

Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of the Word: The Dialogical Structure of His Thought

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BOSTON COLLEGE

JOSEPH RATZINGER'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD: THE DIALOGICAL STRUCTURE
OF HIS THOUGHT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AND MINISTRY

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BY

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Based on his role as a *peritus* at Vatican II in the shaping of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Ratzinger reflected back on the deliberations at the Council soon after its conclusion and indicated that the new development of understanding of Revelation was that Revelation is to be seen “basically as dialogue.” In his *Introduction to Christianity*, he would indicate that because of the experience of Jesus Christ, the Church comes to see that God is not only logos, but dia-logos. Throughout his theological and pastoral career, Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, consistently relies upon the framework of “dialogue” as the principle of coherence for how he attempts to articulate the one Christian mystery, whether he is speaking of Revelation, Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology or any other area of Christian theology. I will attempt in this presentation to trace some of the major sources of influence in Ratzinger's intellectual and theological formation that has resulted in his reliance upon this “dialogical structure of thought” that grounds his theological hermeneutic.

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Introduction

After two years of pastoral service in my first assignment as a priest on the Pine Ride Indian Reservation in South Dakota, I came back to Boston to begin a doctoral program in systematic theology. In speaking with my director, Khaled Anatolios, before talking about anything regarding my academic program, he asked me about my pastoral experience on the Pine Ridge. I described the familiar narrative of life and struggles on the reservation including the massive unemployment, breakdown of family structures, violence, alcoholism, etc. It seemed that none of the social, political or even religious institutions worked very well to address these needs. It also seemed that in that environment nothing I tried to do programatically as a pastor *worked* either. No new initiatives of mine bore any fruit. Nobody seemed too interested in new ways of being involved in the Church. However, what did *work*, I told him, on a regular basis, was the liturgy. No matter how broken down all the other institutions and activities seemed to be, for me, especially in my sensitivity as a new priest, it was palpable how “effective” the liturgy was. Even if ten or twelve people were there for a Sunday mass, or it was a funeral mass wherein only a handful of people might come for communion, somehow, by paying attention in a new way to the prayers being said, knowing a bit of the personal stories of the people in the congregation including much of the sorrow and pain in their histories as well as something of the hopes for something new in their lives- all of this made for a profound encounter that I had the privilege of standing in the middle of every day. I listened, in a sense, with new ears to what Christ was speaking to his people gathered around him in the Eucharist and I heard

with new ears the response and the plea of these same people. There was speaking and listening... silence. There was dialogue that was very fragile and on the surface, not appearing to achieve much. But I had a profound sense that this encounter- this dialogue- was the only thing that *worked* during my time on “the Rez.”

As I described this situation, Khaled said, “Well why don’t you write about that?” And so I have. With that pastoral and spiritual experience as a kind of catalyst for the research and writing I have taken up in the last couple of years, I came to settle on the figure of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, as a guide and an exemplar of a contemporary theologian who does theology, it seems to me, with a profound pastoral and spiritual sensibility. I had never read him before he was elected pope. After that, I would occasionally see one of his homilies or angelus addresses that he would give in ordinary pastoral settings. I was struck by the simultaneous simplicity and profundity of his words. It was captivating how he could so succinctly encapsulate the mystery of the encounter with Christ in such a concrete and simple, narrative manner. Again and again, he would reiterate that Christianity is not a set of ideas to believe or even less, moral principles or laws to follow. Rather, Christianity is about a person and specifically, the question of our own encounter with that person. He stresses repeatedly that God has spoken to humanity, ultimately and most perfectly, in the person of Jesus Christ.

The more I read of Ratzinger’s theology as well as his preaching, I gradually came to detect a very basic structure in his work. Whether he was speaking of the liturgical season of Advent, the mystery of Christ’s suffering on the Cross, the life of

any given saint or the need for justice and solidarity in a broken political and social structure, one way or another, I would always catch a glimpse of his method that described the transformation that happens by entering into a personal encounter, into dialogue. This is the way he articulates the whole of the Christian vision, it seems to me. And so I have attempted to trace this pattern, to describe this dialogical principle of coherence in various and diverging aspects of his thought.

Ratzinger sees God as the one who *speaks*. Humanity is best understood as those who listen to God's Word and then are able to respond. God and humanity are dialogue partners. But they are not equals, either. This is a dialogue that is necessarily asymmetrical. It matters who speaks the first word. For Ratzinger, God is always the one taking the initiative. And humanity is always in the posture of responsiveness. So for Ratzinger, all of reality is dialogical, but dialogical in an asymmetric manner. Indeed, even in the very essence of God there is dialogical communication and communion in the eternal Trinitarian relations. But here too, there is an asymmetry to this communication. The priority of speech always lies with the Father. Furthermore, not only is the *inner life* of the Trinity asymmetrically dialogical but this same God also communicates Himself in creation and in human history. This communication that unfolds throughout human history culminates in *speaking Himself* in the person of Jesus Christ. The basic structure of all reality, then, is dialogue. My aim in this dissertation is to show how this dialogical, communicative structure that is necessarily always unfolding, is the unique way that Joseph Ratzinger constructs his theology. As such, I argue, he represents a unique

contribution to the renewal of theology that is more personalistic and therefore more responsive to contemporary culture.

Before showing the way in which Ratzinger does theology in this dialogical manner, I will begin in the first chapter with a brief exposition of what I think are the most significant dimensions of his own theological formation that produced such a communicative, dialogical approach to theology. Having provided a synopsis of Ratzinger's intellectual formation and the early expression of his theological scope of concern, the subsequent chapters of this dissertation will attempt an exposition of how the "dialogical structure" of Ratzinger's thought, based on the eternal Logos of God communicated both in eternity and in human history, provides a framework for the whole of his theology. In chapter 2, I will focus on how this communication of the Eternal Logos pertains to his theology of revelation that he sees as necessarily involving the active reception of God's Word by God's people in history. In the third chapter, I will examine the Christology of Ratzinger that follows this same dialogical framework wherein God's speaking of the Word is not only the source of an intelligible creation but also becomes the center of human history when that Word becomes human. In the fourth chapter, I will give an exposition of Ratzinger's ecclesiology that flows directly from his Christology so that the Church becomes the privileged place to encounter the fullness of the Word in Jesus Christ. Special attention will be given to the role of the liturgy in Ratzinger's ecclesiology in this respect. Finally, in the fifth chapter I will describe the implications of this dialogical framework for a renewed eschatology and theology of creation that especially provides a basis for the theological virtue of hope that is of such concern

for Benedict in the current cultural and religious context. Throughout all these aspects of his theology, it will, I hope, become evident, how this dialogical structure of the Word of God being spoken, heard and responded to, provides a basis for a contemporary kind of “personalistic” theology that is narrative in its texture and provides an alternative to the abstraction characteristic of much of modern theology. In so doing, an exemplar can be found in Joseph Ratzinger, of a theologian who is able to communicate the content of the Catholic faith in a manner accessible not only to the minds, but also the hearts of his contemporary audience.

Chapter 1

The Theological Formation of Joseph Ratzinger

As he began his opening lecture of the last course he would ever teach, a class on the theology of Pope Benedict XVI, Avery Cardinal Dulles remarked, "The real leader of the seminar, under the Holy Spirit, will be Pope Benedict himself. By virtue of his intelligence, his learning, and the positions he has held, he is in my judgment the most important Catholic theologian of the day."¹ Benedict can perhaps be considered as such not only because of his role as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for nearly a quarter of a century and then as the elected successor of Peter, but because he has so clearly cultivated his theological project in the pattern called for in the Second Vatican Council in returning to the sources of Scripture² and the patristic tradition while being consciously open to translating the Gospel in a mode intelligible to the modern world, according to the signs of the times.³ Whether or not one might agree with Dulles' assessment, it is clear that in the landscape of Catholic theology at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, stands out as a major figure who has served as a catalyst toward encouraging an approach to theology that simultaneously involves a return *ad fontes* to biblical and patristic

¹ Class lecture notes, January 16, 2008. Thanks to Sister Ann Marie Kirmsie, OP, the long-time secretary of Cardinal Dulles at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York for this reference.

² Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northport, N.Y.: Dublin, Ireland: Costello; Dominican Publications, 1996), "Dei Verbum" #24.

³ Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). See especially Francis Martin's chapter, "Revelation and Its Transmission", 55ff. Martin sees *Dei Verbum* as taking its place in the "ecclesial continuity" along with the patristic tradition, of the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel.

sources and at the same time one that is able to speak the new language of personalism hungered for in contemporary culture.⁴

In this first part of the opening chapter I will outline the contours of Joseph Ratzinger's own intellectual and theological formation that contributed to the development of his "dialogical" approach to the theological task. Based largely on his own description of this formation from his memoirs,⁵ I will describe first his embracing of a new emphasis in Catholic theology in the middle of the twentieth century on placing biblical exegesis at the fore of systematic and dogmatic theological method. Second, I will describe the importance he came to place on the liturgy as a source for doing theology. Third, I will examine the influence of the patristic tradition on his thought. Finally I will indicate the links he discovered with contemporary philosophical personalism, especially through the thought of Martin Buber's "dialogical philosophy".

Brief Biography

Joseph Ratzinger was born and baptized on the same day, April 16th, 1927- Holy Saturday- at Marktl Am Inn in Germany. He studied philosophy and theology from 1946 to 1951 at the Higher School of Philosophy and Theology of Freising and at the University of Munich. He was ordained a priest on June 29th, 1951 and taught briefly at the Higher School of Freising. In 1953 he obtained his doctorate in theology with

⁴ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008). A consistent theme for O'Malley is the new "style" indicative of Vatican II that speaks to the hearts and minds of more contemporary people. This style includes a responsiveness to the reality of the "turn to the subject" in modern philosophy and theology.

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

a thesis entitled *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (*The People and House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church*).⁶ Four years later, under the direction of Gottlieb Söhngen, professor of fundamental theology, he wrote a second thesis, the *Habilitationsschrift* that made him eligible to teach in a German university. *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*,⁷ published in 1959, was translated into English in 1989 under the title, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*. After lecturing at Freising, he went on to teach at the universities in Bonn from 1959 to 1963, at Münster from 1963 to 1966 and at Tübingen from 1966 to 1969. In 1969, he assumed the chair of dogmatics and history of dogma at the University of Regensburg. For the duration of the Second Vatican Council, from 1962 to 1965, he served as a *peritus*, a theological “expert,” for Cardinal Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne. In 1977, he was named Archbishop of München-Freising by Pope Paul VI and served there until 1981 when he became the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was named a cardinal that same year. Ratzinger served Pope John Paul II in this capacity for the remainder of his pontificate and ultimately succeeded him to the Chair of Peter on April 19, 2005.

Writing a dissertation on a living figure presents its own set of advantages as well as challenges of course. On the one hand, there is no doubt as to the contemporary relevance of the theology of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. At the same time, new works of his continue to make their way onto the

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (München, K. Zink, 1954).

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (Munich: Schnell and Steiner, 1959).

ecclesial and theological scene literally on a daily basis! In consideration of this problem, I have chosen to limit much of my analysis to his scholarly theological works published prior to his election to the Chair of Peter on April 19, 2005. I will, therefore, largely refer to the theologian named Joseph Ratzinger. Still, in order to illustrate the pastoral expression of some of his earlier theological insights, I will occasionally make use of more recent homilies, addresses, apostolic exhortations and encyclical letters he has offered in his capacity as universal pastor of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI. When referring to these works, I will refer to their author as Benedict.

I. Formed by a Living Tradition

In attempting to provide a sense of the unfolding of the early intellectual and specifically theological formation of Joseph Ratzinger, it is worth mentioning immediately how, in hindsight, he has conceived of his own theological method throughout. In the course of an extended interview with Peter Seewald, he explains:

I have never tried to create a system of my own, an individual theology...I simply want to think in communion with the faith of the Church and that means above all, to think with the great thinkers 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.⁸

This brief sentiment gives a clear sense of the contours of his theological vision, his desire to operate within the *communio* of the whole tradition and to do so always based first and foremost on the Word of God, particularly as encountered in Sacred

⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 283.

Scripture. His theology has always consciously been ordered toward the pastoral good of the Church. The entrée into his theological reflection is always through the gateway of Scripture, the interpretation of which is always to be done in the context of the broader ecclesial communion of interpreters. Furthermore, in order to undertake this interpretation well and with clarity, it is always to be done, in Ratzinger's view, through an explicitly Christological lens since the figure of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, *is* the fullness of the dialogue between God and humanity.

But Ratzinger's theology of the Word does not limit itself to an *ad intra* discussion among Christians alone. By appealing to the ancient category of Logos, not unlike the early Church Father, Justin Martyr,⁹ Ratzinger makes a case to the world beyond the Church for the intelligibility of all of creation- human existence in particular- in light of the Word being spoken by God that is the basis for all reality. In so doing, he provides a challenge to post-modern relativism that has called into question the human capacity to discover and know truth.¹⁰ He makes this case not on the basis of abstraction and rationalistic argumentation but rather primarily on the basis of the narrative of salvation history. As this historical narrative unfolds, the *Logos* comes to be known as a person, as love itself. The *Logos*, then, becomes the basis for a more personal sense of the Christian mystery for believers themselves and also provides a criterion for dialogue with secular culture.

⁹ Justin Martyr, *The First and Second Apologies (Ancient Christian Writers)*. Translated by Leslie W. Barnard, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997).

¹⁰ The pope's now famous lecture at Regensburg, intended primarily for the academic community, had this theme as its primary focus. James V. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2007).

The Word Spoken at Home

The importance for Ratzinger's theology of the Word spoken and heard, and the subsequent transformation in the "hearer of the Word", stems from a profound philosophical and theological framework carefully cultivated throughout his intellectual formation. But it also carries weight, for Ratzinger, precisely because it derives from and is confirmed in the most ordinary and extraordinary moments of his own personal life. In a few rather poignant moments in his memoirs, Ratzinger indicates how the mystery of the power of human communication is reflective of the ultimate mystery of the Word of God communicated from eternity in human history. In the course of his father's death he recalls, "We were grateful that we were able to stand around his bed and again, show him our love, which he accepted with gratitude even though he could no longer speak."¹¹ And again, at the time of his mother's death, he would speak about this mystery of the truth of love being communicated in life and perhaps most poignantly in death in terms of the theological framework he had been building: "On the day after Gaudete Sunday, December 16, 1963, she closed her eyes forever, but the radiance of her goodness has remained, and for me it has become more and more a confirmation of the faith by which she allowed herself to be formed. I know of no more convincing proof for the faith than precisely the pure and unalloyed humanity that the faith allowed to mature in my parents and in so many other persons I have had the privilege to

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 119.

encounter.”¹² The tangible, intimate and expressive nature of this faith with which he grew up surely shed light on his later theological formulations of the faith. Though he would quickly enter into an academic environment, his theological project would never become so abstract as to be removed from the simple and profound experience of his Catholic faith and the bonds of love in his family that mediated this experience of God early in his life.

Seminary Formation

Such was the affective sensibility he brought with him into the experience of seminary studies. In his memoirs, however, then-Cardinal Ratzinger recalls plainly his dissatisfaction with the arid neo-scholasticism in some aspects of this early theological training. The modern person, Ratzinger could see, longed for authentic encounter with the living God- an encounter which could lay a claim on the whole person and not merely upon the mental faculties of theological experts. He recalls the version of Thomism being presented in those years in the seminary that made him think its “crystal clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made.”¹³ Consequently, he sought out- and discovered- a way of doing theology that would speak to the contemporary cultural needs that would draw modern man out of his anxiety and isolation, into communion with other believers and with the living, Triune God who is, above all, relational and personal. To enter into that vision, he came to see, engaging the biblical narrative must be the starting point.

¹² Ibid., 131.

¹³ Ibid., 44.

A New Biblical Point of Departure

One of the most significant influences on the mind and heart of the young seminarian Ratzinger at this time was the exciting new developments in biblical exegesis and the renewed prominence given to Scripture in the context of all the other branches of theological study. Friedrich Maier was the “star” biblical scholar at the Munich University Faculty of Theology while Ratzinger was a student there from 1947 to 1951. Maier was a significant proponent of the “two source theory” of the synoptic Gospels which proposed the existence of another *Quelle*, a source, from which Matthew and Luke must have drawn, in addition to Mark, to write their own Gospels. This hypothesized alternative source for the Gospels came to be known as the “Q source”. Coming to a greater appreciation of the need to pay attention to the concrete setting of the Gospels and the historical settings and particularities within which they were written, Ratzinger recalls the great excitement surrounding Maier’s lectures and how he took to these new studies with great hunger for learning the newly emerging methods for doing biblical exegesis. He would later come to a more critical reception of a certain mode of historical exegesis because he could see how, in its attempt to be highly objective and analytical in its practice of situating the gospels in their historical contexts, “it is not in a position to see the full depth of the figure of Christ.”¹⁴ He soon had a sense of the tension between appropriating the gospel as historically embedded and yet only accessible by way of an ecclesial

¹⁴ Ibid., 53.

hermeneutic that allows the reader to understand scripture for what it is: texts written *from* the experience of faith and *for* the experience of faith. Nonetheless, from this point on in his early seminary study, he would say that biblical exegesis would always remain “the center of my theological work.”¹⁵

In the development of another important aspect of his thought, Ratzinger attributes great importance to the teaching and scholarship of Friedrich Stummer, an Old Testament scholar. Stummer demonstrated the importance of the perspective of the *inner unity* of the two biblical testaments. Based on this perspective, Ratzinger recounts, “More and more I came to understand that the New Testament is not a different book of a different religion that, for some reason or other, had appropriated the Holy Scriptures of the Jews as a kind of preliminary structure. The New Testament is nothing other than the interpretation of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings found and contained in the story of Jesus.”¹⁶ The two testaments, he could see, are really one expression, unfolding in a coherent way, of the one Word from God spoken in salvation history, culminating in the person of Christ. He came to see that attempting to analyze and interpret each book of the bible and each part of each book as isolated, historically conditioned artifacts of a given historical and cultural setting, results in losing sight of the forest for the trees. The insight offered by Stummer regarding the inner unity of the biblical testaments would have significant impact later in Ratzinger’s understanding of the deep structure of Revelation itself and how it is conveyed in the course of salvation

¹⁵ Ibid., 52-53.

¹⁶ Ibid. 53

history. He was beginning to formulate not only an *historical* sensitivity to the nature of biblical exegesis but also the need for a *literary* approach that can appropriate in a unified way the integration of many texts that offer a multifaceted but nevertheless coherent vision and basis for a whole people's experience of God.¹⁷ Throughout all of scripture, he realized, the interpretive tension must be kept alive which simultaneously appreciates the particularities of any given aspect of the scriptural narrative while also keeping a sense of the unity of the *one narrative* which is expressive of one ongoing dialogue between the eternal *Logos* and historical man. Ratzinger would later describe this historical and literary approach to biblical interpretation as the *analogia scripturae* that is suggested by the biblical texts themselves: "texts have to be referred back to their historical setting and interpreted in their historical context. Then, however, in a second process of interpretation, they must also be seen from the perspective of the movement of history as a whole and of Christ as the central event."¹⁸ The impact of this recognition of the inner unity of the testaments and the Christocentrism of all of history on Ratzinger's thought will be explored in further depth in the next chapter on Revelation.

A Liturgical Horizon

Next to the exegetes, Ratzinger recalls his greatest influences at the time were the dogma specialist, Michael Schmaus, the fundamental theologian, Gottlieb

¹⁷ *ibid.* 53-54. The proper historical and literary approach to scripture would prove to be ongoing areas of focus for the rest of Ratzinger's theological career.

¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*. Edited by Peter Hünermann, and Thomas Söding (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 121.

Söhngen, a pastoral theologian named Josef Pascher and a canonist, Klaus Mörsdorf.¹⁹ Each in their own way pointed toward deeper sources for the various branches of the theological disciplines they taught. If he saw that the biblical narrative is the “soul” of fundamental and dogmatic theology, so too in moral theology, for example, he gained the perspective that sought to “end the dominance of casuistry and the natural law and to rethink morality on the basis of the following of Christ.”²⁰ If Scripture served as the primary basis for the various aspects of theology, liturgy too became primary as a source for theological reflection. Michael Schmaus, seeing the limitations of the neo-scholasticism of the day, offered an innovative, systematic portrayal of doctrine “in the spirit of the liturgical movement and the recent return to Scripture and the Fathers, which had developed in the years after the First World War.”²¹ Ratzinger could begin to see more and more clearly the inner relationship of all the branches of theology reflecting in various ways one coherent vision of the dialogical encounter of God and humanity in the living tradition of the Church.

Being introduced to the work of Odo Casel and Romano Guardini was also significant for Ratzinger in the focus they provided on the liturgical “shape” of the Christian faith. Casel’s contribution, highlighting the fact that the early Christian liturgical life drew especially on the reality of *mystery*, helped contemporary theologians to re-examine sacramental theology not so much through the scientific/ analytical approach characterized by reliance on the ontology of Aristotelianism and

¹⁹ *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 49

Neo-Scholasticism, but rather through the lens of personal engagement in worship that could not be tamed and defined easily by the mode of propositional logic.²² Ratzinger notes that Casel's emphasis on *mystery* had emerged from the renewed interest in the liturgy as a source for Christian theology. The very existence of this "mystery theology," he said, "posed with new acuteness the basic question concerning the relationship between rationality and mystery, the question concerning the place of the Platonic and the philosophical in Christianity, and indeed about the essence of Christianity."²³ This "mystery" can only be experienced when the individual, isolated person lets go of the prospect of self-security and opens up into the dynamic of conversation with the sovereign God who has "spoken" Himself and called for a response from all humanity. Casel explained that "modern man thinks he has finally driven out the darkness of the Mystery" thanks to the efforts of technical rationality. And yet, he "remains wholly circumscribed in the bounds of the material world. By imagining he is the ruler of this world, he is forced more and more to do its will."²⁴ This notion that man finds authentic freedom only in entering into and surrendering to the dynamic of relationship with God in the context of worship would become the chord struck again and again in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger. He notes, for example, in *Spirit of the Liturgy* that the real reason for God's call through Moses to the people of Israel to go out into the desert is not just so that they can pass through it on the way to the promised land. Rather, they are to go where there is no other source of security, *in order* to freely worship the

²² Most prominently in Odo Casel and Burkhard Neunheuser, *The Mystery of Christian Worship, and Other Writings* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962).

²³ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 55-56.

²⁴ Casel, *Mystery of Christian Worship*, 3.

living God. When God says, “Let my people go that they may serve me in the wilderness” (Ex 7:16), Ratzinger lets this command speak for itself- that the essence of God’s call to his people, and therefore the fullness of the freedom that God has in mind for them, is ultimately rooted in their capacity to enter into this worship, into this dialogue with the living God.²⁵

Romano Guardini, too, did much to open up new horizons for Ratzinger in his theology that reminded people of the core of the Christian experience as liturgical worship.²⁶ For Guardini, the Church realizes the deepest expression of her identity only in the context of corporate worship. For, “in the liturgy” he explains, “God is to be honored by the body of the faithful, and the latter is in its turn to derive sanctification from this act of worship.”²⁷ Consequently, it is essential to be reminded that there is a primacy of *Logos* over *Ethos* in the Christian life. That is to say, contemplation of Divine Truth in the liturgy must always precede any authentic efforts to *work* for the Kingdom of God. He explains that the liturgy is “primarily occupied in forming the fundamental Christian temper. By it man is induced to determine correctly his essential relation to God... As a result of this spiritual disposition, it follows that when action is required of him he will do what is right.”²⁸ Entering into the dynamics of the liturgy wherein the human person discovers who he truly is in relation to God is essential in shedding light on the rest of the Christian life. These insights that became so central to the liturgical renewal of the early twentieth century were, of course, based on the historical retrieval of more ancient

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000), 15.

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 43.

²⁷ Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1998), 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

Christian sensibilities and it is to these (and their influence on Ratzinger) that we now turn.

The Influence of The Fathers

Ratzinger embraced the insights of Casel and Guardini regarding centrality of the liturgy all the more given his simultaneous realization of the fruitfulness of patristic biblical exegesis and theological conclusions drawn from this approach. From the Fathers, he was shaped in the conviction of the normativity and the unity of Scripture. All theological reflection must begin with a posture of faith that God has taken the initiative and has indeed spoken in history. Origen, for instance, notes in the first lines of Book One of *On First Principles* that those who find confidence in a way of life that will be “good and blessed” do so because of the “words of Christ.” But “by the words of Christ, we do not mean only those which formed his teaching when he was made man and dwelt in the flesh, since even before that Christ the Word of God was in Moses and the Prophets.”²⁹ As Sacred Scripture is a conveying of these moments of God’s speech, Ratzinger, along with his patristic teachers, recognizes it must be the starting point for further theological reflection and as such it provides the normative framework for all that follows. The character of the scriptural witness, though it is expressed in a variety of different genres and comes from various historical and cultural settings, nevertheless is a coherent and unified “word.” It must be taken, in this patristic vision, as a whole and not as a collection of isolated historical documents. Furthermore, from the Fathers Ratzinger learned that the living tradition since the age of the scriptural witness is always essential to

²⁹ Origen, *On First Principles*, Edited by G. W. Butterworth, (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 1.

the present understanding of the faith. How the ecclesial community has appropriated the Word of God spoken in the past, serves always as a clue as to how to remain in the dialogical exchange with God in the present. This is especially true when one considers the nature of Christian worship that has been inherited from previous generations. The *lex orandi* of the living tradition becomes essential for the current ecclesial community's grappling with questions of the *lex credendi*.

Underlying the reliance on biblical and liturgical sources for theology is a presumption of the importance of historical experience of God's salvation among the people of God. One of Ratzinger's professors, Gottlieb Söhngen was especially influential in helping to form this vision. In his own scholarship he argued, "the Christ mystery is no kingdom of 'pure' values like the kingdom of 'eternal truths.'"³⁰ Rather, at every turn in the Christian tradition, it is clear for Söhngen that truth is necessarily communicated by God to humanity in a manner that is *historical*, and not as ideas somehow disembodied from historical reality.³¹ The development of Christian dogma, by way of the age of the Fathers, comes to be an essential aspect of how God's word continues to be communicated to the Church in every age.

In addition to Söhngen, another professor, Alfred Läpple, directed Ratzinger toward Hans Urs von Balthasar's translation of Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme*.³² De Lubac became a guide for Ratzinger to the Fathers, especially Augustine. He

³⁰ Gottlieb Söhngen "Das Mysterium des lebendigen Christus und der lebendige Glaube..." in *Die Einheit in der Theologie: Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (München: K. Zink, 1952), 344-48. Cf. Patrick W. Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ: A Model Theologian, 1918-2008* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 168.

³¹ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 55.

³² Henri de Lubac, *Glauben aus der Liebe : Catholicisme*. Translated by Hans Urs von Balthasar. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970). See also Ratzinger's own introduction to a later edition of the same work of de Lubac in *Henri de Lubac, Catholicism. Christ and the common destiny of man*. Translated by Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

describes how de Lubac helped him to discover the “essentially social” nature of the Christian faith.³³ He found an alternative to the presentation of the faith sometimes narrowly conceived as an individualistic following of moralistic codes or private assent to particular propositional truths. In opening up the horizon of the essentially communal and ecclesial nature of the Christian faith, it became clear how the celebration of the sacraments by the whole Church really expresses the fullness of Christian life. In particular, he realized in a deeper way the essential link between the Eucharist and the Church- how each one “makes” the other.³⁴ By placing the Eucharist at the center of ecclesiology, he simultaneously insists, with Augustine, that the substance of ecclesiology is essentially Christology. This is so since the unfolding of the life of the Church whose members are in communion with one another and with the tradition that has preceded them, is always centered on, in imitation of, and participating in, the mystical body of Christ himself.³⁵

The encounter with Augustine would ultimately lead to the focus of Ratzinger’s later doctoral work on the great Latin Father’s theology of the Church as communicated in the images of “people” and “house” of God.³⁶ Here a familiar theme in Ratzinger’s theology would be developed in his sense of the “collective I” of the Church. Ratzinger notes that Augustine’s use of the term “people of God” often recalled Old Testament foundations wherein God gathered his people together for them to listen to his word spoken through Abraham, Moses and the prophets. This

³³ Ratzinger, *Milestone: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 98.

³⁴ Ibid. More will be said on this in the following chapter on Church and Liturgy.

³⁵ Emery De Gaál, *Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 65.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*.

notion of the people of God is recapitulated and fulfilled in the New Testament when the Apostles gather together as an *ekklesia* around the person of Christ.³⁷ In the process of the hearing of the Word of God, the Church becomes a true subject, able to speak back, to enter into dialogue with God who has spoken first. In the process of this exchange of listening and speaking, the Church becomes her “true self.” Though Ratzinger drew on an ancient source in Augustine for such a vision, the theme would resonate in at least some strands of contemporary hermeneutics as well. The proposal in “reader response theory,” for example, that meaning in a text is not fully realized until the reader appropriates that meaning, and further, that this appropriation is a matter not simply for the individual reader, but for the whole “interpretive community”, would find a certain resonance, for instance, in Ratzinger’s recognition that “by definition, [divine] revelation requires someone who apprehends it.”³⁸ More on this aspect of Ratzinger’s thought will be taken up in chapter four, on the relationship of the Word to the Church. But suffice it to say for now that in the insight of the “essentially social” nature of the Church gathered from Augustine, Ratzinger found yet another place of contact with contemporary thought that was re-discovering some of these ancient anthropological and epistemological insights. We turn now to an elaboration of Ratzinger’s contact with some other strands of contemporary philosophical movements that would find resonance in the Christian theological tradition.

³⁷Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 159.

³⁸ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 108.

Philosophical Personalism

In first being introduced to the “philosophy of dialogue” of Martin Buber, Ratzinger says he was given “a spiritual experience that left an essential mark” not unlike his first encounter with Augustine’s *Confessions*.³⁹ Though he does not go on to elaborate much about what this experience was like, it is evident in his later writings how much Buber has been an influence.⁴⁰ This new horizon of a “metaphysics of dialogue”⁴¹ suggested by Buber would give a contemporary philosophical grounding that would allow Ratzinger to appropriate the Christian vision from the ancient biblical and patristic sources while enabling him to simultaneously engage contemporary culture in the sphere of its own concerns.

Buber first published his landmark essay, “Ich und Du” in 1923.⁴² His “dialogical philosophy” offered a basis not only for a renewal of ethics, politics and hermeneutics, but also for an understanding of authentic religious experience. Conscious of the needs and concerns of modern culture, Buber’s “Ich und Du” spoke to the “sickness of the age” and offered an antidote to it. In this age between the wars, Buber sensed, like many of his contemporaries, an alarming isolation, anxiety and alienation in his contemporaries. The way to healing this sickness of alienation, for Buber, lay in humanity’s “return” to the dialogue with “the Eternal Thou”.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid. 44.

⁴⁰ Markus Rutsche, *Die Relationalität Gottes Bei Martin Buber Und Joseph Ratzinger*, (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2007).

⁴¹ See Charles Hartshorne’s “Martin Buber’s Metaphysics” in Paul Arthur Schilpp, Maurice S. Friedman, and Martin Buber, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), 49-68.

⁴² For an early English translation, see Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

⁴³ Tamra Wright, “Self, Other, Text, God” in Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102-121.

In this seminal work, Buber points to the possibility of a real encounter of the human person with God- a proposal called into question in the modern philosophical and theological landscape. Only in this encounter, however, would the human person find a way out of the oppressiveness of the modern mentality that had come to objectify all around him. This way of objectification Buber deemed the “I and It” relationality. Buber admits that relating to objects- “Its”- is the way in which we must live much of our practical lives, but when it comes to interacting with the world around us, with other people and even in attempting to relate to God, it is impossible for us to remain constantly standing in this objectivist posture, relating only to “It”. This objective relationality is precisely what creates a sense of isolation and “sickness” in the human subject, for Buber. Offering a critique similar to Odo Casel, Buber explains that to have our way of interacting beyond ourselves limited only to this “objectifying” mode is to have the essence of our true human nature stifled. Rather, what is necessary, is an entering into the “mystery” of the encounter that is established in an opening up to “the Thou.”⁴⁴ The most authentic human experience, for Buber, is an “I-Thou” encounter. This is indeed what makes us human- the capacity for that personal encounter and the degree to which we allow those encounters to occur. Too often, however, we become content to remain in the realm of talking about these encounters from the safe distance that “various conceptual, aesthetic, instrumental or mathematical” mediations afford us.⁴⁵ Insofar as we do not allow ourselves to be drawn into and changed by these encounters, we

⁴⁴ Martin Buber and Ronald Gregor Smith, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 229. The nature of this “mystery” of the “I-Thou” relation is described more fully in Nathan Rotenstreich’s essay “Buber’s Dialogical Thought” in Schilpp and Friedman, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, 98.

⁴⁵ Morgan and Gordon, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, 108.

become closed off from authentic human existence- and we become “sick” and ultimately unfulfilled in our human potential. Rejecting the objectification of God, then, Buber reintroduces his reader to God as divine *subject* with whom the human person is able to enter into real relationship and thereby actualize authentic human identity.

Joseph Ratzinger found in this “I-Thou” paradigm a way of talking about relating to God that opened up new horizons that could speak to the longing for relationship and of the overcoming of isolation so characteristic of the modern person. Ratzinger would concur with Buber in his belief that the crucial turning point in this authentic coming to be of one oneself, is that God must be “addressed”, not to be simply “asserted” or “expressed.”⁴⁶ Tamra Wright describes Buber’s strong critique at the end of *I and Thou* of both modern theology and many traditional religions that, even if for very different reasons, are often drawn into an objectification of all that pertains to the encounter with God.⁴⁷ While God can be spoken of in certain circumstances as an “It”, it is not true that God *is* an “It”. Making a kind of liturgical argument that resonates with the biblical admonition against idolatry, Buber reminds his reader, “God, the eternal Presence, does not permit himself to be held. Woe to the man so possessed that he thinks he possesses God!”⁴⁸ Worship, then, that activity wherein the human person *addresses* the personal God and allows the God who is not object but subject to *speak*, is essential for the healing of modern sickness of humanity.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁷ Ibid. See especially the section on “The Eternal Thou”, 109-111.

⁴⁸ Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 106.

For Ratzinger's part, it seems that he has drawn especially upon the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, to suggest the very "shape" of the Christian faith itself. At the very beginning of his *Principles of Catholic Theology* for example, he recalls Heinrich Schlier's distinction between the faith being proclaimed in *nominal* terms- trying to define or assert who the person of Christ *is*- and the faith being proclaimed in verbal terms- describing what God has *done* in salvation history.⁴⁹ By following the "grammar" of Buber's description of the God-man relationship, Emery de Gaál argues that for Ratzinger, both Christian theology and anthropology are redefined precisely because "through a human being God has entered history as a speaking subject."⁵⁰ Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy was certainly an impetus in Ratzinger's development of this "grammar" of the Christian mystery. Later, in reflecting back on the development of the Church's teaching on Divine Revelation in *Dei Verbum*, at Vatican II, Ratzinger would note that there emerged "an understanding of revelation that is seen basically as dialogue"⁵¹ as opposed to "tacitly restricting 'revelation' to a teaching that one acquires from different 'sources'- a view typical of the age of historicism and its emphasis on the 'positive', which here, however unconsciously appeared in the garment of ecclesiastical traditionalism."⁵² The dialogical understanding of revelation taken up in *Dei Verbum* was influenced in no small part, according to Ratzinger, by the

⁴⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 18. He cites Schlier's essay "Die Anfänge des christologischen Credo" in *Zur Frühgeschichte der Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 13-58.

⁵⁰ de Gaál, *Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 61.

⁵¹ Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II Vol. 3*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1967, 171.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 170.

“personalistic thinking” of Martin Buber that had helped to shape so much of philosophy and theology on the eve of the Council.⁵³ It is to this dialogical conception of the Christian faith embraced by Ratzinger that served as an alternative to other modes of Catholic theology that we now turn.

II. A Post-Conciliar Theological Alternative

The ecclesial divide that has emerged in the wake of the Second Vatican Council has been frequently described. The conflict is typically framed in sociological and political terms of “conservatism” and “progressivism.” This schema, however, does not easily offer a way of understanding the likes of someone like Joseph Ratzinger. In the lead up to the Council and in the midst of it, he is easily placed in the “progressive” category, and yet his identity is, in more recent decades, associated with conservatism. Again, people search for political and sociological reasons for such a “change” in him. He was unsettled by the social upheavals of 1968; he became motivated by ecclesial ambitions, etc.⁵⁴ These must be the reasons, so the conventional wisdom goes, for his “reversal” of thinking. However, if the social and political hermeneutic can be suspended for a moment and the theological perspective allowed to come to the fore, the development of Ratzinger’s thought becomes more intelligible.

David Tracy has noted two basic groups of theologians who contributed so significantly to the formulation of the documents of Vatican II and their

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Clifford W. Mills, *Pope Benedict XVI*, (New York: Chelsea House, 2007); John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 98; Michael Collins, *Pope Benedict XVI: Successor to Peter* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba Press, 2005), 98.

communication and appropriation since then.⁵⁵ One distinctive group of theologians including the likes of Rahner, Schillebeeckx, Chenu, etc., had had as their project before the Council, the translating of Thomas Aquinas into a modern idiom. These theologians saw the way forward after the Council as being characterized by ever-greater cooperation with the developments and promises of modern culture. The other group, those who had as their project prior to the Council, the retrieval of biblical and patristic sources for theology, included the likes of de Lubac, Ratzinger, Daniélou, Congar, etc. For these, translation of the Gospel into the idiom of the modern world, though ultimately essential, was not the primary task they saw before them. Rather, deepening the appropriation of the original sources for theology took primacy in their understanding of their project. Only upon this deepening of understanding, could the content of the tradition be articulated fruitfully in the modern world.⁵⁶

With regard to the first group of Thomists, Tracey Rowland has helpfully described the dominance of two different kinds of Thomisms in the Catholic landscape in the early twentieth century. One form of neo-Thomism was given great encouragement and legitimacy by Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* in 1879 in which he urged Catholic theological reliance on the "perennial philosophy" of Thomas. These "Leonine Thomists" who attempted to continue the project of teaching the substance of the faith in an Aristotelian framework, were confident in the scholastic method that could give even a modern audience a clear conception of the

⁵⁵ David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 552-3.

