic Church, particularly also the two previous councils. And that also applies to the so-called 'progressivism', at least in its extreme forms.'... It is likewise impossible to decide *in favor* of Trent and Vatican I, but *against* Vatican II. Whoever denies Vatican II denies the authority that upholds the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

other two councils and thereby detaches them from their foundation. And this applies to the so-called 'traditionalism', also in its extreme forms. Every partisan choice destroys the whole (the very history of the Church) which can exist only as an indivisible unity.²⁰

3. Some helps towards a proper understanding of the Ecclesiology of Vatican II: Communion and People of God

The Church as the Body of Christ

The opening lines of *Lumen Gentium* alert us to the fact that Jesus is the light of the nations, not the Church. As the Mystical Body of Christ, "the Church is much more than an organization: it is an organism of the Holy Spirit, something that is alive, that takes hold of our inmost being."²¹

Elsewhere Ratzinger notes that the Church is "not a club, not a party, not even a sort of religious state within the secular state, but a body – Christ's Body. And this is why the Church is not of our making but is constructed by the Lord himself when he cleanses us by Word and sacrament and thus makes us his members."²²

Thus the life of the Church comes "from the fact that Christ is present in our hearts and it is there that Christ forms His Church. That is why the first word of the Church is Christ, and not herself."²³ So much so that according to Ratzinger, "the Church is healthy to the extent that all her attention is focused on Him."²⁴ Thus, the Church is called to deep communion with Jesus. It is from this communion with Christ that the Church grows from within:

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

²¹ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English Edition (23 January 2002), p. 5.

²² Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion, Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), pp. 161-162.

²³ Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," p. 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

The Church grows from within and moves outwards, not vice-versa. Above all, she is the sign of the most intimate communion with Christ. She is formed primarily in a life of prayer, the sacraments and the fundamental attitudes of faith, hope and love. Thus if someone should ask what must I do to become Church and to grow like the Church, the reply must be: you must become a person who lives faith, hope, and charity. What builds the Church is prayer and the communion of the sacraments; in them the prayer of the Church comes to meet us.²⁵

The Church must not take the place of Christ. The Church is really in Christ and only when the Church has an intimate communion with Christ will the Church be the body of Christ. Christ formed a body for himself, a body that he can call his own, "This" is my body." And" as a member of the Church, each of us is directly called to become a humble and complete and full member of the body of Christ. I should become one with him so that I can be part of his body. And as members of one body, we can share responsibility and collaborate personally with one another to build up the Church. It is this willingness to belong to Christ that is the secret for the communitarian nature of the Church:

The Church is not somewhere apart from us, it is we who constitute the Church. No one person can say "I am the Church", but each one of us can and ought to say, "we are the Church". This "we" does not represent an isolated group, but rather a group that exists within the entire community of all Christ's members, living and dead.²⁶

Eucharistic Ecclesiology

If you ask Ratzinger when Jesus establish the Church, he will say that it was at the last supper. For him, the last supper "could be defined as the event that founded the Church. Jesus gave His followers this Liturgy of Death and Resurrection and at the same

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

time He gave them the Feast of Life.”²⁷ The supper cannot be understood apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The supper of the Lord is a fulfillment of the covenant. If we listen to the institution account and even the ritual account, the word “covenant” is constantly repeated, a covenant in Christ, in the body of Christ. Ratzinger explains why he considers the last supper as the foundation of the Church as follows:

In the last supper he recapitulates the covenant in Sinai, or rather what had there been an approximation in symbol now becomes reality: the community of blood and life between God and man. When we say this, [it] is clear that the last supper anticipates and at the same time necessarily presupposes the cross and the resurrection, since otherwise everything would remain empty gestures. Hence the Fathers of the Church were able to use a striking image to say that the Church sprang out of the wound in the Lord’s side from which blood and water flowed. In reality this is the same, though seen only from another point of view, as when I say that the last supper is the origin of the Church.²⁸

Ratzinger appeals St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians for this sacramental dimension of the Church, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body ...” (I Cor 10,16ff.).²⁹ In the Eucharist, when Jesus gives his body and we who are many receive that same body in faith, we become the body of Christ. Thus, the Church is born in the Eucharist. Ratzinger clarifies further:

The Mass is the Church’s form, that means that through it she develops an entirely original relationship that exists nowhere else, a relationship of multiplicity and of unity. In

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell and Dame Frideswide Sendemann, O.S.B. (New York: Crossroad, 1998), p. 8.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” p. 5.

each celebration of the Eucharist, the Lord is really present. He is risen and dies no more. He can no longer be divided into different parts. He always gives Himself completely and entirely. This is why the Council states: "This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local communities of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called Churches in the New Testament. For in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and with great trust (cf. 1 Thes. 1.5)... In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living in the diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His power there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 26).³⁰

The abovementioned quote tells us that the ecclesiology of the local church should come from the Eucharistic ecclesiology. Not all communities that gather can claim to be Church. Some might object and say the Church exists following Jesus' words, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20). According to Ratzinger, that is not the intent of Vatican II, which clearly states that the Church of Christ is present in all legitimate local communities of the faithful united with their pastors.

The People of God

During Vatican II, the notion "people of God" became very important as it introduced an ecumenical bridge with other communities. "The Constitution on the Church found it helpful for this purpose to use the concept of 'the People of God'. It could describe the relationship of non-Catholic Christians to the Church as being 'in communion' and that of non-Christians as being 'ordered' to the Church where in both cases one relies on the idea of the People of God (LG, nn. 15, 16)."³¹ The theology of the people of God also conveyed the historical nature of the Church,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

the unity of the Church as a people, and its eschatological dynamism—that—there is a destiny, a goal in history—of the Church:

In broad outline, if one wants to sum up what elements relating to the concept “People of God” were important for the Council, one could say that the phrase “People of God” conveyed the historical nature of the Church, described the unity of God’s history with man, the internal unity of God’s people that also goes beyond the frontiers of sacramental states of life. It conveys the eschatological dynamic, the provisional and fragmentary nature of the Church ever in need of renewal; and finally, it expresses the ecumenical dimension, that is the variety of ways in which communion and ordering to the Church can and do exist, even beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church.³²

Unfortunately, the notion of “people” has been influenced by other currents of thought such that the theology of people of God has been co-opted by ideological roots. Heim identifies three factors that influenced Ratzinger’s concerns with the post-conciliar understanding of people of God, “first, the transformation of the People of God concept into something political; second, the question about relativism as a prerequisite for a democratic state; and third, the problem of the majority principle in questions of faith.”³³ One example of these challenges is Ratzinger’s observation that:

Among the proponents of liberation theology it was taken to mean “people” in the Marxist sense, in opposition to the ruling classes, or more generally, it was taken to refer to popular sovereignty at long last being applied to the Church. This led to large-scale debates on Church structures. On occasion the expression was understood in a peculiarly Western sense as “democratization” or more in the sense of the so-called Eastern “People’s Republics”.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 383.

³⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” p. 5.

Ratzinger is quick to remind us that “the Church does not exist for herself; rather, she is God’s instrument to gather mankind in Himself and to prepare for that time when ‘God will be all in all’ (I Cor 15.28).”³⁵

Ecclesiology of Communion

The ecclesiology of communion is rooted in the Eucharist, in sharing in the life of Jesus Christ for it is because we share in the life of Christ that we are one community. “One gains access to communion with God through the realization of God’s communion with man – it is Christ in person. To meet Christ creates communion with Him and therefore with the Father in the Holy Spirit. This unites men with one another. The goal of all this is the fullness of joy: the Church carries in her bosom an eschatological dynamic” (cf. I John 1:1-3).³⁶

The key however is holiness, conformity to God. “There must exist in the world space for God, where he can dwell freely so that the world becomes His ‘‘Kingdom’. Holiness is something greater than a moral quality. It is the presence of God with men, of men with God; it is God’s ‘tent’ pitched amongst men in our midst (cf. Jn 1,14).”³⁷ The Church is supposed to be the place of holiness in the world, in history. To be holy is to conform oneself to God, to attune oneself to God’s truth and not to fabricate your own truth.

According to Heim, “Ratzinger is concerned here about the center of Christian vocation, about the question: ‘What shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ (Lk 10:25). In grappling with this crucial question of the Gospel, he deliberately turns his attention first to responsibility in God’s sight as a prerequisite for a sincere love of neighbor.”³⁸

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 398.

Heim adds,

The call to holiness represents for Ratzinger 'a kind of Copernican revolution'. It means that the individual should not think that he is the real center around which everything has to revolve, but rather he must 'leave this error' and act like a brother or sister, 'joining together with all the others in the round dance of love around the one center'. Although pathways through life may vary greatly, the Christian must not lose sight of this one goal.³⁹

The model of the Church is Mary. According to Ratzinger, a Marian understanding of the Church is opposed to the concept of the Church as an organization or just a bureaucracy. A Marian understanding leads us to believe that we cannot make the Church, nor produce it. We have to be made the Church. This happens when we become more like Mary whose faith forged a deep communion with Jesus and communion with others. "Only by being Marian, can we become the Church. At its very beginning the Church was not made, but given birth. She existed in the soul of Mary from the moment she uttered her fiat. This is the most profound will of the Council: the Church should be awakened in our souls. Mary shows us the way."⁴⁰

ANOTHER CASE IN POINT: LIBERATION AS MISSION OF THE CHURCH?

1. Ratzinger's analysis of presuppositions of liberation theology

After the Second Vatican Council, there was a theological orientation that said true theology is done by going directly to Scriptures and signs of the times. I remember hearing as a student that one must have the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other; or one foot in the church and the other foot in the world.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 399.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," p. 5.

Unfortunately, an extreme form of this theological orientation neglects the total Tradition of the Church. We have already touched upon some of these points in the previous pages but it is good to return to some of them.

The turn to the world encouraged by some theologians was not bad in itself for many actually wanted greater responsibility for the world as a mission. However, this turning to the world deteriorated into a naive belief in science (its various fields) as the new gospel. For example, faith is interpreted primarily and even solely through the lens of psychology, sociology and the Marxist interpretation of history. Why? Because these fields are seen as “more scientific” than the Tradition of the Church. Underlying such a perspective is a method critical and suspicious of Tradition, so much so that proponents attempt to dismantle, deconstruct and produce new Tradition to replace the old.

Another noteworthy development that underlies liberation theology is that after the horrors of Second World War, neo-Marxism offered an irresistible promise of meaning and action to the world. Unfortunately, this neo-Marxist ideology only repackaged itself by using biblical message. Finally, the challenge of poverty and oppression was too overbearing. The Church needed to respond but many in the Church were enticed to respond by using the models of hope coming from neo-Marxist philosophy, masking itself in biblical imagery.

2. His critique of the structure of liberation theology (3 points)

With the scientific-historical exegesis and the neo-Marxist interpretation of the Bible, the figure of Jesus is presented in a new way but torn from the Gospel. The figure of Jesus becomes the liberator rather than the Son who is in deep communion with the Father.

(a) All of reality has been politicized. It seems the prism used to interpret reality was the political prism. The biblical image of the poor has been given a political slant. And within the Marxist dialectic, the poor is no longer one who is dependent on God but

one who is a proletariat. Thus, the Magisterium can be interpreted as the oppressive class; and even the Church, the hierarchy, the different states of life can be reinterpreted in light of this understanding.

(b) The categories people, community, and history have taken over the word "Church". Nobody talks about Church anymore. The community interprets their experience, determines their praxis, and so determines their *being* Church. The people of God has been transformed into a Marxist reality and the people becomes the antithesis to hierarchy and institution.

(c) History is interpreted as a progressive process of liberation if we have the right praxis. History does not need a Savior. History has eliminated the Son of God. We can save ourselves if we choose the right historical project; and so the true interpreter of the Bible is history, not Jesus, the Spirit nor the Church. History swallows up God and God's revelation. History has taken the place of God. And so he asks, do you recognize here the true mission of the Body of Christ? How could this be mission if it has eliminated God?

Ratzinger sums up his critique of the Marxist influence as follows:

It seems to me that, in its philosophy and its moral goals, Marxism represents a more insidious temptation than many practical atheisms which are consequently less ambitious intellectually. For the Marxist ideology actually uses the Jewish-Christian tradition and turns it into a godless prophetic movement; man's religious energies are used as a tool for political ends and directed to a merely earthly hope, which is equivalent to standing on its head the Christian yearning for eternal life. This perversion of the biblical tradition deludes many believers who are convinced in good faith that the cause of Christ is the same as that proclaimed by the heralds of political revolution.⁴¹

Heim devotes several pages of his dissertation to trace Ratzinger's critique of liberation theology. He notes that Ratzinger is certain that the Christian faith surpasses the social and political

⁴¹ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 188.

realm. For Ratzinger, “Social responsibility is an essential part of Christian social doctrine, which is concerned with “making the faith operative, that is, relating the ethos of faith to economic and political reason”.”⁴² Heim quotes Ratzinger lengthily on his belief that social responsibility must be guided by reason and will, so as to make God’s law concrete and realize it in changing historical situations, always in the essential imperfectability of man’s action within history. It is not permitted to man to set up the “Kingdom”, but he is charged to go toward the Kingdom through justice and love.... Faith’s hope always goes infinitely farther than all our realizations, reaching into the realm of the eternal; but precisely the fact that this hope is given to us gives us the courage to take up again and again, despite all inadequacy, the struggle for a just order that is the form of freedom and builds up a dam against the tyranny of injustice.⁴³

On the other hand, Heim does note that “Ratzinger admits that the various approaches of liberation theology also contain “really ... worthwhile insights’, in that they attempt ‘to rethink and elaborate the connections between faith and work, given today’s assumptions’. Their basic problem, however, is their ‘faith in politics as a salvific force’ and the related notion that the idea of God has no practical purpose.”⁴⁴

The Way of the Church: How can we be true Church as body of Christ?

The Spiritual Revolution or Conversion that must define the Church

The experiences of the heart, the artist, and of beauty present us the way for the Church towards conversion. Ratzinger contrasts the activist from the artist – the activist wants to construct something by himself whereas the artist is first a beholder, a contemplative, who sees and admires; the activist operates on reason, the artist opens to mystery and sees something there and allows this something to come out through his activity.

The way of the artist tells us that we must begin with *ablatio* (removal), and this becomes *congregation* (gathering). We need to

⁴² Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 219.

chip away at everything hiding the figure behind the stone, so that the true, the good and the beautiful form comes out. The inauthentic is chipped away so the authentic can come out. But who is the artist? The true artist is God, not us. God is the one who will purify us; and our response is to ask pardon. Oblation leads to conversion, which leads to communion, a true gathering.

How can we build up a Church if everything is “I”? When the Church is purified, it is not anymore “I” against another “I”. But where faith and love abound there will be reciprocity of what is good in each one, of what is pure and beautiful – the *nobilis forma* of the Church comes out. We must recover the artistic orientation of the Church and apply it to conversion.

The Church is God’s Church, not ours.

Give to God what is God’s.

God constructs the Church, and our response is faith. We are often eager to literally construct the Church, attend meetings, and even form committees to do various work (even episcopal conferences have a multitude of committees that make the Church look like a bureaucracy). However, Ratzinger criticizes an over-emphasis on “organizing” the Church. The Church should not be ruled by the majority vote for only the Lord must rule. The Church is more than a modern organization:

A church based on human resolutions becomes a merely human church. It is reduced to the level of the makeable, of the obvious, of opinion. Opinion replaces faith. And in fact, in the self-made formulas of faith with which I am acquainted, the meaning of the words ‘I believe’ never signifies anything beyond ‘we opine’. Ultimately, the self-made church savors of the ‘self’, which always has a bitter

⁴³ Ibid. Heim quotes Ratzinger’s *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World—Assessment and Forecast*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 77.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

taste to the other self and just as soon reveals its petty insignificance. A self-made church is reduced to the empirical domain and thus, precisely as a dream, comes to nothing.⁴⁵

One must always see the Church as the space for the Spirit of the Lord. As Ratzinger explains:

The Church is not to be deduced from her organization; the organization is to be understood from the Church. But at the same time it is clear that for the visible Church visible unity is more than “organization”. The concrete unity of the common faith testifying to itself in the Word and of the common table of Jesus Christ is an essential part of the sign that the Church is to erect in the world.⁴⁶

When we look at ordinary people who are not members of Church organizations and committees but quietly live their faith, listen to the word of God, follow the sacraments and live in love, they are sometimes “truer” Christians than those who are active in organizations. We do not need a more human Church. We need a more divine Church; and only a divine Church can be truly a human Church. In his 2005 Foreword to Heim’s book (the second edition of the German text), Ratzinger reiterates the basic theme of *Lumen Gentium*:

The first sentence of the document reads: ‘Christ is the light of humanity.’ This light is reflected upon the face of the Church. She is – as the Fathers of the Church say – the moon that receives all of its light from the sun, from Christ. Correctly understood, the Church’s essence is found, not in the Church herself, but rather in her orientation and her referring to One beyond herself. ... In Christ, man – human nature – is united with God. Through him, humanity has been taken up into the trinitarian dynamic: The Son leads to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is about God, and only in this way do we treat the subject of man correctly.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, pp. 139-140.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, p. 346.

⁴⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “Foreword,” in Heim’s *Joseph Ratzinger*, pp. 1-2.

The Church must proclaim the truth of salvation in Jesus, the only mediator between God and humanity, without fear of “going against the current”.

Some have said that Ratzinger is anti-world by proposing a non-conformist attitude. But Ratzinger says that it is not the Christians who oppose the world but the world opposes itself to Christianity. When the truth about God, about Christ, and about people is proclaimed the world waxes indignant.