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, "A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council" in Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ix-xvi.

metaphysical foundations of the Catholic world-view. Though Ratzinger would find nothing objectionable in this approach per se, he found it lacking. Rowland explains:

“The Thomist tradition was treated as an architectural model which had to be taken apart piece by piece with the smallest conceptual components subjected to rigorous analysis. It was precisely the presentation of the faith in this manner that led Ratzinger, von Balthasar and others of their generation to complain that they found Thomism dry and unable to convey a sense of the glory of Revelation. It was a much contracted presentation of the *kerygma*.”⁵⁷

On the other hand, there was the emergence of the “Transcendental Thomists” later in the twentieth century. They provided an alternative to the often staid and formulaic versions of neo-scholasticism that Ratzinger and so many others found to be inadequate and unsatisfying as a means to communicating and exploring the Christian mysteries. This new transcendental Thomism was thoroughly modern in its placement of the human knower at the center of the theological project. For Transcendental Thomism, by and large the starting point is engagement with the epistemology of Immanuel Kant. Flowing from this engagement, Karl Rahner concludes that the existential reality of the human person is always a supernatural one- that there is a theological *a priori* character to all human knowing. In seeking to respond to Kant’s critique of religion, but even more fundamentally, the human capacity to know things in themselves, the Transcendental Thomists attempted to

⁵⁷ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

use a philosophical framework beginning with anthropological issues as the basis of a new mode of doing fundamental and dogmatic theology.⁵⁸

In the pre-conciliar landscape, Tracy also points to an alternative to these various Thomisms, who had been focused on retrieval of biblical and patristic sources. Very soon after the Council, these came to see the limitations in other more Thomistic approaches of what they saw as accommodation to modernity's "anthropological turn". What took primacy instead was the ever-renewing possibility in theology of returning *ad fontes* to the Divine initiative of Revelation and the historical-symbolic structure of meaning.⁵⁹ What was required for fruitful engagement with the modern world, for this group, of which Ratzinger was a part, was confidence in the power of the *kerygma* to transform hearts and ultimately whole cultures. This commitment among some Catholic theologians in the latter half of the twentieth century to return to the proclamation of the Word was no doubt influenced by the Barthian neo-orthodox revolution that countered the apex of liberal Protestantism shaped by Schleiermacher and Harnack.⁶⁰ Rather than primarily adapting to the demands of the rapidly developing contemporary culture, that is to say, rather than letting culture "have the first word", this alternative school of theologians called for renewed confidence in the power of the proclamation of the

⁵⁸ Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-8.

⁵⁹ David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity and Postmodernity," 552.

⁶⁰ See Graham Ward's essay, "Barth, Modernity and Post-Modernity" in J. B. Webster, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274-295. Ratzinger would later note the debt the Council had to the theology of Barth which had forced a positioning of the proclamation of the Word at the center of Christian life. See Vorgimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 3, 170.

Word of God to *transform* contemporary culture- to let the eternal Logos be spoken first in the course of ordinary theological reflection. Joseph Ratzinger has consistently embraced this approach.

Rowland argues that Ratzinger can be seen as ‘modernist’ to some neo-Thomists for failing to keep up the traditional resistance to modernity on the terms set by Leo XIII. He can also be seen as reactionary by the Transcendental Thomists for not taking as his priority the answering of the epistemological critique of Kant and the whole of modernity. Indeed, Rowland sees a curious bond between Ratzinger and the postmodern Nietzschean suspicion of reason as conceived in the modernist mentality. Reason alone, as Ratzinger has often put it, has a “wax nose” and unless it is seen in light of its inherent complementarity with the other faculties of the human person, it easily withers and is manipulated into various distortions. The application of dry abstraction in theological method is unable to do justice to the mystery of what God has done in the course of the drama of salvation, for Ratzinger. He has consistently and deliberately rejected rationalist abstraction that would conceive of the kind of God that “needs no mother.”⁶¹

Ratzinger, following Hans Urs von Balthasar, places the mystery of the drama of salvation at the center of the theological project.⁶² The Christian is the one called into the tension of *living within* this dramatic narrative of the salvific dialogue of God and humanity. To use the category of Martin Buber, it is a way of “in-betweenness”-

⁶¹ Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 3. Citing an interview with Ratzinger's seminary prefect, Alfred Läßle soon after the election of Ratzinger to the papacy conducted by Gianni Valente and Pierluca Azzardo in *30 Days* 1 (2006), 60.

⁶² See Ratzinger's essay, “Communio: A Program” in *Communio; International Catholic Review* (Fall 1992). Here he describes Balthasar's use of the drama of the Christian narrative as the hermeneutic lens for understanding the Second Vatican Council's understanding of the task of theology.

a way of tension between God who speaks to the World and the World who is able to, but perhaps afraid of, listening.⁶³ The “deep structure” of reality is based not primarily on the individual’s knowing and understanding reality according to this mode of knowing. Rather, by entering into relationship with both God and others, the conditions are set for the emergence of the possibility of *knowing* at the deepest level. Indeed, this knowing that is consistent with faith takes place most perfectly in the life of the Church and occurs only by letting perception of the whole of reality be shaped by the vision from within these sets of relationships. Rowland cites in Charles Taylor a similar understanding of the encounter of the Church and modernity: “It is not that we have sloughed off a whole lot of unjustified beliefs leaving an implicit self-understanding that had always been there, to operate at last untrammelled. Rather, one constellation of implicit understandings of our relation to God, the cosmos, other humans, and time, was replaced by another in a multifaceted mutation” in the course of the emergence of secularized modern culture.⁶⁴ For Ratzinger, in order to address this challenge of the culture of modernity, what is required above all is “receiving” the truth of the reality of the Revelation from God, thereby giving impetus for a Christian culture to revivify according to what has been received in the community of the Church. As Ratzinger would put it in a 1992 essay, “Christianity is not speculation; it is not a construction of the intellect. Christianity is not ‘our’ work, it is a Revelation, a message that has

⁶³ Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 3-10.

⁶⁴ Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 145-6. Cf., Charles Taylor's “Two Theories of Modernity” *Hastings Center Report*, March-April 1995, 24-27.

been given us, and we have no right to reconstruct it as we wish.”⁶⁵ This Revelation that is given constructs the whole of reality for the Christian. Reliance on Revelation and its historical-symbolic nature, as opposed to the abstract character of other modes of contemporary theology, has been an essential characteristic of Ratzinger’s manner of doing theology. This approach, I suggest, might be considered as uniquely “dialogical.” He has proceeded in this “historical-symbolic” manner of doing theology which is most given to a *narrative* way of doing theology that has as its central motif the dialogue between God and humanity. I would argue that he chooses this mode of doing theology not only because he sees it as being true to the core of the faith that has been given, but also because he sees that this is pastorally the most effective way of communicating the saving power of the Word in history.

III. Conclusion: A Dialogical Vision Formed

The process of the formation of the “dialogical structure” of the young Joseph Ratzinger’s thought was multifaceted. Thanks to the contribution of many and varying influences, a coherent vision began to emerge. The formation of his thought was in itself, of course, the fruit of ongoing dialogue- with sources both ancient and new. As he matured, he cultivated what might be termed a “personalist theology”, or perhaps better, a “dialogical theology” shaped ultimately by biblical and patristic frameworks but which would also be reaffirmed by more contemporary philosophical sources such as that of Martin Buber. The source of this personalist theology is the eternal *Logos* who is speaking, who is being spoken, who is being

⁶⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth: Meditations for Every Day of the Year*. Edited by Irene Grassl (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 265.

heard. At the heart of the Holy Trinity is this Logos and it is through this Logos that all creation comes about. Therefore, in Ratzinger's theology, whether it pertains to the inner life of the Trinity, Christology, or theological anthropology, there is always present what might be called a dialogical principle in which the Eternal Word is continually being spoken in history- in human words. This reliance on the Word, which is by definition both intelligible and communicable, sets up the basis for a theology that is inherently relational. Ratzinger's dialogical mode of doing theology, then, serves his preference for the "communio" shape of theology.⁶⁶ For example, when he reflects on the intrinsic link between Christology and the Eucharistic liturgy and its import for ecclesiology, he notes, "The Eucharist is never an event involving just two, a dialogue between Christ and me. Eucharistic Communion is aimed at a complete reshaping of my own life. It breaks up man's entire self and creates a new 'we.' Communication with Christ is necessarily also a communication with all who belong to him: therein, I myself become part of the new bread that he is creating by the resubstantiation of the whole of earthly reality."⁶⁷ At the heart of how he understands all these aspects of theology, then- Christology, liturgy, ecclesiology, creation, eschatology, etc.- is communication- dialogue.

Ratzinger's dialogical structure of theological reflection follows a consistent pattern: Scripture, as it is the "soul of theology", must be its starting point, methodologically speaking. The nature of Scripture as a whole is the narrative of the unfolding relationship between God and humanity. A narrative is always set in

⁶⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "Communio: A Program" *Communio: International Catholic Review* 19, no. 3 (1992): 436-49.

⁶⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 78.

history; it is never merely abstract reflection. It is in history, then, that God speaks to humanity, reveals Himself ultimately as Word-made-flesh in the protagonist of the entire narrative: Jesus of Nazareth. This is the culmination of the narrative in which both God and humanity are rediscovered in a new way. Indeed, in the person of Jesus appears the perfect dialogue itself between God and humanity. Through our experience of Christ, we come to know “God who is not only *logos* but also *dialogos*.”⁶⁸

A More Historical, Spiritual and Pastoral Systematic Theology

Characteristic of Ratzinger’s thought is to re-conceive of the philosophical underpinnings of Catholic theology by way of a renewed attention to the historicity of the Christian mystery. His formation, as I have indicated, was influenced very much by the new attention paid to historical consciousness in authentic biblical exegesis. Ratzinger’s response to the need for a theology more “historically conscious”, however, has not simply been a capitulation to a recent academic trend. Rather, it has made possible a mode of doing theology that is more accessible spiritually and pastorally, given its dialogical and narrative style. The historical and dialogical mode of doing theology is also arguably more capable of plumbing the depths of the essential truth of the Christian vision that has at its center the mystery of the “tearing of the veil” that had previously separated heaven and earth and that makes possible now, this intimate dialogue and communion between God and humanity. Dialogue and encounter with the Logos-made-flesh in history is at the heart of Ratzinger’s theological and pastoral vision. This is what makes Ratzinger’s

⁶⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 183.

“spiritual Christology” possible, since “behind” Christ is intelligibility, communicability of God and ultimately, love for the beloved even as that love is expressed in Creation which, when beheld by its creator was declared to be “very good” (Gen 1:31).⁶⁹

Logos Manifested as Love

A consistent concern since Ratzinger’s seminary and doctoral studies is the articulation of how it is that God speaks across the chasm that separates heaven and earth. A theology based on the *Logos*, communicated in dialogue of word and response, is central to his way of dealing with this question. With the *Logos* as the key to his approach, Ratzinger’s theology is reasonable, but not abstract. Rather, it is reasonable in a manner that becomes personally attractive when communicated in the context of the biblical narrative as the *Logos* becomes *love* in Jesus Christ.⁷⁰ It is for this reason that Ratzinger has from the beginning seen love as the “key to Christianity.” When he was asked in an interview about the significance of the common theme from his first publication as an academic to his first encyclical as pope, both of which centered on *love*, he replied, “Two themes have always accompanied me in my life, then: on the one hand, the theme of Christ, as the living, present God, the one who loves us and heals us through suffering, and, on the other hand, the theme of love...because I knew that love is the key to Christianity, that love

⁶⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 13-15.

⁷⁰ This is not only true of Ratzinger’s own personal approach to theology, but it has also influenced the broader theological community in the life of the whole Church. Fergus Kerr has observed that as Ratzinger became the first “non-Thomistic” Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with him a new era began that is open to new modes of doing theology with greater focus on Scripture and liturgy as primary sources for theology. Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007), 187.

is the angle from which it has to be approached.”⁷¹ He has made this “angle” his own throughout his theological and pastoral career.

In this chapter, I have attempted to establish the centrality of the *Logos* in Joseph Ratzinger’s thought. Based upon the consistent use of the *Logos* in his theology, I have suggested a dialogical principle at work in the whole of his theology that serves as a kind of unifying principle for all of theology as he undertakes it. I have proposed a few early influences in his philosophical and theological formation that helped to provide a basis for such a dialogical structure in the whole of his thought. In the next chapters, I will try to demonstrate how this dialogical principle is at work in particular areas of theology, beginning with his theology of Revelation and then moving on from that basis to his Christology, ecclesiology and finally his theology of creation and eschatology.

⁷¹ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 102.

Chapter 2

“Revelation Seen Basically as Dialogue”

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.” (Heb 1:1-3)

Because Joseph Ratzinger has never written a comprehensive “systematic theology” of his own, it is a challenge to know what area of theology to begin with in attempting an exposition of the coherence of his thought. The difficulty of finding a precise starting point is indicative of the nature of Ratzinger’s theology. His *modus operandi* is always to show the synthetic and holistic nature of the Christian vision and therefore of the whole of the theological enterprise. To speak of sacraments, for example, it is necessary always to have in mind their scriptural basis and the theological as well as philosophical grounding that make them efficacious. To engage in a question of moral theology, one must never do so outside the scope of ecclesiological and Trinitarian theologies of communion, etc. Still, it is necessary to start somewhere in the effort to explicate the coherence of his thought and so I’ve chosen to begin with his theology of Revelation. I do so in order to establish immediately the contention of the thesis that what provides coherence for the whole of Ratzinger’s thought is the organizing principle of the communicability of the Word of God.

Ratzinger's theology of Revelation is Logo-centric, historical in character and therefore narrative and in style such that the dynamic it most clearly follows is that of an *unfolding* of the Christian mystery. As such, it can rightly be characterized as dialogical. As he makes consistent use of the appeal to the *Logos* as the principle of coherence for his explanation of how God reveals Godself to humanity, he is simultaneously insistent on the *historical* aspect of revelation. As God reveals his Word in human words, He does so always in concrete historical settings and circumstances. Ratzinger learns from Bonaventure that "wisdom is unthinkable and unintelligible without reference to the historical situation in which it has its place."⁷² Only from this historical "place" can the *event* of the encounter with the Logos unfold which has the potential to draw humanity "up into the trinitarian dynamic: The Son leads to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It [the Christian mystery] is about God, and only in this do we treat the subject of man correctly."⁷³ Beginning with the divine *actio* of the Logos being spoken from above and then seeing how that Logos is spoken "below" in history- only then is it possible to understand the core of the Christian mystery as one of dialogue between God and man. In this vision, revelation is not properly understood as a *monologue* from God containing information that God chooses to reveal about himself and the world, but rather a *dialogue* between two essential parties, the Eternal "I" speaking to the historical

⁷² Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 6.

⁷³ Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 2. This passage is taken from Ratzinger's Foreword to this study of his own ecclesiology by Heim. He is affirming Heim's sense of the Christocentric and theo-logical structure of the Council's teaching about Revelation and the life of the Church.

“Thou” of humanity and the historical “I” of humanity responding to the Eternal “Thou”. While there is always more to the Eternal Logos than that which gets expressed in history, the content of this dialogue is the substance of revelation itself.

In the course of this chapter, I hope to show first how Ratzinger’s study of Bonaventure’s theology of history helped to fundamentally shape his thought on the nature of revelation. Secondly, I will examine his attempt to articulate the nature of the relationship of Scripture and tradition to revelation in an essay published in the midst of the Council. Next I will highlight the relationship of Ratzinger’s approach to the question of Revelation and some of the developments from Vatican I’s *Dei Filius* to Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* and then how the recent apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* elaborates upon the dialogical structure of revelation developed in Vatican II. Finally, I will turn to Ratzinger’s treatment of the authentic nature of exegesis and theology as *ecclesial* practices. I hope to show how he sees them as ways of participating in the dynamic of revelation insofar as they consist first and foremost in a *listening* to the Word in particular historical settings in order that the whole Church might be able to better enter in to the dialogical event of the unfolding of revelation.

I. Foundations in Bonaventure’s Theology of History

After his dissertation on Augustine’s ecclesiology, Ratzinger turned to Bonaventure’s theology of history for the topic of his *Habilitationsschrift*. He undertook this project in 1953, he says, because the question of salvation history was re-shaping the Catholic theology of revelation “which neoscholasticism had

kept too confined to the intellectual realm.”⁷⁴ He recalls in the setting of the emerging ‘historical consciousness’ within Catholic theological circles, “Revelation now appeared to no longer be a communication of truths to the intellect but as a historical action of God in which truth becomes gradually unveiled.”⁷⁵ Though the insistence on historical consciousness being applied to biblical exegesis and dogmatic theology was unsettling so many in Catholic circles, Ratzinger took it as an opportunity to examine the tradition in light of this new question. He did so by reaching back into the resources of that tradition in the thought of St. Bonaventure to “discover whether ... there was anything corresponding to the concept of salvation history, and whether this motif- if it should exist- had any relationship with the idea of revelation.”⁷⁶ The fruit of this study was to discover exactly such a correspondence and to begin to conceive of a contemporary theology of revelation in light of the new ‘historical consciousness.’

Central to this new way of conceiving of revelation was that it is properly understood as essentially a *dialogue that unfolds in history* between God and humanity. It is not merely a monologue from God consisting of truths communicated in the abstract. Indeed, for Ratzinger, there is no “revelation” at all without the historically embedded human subject appropriating that which is being revealed by God. Whereas it had been common in Catholic theology in the early part of the twentieth century to think of revelation primarily as the objective data given by God to humanity, for Bonaventure, revelation is primarily the more foundational

⁷⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 104.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

act by which God reveals what had previously been hidden; it is not the “objectified result of this act.”⁷⁷ In order for this “unveiling” to properly be said to have happened, the human subject must receive what has been given.⁷⁸ He explains:

Here, ‘revelation’ is always a concept denoting an act. The word refers to the act in which God shows himself, not the objectified result of this act. And because this is so, the receiving subject is also always part of the concept of ‘revelation’. Where there is no one to perceive ‘revelation’, no *re-vel*-ation has occurred, because no veil has been removed. By definition, revelation requires a someone who apprehends it.⁷⁹

Ratzinger notes that in modern usage of the term, “Revelation” is often simply equated with Sacred Scripture. This would have been entirely foreign in the High Middle Ages, he says. While he starts with Scripture, and sees all of human history through the lens of the narrative of Scripture, Ratzinger argues that Bonaventure conceived of revelation in a much more expansive way given the association of *revelatio* with *actio*.⁸⁰ As he interprets Bonaventure’s sometimes convoluted schemas regarding revelation and history, Ratzinger draws out some basic principles more accessible to the contemporary reader. For one, there is always more to revelation than the “letter” that is accessible to the human person. He notes a striking similarity between Scripture and Creation in this regard. Both present a “literal” expression of reality, but the challenge for the human subject is

⁷⁷ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 58.

⁷⁹ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 108.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

always to see behind this immediate presentation of reality to grasp the more transcendent truth of things.⁸¹

In this regard, Bonaventure suggests that the *future* is “revealed” or accessible on some level to those in the present, if history is properly understood in the light of Scripture. By way of Scripture, if understood “in the Spirit,” it is possible to apprehend the substance of the future that lies ahead. Constant attentiveness in the present, in the light of the scriptural witness, is also essential to this kind of historical discernment, as one might call it.⁸² This attentiveness in the present involves a consistent struggle to discover what Bonaventure calls the “mystical meaning” of Scripture that is unveiled from its hidden state in the process of *revelatio*. For the living Church, as the Word of God expressed in Scripture is proclaimed and appropriated within the community, it becomes clear to those guided by the Holy Spirit, that no immediate interpretation of the texts of Scripture is able to exhaust their meaning. The Spirit who transcends history is the One by whom what is hidden ‘behind’ Scripture, is revealed. In this model, it is the Spirit who makes the Word intelligible for the faithful living in the Church grounded in history.⁸³ Ultimately, for Bonaventure, that which is “unveiled” in the process of *revelatio* is *divine reality* itself. This divine reality- God’s very Self- is encountered in the mystical ascent of man, made possible by the grace of God.⁸⁴ The content or substance of this *revelatio* of divine essence is not an “exclusive I-Thou relationship,

⁸¹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 84.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 83-4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

rather it stands in a great cosmic-hierarchical context”.⁸⁵ As Ratzinger interprets Bonaventure, then, the understanding of God that comes in revelation is not that which is apprehended in isolation by one thinker but rather is a discovery that is made, in union with the community of the whole Church over the course of salvation history. Consequently, what comes to be known by the human person in the process of *revelatio* is not some kind of “clear and distinct” *idea* about God, but rather, only the kind of knowledge that comes from personal encounter with God in history. This encounter does not take place in private between the individual and God, but in the context of a whole complex of relations which comprise the Church in the present that is always connected to her past.

Controversy: Ratzinger’s Dialogical Structure of Revelation

Ratzinger’s “dynamic” or “dialogical” interpretation of Bonaventure’s theology of history created problems for him in the course of the submission of his *Habilitationsschrift*. The insistence on the role of human reception in the act of revelation from God smacked of a modernist tendency that one of his readers, Michael Schmaus, intended to guard against. This caused concern for Schmaus, who concluded that Ratzinger was opening the door to what could be understood as the “subjectivization” of revelation and the simultaneous dismissing of the objective and eternal truth of revelation.⁸⁶ For this reason, Schmaus initially rejected Ratzinger’s work as unacceptable and only later would accept it once Ratzinger deleted this

⁸⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁶ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007), 185.

allegedly “subjectivist” aspect of his analysis.⁸⁷ This was not a minor edit but consisted in eliminating over half of his original thesis. He later expanded on the second half of the original thesis in order to make it acceptable to Schmaus. The trauma of this experience, no doubt, had a way of leaving its mark even more indelibly on the young theologian and would, consequently, sharpen his attentiveness to this aspect of his understanding of the Christian vision as inherently dialogical.⁸⁸

Different Levels of Meaning in Scripture

By being convinced of the need to always begin his theology with Scripture, Ratzinger’s methodology is never given over to sheer speculation. There is, for him, always the narrative of salvation history to be responded to in doing theology. From this vantage point, revelation itself is understood in these terms. Ratzinger explains that Bonaventure’s notion of revelation involves God’s communication in the context of historical particulars. Bonaventure is not concerned, as modern theologians are with the nature of the one revelation, but rather in seeking patterns among the many instances of revelation in history. In this sense then, Ratzinger says, “We could say that Bonaventure does not treat of ‘revelation’ but of ‘revelations.’”⁸⁹ These many revelations, nonetheless, make up a coherent narrative filled with events that include a disclosure of meaning. At the heart of this coherent narrative is the principle that God provides revelations as *acts*. Ratzinger interprets

⁸⁷ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 108.

⁸⁸ The full text of Ratzinger’s original thesis was only recently published. See Benedict, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by Gerhard Ludwig Müller (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2008), v.

⁸⁹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 57.

Bonaventure's understanding of revelation as being the *act* of revealing by God, not simply the *content* of what is ultimately revealed. Revelation, therefore is not a static body of data or knowledge but rather always characterized by the dynamic of an *unfolding event* that in turn gives it a narrative texture rather than a propositional one. If this is true, then Revelation, strictly speaking, suggests that what is *behind* Scripture is always more than the "letter" of Scripture itself.⁹⁰

Consequently, he explains that for Bonaventure, the *understanding* of Scripture was itself a "gradual, historical, progressive development...which was in no way closed."⁹¹ According to this basic grasp of the multivalence of Scripture, Bonaventure proposes three ways of deriving its meaning. The first is the *spiritualis intelligentia*, or spiritual understanding, which is identical to the traditional manner of recognizing literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical meanings to any given portion of Scripture.⁹² In any given text, meaning can be derived that is deeper than the literal sense to allow the reader to understand how certain objects, characters, events, etc., in this or that passage might be representative of other more spiritual realities, how those realities might speak to the importance of moral conversion in the reader and finally how these realities are instructive about eschatology and divine truth itself. But Bonaventure is not content with this framework for interpreting the texts of Scripture alone. He has in mind the need to understand the *whole* of the Scripture, as one coherent narrative unfolding throughout all of human history.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁹¹ Ibid., 75.

⁹² Ibid., 62-63.

Consequently, Bonaventure suggests a second manner of interpreting Scripture that calls for analysis of what he calls the *figurae sacramentales* in the whole of Scripture. In this model, there are “sacramental figures” that point to the presence of Christ throughout Scripture especially as he comes into conflict with forces of the anti-Christ. Failing to cite any specific examples in the Bible, Ratzinger cites Bonaventure’s general dialectic explanation of the whole of the scriptural narrative: “All the mysteries of Scripture treat of Christ with his Body and of the Anti-Christ and the Devil with his cohorts. This is the meaning of St. Augustine in his book on the City of God.”⁹³ Whereas in Augustine’s *Civitas Dei*, Ratzinger explains, conflict and duality is what makes sense of the whole of history, for Bonaventure, the dialectic of conflict between the Christ and the anti-Christ is real but it is relegated to this second of three ways of approaching Scripture.⁹⁴

After the *spiritualis intelligentia* and the *figurae sacramentales*, Bonaventure characterizes the third and most fruitful approach to Scripture as that of the *multiformes theoriae* wherein the reader can apprehend many manifestations of *theoria*, or meaning, of the one truth, of the one Word being spoken throughout the whole of Scripture.⁹⁵ Here is the highest level of understanding of Scripture, for Bonaventure. It is not characterized simply by the dialectic struggle between the Christ and the anti-Christ, but rather by the one, unified but “multiform” communication of God for the sake of drawing humanity into relationship. The centrality of the *Logos* is essential for this aspect of Bonaventure’s theology of

⁹³ Ibid., 10. Cf., *Hexameron XIII-XV*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7.

history. The *Logos* through which all things in heaven and on earth are created, is the same *Logos* spoken in human history. From Adam and Noah, to Abraham, Moses, David and all the prophets, all the way up to the coming of Christ and in the life of the Church founded on Christ, many “*theoriae*” appear in the scope of salvation history, but they are expressive of the one *Logos*, or Word of God. For example, Charlemagne is reflected in the life of the Church as a Zealot, reflective of his Old Testament patterns, Ezekiel and Hosea. In a contrary way, “Henry IV and Fredrick I are hostile kings corresponding to Manasses.” Finally, though, in a most important way, Francis of Assisi is the contemporary figure associated with the coming of an age of *Pax*. Associated with John the Baptist, Francis plays a crucial role in Bonaventure’s understanding of the immediate past in order to understand the near future. In the figure of Francis, the most important instance of a *theoria* is offered in Bonaventure’s schema.⁹⁶ He is one central character in the larger context of the narrative of salvation history.

Revelation Unfolding in History: The Many *Semina* of One *Logos*

Bonaventure uses an organic metaphor to concretize this model of the *multiformes theoriae*. Drawing upon a philosophical image common since the time of Zeno and the Stoics who described the *logoi spermatikoi* (seeds of the word) that make creation intelligible,⁹⁷ Bonaventure suggests that from the one *Logos* of God, many “*semina*”, or seeds, are produced and planted in the soil of human history as well. Bonaventure writes, “Who can know the number of seeds which exist? For

⁹⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

⁹⁷ In a later work, Ratzinger spells out the development of this thought from ancient Greek philosophy to its interaction with biblical belief. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 137-150.

from one single seed, entire forests grow up; and they in turn bring forth innumerable seeds. So it happens that innumerable theories can arise from Scripture that only God can grasp in His knowledge. As new seeds come from plants, so also new theories and new meaning come from Scripture.”⁹⁸

This interpretive image of the seed is key to Bonaventure’s whole theology of history, because it helps to account for the way the whole of salvation history *unfolds*- not just within what is recounted in Scripture, but including all of human history up to the present moment. The challenge for the present is to understand, then, the meaning of current circumstances in light of the whole narrative up until now. True understanding of any present context can only be obtained in light of the earlier *semina* that had sprung forth from the One *Logos* in the past.⁹⁹ Though Ratzinger does not indicate this explicitly, it seems evident that there is offered here, the underlying principle allowing for development in Christian doctrine as well. The appearance of the Church and the way in which the Christian mysteries are articulated in any given age may differ but there is still coherence to it all in light of the unity and intelligibility of the *Logos*, the original source of the whole story of salvation history from its inception. Indeed the coherent expression of this principle of the many seeds coming from the one Word is given within Scripture itself. Ratzinger highlights how Bonaventure’s theology of revelation in history has to do with the inner-relationship of the Old and New Testaments. For Bonaventure, the Old Testament gives way to the New Testament as one seedling begets

⁹⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 7. Citing *Hex. XIII, 2*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

another.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the 'seed' of the Word made flesh in the presence of Jesus, characterizes the essence of the identity of the Church, according to Ratzinger's analysis. In this way, then, both what we call the Old and the New Testament, comprise one testament, one expression of the one Logos of God who is ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ who continues to be known within the Church.¹⁰¹ There is, then, a two-fold sense of the unfolding of revelation. In one sense, there is a linear unfolding of revelation in salvation history from the events of the Old Testament leading up to the Christ-event that is the basis of the New Testament. Once the Christ event occurs, however, history is now conceived of, in Bonaventure's view, not in a linear manner, but according to the dynamic of concentric circles at the heart of which is the fullness of revelation, the person of Christ, the Logos itself made flesh.

Christ as *Center*, not *End*, of History

In this metaphor of the many seeds being planted from the one Logos, history begins to be conceived of in a progressive manner. This progress, however, is in the mode of a narrative as opposed to the linear character as is the case in the scholastic tradition based on the teleology of Aristotle.¹⁰² Ratzinger explains, "Bonaventure sees Aristotle's concept of time to be linear; it is an infinite line without ordering. In contrast with this, Bonaventure holds a type of circular movement as the image of Christian understanding of time, the double movement of *egressus* and *regressus*."¹⁰³ For Bonaventure, the center point of this circular, or perhaps spherical, notion of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 143.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 144.

history is the person Christ. From the *center* point of history, which is the Incarnation of the Eternal Word in human history, growth and development flow *outward* until all of history is vivified according to the power of that which lies at the center. One of Bonaventure's great contributions, in Ratzinger's view is the development of this *Christocentric* view of human history. Challenged by Joachim of Fiore's vision of salvation history, Bonaventure was forced to deal with the question of history in a new way. Bonaventure argued against Joachimism that supposed "new" revelation beyond the age of Christ into the Age of the Spirit. The argument for a deeply Christocentric hermeneutic of Scripture and all of history became central for Bonaventure and is certainly a central principle for Ratzinger. The fruit of his contemplation on the matter left with the Church the early seeds of a kind of an "historical consciousness" when it comes to doing theology.¹⁰⁴ This concentric shape of human history is also then complemented in Bonaventure's model by a different sort of circular pattern that is on a vertical plane, connecting eternity and history. In this sense, the circular movement of salvation sees history flowing from God and ultimately back to God by way of Christ, in an *egressus* and a *regressus* from God to humanity and back to God through the figure of Christ.¹⁰⁵

For Bonaventure, Christ is the *center* of history precisely as Word, as the *Logos*. There is communication from God at the center of history. And how and in what way history "progresses" relates to the nature and quality of the human response to that Word. Through the Church, the Word continues to be

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 145-147.

communicated and revealed in history and is the source of coherence in all of history. This Logos made flesh in Christ, who is manifested ultimately as love, is the unifying principle and the source and summit, so to speak, of all of human history. The fulfillment of history comes, not when the “end of the line” is reached, but when *love* comes to fruition and prevails in the hearts and lives of the people to whom this love has been offered, from the person of Christ. Love itself enters history when the Word is made flesh in Christ. Therefore the “end”, or better, the fulfillment, of history happens when the extension of the Word made flesh in history “becomes all in all” (1 Cor.15:28)- when love is all that remains (1 Cor 13:13).

Historical Consciousness

In Bonaventure’s schema, history is given importance precisely because of the fact that it is the locus wherein the Word of love is planted at its heart in order to redeem it from within, from its center. God who is sovereign over human history gives new depth to the meaning of history because of the fact that he enters into it. Ratzinger explains that when the infancy narratives in the gospels proclaim that the Incarnation happened in the fullness of time, this itself is a profession of faith in the Incarnation, because what makes time “full” is nothing attributable or discoverable from within the horizon of time itself, but only by virtue of the fact that the Eternal has entered into the temporal. This *event* that marks the fullness of time becomes the *center* of time in Bonaventure’s theology of history.¹⁰⁶ From this center, history itself begins to be redeemed from the inside because of what has entered into it

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 110.

from the outside. The orientation toward the future, then, unfolds based on this *actio Divina* from above. In order to understand the present and anticipate the shape of the future, then, a certain “historical consciousness” is required that is necessarily eschatological as well.¹⁰⁷

Within Bonaventure’s theology of history, the virtue of hope becomes a major reference point for the whole of his vision. Authentic hope in every age is to be discovered and cultivated from *within history* and not outside of it. True hope is not characterized as a kind of escape from difficult historical reality. This embodiment of hope from *within* history is what characterizes the life and mission of the Church that gets its life and purpose from Christ, its center. Christ is both the center and the fulfillment of history, for Bonaventure. Ratzinger consistently embraces this same Christo-centric view of all of human history that is fundamentally a “movement of *egressus* from God; and *regressus* to him through Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁸ The inner-principle of this movement of history is love that flows from God and flows back to God. In this sense, a further interpretive mechanism for salvation history comes to the fore, namely *love* as that which “moves” history toward its gradual fulfillment. The conclusion of Ratzinger’s study of Bonaventure provides a key to understanding what motivates and informs the whole of his own theology:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 106-108. Ratzinger sees this historical consciousness as the great contribution made by Joachim in theology, even if he arrived at its importance in an inelegant manner.

¹⁰⁸ Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2007), 42.

both Augustine and Bonaventure know that the Church which hopes for peace in the future is, nonetheless, obliged to love in the present; and they both realize that the kingdom of eternal peace is growing in the hearts of those who fulfill Christ's law of love in their own particular age. Both see themselves subject to the word of the Apostle: "So there remain faith, hope and love, these three. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:3).¹⁰⁹

Encountering Christ, encountering love itself in history, is the foundation for the life of the Church, then. And from this encounter with love, the Church's life is to be characterized by that same identity as the locus for the whole world of the dialogical encounter with love. This principle derived from Bonaventure of the centrality of the dialogical encounter with the Word became the basis for Ratzinger's contribution that he would soon make in the Second Vatican Council.

II. Quaestio Disputata: "Tradition" in Deliberations of *Dei Verbum*

Ratzinger brought with him this Bonaventurian understanding of the historical and dialogical nature of revelation to his role as a *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council. The thirty-four year old theologian was asked by Cardinal Josef Frings of Köln, before the Council had started, to help with the preparatory work. Ultimately, as Ratzinger would serve as Fring's official *peritus*, he would contribute along with several other theologians including Karl Rahner, in the crafting of the Constitution on Divine Revelation.¹¹⁰ Based on this preparatory work, Rahner and Ratzinger ended up writing articles independently that later were joined together for a book entitled *Revelation and Tradition*, published in German in 1965 and then

¹⁰⁹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 163.

¹¹⁰ W. J. Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI* (New Orleans, LA: Loyola University, 2007), 24.

translated and released in English in 1966.¹¹¹ The publisher's introduction to the book situates it consciously in the *ad extra* setting of the new ecumenism emerging in the time of the Council as well as *the ad intra* context of the Catholic Church emerging out of the modernist crisis and the problem of historical consciousness posed by it. Their work represents the most proximate efforts being made by two of the most influential *periti* working on *Dei Verbum* to generate new ways to articulate the essentials of the Church's self-understanding in relationship to God's self-communication.

Rahner's introductory chapter for *Revelation and Tradition*, offered first as a lecture at Münster in 1964, begins by acknowledging the *immanentism* of some strands of modernism of the late nineteenth century wherein there can appear to be a certain "inevitable development, immanent in human history, of man's 'religious needs.'"¹¹² Rahner also notes the reaction to this *immanentism* being the opposite extreme of *extrinsicism* in which revelation comes to be seen as God's intervention, "purely from the outside" of humanity's reality which communicates information from God that is extrinsic to God's own identity.¹¹³ The time was now ripe, Rahner argued in this essay, for a new understanding of revelation that could bridge this gap between the immanentism and extrinsicism of modern theology. He begins his exploration of the nature of revelation with a characteristic anthropological starting point. Here, he explains the necessity to

¹¹¹ Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (London: Herder, 1966).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

assume that every human being is elevated by grace in his transcendental intellectuality in a non-reflex manner; that this 'entitative' divinization- which is proffered to freedom, even if it is not accepted freely in faith- involves a transcendental divinization of the fundamental subjective attitude, the ultimate horizons of man's knowledge and freedom, in the perspective of which he accomplishes his life.¹¹⁴

While Rahner insists that this 'entitative divinization' can occur only in the context of human freedom *in history*, his manner of articulating the new understanding of revelation is given primarily in the speculative language of his Thomistic anthropology that was encountering the existentialism of the day.¹¹⁵ While he insists upon the historical nature of human experience of revelation, his description of that historicity remains more conceptual than concrete.

Ratzinger undertook his task in this book from an historical perspective more narrative in style. Beginning with the New Testament proclamation "Jesus is the Christ", he traces in several ways from the Old Testament how it is that the Christ event is the fulfillment of what had been promised over the generations.¹¹⁶ Underlying the development of these generations is the interaction of the *gramma* and *pneuma*, as St. Paul put it. In the Old Testament, the written prophecy had been anticipating its fulfillment. St. Paul sees Christ as the *pneuma* who makes the rest of Scripture intelligible (2 Cor 3: 6-18). Whether it is the prophet Isaiah, Joel or Jeremiah proclaiming the hope of a Messiah, Ratzinger asserts, "in each case, the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁵ See especially Thomas Sheehan's "Rahner's Transcendental Project" and Daniel Donovan's "Revelation and Faith" in Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 318.

¹¹⁶ Rahner and Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 37-38

time inaugurated by the Christ event now appears as the answer to a line of hope, which expected that in the future age scripture would, in an ultimate sense, be rendered actually superfluous by the immediate proximity of the divine teacher in man himself.”¹¹⁷ Here, then, is the basis for the living tradition that unfolds in the life of the Church and follows the basic pattern of the drama of salvation history. For Ratzinger, this narrative is the starting point for understanding how it is that tradition operates and what indeed tradition is, in its essence. The story takes the lead over speculation.