After the face of indiscriminate openness, it is time that the Christian reacquire the consciousness of belonging to a minority and of often being in opposition to what is obvious, plausible and natural for that is the mentality which the New Testament calls (and certainly not in the positive sense) the spirit of the world.

It is time to find again the courage of nonconformity, the capacity to oppose many of the trends of the surrounding culture, renouncing a certain euphoric post-conciliary solidarity. We will not oppose the world. We present the truth and the world will get angry. But we should be ready not to conform to the world just in order to be at peace with the world. This is facile openness and accomodation. We must be faithful to the truth of Christ. In his reflection on the Church in the Third Millennium, Ratzinger identifies a key task facing the Church:

The Church has to make him [Christ] more widely known; she has to bring men to Christ and Christ to men, so as to bring God to them and them to God. Christ is not just some great man or other with a significant religious experience; he is God, God who became man to establish a bridge between man and God and so that man may become truly himself.⁴⁸

My personal observations and comments

Those who have studied the thought of Ratzinger acknowledge his impact on ecclesiology after Vatican II. Their

⁴⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith, The Church as Communion*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 292.

appreciation, however, has not prevented them from raising critical observations and comments, some of which I want to indicate.

Ratzinger “absolves” the Second Vatican Council of any significant role in the ecclesiological crisis that ensued from it. He attributes the malaise to wrong interpretations of the Council. Some authors suggest that it might be good to ask if the Council could be spared as easily as he does. We need to re-read its history, documents and official implementation to see if the event of the Council lent itself to those misinterpretations.

Secondly, it is noticeable that Ratzinger focuses on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) when dealing with the ecclesiology of Vatican II. We can ask why *Gaudium et spes*, *Ad gentes*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate* and other documents that have clear missiological themes do not figure prominently in his treatment of the Council’s body of ecclesiological teaching.

Thirdly, some authors have also highlighted the heavy Augustinian bent of Ratzinger. They claim that due to this theological choice, he tends to be negative and pessimistic towards the world. They say that while the world will always be under the shadow of the evil that led to the cross, that same world will always be under the splendor of the resurrection of Christ as well. They want to see the dynamic tension of the Paschal Mystery exerting more influence on Ratzinger’s view of the Church and mission in the world.

Fourthly, Ratzinger seems to agree with Henri de Lubac’s distinction between the properly theological and non-theological elements that comprise the reality called Church. The cultural, social, economic and historical realities that make up the lives of the people in the Christian community are considered necessary for the Church but do not enter into its properly theological core. This core consists purely in the work of the Triune God through the Word, Sacraments and Ministry. How can this approach prevent one from falling into spiritual reductionism? Will not the human concerns of Christians be relegated to the periphery of ecclesial life?

These are just a few of the observations and comments that could be good conversation points with Ratzinger. But let us close this presentation by listening to Ratzinger himself:

We must always bear in mind that the Church is not ours but his. Hence the 'reform', the 'renewals' – necessary as they may be – cannot exhaust themselves in a zealous activity on our part to erect new, sophisticated structures. The most that can come from a work of this kind is a Church that is 'ours', to our measure, which might indeed be interesting but which, by itself, is nevertheless not the true Church, that which sustains us with the faith and gives us life with the sacrament. I mean to say that what we can do is infinitely inferior to him who does. Hence, true 'reform' does not mean to take great pains to erect new façades (contrary to what certain ecclesiologies think). Real 'reform' is to strive to let what is ours disappear as much as possible so what belongs to Christ may become more visible. It is a truth well known to the saints. Saints, in fact, reform the Church in depth, not by working up plans for new structures, but by reforming themselves. What the Church needs in order to respond to the needs of man in every age is holiness, not management.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 53.

REREADING 'JESUS OF NAZARETH' *A Guide to Pope Benedict XVI's Spiritual Testament*

Fr Alfred Maravilla SDB SThL

INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 2007, the eightieth birthday of Pope Benedict XVI, his book *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*¹ was published by in German, Italian and Polish. The French edition was published on May 15 while the English edition was published on May 24 by Doubleday. To date it has been translated into around 22 languages.

Benedict XVI clearly states at the outset that the book is «solely an expression of my personal search 'for the face of the Lord' (cf. Ps. 27:8)» (xxiii). Ultimately he hopes that the book would «help foster the growth of a living relationship with him» (xxiv). Evidently, in doing so he presents his own personal position not only on modern Christological discussions but especially regarding biblical exegesis today. This, obviously, is not shared by all theologians and modern exegetes. That is why he clearly states that he does not pretend that all would agree with the results of his «personal search». Thus, he states, «everyone, then, is free to contradict me». He only asks readers «for that initial goodwill without which there can be no understanding» (xxiv).

Benedict XVI started writing in the summer of 2003. Since, due to his age, he does not «know how much more time or strength I am still given» (xxiv) he, therefore, decided to publish the first 10 chapters covering from Jesus' baptism, which inaugurates his public ministry, until the two important moments in Jesus life taken from the Gospel of John: the confession of Peter and the transfiguration.

¹ The German original is *Jesus von Nazareth. Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklarung* (Herder: Freiburg 2007). The numerals and numbers in parenthesis refer to the pages of the English edition.

These events are not, however, presented chronologically. All these make up the first part of the projected two volume series. The second volume would presumably deal with events leading to his passion, death and resurrection as well as «the chapter on infancy narratives» (xxiv) which had been omitted in this volume.

Jesus of Nazareth is written in a way which is readily accessible to people with some theological or biblical formation even if certain parts would require a more attentive reading and a certain level of theological formation. However a certain familiarity with the theology of Joseph Ratzinger would be indispensable in order to better appreciate the book's deeper theological message. This article hopes precisely to do that by leading the reader to an initial contact with some theological thoughts of Joseph Ratzinger reflected in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

THEOLOGICAL METHOD

In the *Foreword* Benedict XVI quotes Rudolf Schnackenburg's (1914-2002) who insisted in *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology* that «'without anchoring in God, the person of Jesus remains shadowy, unreal and unexplainable'». He then elaborates on this to explain his theological method in writing this book: «This is also the point around which I will construct my own book. It sees Jesus in the light of his communion with the Father, which is the true center of his personality; without it, we cannot understand him at all, and it is from this center that he makes himself present to us still today» (xiv).

Consequently, Benedict XVI underlines that the constant Father-Son dialogue we see in the Gospels show that Jesus «is wholly 'relational', that his whole being is nothing other than relation to the Father» (348-349). In fact he «lives before the face of God, not only as a friend but as Son; he lives in most inward unity with the Father» (6). Only from this standpoint, he stressed, can we really understand the figure of Jesus, «as presented to us in the New Testament; all that we are told about his words, deeds, sufferings, and glory of Jesus is anchored in this» (6).

HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

As the title of the book reveals, the object of Benedict XVI's personal biblical-theological-pastoral reflection is Jesus Christ himself. But which Jesus? With a few strokes of his pen Benedict XVI summarizes modern efforts - or *Quests* - to discover the historical Jesus or the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. After the First World War, Gospel research restarted under the inspiration of the German form-critical school founded by Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884-1976). This search for the historical Jesus is specially characterized by the 'no quest' of Albert Schweitzer in 1920 and especially by the 'second' or 'new quest' launched in Germany by Bultmann in 1921 who reemployed the form-critical method in the pursuit of historical research without much success. Thus in the 1950s «the gap between the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith' grew wider and the two visibly fell apart» (xi). This gave rise to the 'third quest' pioneered by Ernest Käsemann. Benedict XVI, however, laments that «all these attempts have produced a common result: the impression that we have very little certain knowledge of Jesus» thus «intimate friendship with Jesus, on which everything depends, is in danger of clutching at thin air» (xii). Benedict XVI concludes that, unfortunately, the «alleged findings of scholarly exegesis have been used to put together the most dreadful books that destroy the figure of Jesus and dismantle the faith» (35).

Benedict XVI believes that the tensions that Rudolf Schnackenburg finds between the images of Jesus created by the historical-critical method and the image of Jesus that trust in the Gospels produces are not insurmountable. Historical-critical exegesis, he points out, «can make the figure of Jesus present to us with a vividness and depth that we could not have imagined a few decades ago» (xxiii). In spite of its shortcomings Benedict XVI affirms that:

«...the historical-critical method-specifically because of the intrinsic nature of theology and faith-is and remains as an indispensable dimension of exegetical work. For it is the very essence of biblical faith to be about real historical events. It does not tell stories symbolizing superhistorical truths, but is based on history, history that took place here on this earth. The factum historicum (historical fact) is not an interchangeable symbolic

cipher for biblical faith, but for the foundation on which it stands: Et incarnates est-when we say these words, we acknowledge God's actual entry into real history» (xv).