Only after dealing with the concrete historical particulars about how the scriptural accounts give way to the life of the Church, does he then offer a reflection on the nature of tradition itself as operating according to the principles of the *analogia fidei*. The Old Testament, he says, is to be understood in light of the Christ event and “also an interpretation of the Christ event itself on the basis of the *pneuma*, which means on the basis of the Church’s present.”¹¹⁸ The method derived for understanding tradition, then, does not start with a speculative or philosophical framework, but rather it begins with the narrative of Scripture and salvation history and only then attempts to discover patterns of meaning and intelligibility. Many years later, Ratzinger would note that it was in the context of writing this book with Rahner that he began to realize they occupied “different theological planets.”¹¹⁹ For Ratzinger, the differentiating characteristic of “his planet” was the method basing his theology of revelation on the experience of the salvation-historical narrative of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 128.

the Bible that continues in the life of the Church as opposed to the more speculative or conceptual mode of Rahner. Though Ratzinger's style is historical, it is not primarily anthropological because the narrative he follows in history is that shaped by the *actions of God* in history. The starting point is not man's natural or even supernatural inclinations toward God.

By giving primacy to the *actio divina* in history, to God's revelation of his Word in history, Ratzinger also found common ecumenical ground on which to stand especially with Evangelical Protestants. Striking a note of concern regarding ecumenism from the beginning, he explains in his first essay that the question of the inner relationship between revelation, Scripture, tradition and the Church has been the source of division among Christians since the time of Martin Luther.¹²⁰ While the Reformers saw the magisterial teachings of the Church as accretions of tradition onto the only authentic revelation given by God *sola scriptura*, the basic Catholic understanding has been that the revelation of God, as recounted in Scripture, continues to be deepened in understanding within the living tradition of the Church, centered on Christ and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. He notes that even Philip Melancthon conceded that if the Church would "allow the Gospel" that it would behoove the Reformers to allow for the ecclesiological structures of bishops with the pope primary among them as an important dimension of ministry within the Church. This, Melancthon recognized, would allow for the ongoing appropriation

¹²⁰ Rahner and Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 27-28.

precisely of the power of the Gospel in the lives of the faithful.¹²¹ As the Reformers insisted on the primacy of the Word “over” the Church, a caricature of the Tridentine position has been the Church’s insistence on her role as being “over” the Word. Rather, as Ratzinger explains, the true position of Trent was to insist on the fact of the Lord *giving* the Word *to* the Church so that the Church might always be centered on the Word and be the authentic interpreter of it throughout history.¹²² This ongoing appropriation of the Word is what constitutes *tradition*, in the Catholic sense. Therefore, rather than collapsing the Word into an identification with Scripture as is the tendency for the Reformation tradition, the Catholic position has been to see the appropriation of the Word as always beginning with Scripture and then unfolding throughout history in a way that makes possible an ever-developing tradition.

Ratzinger notes the strengths and weaknesses of both the Protestant and Tridentine approaches to the question of the receiving of the Word by the Church. In the Protestant tradition, once Revelation comes to be identified with Scripture,¹²³ once the distinction is collapsed and it is asserted that the Word is “over” the Church, then an interpretive problem emerges. As the Word is given autonomy with respect to the living Church, the same Word is “delivered to the caprice of the exegetes.”¹²⁴ This interpretive problem pointed to in the mid 1960s also characterizes, for Ratzinger, the present day crisis created by some of the limitations

¹²¹ Ibid., 28.

¹²² Ibid., 30

¹²³ Ibid., 34.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 31.

of the historical critical method. In this situation, many modern exegetes have vacated the Scripture of the power of the Word of God and consequently Scripture “has become a word of the past” to be dissected by professional experts, as the Church all the while sits idly by.¹²⁵ On the Catholic side, a certain distortion had emerged in the post-Trent era wherein the insistence on tradition as a “second source” of revelation had too often come to be seen as standing in its own autonomous posture with respect to the Scripture that precedes it. Scandal could be given in this context if it were perceived that the magisterium of the Church could teach *apart* from the normative scriptures.

Ratzinger approached this question of fundamental theology by following the historical developments in the debate about the question of tradition. He does so in his contribution to *Revelation and Tradition* by entering into dialogue with a contemporary and influential work at the time of the dogmatic theologian from Tübingen, J. R. Geiselman.¹²⁶ Geiselman’s historical analysis of the development of the teaching on revelation in the context of the Council of Trent helped clarify the questions for the deliberations at Vatican II.¹²⁷ Geiselman demonstrates that in the *Acts of the Council of Trent*, in the early drafts of the document on revelation, the thesis was advanced that what God reveals is to be found “partim in libris...partim

¹²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*. Edited by Peter Hunermann, and Thomas Söding (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 98.

¹²⁶ Josef Rupert Geiselman, *Die Heilige Schrift Und Die Tradition: Zu Den Neueren Kontroversen Über Das Verhältnis Der Heiligen Schrift; Zu Den Nichtgeschriebenen Traditionen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962).

¹²⁷ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 124-7.

in...traditionibus”- partly in scripture and partly in tradition.¹²⁸ This *partial* attribution of revelation to Scripture and *partial* attribution to tradition would have clearly delineated the two-source nature of revelation indicating that some revelation could be found in tradition that is not in Scripture. This would also have made reconciliation with Protestantism on this question impossible. In the end, however, the fathers at Trent decided upon the more simple formulation, “in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus” indicating that revelation is handed on *both* in written Scripture *and* in unwritten tradition.¹²⁹ The fact that Trent settled on this formulation kept open the door, in Geiselmann’s view, to the possibility of a Catholic rapprochement with Protestant insistence on seeing revelation as expressed *sola scriptura*. For Geiselmann, by concluding that revelation is simply found in Scripture *and* in tradition, a Catholic could in good conscience go along with the Reformation doctrine of the “material sufficiency” of Scripture.¹³⁰

Ratzinger, admiring of the scholarship and methodology of Geiselmann in going back to the historical narrative of developments at Trent, soon, however, became critical of his interpretive conclusions. In order to avoid the Protestant mistake of collapsing revelation with Scripture¹³¹ and a frequent Catholic misinterpretation of

¹²⁸ Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, v. <1-5> (New York: herder and Herder, 1967), 3:156. Cf., Geiselmann, *Die Heilige Schrift Und Die Tradition*, 287.

¹²⁹ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:157.

¹³⁰ Rahner and Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 34.

¹³¹ According to Benedict Thomas Viviano, OP, despite the objections people like Ratzinger made, this is precisely the interpretation many Catholic exegetes took in the wake of the Council, accepting the material sufficiency of scripture in matters of *faith* even if they acknowledge the need for tradition for interpretation of scripture later on. They fail to see, however, the integral role tradition plays in the unfolding of revelation itself. See Viviano’s essay, “The Normativity of Scripture and Tradition in Recent Catholic Theology” in *Scripture’s Doctrine and Theology’s Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*. Edited by Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 125-131.

the “two source” theory of revelation given at Trent which could separate the substance of Scripture and tradition too drastically, he concluded that the real concern is to more fundamentally understand the “mode of presence of the Word of God among the faithful”¹³² not in a theoretical way, but as it unfolds in the contingencies of history. After all, he says, “Revelation always and only becomes reality where there is faith.”¹³³ We see here the influence of Bonaventure on his thought, keeping historicity always before him when it comes to the question of revelation. The real task for the Church, he concluded, and ultimately the task that the Second Vatican Council took up so fruitfully in *Dei Verbum*, is to “go behind the positive sources, scripture and tradition, to their inner source, revelation, the living word of God from which scripture and tradition spring and without which their significance for faith cannot be understood.”¹³⁴ This method he proposed clearly harkens back to his discovery in Bonaventure of the many *semina* of the one *Logos* in salvation history as a way of describing the transmission of revelation in history.

Only from the perspective gained once one has “gone behind” the positive sources of Scripture and tradition to revelation itself, does it become possible to begin to see the unfolding of that Word in salvation history. Ratzinger explains that this dynamic is at work even in Scripture itself. For the relationship of the Old Testament and the New Testament is rightly understood as one expression of the Word of God that is *unfolding* in salvation history. In one sense, he notes, only the Old Testament is rightly considered Scripture. For the writers of the New

¹³² Rahner and Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 34.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

Testament, the only scriptures were those contained in the Old Testament. The New Testament, then, is the Spirit-led interpretation of the Old Testament in light of the Christ-event.¹³⁵ The scriptures (Old Testament) are fulfilled and therefore intelligible only in light of the Christ-event and the beginning of the interpretation of this event is the set of writings contained in what comes to be recognized as the New Testament. Ratzinger notes that in several places in the New Testament, the Old Testament prophecy is seen as the letter (*gramma*) and the New Testament as the spirit (*pnuema*) of the one unfolding revelation of God's Word among his faithful.¹³⁶ At work, then, even within the Old and New Testaments is a kind of principle of tradition that is handing down to future generations that which has been received in faith from God in previous generations, so that faith might take root in the future as well. At the center of this process is the Christ event- the fullness of God's revelation. Here, the "letter" of the "old" testament is fulfilled and then only understood according to the guidance of the Spirit- which then makes possible the reception of the "new" testament. The ongoing revelation communicated in the tradition of the Church, is always founded on Scripture and appropriated authentically only when seen through the lens of the Christ event. The nature of this principle of the unfolding of tradition is the focus of Ratzinger's concluding remarks in this essay.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 37.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 38. In various ways, New Testament witnesses refer to Old Testament prophecies anticipating the Christ event, eg. Paul in 2 Cor 3: 6-18 referring to Jer 31:31; John referring to Isaiah 54:13; Peter in Acts 2:14-36 referring to Joel 3:1-5.

Based in part on his own analysis of the debates that contributed to the formulation of the Decree on Revelation at Trent, Ratzinger notes four distinct “strata” of factors involved in the unfolding of revelation in history:

1. the inscription of revelation (=the gospel) not only in the Bible, but in men’s hearts
2. the Holy Spirit speaking throughout the whole age of the Church
3. the conciliar activity of the Church
4. the liturgical tradition and the whole of the tradition of the Church’s life.¹³⁷

More will be said about his articulation of the manifold expressions of Revelation, the Word of God, to humanity in a later section of this chapter, but we turn now to Ratzinger’s understanding of these questions as he reflected back upon the final product of the fathers at Vatican II, in the promulgation of *Dei Verbum*.

III. *Dei Verbum*: Revelation “Seen Basically as Dialogue”¹³⁸

In his description of the origins and background of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Ratzinger recalls Archbishop Florit’s *relatio* to the Council on the first two chapters of the document: “Because of its inner importance as well as the many vicissitudes that it has undergone, the history of the draft on the Constitution on Divine Revelation has fused itself with the history of this council into a kind of unity.”¹³⁹ The ultimate teaching of the Council on revelation would provide an important basis for how to understand the other documents related to liturgy, the relationship of the Church to other entities in the modern world, etc. This is so precisely because what was at stake in this Constitution was the question

¹³⁷ Ibid., 65-66.

¹³⁸ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:171.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 155.

of how the Church conceives of God's most fundamental interaction with the world, reaching from eternity into the contingencies of human history- how the eternal Word is spoken in human words. The Council embraced the vision that "the pattern of this revelation unfolds through deeds and words"¹⁴⁰ both in creation and in history. Indeed, in the immediate wake of the Council, Ratzinger himself described the newly emerging understanding of revelation that is "seen basically as dialogue."¹⁴¹ This understanding of the unfolding of revelation that is expressed in an ongoing dialogue between God and humanity in human history, in turn provided a theological foundation for discussions regarding other pressing matters including how the Church relates to other Christians, to the Jewish people, to non-Christian believers and to the modern world as a whole. While retaining confidence in how God had revealed himself in Scripture and tradition, and most fully through Christ in the Catholic Church, space was also created for understanding the ongoing deepening of this revelation that takes place in the context of dialogue with those outside the Church. Again, this category of dialogue is central and the way of understanding the dialogue is always through the Christological hermeneutic that sees the person of Jesus Christ as the fullness of the dialogue itself between God and humanity. Indeed, the opening words of the Constitution highlight the role of human receptivity, the "hearing" of the word of God.¹⁴² A mere five years after the young student Joseph Ratzinger had his struggle to have his *Habilitationsschrift*

¹⁴⁰ Vatican Council (2nd: 1962-1965), *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*. Edited by Austin Flannery (Dublin, Ireland: Costello; Dominican Publications, 1996). See "Dei Verbum" #2, 98.

¹⁴¹ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:171.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, Dei Verbum #1, 97.

approved because of his defense of humanity's essential role in it, "this 'novel' understanding of revelation...would prove revolutionary at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and set the tenor for the whole council" in its ultimate insistence on revelation as "historical and contextual" and therefore having everything to do with God's dialogue partner- the human family.¹⁴³

Ratzinger notes the background of the intellectual current that helped to inform the Church's ultimate articulation of her teaching on this question.¹⁴⁴ First, the "Romantic movement" had been developing an understanding of tradition, not in material terms, but in more organic terms suggestive of the principle of development and growth. Though he does not describe the main figures in this "Romantic movement," he associates it with the need, after the proclamation of the Marian dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, to understand tradition as *developing* and not simply something that is handed down neatly from one generation to the next. He notes Cardinal Newman as one who had been influenced by Romanticism in this regard.¹⁴⁵ The second aspect of the intellectual climate that affected these discussions, in Ratzinger's view, was the challenge posed by historical critical methods of exegesis that were forcing the Church to take more seriously the demands of "historical consciousness" and the role of human factors in the composition of divinely inspired texts. The third most important influence in the culture that shaped these discussions on revelation at the Council, was the fact that

¹⁴³ Emery de Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 66-67.

¹⁴⁴ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:155-9.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155-6.

there had already been in the air, within the life of the Church, a new familiarity both at the level of theology as well as the piety of “the biblical movement” wherein the spiritual resources in the Word of God were being rediscovered by Catholics. In his own analysis in close proximity to the Council’s conclusion, Ratzinger looked back on the crafting of *Dei Verbum* against the backdrop of these “signs of the times” from which it emerged. This reflection itself was an act of historical consciousness regarding the nature of the Council that continued to receive revelation from God in continuity with what had preceded it and also in a manner responsive to current historical and cultural situations. Having described some of the cultural and intellectual context of the Council, Ratzinger then provides an account of the dramatic development of the deliberations that ultimately produced *Dei Verbum*.

Setting Aside Neo-scholasticism for the Language of Shepherds

Ratzinger has described in different places the nature of his dissatisfaction with the original schemata for the Council’s deliberation on the “Sources of Revelation” that was given to the central preparatory committee.¹⁴⁶ He was not alone in his dissatisfaction. As the preparatory schemata were introduced to the Council by Cardinal Ottaviani in November of 1962, several other cardinals immediately gave a *non placet* for various reasons but foremost among them was that in their current form, they would undermine the basic ecumenical desires of the Council.¹⁴⁷ For his own part, Ratzinger recalls that while he saw no errors in the initial drafts *per se*, he

¹⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 156; Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 3; Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 185.

¹⁴⁷ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:160.

also noticed that little of the recent biblical, patristic and liturgical retrievals (which had the capacity to help ecumenical dialogue) were leaving their mark on the texts. His pastoral concern *within the Church* was that “they gave an impression of rigidity and narrowness through their excessive dependency on scholastic theology. In other words, they reflected more the thought of scholars than that of “shepherds.”¹⁴⁸ He notes elsewhere that in the spirit of the Council as it was emerging, bishops and theologians alike were discovering that a pastoral body such as this should be “speaking in the language of scripture, of the early Church Fathers and of contemporary man” and that technical theological language has its place, but that ultimately, it “does not belong in the kerygma and in our confession of faith.”¹⁴⁹

In Ratzinger’s view, the preparatory schemata for *Dei Verbum* initially reflected the notion of revelation characterized as substantial in and of itself and essentially unrelated to history and therefore not subject to development.¹⁵⁰ Ratzinger notes in his early recollections of the dynamics of the Council that the first drafts for the Constitution on revelation were primarily “anti-modernist” in their scope of concern and consequently rather cold when compared to the warm, hopeful and innovative tone of the document on the renewal of the liturgy.¹⁵¹ The initial tendency of the preparatory commission was to continue the magisterial trajectory of the late nineteenth century, beginning with the condemnation of subjectivism with respect to the question of revelation in the *Syllabus of Errors*. Eventually this tendency gave

¹⁴⁸ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 121.

¹⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 63.

¹⁵¹ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 120-3.

way to a more nuanced understanding of the primacy of the fact of God revealing himself but also took into consideration the dialogical structure of this revelation¹⁵² in which the receiver of the revelation is essential to the mystery of God's self-revelation.¹⁵³ As the deliberations at the Council unfolded, from Ratzinger's perspective, it became more and more clear to the fathers that they must treat the question of revelation in terms of its necessarily historical character. Consequently, as they engaged the historical character of revelation, they simultaneously shaped the character of theological reflection in the language of the narrative of God's interaction with humanity. In so doing, the language of the Council and subsequently of much of theological reflection became more accessible pastorally and spiritually to the people of God.

Dei Filius

Ratzinger contrasts the dialogical conception of revelation¹⁵⁴ that was eventually adopted in *Dei Verbum* with an earlier, nineteenth century view of it crafted in terms of juridical decrees related to the wisdom and goodness ultimately extrinsic to God. The First Vatican Council articulated the mystery of Divine Revelation in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, *Dei Filius* thus: "it pleased his [God's] wisdom and his bounty to reveal himself and his eternal decrees in another, supernatural way, as the apostle says: in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son' (Heb 1:1-2)."¹⁵⁵ Though the Fathers

¹⁵² Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:170.

¹⁵³ Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 48.

¹⁵⁴ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:171.

¹⁵⁵ Jacques Dupuis and Josef Neusner, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1996), 43.

at the First Vatican Council did indicate that God reveals *Himself*- se ipsum- Ratzinger sees the emphasis here on the eternal decrees of God's will that are external to Himself.¹⁵⁶ Consequently what is revealed in this conception is essentially a kind of monologue from God to humanity, rather than a dialogue between God and humanity. The theory of the "material tradition" of revelation- the handing down to humanity what is extrinsic to God - while not erroneous in Ratzinger's eyes, does not do enough to plumb the depths of the fullness of the mystery of salvation, either.

The reason for its inadequacy, he suggests, is, in part, the neo-scholastic, philosophical and analytical categories that it uses as its first principles. In his commentary on Vatican II, Ratzinger notes that the methodology of Vatican I's *Dei Filius* starts with natural knowledge of God and then briefly touches upon the content of revelation before dwelling more on how scripture and tradition are transmitted. *Dei Verbum*, on the other hand, begins with the narrative, with the *acts* of God in history, and only at the end indicates how it is that, as it turns out, the human person is disposed to receive this revelation from the beginning. Anthropology, then, is seen in light of revelation rather than the other way around. Since when God speaks and reveals Himself, he reveals not just his wisdom and his goodness, but his very *self*, that revelation penetrates to the very core of humanity that was created by the same Word of God.

¹⁵⁶ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:171, Cf., DS 3004.

Humanity, then, can only be fulfilled, or actualized, when making a full and conscious response to that Word. Indeed, this is the foundation of the essence of Scripture and tradition- that they involve *responses* to the action of God's speaking in history to humanity.¹⁵⁷ Because the theological starting point of Ratzinger's thought, is God's speaking, humanity is understood in light of the capacity to be in dialogue with God. Such is the nature of the theological personalism of Ratzinger's theology and such is the character of the way Divine Revelation is presented in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. What had often previously been matter consigned to the abstract language of propositional statements had, in *Dei Verbum*, been informed by a new theological personalism thanks in no small part to the contributions of Joseph Ratzinger.¹⁵⁸ Such an analysis rings true upon reading such a description of the role of Scripture in the life of the Church in the final draft of *Dei Verbum*: "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them."¹⁵⁹ Given the narrative form of the Scripture it is perhaps easier to see the dialogical nature of it. But in Ratzinger's theology, tradition too follows the same dialogical pattern.

Tradition as Expressive of Revelation

The Father coming from heaven to speak with his children in various ways throughout history provides a personalistic image for how to understand the inner

¹⁵⁷ Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2009), 75.

¹⁵⁸ Jared Wicks, "Vatican II on Revelation from Behind the Scenes" *Theological Studies*. 71.3. (September 2010). See also W. J. Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI* (New Orleans, LA: Loyola University, 2007), 24.

¹⁵⁹ *Dei Verbum* #21.

relationship of Scripture and tradition in *Dei Verbum*. The pivotal choice by the fathers at Vatican II of “going back to the comprehensive reality of the deeds and words of God” as a starting point made it possible to gain freedom from the problematic “duplex fons” theory of revelation that held two distinct sources of revelation in Scripture and tradition.¹⁶⁰ *Dei Verbum* reflects Ratzinger’s plea to “go behind” both Scripture and tradition to see that there is only one Revelation of God, expressed in a two-fold manner. This is so because of the nature of God’s desire in which he “graciously arranged that what he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples [as recounted in Scripture] should last forever in its entirety and be transmitted to all generations.”¹⁶¹ Tradition, then, is that by which the saving revelation of God is extended to all generations. Though what the Church teaches are timeless *truths*, she must never teach them in a way that separates them from the historical context in which her mission to proclaim the living word of God, lies. The truth communicated in tradition is to be based upon the *Logos* of the Father understood as *Verbum* that unfolds in its communication in history and in a relational and communal mode and not merely as *Ratio* that is accessible to the individual mind.¹⁶² More will be said on this unfolding understanding of Logos in the Christian tradition in the next chapter on Christology. For now, however, suffice it to say that in order to appropriate tradition authentically, there must be attentiveness within the Church to both its eternal, universal dimension, as well as to its historical, particular expression. This attentiveness demands an “historical

¹⁶⁰ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:170.

¹⁶¹ *Dei Verbum* #7.

¹⁶² Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 189.

consciousness” that is simultaneously informed by the light of faith. This basic framework makes possible Ratzinger’s “hermeneutic of reform” within the one subject of the Church which both preserves what is constant and also accounts for and is open to genuine development within the living tradition.¹⁶³ This hermeneutic has its foundations much earlier in the Christian tradition and earlier in Ratzinger’s own formation, namely in his study of St. Bonaventure.

Bonaventurian Echoes in *Dei Verbum*

In *Dei Verbum*, we can see the imprint of Ratzinger’s dialogical approach to theology that he inherited from Bonaventure. Describing the Word of God as living and effective and unfolding from the “speech” of God’s very self in Scripture, unfolding in tradition and being fulfilled in the Christ event is characteristic of this updated approach to revelation that is seen fundamentally as “dialogical.” What Ratzinger argued for and what ended up being adopted in the vision offered in *Dei Verbum* was a less propositional and more narrative view of revelation that is necessarily and always seen as contingent upon how it is received by the Church at any given time in history. The condition of the “soil” shapes, in part, how the many “seeds” (semina) of the “one Logos” takes root, according to the organic metaphor borrowed from Bonaventure.¹⁶⁴ Until God’s revelation is received and appropriated and until that seed of God’s Word takes root there really is no revelation, *per se*, occurring. In Bonaventurian terms, tradition is that which is consistent with the original “seed” of the Word of God’s action in salvation history, recorded in

¹⁶³ Benedict XVI.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html

¹⁶⁴ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 6-12.

Scripture and then proclaimed perpetually at all times and in all places in the life of the Church. In this way, tradition is always unified and coherent and yet always developing in new manifestations as well.

Revelation in *Verbum Domini*

Nearly a half century after the Council, Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, promulgated his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, on the topic of the Word of God in the life of the Church.¹⁶⁵ Taking up the same topic as *Dei Verbum*, this time synthesizing the deliberations of bishops gathered from around the world for the synod on the Word of God, Benedict was able to offer a reflection on these deliberations in light of his own theological vision that by this point had so significantly helped to shape the universal Catholic teaching on the subject. As the title of the opening section, “God in Dialogue” indicates, priority is given to the divine subject who speaks and who seeks a response from the human listener. He explains, “The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us.”¹⁶⁶ As such, revelation is to be fundamentally understood as dialogue that unfolds in history, and the way this dialogue unfolds is pluriform. Whether it is God’s revelation of Himself in His creation, accessible through reason, or in salvation history (comprised of both Scripture and tradition), accessible only through faith, there is divine speech being communicated to a human audience capable of hearing and responding and thereby

¹⁶⁵ Catholic Church (2005-: Benedict XVI), *Verbum Domini: The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church*. (Frederick, MD: Word Among Us, 2010).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, #6.

entering into dialogue with God. He explains that to speak of the “Word of God” is to enter into a multifaceted reality, to participate in a symphony of words that is reflective of a single word that, taken as a whole can be understood as a “polyphonic hymn.”¹⁶⁷ This is so because the “Word of God” is unified and coherent first of all as the Eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. But the “Word of God” is also manifested in many and various ways: a.) in its fullness as the person of Jesus Christ, b.) in Creation itself as the *liber naturae*, c.) in the message of the prophets of the Old Testament, d.) in the proclamation of the apostles, e.) in the Living Tradition as a whole and finally, f.) in the written texts of Sacred Scripture. It is for this reason, Benedict argues, that Christianity is not rightly considered a “religion of the book”, but rather a “religion of the Word of God” which is “living and Incarnate”.¹⁶⁸ Reading *Verbum Domini* as a further expression of the innovative teaching on revelation offered in *Dei Verbum*, one clearly senses Ratzinger’s influence that was so shaped by his own study of Bonaventure. In Bonaventure, Ratzinger found a model theologian who let the scriptural witness be his starting point for theological reflection and did not shy away from allowing theological perspectives to shape the way he did exegesis. Ratzinger makes use of this mutually informing dynamic between exegesis and theology and in so doing provides direction for the renewal of Catholic theology eight centuries after the contributions of his Franciscan mentor.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., #17.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. #7.

IV. Directions for Exegesis and Theology

In his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, Ratzinger, in looking forward to the post-conciliar era, made a direct plea for greater cooperation and interaction between exegetes and theologians, especially dogmatic theologians. He proposed that the two groups of scholars be “independent partners” for each other.¹⁶⁹ The ongoing research of the exegetes would keep the particularities of the scriptures and its historical basis ever before the theologians who reflect upon the doctrine that flows from this historical biblical witness. And theologians should be able to provide the exegetes with a constant attentiveness to the horizon of faith within the Church as a hermeneutical perspective for their own attempt to understand Scripture. Though one group should not dictate the parameters of the method of the other, he argues, their presence ought always be before the other so that they might always keep in mind the perspective of the historical, on the one hand and the eternal on the other.¹⁷⁰

Some forty years later, in the “Introduction” to the first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict offers a concise yet comprehensive instance of his most mature thought on the nature of authentic biblical exegesis.¹⁷¹ Benedict challenges exegetes to allow a more theological understanding to inform their work while

¹⁶⁹ Vorgrimler, *Commentary*, 3:160. He would subsequently elaborate and refine this vision of the complementarity of exegesis and dogmatics in many various places. See especially “The Spiritual Basis and Ecclesial Identity of Theology” in Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 44-72. One can read this essay, in light of the deepening chasm between the two disciples, as an implicit re-thinking of his phrasing calling for “independence” between the two to “interdependence” instead.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45-72. See especially Ratzinger’s in-depth exploration of the issue in “The Spiritual Basis and Ecclesial Identity of the Theologian”.

¹⁷¹ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. Translated by Adrian J. Walker. (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

remaining true to the directions and innovations taken up in modern historical critical methods of scriptural study. Fundamental to this theological approach to Scripture is the posture of faith from which one must approach the texts. Operative here is the Second Vatican Council's admonition that Scripture should be read and interpreted in light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.¹⁷² Furthermore, in order to be under the inspiration of the same Spirit, it is necessary for the reader to engage the scriptures as one in communion with the whole Spirit-led Church- to be engaging in this dialogue with God from the perspective of the "collective I of the Church."¹⁷³ More will be said on these matters from an ecclesiological standpoint in chapter four. It is enough for now, though, to recognize that Ratzinger's exegetical and theological insistence on a spiritual, theological and ecclesiological perspective in approaching Scripture is a mark of the holistic approach to theology which always includes both a kind of historical-critical biblical exegesis as well as a hermeneutic of faith by which to interpret the fruit of this exegesis. This is also precisely what provoked the sharpest criticisms of his book on Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁷⁴

Dogma and Bible

The reluctance on the part of many to allow a robust interaction of dogma and biblical exegesis is one of the great areas of concern for Ratzinger in contemporary theology.¹⁷⁵ In the effort to arrive at "the historical Jesus", he explains, it has been

¹⁷² *Dei Verbum*, #11-12.

¹⁷³ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 87-90.

¹⁷⁴ For some varying examples of critiques, see G. Lüdemann, *Eyes that See Not: The Pope Looks at Jesus*, 2008); C.M. Martini, "Arduous Testimony on Jesus: On the Book Jesus of Nazareth by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI," *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 84/85 (2007): 44; Luke Johnson, "Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration," *Modern Theology* 24. 2 (2008): 318.

¹⁷⁵ Ratzinger, *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 91-9.

thought necessary by many exegetes, to exclude from exegesis the horizon of ecclesial faith and dogma expressive of that faith because it represents an obstruction of the “pure” historical vision. The layers of interpretation of the figure of Jesus and the whole of Scripture seem to cloud the truth of “primitive Christianity.” However, by eliminating from the discourse, the historical (and faith-shaped) appropriation of the truth of the scriptures, much of modern scholarship has sterilized Scripture, in Ratzinger’s view. By treating the texts of Scripture as mere objects for historical analysis, it has been made into a genre incompatible with its original form insofar as it is divorced from the setting of communal faith in God’s salvific communication in history. Consequently, he explains, “the Bible that has freed itself from dogma has become a document about the past and, thereby, itself belongs to the past.”¹⁷⁶

In order to rectify this distortion, he outlines important hermeneutical elements for the renewal of the mission of both Catholic exegesis and theology. What is at stake for Ratzinger, is not just a preference about what is a better way to undertake an academic discipline. What is at issue is not just an intra academic debate but the question of how well God’s revelation will continue to be appropriated in the life of God’s people since when exegesis and theology are exercised in a spiritual and ecclesial manner, they also become an extension of the very revelation of God in history. The Word spoken by God that continues to be authentically received, reflected upon and communicated is in continuity with the Word originally spoken. The role of the theologian is to translate that Word in new and relevant ways in

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 99.

every age and culture according to the logic of revelation itself that has its roots in eternity and yet is always oriented toward communication in history. In a recent address to theologians from around the world, Benedict explained the role of the theologian highlighting the “communicative” and dialogical nature of the discipline as it pertains to seeking knowledge of the living God as this is undertaken in the context of ecclesial faith. In so doing he provided them with a concrete historical exemplar for their discipline in the modern milieu:

the word itself "theo-logy" reveals this communicative aspect of your work -- in theology we seek to communicate, through the "logos," what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:3)...[Furthermore] no theological system can subsist if it is not permeated by the love of its divine 'Object,' which in theology must necessarily be 'Subject,' who speaks to us and with whom we are in a relationship of love. Thus theology must always be nourished by dialogue with the divine Logos, Creator and Redeemer. Moreover, no theology is such if it is not integrated in the life and reflection of the Church through time and space. Yes, it is true that, to be scientific, theology must argue in a rational way, but it must also be faithful to the nature of the ecclesial faith; centered on God, rooted in prayer, in communion with the other disciples of the Lord guaranteed by communion with the Successor of Peter and the whole episcopal college...ecclesial communion is diachronic, and so is theology. The theologian never begins from zero, but considers as teacher the fathers and theologians of the whole Christian tradition. Rooted in sacred Scripture, read with the fathers and doctors, theology can be school of sanctity, as attested by Blessed John Henry Newman.¹⁷⁷

Recalling Newman, and the source of Newman’s theological fruitfulness in his reliance on the Fathers in order to understand Scripture and tradition, Ratzinger

¹⁷⁷“Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the International Theological Commission,” Vatican City Consistory Hall, 3 December 2010.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101203_cti_en.html

models that call to theologians to always see themselves as living, thinking and writing in communion with the whole tradition that has preceded them.

Again, Ratzinger's study of Bonaventure is formative. It is worth recalling here Bonaventure's very striking insistence on the role of the patristic tradition in understanding Scripture. Indeed, Bonaventure saw the writings of the Fathers in some way as part of revelation itself insofar as they appropriated Scripture and communicated the Word of God to the Church in the earliest generations. Consequently, our own appropriation of the Word must be done by way of their historical mediation. This inner unity of the Fathers and the authentic understanding of Scripture that can only be understood spiritually is the only means by which the contemporary Church can be transformed by the Word of God. He quotes Bonaventure, "By himself, man cannot come to this (spiritual) understanding (of Scripture). He can do this only through those to whom God revealed it, i.e. through the writings of the Saints such as Augustine, Jerome and others."¹⁷⁸ Ratzinger embraces Bonaventure's insistence on the intimate link between Scripture and the ongoing appropriation of the Word in history by the saints. As soon as he explains Bonaventure's perspective, he immediately makes use of it in advocating a manner of doing theology today that relies on both Scripture and tradition explaining,

This means that the spiritual understanding does not arise purely and simply as a penetration from letter to spirit which, as spirit, would lie beyond the world of mere words and as such could be grasped only in individual cases. Rather, it has already found its binding rules and even content in the writings of the Fathers. This understanding,

¹⁷⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 77-78. Cf., *Collationes in Hexameron XIX*.

which cannot be reached by man alone, was 'revealed' to them once and for all.¹⁷⁹

In accordance with this "logic of revelation" that God speaks his Word from eternity through human words in history, Ratzinger also asserts the normativity of accepted translations of scripture, namely, the Vulgate, as well as traditionally accepted commentary on Scripture in the patristic tradition as comprising, in some sense, "inspired" tradition. The patristic appropriation of Scripture and the rule of faith, then, in some way, are authoritative and as such are part of revelation as they constitute some of the many *semina* of the one *Logos*. Tradition, therefore, is conceived of by Ratzinger much more broadly and diversely than simply as the *depositum fidei* of the magisterial teachings of the popes and bishops.¹⁸⁰

By considering the Fathers as part of revelation in some sense, the contemporary theologian is urged to consider in a new light the nature of his or her own task. This reconsidering is central to Ratzinger's theological and pastoral concern. Again, recalling Bonaventure, Ratzinger rather strikingly asserts that Scripture itself, strictly speaking, is the only real work of theology, for Scripture is simply the direct reflection of Spirit-led writers upon the direct action of God in history.¹⁸¹ Following this pattern, the ongoing work of theology ought to imitate, in some sense, the scriptural authors- to reflect upon the experience of God among the faithful in history. Reading Scripture in this new manner, then, becomes what the Second Vatican Council called "a *colloquium inter Deum et hominem* wherein the dialogue

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁸⁰ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:264-5.

¹⁸¹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 67.

with the eternal God is always in the present for the human subject.”¹⁸² It is precisely this radical entering into *colloquium* with the Word that constitutes the true nature of the Church and which ultimately makes saints of ordinary Christians. Consequently, Ratzinger argues, the work of the theologian is always secondary to the experience of the saints because it is the saint who experiences and enters into profound relationship- dialogue- with the living, speaking God.¹⁸³ To put it more precisely, then, the task of the theologian is not to *say things about* God, but to *treat God as the one who is speaking* through the people and events that reflect His plan of salvation. He writes,

The beautiful vocation of the theologian ...means making present the Word, the Word who comes from God, the Word who is God...God, in reality, is not the object but the subject of theology. The one who speaks through theology, the speaking subject, must be God himself. And our speech and thoughts must always serve to ensure that what God says, the Word of God, is listened to and finds room in the world. Thus once again we find ourselves invited into this process of forfeiting our own words, this process of purification so that our words may be nothing but the instrument through which God can speak, and hence, that he may truly be the subject and not the object of theology.¹⁸⁴

Ratzinger very much follows Balthasar, then, in his famous statement that theology is to be done in imitation of the saints, in all humility and obedience to the Word that has been spoken by God in history and always undertaken in reverence, “on

¹⁸² Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:171.

¹⁸³ Benedict XVI, Pope, *The Yes of Jesus Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love* (New York: Crossroads, 2005), 31.

¹⁸⁴ Benedict, “Homily, Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the International Theological Commission,” (October 6, 2006). Cf., Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 89-90. See also: Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 321.

bended knee.”¹⁸⁵ This posture of doing theology provides a concretized image for the whole of Joseph Ratzinger’s approach to reflecting upon the one mystery of Christian faith. His theology of revelation provides a foundation and offers shape to the rest of his theology that will be taken up in subsequent chapters. For now, then, we turn and take stock of the most essential aspects of his theology of revelation that is, we shall see, expressed in every other area of reflection on the one Christian mystery.

V. Joseph Ratzinger’s Dialogical Theology of Revelation

Having outlined the contours of the development of Ratzinger’s own theology of revelation, we turn now to highlight a few of the major thematic elements of his thought. Lieven Boeve describes Ratzinger’s “concept of dynamic revelation” that is the “turning of God toward humanity” which “effectively continues to this day- even after the closure of objective revelation.”¹⁸⁶ The “dynamic” process of the *unveiling* of the Logos in the *act* of revelation is seen both in the created order as well as the historical order and so the scientist, the philosopher, as well as the simple person of faith, can all be receivers of the one revelation of Godself.¹⁸⁷ The essential role played by the human subject in the unfolding of revelation introduces an essential mark of what I call the “dialogical structure” of the whole Ratzinger’s theology. The unfolding dialogue between God and humanity culminates in the person of Jesus

¹⁸⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Word made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209.

¹⁸⁶ Benedict, Gerard Mannion, and L. Boeve, *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 13.

¹⁸⁷ Benedict, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the International Theological Commission,” Vatican City Consistory Hall, 3 December, 2010.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101203_cti_en.html

Christ who is the definitive instantiation of divine revelation.¹⁸⁸ The Church continues to engage in this dialogue with the living God and so appropriate revelation that is “new” in the ongoing development of tradition that reflects upon Scripture. Together, then, both Scripture and tradition are the ‘positive’ sources that simultaneously draw upon the ‘internal source’ of the one revelation that lies “behind” the positive sources encountered in the life of the Church.¹⁸⁹ The consequence of this understanding of Ratzinger is that what is unveiled in the positive sources of revelation does not exhaust the substance and content of the whole of revelation. There is always a “surplus” beyond that which is revealed. There is always more to the Word than what the Eternal Word communicates in historical, human words. This *surplus* is the basis for the ongoing development of doctrine in the life of the Church as expressed in tradition as well as in theological reflection. Though the fullness of the revelation is given in the person of Christ, the way in which the Church continues to appropriate and “hear” the Word in history is always characterized as the ongoing dialogue that never ceases to convey new meaning. The ongoing engaging in the dialogue that is revelation is the action by which the Lord “makes all things new” (Rev 21:5) and which also accounts for the possibility of “development of doctrine.”

¹⁸⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 82.

¹⁸⁹ Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, 286, 14. Cf. Ratzinger’s essay, “The Question of the Concept of Tradition: A Provisional Response” in Rahner and Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 78.