This is so because, he says, «a faith that discards history in this manner really turns into 'Gnosticism'. It leaves flesh, incarnation-just what true history is-behind» (228). In short Benedict XVI wishes to point out that the historical-critical method is «an indispensable tool, given the structure of Christian faith» (xvi). It is «good and important» because it «seeks to discover the precise sense the words were intended to convey at their time and place of origin» (xix). However, he also insists that «any human utterance of a certain weight contains more than the author may have been immediately aware of at the time» (xix). As the words mature in the course of «faith-history» mature, the common history that sustains the author as he writes implicitly contains future possibilities.

Therefore, for Benedict XVI we ought to remember two things: first, that the historical-critical method can claim only «relative certainty» because «it considers the individual books of Scripture in the context of their historical period, and then analyzes them further according to their sources» (xvii). It cannot, however, «make it into something present today» (xvi). The second reminder is that the historical-critical, because it is concerned with things human (history), has to investigate the words of Scripture as primarily human words. It might occasionally admit that the words can have a “deeper” meaning than their face value historical one, but its object nevertheless remains the human and time bound (xvii).

The method is, therefore, inherently limited because it cannot rule out of bounds additional layers of meaning in the Scriptures—namely, their meaning now. The historical-critical method is, consequently, not absolute. In fact it «contains within itself an openness to complimentary methods» (xviii). Benedict XVI stresses clearly that he has gone at great lengths «to go beyond purely historical-critical exegesis so as to apply new methodological insights that allow us to offer a properly theological interpretation of the Bible» (xxiii) «because they govern my interpretation of the figure of Jesus in the New Testament» (xxi).

CANONICAL EXEGESIS

In writing *Jesus of Nazareth* Benedict XVI chooses canonical exegesis among the different methods of biblical exegesis. He defines it as «reading the individual texts of the Bible in the context of the whole [...] becoming theology in the proper sense» (xix). It is clear that he is guided by two documents: *Dei Verbum* 12 which pointed out that «Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written» keeping in mind «the content and unity of the whole of Scripture»; and *Interpretation of Bible in the Church* which points out that «the theological task of interpretation» becomes more successful «by beginning from within an explicit framework of faith: the Bible as a whole».² Canonical exegesis, therefore, leads to reading the Scriptures as a unity and in its totality. Consequently beyond the possible divergences there lies a profound unity of the biblical texts which leads the exegete to discover «that the Old and New Testaments belong together» (xix).

Canonical exegesis, Benedict XVI insists, takes place within the context of the community of believers because «the Scripture emerged from within the heart of a living subject-the pilgrim people of God - and lives within this same subject» (xx). Conversely «the People of God-the Church-is the living subject of Scripture; it is in the Church that the words of the Bible are always present» (xxi). The authors too «are not autonomous writers [...] they form part of a collective subject, the 'People of God,' from within whose heart and to whom they speak». Thus «the People of God-the Church-is the living subject of Scripture; it is in the Church that the words of the Bible are always present» (xxi).

Rooted in Tradition

Benedict XVI also explicitly mentions that the magisterium «has guided me in writing this book» (xv). He specifically mentions the Councils of Nicea, Chalcedon (355) and Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* [1965] as well as Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* [1943] and the two

² Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City 1993) I.C.1.

documents of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* [1993] and *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* [2001] (xiv-xv). Thus, although the book «is in no way an exercise of the magisterium» (xxiv) it is firmly grounded in the faith and Tradition of the Church.

Presuppositions

Through a continuous interpolation of the four Gospels Benedict XVI clearly stresses that «the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of the Synoptics is one and the same: the true ‘historical’ Jesus» (111). In doing so he «wanted to portray the Jesus of the Gospels as the real, ‘historical’ Jesus in the strict sense of the word»; And that «the figure is much more logical, and historically speaking, much more intelligible than the reconstructions we have been presented with the last decades». Indeed, Jesus, as presented by the four Gospels, is a «historically plausible and convincing figure» (xxii), one comparable with the faith of the Church. Consequently, reading the Scriptures presumes first and foremost, faith in Jesus Christ because «in reading the texts with the help of historical methodology» they «reveal a figure worthy of belief» (xxiii) and because to discover Jesus as the key who unites the Bible «presupposes a prior act of faith» (xix). The second presupposition is that the Bible is true without insisting on its being factual. Benedict XVI could, therefore, boldly claim «I trust the Gospels» (xxi).

Structure

The internal structure of the book is built on the three pillars which are the three responses that Benedict XVI gives to the question ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ He responds by showing that Jesus is the new Moses, the living Torah and the Temple in person. This comprises the Christological core of *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Jesus is the New Moses

Benedict XVI notes that in the Book of Deuteronomy «a curious melancholy hangs over this conclusion of the Book of Moses. The promise concerning ‘a prophet like me’ has not yet been fulfilled» (3) thus «Israel is allowed to hope for a new Moses, who

has yet to appear, but who will be raised up at the appropriate hour» (4-5). This promise implies that «the new Moses, will be granted what was refused to the first one—a real, immediate vision of the face of God» (5). «This naturally entails the further expectation that the new Moses will be the mediator of a greater covenant than the one that Moses was able to bring down from Sinai» (6). Through his exegesis Benedict XVI leads the reader to see that «it is in Jesus that the promise of a new prophet is fulfilled. What was true of Moses only in fragmentary form has now been fully realized in the person of Jesus» (6). «In him we see the fulfillment of the promise made to Moses» in *Deuteronomy* 18:15 (122).

From the Sermon on the Mount Benedict XVI reinforces this exegesis by stating that the 'Mount' of Beatitudes where Jesus teaches is also the place where he prays «face to face with the Father» because «his teaching comes from the most intimate exchange with the Father. The 'mountain' then, is by the very nature of the case established as the new and definitive Sinai» (66). That is why for Benedict XVI «the Sermon on the Mount is the new Torah brought by Jesus» which «presupposes his entering into communion with the Father» (68). At the same time Benedict XVI insists that the Sermon on the Mount «demands discipleship and can be understood and lived out only by following Jesus and accompanying him on his journey» (69).

Jesus is the Living Torah

Benedict XVI points out that on the Mount of Beatitudes Jesus becomes the new Torah-giver. The new Torah of Christ sets us free to be like Christ. «The 'Torah of the Messiah' is totally new and different - but it is precisely by being such that it fulfills the Torah of Moses» (100). To illustrate his point Benedict XVI quotes Rabbi Jacob Neusner where he narrates an imaginary encounter with Jesus³. In that encounter he sees that Neusner «takes his place among the crowds listening to Jesus, compares Jesus' words with those of the Old Testament and with the oral traditions of the Talmud and

³ The English edition is Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus* (Doubleday, New York 1993).

Mishnah [...] he listens, he compares and he speaks with Jesus himself» (103). Neusner is deeply disturbed by the heart of the Sermon of the Mount: «the centrality of Jesus' 'I' in his message, which gives everything a new direction [...] perfection, the state of being holy as God is holy, as demanded by the Torah, now consists in following Jesus» (105).

Thus Benedict XVI points out that «the issue that is really at the heart of the debate is thus finally laid bare. Jesus understands himself as the Torah-as the Word of God in person» (110). He «reflects the internal structure of the Torah itself» (126). «Neusner thus concludes: 'I now realize, only God can demand of me what Jesus is asking'» (115). Thus in the end, Neusner «decides not to follow Jesus. He remains - as he himself puts it - with the 'eternal Israel'» (104)⁴. Benedict XVI's statement in *Deus Caritas Est* 1 seem to summarize this point clearly: «Christian faith has retained the core of Israel's faith, while at the same time giving it new breath and depth»!

Jesus is the Temple in Person

Benedict XVI «points out that the Sermon on the Mount also leads us to see Jesus as the new temple. In fact Neusner does not become Jesus' disciple precisely because he is scandalized at Jesus' teaching assuming that he and the disciples now «stand in the place of the priests in the Temple; the holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples; the holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples» (108). Benedict XVI continues to explain that «John sees the risen Lord, his body, as the new temple, which is awaited not just by the Old Testament, but by all peoples (cf. *Jn.2:21*)» (247). In fact John 19: 34 «shows the body of Jesus to be the real Temple [...] and will remain, the source of life for all ages» (247). «The issue of Jesus' claim to be Temple and Torah in person also has implications for the question of Israel-the issue of the living

⁴ Here it is clear that Benedict XVI follows the position presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2001) especially II, C.1-3.

community of the people in whom God's word is actualized» (111). «It is adherence to Jesus himself, to his Torah that forms the new family» (115).

CONTENT

Jesus of Nazareth is divided into ten chapters preceded by a Foreword and Introduction. In the *Foreword* Benedict XVI lays down the methodology he uses, the presuppositions in this book as well as explains the reasons in writing the book. The *Introduction* leads the reader to understand through canonical exegesis that «it is in Jesus that the promise of a new prophet is fulfilled» (6). In this way Benedict XVI presents the reader the hermeneutical key in understanding his book.

Who is Jesus?