Conclusion: Revelation as Historically Unfolding Dialogue

In this chapter I have outlined the essential characteristics of Ratzinger's theology of revelation. Beginning with an explanation of the influence his study of Bonaventure's theology of history had on him, I suggest that this understanding of the one Eternal *Logos* begetting many *semina* in human history is an organic metaphor for understanding how it is that revelation unfolds in history and is expressed in a two-fold way in both Scripture and tradition. This vision of revelation as unfolding in a dynamic way in history helped to open up a new horizon in the Church's own understanding of this mystery at Vatican II. Due in part to Ratzinger's influence, *Dei Verbum* embraced this understanding of revelation "seen basically as dialogue" between God and humanity that unfolds in history. This dialogical structure of Ratzinger's theology of revelation is necessarily historical in character. It is central in the Christian vision, for Ratzinger, that God "doesn't just drop down from heaven and introduce himself." Rather, God makes himself small enough to meet us as a person and "enters fully into an historical context that offers us a way to approach him, one in which he is expected and in which we are able to receive his message."¹⁹⁰ It is precisely because of the historicity of the moments of dialogue in the unfolding of revelation that Ratzinger's theological reflection is always done in a manner attentive to the particulars of history. For it is from history that Scripture and tradition emerge and it is in history that the kerygma is being proclaimed at all times in life of the Church. Finally, the most essential

¹⁹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger and Peter Seewald, *God and the World: Believing and Living in our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 206.

hermeneutical principle at work in Ratzinger's theology of revelation has to do with what has recently been deemed "the Christocentric shift" in some contemporary theology of which Ratzinger's thought is characteristic.¹⁹¹ Since Christ, the Logos of God made flesh in history, is the fullness of the revelation of God, there is no new public revelation after the New Testament.¹⁹² Consequently Ratzinger sums up his own understanding of the inner unity of the testaments in this way, "The New Testament is nothing other than the interpretation of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings found contained in the story of Jesus."¹⁹³ As the person of Christ makes intelligible all that had been anticipated about him in the unfolding of salvation history among the people of Israel, so too does he give shape to and fulfill the identity of those in the Church who come after him seeking to understand the dynamic revelation of God in which they still participate. It is to Ratzinger's understanding of the fullness of this revelation- the person of Jesus Christ- that we now turn in the next chapter.

¹⁹¹ Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*; see also Avery Cardinal Dulles, "From Ratzinger to Benedict" *First Things* 160 (Fall 2006): 24-29.

¹⁹² Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 69.

¹⁹³ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 53.

Chapter 3

Jesus the Christ: Eternal Logos-Made-Love in History

There is “a divine plan, which has long been kept hidden and that God himself has revealed in the history of salvation. In the fullness of time, this Wisdom took on a human Face.”¹⁹⁴

On the 30th of September, the Feast of St. Jerome, in 2006, a year and a half into his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI signed the foreword to his book *Jesus of Nazareth*.¹⁹⁵ It is striking and indeed unprecedented that a pope approaching an 80th birthday- *while* serving as universal pastor for a church of well over a billion members, and in addition to the countless commitments that come with that office, including duties of internal ecclesial governance, international diplomacy, as well as a steady flow of other venues calling for written speeches, homilies and various teachings in every aspect of Christian concern- the same man took time and made the effort to initiate a three volume series on the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. It is also worthy of note that he made this offering to the world, not in a magisterial mode, but in a very personal way, the fruit of his life long “search for the Face of the Lord.”¹⁹⁶ With such an effort, Benedict made it unmistakably clear that the figure of Jesus Christ is at the center of his whole project, both theologically and pastorally.

¹⁹⁴ Benedict, “Homily, Celebration of First Vespers with University Students,” Vatican Basilica, 17 December 2009.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20091217_vespri-universitari_en.html. Cf., 1 Cor 2:7.

¹⁹⁵ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. Translated by Adrian J. Walker. (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxiii, citing Psalm 27:8. The second volume was published in March 2011, nearly seven years into his pontificate. See Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth. Part Two, Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).

I situate this exploration of Ratzinger's Christology in the immediate wake of an examination of his theology of divine revelation and before an exposition of his ecclesiology. This is so because for Ratzinger, Christ is the fulfillment of revelation and yet at the same time, he is able to be known truly only in the context of the believing *ecclesia*. In this chapter, I will therefore begin by describing how it is that Ratzinger's Christology flows directly from his understanding of revelation and will conclude with an introduction to the intrinsic link between his Christology and ecclesiology since it is precisely in the context of the Church that Christ is known. The middle of the chapter will be devoted to how his Christology is characterized as an unfolding dialogical narrative that characterizes the relationship between God and humanity. While the center of this narrative is the Incarnation of the Eternal Word in Jesus Christ, we encounter the same Word through whom "all things were made" (Jn 1:3) in creation and also as the Word toward whom all of salvation history tends. Within the order of creation, then, Christology becomes the lens through which we can discern the ultimate ground of all reality. This metaphysical grounding, when seen in conjunction with salvation history, proves to be one of communicability. The Word (Logos) through whom all things were made, when following the order of salvation history, turns out to be the Word that is ultimately manifested as love itself in Jesus' self gift on the cross. The systematic framework that makes sense of reality in the order of creation as an expression of divine Logos cannot be arrived at outside of tracing the development of salvation history. And so, in Ratzinger's thought, Christology has a logical coherence that is intelligible not simply in the realm of pure logical speculation but has light shed on it by way of

experience in history. The experience of the Word in history illuminates the order of creation that is logically coherent and which ends up being most intelligible not as logic alone, but as dia-logic- as communication.

I. The Fullness of God's Revelation

In this study of the coherence of Ratzinger's thought, we approach his Christology after having examined his theology of revelation. There, we recognized that his understanding is that revelation is not static and abstract in its essence but rather "dynamic."¹⁹⁷ Characteristic of revelation, as Ratzinger sees it, is that it is unfolding in history and as such *dialogical* and *narrative* in structure. The culmination of this unfolding revelation of God in history is the entrance into the narrative of the person of Jesus Christ. He *is* the dialogue, the *encounter itself* between God and humanity- in one person. As the figure of Jesus Christ is seen as the fullness of the revelation of God, Christology then becomes, for Ratzinger, the hermeneutical key to the whole of theology. Emery de Gaál has recently highlighted this Christocentric aspect of Ratzinger's theology. In the epilogue to his book, he makes his concluding remarks on the whole of Ratzinger's thought:

Life in its varied abundance is far too powerful to be grasped or harnessed by a system. This is the 'Christocentric shift.' In this sense one would do a great injustice to Ratzinger's theology were one to press it into a self-contained, closed box of timeless truths. He has always avoided such a temptation in his own theology... But amid human frailties, the Word did indeed become incarnate. This is the incontrovertible reality and truth... One cannot doubt it and still be a Christian.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Jose Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez Navarro, eds. *Opening Up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 26.

¹⁹⁸ Emery de Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 301.

The figure of Jesus Christ, then, in de Gaál's estimation of Ratzinger's thought, is foundational for the whole of Christian experience and for every aspect of authentic theological reflection in the Christian tradition. He goes on to say, "As is the case for every Christian, every theology, every theologian, bishop or pope as well, they receive their true greatness by becoming similes or parables for God by participating in the natural, supernatural life of Jesus Christ, who is the *Logos* and thus permitting the Incarnation of God in Jesus to continue to the end of time."¹⁹⁹ What marks the difference of Ratzinger's theology in this regard is the differentiation it draws from the "anthropocentric shift" that occurred in many circles in twentieth century Catholic theology that ran the risk of trying to make sense of the Christian mystery from within the confines of "a Cartesian egocentric view"²⁰⁰ that equates meaning with human knowledge. Rather, as de Gaál argues, Ratzinger has insisted on the centrality of the "Christian hermeneutics of salvation history."²⁰¹ At the center of this history, of this narrative, is the character of Jesus Christ.

For Ratzinger, the centrality of Christ is evident precisely because of the dialogical nature of the whole of his theology. He explains that Christology is the "new subject and foundation of all theology"²⁰² because in Christ, not only has God spoken to humanity but humanity is now able to enter into a new subjectivity with respect to God- to speak as a new "I." Ratzinger sees St. Paul's experience as

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 300

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 50.

paradigmatic of this new subjectivity, recalling the Apostle's declaration of his new identity: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This was not only Paul's experience, but is rather the fundamental experience of all Christians, and involves a dying of the old "I" that "ceases to be an autonomous subject standing in itself. It is snatched away from itself and is fitted into a new subject. The 'I' is not simply submerged, but it must really release its grip on itself in order to then receive itself anew together with a greater 'I'."²⁰³ There is, then, at the heart of Christian identity, the need to undergo transformational conversion in light of the encounter with the person of Christ. The evangelist John recounts Jesus' own words to his disciples: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (12:24). They will come to see the perfect instance of the one who dies and bears much fruit and come then to learn how they can do the same in their own lives in union with and in imitation of him. This new fruit that can be produced among the faithful comes as a result of the union with Christ and being drawn into the new subjectivity of Christ. There is a necessary dying of the old human self to become alive again as a new "I" in Christ. This recognition that God has spoken to humanity in Christ as the eternal "I," and that by way of relationship with Christ, we can speak in turn to God in a newly acquired subjectivity, is the basis of Ratzinger's understanding of the whole of the Christian mystery.

From the view of the whole narrative which culminates in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus, Ratzinger's method of theological reflection can then look

²⁰³ Ibid., 51.

back on the whole of the narrative, going steadily back over salvation history in the presence of the Risen Lord in order to understand it anew in light of the saving experience in Christ. We might characterize this approach to Christology as “dialogical” in that its very shape is following the speech of God and humanity’s response throughout history. This dialogue between God and humanity subsequently constitutes a narrative of its own throughout salvation history. Ultimately, the person of Christ himself is the perfection and fullness of this dialogue both as God speaking to humanity and humanity responding to God.²⁰⁴

The Historical Jesus Accessed Through a Hermeneutic of Faith

Ratzinger sees that as divine revelation unfolds in history, it reaches its fullness in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. As he is historical, the figure of Jesus is rightly approached by the method of historical analysis. But an historical approach divorced from the perspective of faith is not sufficient for true knowledge of him. In the Foreword to his second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict notes his satisfaction that since the publication of his first volume, there seems to be an increasingly robust scholarly discourse on the question of allowing for a theological perspective on exegetical methodology. He says that after two hundred years of historical critical exegesis, its “essential fruit” has already been produced. However, if historical-critical exegesis hopes to remain fruitful and not “exhaust” itself, it must “take a methodological step forward and see itself once again as a theological

²⁰⁴ Ratzinger alternates between these two approaches when he describes the discovery of the “God of the philosophers” and the “God of biblical faith” in *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 116-150. The tension of these two approaches was also the topic of the inaugural lecture he gave upon his arrival at the University of Bonn in 1959. J. Ratzinger, *Der Gott Des Glaubens Und Der Gott Der Philosophen*, (München: Schnell & Steiner: 1960), 70.

discipline, without abandoning its historical character.”²⁰⁵ Developing a familiar theme in his theological vision, building on a focus on biblical exegesis and from there moving to construction of theological perspective, he asserts that scholarly exegesis “must recognize that a properly developed faith-hermeneutic is appropriate to the text and can be combined with a historical hermeneutic, aware of its limits, so as to form a methodological whole.”²⁰⁶ For Ratzinger, Scripture cannot be understood outside of this “methodological whole” that keeps in tension the faith-hermeneutic as well as the historical hermeneutic. Together, they form one authentic perspective on the nature and substance of revelation’s two expressions in Scripture and tradition. But what of this “faith-hermeneutic”? What constitutes its shape? For Ratzinger, this approach always flows from the ecclesial context in which God speaks and in which he spoke definitively in the person of Jesus Christ.

This “faith-hermeneutic” that Ratzinger describes that is always ecclesial in shape, is outlined in *Dei Verbum* #12:

“since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith.

This becomes one of the major motifs of Ratzinger’s theological and pastoral career. Only in this ecclesial context can Jesus Christ be known- in the context of *encounter* with him, along with others who seek his face- together, in the “collective I” of the

²⁰⁵ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two*, xiv.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

Church.²⁰⁷ The vision of the union of God and humanity found in Christ, therefore, is for a Ratzinger, the “result of a dialogue, the expression of a hearing, receiving and answering that guides man through the exchanges of ‘I’ and ‘You’ to the ‘We’ of those who all believe in the same way.”²⁰⁸ The nature of this inner relationship of ecclesiology and Christology in Ratzinger’s theology will be taken up at the end of this chapter as a bridge to the next chapter on the dialogical nature of the Church. In the meantime, we draw closer to examine the particular shape of this Christological and ecclesiological hermeneutic of faith so central to Ratzinger’s methodology.

Christ and the Scandal of Particularity

Ratzinger’s exposition of the faith “of those who all believe in the same way” in this ecclesial and Christological unity, is of course not universally appealing. The vision of apprehending the unity of God and humanity in terms of a dialogue initiated “in the beginning” and fulfilled in the person of Jesus, has the capacity to draw the reader in and then immediately stop up short once the consequences of accepting this narrative become clear. As disarming as the invitation can seem, there is still reason for resistance to the invitation. Though the very structure of dialogue is necessarily “open” to those who seek to enter into it, it is also, by its nature *particular* and in that sense manifests a dimension of exclusivity. The believer is invited to take part in *this* dialogue, *this* narrative, with its own history, characters, modes of interpretation, etc. It involves entering in to a “hermeneutical circle” with its own boundaries. Hence the resistance in contemporary culture to

²⁰⁷ For an elaboration on this ecclesial hermeneutic of Ratzinger, see Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 147ff.

²⁰⁸ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 90.

the Christocentrism of one like Ratzinger becomes evident. The reason for the resistance is that underneath the invitation is a particular proposal, even *promise*, of salvation for all those who are willing to say “yes” to it. The particularity of this promise proves to be a stumbling block in the contemporary context of religious pluralism and the general “dictatorship of relativism” that Ratzinger has so famously diagnosed in contemporary western culture.²⁰⁹ Before giving an exposition of the structure of this particular narrative, we pause to acknowledge the nature of the resistance to its consequences as various scholars have responded to Ratzinger’s articulation of it.

Pope Benedict’s portrayal of the Jesus of the Gospels in *Jesus of Nazareth* is both attractive and also provides a stumbling block for contemporary audiences accustomed to a posture of “objectivity” as the *modus operandi* in a religiously pluralistic context. The Christological hinge upon which this vision turns is given a special clarity in the course of the dialogue he enters into with Rabbi Jacob Neusner.²¹⁰ Intrigued by Neusner’s concerted attempt to look upon the figure of Jesus from a thoroughly Jewish perspective,²¹¹ Benedict makes use of the fruit of his friend’s contemplation and then lets it shed light upon his own long “search for the face of God” in Christ. The rabbi and the pope see a great deal in common regarding

²⁰⁹ For an in-depth articulation of Ratzinger’s understanding of the danger of this relativism, see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004). See also his famous homily at the conclave of cardinals gathered to elect John Paul II’s successor: “Homily of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals,” Vatican Basilica 18 April 2005. http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.

²¹⁰ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 103-127.

²¹¹ Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus: An Intermillennial, Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Neusner continued the dialogue with Benedict with a simultaneous release of his response to *Jesus of Nazareth*: J. Neusner, “Renewing Religious Disputation in Quest of Theological Truth: In Dialogue with Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth*,” *Communio* 34. 2 (2007).

the continuity of the figure of Jesus within the tradition of the people of Israel, but it is especially in the place where they depart that Benedict finds confirmation regarding the unsettling nature of the Christian proclamation of the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Benedict relates how Neusner sees claims of divinity by Jesus, not only in the more direct statements about the Father and him being “one” (e.g., Jn 10:30; 17:21), but even within the Sermon on the Mount which many would point to as the least controversial and most universally appealing of Jesus’ teachings. Rabbi Neusner points to this claim to divinity within the Sermon by recalling the Babylonian Talmud in which Rabbi Simelai analyzes the synthesis of the law from the 613 commandments given to Moses and their steady consolidation from David to Isaiah to Habakuk, etc. Then Neusner, in this dialogue across centuries, “asks” Simelai how Jesus fits in to this understanding of the law. Through the course of this “dialogue” Neusner concludes that Jesus took away nothing from the law and *added only himself* to it.²¹² That is to say, Jesus is consistent with the tradition of Israel up to his inclusion of himself as the fulfillment of the law and therefore in identification with God himself.

This honest exchange with a Jewish friend and partner in dialogue is held by Benedict as a model of taking seriously each tradition *from within* and according to its own sources of revelation and then letting the dialogue unfold without fear or manipulation from that point, even if it ends up in ultimate disagreement about interpretive conclusions. At the center of this dialogue is that “word” of God, Jesus

²¹² Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 105. Cf. J. Neusner, *The Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, 107-108.

of Nazareth, who both establishes a bridge to dialogue beyond the Church and also a stumbling block for total agreement with it. This same dynamic is increasingly at work in contemporary culture, the greater the awareness of religious pluralism becomes. For Benedict, this ecumenical exchange between two clear-sighted and strong believers honest about their different beliefs about the person of Jesus is an especially fruitful moment of dialogue.²¹³

Though the ultimate disagreement on the identity of Jesus is obvious in the context of Christian-Jewish dialogue, it also becomes problematic within Christian circles as well. John Haught, for example, grapples with the “alleged finality of Christian revelation”²¹⁴ consistently held in the Christian tradition. Given the pluralism of today, there emerges a problem with the dialogical theology of one like Joseph Ratzinger.²¹⁵ Precisely because he posits a more personal and even intimate portrayal of God’s revelation in Christ, there is a specificity to be grappled with. If the claims were more general and more philosophical, this difficulty would dissipate. Precisely because Ratzinger takes a narrative approach to theology, there is a need to follow the specificity of the one story being told and ultimately to be confronted with the main protagonist of the story who demands a response and who cannot be relegated to the sidelines of one among many characters. The difficulty entailed by the Christocentrism of the Church’s teaching on revelation and

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ John F. Haught, *Mystery and Promise: A Theology of Revelation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993).

²¹⁵ For an survey of some of the responses to *Jesus of Nazareth*, see Roland Deines, “Can the ‘Real’ Jesus be Identified with the Historical Jesus? A Review of the Pope’s Challenge to Biblical Scholarship and the Various Reactions it Provoked” *Didaskalia*, 2009, 39.1, [Note(s): 11-46, 5-6 [37 p.]].

the contemporary backdrop of religious pluralism became abundantly clear in the eruption after the publication by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of the Declaration entitled, “*Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*,” on the Solemnity of the Transfiguration in the Jubilee Year, 2000.²¹⁶

A nerve was certainly touched in the wake of this document from the CDF, headed at the time by Cardinal Ratzinger. The insistence on the unicity of Christ and the Church in the divine plan of salvation history struck a chord of dissonance in the contemporary intellectual culture so conditioned by this time to the landscape of religious pluralism. But Ratzinger’s Christology that centers on the *Logos* as a way of interpreting the Christian mysteries in terms of dialogue and an unfolding narrative of the relationship between God and the world, is vital to keep in mind in reading *Dominus Iesus*. The Church herself recognizes the ongoing need in history to continue to contemplate the mystery of the Word spoken in Christ. The Church does not consider herself the “possessor of the monopoly” on truth. At the same time, the Christian faith very plainly has believed from the very beginning, that God spoke uniquely and definitively his Word in Jesus Christ. As such, the Church herself stands in humility before this mystery along with the rest of humanity, trying to be receptive to listening to what this Word says about who God really is and what humanity is really capable of. This listening is ever unfolding in the authentic Christian vision and it is characterized by that posture of humble listening and

²¹⁶ *Sic Et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, Edited by Stephen J. Pope, Charles Hefling. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

receiving. To *relativize* this Word spoken as equivalent to many other *words* in human history, is actually a refusal to stand in humility before the mystery that God has spoken the fullness of himself once and for all in Jesus Christ. Holding to the truth of this mystery, the Church actually holds to the possibility of unity among all peoples precisely because of the particularity of this Word spoken once, in fullness, in history. Indeed, this declaration of the CDF offered thirty five years after the Council draws upon conciliar teaching in its conclusion indicating that only by holding fast to the faith of the Church, as *Dignitatis Humanae* urges, can the Church be a source for unity in the world among all people.²¹⁷ At the center of this faith of the Church is the revelation of Christ who is “‘the true lodestar’ in history for all humanity,” as John Paul II put it in *Fides et Ratio*.²¹⁸ Having taken note of the “scandal” of the particularity of Ratzinger’s Christology, we turn now to the difference the unicity of Christ makes in understanding both God and humanity in his theology.

Christ Determining Theology and Anthropology

Ratzinger’s Christology simultaneously shapes his theology of God and his theological anthropology. Both a new understanding of God and a new understanding of humanity emerge as one follows the narrative that has Jesus Christ as the central character. As the oft-quoted passage from *Gaudium et Spes* puts it, “Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his

²¹⁷ *Dominus Iesus* #23. Cf., *Dignitatis Humanae*, #1.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, #23. Cf., *Fides et Ratio*, # 15.

love, fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling.”²¹⁹ Not only is humanity reconceived in light of Christ, but so is the Godhead. Because of the experience of Christ, God comes to be understood, in Ratzinger’s view, “not only as *logos* but also as *dia-logos*, not only idea and meaning but speech and word in the reciprocal exchanges of partners in conversation.”²²⁰ He notes that this revelatory and dialogical view of God, who communicates himself, radically challenges the ancient Greek philosophical understanding of reality. As such, God and all being that flows from God’s creative will is to be understood anew as perfected not in static unity, simplicity, immutability, and so on. Rather, the perfection attributed to God comes to be re-interpreted in fundamentally dynamic, *relational* terms. God comes to be known as the One who speaks and who, in His speaking, shows himself to be not only creative, intelligent and intelligible but also *essentially* communicative and loving.

A new anthropology is given in Ratzinger’s Christocentric vision as well. When he treats the question of God in general in his *Introduction to Christianity*, he notes that the question can be approached by questions of speculative philosophy through the themes of being and truth²²¹ and so on, but also existentially according to the theme of the human *experience of loneliness*. As the “I” of the person experiences longing for the “you” of another, the longing for relationship is fulfilled only partially, he explains, when the “you “ is another human person. But the satisfaction

²¹⁹ Vatican Council (2nd: 1962-65), *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northport, NY: Costello; Dominican Publications, 1996), “Gaudium et Spes” #22, 185.

²²⁰ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 183.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

of this longing occurs only when “a call to the absolute ‘You’ that really descends into the depths of one’s own ‘I’”²²² is experienced and responded to. Jesus is the one, in Ratzinger’s Christological anthropology, who simultaneously shows humanity what a human response to the longing for the “absolute You” looks like and how the absolute “I” speaks in turn to humanity who longs to be drawn out of the experience of loneliness into relationship. The human person is fulfilled only when entering into the human- divine, I-Thou dialogue. This encounter makes possible the discovery of the fullness of love that has as its perfect pattern the dialogue that is love of the Father and the Son, united by the Holy Spirit. The human person is created for participation in this same dialogue. All other human relationships are perfected when flowing from this Trinitarian pattern of dialogue. The figure of Christ, then, opens up new horizons both for the theology of God and also of the human person. In this sense, Ratzinger’s Christology sets the stage for a profound personalism that can shape our understanding of Christian anthropology. Central to this Christological anthropology of Ratzinger is the insistence that since eternity has entered into history in Jesus Christ, the human person living in history always has his or her destiny lying ahead in eternity and this destiny is fulfilled in being drawn into relationship with that same Jesus Christ. The human person, then, seen through a Christological hermeneutic, is always both historical and transcendent in nature and in fulfillment.

²²² Ibid.

II. Christ Uniting Faith and History

Throughout the course of the theological explorations of Joseph Ratzinger, thanks especially to his study of St. Bonaventure, a constant motif is that of Jesus Christ as the *center* of history.²²³ All of salvation history that preceded him was leading up to him and all that comes after him, in the life of the Church, is lived out in reference to him as the fullness of the Church's identity and as the fulfillment of human history. As he would later begin the Christology section of his *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger describes Christ as the "central and decisive point of all human history."²²⁴ Jesus Christ is the locus par excellence of the encounter of the eternal with the temporal. The redemption of all history is made possible thanks only to the fact of the entry of the divine into human contingency. Furthermore, when it comes to the life of the Church and the ongoing struggle to find the path to ongoing renewal, the shape of that path is always determined by the quality of the encounter of every person, from every age, with the person of Jesus.

As these encounters with Christ happen in the context of the *ecclesia*, so too do the descriptions of Jesus as the Christ emerge from the ecclesial community in the form of various *symbola fidei*. The profession of the symbol of faith on the part of the ecclesial community is the way in which the community reminds itself at any given moment within history who they are, from whom they have come and to whom they are going. At the center of this profession is the acknowledgement of the person of Jesus Christ and the work he accomplishes in redeeming all of humanity.

²²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 143-148.

²²⁴ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 193.

The structure of the whole of Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* is the framework of the Apostles' Creed. While his exposition of the meaning of the different articles of faith is innovative and struck an immediate chord of freshness,²²⁵ it is telling that the manner in which this exposition unfolds is not original, but rather traditional and ecclesial in that it proceeds deliberately from *within* the framework of the ancient, established boundaries of the settled dogmatic articulation of the faith in the *symbolum*.²²⁶ From within this framework, however, he articulates the meaning of the articles of faith in dialogue with the questions of his contemporaries. By using the Apostles' Creed, Ratzinger is able to hold in tension the doctrine of Christ that avoids the simplistic extremes of, on the one hand, "the reduction of Christology to history and on the other, abandoning history as irrelevant to faith."²²⁷ Thomas Rausch explains the dynamics here between Ratzinger and his main interlocutors: "The first approach [reducing Christology to history], symbolized by Harnack, purifies the faith of doctrine and creed, making the reconstruction of the historical Jesus determinative for Christology. The other, symbolized by Bultmann, makes faith in the Christ alone important" while the importance of the historicity of the person of Jesus Christ fades.²²⁸ Harnack and Bultmann are indicated at times in Ratzinger's theology as representative of two trajectories in modern theology that grapple with the question of faith and history

²²⁵ Emery de Gaál calls it a "twentieth century classic" and that it was received as such with great enthusiasm when it was first published. De Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 129-143.

²²⁶ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 82-102.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

²²⁸ Thomas P. Rausch, *Who is Jesus? : An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 4.

both of which end up proceeding in ways that truncate the fullness of the Christian mystery. There is a sense in Ratzinger's own self-understanding of the need to stand in the breach created by these two modern approaches to theology in order to achieve a certain synthesis that holds in tension the necessity of the perspective of faith and the importance of history within that same perspective.²²⁹ This is perhaps the most significant mark of division within contemporary Christology, namely the apparent mutual exclusion of the "Christ of faith and the Jesus of history." On the one hand, as the challenge of historical criticism became stronger in modern scholarship, historicist exegetes saw the perspective of faith obscuring the quest for the *historical* and therefore, the 'real' Jesus. On the other hand, as the figure of Jesus became more and more stripped of vitality under the scalpel of some historical-critical methods, others were compelled to posit Christ as more of a strictly spiritual figure that at least would meet some of the needs of the contemporary existential search for God. Yet the more these trajectories developed, the less feasible it seemed to ever reach a point of reconciling them into one person, *Jesus the Christ*.

A Spiritual Christology

Ratzinger consciously walks the line between these two divisions attempting again and again to respond to the demands of each side and then bring them into dialogue with one another. On the one hand, in the preface to *Behold the Pierced One*, Ratzinger indicates the need that exists for a "spiritual Christology" in contemporary theology. He compares the contemporary need to the need seen also by the Third Council of Constantinople concluded in 681 that sought, after centuries

²²⁹ De Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 140.

of struggle to define Christological doctrine, to situate the mystery of Christ back into the spiritual context that makes him accessible to his contemporary followers.²³⁰ The Chalcedonian assertion that Christ is both fully human and fully divine did not adequately account for the how it is that the two natures coexist in one person, Ratzinger explains. Two centuries after Chalcedon, questions about the relationship between the human and divine natures of Christ persisted. In the face of the question of the will of Christ, Ratzinger recalls the Third Council of Constantinople that taught,

We proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers. And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said, far from it, but his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will.²³¹

The fully human will of Jesus, then, is fulfilled and perfected as it is lived out in obediential relationship to the divine will. For this reason, Ratzinger focuses on the “spiritual” dimension of Christology that alone has the capacity to indicate the importance of Jesus’ own spiritual life that sought only to do the will of his Father.

Ratzinger explains that contemplation of the figure of Jesus leads one to the recognition that at the core of his personality is the fruitful tension of his communion with the Father and his desire to be obedient to Him out of love for and trust of Him. Focusing on Jesus’ prayer allows the contemporary audience to be drawn into the same dynamic of coming to find the fullness of humanity in loving

²³⁰ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 9.

²³¹ Jacques Dupuis and Josef Neusner, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1996), 1006. Cf., DS 556/246.

and trusting obedience to the Father. For Ratzinger, while much of the recent history of modern Christology had been devoted to questions of the nature of the hypostatic union, the knowledge and will of Christ, etc., a new awakening has emerged that has had led theologians to realize that as important as these ontological and epistemological questions may be, focusing on them at the expense of the spiritual dimension of Christ's most basic identity can result in giving a skewed vision of the totality of the Christian mystery- both in his relationship to the Father and Spirit and in his relationship to the rest of humanity. Ratzinger perceives in his own time the need for a renewed Christology that, while taking seriously the contemporary issues of the day, never lets the spiritual reality of Christ's identity and work be obscured.

On the other hand, while it is essential to situate authentic Christology in a spiritual context, it must not become merely "spiritualized" either. For this reason, Ratzinger highlights the importance of the historicity of Christ. While it can be easy to get lost in various intricacies of different aspects of the Christological controversies over the centuries, it is essential that the most fundamental mystery not be obscured, which is that God has entered into human history in order to redeem it from *within* history. With the simultaneous new emphasis on the importance of history, Ratzinger saw that only by taking human history seriously, is an authentically spiritual theology made possible. The question of the relationship between the spiritual and the historical becomes especially poignant when it comes to the area of biblical exegesis.

Ratzinger rejects attempts at exegesis that become detached from history

and engage the gospels only as a means toward spiritual insight or meaning. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, he dismisses, for example, what he calls the theory of the Gospel of John as a “Jesus poem” that is ultimately detached from historical reality. He does so on the grounds of his insistence on the historicity of the salvific kerygma of all the gospels. “A faith that discards history in this manner really turns into ‘Gnosticism.’ It leaves flesh, incarnation-just what true history is-behind.”²³² If Jesus is not the Eternal Word who has descended from above and really made known in the flesh, in history, there is ultimately no spiritual meaning and efficacy in him, for Ratzinger. It is precisely the fact that the Eternal *Logos* that ends up being expressed in history as *sarx* in Jesus Christ that makes the hope of salvation *within history* real.²³³ In Christ, the *Logos* that had been understood as the principle of coherence for all of creation, is now seen as a person- the *Logos* made flesh, manifested in love.

What makes possible this union of the perspectives of faith and historicity is precisely the fact that history is created through the eternal *Logos* and that the same *Logos* continues to be spoken within history. In *Verbum Domini*, Benedict recalls Origen’s description of the Christology of the Word as the *Logos* having been “abbreviated.”²³⁴ This abbreviation makes the Eternal Word “shorter” in that it has become historical, in order to be apprehended by humanity. As Benedict himself put it in a Christmas homily, “the eternal word became small – small enough to fit

²³² Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 228.

²³³ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 193-4.

²³⁴ Benedict, *Verbum Domini*, #12. Citing a Greek translation of the prophet Isaiah that was then taken up by St. Paul, (Is 10:23; Rom 9:28): “Ho *Logos* pachynetai (or: brachynetai)”. Cf. Origen, *Peri Archon*, I, 2,8: SC, 127-129.

into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us.”²³⁵ This is the classic kind of Benedictine formulation that is startling in its tenderness and pastoral sensitivity, drawing the suspicious contemporary audience into a highly intimate encounter- the kind of encounter for which the contemporary person longs. This confrontation with the abbreviated word opens up the possibility of a kind of re-entry into the drama of salvation history in that because of this unexpected twist in the narrative, a universal audience can take note and consider participation from a fresh perspective. Such is the mode of Ratzinger’s writing and preaching which seeks to open up new entrances for a contemporary audience into the one unfolding narrative of salvation.²³⁶

The Unfolding of the Meaning of Logos

Taking Scripture as the primary source for theology, his own theology follows that basic form of gradual unfolding of the plot, keeping the characters central and building a tension in the listener or the audience that draws him or her into the inner dynamic of the story.²³⁷ Within the I-Thou structure of his thought, Ratzinger repeatedly describes the Christian story as God “coming to” humanity, ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ. In a striking example of this in a recent work, Benedict explains the gospel narrative that concludes with the Ascension of

²³⁵ Ibid. Cf. Benedict, “Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord: Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI,” St. Peter’s Basilica, 24 December 2006.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061224_christmas_en.html

²³⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*. Translated by Michael Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).

²³⁷ It is worth recalling at this point the importance of his study of Bonaventure’s theory of the many *semina* of the one *Logos* being planted throughout human history as God’s way of revealing Himself and how the fullness of this planting of the *semina* occurs when the *Logos* itself, in the flesh, is planted in human history and thus becomes the center of that history.

Jesus to the right hand of the Father as an apparent “going away” which in actual fact is the means by which he will “always remain” with humanity. It is for this reason that upon his Ascension, upon his “going away,” the disciples can be simultaneously “filled with joy.”²³⁸ The ongoing presence in history of Christ, the central character of this narrative, is made possible precisely because of the fact that he is the eternal divine person who has taken on temporal, historical human nature. This union of divinity and humanity in Jesus of Nazareth is what makes it possible for humanity to be drawn up into eternity while at the same time making his presence in history a lasting one.

In Ratzinger’s thought, not only is the drama itself of salvation history unfolding, but the theological *understanding* of this history is also unfolding in its own kind of drama within a drama. The whole of his theology is manifested following the pattern of narrative, rather than propositional and therefore static, assertion of arguments in the form of propositions and mere ideas. The truth of the Eternal Logos continues to be appropriated in history in the life of the Church. In a crucial way, we see Ratzinger follow a “narrative” in the history of ideas in which a development of the understanding of terminology in the Christian tradition is observed. The development of the understanding of the term, *Logos*, is of special importance here. In a key passage in his *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger produces a brief etymology of the term as it has been appropriated in the course of Christian tradition. He demonstrates that there is nothing static about the term and its meaning. It has, in fact, become multivalent and it is essential to pay attention to

²³⁸ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two*, 281.

the many layers of meaning the term *Logos* has acquired in the life of the Church over time.²³⁹ Following the development of the term and the varying degrees of meaning of it is a way of tracing the development of the theology God and of Christology. In light of its appropriation in the area of Christology, it then has implications for the Christian understanding of creation and anthropology as well. In his examination of the historical roots and development of the Judeo-Christian tradition, he notes that there was a fundamental choice to be had, between *Logos* and myth.²⁴⁰ Exactly at the time the “gods” of the Greeks were being dismissed thanks to the purifying reason of the philosophers, the oneness and transcendence of God was being more firmly established in the ancient world. The Greek displacement of mythology by philosophy then encountered the biblical world-view of Jews and Christians.²⁴¹ The interaction between these two cultures and their mutual challenge and purification of each other produced something new. Myths would no longer do, but neither would philosophical reason alone suffice in the attempt to explain reality. At the heart of this encounter is *Logos*, the meaning of which is expressed ultimately in the concrete personhood of Jesus Christ. The apprehension of the fullness of what this term signifies constitutes a kind of unfolding drama in its own right in the philosophical and theological realm.

In a typically patristic style of theological exposition wherein he likes to emphasize the unity of what seems to be incompatible, Ratzinger notes the

²³⁹ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 189.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 139-43.

²⁴¹ Josef Pieper and Romano Guardini, two of the great influences on Ratzinger, were very much focused on this relationship of the development of myth to *Logos* in western thought. See for example, Josef Pieper, "The Concept of Tradition," *The Review of Politics* 20.04, 1958 and Romano Guardini, *Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Herder, 1998).

“scandal” presented in asserting the union of *logos* and *sarx*. In the opening lines of his section on Christ in his *Introduction*, he describes how the second article of the Creed “proclaims the absolutely staggering alliance of *logos* and *sarx*, of meaning and a single historical figure. The meaning that sustains all being has become flesh; that is, it has entered history and become one individual in it; it is no longer simply what encompasses and sustains history but a point in it.”²⁴² Having established the tension between the realities that do not seem to “fit together”, his audience is then opened up to hearing proclaimed in a fresh way the central mystery of the Christian vision- the mystery of the person who unites what seems so inherently separated. In more recent days and in a more a pastoral setting, he makes this proclamation of the only reality that can bridge the chasm between spirit and flesh, between eternity and history. In a proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation for a world-wide audience, he explains:

‘The Word became flesh’. Before this revelation we once more wonder: how can this be? The Word and the flesh are mutually opposed realities; how can the eternal and almighty Word become a frail and mortal man? There is only one answer: Love. Those who love desire to share with the beloved, they want to be one with the beloved, and Sacred Scripture shows us the great love story of God for his people which culminated in Jesus Christ.²⁴³

The philosophical question, then, as to how *Logos* and *sarx* can be united is resolved only in following the narrative of salvation history. By tracking this narrative, the meaning of the eternal *Logos*- even that *Logos* that provides the basis of metaphysical reality itself- comes to be seen in new ways depending on how it is

²⁴² Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 193.

²⁴³ Benedict XVI, *Urbi et Orbi Christmas Message*, 2010.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/urbi/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101225_urbi_en.html

communicated in history. Indeed, as it turns out in the course of human history, the unity of *logos* and *sarx* is communicated dialogically as a word, as a *person*, who reveals love itself to all of creation.

From Ratio to Verbum

Ratzinger notes that the Greeks understood *Logos* to mean something like “meaning”. Initially the word was associated in Latin with *ratio*. By the power of this *Logos*, through *ratio*, the Creator creates with intelligence, in a way that is accessible to reason. The Creator speaks through creation in such a way that all being that comes to be is “Being-thought.”²⁴⁴ Of course, the intelligibility of the created order is not a notion that has its birth in the Christian narrative. The Greek philosophical tradition that for centuries challenged the old “mythology of the gods” was an important transition in intellectual and cultural history to seek a reasonable way of understanding the universe. Philosophy and science had, in this sense, purified religion in the western tradition. Seeing creation as *being-thought* had become a well-established aspect of Greek philosophy. Still, within this philosophical horizon, a different limitation was discovered as questioning of the *source* of this being-thought persisted. Is the creation that is “being-thought,” generated in freedom or is it merely a product of a kind of automated determinism?²⁴⁵ Does the Creator create out of necessity or in freedom? The introduction of the biblical narrative at this moment makes possible an encounter in history between the horizon of philosophy and that of faith that then produces a

²⁴⁴ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 156.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

new kind of synthesis for how to understand the relationship between God and the world. With the *Logos* at the center of this union between the worlds of philosophy and biblical faith, both creation and history are able to be understood as personal expressions of divine communication.