In *Chapter One* Benedict XVI underlines that the events surrounding *the Baptism of Jesus* are important Christological keys because they «enable us to ascertain how Jesus is connected with 'Moses and the prophets'» and «enable us to recognize the intrinsic unity of the trajectory stretching from the first moment of his life to the Cross and the resurrection» (24). In *Chapter Two* he shows that through the temptation in the desert Jesus offers «evidence for his claims» in order to «remove all ambiguity and every contradiction, so as to make it indisputably clear for everyone who and what he is or is not» (30).

Jesus, the Christ

Jumping to *Chapter Four* we arrive to what could rightly be considered the core of this book: *the Sermon on the Mount* reveals the identity of Jesus as the new Moses (122), the living Torah (68) and the new Temple in person (111). Jumping again to *Chapter Eight* we read Benedict XVI going at great length to show that «the connection between Jesus and Moses appears most prominently» (235) in John. Thus he responds to Bultmann and modern critical scholarship who claim that the Gospel of John does not «constitute a reliable source

of knowledge of the historical Jesus» (219). He then analyzes rather lengthily the Johanine images of water, vine and wine, bread, the shepherd which «not only shows us who Jesus was, but is, who can say 'I am' in the present tense» (235).

Following Jesus

Chapter Five focuses on the Our Father with a catechesis on «what prayer really is» (130) in order «to form our being, to train us in the inner attitude of Jesus» (132). In *Chapter Six* Benedict XVI explains that in order to «become witnesses of his mystery» the Disciples needed to «be able to recognize his oneness with the Father» (172) because their call «emerges from the Son's dialogue with the Father and is anchored there» (170).

Imitating Jesus

In *Chapter Three* Benedict XVI explains that «the core content of the Gospel is this: the Kingdom of God is at hand [...] and an answer to this gift is demanded of man: conversion and faith» (47). This is closely connected with *Chapter Seven* where Benedict XVI uses the parables of the *Good Samaritan*, the *Prodigal Son* and the *Rich Man and Lazarus* from Luke to point out «the heart of Jesus' preaching» (183), and «the essence of Jesus' message» (194) in order to invite «us to believe and follow him, God's great sign» (217).

The Faith of the Disciples

In *Chapter Nine* Benedict XVI explains Peter's confession and the transfiguration to show that the disciples need to «learn ever anew to 'listen to him'» (316) who «is the wellspring of their faith» (291) so that they may be «slowly initiated into the full depth of the mystery of Jesus» (318).

The Titles of Jesus

This leads to *Chapter Ten* where Benedict XVI finally analyzes «the effort to express the mystery of Jesus in titles that explained his mission, indeed his essence » (319) and «in which Jesus at once conceals and reveals the mystery of his person» (354). Obviously there is no conclusion in this book. This will be in Part II which, hopefully, will be published soon.

IMPORTANT POINTS

At a closer look there are some important points that would be helpful to consider briefly in order to better appreciate the value of this book.

Towards Intellectual Maturity

At the outset it is important to point out that by writing a long and rationally argued book (of which we have only the first part), Benedict XVI is educating the faithful out of the infantilism of easy answers. In presenting his arguments in a rational manner as well as making it open to discussion, he takes a further step toward guiding the faithful to intellectual maturity. A dimension certainly considered so important by him in order to keep our faith in our postmodern society where we constantly experience «a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires»⁵!

Inspiration

Benedict XVI points out that a biblical author «speaks in a living community and thus in a living historical movement, which he does not create and which is not created by the collectivity either, but in which a greater guiding power is at work» (19). Since inspiration is a communal matter, then each biblical author is sustained by the entire history of the People of God, and the labor of composition advances by a process of constant rereading of the traditions.

Unity of Scriptures

Through canonical exegesis Benedict XVI guides the reader to «read the Bible, and especially the Gospels, as an overall unity expressing an intrinsically coherent message, notwithstanding their multiple historical layers» (191). He does this by taking a scene from the Bible, then explains that scene in the light of the entire Bible.

⁵ J. Ratzinger, Homily Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*, April 18, 2005 [accessed Feb 10, 2008] http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

Through this «Christological hermeneutics» he leads the reader to see «Jesus Christ as the key to the whole and learns from him how to understand the Bible as unity» (xix).

Benedict XVI also quotes other authors to show that he draws from modern biblical scholarship to better understand the historical context of the scene. He then shows how the Fathers of the Church interpreted the same scene. He then describes how it had been viewed in Judaism and then gives the reader the meaning of this event for us today. Along the way he answers questions of modern people so that they may have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Through this process he seems to remind that theologians must not be excessively bound by the constraints of exegesis. They have access to Christ through the Church's life and doctrine and must not hesitate to recognize that this same Christ is speaking in Scripture.

Benedict XVI clearly insists on a point close to his heart as a theologian: the reciprocity of faith and reason, each one with its own right and competence, without confusion nor ill will towards the other. In this light he refuses to place faith and history as opposites. He clearly expresses his conviction that the Jesus of the Gospels is a historical figure and that the faith of the Church cannot but have a historical basis. Thus he insists that Christological hermeneutics «presupposes a prior act of faith. It cannot be the conclusion of a purely historical method. But this act of faith is based upon reason – historical reason – and so makes it possible to see the internal unity of scriptures». Through this mutual collaboration «it enables us to understand anew the individual elements that has shaped it, without robbing them of their historical originality» (xix).

Openness to Modern Biblical Scholarship

Benedict XVI quotes other authors not necessarily in agreement with the Catholic Church not only as a matter of intellectual honesty but also in order to point out their contribution to better understanding the person and the message of Jesus Christ. By quoting even authors not in full agreement with the Catholic Church he seems to subtly point out that he is open to their contribution in understanding the Gospels. For example he cites Vladimir Soloviev's 'Antichrist' where he narrates that «the Antichrist receives a honorary doctorate of Tübingen and is a great

Scripture scholar. Soloviev's portrayal of the Antichrist forcefully expresses his skepticism regarding a certain type of scholarly exegesis current at the time» (35). He writes that «Rabbi Neusner rightly sees this [4th] commandment as anchoring the heart of a social order, the cohesion of the eternal Israel» (113). He recognizes that «in itself Jülicher's basic idea of the distinction between parable and allegory is correct [...] yet gradually the limitations of his theory began to emerge» (185). He acknowledges that «in this sense, we have to grant that Dodd was basically right. Yes Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is 'eschatological', if you will, but eschatological in the sense that the Kingdom of God is 'realized' in his coming» (188). He stresses that Helmut Kuhn «offers an exposition of this parable [i.e. the Good Samaritan] that, while certainly going beyond the literal sense of the text, nonetheless succeeds in conveying its radical message» (198).

Benedict XVI, however, does not hesitate to indicate what he perceives to be incorrect «because it enables us the glimpse the limits of liberal exegesis» (186). He, thus, insists that Adolf von Harnak [1851-1930] was mistaken when he «claimed that Jesus' message was about the Son, and that Christology therefore has no place in it» (7). He also points out that von Harnak wrongly held that «Jesus' message was strictly individualistic» (51). Regarding the supposed influence of Gnosticism on the Gospel of John he categorically insists that «on this decisive point Bultmann is wrong» (220). He also points out that Ulrich Wilckens «has recently presented new arguments for the thesis that the 'beloved disciple' should be thought of not a historical figure, but as a symbol for a basic structure of the faith [...] however correct this may be as a structural claim, it remains insufficient» (223). He finds it «surprising that Martin Hengel, from whom we have learned so much about the historical rooting of the Gospel in the priestly aristocracy of Jerusalem-and in the real context of Jesus' life-nonetheless offers an astonishingly negative or (to put it more gently) extremely cautious judgment of the historical character of the text» (227-228).

Jesus Christ Image of the Father

Benedict XVI's canonical exegesis might seem to be a monotonous insistence on the reality of God. But this should be

seen in the light of his deep conviction that «the issue is the primacy of God. This issue is acknowledging that he is a reality, that he is the reality without which nothing else can be good» (33-34). For Benedict XVI this is of decisive importance because he believes that «our image of God» decides «the picture we form of Christ: [...] the Son of the living God» (36). In this light one can understand Benedict XVI's affirmation that «Jesus is only able to speak of the Father the way he does because he is the Son, because of his filial communion with the Father. The Christological dimension—in other words, the mystery of the Son as revealer of the Father—is present in everything Jesus says and does» (7). From this flows the Christology presented in this book which have all been explained above in detail: Jesus Christ, Son of the living God is the new Moses, the new Torah and the Temple in Person!

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In his latest encyclical Benedict XVI stresses that «the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known. It is one that makes things happen and is life changing» (*Spe Salvi* 2). Thus the search and discovery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God challenges every believer. It is in this light that he always kept an eye on the world of today by sprinkling *Jesus of Nazareth* with a good doze of pastoral reflections. For example he warns that «faith and religions are now directed towards political goals. Religion matters only in as insofar as it can serve the objective» (54). He underlines that «knowing now from experience how brutally totalitarian regimes have trampled upon human beings and despised, enslaved, and stuck down the weak, we have also gained a new appreciation of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness» (98).