Verbum Communicated as Person

This new synthesis begins, in a certain way, when St. John the Evangelist applied the term *Logos* to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth in the prologue of his gospel. Ratzinger notes that the term began to take on new meaning in the history of ideas in this moment. “It no longer denoted simply the permeation of all being and meaning; it characterizes this man: he who is here is ‘Word’ ...He is constantly ‘spoken’ and hence the pure relation between the speaker and the spoken to. Thus *logos* Christology, as ‘word’ theology, is once again the opening up of being to the idea of relationship.”²⁴⁶ In this one pivotal moment, then, as salvation history and philosophy meet on a scriptural field, a new reality emerges. By the Church’s reception of the figure of Christ as the *Logos* itself in the flesh, all of creation and human history begins to be re-interpreted in light of this “verbum” who is actually communicated as a *person*.²⁴⁷

The *Log-ic* of all reality now begins to be understood not only as “meaning” in the abstract, but meaning as word-spoken that in turn becomes a person. In this sense, there is a kind of merging and mutual purification of the realms of

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 189.

²⁴⁷ In various ways, the communicative nature of theology is being explored recently. See for example, Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984) and Matthias Scharer, *The Practice of Communicative Theology: Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 2008).

mythological religion, philosophy and human history. The consequence of this pivotal encounter of these ways of thinking also opens up a new horizon for humanity in a world with a person at the center of it and with whom a real relationship is possible. In a homiletic tenor, Benedict explains,

At the very moment when the Magi, guided by the star, adored Christ the new king, astrology came to an end, because the stars were now moving in the orbit determined by Christ...It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person. And if we know this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer has the last word; we are not slaves of the universe and of its laws, we are free.²⁴⁸

The freedom of humanity is made possible then by participating in the logical structure of the universe that is not only logical in the sense of its inherent intelligibility, but also in the sense of the logic of the communicative structure of reality that is based on the Logos who is Word.

The development of the meaning of *logos* from *ratio* to *verbum* is not only a matter of semantic or linguistic preference, in Ratzinger's view. Seeing *logos* not merely as *ratio*, but as *verbum* has enormous implications, of course. And it stands at the center of Ratzinger's own "dynamic" understanding of the Christian mysteries that contributed to his innovative contributions to the Church's teaching on revelation as the previous chapter indicated. Jared Wicks, for example, sees Ratzinger's Christology resonating in the compendium on revelation written by Rahner and him as an early alternative to the neo-scholastic formulation offered by

²⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, *On Christian Hope: Spe Salvi, Encyclical Letter* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), #5.

the preparatory commission at the Council. Ratzinger's influence is seen in the description of Christ as the "vivum Dei verbum quaerens nos." This living word that has been seeking out humanity throughout all of history is fulfilled in the Incarnation.²⁴⁹ In light of this historical moment of the Incarnation, the Logos that had been spoken throughout all of history and indeed from the moment of creation, is understood anew.

Moving from *ratio* to *verbum* opened up a necessarily *dialogical structure* to theology that Ratzinger sees as essential to the content of the Christian mystery itself. He explains, "Word never stands on its own; it comes from someone, is there to be heard, and is therefore meant for others."²⁵⁰ "Word" by its very nature is communicative and points to dialogue- on being spoken and demanding a response from the one to whom it is spoken. This central term taken from Scripture is appropriated in a living way that conveys a meaning given to a narrative and dialogical view of the Christian mystery and moves away from a merely philosophical or theoretical understanding of God and his self-revelation to humanity to an understanding that radically re-formulates the approach to these questions. Consequently, as this new dimension of "logos theology" comes to be appropriated in the Christian tradition, the theology of God and indeed all of metaphysics begins to call for a renewed understanding in Ratzinger's estimation. He writes:

²⁴⁹ W. J. Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI* (New Orleans, LA: Loyola University, 2007), 9.

²⁵⁰ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 210.

The experience of a God who conducts a dialogue, of the God who is not only logos but also dia-logos, not only an idea and meaning but speech and word in the reciprocal exchanges of partners in conversation- this experience exploded the ancient division of reality into substance, the real thing, and accidents, the merely circumstantial. It is now quite clear that the dialogue, the *relatio*, stands behind the substance as an equally primordial form of being.²⁵¹

The assertion that God and indeed all of being are to be re-interpreted in light of “experience” of the God who engages in dialogue- in revelation- is indeed striking. It also changes the epistemological landscape. Because *relatio* “stands behind” and is therefore constitutive of all being, being can really only begin to be understood not by way of private speculation but in the context of dialogue with God and in the context of dialogue with the believing community- those who have “experienced” the same God who engages in dialogue.

Ratzinger stresses that the development of the meaning of the term *logos* is not the product of pure human speculation, but rather that “it grew in the first place out of the interplay between human thought and the data of Christian faith.”²⁵²

The translation of *logos* as *verbum* in the Vulgate, as well as the ultimate description of the eternal *Logos*-made-flesh as *prosopon* in the Christological and Trinitarian debates of the early Church, indicate a lively tradition appropriating the “data” of Christian faith as it is handed down from the past. That which is “given” in the Christian tradition, as long as the tradition continues to be guided by the original data, continues to be able to be mined for deeper and fuller meaning as that tradition extends into new cultures and time periods.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 183

²⁵² Joseph Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990), 439.

A Person at the Center of Christology and Soteriology

In the introduction of *prosopon*, for example, the tradition borrows deliberately from the theatrical world precisely because theologians in the Christian tradition viewed Christian faith as a playing out of a literal drama of salvation. Recalling Justin Martyr's analysis of the *Logos* speaking through the prophets of the Old Testament, for example, Ratzinger notes, "The literary artistic device of letting roles appear to enliven the narrative with their dialogue reveals to the theologians *the one* who plays the true role here, the *Logos*, the *prosopon*, the person of the Word which is no longer merely role, but person."²⁵³ The role of the one who saves has everything to do not just with what he accomplishes but who he *is*. It is evident from the early stages of theological reflection then, that there was perceived an inherent unity between soteriological and Christological understanding. How Christ saves is a question inseparable from who he is. Ratzinger's retrieval of this patristic approach to Christology as inherently intertwined with soteriology serves as a corrective of the neo-scholastic tradition that tended to separate out questions of the nature of salvation from the philosophical grounding of Christological doctrines including the nature and mode of the hypostatic union, the knowledge and will of Christ, etc. But by highlighting the interplay between philosophy and salvation history as embodied through the mediation of *Logos*, Ratzinger emerges as an important figure in post-conciliar theology that sought to reconnect Christological concerns with soteriological ones- reuniting theological

²⁵³ Ibid., 442.

reflection on Christ with its biblical context.²⁵⁴ It is precisely the *person* who reconciles humanity and divinity in his passion and death on the cross who is the person who has united humanity and divinity in his own person in the Incarnation. His identity and his work are one.

Though the early Christian tradition embraced the understanding of the Word as person, the category of Word itself also kept a certain pride of place. But it did so as understood in light of personhood. The primacy of the category of the Word in Christology did not leave questions in the purely philosophical or speculative realm. The nature of Truth itself that Logos communicates came to be re-interpreted in light of love in the Christian vision- from a static conception of it to a more dynamic one. As such, the question of the Word's effect in soteriology remained always prominent. Ratzinger explains this gradual unfolding of the position of the *Logos* as Truth as being primary and leading seamlessly to the apprehension of the Truth as Person: "Already in Greek philosophy we encounter the idea that man can find eternal life if he clings to what is indestructible – to truth, which is eternal. He needs, as it were, to be full of truth in order to bear within himself the stuff of eternity. But only if truth is a Person, can it lead me through the night of death. We cling to God – to Jesus Christ the Risen One. And thus we are led by the One who is himself Life. In this relationship we too live by passing through death, since we are not forsaken by the One who is himself Life."²⁵⁵ Situating the

²⁵⁴ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 13-5.

²⁵⁵ Benedict, "Mass of the Lord's Supper: Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI" St. John Lateran Basilica, 1 April 2010.
http://www.pcf.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100401_coena-domini_en.html

question of truth against the backdrop of the final question of the limit of death moves the whole discussion from the speculative to the existential realm of concern. Ratzinger's argument that "only if truth is a person, can it lead me through death," is not of course a product of *a priori* speculation. It is, rather the fruit of *a posteriori* reflection upon the experience of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection given in the scriptural witness. He is the person who is revealed to be Truth itself precisely because he leads *through* death- that which otherwise would seem to define the limits of the truth of human existence. The experience then of the "Jesus of history" who defeats death, leads to the understanding of the same man as the "Christ of faith" precisely because of the fact of the destruction of death and restoration of life that occurs in him in history.

III. The Person of Christ as Key to Scripture and Tradition

In arriving at the understanding of the *Logos* ultimately revealed in Scripture as *person*, the question inevitably arises, what kind of person? What are the values of this person? What are the primary relationships? What are the dispositions and aims of this *Logos-made-person*? Careful exegesis of course is central to this task of answering these questions. For Ratzinger, the fullness of the identity of the Word of God spoken in the context of ecclesial faith, among the Chosen People of God, is the person of Jesus Christ. Christ both emerges out of the tradition of Scripture and is the summation of the revelation of Scripture and he is therefore the key to its

authentic interpretation.²⁵⁶ Consequently, he must be approached on his own terms and not according to those who do not have the benefit of the horizon of the communal and ecclesial hermeneutic of faith. He must be approached as he is presented in Scripture and from within tradition. For Ratzinger, Christ is also the *form* of authentic tradition, emerging from the narrative of the past and yet bringing to fulfillment the new development of the Revelation of God for all generations. What has been handed on in faith from the time of Abraham to John the Baptist was oriented toward the coming of Christ. And since his coming, the living tradition of the Church has had as its *raison d'être*, the ongoing attempt to understand and appropriate the meaning of his identity and how he accomplishes the new and everlasting covenant between God and humanity.

The task of understanding the figure of Jesus of Nazareth has from the very beginning, been fraught with difficulty. The Gospels themselves offer a kind of paradox when it comes to Jesus' relationship to Tradition and the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. Ratzinger relies on Ernst Käsemann's assessment of the dilemma: the question for the modern interpreter of Jesus seems to be the choice between Jesus as a kind of "liberal revolutionary" or a "pious traditionalist." Portions of the gospels give support for both of these conclusions. On the one hand, there is the admonition Jesus gives that if anyone departs in the least way from the demands of the Law, he "will be considered least in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt

²⁵⁶ Again, Wicks attributes to Ratzinger the language of Christ as the "Clavis Scripturarum, canon interior apriens quod in eis est" in the compendium on revelation given to the bishops at Vatican II. Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II*, 10.

5:19). At the same time, Jesus operates with clear freedom with respect to the Law when he himself reminds the Pharisees that the Sabbath is “made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27).²⁵⁷ But the way forward in understanding Jesus is not to choose between these seemingly opposing views of Jesus but rather letting the tension between them speak to the whole truth of his identity. Ratzinger explains that Jesus operates in a way suggesting he is obedient to *Tradition* and yet free from the constrictions of particular *traditions* that have emerged in the attempt to be faithful to the underlying Revelation of the Word of God. To what, then, is Jesus really obedient?

For Ratzinger, the fundamental identity of Jesus is not as a follower of tradition nor is it as a revolutionary against it. He is neither fundamentally a liberal revolutionary nor he is simply a traditionalist in his piety with respect to the Law. Rather, his most basic identity is as the Son of the Father.²⁵⁸ As the Father is the initiator of the Covenant, we can see in the Son the fulfillment of the Covenant from both the divine and human sides. As such, Jesus both affirms the covenantal relationship of the past and also is critical of the following of it in the present. He is critical in order that the covenant might be fulfilled by the whole People of God in

²⁵⁷ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 95. Cf., Ernst Käsemann, “Was Jesus Liberal?” in *Der Ruf der Freiheit*, 3rd edition, (Tübingen, Mohr, 1968), 19-53.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 94-99. See also the beginning of Benedict’s “personal search for the face of the Lord” when he describes how the Baptism of the Jesus gives the first cues as to the real substance of Jesus’ identity not as a “human genius subject to emotional upheavals, sometimes fails and sometimes succeeds” but rather as “the beloved Son.” Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 24.

the future. The fulfillment of this covenant is to draw humanity precisely into the Sonship that is at the core of Jesus' identity.²⁵⁹

Person as Son

More than a philosophical question, the reality of the divine person entering into human history is a question of entering into a story. And at the center of the story are characters, with real relationships. There is a sense in which, in Ratzinger's approach, the identity of Jesus as *Son* of the Father unfolds from the identification of him with "the Word." This filial identity of Jesus is another expression of the paradigm of the relationality of Word-spoken-by-speaker and continues to reveal the fullness of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. This is evident in Benedict's most mature exposition of the figure of Jesus as primarily revealing the character of "Son." Especially in the opening chapter of the first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, in his description of the baptism in the Jordan, Jesus is presented in the gospels as the beloved Son of the Father. This is true at the beginning of his public ministry and then again in the nature of his rejecting the temptations of Satan in the desert by referring back again and again to his relationship with the Father as *the* center of his identity. All the way to his communication with his Father on the Cross, it is clear for Benedict what the central characteristic of Jesus' person is—namely his identity as the Beloved Son of the Father. This identity is then opened up and extended to the followers of Jesus as he teaches them to share in his own

²⁵⁹ Benedict, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 33-7.

relationship with the Father when he teaches them to pray.²⁶⁰ This filial identity of Jesus, then, also comes to mark the core identity of the whole Church- as children of the Father.

The centrality of the Sonship of Jesus is made evident, for Ratzinger, not merely from assertions of that identity in Scripture (eg “the Father and I are one,” etc.), but rather the import of it is discovered only in following the *whole of the narrative* of the person of Jesus. We see that central to his personhood is the more specific identity of the beloved, and therefore obedient *Son* of the Father. This is an identity that gets lived out and it is an identity most poignantly recognized in his suffering and death. In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger draws upon an observation from one of his most trusted sources of biblical exegesis, Heinrich Schlier. Precisely because of the identity of Jesus as the Son of the Father, there is a way to understand more directly the inner relationship of the Incarnation and the Cross and what is revealed about God in an unfolding way through these two central “poles” of the Christian vision. “Word” alone does not adequately communicate the depth of this double revelation from Incarnation to Cross. The inherent relationality and the central aspect of sonship-as-love uniquely “carries” the meaning of these two central events in the life of Christ as “Son.” Who Jesus is and what he accomplishes, the substance of the “nominal and verbal” confessions of faith, are brought into unity when Jesus is viewed primarily from his *filial* identity. Ratzinger argues that in the *Letter to the Hebrews*, for example, the Incarnation is interpreted as an event which is fundamentally a dialogue (*Wortgeschehen*) in prayer

²⁶⁰ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 9-45; 135-41.

(*Gebetgeschehen*) between God the Father and God the Son (10:5) wherein the Incarnation is seen as the acceptance by the Savior of the body which will then be offered on the Cross.²⁶¹ This dialogue of Father and Son, a dialogue that is “in the Spirit,” continues all the way up to Calvary. For this reason, for Ratzinger, Jesus’ sonship from the Incarnation to the Cross, is able to account for and provide the locus of the perfect expression of the love of God for humanity and humanity for God.

Double Revelation of the Incarnation and Cross

We come to the point then, in Ratzinger’s Christology that seems a culmination. The understanding of *Logos*, by a path of historical and theological appropriation in the Christian tradition, has gone through various stages of meaning- from *ratio*, to *verbum* and then to the appropriation of *verbum* that is communicated as *prosopon* (person), the primary characterization of which is that of *filius*. Indeed, in Ratzinger’s mature reflection on the person of Jesus, it seems that Son of the Father takes a privileged place among the many titles and modes of understanding Jesus of Nazareth,²⁶² while this does not by any means exclude the importance of the other modes of Christology. When crowds wonder at the message of Jesus in the gospels, when they wonder where he gets the authority to speak as he does, Ratzinger notes that these are the real questions about his identity emerging. And if the *identity* is made clear, the *work* Jesus is capable of, the fact that he comes as the one who saves, also comes into focus. Ratzinger appeals back to the category of Jesus’ sonship in

²⁶¹ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 20.

²⁶² Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 1-8.

attempting to answer these questions. What Jesus speaks to the world, he says, flows directly from what is spoken to him by his Father. Countering Harnack's famous contention that Jesus spoke only about the Father and that therefore the dogmatic claims about him developed in Christology ought to be set aside, Ratzinger responds, "Jesus is only able to speak about the Father in 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."²⁶³ The Christological definitions of Jesus' identity as divine and human, then, are not accretions to his sonship but flow directly from this identity so intimately related to the Father.

But even within the framework of the "Son Christology"²⁶⁴ of Ratzinger, there is no room for complacency. Within the identity of Jesus as Son of the Father, a further tension is ever present and it is a tension that has been present throughout the Christian theological tradition. It is a tension between theology built primarily from the Incarnation and that from the Cross. He acknowledges readily that no easy synthesis is possible that might dissolve this tension. Rather, "they must remain present as polarities that mutually correct each other and only by complementing each other point to the whole."²⁶⁵ Holding these polarities in tension with one another is the task of the theologian, for Ratzinger. He notes the early work done in bringing into dialogue the "God of the philosophers" and the "God of biblical faith" in juxtaposing the importance of the category of "being" and "doing." For by looking at

²⁶³ Ibid., 7.

²⁶⁴ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 168. This is the term he uses to describe the perspective on Jesus given in the Gospel of John, on which he relies heavily for his own theology.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 230.

the figure of Christ as the Logos-made-flesh, in a theology of Christ based primarily on the Incarnation, as the Greek tradition especially developed it, the Word is seen as that which holds all being together. At the same time, precisely because of what is encountered on the Cross, the Word is communicated not just as mere “meaning” or intelligibility or even simple relationality, but as love itself- that radical, personal giving away of oneself for another.²⁶⁶ When looking upon the figure of Christ, Ratzinger says, we see that if he is held as the Word through whom all things are made, if he is being itself, he is being in such a way that being comes to be seen as doing- as “going out of oneself.” *Being* is seen, then, through a Christological lens as “exodus”, as “transformation.” Therefore, he writes, “a properly understood Christology of being and of the Incarnation must pass over into the theology of the Cross and become one with it; conversely, a theology of the Cross that gives full measure must pass over into the Christology of the Son and of being.”²⁶⁷ Such an attempt on Ratzinger’s part, to keep the polarities of Incarnation and Cross in tension with one another, is illustrative of a key aspect to the renewal of Christian theology that has seen the two poles drift from one another at various times in the history of theology.

Recognition of the tendency in Christian theology to separate too easily the theologies of the Incarnation and of the Cross emerged in the deliberations at the Second Vatican Council as well. Jared Wicks notes Ratzinger’s warning against this divide in the context of the discussion around *Gaudium et Spes* which he found at

²⁶⁶ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology”, 443-447.

²⁶⁷ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 230.

times to be too easily drawn into the optimism of the day manifesting great trust in the promise of “progress” in modern culture and human development within modernity and using the theology of the Incarnation to provide a framework for this naïve world-affirming optimism. Ratzinger warned against the notion of “progress” by our own efforts as theologically justified by the traditional doctrine of the Incarnation. Rather he insists upon the necessity of the Cross in salvation history which is an *actio divina* of *amare*, not just *laborare*.²⁶⁸ He urged the Council to keep the tension between Incarnation and Cross alive, maintaining that a full Christology involves keeping the polarities of the Incarnation and the Cross in dialogue with one another. The tension, he argued, is essential if the Church is to be true to the one Christian narrative given in Scripture. Remaining true to this tension also provides the grounding for a more profound anthropological vision in Ratzinger’s eyes, providing a basis for hope that is much deeper than mere optimism about the future based on a superficial ideology of human “progress” in the modern era.

Ratzinger holds that the Cross also forces us to reconsider *who God is* who has allowed himself to be drawn into this scandalous humiliation and defeat in the person of Jesus. He explains, “In the face of the crucified Christ we see God, we see true omnipotence not the myth of omnipotence. ... In Him, true omnipotence means loving to the extreme of suffering for us.”²⁶⁹ But this clear vision of who God really is and what love really looks like is not at all clear precisely because of the Cross. In

²⁶⁸ Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II: a Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI*, 12. Cf., *Acta Synodalia*, III/5, 562-3; IV/3, 760-1.

²⁶⁹ Benedict, “Visit to the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary in Honor of the Memorial of Our Lady of Trust..” Rome, 12 February 2010.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100212_seminario-romano-mag_en.html

fact our vision is very much clouded when we look upon the Crucified Christ. This seems to be no God at all, but a victim, one who has been defeated. Indeed, there is a sense in which we can have a clearer conception of God to a limited degree, as Creator, as long as God remains distant and we extrapolate what we think about God by way of what we encounter and know in the created world. Surely it is an intelligent and all-powerful God who can do all this! As God comes close, however, our vision is for a time confused. Our ideas of God can no longer remain so clear and distinct. Ratzinger explains the difficulty that comes into play for a theology of God once God bridges the gap between heaven and earth. "God has come so near to us that we can kill him and that he thereby, so it seems, ceases to be God for us."²⁷⁰ Only in the contemplation of the *Logos* revealed as the person of Jesus are we confronted with these challenges to see humanity and divinity both in new light. And specifically, it is through the relation of Jesus as Son of the Father that we see what is the driving force at work in his life, namely filial love.

The Father Known in Prayer

We have explored before how it is that the Father-Son relation is a dialogical relation. But the Son's experience of the Cross demonstrates there is a particular texture to the dialogical relationship between the Father and Him. It is more than just a mutual speaking back and forth. It is a relationship of obedience. The dialogue is one in which the Son hears the Father and then acts out of obedience to Him. But what is the source and aim of Jesus' obedience to the Father? Ratzinger notes in *Principles* that this obedience is not a mechanical one, but rather one that

²⁷⁰ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 55.

can only be understood in the context of his two-fold relationship a.) to the Father and b.) to humanity. The Chalcedonian framework of his identity that simultaneously asserts the full divinity and humanity of Jesus, therefore, is a hermeneutical key to understanding his mission to be obedient in such a way that it leads to his passion and death. The primacy of his identity as the divine Son of the Eternal Father is precisely the foundation for his mission to take on human nature to save it as God *and* man.²⁷¹

In order to understand this filial, obediencial relationship the Son has with the Father that leads to him being so radically “for the world,” it is necessary, in Ratzinger’s view, to enter into the *interior life* of the Son that at its core is a spiritual communion of love with the Father. Only this perspective can shed light for us on the true nature of his identity. One of the central theses in Ratzinger’s thought is that since the essence of Jesus is his constant prayerful communion with the Father, we must enter into his prayer in order to get to know who he really is.²⁷² In this, Christology sets the boundaries for anthropology. In entering into the prayer and relations of Jesus, the way is opened for humanity to be fully realized as sons and daughters of the Eternal Father. As Ratzinger explains, this is the root of our own true identities, to come to participate in Jesus’ sonship, in his prayer to and communion with the Father, by the uniting power of the Holy Spirit: “The question of Jesus’ filial relation to the Father, gets to the very root of the question of man’s

²⁷¹ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 94-101.

²⁷² de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 5.

freedom and liberation, and unless this is done everything else is futile.”²⁷³ The implications for the disciples of Jesus are definitive in light of this filial identity of Jesus. In union with Christ, his followers are able to approach the One who has been invisible until now as *Father*. He explains this unfolding of the double revelation of who God is and who humanity can become by way of union with Christ:

For one who has grown up in the Christian tradition, the way begins in the “thou” of prayer: such a one knows that he can address the Lord; that this Jesus is not just a historical personage of the past but is the same in all ages. And he knows, too, that in, with and through the Lord, he can address him to whom Jesus says “Father.” ...He sees that this Jesus is truly “Son” in his whole existence, is one who receives his inmost being from another, that his life is a receiving. In him is to be found the hidden foundation; in the actions, words, life, suffering of him who is truly Son it is possible to see, hear, and touch him who is unknown. The unknown ground of being reveals itself as Father.²⁷⁴

This revelation of the “unknown ground of being” as Father also becomes the foundation and *raison d’être* of the life of the Church. The nature of the communion that exists in the Church gathered around the person of Jesus is the possibility of his followers finding the fullness of life in participation in his filial identity.

The Risen Christ Drawing Humanity to the Father

Only in communion with the Risen Christ, with Jesus who has united himself to humanity in everything, in life, suffering and even the isolation of death, can the human family be led beyond death into eternal life. It is precisely the Risen Christ who has defeated death thanks to his radical reception of the Father’s love that brings him out of the tomb, the place of the dead, it is this Christ that is the source of life and hope for humanity. Humanity who enters into this relationship with Christ

²⁷³ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 35.

²⁷⁴ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 73.

is the Church. The members of the Church who enter in union with the Risen Christ are those who become the members of the Body of which Christ is the head.

Particularly in the gathering together to listen to the Word of God who is Christ and then in receiving that same Christ in the sacraments, the Church is able to participate in Christ's own identity as the Son of the Father.

Christ's Resurrection makes this union with him and therefore with the Father, possible, for Ratzinger. In providing a unified exegesis of the resurrection narratives from John's Gospel, he finds the basis for this understanding of the Church as grounded in Christ's filial relationship with the Father. First, he notes the puzzling response from Jesus when he appears to Mary Magdalene who, upon recognition of Jesus, attempts to cling to him and return to the former way of relating to him as "My Teacher." Rather, as Jesus rebuffs her and tells her not to cling to him until he has ascended to the Father (Jn 20:17), he seems to be pointing, in Ratzinger's view, to the need to be relating to Jesus in a familiar yet radically new way in his Resurrection.²⁷⁵ This is confirmed in the appearance to Thomas insofar as Thomas is indeed invited to come close to touch Jesus, only because it is clear that he is approaching the one who, bearing the wounds, is indeed the one who died and is now in a glorified state. There is clearly no returning to the former way of relating to Jesus as the wounds are front and center in this encounter. Ratzinger explains that this presentation of the wounds is meant for Thomas "not to make him forget the Cross, but rather to make it unforgettable."²⁷⁶ As a result of this presentation of

²⁷⁵ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 302.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

the Crucified and Risen Lord to the Church in the person of Thomas, it is now possible for the Church to be drawn into communion ultimately with the Father. This is so since, "Jesus has now become the one who is exalted at the Father's side and accessible to everyone. Now he can be touched only as the One who is with the Father, as the one who has ascended."²⁷⁷ Finally, in the case of the narrative of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, a liturgical element is brought forth which indicates that this encounter with the Risen Christ is the true basis of the life of the whole Church. Following the pattern of the liturgy that is later established, Christ is recognized and truly encountered only after a period of listening to the Word and this recognition is perfected only in the communion of the breaking of the bread. Finally, in Jesus' subsequent disappearing upon their recognition of him, there is implicit, for Ratzinger, a sense of the mission of the Church: "The worship of the Lord in Word and sacrament is the way in which we can encounter the Risen Lord; the love that shares a meal with him opens our eyes. Then he whom we have recognized disappears, for he calls us to journey farther along the road."²⁷⁸ The Resurrection, then, becomes the essential hinge upon which turns the subsequent theology of the Church, for Ratzinger. It is to this movement from Christology to ecclesiology that we now turn our attention.

Christological Basis of Ecclesiology

By being drawn into this relationship with Christ, the Church is then ultimately brought into relationship with the Eternal Logos who is not only the one

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 302.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 303.

revealed gradually in salvation history, but the Logos through whom all creation came about in the first place (Col 1: 15-17). What becomes possible within the Church is access to the fullness of truth- for the human person to find the fullness of his or her identity- to be in relationship with the one through whom all things have their being. Ratzinger succinctly articulates this Christological vision that links the eternal identity of Christ with his historical identification with the Church:

Only Christ can hold together and unify the whole; when we speak of Christ, we must of course always see the trinitarian mystery in the background; he comes from the Father, and he is present in all of history through the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to Christ and guides believers into all truth (Jn 15:26; 16:13). Universality is God's concern; Christ holds it all together because he is the Son. The Christocentric emphasis is, as such, always a Trinitarian emphasis.²⁷⁹

It follows that the pattern of ecclesial communion is also ultimately founded in Trinitarian patterns of communion and love.

In coming into relationship with Christ, then, one comes into Trinitarian relationship- participating in the filial love of the Son for the Father and being united in the love of the Holy Spirit. What the believer seeks in a personal and genuine dialogue with God- an "I-Thou" dialogue- soon reveals itself to be a dialogue that involves greater multiplicity and dynamism than might have been apparent initially. In a consideration of the Christian roots of the concept of the "person" in western thought, Ratzinger notes that because of the theological reflection on the questions, "Who is the God presented in the Scripture?" and "Who is Christ?" as the Christian tradition slowly comes to understand him, a concept of personhood is also given

²⁷⁹ Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 132.

that sheds new light on our own self-understanding.²⁸⁰ For one, seeing the true “person” revealed in Christ makes it clear that human relationality with God is at the heart of what it is to be a person- it is not an annihilation of the person. Rather, being in relation to God, “human existence is not canceled, but comes to its highest possibility.”²⁸¹

This theological personalism that emerges in the Christian intellectual tradition is perfected, Ratzinger, holds, when it is brought into the perspective of the *communio* of the Trinitarian relations. Ratzinger does not only assert a *theological* anthropology in the course of this consideration of the concept of personhood flowing from Christological deliberation. He goes a step further to demonstrate the *Trinitarian* shape of the relations that provide the foundation for authentic human relations. He says that Christology that is understood in tandem with a Trinitarian framework “adds the idea of ‘we’ to the idea of ‘I’ and ‘you’.”²⁸² Both the ‘I’ of humanity and the ‘You’ of God, are, as the Christian narrative unfolds, seen from the perspective of an intimate personal encounter, but it is not a *private* encounter between two individuals. Rather, there is multiplicity and community at work on “both sides” of this encounter that has Christ at the center. In this regard, Christ is not merely an exemplar to be followed who shows the way to union with God. Rather, he is “the integrating space in which the ‘we’ of human beings gathers itself toward the ‘you’ of God.”²⁸³ This notion of Christ as the “integrating space” in which the whole of humanity can gather makes it clear that this process of being drawn

²⁸⁰ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 439.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 452.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 453.

into his filial relationship with the Father is not one that annihilates our personhood but rather fulfills it always in the context of communion with others- with the 'collective I' of the Church. It also makes it clear that this filial relationship that involves an obediential aspect, is not a matter of submission to the one God who can easily be construed as a kind of eternal absolute monarch. Rather, this relationship, this dialogue that we are drawn into through Christ is one that not only has "space" on the human side but on the divine side as well. He explains,

In Christianity there is not simply a dialogical principle in the modern sense of a pure "I-thou" relationship, neither on the part of the human person that has its place in the historical "we" that bears it; nor is there such a mere dialogical principle on God's part who is, in turn, no simple "I," but the "we" of Father, Son, and Spirit. On both sides there is neither the pure "I," nor the pure "you," but on both sides the "I" is integrated into the greater "we." Precisely this final point, namely, that not even God can be seen as the pure and simple "I" toward which the human person tends, is a fundamental aspect of the theological concept of the person.²⁸⁴

By continuing to follow the course of the dialogue given in the Scriptural witness and the Church's ongoing appropriation of the nature of this dialogue between God and humanity, Ratzinger sees a great gift given through the Church for the whole world. In the offering of this anthropology the Church provides a basis for the great dignity of the individual person and then a reason for seeing the individual never as an individual but always one made for loving relationship with others. Indeed, many of the strikingly contemporary questions about unity and diversity in human relations resonate deeply (and perhaps surprisingly) in the presentation of this Christological and Trinitarian anthropology. Ratzinger notes, "The Christian concept

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

of God has as a matter of principle given the same dignity to multiplicity as to unity.”²⁸⁵ This unity and multiplicity that is at the heart of the Christian theology of God is also essential to the theology of the Church. Since we come to know this harmony of unity and multiplicity most perfectly in the person of Christ, he is also at the center of the Church’s self-understanding.

Conclusion: Christ Revealed and Truly Known in the Church

Before moving to an examination of Ratzinger’s understanding the Church we pause to recall what has been said about his Christology. The person of Christ, as the fullness of God’s revelation of Godself, is the center point of all of human history. By following the narrative of salvation history, through the Resurrection of Christ, it becomes possible to look back both on the order of creation and the order of history and re-interpret all of it through a Christological lens. The term Logos starts to take on different layers of meaning when this is done. The Logos through whom all things were made is not merely a principle of reason, but rather becomes personalized in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, shown most perfectly as love itself in giving up his life freely on the Cross out of obedient love to his Father and for the sake of the world. Relational, dialogical love then, becomes the proper lens for understanding all of history and even being itself. Such is the nature of Ratzinger’s Christology and such is the necessary basis for his ecclesiology as well. For Ratzinger, Christ is the center of the Church in that the very essence of the Church is to gather to hear the Word from God spoken to them and in turn to respond to that Word. The Church learns how to do this insofar as she is conformed to the person of

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

Christ who is both the Word spoken from God to humanity and is also humanity's perfect response from humanity back to God. By coming together in worship, then, in hearing the word proclaimed and being given the Word made flesh in the Eucharist, the members of the Church are in turn motivated by this Christological transformation to begin speaking that same Word of love to the world.²⁸⁶ It is to this aspect of Ratzinger's theological vision that we turn next.

²⁸⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 13-46.

Chapter 4

Church as the Locus of Divine- Human Dialogue

Having explored in the previous chapter the contours of the Christology of Joseph Ratzinger, we now turn to his ecclesiology. The two are intimately linked. Many of the essential elements of his Christology can be translated into his ecclesiology, including: 1. the dialogical and narrative understanding of Christ unfolding in history that always takes pace within the body of the Church; 2. how it is that Christ who reveals God to be *dia-logos*²⁸⁷ is always known in Trinitarian relationality which then becomes the essential basis for the structure and identity of the Church and, 3. how Christ's presence and nature is not a static but a dynamic one ultimately made known in the event of the Cross where the fullness of love is made known. It is the event of the Cross that is experienced ever anew in the context of the liturgy of the Church. For the Church, then, this fundamental expression of the love of Christ poured out on the Cross and experienced again and again in the Eucharistic liturgy becomes *the* criterion by which she can be judged as being true to herself in her mission in the world. Just as the person of Christ must be seen in light of his theology of Revelation as the Word of God spoken both in particularity as well as for a universal audience in history, so it is that the life of the Church, for Ratzinger, follows the same "once only" as well as "forever" structure of Revelation and Christology.²⁸⁸ In this chapter, I will attempt to explicate the Christological shape of his ecclesiology. I will describe how Ratzinger's dialogical,

²⁸⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 183.

²⁸⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1996), 123.

and narrative way of doing Christology and therefore ecclesiology, resonates with the theology of the Church offered in *Lumen Gentium*. In light of this conciliar teaching, I will then conclude the chapter with a section on the liturgy as the concrete expression of the theology of the Church that then provides the basis for the mission of the Church in the world.

I. Church as Place of Dialogue Between God and Humanity

In an essay attempting to look back upon and synthesize the meaning of *Lumen Gentium*, Joseph Ratzinger recalls two important moments from the Council.²⁸⁹ First, Pope John XXIII called the Council without proposing any particular themes for it, and yet as the bishops began their deliberations, they quickly came to a consensus that the Council ought to take up, primarily, the theme of the Church.²⁹⁰ This was due, in part, to the fact that Vatican I was cut short before it could complete its teaching on the matter. As clear as it became early on that the Church ought to be the focus of the Council, another voice emerged which resonated with the members as well. While gathered among the German bishops conference in anticipation of the Council, the elderly bishop of Regensburg spoke up and urged his brothers that they must, above all, “talk about God. That is what is most important.”²⁹¹ In Ratzinger’s view, this is precisely the methodology taken up by the Council Fathers. As he interprets the events of the Council as a whole in hindsight, he explains, “the Second Vatican Council certainly did intend to subordinate what it said about the Church to what it said about God and set it in that context; it intended

²⁸⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*” in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2005), 123-152.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

to propound an ecclesiology that was theo-logical in the proper sense.”²⁹² In so doing, the Church’s most authoritative teaching confirms the importance of seeing ecclesiological concerns always in light of the larger theo-logical perspective of the Christian mystery and attempts to ensure that ecclesiological concerns are not swallowed up by a horizon limited to social and political issues. This ecclesiological vision offered in *Lumen Gentium* very much resonates with Ratzinger’s own thought on the subject and we turn now to the elements in his own theology which are no doubt shaped by *Lumen Gentium*, as well as perhaps how his own theological vision was one source of influence for the Council Fathers as they discerned the theological and Christological identity of the Church.

Logos-basis of *Lumen Gentium*

As has already been discussed in earlier chapters, the primacy of the Word in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger both contributed to and continues to be shaped by the documents of the Second Vatican Council. His own study of Bonaventure’s theology of history, among other things, helped to provide foundations for the writing of *Dei Verbum* and the Christocentrism of the Catholic understanding of Revelation. This Christocentrism also finds resonance in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Here we are reminded that it is not the Church after all, but Christ, the Eternal Word made flesh and center of history, who is indeed the “lumen gentium.” He is the “vivum Dei verbum quaerens nos”- the living Word of God who

²⁹² Ibid., 125.

seeks us out.²⁹³ The Church, then, is the means by which this *verbum* continues to be spoken in human history; it is the locus of the communication between God and man. Implicit in Ratzinger's theology of Revelation based on the communicative dynamics of "the Word," is a tension that helped to anchor the teaching of the Council in the tradition, as well as opening up that same tradition to development in the future. Precisely because the Word is spoken from eternity, there is a unity and stability about it. At the same time, because it is spoken from eternity *in history*, the way the Word is heard and appropriated within the life of the Church will vary from age to age and culture to culture. This is the basis for an understanding of Revelation that is characterized as both developing historically and all the while in continuity with what had been revealed and taught in the past.

This tension was highlighted at the Council not only with respect to Revelation in *Dei Verbum*, but also for the case of the Church in *Lumen Gentium*. He noted early on after the Council's conclusion that previous modern definitions of the Church were often formulated as negative arguments against the Protestant notion of the "invisible" Church. The response of the Catholic Reformation into the twentieth century, Ratzinger explains, had often been to stress, alternatively, the institutional and therefore *visible* nature of the Church.²⁹⁴ Consequently, much of the theology of the Church had come across as rather static and communicated in propositional terms. The text that was ultimately adopted, Ratzinger notes,

²⁹³ W. J. Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI* (New Orleans, LA: Loyola University, 2007), 9. Wicks takes this phrase from a draft of a document collaborated on by Rahner and Ratzinger, serving as an alternative to the original schema on Revelation early on in the Council. He attributes this particular phrasing to Ratzinger.

²⁹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 70.

embraces the “biblical polarities” of both the sacramental and charismatic notion of the “people of God.”²⁹⁵ By undertaking a more biblical and therefore narrative approach to ecclesiology, *Lumen Gentium* is able to account for the ongoing development of the identity and mission of the people of God- the Church- as well as its foundation in the concrete and particular history of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Here is another expression of the dialogical and historical nature of Ratzinger’s understanding of theology, this time, as it pertains to the nature of the Church. The Church, he says, is always moving toward God who calls. It is not frozen in one structure of the past, but rooted in its “changeless center” of the person of Christ. And yet the Christ continues to “come,” open and speaking in history.²⁹⁶ The Church, in this Christological pattern of identity, is the people of God gathered to be open to this coming and in responding to this coming and speaking of the Christ they discover and in so doing, discovers and realizes its true identity.

II. Christological-Pneumatological Tension of the Church

As part of Ratzinger’s analysis of the theology of the Church given at Vatican II, he recalls the essential biblical pillars of the life of the Church given in the second chapter of *Acts of the Apostles*. This analysis leads him to trace three theological aspects of the Church that are present in *Acts* and which are highlighted in a new way in *Lumen Gentium*. He sees the Church in *Acts* to be revealed as *pneumatological, dynamic and liturgical*. He explains that the Lucan vision of the Church as given in *Acts of the Apostles* reveals that “First of all we are faced here

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 74.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 76

with a pneumatological ecclesiology- it is the Spirit who makes the Church. We are faced with a dynamic ecclesiology of salvation history, of which the dimension of catholicity is an essential part. Finally, we are faced with a liturgical ecclesiology: the assembly receives the gift of the Holy Spirit in the act of praying.”²⁹⁷ Similar to the rejection of the neo-scholastic categories used to try to explain Divine Revelation in the writing of *Dei Verbum*, when it came to the deliberations on the Church, there was a similar dissatisfaction with the neo-scholastic framework for understanding the Church.²⁹⁸ Above all, the static notion of the Church that was defined in more scholastic and institutional terms prior to Vatican II was set aside for a more historical, narrative and dynamic understanding of the Church’s nature. Ratzinger notes that Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis* was an important moment in the development of the Church’s teaching about her own nature that paved the way for *Lumen Gentium*. In *Mystici Corporis*, he explains, “the Church is seen as determined by pneumatological as well as Christological elements; the Church is charismatic as well as sacramental in nature.”²⁹⁹ Adding the pneumatological tension to the Christological understanding of the Church³⁰⁰ made for an ecclesiology that necessarily opened up to the current historical and ecclesial context more fully and was also, therefore, more able to engage the demands of the new spirit of ecumenical relations. Ratzinger describes the Church as the

²⁹⁷ Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 62-63.

²⁹⁸ Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights*, 71-79.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 68. Ratzinger notes the importance given to this pneumatological reality of the Church in the emphasis given to it by Pope Paul VI in his opening address to the reconvened Council in its second session on September 29, 1963.

Christological presence in history,³⁰¹ but because of the pneumatological aspect of the Church, as the Body of Christ, it is also not identical with Christ either.³⁰²

This understanding of Christ's presence in history as the Church centered on the person of Christ and yet vivified by the Spirit is, for Ratzinger, the essential aspect of the development of ecclesiology at Vatican II. The basis for such a manner of explaining Revelation in history and the Church as a carrier of Revelation is precisely the inner Trinitarian tension of Christological and Pneumatological dynamics in salvation history. While Christ is the absolute center of history and is the One through whom all creation came about and the one toward whom all of salvation history is oriented, the Holy Spirit is the One *in* whom these developments unfold. As the history of the Church unfolds, it is always moving from the center of history- the event of the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Christ. Yet the Church is also vivified and expresses itself in new ways by the ongoing movement of the Spirit. The Spirit's movement, however, is not characterized by a "pneumatic anarchy,"³⁰³ but rather always unfolds in a way that refers the Church back to its source of life in Christ. There is then, both a sense of being anchored in historical particularity of the Christ event and simultaneously an openness to the future inherent that is inherent to the character of the Church.³⁰⁴ Acknowledging the tension of the Christological and Pneumatological characteristics of the Church, then, opens up a more dynamic understanding of the nature and mission of the

³⁰¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 77.

³⁰² Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights*, 74.

³⁰³ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 119.

³⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 178-187.

Church in the modern world. This was the aim of the Second Vatican Council, as Ratzinger sees it.

I would argue that Ratzinger's appropriation of Bonaventure's theology of history is important to recall in this regard. It seems that his understanding of the Pneumatological aspect of the Church provides a way of accounting for the fact that the Church by its very nature is always unfolding in history. The one *Logos* that begets many *semina* in salvation history is a reality that accounts for both continuity and change in the life of the Church. As such, the Church is also always either developing or running the risk of corrupting and therefore is always in need of reform and renewal. The Council's shifting away from the language of the Church as the *societas perfecta*³⁰⁵ created a space for greater engagement with those beyond her "borders." The pneumatological nature of the Church that was emphasized also opened up an ecumenical horizon that made possible new avenues of dialogue and reconciliation. Earlier conceptions of the Church that were more static, he explains, gave the incorrect impression of the absolute identity of the Church with the person of Christ. This impression therefore established a kind of stalemate with respect to dialogue with other ecclesial and religious communities whereby the only possibility for "development" was conversion of others to the fullness of truth in the Catholic Church, or else remaining "in error" and necessarily outside full communion with Christ. This conception of the nature of the Church risked what Paul VI called "ecclesio-monism," making out of the Church a kind of idol that could

³⁰⁵ Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, (New York, America Press, 1936), #10. This encyclical was first promulgated in 1885.

obscure the living vitality of the Church that is better understood as a pilgrim people sojourning always “on the way” to deeper dialogue and communion with the living God in history.³⁰⁶ The Council set a whole new trajectory for ecclesiology in moving beyond the static understanding of the Church defined ontologically as the perfect society identified solely with the figure of Christ. In embracing an ecclesiological vision more biblically based, both Christological *and* Pneumatological in character, fulfilled and shaped liturgically and therefore expressing an ongoing dynamism in history, *Lumen Gentium* breathed new life into the Church’s self-understanding that was more dynamic, I argue, precisely because it was more dialogical and relational in nature. Joseph Ratzinger both contributed to this new vision and also continues to be shaped by it himself.

Dominus Iesus

A similar tension in understanding the Church emerged in more recent years. This time, however, Ratzinger found himself on the opposite side of the debate, one might say. If before the Council, he was among those arguing, with Paul VI against the ecclesio-monism that identified the Church with the Body of Christ, now, at the turn of the new millennium, he was attempting to preserve any connection at all between the Church and Christ. As the debate has unfolded, depending upon his interlocutors and how the balance had shifted in his eyes, it seems that Ratzinger has stressed the Pneumatological aspect of the Church more in the immediate wake of the Church and the Christological aspect more several decades later. The

³⁰⁶ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 3, 162.

publication of the note, *Dominus Iesus*,³⁰⁷ from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, under the leadership of then Cardinal Ratzinger in 2000, brought with it a bitter backlash against the assertion of the unicity of both Christ and the Church in the economy of salvation. Perhaps in the forty years since Vatican II, theologians and many inside and outside the Church had become so accustomed to the Pneumatological character of the Church (a proposition that had met with such resistance from many at the Council), that now there seemed to be a kind of forgetting of her Christological character.³⁰⁸

In an essay recalling the experience of the ‘train wreck’ of the reception of *Dominus Iesus*, Ratzinger attempted to articulate in more theological terms the canonical and pastoral points made in the document.³⁰⁹ Underlying this defense is his customary approach to a question based on the two-fold dynamic of the Logos that both reveals divine reality and in some ways also keeps it hidden. He refers to the basis of the title of the document as that of the confession of faith provided by St. Paul in First Corinthians, “Jesus is the Lord” (1 Cor 12:3). He calls this profession present from the inception of the Church as “a word that has been given to us by the Holy Spirit and *is* the word of the Holy Spirit.”³¹⁰ Profession of faith in Jesus as the Word made flesh who is Lord of creation and history is a profession that is made

³⁰⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000).

³⁰⁸ See for example: José Oscar Beozzo and Giuseppe Ruggieri, *The Ecumenical Constitution of Churches* (London: SCM Press, 2001); Stephen J. Pope, Charles C. Hefling, editors, *Sic Et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002); Edmund Chia, *Towards a Theology of Dialogue: Schillebeeckx's Method as Bridge between Vatican's Dominus Iesus and Asia's FABC Theology: A Scientific Essay in Theology* (Bangkok, Thailand: Edmund Chia, 2003); Hermann Häring, Janet Martin Soskice, and Felix Wilfred, *Learning from Other Faiths* (London: SCM Press, 2003).

³⁰⁹ Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 55-78.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

possible on the part of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit who in turn points to the Word.

This reliance on the category of the Logos is problematic for some contemporary theologians. Thomas Rausch, for example, laments what he sees as Ratzinger's Platonism that is guilty, in his view of "privileging idea over the concrete and the empirical."³¹¹ Rausch sums up the critiques of others based on Ratzinger's placing *logos* over *ethos* when it comes to the Church, which is an approach, they would say, that fails to take history seriously. Rausch cites James Corkery and Walter Kasper in this critique, accusing Ratzinger of an "idealist" ecclesiology.³¹² This critique fails, however, to appreciate the nature of Ratzinger's theology of history that, while it has as its source the eternal Logos that is *beyond* history, is only really communicated *in* history. It is precisely the primacy of the Logos, in fact, that makes it possible for him to develop a theology of the Church that is utterly reliant on history. With history having its source in that which is beyond history, it becomes possible to discern in history a coherent narrative that is always unfolding. Without this transcendent source of history, however, the matter of history itself quickly becomes simply a series of events that are unconnected with one another, and merely interesting items from the past that remain locked away in the past and have no real bearing on the present and the future. This is an important, ongoing theme in Ratzinger's theology, but again, in a pastoral setting, he is able to explain its importance with greatest effect in the midst of a homily. In describing the

³¹¹ Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 44.

³¹² *Ibid.*

inherently historical nature of the liturgical season of Advent, he explains, “there is no period in history for which God would be just the past which already lies behind us and has already been done. On the contrary, for all of us, God is the origin from which we come and yet still also the future toward which we are going.”³¹³ We discover this character of God’s lordship over human history only by way of encounter with the Word made flesh who *comes to* us in the Incarnation. Only from within what some call his “idealist” theology that places priority on the Logos, then, does dialogue with the living God become possible *within history* and the whole of history is thereby rendered accessible and intelligible because of it.

Ecclesia Semper Reformanda Est

Because the Logos is spoken in history in human words and in a human context, ultimately in Christ and the Church that carries the presence of Christ, there is both particularity and universality at the heart of the identity of the Church. This tension accounts for the simultaneous claims that the Church is necessary for salvation in its unique character of holiness and at the same time she carries sin within her and is always, therefore, in need of reform. In addressing the problem of the role of Christ and the Church in salvation, Ratzinger affirms the unicity and necessity of both in salvation history. He explains, “For the church to be the means of salvation for all, it does not have to extend itself visibly to all, but has instead its essential role in following Christ, he who is uniquely ‘the one,’ and therein the church is the little flock, through which God however intends to save ‘the many.’ The

³¹³ Benedict, *What it Means to be a Christian: Three Sermons* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 36-37.

church's service is not carried out *by* all human beings, but is indeed carried out *for* all of them."³¹⁴ It is precisely because of the dialogical and historical nature of the Church that the Church is never complete. It is always in need of being reformed by allowing the person of Christ to be at the center of its life and self-understanding.³¹⁵ Because her self-expression is always unfolding in history, the Church is always expressing her true identity and at the same time, always being corrupted and drawn away from the dialogue with the Lord that actualizes her true identity. In Ratzinger's view, it seems, the Church as a whole is never statically perfect, but rather perfect only in the context of the historical dynamism that is fulfilled in the on-going dialogue with the Living God. Those within the Church are often drawn away from this dialogical relationship with the Lord and turn in on themselves in sin. But in every age, there are those who heroically and dramatically manifest the fullness of this dialogical relationship with the Lord. Maximilian Heim explains that in Ratzinger's thought these historical figures who carry out such a task are the saints and they play an indispensable role in Ratzinger's narrative, historically unfolding and dialogical ecclesiology.³¹⁶ The saints are those who stand out as lights in darkness who specially reflect the light of Christ. They let their relationships with Christ reflect through them and call those around them to greater faith, hope and love. They are, indeed, at the center of the true identity of the Church insofar as they constitute her "real majority."³¹⁷ They are the concrete

³¹⁴ Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation," Translated by Jared Wicks, SJ, 2011. Publication pending.

³¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 40.

³¹⁶ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, 396.

³¹⁷ Ibid. Cf., Benedict and Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 189.

expressions of the Church that is always being reformed in every age by remaining in dialogue with Christ.

The Saints as the Normative Majority of the Church

The Church, then, for Ratzinger, is not a group of activists who come together to “set parish life in motion.” It is not comprised of those who hold ecclesial offices. All these belong to the Church, but the “radius of the ‘company’ into which we enter by faith reaches farther- beyond the limits of death... The saints are the true normative majority by which we orient ourselves. Let us adhere to them... [for] they translate the divine into the human, eternity into time.”³¹⁸ This ongoing translation of eternity into time is the echo in history of the Word made flesh. The saints are, to borrow from Bonaventure’s theology of history, unique “semina” who have been shaped by and sprung from an intimate dialogical union with the One Logos. They in turn reflect the light of and joy that comes from this union and provide not only encouragement and model for those in the Church, but they serve as a light to those outside the Church, in the rest of the world.

By way of the saints, then, others are able to imitate and be drawn into the same relationship, the same friendship, with Christ as they came to enjoy and thereby are able to be made into saints themselves. In a strikingly tender manner, speaking to a group of school children from a school nearby his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, Pope Benedict spelled out the possibility of this friendship with God that is fundamental to the identity of the saints. The process begins by listening to God’s Word- that fundamental characteristic of the Church as a whole:

³¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 154.

Dear children, you go to school and you learn naturally, and I am recalling that seventy-seven years have now passed since I began school. I lived in a small village of three hundred inhabitants, ... yet we learned the essential things. Most importantly, we learned to read and write. I think it is a great thing to be able to read and write, because in this way we can know other people's ideas, read newspapers and books. We can also know what was written two thousand or more years ago; we can know the spiritual continents of the world and communicate with one another. Above all there is one extraordinary thing: God wrote a book, He spoke to us human beings, finding people to write the book containing the Word of God. Reading that book, we can read what God says to us. At school you learn everything you need for life. You also learn to know God, to know Jesus and thus you learn how to live well. At school you make a lot of friends and this is a beautiful thing because in this way you form one big family, but among our best friends, the first we meet and know should be Jesus Who is a friend to everyone and truly shows us the path of life."³¹⁹

This path to holiness that Ratzinger describes which is accessible even to the smallest of children (perhaps especially to them!) is characterized by a posture of humility and of receptivity toward God's word. This must also be the starting point for even the most sophisticated theologian. He describes as the precondition for all of theology, in fact, the conversion of the theologian into a "new subject" the "I" of which is no longer an "autonomous subject standing in itself" but rather the "I" who "has released its grip on itself in order then to receive itself anew and together with a greater 'I.'"³²⁰ The saint that offers a model for this conversion is important for the theologian but more importantly for the whole Church. For Ratzinger, to the degree that the Church's members are willing to begin with this posture of humility and receptivity to the word of the "greater I" and not assert her own agenda, she truly becomes herself.

³¹⁹ Benedict, Angelus Message, Castel Gandolfo, 23 Sep 2010.

³²⁰ Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 51.

Obedience to the Word

This understanding of the Church as fulfilled in the act of humility that allows the “I of Christ” to shape the true identity of the Church becomes controversial when it is seen in light of the question of authority that, of course, causes so much tension in so many corners of the Church today. But this obedience to authority that is called for in his “*communio*” vision of the Church is never an absolutist and authoritarian quality that so many fear. It is clear the importance of the Logos in this regard that provides a basis for both authentic authority and truth itself that is expressed as love. This is a far cry from the modern understanding of authority that has become separated from truth and love and is manifested only as power. Ratzinger recalls the way Thomas Hobbes famously put it, “*Auctoritas, non veritas fecit legem*”- power, not truth, makes law.³²¹ In the ecclesiological vision of Ratzinger characterized by obedience out of love, authority looks very different. It is always to be seen in light of the very same dialogical relationship of faith and love that is at the core of God’s revelation of himself to his beloved children. He explains, “Authority in the Church stands on faith. The Church cannot conceive for herself how she wants to be ordered. She can only try ever more clearly to understand the inner call of faith and to live from faith.”³²² Her identity is *given* to her insofar as she allows herself to be shaped by this dialogue with God, that begins with God’s initiative and can only be responded to in a spirit of humble obedience that comes from loving trust. This reception of authentic ecclesial identity is ultimately fostered

³²¹ Benedict, *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 111-112.

³²² Joseph Ratzinger, *Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006) 34.

in prayer. This posture of receptivity to the Word is at the heart of what has come to be known as “*communio ecclesiology*”, a most prominent advocate of which has been Joseph Ratzinger. It is to an uncovering of the basic contours of this ecclesiological methodology that we now turn.

III. Ratzinger’s “*Communio Ecclesiology*”

Ratzinger describes in his own words the factors involved in the emergence of “*communio ecclesiology*” as a way of trying to interpret what the Church taught at Vatican II. He explains, with the aid of hindsight that “perhaps since the extraordinary synod of 1985, which was supposed to draw up a kind of balance sheet for the twenty years since the Council, there has been a new attempt to sum up the whole of the Council’s ecclesiology in one basic concept, which dominates the discussion, under the term *communio-ecclesiology*.”³²³ He acknowledges that even though the term “*communio*” does not figure prominently in the texts of the Council, it is useful nevertheless as a concept that synthesizes its ecclesiological vision. It is also descriptive of his own ecclesiological model that he had cultivated in his own career prior to the Council. Tracey Rowland argues the whole of Ratzinger’s ecclesiology must be seen as a “synthesis of a number of currents. There are strong resonances of Guardini, de Lubac and von Balthasar.”³²⁴ She traces these sources of an emerging “*communio ecclesiology*” in the early part of the twentieth century initially through the thought of Romano Guardini, who stressed the primacy of the experience of the Church at worship, especially in the Eucharistic liturgy, as the

³²³ Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 129.

³²⁴ Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 103.

source of life and identity for the Church. Henri de Lubac further explored this vision of the Church as a *communio* of people “made” from the Eucharist and then identified according to a plurality of charisms within the one body of the Church. Rowland also notes that Hans Urs von Balthasar, in using his highly literary and narrative approach to theology also did much in the wake of the Council to give flesh to this vision of the Church.³²⁵

The international journal, *Communio* came to be a centerpiece and a platform for a deepening of this mode of theological reflection with a conception of the Church not merely as one more sociological entity with the categories of politics and power as its primary characteristic, but rather according to this liturgical and multifaceted mosaic of many gifts building up one body (1 Cor 12:4-14). Joseph Ratzinger soon became a part of this theological movement, in part as a way of continuing the new theological developments from the Council and simultaneously realizing almost immediately that serious problems were emerging in the interpretation of those developments in the wider theological community.³²⁶

He situates what he perceived as the problematic dimensions of ecclesiology as it was emerging after the Council, as a problem of how to interpret a term from *Lumen Gentium* that had become a kind of slogan seen through the lens of contemporary politics and sociology. He writes, “The crisis concerning the Church as it is reflected in the crisis concerning the concept ‘People of God’, is a ‘crisis about God’: it is the result of leaving out what is most essential. What then remains is

³²⁵ Ibid., 84-85.

³²⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Communio: A Program” in *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 19, no. 3 (Fall 1992), 436-449.

merely a dispute about power. There is already enough of that elsewhere in the world- we do not need the Church for that.”³²⁷ And so the primary task of ecclesiology is to recover and retain the theo-logical dimension of its study and from within that horizon, to see that its transcendent nature is not tantamount to oppression of “the people”, but of finding the authentic set of relationships that alone can truly liberate the people as they find themselves belonging to and being loved by the God to whom they belong.

Another more recent challenge in ecclesiology is not so much one of the confusion of a Marxist hermeneutic for understanding the notion of the “people of God”, but rather one characterized by the challenge of sensitivity to pluralism. This sense of the Church as *communio* relies in the various appropriations of the term, on the basic fact of the unity of the Church. The Church, in this vision is essentially one even though there are various manifestations of her essence both among those in communion with Rome as well as other Christian communities outside that communion. Contrary to the understanding of the Church fundamentally pluralistic and only secondarily united from that plurality, he argues for the “ontological priority” of the one universal Church. He explains the biblical basis of this vision of the unity of the Church:

The fact that the one Church is a theological entity, and not the subsequent empirical uniting of many churches, certainly emerges convincingly from the New Testament itself...This theological priority is what is meant by the “ontological priority”, which the Fathers then

³²⁷ Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 129.

portray- following analogous Jewish traditions- as a kind of pre-existence of the Church....What is essential, however, is not the temporal priority, which is an image, but the question of inner (=theological-“ontological”) precedence.³²⁸

He goes on to explain that the Evangelist Luke offers the vision that from the twelve apostles, various Churches emerge but that they come from the one Church that has theological or ontological priority. Following the narrative of the New Testament, then, “First, the Church as a whole is there; and then she forms individual Churches; and it is not the individual Churches that gradually come into one Church.”³²⁹

Ratzinger’s ecclesiological vision then, allows for diversity in the life of the Church while retaining its basis in one of the four traditional marks of the Church, namely, unity. Hence, yet another one of the challenges in current ecclesiology is responded to in Ratzinger’s methodology as one of *communio* based on the close following of the biblical narrative that establishes the fundamental characteristics of the Church today.

As has been noted, in the effort to offer an alternative to the static and propositional definitions of the Church, Ratzinger consistently favors narrative and descriptive visions of the Christian mystery that unveil the essence of relationality at its center. He consciously uses the term “*communio*” to capture, though admittedly imperfectly, the various relations and dynamics that make up the Church’s essence. Recalling three of the four traditional “marks of the Church”, he

³²⁸ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 249.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

notes specifically her historical groundedness in the *apostolic* tradition, the *holiness* of the praying Church and the *unity* of her throughout it all.³³⁰ These essential marks are seen with special clarity by paying close attention to the dynamics of the liturgy. He sees great significance in the concrete focus and starting point for deliberations at Vatican II on the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) as the on-going locus of the “making” of the Church. Focus on a certain primacy given to the liturgy as the source and summit of Christian life has also made possible a more dynamic sense of the Church always being lived out always anew. He explains the perhaps unintended grace given at the Council as the Fathers took up the renewal of the liturgy as the first order of business: “There were practical reasons for the fact that this was the first. Yet looking back, we have to say that this made good sense in terms of the structure of the Council as a whole: worship, adoration comes first.”³³¹ Situating herself before God as a people made first and foremost for worship, then sheds light on other aspects of the Church’s self-understanding that would be later taken up in *Dei Verbum*, *Lumen Gentium* and finally in *Gaudium et Spes*. For Ratzinger, this posture of the worshipping Church as fundamental to her identity also provides a grounding for the essentially relational and therefore unfolding nature of her identity as is captured particularly in *Lumen Gentium*’s use of the image of the Church as Pilgrim. Under this image, Ratzinger noted soon after the Council, the Church came to be understood as “incomplete and continually

³³⁰ Ibid., 61.

³³¹ Ibid., 126.

journeying with and toward God who constantly called out to it.”³³² This multifaceted sense of the Church- being based always in the absolute center of the Christ event while also being led in ever new ways by the Holy Spirit- is constantly concretized and made new in the celebration of the liturgy. Indeed, Ratzinger argues, following Guardini, it is precisely in the action of the liturgy that the Church “subsists” and fulfills her true and deepest identity.³³³ In the liturgy, the Church realizes her true self.

Biblical Foundation and Liturgical Expression of *Communio*

Ratzinger’s decision to settle on the term “communio” to best describe the character of the Church is based most importantly on the scriptural witness. He sees both the liturgical and Christological links to ecclesiology in the foundational biblical source of *Acts of the Apostles*. He calls this book a kind of “first ecclesiology.”³³⁴ The character of this ecclesiology is a “narrative” one as opposed to a conceptual one.³³⁵ Specifically, he relies on *Acts 2:42* where we are given four essential aspects of the Church’s own self-understanding: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” As these basic elements are echoed in the *Didache* as well, it becomes clear for Ratzinger that Christ remains present in the Church in this manner that Scripture and the earliest tradition indicate. The consequences for this today are significant in that these four pillars of ecclesial life mark, for Ratzinger, the

³³² Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights*, 76.

³³³ Ratzinger, *God is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 121-129.

³³⁴ Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 61.

³³⁵ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 41.

essential form of the Church from the beginning and therefore delimit the essential nature of the Church today even though in many ways, development and change has occurred in her expression of these essential aspects.

Relation of Christ and the Church: Liturgical Confirmation of a Biblical Vision

Ratzinger's insistence on placing the biblical foundations of the Church at the fore guarantees a certain Christological basis for ecclesiology, which is sorely needed in the current context, he believes. For Ratzinger, this is perhaps *the* crucial challenge that faces contemporary ecclesiology, namely the propensity toward a separation from its true basis in Christology. The Church can only be her true self, insofar as she is the authentic place of encounter of the person of Christ. He explains, "In both her sacramental and in her proclamation of the Word, the Church constitutes a distinctive subject whose memory preserves the seemingly past word and action of Jesus as a present reality."³³⁶ But this is not easily recognized today. The modern separation of Jesus from the Church, he explains, is in part a product of a Protestant exegetical tradition that shaped a biblical understanding of the Church based on opposing the themes of *priest* and *prophet* in the Old and New Testaments. The bias behind this exegetical tradition has all too often set up Jesus as the modern liberal prophet rising up and freeing the people of God from the sterile and oppressive institution of cultic, priestly religion.³³⁷ This divide intensified with later Marxist-inspired strands of liberation theology wherein Jesus came to be seen as a "revolutionary" rising up against the "enslaving power of institutions" of his day,

³³⁶ Ibid., 19.

³³⁷ See his description of the conception of Jesus coming from the height of liberal Protestantism in Adolf von Harnack in *Introduction to Christianity*, 196-202.

which are in turn associated with the Church in modern times.³³⁸ However, as more recent exegetical interpretations have emerged, discoveries have been made that recognize the cultic and liturgical character of the early Church that had Jesus very much as the center of its cultic and liturgical worship. In light of this link between exegesis and the centrality of the liturgy as a source for understanding Christ and the Church, Ratzinger acknowledges the important contributions made by eastern theologians for preserving in the modern era the focus on the liturgical character of the Church.³³⁹ In arriving at this perspective of the relationship between Christ and the Church within the biblical witness, he acknowledges the great influence of the work of various Orthodox theologians on the eve of the Council in helping to shape his own understanding of the spiritual nature of the Church that is grounded in the concrete liturgical context. The liturgy as the *locus theologicus* accounts for the various sets of relations that make up the Church.³⁴⁰ He notes the importance of the term “communio” and how it has taken on more significance in light of deficiencies in modern language that make it difficult to fully communicate the “sense...of the linguistic and conceptual framework of the Bible and of the great tradition.”³⁴¹ He argues that the term “communio” captures well the relationality of the members of the Church among one another in the present as well as the past; the relationality with Christ Himself; and the relationality of all those united to Christ both on earth

³³⁸ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 112

³³⁹ Ibid., 15-17. He also cites, on the Catholic side, Oskar Saier, “*Communio*” in *Der Lehre Des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils: Eine Rechtsbegriffliche Untersuchung* (Ismaning: Hueber, 1973), and J. -M -R Tillard, *Eglise d'Églises: L'Ecclésiologie De Communio* (Paris: Cerf, 1987).

³⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 131, footnote #5. Cf. Afanas’ev, *La Primauté De Pierre Dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe [Par] N. Afanassieff [Et Al.]*; L. Hertling, “*Communio und Primat- Kirche und Papstum in der christlichen Antike*” in *Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae* (Rome, 1943).

³⁴¹ Ibid., 60, footnote #1.

and in heaven. Ratzinger's emphasis on the Church's fundamental posture of receptivity of both identity and mission from the prior Word spoken by God in Christ, stands in contrast to some other approaches that prioritize the "horizontal *communio*" that attempts to be established by the Church's own initiative. Tracey Rowland explains, "Rather than analyzing the Church from the vantage point of corporate models he prefers the perspective of the *Communio* ecclesiology which acknowledges the existence of a unified symphonic network of different spiritual missions."³⁴² This symphonic network is ultimately grounded in the personal and spiritual encounter with God who speaks.

Though the central aspects of this "communio ecclesiology" are apparent in the scriptures, it is really through the lived experience of the Church at prayer, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the entering into sacramental communion, that the depth of the meaning of "communio" becomes that much more clear. Ratzinger sees as central to this sacramental reality of the Eucharist the mutual communion that is a sharing out (*Teilgabe*) and a sharing in (*Teilhabe*) of the communion of the *Pascha* of Christ.³⁴³ Christ offers himself to his people in the liturgy so that they might be drawn into communion with him. And as the people go away from the liturgy, they in turn give themselves away to the world so that the world might be drawn into the same communion with Christ and His Body, the Church.

³⁴² Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 89.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

It is this aspect of the *sharing in* and *sharing out* of communion with the Lord in the Eucharist that re-shapes the notion of *communio* in both the Jewish and Greek ancient worlds that preceded the events testified to in the New Testament.

Ratzinger explains that the Greek term *koinonia* that becomes *communio* in Latin is used in one way in the Gospels to describe the professional association of Peter, James and John as fisherman.³⁴⁴ They had a relationship of *koinonia* restricted to the needs of their livelihood. From the Greek world, this term seems to carry a more commercial or professional connotation. In the Jewish world, the Hebrew term associated with the Greek *koinonia*, *chaburah*, describes a highly intimate relationship. Indeed, *chaburah*, in the Jewish mind, indicates a kind of relationship that is *too intimate* to signify the relationship between God and humanity. For this relationship, *berith*, covenant, is used.³⁴⁵ Only because of the experience of Jesus' disciples at the Last Supper and then their witness of his self-sacrificing love for them on the Cross, was the stage set for them to enter into the deepest sense of intimacy with him. In their encounter with the Risen Jesus, it then began to become clear that their intimacy with him as friend and teacher was also intimacy with him as Lord, with God himself. Only then, as they began to celebrate the meal that commemorated this act of divine love poured out for them, did they experience an "opening up" of the Lord to them- only because of this experience, is *koinonia*, or *chaburah*, able to be applied to the human-divine relation. Looking back on the identity of Christ through the lens of his Resurrection, it begins to become clear for

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 71.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 74.

the followers of Jesus that in his person, God Himself was offering a new *communio*, a new intimacy with them simply by his presence among them, even before the events on Calvary. Ratzinger explains, “In the Incarnation of the eternal Word, there comes about that communion between God and the being of man, his creature, which had hitherto seemed impossible to reconcile with the transcendence of the one God.”³⁴⁶ This *koinonia* that before could only correspond to human relations, does indeed fortify these human relations now, on the “horizontal” plane, but it does so with much more depth given the fact that this new *communio* between humans is grounded in the *communio* that God has initiated with humanity, on the “vertical” plane, in the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Christ.³⁴⁷ And so for the Church to be genuinely open to the source of its identity and self-understanding, she must remain in that posture of receptivity of the Word of God. This priority on hearing the Word characterizes the core of Ratzinger’s own ecclesiology- that establishes the “*communio*” itself. It is to an extended consideration of these dynamics of receptivity to the Word in the Church that we now turn.

IV. The Priority of Revelation for Church

In the second chapter, I described the course of the deliberations that ended up producing *Dei Verbum*. Ratzinger recalls that because of the stalemate in the debate on the “material completeness” of Divine Revelation there, some wanted to give up on a separate document on Revelation and simply enfold those aspects into the document on the Church. Pope Paul VI rejected this possibility, insisting upon

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 76.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 72, cf., J. Hamer, *L’eglise est une communion* (Paris, 1962), 176.

the Constitution on Divine Revelation and preserving it as a way of emphasizing the priority of Revelation for the reality of the Church. As Ratzinger puts it, it was necessary to embrace this new understanding of the Church as primarily the body that “listens” to the Word of God. In this listening, he wrote, the Church fulfills her true nature and becomes able to transcend herself by entering into communion with the Word, precisely based upon her prior posture of receptivity to the Word. In this manner, the Church fulfills her identity as the *Sponsa Verbi*, Ratzinger asserts, and as this bride of the Word of God, she becomes able to bear the Word made flesh in an ongoing way into the world in which she lives.³⁴⁸ This “new” ecclesiological model grounded in the priority of Revelation of God’s Word articulated in *Dei Verbum* would be foundational not only for the Church’s self understanding in *Lumen Gentium*, but also for how she would conceive of her mission in the world beyond herself as *Gaudium et Spes* indicates. Having received her identity by listening to the speech of God, she fulfills her identity by extending that speech from God into the whole world. Fundamentally at work, here, then, in the Church’s self-understanding is the dialogical and communicative nature of listening, and speaking, standing between God and the world as a dialogue partner for both. For Ratzinger, while the Church is to be both a listener and a speaker of God’s Word, the priority is with the mode of listening.

The Listening Church

In the Preface to *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, the editors note that in the homily preached by Cardinal Ratzinger on the

³⁴⁸ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 3, 162.

eve of his own election as successor of Peter, he struck two main notes: obedience and fruitfulness.³⁴⁹ Obedience to the Truth, to the Word of God, begets fruitfulness. Indeed, this is not only an admonition for the faithful, but it characterizes the very identity of Christ himself who is the One who is obedient to the Father and thereby the One who bears much fruit. Only because this is the identity of Christ does it follow that this is also who the Church is to be- the community of followers, gathered around the Word, trying to live in obedience and thereby becoming the community that bears much fruit in the world. To the degree that the Church is able to remain open and obedient, the Church becomes who she is meant to be. For Ratzinger to sound that note in such a historically pivotal moment for the life of the Church indeed sheds light on his ecclesiological perspective.

To highlight this characteristic of the listening Church, Ratzinger again relies on the narrative of the *Acts of the Apostles* that describes the earliest days of the Church as the disciples who gather to listen to the Word of God together and to do so in union with those apostles who had been closest to the person of Jesus. The “People of God,” as *Lumen Gentium* would come to describe the Church, is rightly understood, then, in Ratzinger’s view as “the people” not by their own choosing to come together, but rather based on its dialogical relationship with Jesus Christ. This gathering of people, in the New Testament is called the *ekklesia*. As is customary for Ratzinger’s theological method, he pauses to explore the historical and cultural development of the meaning of key terms in this regard. Borrowing an existing

³⁴⁹ Benedict, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*. Edited by John F. Thornton, and Susan B. Varenne, (New York: Harper, 2007), xiii.

term from the Greek world, *ekklésia* most often referred to gatherings of men for the sake of civil and political deliberations.³⁵⁰ The development of its meaning in the Christian community becomes clear only when one looks deeper into the tradition and examines a similar term from their own religious tradition. The Hebrew word, *qahal*, with which the earliest Jewish Christians would have been familiar, was a gathering of *all* the people- women and children included- and not just the men who have social and political authority as was the case in the Greek sense of the *ekklésia*. When the people gather in this way, primarily to listen to God's word, their identity is given to them- they "become a people." The roots of this experience of being formed as a people are in the fundamental experience of the People of Israel who gather at Mt. Sinai to listen to and receive the Word of God as handed down to them through Moses.³⁵¹ It was Moses who had, himself, spoken with God as one would with a friend (Ex 33:11). By way of this intimate encounter with one man, the whole of the People are gradually drawn in to this unique and personal relationship with God. This intimate dialogue with God is fulfilled for the Christian community in the gathering around the figure of Christ, along with all the others who come to seek the same kind of dialogical encounter with him. In order to demonstrate this authentic ecclesiological pattern, Ratzinger often presents as a kind of icon for this vision of the Church, the one in history who said "yes" to the Word and in so doing allowed the Word to become flesh within her.

³⁵⁰ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 30.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Marian Pattern of Listening to the Word in the Church

In a recent pastoral admonition, Pope Benedict challenged his audience to work on establishing an element of quiet in their lives so that they might be able to hear the Word of God that is the source of life for them: "It is important for us today... to know how to make silence within us, to listen to God's voice, to seek, as it were, a 'parlor' in which God speaks with us."³⁵² The example *par excellence* for this mode of listening in quiet is the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Ratzinger sets out as a model for the whole Church, the one who heard and received the Word most radically in her own life and in the flesh. In contemplating the figure of Mary the Mother of God, the whole Church learns her own deepest identity. He explains, "Mary was, so to speak, 'at home' with God's word, she lived on God's word, she was penetrated by God's word. To the extent that she spoke with God's words, she thought with God's words, her thoughts were God's thoughts, her words, God's words. She was penetrated by divine light and this is why she was so resplendent, so good, so radiant with love and goodness."³⁵³ This Marian pattern of receptivity of the Word that then makes possible the Word taking flesh, is to be the pattern of the whole Church.

For Ratzinger, the focus on Mary makes clearer the link between the patterns of Christology and those of ecclesiology. It is for this reason that Mariology is crucial for the whole of theology.³⁵⁴ The nature of the Church cannot be understood apart

³⁵² Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, Paul VI Audience Hall, 9 September, 2009.

³⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI, Parish Church, Castel Gandolfo, 15 August, 2005.