He also laments that «the aid offered by the West to developing countries has been purely technically and materially based, and not only has left God out of the picture, but has driven men away from God» (33). On the other hand he invites an honest examination of conscience every time «we see how the peoples of Africa, lying robbed and plundered, matter to us. Then we see how deeply we are neighbors; that our lifestyle, the history in which we are involved, has plundered them and continues to do so» (198).

This is also the case for «the victims of drugs, of human trafficking, of sex tourism, inwardly devastated people who sit empty in the midst of material abundance. All this is of concern to us, it calls us to have the eye and the heart of a neighbor, and the courage to love our neighbor too» (199). These reflections ultimately leads us back to the centrality of God because, as he would later write in his second encyclical, «a world without God is a world without hope (cf. *Eph* 2, 12) [...] God is justice and creates justice. This is our consolation and our hope» (*Spe Salvi* 41).

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

It would be presumptuous to synthesize in a short article the library of theological works of Joseph Ratzinger. However, a brief glance at some important points of his theology as expressed in some of his works would be helpful in order to better understand the theology behind *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Joseph Ratzinger once explained that «what I really have at heart is keeping this precious treasure, the faith, with its power to enlighten, from being lost»⁶. He further explained his theological method in this pursuit. In doing so he also explained clearly his style and methodology in writing *Jesus of Nazareth*:

«I have never tried to create a system of my own, an individual theology. What is specific if you want to call it that, is that I simply want to think in communion with the faith of the Church, and that means above all to think in communion with the great thinkers of the faith. The aim is not an isolated theology that I draw out of myself but one that opens as widely as possible into the common intellectual pathway of the faith. For this reason exegesis was always very important. I couldn't imagine a purely philosophical theology. The point of departure is first of all the word. That we believe the word of God, that we really try to get to know and understand it, and then, as I said, to think it together with the

⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth. Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium. An Interview with Peter Seewald* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco 1997) 113.

great masters of the faith. This gives my theology a somewhat biblical character and also bears the stamp of the Fathers, especially Augustine. But it goes without saying that I try not to stop in the ancient Church but to hold fast to the great high points of thought and at the same time to bring contemporary thought into discussion»⁷.

Widen the Concept of Reason

As a «decided Augustinian»⁸ Joseph Ratzinger often quoted Augustine's *Credo ut Intelligam* (*Epistula* 120, 1, 2; *Sermo* 43, 9) to underline the need for faith and theology to be open to reason. He, consequently, never missed any chance to criticize the intellectual attitude of the modern person: «Against the Scholastic equation *verum est ens* (being is truth) he advances his own formula, *verum quia factum*. That is to say, all that we can truly know is what we have made ourselves. It seems to me that this formula denotes the real end of the old metaphysics and the beginning of the specifically modern attitude of mind»⁹. Thus modern mind rejects the metaphysical approach. Consequently «the true is not that which simply is true, for truth is not simply that which is; it is true for a time because it is part of the becoming of truth, which *is* by becoming. For Ratzinger, however, truth is always something that outlasts the ages, independently of our limited capacity to know»¹⁰.

It is no wonder then that his constant concern since his first lecture in 1959 has always been to widen the concept of reason so that it may be capable of exploring other aspects of reality which go beyond solely empirical dimensions in order to bear a fruitful and complimentary relationship of faith and reason. Ratzinger insistently pointed out the intrinsic reasonableness of Christianity: «*Logos*

⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 66.

⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 33.

⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco 2004) 59.

¹⁰ M. H. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger. Life in the Church and Living Theology* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco 2007), 512.

signifies reason, meaning or even 'word' - a meaning, therefore, that is relationship, that is creative. The God who is *logos* guarantees the intelligibility of the World, the intelligibility of our existence, the aptitude of reason to know God and the reasonableness of God, even though his understanding infinitely surpasses ours and to us appears to be darkness». Thus «reason can speak about God, it must speak about God, or else it cuts itself short»¹¹. «Through Logos-oriented faith, *ratio* itself can be restored to health, since one important function of faith, according to Ratzinger, is that it offers healing for the reason as reason, not to empower it or to remain outside it, but in fact to bring it to itself»¹². Benedict XVI would eventually summarize these thoughts: «Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfill their nature and their mission» (*Spe Salvi* 23).

Ratzinger had long insisted that «when reason as such becomes suspect, then faith itself becomes falsified. It becomes a sort of a party ideology that no longer has anything to do with turning confidently to God as the primordial ground of our life and reason»¹³. He sternly warned that the fundamental consequence of this way of thinking into the centre and nucleus of the Christian faith «is the substantial rejection of the identification of one historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, with the reality of God himself, of the living God»¹⁴. It is no surprise then that in *Jesus of Nazareth* Benedict XVI strives to lead the readers' to grow in their faith in Jesus Christ as well as guides them to intellectual growth.

The Centrality of God

Joseph Ratzinger built his theological reflection on the centrality of God: «I would say that I study the theme of the Church

¹¹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 26.

¹² M. H. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, 514.

¹³ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 137.

¹⁴ *Intervento del Cardinale Prefetto Joseph Ratzinger in Occasione Della Presentazione della Dichiarazione 'Dominus Iesus' alla Sala Stampa della Santa Sede* in http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000905_dominus-iesus-ratzinger_it.html [accessed: January 20, 2008] The English translation is mine.

with the intention of opening a vista unto God. And in this sense God is the real central theme of my endeavors»¹⁵. Our faith in Jesus is rooted in his intimate relationship with the Father. Deprived of this divine sonship «Jesus appears in this perspective only as a historical leading figure without mediating any grace»¹⁶. Thus Ratzinger warned that «if the figure of Jesus [...] is separated from his Godhead, then it becomes self contradictory. All that is left are shreds that leave us perplexed or else become excuses for self-affirmation»¹⁷. That is why Benedict XVI vigorously insists in *Jesus of Nazareth* that «God is the issue» (29). Giving him the primacy today means «acknowledging that he is a reality, that he is the reality without which nothing else can be good» (33-34).

It is in this light that he severely criticized Western society for isolating itself from God and thus become incapable of seeing the value and sense of life. In fact «its nature is the flight from God, the wish to be alone with oneself and one's finiteness and not to be disturbed by the presence of God»¹⁸. Tragically «when God is not there, the world becomes desolate and everything becomes boring, and everything is completely unsatisfactory. It is easy to see today how a world empty of God is also increasingly consuming itself, how it has become a wholly joyless world»¹⁹. «In Ratzinger's view everything ultimately depends on the question about God: faith is faith in God or else there is no faith. Ultimately it can be traced back to the simple belief in God, the living God, from which all the rest follows»²⁰. It is no surprise then that Benedict XVI warned in *Jesus of Nazareth* that the greatest temptation for western society «is the act of putting God aside because we perceive him as secondary, if

¹⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 66.

¹⁶ M.H. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, 263.

¹⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 22.

¹⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Look to Christ. Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love* (St. Paul Publication: Middlegreen 1991) 71.

¹⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 27.

²⁰ M.H. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger*, 265.

not actually superfluous and annoying, in comparison with all the apparently far more urgent matters that fill our lives» (28)!

Faith in Christ

«With the resurrection the new Temple will begin: the living body of Jesus Christ, which will now stand in the sight of God and be the place of all worship»²¹. Thus for Joseph Ratzinger faith is above all founded on Christ because the chain of trust which opens and liberates us from darkness needs one who can see through our darkness, to whom one can trust and who, reciprocally, inspires trust. Jesus is one who is truly God and truly man therefore our faith is connected to Christ's vision. Thus in this sense our faith in Christ truly sets us free²².

Joseph Ratzinger constantly insisted that faith is a personal trust in Jesus. It is communicating with him who leads us to be truly open and available to all. When we are in communion with Jesus we may acquire his same way of seeing and being because we in we are truly in communion with God and with others. Consequently one cannot believe in Christ alone. One believes with others, who are in communion with Christ, and with whom Christ wishes to be in communion. Consequently I «cannot build my personal faith in a private dialogue with Jesus. Faith lives in this 'we', or else it is not alive»²³ thus, the mediation of other people becomes truly personal, in such a way that it leads one to a personal relationship with God himself. Thus God reveals himself through one's openness towards others because God does not reveal himself to an isolated 'I'²⁴.

In this light one understands Benedict XVI insistence in *Jesus of Nazareth* that when we pray the *Our Father* «it requires that we step out of the closed circle of our 'I'. It requires that we surrender

²¹ J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco 2000) 43.

²² Cf. J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella Crisi delle Culture* (Cantagalli: Siena 2005) 138-139.

²³ J. Ratzinger, *Look to Christ*, 38.