³⁵⁴ Heim, Maximilian Heinrich, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, 412-413. Cf., Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 31-36.

from the source of the Church and what precedes it, namely the figure of Jesus Christ, the Word Made Flesh. As such, the essential Marian role in the Incarnation has important implications for the Church. Because of her “yes”, the union of God and humanity can take place. Her radical receptivity and openness to the Word makes it possible for that Word to take flesh in history. In Mary’s *Fiat*, we see a kind of *consummation* of the dialogical relationship between God and humanity that had been unfolding since the beginning of human history. Later in Ratzinger’s career, following Hans Urs von Balthasar, he begins to explore more explicitly this “nuptial” character not only of Christology but of ecclesiology as well, that is enriched by the contemplation of Mary as the *Sponsa Verbi*. The nuptial union, which can be understood as the culmination of the dialogical nature of the Church, is established again and again, in the Eucharistic celebration wherein the flesh of the bridegroom is offered to the bride. Christ goes “beyond himself” to offer himself to the bride the Church, and the bride in turn goes beyond herself in opening up to receive the Word made flesh in the context of Eucharistic communion. This characteristic of “going beyond oneself”, for Ratzinger, is what marks the “nuptial” nature of this union.³⁵⁵ As the Church responds in kind to the gift of Christ’s whole self, she becomes her true self- only in this nuptial union with the Lord. We see, then, in this model of intimate dialogue between Christ and the Church, the intrinsic link between Christology and ecclesiology. Just as there is no authentic way of being the Church without a posture of gathering to listen to and encounter the Word and the person

³⁵⁵ Fergus Kerr stresses the importance of this nuptial vision not only for Ratzinger but for the whole Church through him by way of his 2004 *Letter on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* issued by the CDF shortly before he was elected pope. See Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 181-202.

of Christ, so too, there is a necessity in coming to genuinely know Christ to do so always in the context of the communal, ecclesial setting and never simply on an individualized basis.

Ecclesial Knowing of Christ

In the third chapter, I indicated how the ecclesial manner of coming to know the person of Jesus Christ is central to Ratzinger's Christology. This ecclesial manner is most importantly characterized as communal and historical. God speaks to His people, he argues, only through those who have *already* listened.³⁵⁶ The Eternal Word is made known in the flesh in history, precisely in the context of the living tradition of God's Chosen People of Israel. Jesus comes to be known only in the context of the ecclesial community that he gathers around himself. And so, in the course of the unfolding of the history of the Christian community, he can only be known not as an object of the past studied scientifically and from a distance, but as a living subject knowable in the *present* in the context of the *ekklésia*. The "I" of the Church finds its unity and the possibility of a coherent knowing of Christ, not by the consensus it is able to arrive at by its own analytical efforts, but ultimately as a gift, by the power of the Holy Spirit, given to the Church in Pentecost. Only by the gift of the Spirit can Christ be known. As St. Paul reminds the Church, only by the power of the Holy Spirit can one confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (1 Cor 12:3).

In the contemporary intellectual landscape, Ratzinger explains this ecclesial hermeneutic takes on a new viability. He explains that the importance of the concept of the "I" has changed from the Cartesian notion that has the "I" locked

³⁵⁶ Ratzinger, *The Yes of Jesus Christ*, 27.

securely in itself does not exist.” Rather, the “I” is constituted in relation to the ‘thou.’”³⁵⁷ There is no “I of the Church” without the divine “Thou.” Furthermore, the Church is, by definition, a collection of subjects who make up the “people of God” who are given their corporate identity by being in dialogue with the living God. The Church becomes a communal “I”, a subject, only when there is a common willingness to listen to the Word spoken by the Divine Thou. In this listening, the identity of the Church is realized. This aspect of the gathering of the people *in order to listen* is crucial the Christian appropriation of the notion of the Church. Indeed, “the people” are formed and given their true identity in the unfolding of the dynamic of listening that then leads to response (*Antwort*) to the Word (*Wort*) fully spoken in history in the person of Christ.³⁵⁸

In following the Word of God in their own communal lives, the people of God become who they truly are. This is so for the people of Israel especially as they gather to receive the Law at the foot of Mt. Sinai. In the Christian context, however, a new depth is revealed in the nature of this formation of identity as the *ecclesia* gathers for worship. It is not only a listening and responding to the Word that happens in the liturgy. In addition to this listening, the Christian *ecclesia* receives the Word made flesh, *sacramentally*. This is the culmination of the gathering of the people. In this verbal *listening* and sacramental *reception*, the dialogue between God and his people is then given a concrete reality every time the community gathers to participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Eternal Word made flesh in history.

³⁵⁷ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 35-36.

³⁵⁸ Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 26.

Indeed, Ratzinger draws upon the famous Augustinian remark that the people of God are given their identity in the liturgical encounter because they are not only established as a communion among themselves but they are made into what they eat.³⁵⁹ As the Church deepens its identity as the Body of Christ, the people of God become who they truly are by being drawn into communion not only with one another on a horizontal plane but into the vertical set of relations that are rooted in God Himself, the three persons of the Trinity.

V. Church Realized in Trinitarian Communion

The Church's participation in Trinitarian communion, for Ratzinger, is not simply a matter of communication between human and divine parties, but a matter of the very formation of the identity of the Church by this experience of communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the Old Testament description of the *qahal* of the People of God gathered to listen and to be shaped by the encounter with the living God is transposed to the New Testament setting, the nature of the encounter becomes more multifaceted given that in Christ, the God that is encountered is the one who speaks from an eternal set of relations that is the triune God. Jesus Christ, as the *Logos* of God, Ratzinger explains, reveals "God who is not only *logos* but *dialogos*."³⁶⁰ This God "who conducts a dialogue" is *essentially* relational, not only *ad extra* toward creation but even *ad intra* in God's eternal Trinitarian relations. That relationality extends to His own creation and in Jesus we see the culmination and perfection of that dialogue with the apex of his creation- the human person. In

³⁵⁹ Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 78. Cf., *Confessions* Bk 7, 10:16

³⁶⁰ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 183.

order for humanity to be drawn into this divine communication, however, a dramatic opening is required. This opening is offered on the Cross as the Word spoken in the silence of death, as Love. Jesus finally reveals Himself as Love itself, in the form of the beloved and freely obedient Son of the eternal Father offering his life for the salvation of humanity. Ratzinger stresses that we can interpret the *event* of the Cross as an act of love primarily based on the *words* of Jesus the night before at the Last Supper. By freely and consciously speaking of his understanding and willingness to offer himself “for you”, the intentionality of what would come about on the Cross the next day is made clear. He explains that Jesus’ “Eucharistic words” and the free intention behind them are what “transforms death into the spiritual act of affirmation, into the act of self-sharing love.”³⁶¹ In this sense, Jesus fulfills his mission from the Father and for the world on the Cross. It is this “word” of silent love spoken from the Cross, manifested in his pierced side, that brings to fulfillment the dialogue between God and man- the meeting of the “yes” of God’s love for humanity and humanity’s response of love back to God.³⁶² For Ratzinger, it is only in this final, fullest word of love “spoken” from the Cross that the Church begins to see who it is that they are in relation to- that this is God who has come from a set of triune relations in the flesh and who has spoken to them precisely in this mode. The “people of God,” then, starts to become a people with a new identity, born from this experience of “looking upon him whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37, Cf., Zech 12:10) who has accepted this piercing in love.

³⁶¹ Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 29.

³⁶² For an elaboration on this dynamic, see especially *God is Near Us*, in the chapter entitled, “God’s Yes and His Love Are Maintained Even in Death”, 27-41.

“Behold Him Whom They Have Pierced”

For Ratzinger, the recurring biblical vision given in the passages wherein we “behold him whom they have pierced”, serves as a key Christological source for ecclesiology. This is, perhaps the central biblical moment for Ratzinger that provides the link between Christology and ecclesiology. St. John’s exposition of the piercing of the side of Christ on the Cross and the subsequent flowing of blood and water has long been a sign of the origins of the sacramental life of the Church beginning with baptism and culminating in the Eucharist. Henri de Lubac, for example, in the effort to retrieve the biblical and patristic framework for understanding the Church as the Body of Christ highlights the importance of the image of the pierced side of Christ as the source of the life of the Church.³⁶³ Furthermore, for Ratzinger, from the pierced side of Christ, not only is the Church born but a new creation is begun. From the side of “the New Adam,” a new bride is created in the Church who draws her life from the wellspring of his heart, the heart of God that loves in the flesh- all the way to death.³⁶⁴

The bodily imagery given in the narrative of the bible also of course has spiritual ramifications, for Ratzinger. He notes that though the piercing of the Heart of Christ on the Cross occurs in the realm of the *soma*, the coming to know Christ by way of this piercing is, for Ratzinger, a matter of the *pneuma*. Here, the intrinsic link between Christology and Pneumatology and how both are the sources of an

³⁶³ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 69.

³⁶⁴ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 47-69.

authentic ecclesiology is made evident. Christ's *soma* exists in Church as *pneuma*.³⁶⁵ As those in the Church who encounter the *logos* that has been revealed as love, are in turn drawn by the Spirit into that same dynamic of love themselves and so reflect that love in history. He explains that the "I" of Jesus is not an independent "I" but one very much dependent upon his identity as Son of the Father. This identity of Jesus, he explains, "is the identity of logos (truth) and love and thus makes love into the *logos*, the truth of human existence. The essence of faith demanded by a Christology so understood is consequently entry into a universal openness of unconditional love. For to believe in a Christ so understood means simply to make love the content of faith."³⁶⁶ This living out of faith so understood is the criterion by which the character of the Church is to be judged. The Church's mission to the world according to this faith- the content of which is love- is the aspect of Ratzinger's ecclesiology to which we now turn.

VI. Mission: Speaking the Word to the World

As I have argued, all of Ratzinger's theology is characterized by a dynamic of unfolding within a framework of dialogue. This is so with respect to his ecclesiology perhaps most clearly. If the first major characteristic of his "communio ecclesiology" is the movement of receptivity of the Word of God, the second movement is the outward one to communicate the Word to the world. Receptivity begets mission. As was noted earlier, Ratzinger sees this Word as ultimately being

³⁶⁵ Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology*, 241. Cf., "Kirche als Tempel des Heiligen Geistes" in *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte: Grundorientierungen: Texte aus vier Jahrhunderten*. Edited by S.O. Horn and V. Pfnür. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997), 148-157.

³⁶⁶ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 208.

experienced as love itself. The *Logos* of God ends up being communicated, in the Christian narrative, as *caritas*, most poignantly from the Pierced Heart of Christ on the Cross. This *caritas* is the substance, the content, of the Word that is spoken by God. It is also the force by which the Church becomes herself and undertakes her mission in the world. The word she receives is love and the word she speaks in the world is love. Ratzinger recalls a New Testament expression of this link between the love that unites and gives dynamism to Trinitarian communion and also moves the Church into her identity and mission: “For Christians, the words of St. Paul are valid: ‘The love of Christ impels us’ (II Cor. 5: 14). The charity that moved the Father to send his Son into the world, and moved the Son to offer himself for us even to death on the Cross, that same charity has been poured out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.”³⁶⁷ The Word communicated through Christ as love has power to “impel” the Church into the world, according to Ratzinger’s ecclesiological schema.

As those drawn into union with Christ find their most fundamental identity as beloved children of God the Father,³⁶⁸ a transformation occurs within the heart of the believer that sparks an outward looking to the world in love. The fruit of this transformation leads the Christian to then further enact his or her identity in Christ as not only “from the Father”, but also, “for the world”. This two-fold identity that is at once vertical and horizontal, is the foundation for the characteristic of the

³⁶⁷ Benedict, Angelus Address, World Mission Day, 22 October, 2006.

³⁶⁸ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 132-133.

Christian community as those who are always essentially missionary.³⁶⁹ As the foundational identity of Christ is the Eternal Son of the Father, and as his identity is lived only in dialogue with the Father, his identity as the Incarnate Son is worked out not only in dialogue with the Father, but in dialogue with the whole of humanity with whom he has been united in his Incarnation.³⁷⁰ His *identity* as Son, then, seamlessly expresses itself in his *mission* to the world.

The mission of the Church, however, is to witness to this love in the world to those *beyond* the “borders” of the Church and to draw all people *into* the love of Trinitarian communion. It is in this way that the Church is missionary in character. Just as Israel was light to the nations, Christ, the *Lumen Gentium* himself, through his body the Church, reflects that light, so that all might be drawn into participation in Trinitarian communion.³⁷¹ The Church fails in living up to her true identity, Ratzinger argues, when she spends too much time focused on herself. The Church is most fully who she is when communicating the love of Christ to the World and the world in all its woundedness and fragility back to the Father through Christ. Being a place where this communication, this dialogue can happen, is the real aim of the Church and when she fulfills it, she offers an irreplaceable service to the world. Ratzinger notes that when the Church fulfills her identity, to be in union with Christ and reflecting that union to the world, the Church offers the ultimate liberation to the world that is not material but rather an “eternal horizon.”³⁷²

³⁶⁹ *Lumen Gentium* #8.

³⁷⁰ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 75-84.

³⁷¹ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 126.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 145.

The Church's Offering to the World

Only when the Christian identity is established by entering into the subjectivity of person of Christ in the context of the ecclesial community, is the Christian ready to look outward to the needs of the world. In Joseph Ratzinger's first substantial essay published after his doctoral work, he explored the theme of Christian solidarity with the world in *The Christian Meaning of Brotherhood*.³⁷³ He follows here a similar theological method as in other aspects of his theology when he traces the development of meaning of terms from different languages and cultures of the ancient world and then examines how they come to a new fullness of meaning and depth in the light of the Christ event. In this case, he examines the notion of brotherhood as it develops in the Jewish tradition as well as in the context of Greek culture and philosophy.³⁷⁴ He notes that in the Enlightenment, the notion of *fraternité* becomes a basis for new rationalist society of *égalité* and *liberté* as well. But in the Christian vision, because of the solidarity with humanity that comes about by the divine initiative of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, a new brotherhood among the human community becomes possible, not on the basis of human efforts, but because we are baptized (plunged) into it by the Father's choice to adopt humanity into the relationship of beloved daughters and sons of his by way of union with his eternal Son. From this filial relationship established in baptism, there emerges a special solidarity not only with Christ, but with all of humanity for the one baptized. This is a solidarity based on Christological identity. The social

³⁷³ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 93.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-19.

consequences of this spiritual and theological reality of Christian incorporation into the family of God are profound, in Ratzinger's view.³⁷⁵

Ratzinger's theology of Christological solidarity has since become a part of the deposit of the whole Church's faith enshrined in the social teaching of Benedict's third encyclical and first explicitly "social encyclical", *Caritas in Veritate*.³⁷⁶ Here he acknowledges that while the possibility of recognizing the equality of all people can be arrived at by reason alone, it is only by way of the Revelation of God, by being united in Christ, that the possibility of *fraternity* among people can be established.³⁷⁷ This deeper bond of love is not something that can be generated by human effort alone, but rather is a gift to be received.³⁷⁸ This is a gift that is given by God the Father who sent his eternal Son into our midst to draw us into intimate union with him and therefore make possible the raising of our identity and dignity from creatures of God to adopted, beloved daughters and sons of God. This deeper bond of unity is known in the Christian tradition as *caritas*.³⁷⁹

From a secular perspective, the notion of *charity* in modern times has taken on a negative connotation because seen solely from within the horizontal, social plane, it indicates an inequality and a condescension and demeaning of those who

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 21-37.

³⁷⁶ Benedict, *Charity in Truth: Caritas in Veritate: Encyclical Letter* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009), 93.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., #19. Cf., Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter on the Development of Peoples: *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, #21.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., #34.

³⁷⁹ For a further elaboration on this Christological dimension of *fraternité* as it is developed in *Caritas in Veritate*, see Christopher Collins, SJ, "Christology and Prophetic Witness in *Caritas in Veritate*" in *Promotio Iustitiae*, No. 104, Rome, 2010.

are below by those who are above.³⁸⁰ The *act* of charity is furthermore undertaken on the terms of those who “have” toward those who “have not” and no real reciprocity or equality of dignity is recognized within that economy of exchange. But for Benedict, the Christian dynamic is very different in that all charity begins with God who is love, who chooses solidarity with all humanity living in poverty of love. Once the faithful have received that love of God in their own lives, they necessarily are moved out into the world to live according to the same pattern. It is for this reason that Benedict says, “For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity ... but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”³⁸¹ This expression is ultimately concretized in direct contact and work with and for the materially poor, but it flows from the deeper spiritual reality of the universal spiritual poverty from which God comes to liberate humanity. For Ratzinger, the beginning of that liberation occurs in the experience of meeting the Risen Christ in the liturgy.

VII. Word Encountered in Liturgy: Dialogue Made Flesh

Always seeking to personalize and provide a narrative way to explain these mysteries in the Christian life, Pope Benedict recently situated the meaning of the liturgical encounter within the scriptural narrative as well as the narrative of his own life. He did so with the hope that his audience could make the same connection in their own lives. In his anticipatory address to young people planning on attending the World Youth Day in Madrid in August 2011, after explaining his own

³⁸⁰ Christopher Rowland, *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 260.

³⁸¹ Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est* # 35.

path from his youth seeking to live a life full of freedom and meaning, and how this path led to the priesthood and ultimately to his service as a bishop and the vicar of Christ, he explains why this project of portraying in an ever new way the substance of the encounter with Jesus is so essential. Recalling Thomas's disappointment at initially not being able to see the risen Lord in his first appearance to the other disciples, he relates Thomas' experience to those of his audience:

We too want to be able to see Jesus, to speak with him and to feel his presence even more powerfully... Jesus himself, when he appeared again to his disciples a week later, said to Thomas: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe" (Jn 20:27). We too can have tangible contact with Jesus and put our hand, so to speak, upon the signs of his Passion, the signs of his love. It is in the sacraments that he draws particularly near to us and gives himself to us. Dear young people, learn to "see" and to "meet" Jesus in the Eucharist, where he is present and close to us, and even becomes food for our journey. In the sacrament of Penance the Lord reveals his mercy and always grants us his forgiveness. Recognize and serve Jesus in the poor, the sick, and in our brothers and sisters who are in difficulty and in need of help.³⁸²

These few words succinctly provide the outlines of the most essential elements of Ratzinger's method of intertwining Christology, ecclesiology and the essence of liturgy. The starting point of this Christology, of course, is the scriptural witness related to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. From there, he links the contemporary "hearers of the Word," to the same narrative initiated in Scripture, allowing those in the present to identify with the character seeking Jesus in the past, in this case, Thomas. With the aid of the model of Thomas, Benedict acknowledges the obstacles to genuine encounter with Christ in contemporary culture that is shaped by

³⁸² Benedict XVI, Message of his Holiness for the Twenty-Sixth World Youth Day (2011), 6 August, 2010.

alternative concerns and perspectives. He then allows his own searching to become a part of this one unfolding narrative, seeking solidarity with his audience around the person of Jesus, and then points the way to the ecclesial and especially liturgical and sacramental locus for the fulfillment of this “search.” This seeking is not fulfilled until it generates a response in the seeker to then move out into the world in a missionary mode to help others be drawn in to the one unfolding narrative that makes possible encounter with the Eternal Word spoken in history, in the flesh, in love.

It is in the context of the liturgy that the whole of Joseph Ratzinger’s theology comes to life. It is where the whole of theology is consummated and from which it draws its vitality. The liturgical law of the Church acknowledges, too, that the liturgy as a whole is fundamentally marked by a dialogical character: “In a celebration in common or in individual recitation [of the Divine Office] the essential structure of this liturgy remains the same, that is, it is a conversation between God and man.”³⁸³ When he notes that all Christian revelation is essentially dialogue,³⁸⁴ we see how it is in the setting of liturgical worship, that this dialogue takes place most concretely. The Word unfolds to become Flesh as the liturgy of the Word gives way to the liturgy of the Eucharist. The liturgy itself follows the framework of Revelation as *logos* is made *sarx* and in the reception of the *logos-made-sarx*, the recipient of this gift is drawn up into true worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23)- back into the realm of *logos*. According to this dynamic, there is an *exitus-reditus* pattern

³⁸³ Catholic Church, *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of Publishing Services, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1983), 40.

³⁸⁴ Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 3, 171.

at work in every particular celebration of the liturgy. As he writes in his book on the liturgy the title of which he borrows from a great influence on his own thought on these matters, Romano Guardini,³⁸⁵ Ratzinger notes that the *re-vel-ation*, the unveiling, that takes place in the liturgy is none other than that which occurred definitively on Mt. Calvary and yet is recapitulated daily on altars around the world as Christ comes to his people just as he did in the Upper Room on Holy Thursday and on Calvary on Good Friday.³⁸⁶ The definitive unveiling of God's love for humanity marks the turning point of man's response of love and therefore his return to God.

Ratzinger notes that in every Eucharistic celebration, the entire mystery of the life of Christ is reflected. There is a "coming" in the offertory that is reflective of Advent. At the institution narrative, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is recalled and made present again. Finally it is an Easter moment of encountering and being united to the Risen Lord in holy communion. All the mysteries of the life of Christ are present and accessible to the faithful in the unfolding of every eucharistic liturgy.³⁸⁷ But even prior to this, what makes it possible for the Christian to enter into this union with the narrative of the life of Christ is being united to him in baptism. Before looking at the eucharistic liturgy as the source and summit of Christian life, as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* put it, it is essential to look at the role of baptism and its theological significance in order to see the shape of the faith into which one is introduced in this initiatory Christian experience.

³⁸⁵ Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), 148.

³⁸⁶ Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 44-50.

³⁸⁷ Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 69.

In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger outlines the foundational characteristic of baptism and how it provides a pattern for the whole of Christian faith.³⁸⁸ Acknowledging that in the attempt to emphasize the essential dimensions of the rite of baptism- the need for flowing water and the short formula of Trinitarian faith- what has sometimes occurred unintentionally in the theological expressions of this mystery, is a kind of abstraction of Christian faith. Since baptism is the entry into faith, he says, the personal and ecclesial nature of baptism and therefore of the Christian faith as a whole must be highlighted in a new way. Above all, the forgiveness of sins makes baptism, and therefore the faith as a whole, a deeply personal encounter with the Lord. Ratzinger notes that Luther was on to this problem of the separation of faith and baptism and this is why he stressed so much the personal nature of the forgiveness of sins in baptism. What Luther lacked, however, was the further insight regarding not only the personal but also the ecclesial nature of Christian faith as it is begun in the experience of baptism.³⁸⁹ The intrinsic link between baptism and eucharist helps to highlight the ecclesial nature of this unfolding encounter of the faithful with Christ.

Perhaps no other aspect of Ratzinger's theology of the liturgy (broadly conceived, including both baptism and eucharist) is as important as the insistence upon the priority of the *actio divina*. If in the whole of his theology, the category of "dialogue" best describes how Ratzinger sees the Christian mystery, it is always a dialogue *initiated* by God. The people of God respond to this initiative. Indeed, not

³⁸⁸ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 27-55.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 106-108.

until the people of God respond, provide an *Antwort* to the *Wort Gottes*, do they manifest their true identity.³⁹⁰ For Ratzinger, the divine liberation of humanity that is begun in baptism is most fully realized in the dynamics of the Eucharistic liturgy, wherein Christ, Caritas itself, comes to the poor of the assembly, speaks to their hearts and gives them his love, his own heart, sacramentally. What begins with a Divine speaking to humanity becomes a divine giving of love, of self, in the flesh. By way of Divine Action, then, does the Church herself become who she really is.

The receiving of the Word made flesh ultimately becomes concretized in the most dramatic way in the context of the liturgy.³⁹¹ In this encounter, the Church is *made*. This is the foundational element of Ratzinger's "communio ecclesiology" which he explains is "in its inmost nature a Eucharistic ecclesiology."³⁹² He describes how in the encounter of the liturgy, the corporate personality of the Church is fulfilled only as she goes beyond herself in the sacramental union with Christ. In this sense, the celebration of the Eucharist expresses a nuptial union in which the "I" of the Church truly becomes herself only when letting down the barriers of her former "I" and "losing" herself in the "Thou" of Christ who fulfills his own identity by virtue of his perfect self-donation. Insofar as this losing of self occurs, the Church ultimately gains her true self in this sacramental union because it is in the liturgy, that what has separated people from their God is now overcome and

³⁹⁰ Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 26. See also Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 148. Ratzinger, as was mentioned earlier, was deeply shaped by the centrality of the liturgy in the formation of Christian identity, thanks, in part, to the work of Guardini.

³⁹¹ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 27.

³⁹² Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 131.

they can become reconciled.³⁹³ It is for this reason that the *sacrifice* of Christ, not just the aspect of the *communal meal* of the Eucharist, takes priority for Ratzinger. The communal nature of the liturgy is established only because of the efficacy of the sacrifice that is re-presented on the altar. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Ratzinger explains, Christ “comes to us and begs, as it were, for reconciliation.”³⁹⁴ This is the word spoken by him from the Cross- that he *thirsts*, for a response from those to whom he is speaking with the word of his self-sacrifice. This speaking continues in the present every time the Eucharist is celebrated. The same Christ continues to beg for a response, and as the people respond in the affirmative, in acceptance of this word, the sacrament of the Eucharist becomes that of those who have *let themselves be reconciled* by God.³⁹⁵ They have let God take the initiative. Christ’s passion and the continual celebration of that passion in the Eucharistic liturgy, however, does not leave the assembly passive. Rather, in offering an *Antwort* to his *Wort* of suffering love, the assembly is reconciled, enlivened and fulfilled in its identity and given what is necessary to fulfill the mission that comes with this identity.³⁹⁶

Conclusion: The Actualization of the Dialogue

For Ratzinger, the Church’s discovery of its true identity and mission in the course of the liturgy is a discovery of the transcendent nature of the human person. This discovery of identity happens in the liturgy because it is a moment of the earthly entry in Heaven. Here the temporal is able to enter into the eternal because

³⁹³ Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 37.

³⁹⁴ Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 40

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50

there has first been an entry into history from the place of eternity. In light of this understanding of the liturgy, it becomes clear that Ratzinger's theology of the liturgy is clearly linked to the concerns of eschatology.³⁹⁷ What happens once in the *semel* of history on Calvary, is recapitulated in a way that it participates in the *semper* of eternity.³⁹⁸ This is possible because the one eternal Logos, through whom all things are made, the one then encountered in Christ, is the same Logos met in the Liturgy. This Word of love, then, when received by the assembly, gives confidence to the recipients in the power of love over even death itself. Ratzinger explains, "The event of the Supper consists in Jesus sharing his body and blood, i.e., his earthly existence; he gives and communicates himself. In other words, the event of the Supper is an anticipation of death, the transformation of death into an act of love."³⁹⁹ It is for this reason that the cross stands at the center of what becomes finally, a worship "in spirit and truth" in the liturgy. Ratzinger describes the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as true worship because it flows from a true knowing of who God is and who humanity is. On the cross, Jesus fulfills the authentically human posture of worship toward God the Father. For Christians who participate in the sacrifice of praise, then, they too can take part in true worship that is aimed at eternal life.⁴⁰⁰ This true worship allows also the assembly to enter into the eschatological hope that Christ makes possible by his own salvific self-offering on the cross. Ratzinger notes that in the form of speech, Christ himself begins to open up this eschatological hope for humanity. In the "Eucharistic words" of Jesus at the Last Supper, he

³⁹⁷ Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 60.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

³⁹⁹ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 25.

⁴⁰⁰ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 287.

explains his approach to death. Indeed, historically, these words not only disposed him to approach his own death confident in hope, but sacramentally, they also effect a bridging of the chasm between life and death for those participating in the liturgy.⁴⁰¹ These Eucharistic words of Jesus that both “make” the Church and are also the words that confront death in hope, play a key role in the shaping of the Christian eschatological vision as well as the ecclesiological one. And so, from the context of the experience of the liturgy, we move our conversation from Ratzinger’s understanding of the Church to his vision of eschatology- how all of human history is fulfilled in light of the Word spoken across chasm of the apparent silence of death.

⁴⁰¹ Ratzinger, *God is Near Us*, 29.

Chapter 5

Word Spoken from Beginning to End: Creation and Eschatology

“With the Incarnation of the Son of God, eternity entered time and human history was opened to absolute fulfillment in God. Time was, so to speak, ‘touched’ by Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, and received from him new and surprising significance: it became a time of salvation and grace.”⁴⁰²

Thus far, I have tried to make the case that in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger, there is always operative a dialogical structure, that is, no matter what the aspect of the one Christian mystery in question, there is always a dynamic at work of a dialogue between parties, of the eternal Logos speaking and being heard. Only from within the tension of this dialogue is the truth of the Christian mystery uncovered. Rather than offering propositional definitions of this or that aspect of the faith, the one Christian mystery is best explained in a narrative mode at the heart of which is the unfolding of the dialogue both within the triune God and between God and humanity. This dialogical narrative has at its center a character named Jesus Christ. All of human history, indeed all of creation, centers on and finds its source and fulfillment in this figure who is the Word made flesh.

In the last chapter, we explored how it is in Joseph Ratzinger’s theology, that the nature of the Church is both established and fulfilled in the communal encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. This is most concretely and poignantly accomplished when the whole of the *ekklésia* comes together for the liturgy to hear the Word of God spoken in scripture and given in the Eucharist. The Church is made

⁴⁰² Benedict, *Vespers Homily for Solemnity of Mary Mother of God*, Rome, 31 December 2009.

who she is meant to be in this liturgical encounter. In this liturgical encounter, time is opened up into eternity as every liturgy celebrated on earth shares in the heavenly liturgy. In this place of encounter, eternity touches history and history is opened up into eternity.

The nature of this meeting place of history and eternity is the object of focus for this last chapter. We take up here, the dialogical nature of Ratzinger's thought as it pertains to his understanding of creation and eschatology. How is it that the creative Word God speaks by which "the heavens were made" (Ps 33:6) is the same Word that is spoken in the midst of the apparent breakdown of the harmony of creation within human history? How is it that that same Word is being spoken even across the apparently ultimate barrier of silence that is death- the end of creation and history, as it were? And how is that Word spoken in death the basis of Resurrection and eternal life? These questions are taken up again and again in the theology and in the preaching of Ratzinger, but in this chapter I will focus especially on two works of his that most explicitly address these issues, namely *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, published in German originally in 1977 and his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, on the nature of Christian hope, promulgated three decades later, in 2007. Both clearly reveal the dialogical nature of his theology of creation and especially his eschatology. Drawing also upon other works of his taken from across the span of his theological and pastoral career, from his second doctoral thesis, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, to his recently published second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, I hope to establish the basic contours of his thought on

creation and eschatology that are essentially expressive of his dialogical and narrative mode of doing theology.

In this chapter, I will first attempt to surface some of the most significant interlocutors of Ratzinger when it comes to his theology of creation and eschatology. The challenges that much of modern theology have posed to a coherent understanding of history as well as an authentic biblical exegesis that is both critical and open to the horizon of faith- these are the most important factors in Ratzinger's development of a fresh approach to these questions in his own career. After outlining the "state of the question" as it were, I will then undertake an articulation of his theology of creation and subsequently of human history as it is founded upon the *Logos* of God being spoken and therefore intelligible to his human creatures. Based upon the dialogical structure of creation and history, according to Ratzinger's theology, the human person is ultimately able to participate in the intelligibility of creation and enjoy *the* privileged place in the created order as those with whom God desires personal communication and relationship. As he put it in his welcome address to the hundreds of thousands gathered at World Youth Day in Madrid in 2011, "God is looking for a responsible interlocutor, someone who can dialogue with him and love him."⁴⁰³ The dialogue that "begins" with creation, then, is extended throughout the whole of salvation history. Having established the dialogical foundations of Ratzinger's theology of creation and eschatology, I will then consider the nature of the challenge to this dialogue that death poses which seems to impose

⁴⁰³ Benedict, *Welcome Ceremony with Young People*, Plaza de Cibeles, Madrid, 18 August 2011. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110818_accoglienza-giovani2-madrid_en.html

a silence on this communication human-divine communication. Ratzinger explains that the Word continues to be spoken from God even in the context of human death. This Word of God, in the person of Christ, becomes the basis of human hope that can persevere even in the face of death. Jesus' own Resurrection, then, becomes the pivot upon which a theology of creation, seemingly undermined by the reality of death, continues to unfold into the sphere of eschatology. Finally, I will examine the dialogical quality of Ratzinger's understanding of eternal life as it pertains to the nature of heaven, hell and purgatory. My hope, then, throughout the chapter, is to trace an overall unfolding of a narrative at work in Ratzinger's creation and eschatology. And so we begin with a brief look at the context of the theological discourse from which his theology emerges.

I. Context of Ratzinger's Contributions

Culturally speaking, in the wake of the Second World War and later in the midst of the Cold War that presented the possibility of global nuclear annihilation, a sense of historical stability had been deeply undermined. At the same time, greater global recognition of the plight of the poor initiated a critique of the historical processes that had produced such injustice and inhumanity. For a variety of reasons, then, in the second half of the twentieth century, a cultural context had emerged characterized by Ratzinger as an "historical process in crisis."⁴⁰⁴ Theologically speaking, the question of history had become pressing, in part, because of recent exegetical work that explored the nature of Jesus' eschatological

⁴⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1988) 1.

preaching, these doctrinal matters had come once again to the fore of interest among theologians. It is to these cultural and exegetical contexts, from which Ratzinger constructs his new dogmatics based on eschatology, that we now turn.

The Challenge of Political Theology

The contemporary need to clarify the Catholic vision of eschatology was recognized by Ratzinger against the backdrop of the emergence of the “political theology” pioneered by the likes of Johann Metz and Jürgen Moltmann. Later, this political theology would develop in the context of Latin American liberation theology pioneered by Gustavo Gutierrez and others. The foundations of this “political theology” could be traced to a certain reduction of theology to ethics that emerged in the nineteenth century. In this regard, the great figure of Protestant liberalism who looms so large, Adolf von Harnack, set aside the elements of the Christian religion relating to the supernatural realm that are purportedly hard to believe. He instead sought to constitute Christianity as it pertains to the realm of ethics wherein all might see Jesus as their brother who lived a heroic life and consequently be motivated to live as one human family who is comprised of children of one Father in heaven.⁴⁰⁵ The political theology of the likes of Johannes Baptist Metz, is no doubt influenced by this tradition of identifying theological reality with ethics. At the core of this political theology is the recognition of the need for Catholic theology to speak to the concrete needs of the poor and oppressed in the present, in part by examining and critiquing the history that had systematically

⁴⁰⁵ Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity? Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter-Term 1899-1900*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903).

produced the conditions for this injustice.⁴⁰⁶ In this sense, someone like Metz takes history very seriously in the sense that he desires a practical effect in the daily lives of humanity to be shaped by the message of Christ.⁴⁰⁷ Ratzinger's critique of this movement in theology, however, points out that in this manner of taking "history" seriously because of political and social concerns, the risk is run that history itself is simultaneously *devalued* in that it can be relegated to the past once the critique against it is leveled. Fergus Kerr recalls Ratzinger's critique of Metz' political theology by citing a 1982 essay from *Principles of Catholic Theology*. Kerr recounts the heart of Ratzinger's critique of certain aspects of the political theology of Metz "in which the enthusiastic option for history represents, at the same time, an equally decisive rejection of the past, a suspension of all reference to tradition in favour of a programme of what is to be done."⁴⁰⁸ This potential for antagonism toward history itself because of its carrying of structures of injustice, is most potently articulated in the Marxist philosophy of history and concern for revolution for the sake of an establishment of social justice. Aidan Nichols argues that Ratzinger sees this "tributary" of Marxism in theological circles of the twentieth century as perhaps the most significant challenge to a proper theological perspective on human history and therefore an authentic vision of eschatology. Here too in the Marxist vision, history is taken seriously in the first stages of critique, but history itself is soon relegated to the mere "past" and what becomes important is really only the future that holds the

⁴⁰⁶ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 58.

⁴⁰⁷ See for example Johannes Baptist Metz and James Matthew Ashley, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 2007).

⁴⁰⁸ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007), 188. Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 157.

promise of coming revolutions instigated by human effort.⁴⁰⁹ The use of history, in the mode of much of political theology, then, is essential, only to diagnose the problem of injustice and suffering and to insist on the improvement of conditions in the future. However, the role of God's ongoing relationship throughout the whole of history seems to recede in importance in comparison to human agency in addressing the problems of human suffering.

Ratzinger acknowledged the fundamental insight that a social and political critique of history was being offered by his twentieth century peers. He too allowed himself to be challenged as a theologian by the reality of those who suffered in the present moment of history. He saw that the matter of *Christian hope* was perhaps the greatest of the challenges facing the contemporary Church and her ability to carry out her mission to evangelize, effectively. He explains, "The most telling objection against the Christian faith lies in its historical ineffectiveness. It has not changed the world; at least that is how it seems. All theoretical difficulties weigh almost nothing in the face of this oppressive experience. For with it the central word of Christianity, the message of salvation, remains empty. It remains just a word. If through the faith nothing happens, then everything that it might otherwise say is empty theory, lying beyond verification and falsification and- as such- of no consequence."⁴¹⁰ In echoing the contemporary critique of Christian impotence with

⁴⁰⁹ Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2007), 111.

⁴¹⁰ James Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions and Legitimate Hopes* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 52. Cf., Joseph Ratzinger, 'Vorfragen zu einer Theologie der Erlösung' in: Leo Scheffczyk (ed.), *Erlösung und Emanzipation. Quaestiones Disputate 61* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1973), 141.

respect to history, he describes the situation in logo-centric terms. It is possible, he explains, that “the central word of Christianity...remains just a word.” That is to say it may be that Christianity itself is comprised of nothing but empty theory and ideals. He uses the phrase “just a word” then, to indicate “a word” that remains abstract, trapped in the realm of the speculative. But the nature of his response is to show how this central *word* of Christianity, *takes flesh*- becomes concrete in history- and shapes the narrative of the whole of salvation history. Ratzinger’s “theology of the Word” that is offered in Revelation, fulfilled in Christology and expressed in ecclesiology and especially liturgy, becomes indispensable, now, in addressing the contemporary cultural and theological concerns that demand a new eschatology.