²⁴ J. Ratzinger, *La Mia Vita* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo 1997) 64.

ourselves to communion with the other children of God [...] it requires that we accept the other, the others-that we open our ear and heart to them» (141). By pointing out the significance of one's relation with Christ he avoids isolating Jesus as a remote kingly figure to be adored and admired. This, indeed, is indispensable for a meaningful Christology today.

Living Faith

For Joseph Ratzinger faith can «never be expressed in words alone. It has to be a way of living, of lived identification, a merging with a way of thinking and understanding. The two things enrich each other»²⁵. He confessed that even as a young professor «for my courses I didn't just cobble something together from the textbooks, but I tried, in the style of St. Augustine, to place much of the material possible in clear relationship to the present and to our struggles»²⁶. In his first encyclical Benedict XVI would insist that «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). It is no surprise then that *Jesus of Nazareth* is heavily interspersed with pastoral reflections and critique of our present society.

Scriptures

In *Jesus of Nazareth* Benedict XVI shows the importance of Scriptures in every theological reflection and preaching. In fact Joseph Ratzinger insisted that the primary criterion in preaching is the Sacred Scriptures, strictly united in the Old and New Testaments²⁷. Crucial to this understanding is *Dei Verbum* 7 which states that «this sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim

²⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 19.

²⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 64.

²⁷ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Dogma e Predicazione. Biblioteca di Teologia Contemporanea* (Quereniana: Brescia 1974) 23-36.

Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2)»

This conciliar document reveals a new understanding of Tradition, of the theological problem of the historical-critical method as well as of the new appreciation of the importance of Sacred Scriptures in theology²⁸. Historically the young theologian Joseph Ratzinger had been deeply involved in the debates during the formulation of *Dei Verbum* in his capacity as *peritus* in the Second Vatican Council.

Joseph Ratzinger had long criticized von Harnack for his attempt to remove Jesus from his personal relationship with the Father and proposed to move «away from Dogma onward to love»²⁹ since for him «the message about the Father-God, about the love of all men that oversteps and surmounts the boundaries of faith» and has been «swallowed up in a christological dogmatism»³⁰. Ratzinger responded that «for the one who recognizes the Christ in Jesus» has «combined both in one and made their mutual separation unthinkable». «The hypen between Jesus and Christ, the inseparability of person and work, the identity of one man with the act of sacrifice – these also signify the hypen between love and faith [...] for to believe in Christ so understood means simply to make love the content of faith, so that from this angle one can perfectly well say, love is faith»³¹.

Joseph Ratzinger first quoted Vladimir Soloviev's story of the Antichrist in Tübingen in his *Erasmus Lecture* in 1988³². In that

²⁸ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Constitutio Dogmatica de Divina Rivelazione in Lexikon für Theologie. Das Zweite Vaticanische Konzil. Konstitutionem, Dekrete und Erklärungen. Latinish und Deutsch. Kommentare Teil II* (Herder: Freiburg 1967) 524-525.

²⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 199.

³⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 208.

³¹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 208.

³² J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundation and Approaches of Exegesis Today in This World: A Journal of Religion and Public Life* 22 (1988) 1-19.

lecture he proposed to biblical scholars to discover the harmony between historical research and the theology of Scriptural texts. He insisted that the Church does not certainly renounce to *Redaktionsgesichte* for when used prudently it is helpful in knowing the words and deeds of Jesus. It's interpretation, however, is always an object of faith! By quoting it in *Jesus of Nazareth* Benedict XVI reiterates his long standing preoccupation in what appears to be the destruction of sacred history understood as a sequence of unrelated events, read without faith in the guidance of God who has a plan in history as shown in the one Bible made up of Old and New Testaments. Benedict XVI has practically let himself be guided by a document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission: «The New Testament [is] thoroughly imbued as it is with the Old Testament [...] What becomes clear is that Scripture reveals the meaning of events and that events reveal the meaning of Scripture, that is, they require that certain aspects of the received interpretation be set aside and a new interpretation adopted»³³.

In *Jesus of Nazareth* Benedict XVI laments the fact that the different 'Quests' for the historical Jesus has led to the dissolution of the concrete identity of Jesus and that, perhaps unknowingly, modern exegesis has painted the picture of 'the Jesus I want.' Thus one appreciates Benedict XVI's defense of the historicity of the Gospels and the validity of Nicea and Chalcedon in *Jesus of Nazareth*. This too had long been his preoccupation:

«These dogmas (of Nicea and Chalcedon) were intended to express nothing else than this identity of service and being, in which the whole content of prayer-relationship 'Abba-Son' comes to light [...] these declarations were not developed out of mythological notions of origin but out of the Johanine testimony, which for its part simply represents the prolongation of Jesus' converse with the Father and Jesus' existence for men to the point of sacrificing himself on the Cross»³⁴.

³³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 3.A.2.

³⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 227.

CONCLUSION

Once cannot but be pleasantly surprised to discover that *Jesus of Nazareth* is neither as difficult nor as heavy to read as one might have previously imagined. It actually helps one to understand better the mystery of Jesus as well as appreciate the evident profound faith of the author. At the same time the author is not limited to intellectual presentation. That is why Benedict XVI reminds the readers the way of loving God and neighbor: «Now we realize that we are all in need of the gift of God's redeeming love ourselves, so that we too can be 'lovers' in our turn. Now we realize that we are always need God, who makes himself our neighbor so that we can become neighbors» (201).

Although the book is spiritually uplifting it is difficult to classify as a treatise either of dogma, spirituality, or pastoral. In fact anyone who hopes to discover 'new' theological insights from the theologian Pope in reading *Jesus of Nazareth* is bound to be disappointed. Benedict XVI admits that the book has «undergone a long gestation» (xxiv). By trying to quote some works of Joseph Ratzinger I wanted to point out precisely that what Benedict XVI says in *Jesus of Nazareth* had indeed «undergone a long gestation» because they had been previously expounded at great length by Joseph Ratzinger either in one of his books or lectures or as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These are also quite evident in his pontifical magisterium. As «a personal expression of my personal search 'for the face of the Lord'» (xxiii) *Jesus of Nazareth* brings no 'theological novelty'. However, it could be rightly considered the first part of Benedict XVI's spiritual testament - after long years of theological investigation and reflection, which expresses his deep and profound faith in Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God!

ROLE OF THE “CHURCH AT PRAYER” IN CHRISTIAN HOPE: A Re-reading of “Spe Salvi” From the Point of View of a Liturgist

Sr Ma. Cecilia Payawal PDDM SThL

INTRODUCTION

April 13, 2006 is a day to remember. I was in an airport in France when I received a text message from a priest-friend: “*Habemus Papam: Joseph Ratzinger.*” I was then on my way back home to the Philippines after five years and seven months in Spain. I was surprised and thought that he was joking. I texted back: “Is it true?” He answered saying how distrustful I was despite knowing him for almost three years. My doubt vanished when a man in his early thirty’s approached me and asked: “Sister, do you think Ratzinger can be a good Pope?” I didn’t know Ratzinger *up close and personal* then, so I said: “I hope so. Let us pray for him.”

In my Theology course, Joseph Ratzinger had not been among authors I read enough. I just heard about him: that he was a “conservative” and “dogmatic” person. I have to accept that I did not know him well. However, I heard that many did not like some of his points of view. The same priest-friend explained to me that Ratzinger was really a liberation theologian. It was only because of his office in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that he needed to be “conservative” on some proclamations on the faith of the Church. That moved me to read more of his writings.

His second encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* (On Christian Hope) came out on 30 November 2007. As I read it, I discovered little by little that he has much wisdom to share with the People of God, and that it was providential to have him as the leader of the Catholic Church. This wisdom I would try to share through a re-reading of *Spe Salvi* from the point of view of a liturgist.

A. HOPE: A DEFINITION

What is HOPE for Ratzinger? He considers *hope as equivalent to faith* (n. 2). And faith for him "is the *substance* of things hoped for; it is the proof of things unseen" (n.7). He explains:

Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: **it gives us something**. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a "proof" of the things that are still unseen. **Faith draws the future into the present**, so that it is no longer simply a "not yet". The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future (n. 7). [Emphasis mine]

Through faith, what we hope for is made present, though it might not be fully or totally present. There is a **foretaste of what is being hoped for**. This reminds me of our liturgical celebration: when we celebrate liturgy, we have a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy to which we will participate at the end of time (*Sac. Concilium*, 8). We are supposed to experience the "glory" or "presence" of the Trinitarian God in the here-and-now, as it is to be experienced in the "fullness of time".

B. SOURCE OR REASON OF HOPE

What is the SOURCE or REASON of hope? What moves us to hope? Ratzinger quotes from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: "Remember that, in former times, you had no part in Christ and were excluded from the community. You were strangers to the covenant and its promise; you were without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). He emphasizes that before their **encounter** with Christ, people were without hope (n. 2). Hence, the source or reason of hope is the **encounter** with Jesus Christ, the human face of God for Christians.

Ratzinger explains that this encounter with God who in Christ has shown us his face and opened his heart **should not be only “informative” but “performative”**. This means that **it has to change our lives**, so that we may know that we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses (n. 4). The African saint, Josephine Bakhita, is one of those whose encounter with the Lord has led to a transformation of life (nn. 3-4). She understood through the events in her life what Paul meant when he reminded the Ephesians that previously they were without hope and without God in the world – without hope – *because* without God (n. 3).

Isn't this one of the challenges of liturgical celebration? Pastoral liturgy emphasizes *participation* (SC 14, 21 and 48). However, there will be no full, conscious and intelligent participation when there is no “encounter” with God in the liturgy. My professor in Pastoral Liturgy at the *Instituto Superior de Liturgia de Barcelona* used to repeat that in liturgy, there is the “before”, “during” and “after”. The “before” involves the preparation done for the celebration of the liturgical rite, the “during” is the celebration itself, and the “after” is the living out of what is celebrated. The celebration is in vain, worthless, if it is not put into life. **The celebration continues in life.** We may even say that our whole life is liturgy. It is not limited to the rite, or to the preparation done before the rite. Only when liturgy is celebrated in life can it be considered “pastoral”. “Pastoral” means **with full, conscious, active and intelligent participation**. In other words, **the experience of God, the encounter with God during liturgical celebration, which supposedly has to bring hope to the assembly, should lead to a fuller participation in the celebration of such hope in life and in flesh.**

C. OBJECT OF HOPE

What is the OBJECT of hope? As Christians, what should we hope for? Ratzinger specifies this object in reference to the baptismal rite. He says that parents expect (hope) more for the one to be baptized: they expect that faith, which includes the corporeal nature of the Church and the sacraments, will give life to their child –**eternal life** (n. 10).

However, **eternal life** can be something abstract or difficult to understand. It may be understood as the life hereafter, oftentimes referred to as *heaven*. Ratzinger says that eternal life is like the **supreme moment of satisfaction**, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality (n. 12). He explains:

It would be like plunging into the ocean of **infinite love**, a moment in which time – the before and after – no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is **life in the full sense**, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply **overwhelmed with joy**. This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John's Gospel: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (16:22). **We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect** (n. 12). [Emphasis mine]

Eternal life, therefore, is comprised of the following elements:

1. overwhelming joy
2. supreme moment of satisfaction
3. fullness of life
4. infinite love

Eternal life is not limited to the life hereafter, when death comes. It can be present and experienced in the here and now, in the life that we live at present. Eternal life exists when there is fullness of life, infinite love, overwhelming joy and supreme moment of satisfaction.

For Ratzinger **hope is equivalent to faith** and **eternal life is equivalent to salvation or redemption**. He declares: "When someone has the experience of a great love in his life this is a moment of *redemption* which gives a new meaning in his life" (n. 26). However, he accepts that human love remains fragile because it can be destroyed by death. Thus **salvation as love refers to the unconditional love of God in the person of Jesus Christ**. It is because of Christ's absolute love that human being is redeemed.

Therefore, it is **through the experience of the infinite love of Christ that a human being can experience eternal life, that salvation can happen even in the here and now, in the present world.**

Reality bites. Harsh realities might reveal that salvation, eternal life as object of hope, is hardly happening in the world. One may even ask: "Is it reasonable to hope in the midst of this hopeless and helpless world?" Some of the realities are: poverty, graft and corruption, broken families, violence, unequal distribution of wealth, injustice, oppression and abuse. How can one "hope against hope"? How can a suffering person say that "salvation" as "redemption through the experience of infinite and unconditional love" is present in the here and now? Can somebody "in pain still have reason to hope for "eternal life" as joy, love and fullness of life? Certainly, this is not easily done! On the other hand, Ratzinger proposes a MEANS to keep on hoping even in the midst of suffering. This consists of PRAYER: PERSONAL AND ECCLESIAL PRAYER (LITURGY).

D. PRAYER AS SCHOOL OF HOPE

Ratzinger writes that PRAYER IS A SCHOOL OF HOPE (n. 33). We may be hoping for something, but this something might not be the true **object of hope** for a Christian. Thus there is a need for purification. Ratzinger notes that **in praying properly, one undergoes a process of inner purification which leads to the opening up to God, and to our fellow human beings as well** (n. 33). Prayer leads to hope that follows the example of Christ. Ratzinger affirms:

Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well.

It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the "perverse end". "It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God. Only in this way does it continue to be truly human hope (n. 34).

[Emphasis mine]

To achieve this hope, one has to learn how to pray personally and with the Church. Ratzinger says that prayer has to be very

personal, an encounter between the intimate self and God, the living God. However, it has to be "constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by **liturgical prayer**, in which the Lord teaches us again and again how to pray properly" (n. 34). Personal and public (ecclesial) prayer should be intermingled. Through this, we can undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings. Consequently, **we become capable of the great hope, and thus we become ministers of hope for others** (n. 34).

PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

Many things are easier said than done. Certainly it is not easy to hope for a better situation, or a better world, when all that we can see is suffering and pain. Tears could become clouds that hinder us to see that the sun is still there, that it will rise at the proper time. Ratzinger challenges us not only to **PRAY** but also to **ACT**. He says: "To suffer with the other and for others, to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are the fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself" (n. 39).

I see this "suffering with the other" as the living out of what we celebrate in the liturgy. It refers to the challenge of Saint Paul to become the **BODY OF CHRIST** (1 Cor 12:27). Every time we celebrate the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, we are challenged to become the bread that we eat: "taken, blessed, broken and given". As the priest breaks the bread, we see Christ who was broken and shared. As we receive this bread, we are called to form one bread, **ONE BODY OF CHRIST**, living in joy and in pain with the other members of the body, "suffering with and for" the other parts of the one bread, loving and caring especially for the needy members of the one body, the Church.

In this sense, the proposal of Ratzinger to resort to prayer as a means to attain hope, to purify our hopes, to make our hope really Christian, is very much valid. I wish to add that this would only materialize when our prayer is not only personal but ecclesial, when

our prayer is a prayer with the Church and for the Church, when liturgy becomes a celebration that happens not only “during” the rite but is “incarnated in life “after”.

Moreover, hope requires a DISPOSITION. We may be praying, and trying to act, but we do not receive nor see what we are hoping for. Ratzinger reminds us that we have to be PATIENT. We have to learn how to WAIT. He quotes from the letter to the Hebrews (10:36): “Knowing how to wait, while patiently enduring trials, is necessary for the believer to be able to receive what is promised” (n. 9).

Patience while waiting is indeed necessary to attain what we are hoping for. Even relationship like friendship, family or spousal relationship, requires much patience and waiting. If love is a manifestation of salvation as an object of hope, one has to learn how to wait for the other in order to grow and mature in the relationship. One has to be patient to accept the other as he/she is, and not to insist on what he/she wants. If not, such relationship will not grow or mature. The fullness of life, the overwhelming joy and infinite love as manifestations of “eternal life” in the here and now, as object of hope, “will never be attained without the proper disposition of “patience and waiting”. My mother used to tell us: “*Ang mapagpasensya ay napupuno ng grasya*”. (The one who is patient is full of grace.) I believe in the wisdom of her words. Oftentimes, when things are not fine in my life, I keep on praying while doing what I can do at the moment. With much patience, despite the difficulty in waiting, I obtain what I hope for. That, I believe, is a manifestation of God’s grace which accompanies those who keep on believing, no matter what.

After this reflection on *Spe Salvi*, I wish to ask again: “Why do we hope? What moves us to hope? Is there a reason to still hope in the midst of a seemingly hopeless and helpless world?” I am reminded of a young man I met in Barcelona. His friend called me up and told me that he wanted to commit suicide. I rushed to his house and he cried when he saw me. He told me: “Sister, I could not bear anymore what is happening in my life. I cannot handle my problems.” This man was experiencing his **hope shattered**. Problems

and suffering darkened his vision of God. I could only tell him: "Keep on believing. It is not yet the end of the world. You can! There is still hope!"

Why should we hope even in the midst of a hopeless situation? Ratzinger says: "This great home can only be God" (n. 31) Hope is a gift freely and fully given by God to all. "I believe that what has to be done is to have another disposition of learning how to "LET GO AND LET GOD". One might say that he/she hopes in God, that he/she believes in God, yet one might insist that God give what he/she wants God. But doesn't God know what is truly good for us?

CONCLUSION

I end with what I believe is Ratzinger's synthesis of Christian Hope:

God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: **a life that is "truly" life** (n. 31) [Emphasis mine]

Christian hope is possible only with prayer, especially with the "Church at prayer". In prayer, encounter with God who is the foundation of hope and the source of all hope, is made possible. Ecclesial prayer – the liturgy – is a means to attain Christian hope. – Through the liturgy, especially through the Eucharist, we are called not only to "give thanks" but also to become bread like Christ, "taken, blessed, broken and shared" for all.

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