De-Mythologized Exegesis

Another major development in twentieth century theology also contributed, in Ratzinger’s estimation, to the undermining of a true sense of the nature of human history in light of divine reality. The trajectory of exegesis of eschatological texts in the New Testament also had a way of stressing the importance of history on the one hand and then subsequently disposing of it as important given the particular exegetical lens. This exegetical trajectory produced a school of interpretation not so much political in nature, but more privatized and existential in its aim. At the center of this movement has been Rudolf Bultmann whose “de-mythologizing” exegesis left the gospels largely devoid of much in the way of historicity.⁴¹¹ With little of the supernatural left over after the de-mythologizing of the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life,

⁴¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 168.

ministry, death and resurrection, what remains is the content of his preaching. For this existentialist school, every reader in every day is left with a profound choice that remains merely private regarding how to live one's life in great freedom and courage, in imitation of the historical figure of the past of Jesus of Nazareth. What is therefore demanded is a construction of an existentialist reading of scripture that would motivate the reader on interior levels, regardless of the truth of the exterior witness given in those same scriptures. As Ratzinger explains in his *Introduction to Christianity*, Bultmann is a key figure in the great question of modern theology: Jesus or Christ? He traces the broad outlines of the debate: "Modern theology begins by turning away from Christ and taking refuge in Jesus as a figure who is historically comprehensible, only to make an about-turn at the climax of this movement- in Bultmann- and flee in the opposite direction back to Christ, a flight, however, that at the present moment is already starting to change back into the new flight from Christ to Jesus."⁴¹² In all of these fluctuations from *Christ* to *Jesus* and back again, what seems common, for Ratzinger, is the emaciated sense of the true nature of history. Either Jesus remains an historicized model who, while personally and existentially inspiring, is nevertheless locked away in the past, or else he becomes a figure that floats atop the ocean of history as a kind of spiritualized ideal of faith but who really has very little relevance to the whole of history itself.⁴¹³

In every case, then, where modern eschatology has become problematic, for Ratzinger, there is a problem with biblical exegesis. And the foundational problem

⁴¹² Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 198.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

with much of contemporary biblical exegesis is an emaciated understanding of the nature of human history. Ratzinger has attempted throughout the course of his theological career to build a more robust understanding of the nature of human history as he took up the particular questions of eschatology regarding death and eternal life. He would proceed with this endeavor relying largely on the nature of the *Logos* that provides for both the transcendent origins as well as the inner-coherence of the scriptural witness and all of human history. The intelligibility of human history as the place wherein the Logos can be heard and appropriated is in turn the basis of creation itself- the expression of the Eternal Logos. It is to this log-centric basis of a theology of creation to which Ratzinger holds, that we now turn.

II. Word Spoken in the Orders of Creation and History

In a collection of reflections on the Catholic understanding of Creation and the Fall, Ratzinger begins in response to the text of *Genesis* 1. Taking for granted the beauty and grandeur of the poetry of the text, he immediately acknowledges the question the modern audience brings to the text: Yes, this is a beautiful vision of created reality as given by the free, generous and creative love of God. *But is it true?*⁴¹⁴ After all, there is a common pattern in much of modern thought, even within Catholic theological circles, to quietly set aside the possibility of the material creation of the universe by a personal God given the challenges to this prospect offered by evolutionary theory and a new epistemology fundamentally shaped by strict scientific criteria. This epistemology has furthermore influenced method in

⁴¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1995), 3.

theology such that there is a tendency among some modern theologians to consider creation more in existential terms rather than ontological ones since the facticity of “creation” as the Judeo-Christian tradition has always understood it, seems so fragile. Consequently, we are left, in Ratzinger’s estimation, running the risk of a “huge (if not total) loss of the reality of faith, whose God no longer has anything to do with matter.”⁴¹⁵ He uncovers the task before, him, then, to take the creation narrative of scripture that so clearly has literary elements in it that are reflective of the stuff of myth, and then re-conceive of the narrative in a way that provides a foundation for material realism in the Christian doctrine of creation.

In the *Genesis* creation narratives, God’s *Word* is the cause of separation of light from darkness, water from land, etc. The same Word is also the positive and efficacious source of the creation of vegetation, land animals, birds of the air, fish of the sea and ultimately of man and woman. God *said* ‘Let there be’ these elements of the created order and indeed they came to be. There is a fundamental reliance in his thinking upon the motif of divine speech that expresses within the scriptural witness the origins of creation. This is a theme that runs consistently through the Old Testament. We think of the *Book of Wisdom* for instance, wherein the author proclaims the Wisdom of God that is “more mobile than any motion” and is also uttered creatively as “a *breath* of the power of God, and an image of his goodness” (7:24-25). And the Psalmist proclaims in various ways the central vision of creation, namely that: “By the *word* of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the *breath of his mouth*” (33:6). This consistently intimate and highly personal way

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., xii.

of conceiving of God's creative action as emanating from his very lips is taken up in the New Testament as well, most foundationally in the Prologue of the *Gospel According to St. John*. Here, the evangelist re-reads the Old Testament creation and wisdom literature through the lens of the experience of the Risen Christ who from "the beginning" must have been the Word made flesh (1:14)- the very same Word who was "with God" "in the beginning" (1:1-2). These are the building blocks of Ratzinger's own theology of creation- these words of God uttered in scripture that are proposed to emanate from the very same Word through which all things come to be.⁴¹⁶

In the Christian vision, then, we can know the truth of the world around us because the world was created through the *Logos*. This capacity to know is at the core of the human condition as rational beings. As St. Augustine put it, "Reason has deigned to reveal itself in the things that appear familiar to you."⁴¹⁷ The intelligibility of God and of all that God has created is then, not only a matter of autonomous intellects apprehending truth about the objects that surround them. Rather, the very possibility of obtaining knowledge is contingent upon the free gift of communication given by the personal God who "deigns" to reveal that which is true, that which, as true, has its source in Truth itself. The possibility of at least some positive intelligibility of God and God's creation and the personalism that underlies this intelligibility are, in Ratzinger's view, essential issues that need to be taken up in modern theology. Given the significant challenges to the Christian

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 15ff.

⁴¹⁷ Bosely, Richard and Martin Tweedale, Editors, *Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy* (Petersborough: Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), 520. Cf., Augustine, *Concerning Order*.

doctrine of creation that have emerged in the era of great scientific and technological development which have so shaped epistemological standards in every walk of life, it becomes that much more necessary to re-present the Christian vision that is able to account for an intelligible creation and an intelligible and loving God who is at the source of this creation.

The Link Between Creation and History

As I indicated earlier in the chapter on Christology, a key component of Ratzinger's "unfolding" theology is the recognition of the *Logos* understood first of all as *ratio*, but ultimately more personally as love itself.⁴¹⁸ The more personal the expression of *Logos* becomes in salvation history, the more possible it becomes to then look back on creation itself as a gift given by a personal and loving God. As he explains in *Introduction to Christianity*, in light of Christ, it becomes clear that in the Christian vision all of creation, indeed, "all being is being-thought" and this being is expressed freely and as an expression of personal love.⁴¹⁹ He later elaborates on the deep reliance on the reasonability of creation in the Christian vision and how that reasonability culminates in the personal and relational structure of this reasonability. He explains, "If Christian belief in God is first of all an option in favor of the primacy of the *logos*, faith in the pre-existing, world-supporting reality of the creative meaning, it is at the same time a belief in the personal nature of that meaning, the belief that the original thought whose being-thought is represented by the world is not an anonymous, neutral consciousness but rather, freedom, creative

⁴¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 189.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

love, a person.”⁴²⁰ He argues that just as the ancient Greek world influenced by emerging philosophical schools reliant on reason was in the process of dismissing the world-view provided by the ancient myths centered on many capricious gods, the Abrahamic faith of the people of Israel made its way onto the world’s stage and offered a kind of union in *one* deity that was personally engaged in human history while at the same time identified with reason, with what the Greeks called *logos*. The nature and depth of this union of *logos* and personal relationship in one God becomes evident in the Christian tradition, only by following that narrative of how the people of Israel and the Christians who follow them, experienced this God in history. Only by tracing the whole of the Judeo-Christian narrative of salvation offered in the Bible does one come to this conclusion at the end and become able to see that operative throughout has been the *Logos* being spoken by God in every moment. The God of biblical history, then, ends up shedding light on the God of the philosophers and vice versa such that “this God of the philosophers, whose pure eternity and unchangeability had excluded any relation with the changeable and transitory, now appeared with the eyes of faith as the god of men, who is not only thought of all thoughts, the eternal mathematics of the universe, but also *agape*, the power of creative love.”⁴²¹ The thread that provides a coherent basis for this theology of God that embraces both the “God of the philosophers” and the “God of men” is the essentially log-ical, and even more accurately, dia-logical, character of

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 158.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 143.

God.⁴²² God turns out to be a God who speaks his Word in creation as well as in the context of the dialogue that comprises His relationship with His people throughout salvation history. And yet, while from one perspective, this God of dialogue can be discerned both in creation and in salvation history, the power of God's Word being spoken throughout can also be called into question. The mystery of death is the ultimate stumbling block for this logos-based vision of both creation and history and it is important to note how Ratzinger deals with this unavoidable challenge.

Death as the Challenge to Logos

For Ratzinger, it is clear that with the eyes of faith, there are times in the life of the human person that the vision of a beautiful and intelligible creation can be seen through the lens of the God who has also shown himself as personal and present in history. But there are also plenty of moments, indeed, many more than we might like to admit that this vision simply does not ring true. Creation seems disordered and history seems absurd. The *Logos* seems to lose its operative power in moments of suffering and especially death- when creation seems to be defeated and history seems to cease. The consequences of the theology of creation that Ratzinger establishes based on the multi-valence of the terminology of *Logos*, are put to the test, then, when the focus of attention is shifted from the first principles of creation and the nature of being to the "last things" of eschatology.

Aidan Nichols describes Ratzinger's understanding of death as a rupture of communion, of relationship. Rather than death being seen as a termination of being

⁴²² Ibid., 183.

or cessation of existence, it is to be understood in dialogical and relational terms.⁴²³ In Ratzinger's theology, the problem of death and the possibility of eternal life that death seems to undermine is primarily a problem not simply of how to account for the restoration of *being*, but of how *communication* can be understood to continue even in the face of the radical silence that death seems to impose. In an Angelus address at St Peter's in Lent of 2011, for example, Benedict explains the phenomenon of death in these relational terms: "In effect, death is for us like a wall that keeps us from seeing what lies beyond; and yet our heart desires to go beyond this wall, and even if we are unable to know what it hides, we nevertheless think about it."⁴²⁴ The longing to "go beyond the wall" is certainly operative in the human heart and yet that wall is not able to be traversed from our side. In the same address he says, it is Christ himself who "destroys the wall of death" so that the communion of God and humanity can come to fruition.

The Difference Christ Makes

To understand the nature of the communication that can still exist even in death, it is necessary to approach the question in light of what has already been said about the communicative dimension of the origin of human life. Eschatology, in this sense, is necessarily linked to and informed by the theology of creation. Since the Word is the grounding of all of creation, precedes creation and is therefore "beyond" creation, it is also the case that this Word is not silenced at the "end" of created life. The same Word can be spoken even across this chasm of death that appears to be

⁴²³ Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 120-121.

⁴²⁴ Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, Rome, April 10, 2011.

the destruction of creation. The Word speaks into death and draws the dead out of its silence. This would not be the conclusion made about the nature of death and eternal life, however, if it were not for the experience of the Risen Christ. Ratzinger explains in his work of “spiritual Christology,” *Behold the Pierced One*, “Death, which by its very nature is the end, the destruction of every communication, is changed by him into an act of self-communication...death, which puts an end to words and meaning, itself becomes a word, becomes the place where meaning communicates itself.”⁴²⁵ The Word spoken in perfect love from the Cross is the Word that continues to be spoken even in the silence of death and is indeed the Word that overcomes death itself. This is the communication that is basis of Christian hope, for Ratzinger. Again, the Christological lens here is essential as he recalls St. Paul’s proclamation that if Jesus is not truly risen, then our hope is in vain (1 Cor 15:17).⁴²⁶ Because of this foundational experience, the nature of who God is as speaker of the eternal Word is reconceived as is the nature of humanity as hearer of the Word, even in the context of death. God does not remain relegated to the distance choosing to remain utterly shrouded in incomprehensibility and definitive silence. And humanity is not trapped in the isolation and loneliness of deafness when it comes to relating to God, but rather is able to “hear”, even in death. For this reason, death becomes the place of the most poignant communication between God and humanity only when death is seen through the historical experience of the Resurrection of Christ. For the person who can live in hope in the face of death, the

⁴²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 24.

⁴²⁶ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 116.

experience of being united to Christ's own death and Resurrection within the life of the Church becomes the basis of that hope.

In the encounter with death, it is clear that seeing God simply as the source of *logos* that gives reason and order to creation is no longer enough since in death it appears that creation's reason and order comes to a definitive end. The human person gets a limited view of the nature of God when God is considered only on the basis of the order of creation. A fuller picture is offered when God is approached under the rubric of the order of salvation history. He explains, "God truly enters into human affairs only when, rather than being present merely in our thinking, he himself comes towards us and speaks to us."⁴²⁷ Only in the fear and isolation that the prospect of death can bring, is the fullness of the question of the human condition posed and only in the face of death, does the fullness of the meaning of the *Logos* of God become manifested. The Word spoken, from the beginning, which is the basis of all material existence, becomes also the basis for the possibility of hope in the face of the apparent end of material existence, for the human person. In the confrontation with the "supreme evil" that is death,⁴²⁸ the human person is confronted with the ultimate question of the whole of his existence that has led up to that point. What is the nature of death and what is called into question about the whole of human existence as a result? For Ratzinger these fundamental human questions are best responded to not in the isolation of private, abstract speculation, but rather, in the context of the narrative of salvation history. Such is the first

⁴²⁷ Ibid., #23.

⁴²⁸ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 9.

principle of the eschatology that he attempted to construct in the wake of the Second Vatican Council that called for a renewed appropriation of the whole of the Christian mystery in light of both the signs of the times and the salvation history from which those times had emerged.

III. Word Spoken in Death: Basis of a Renewed Eschatology

When Ratzinger moved in 1969 to take up a teaching position at the recently established University of Regensburg, he became reacquainted with Professor Johann Auer whom he had known a few years earlier while the two were teaching in Bonn. Auer approached Ratzinger to collaborate on a “Short Catholic Dogmatics” that he had begun in 1947. Ratzinger agreed, but because he was soon named archbishop of Munich-Freising, he was only able to complete one of the two sections assigned to him, namely the volume on eschatology.⁴²⁹ He later referred to this limited contribution of his as “something I still consider my most thorough work and the one I labored over most strenuously.”⁴³⁰ He elsewhere describes how it is that this work on eschatology served as a chance for him to recalibrate in a comprehensive way his approach to dogmatics as a whole. Having been shaped deeply not only by his own study, but by the way the tradition that had so recently been renewed in the Second Vatican Council, he sought to let this renewal of the tradition form him such that he would personally approach the major theological questions of his day in light of the return to the sources of scripture and the fathers

⁴²⁹ Ibid., xvii.

⁴³⁰ John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 93.

as well as recognizing the need to discern the “signs of the times” when doing theology. He explains, “After the decisive turning point of the Council, I first tried simply to conceive my whole dogmatics anew, going back again to the sources and keeping abreast of what was being produced. Thus, a vision of the whole gradually grew for me that was nourished by the various experiences and realizations I had encountered along my theological path. I rejoiced to be able to say something of my own, something new and yet completely within the faith of the Church.”⁴³¹ He realized that much of what must be “new” in the approach to traditional questions of eschatology would be the insights and challenges given by recent biblical scholarship that pertained especially to the New Testament’s treatment of eschatological themes.⁴³² He noted that for some time within the broader context of modern theology, eschatology had quietly faded from importance. What had seemed to be an area concerned about far-off and ethereal speculations regarding the afterlife had now become an area of theology through which the real nature of history as a whole could be explored.

In the foreword to their combined work on dogmatic theology, Ratzinger and Auer agree on the methodology for undertaking their work. They indicate that they will proceed with the questions before them by focusing on: 1. the biblical foundations of doctrine, 2. the historical development of individual doctrines and 3. “the systematic inner-coherence of doctrine” taken as a whole.⁴³³ As has been explored in the earlier chapter on Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation as well

⁴³¹ Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 150.

⁴³² Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 110-133.

⁴³³ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, xxiii-xxiv.

as Christology, an essential aspect of his approach to biblical exegesis, is to embrace the impetus given by so-called “historical-critical” exegetical models insofar as they lead the reader to take seriously the historical and cultural conditions present at the time of the events recorded in scripture as well as those of the author of the texts. At the same time, authentic biblical interpretation cannot remain limited to those questions. The horizon of the contemporary reader who approaches any given text with the eyes of faith must always have a central place in the discourse concerning interpretation of scripture, since what is being discussed is always the living Word of God intended to bring about faith in every age and culture. As helpful and even essential as all the contributions of scientific, historical-critical analysis are, it is also the case, for Ratzinger, that “no interpretation from the past is ever completely old that if in its time it turned to the text in true openness.”⁴³⁴ A true and open turning to the texts of scripture and to the “text” of the living Christian tradition that had in many different ways appropriated the word of God in history, would produce today a fresh appropriation of the Christian mystery for contemporary times. It is for this reason that Ratzinger and Auer would quite deliberately take up the questions before them with the multifaceted approach of biblical exegesis as well as the historical development of the relevant doctrines insofar as they had been appropriated in the life of the actual Church and not simply taken up in the mode of “objective” theorizing.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 24.

This approach to biblical exegesis that is always considered from theological and pastoral horizons is especially important when it comes to Ratzinger's eschatology. Both disciplines have their "temptations" built in to them. He explains, "Dogmatics is always tempted to correct the [exegetical] data for the sake of results. Exegesis wants to perform the task of transposition into the present, claiming the competence of the interpreter for work that simply cannot be carried out in that fashion."⁴³⁵ Appropriating the meaning of an ancient text and allowing it to shed light on circumstances of the present and orienting an audience to the demands of the future, is a multifaceted task that requires great sensitivity to the multiplicity of factors involved in interpretation. Doing the best scientific work to grasp the data that the historical critical method can supply, gives insight into the text as it was produced and appropriated in the history. But then the limits of this method must be recognized and the interpreter must begin to take into consideration the whole trajectory over the ages regarding the manner in which the original text had been interpreted. Ratzinger suggests that this variety of viewpoints within the one unfolding history of the tradition ought to lend itself to fostering some humility in the exegete of today, for "Only by listening to the whole history of interpretation can the present be purified by criticism and so brought into a position of genuine encounter with the text concerned."⁴³⁶ In light of what has already been described as his theology of the word, a primary characteristic of which is its "unfolding" nature, his insistence on examining the whole of the tradition and how it has tried to

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 24.

articulate various aspects of eschatology, becomes that much more intelligible. For Ratzinger, the intelligibility of the whole of the tradition, of the whole of history, is possible precisely because of its transcendent origin. For this reason, in order to make this “listening to the whole history” possible, it is first necessary to establish its transcendent, metaphysical character.

One of the deficiencies of the conception of human history in modern times, for Ratzinger, is that because of the strictly “scientific” approach to history that has become dominant, an inner principle of unity of history has been lost. Or to put it another way, the understanding of the metaphysical nature of history has faded. In its place, history has come to be seen as lacking any underlying unity because it is unhinged from metaphysical reality that transcends history even while it reaches into history as well. Ratzinger recalls in this context the observation made by Josef Pieper of the growing phenomenon of the “materialistic trivialization of death” wherein, on the one hand, death is to be feared above all realities because it is impossible to see any meaning or reality beyond it. On the other hand, there is a sense in which in an age of television, “death is presented as a thrilling spectacle tailor-made for alleviation of the general boredom of life.”⁴³⁷ Here, the shock of the image of death that others undergo is at least an occasion for a temporary awakening from the numbness that comes in living a life devoid of supernatural reality and significance. In both cases, Ratzinger, argues, “death is deprived of its

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 70.

character as a place where the metaphysical breaks through.”⁴³⁸ The prospect of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, of eternity itself, then, is an occasion where the natural realm ends and the supernatural enters in. For Ratzinger, keeping in tension the two-fold nature of history as having its origins in the eternal *Logos* spoken from an infinite God and “heard” in a finite earthly realm, is essential to understanding the fullness of the Christian mystery as it pertains to death and eternal life. Only in this context does death become the locus of the meeting point of history and eternity. Here, the theological category of the *Logos* becomes the necessary framework for being able to handle the tensions that arise in the questions posed by an eschatology seeking to respond to the new cultural and philosophical horizons of the modern world.

The Exegetical Problem of an Imminent End

To begin to formulate this renewed eschatology, the first task, in Ratzinger’s mind, was to address current exegetical challenges. In this case, the most pressing question and the one that had re-introduced the specialization of eschatology to a prominent place in the theological conversation, was the need to grapple with the nature of Jesus’ preaching and aspects of the New Testament that suggested a vision of the imminent end of the world.⁴³⁹ He notes that of the 122 times in the New Testament that the phrases “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of heaven” come up, 90 of them are recounted as coming directly from Jesus’ own preaching. Indeed, Ratzinger agrees with the exegetical opinion that this is the “true Leitmotiv” of Jesus’

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 19.

preaching.⁴⁴⁰ The fact that the mention of the Kingdom of God/heaven are almost always in the context of their being “close” or “at hand” or “among us” suggests a consistent theme that indicates the reign of God, who is *eternal*, is beginning to take root on earth, in the person of Jesus, in the realm of the *historical*. Ratzinger argues that the object of Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom of God/heaven is “not of a heavenly reality but of something God is doing and will do in the future here on earth.”⁴⁴¹ And yet it remains that it is God who is doing the action and so in this locus of the Kingdom of God/heaven, history and eternity are meeting and in that meeting, history is facing its “end” i.e., it is coming to perfection and fullness in the person of Jesus.

Implicit in this proclamation of Jesus, for Ratzinger, is that one way or another the kingdom of eternity was in the process of transforming and overcoming somehow, the kingdom of earth, of human history. This is to say that Jesus was suggesting that the end of the world as we know it was now upon us. And yet, surely, the “end” did not come. Nothing externally in the world seems to have happened that suggested anything was any different than it had been before Jesus appeared on the scene. If these New Testament sentiments, including the direct preaching of Jesus, did indeed expect the imminent end of the world, what are we to make of the trustworthiness of the scriptural witness when “the end” did not indeed come? And since “the end” did not come, can the contemporary Church still find these texts trustworthy in her effort to understand the meaning of history and what

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

to expect in death and eternal life?⁴⁴² Is the New Testament and even Jesus' particular teaching reliable in this area of the questions of death and eternal life?

“Schema and Reality”

Ratzinger's approach to these exegetical problems allows for a diversity of interpretive conclusions. On the one hand, some historians of the texts may be correct in concluding that the New Testament authors and their audiences may have thought that the end would be near- in their own lifetimes. This did not happen. But the fact that they were proved wrong in one sense of the question, does not mean that the writings themselves are in error. In *Eschatology*, Ratzinger describes this interpretive tension that is inherently built in to the scriptures as a tension between “literary schema and reality.”⁴⁴³ Even for the authors themselves of the New Testament, he explains, “what interests them is not the question of exact chronological succession or a possible causality of development but the inner unity of the whole.”⁴⁴⁴ There is a horizon from which these texts were written and within which the texts are to be properly interpreted that is characterized as a coherent narrative of salvation history always being played out. In the moment of the writing of any of the given texts, complete understanding of this inner unity of history is impossible for the particular authors. And yet, in the mind of God, the words spoken in prophecy in scripture are indeed intimately linked and united to the ultimate reality that is yet to unfold for those still living on earth. This tension between schema and reality is most clearly uncovered, for Ratzinger, in the problem of

⁴⁴² Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 46ff.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 41.

interpreting the person of Jesus in light of the Old Testament. He writes, “The words of the Old Testament, in which Israel’s faith experience of the word of God is reflected, anticipate the history of Jesus, the living Word of God in this world. It is only in light of that earlier word that the figure of Jesus becomes theologically intelligible. Jesus is interpreted on its basis, and only thus can his whole existence be acknowledged as itself substantially ‘Word.’”⁴⁴⁵ To speak, then, of God’s word being spoken throughout history, culminating in the Word itself in Jesus, gives the fundamental hermeneutic key for understanding all of history, in Ratzinger’s theology. It is precisely the characteristic of the Word that is both particular in its expression and yet open with respect to its meaning and intelligibility that it becomes so fruitful as a central motif for understanding divine self-communication and the nature and meaning of history itself.

Hermeneutic of the Word in History

So, for Ratzinger, the foundational interpretive principle that holds together “schema and reality” is one of the Word unfolding in history. What coheres in the mind of God is made apparent to humanity only over time as the whole narrative unfolds. Ratzinger explains, “The fundamental and all-important hermeneutical insight here is that subsequent history belongs intrinsically to the inner momentum of the text itself. That is, it does not provide retrospective commentary on the text. Rather, through the appearing of the reality which was still to come, the full dimensions of the word carried by the text come to light.”⁴⁴⁶ And so, if there seems

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 43-44.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 42.

to arise a sense of incoherence or confusion when reading parts of the text of scripture in isolation, including the words of Jesus himself, this confusion need not derail efforts to understand the meaning of the text. For the fullness of the meaning of any given portion of scripture makes sense ultimately only in light of the heart of the testimony of scripture that pertains to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Only in light of this *reality* do all the previous aspects of the *literary schemas* of scripture become intelligible. Furthermore, only in keeping this tension of "schema and reality" operative in an "authentic appropriation of the Word" is the contemporary reader and believer able to avoid the twin pitfalls of "archaism and modernism."⁴⁴⁷ For, "Issuing as it does from the crucified and risen Christ, the word indicates direction which is wide enough to receive all reality into itself, yet clear enough to confront it with a definite measuring rod of its own."⁴⁴⁸ The twin aspects of both the particularity and the openness of "the word" that Ratzinger relies upon, becomes essential for the task of understanding Christ and his message in an ever new way as its meaning continues to be appropriated in history.

Discovering the Kingdom in Person

For Ratzinger, the contemporary person of faith, helped by these historical and exegetical investigations, remains free, and even obliged, to engage the text of revelation in the present, by the light of faith, in order to interpret them as sources of faith. This action is what drives the engine of tradition, always anchored in the testimony of the past and always attempting to appropriate the truth of God's words

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.

and deeds in history to inform the present and future life of the Church. For Jesus to proclaim that the Kingdom of heaven is near, then, led many to expect the end of the world in the very near future. But as the narrative unfolds, and in light of Jesus' death and Resurrection, it becomes clear that the fullness of the coming of the Kingdom is not an expectation about chronological events in a distant future conceived in a linear fashion, but about an openness to an encounter with the Kingdom *in person* in the present.⁴⁴⁹ Ratzinger recalls the exegesis of Origen from the third century in which he calls Jesus the *autobasileia*, "the Kingdom in person."⁴⁵⁰ Only in retrospect, after the Resurrection, and guided by the Spirit, does the Christian community begin to realize the full implications of who Jesus had been all the while in their midst. And they also came to realize that he remained in their midst *now*, as the Risen One. And so in light of the new recognition of Jesus' identity as the eternal *Word* in the flesh, they also begin to understand the meaning of his *words* in a new way. So it is that Jesus' preaching about the closeness of the kingdom of heaven and the closeness of the end of history must be understood in light of the true identity of Jesus himself. The Christian community discovers that as the very presence of God in the flesh in history, in his very person, Jesus himself is the presence of the Kingdom of God of which he spoke. He is the fullness and in that sense the "end" of human history in his very self. Consequently, Ratzinger argues, "Eschatology's meaning and driving force depend upon the power of waiting on Christ, not temporal expectations of the world's end or transformation, no matter of

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

what kind.”⁴⁵¹ Due to this Christological hermeneutic, then, the only proper way to understand any of the *ideas* associated with eschatology and the nature of history must be in light of the *person* of Christ.

Eschatology and Historical Consciousness

We might pause briefly to recall the origins of Ratzinger’s own development of thought on this matter of the Christological hermeneutic used in deriving an eschatology that is undergirded by a particular theology of history. It goes back to his study of St. Bonaventure’s response to Joachim of Fiore and the “spiritualists” who followed him.⁴⁵² Joachim’s attempt to interpret the historical developments in the life of the Church resulted in his controversial and ultimately condemned vision of history and revelation that suggested the Church had entered a third and final stage of history led by the Holy Spirit and that the second Christological and visible ecclesiological age was passing away. Ratzinger observes that it fell to Bonaventure to take the insights offered by Joachim and make good use of them for new theological reflection while holding to the view that the fullness of the revelation of God had indeed been already given in the person of Jesus Christ. Still, he recognized, along with Joachim, that new things were happening in the life of the Church. Though they did not use the terminology, both Joachim and later Bonaventure, recognized “development” in the life of the Church and the need, therefore, for a kind of “historical consciousness” to sort out how to interpret these movements over time within the Church. Bonaventure placed Christ not as one significant figure

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵² Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press), 1989.

occupying a particular moment within a linear history of salvation, but rather at the center of a kind of concentric, circular or, better, spherical model of history. This view of salvation history was open to development of new expressions in history, while always remaining rooted and grounded in its core and source of life in the figure of Jesus Christ, the *Logos* from which all other *logoi* flowed. In Ratzinger's view, Bonaventure's working out of the challenges posed by Joachim led to a "new historical consciousness" in the Catholic theological tradition. Indeed, for Ratzinger, while the ideas of the "spiritual age" were ultimately condemned and discarded from the tradition, this new sense of an historical consciousness, is the "true significance of Joachim."⁴⁵³ It seems that his study of Joachim and Bonaventure on the theological nature of human history produced a foundational principle for Ratzinger's study of the whole of the Christian mystery when he states that because of the Incarnation, "the Church and redemption are rendered historical in an entirely new way which cannot be a matter of indifference for the history of dogma nor for systematic theology."⁴⁵⁴

Several years after his study of Bonaventure was completed, and when he took up the task of offering a contemporary eschatology, this basic insight remained with Ratzinger. His agreement with Auer that their methodology in *Eschatology* would involve the three step process of the use of current exegesis, the analysis of the historical development of dogmatic statements as well as a systematic analysis of the inner-coherence of the aspects of eschatology as it relates to other aspects of

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 107.

theology, seems to be a twentieth century application of many of the same insights applied by Bonaventure as he took up the challenges to theology posed by Joachim. Consequently, Ratzinger refuses the temptation to try to write the definitive word on these issues and rather forces his readers to consider the whole unfolding narrative of the Christian appropriation of these issues over many centuries. Only with this broad perspective, can we, Ratzinger argues, in a contemporary age, begin to understand these mysteries that have remained so richly multivalent since the beginning of the life of the Church.

Maranatha vs. Dies Irae

As a kind of case study of an application of this historically sensitive methodology in eschatology, Ratzinger takes up the contrast drawn by many theologians that exists within the Christian tradition between the ancient biblical proclamation, *Maranatha* and the thirteenth century Latin hymn, *Dies Irae*.⁴⁵⁵ If it is true that the *lex credendi* is formed by the *lex orandi*, what are we to conclude about the Christian belief regarding the final judgment when looking at these two apparently diverging prayer texts? The note of confidence in God's mercy struck in the utterance *Maranatha*, asking Him to come close, stands in sharp contrast with the spirit of fear of that same God's wrath that characterizes the *Dies Irae*. What to do with this tension? Ratzinger first focuses on an examination of the prayers themselves. Beginning with the *Maranatha*, he notes that current exegetical scholarship was somewhat divided between the possibility that the *Maranatha* was

⁴⁵⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 4-6.

a plea *asking* that the Lord *might* come close and others who say the prayer is a proclamation of what has already occurred- “the Lord has come.”⁴⁵⁶ In either case, however, the prayer strikes a note of confidence in the coming of the *savior* who is at the same time the *judge* of humanity. Taking a cue from the eschatological sense of this proclamation, there seems to be a mingling in the one identity of Christ as both Judge and Savior in the ancient Church that seems to allow the faithful to approach the end times- whenever they might come- with confidence, hope and even joy.

In a different historical and cultural setting, however, in the case of the emergence of the *Dies Irae* in the medieval Church, the prospect of judgment seems to have been separated out from the mercy of the Savior. While this certainly seems to be the case, Ratzinger points out that there were also other strands of liturgical life even in the medieval Church that kept alive the reality of the mercy of the Savior and the hope with which the faithful could approach death. He points here to the development of the Litany of the Saints that became such a crucial communal prayer in the medieval Church. In the litany and in the communion of saints that it calls upon, he argues, the faithful find their true identity and home as Christians who can face earthly death with confidence. In the litany, he explains, the Christian “gathers the redeemed of all ages around him and finds safety under their mantle. This signifies that the walls separating heaven and earth, and past, present and future, are now as glass. The Christian lives in the presence of the saints as his own proper

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

ambience, and so lives 'eschatologically'.⁴⁵⁷ Thus, in Ratzinger's schema, with Christ at the center of history, final judgment becomes not necessarily the stuff of fear and dread, but of hope and joy based on the personal encounter with the center of history himself, Jesus Christ.⁴⁵⁸ When Ratzinger considers the whole of the Christian tradition of the *lex orandi*, then, the underlying confidence in the *Maranatha*, sheds more light on eschatology than the fear elicited by the *Dies Irae* when it is separated from the true identity of Christ whose mercy fulfills his justice. The person of Christ who faces death and defeats it in love, then, becomes essential for a theology based on hope even when confronting death. More precisely, the figure of Christ, as he is met in the life of the Church, especially in the celebration of the liturgy, is crucial in filling out the context of genuine eschatological hope in the Christian vision, and it is to this aspect of Ratzinger's renewed eschatology that we now turn.

Spe Salvi

Benedict acknowledges in his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, on the nature of Christian hope, that when discussion moves from the origins and nature of created reality to the final questions posed at the end of life, we can and must ask, "What may we hope for?"⁴⁵⁹ The fulfillment of this hope even in the face of death is offered and given a foretaste in myriad ways in the liturgical life of the Church. Indeed, in the life of the Church, perhaps the best explanations of these mysteries come precisely in the context of the liturgical setting. For it is in these settings, that the

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 108

⁴⁵⁹ Benedict, *On Christian Hope: Spe Salvi, Encyclical Letter* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007), #23.

people of God, the Church, are most opened up and receptive to truly “hearing” the Word spoken to them. In anticipation of the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the universal Church proclaims the Word of God that calls the faithful listener to be open to the Word that is spoken and can be heard even across the boundaries of death. For Christians, being “united” to Christ in baptism is an experience of having been “engrafted onto the death of Christ.”⁴⁶⁰ The foundational experience of baptism as a participation in the death of Christ in order to share in his victory over death in his Resurrection, is a further hermeneutical key to the problem of death that Benedict offers in *Spe Salvi*.⁴⁶¹

Death, as we have said, presents itself to the human person as the apparent silencing of the Word of life. But for the Christian, hope consists in continuing to have faith that the Word is being spoken from God even in the context of death. This is at the core of the vision of the paschal mystery. But there is a muting of this word of hope in contemporary western culture especially. This muting is part of the landscape that Benedict addresses in his introductory observations in the encyclical. Precisely in cultures that have been historically Christian, the word of hope, perhaps because it has become too familiar, has been drowned out. He explains, “We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God.”⁴⁶² On the one hand, the one thing the human person longs for is confidence that there is hope for the fullness of life, even eternal life. Yet there

⁴⁶⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 115.

⁴⁶¹ See also the chapter entitled “On the Theology of Death” in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 243-254.

⁴⁶² Benedict, *Spe Salvi*, #3.

is also something in the human heart that makes us balk at this prospect. Among other reasons, there is a fear that eternal life might turn into a kind of relentless drudgery. After all, he writes, “‘Eternal’, in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us.”⁴⁶³ As long as eternal life and the hope that makes this life possible remain offered in the realm of abstraction and proposition, this fear is justified. But as Benedict consistently emphasizes, Christian hope does not flow from an *idea* offered to the mind, but rather a concrete *encounter* that is available to the whole person. Moving from concept to encounter, then, makes all the difference in opening a contemporary culture back up to authentic hope. Again, this is a hope that is grounded in the *Logos* of God that is spoken to humanity for the sake of relationship.

Hope is possible, Benedict’s argument goes, only in the context of this relationship. This dialogical and relational model of hope is in contrast to the secular virtue of mere optimism. Optimism, for Ratzinger, is a product of an ideology of progress. It is embraced and cultivated in the isolation of individualism. This individualism refuses the need for dependence upon another that is necessary for relationship within the human community and ultimately with respect to God. Hope, then, is not an intellectual conclusion drawn from an ideology thought about in isolation, but rather the product of a dynamic relationship, an encounter. He explains something of the effectiveness of this dynamism as he describes the power of the Gospel itself in his introduction to *Spe Salvi*:

⁴⁶³ Ibid., #12.

So now we can say: Christianity was not only ‘good news’—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only ‘informative’ but ‘performative’. That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.⁴⁶⁴

If hope is not informative but performative, what is it that is achieved in it?

What “things happen”? In the next section he addresses the question, “in what does this hope consist which, as hope, is ‘redemption’?”⁴⁶⁵ By using the illustration of Josephine Bakhita, Pope Benedict draws immediately upon the example of a recently canonized saint to illustrate this hope that “is redemption.”⁴⁶⁶ By way of Bakhita’s life, he is able to provide a kind of icon of the liberty that comes with coming to know the person of Christ and how through this encounter, through entering into dialogue with Christ and therefore cultivating a real relationship with him, one’s present circumstances of suffering can be approached with new confidence. Josephine Bakhita, the 19th century Sudanese slave-turned-religious sister had been sold numerous times and endured several brutal beatings at the hands of various masters. She was ultimately sold into servitude to a master who took up residence in Venice. While there, Benedict describes her coming to know a very different kind of master, or *paron* in Venetian dialect. He recounts her experience:

Up to that time she had known only masters who despised and maltreated her, or at best considered her a useful slave. Now,

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., #2.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., #3.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., #3-4.

however, she heard that there is a “*Paron*” above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this Lord even knew her, that he had created her—that he actually loved her. She too was loved, and by none other than the supreme ‘*Paron*’, before whom all other masters are themselves no more than lowly servants. She was known and loved and she was awaited. What is more, this master had himself accepted the destiny of being flogged and now he was waiting for her ‘at the Father’s right hand.’ Now she had ‘hope’ —no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great hope: ‘I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this Love. And so my life is good.’⁴⁶⁷

Benedict goes on to explain the further transformation that came in St. Josephine’s life thanks to the *word that she had heard* regarding this new kind of relationship with a new kind of *paron*. Upon recognizing that she is loved, the next step was to let others come to know this freedom that she had only recently discovered. The next step in the unfolding of her new identity in relationship with Christ was missionary in character. Upon being baptized, confirmed and receiving first communion from the Patriarch of Venice in 1890, she would be received into the Canossian Sisters with whom she became a kind of missionary within Italy telling the story of her experience of “the liberation that she had received through her encounter with the God of Jesus Christ.” Benedict goes on to explain, “she felt she had to extend [this message], it had to be handed on to others, to the greatest possible number of people. The hope born in her which had ‘redeemed’ her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many, to reach everybody.”⁴⁶⁸

Here, encapsulated in this one story of one saint, is really the pattern for the life of the whole Church, in Ratzinger’s theology. One who is caught in slavery, darkness

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., #3

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

and suffering comes to hear the Word of God in his or her life. As the seed of that Word is planted, it begins to take root. The more clearly the Word of God is heard in that person's life, the greater the transformation that begins to unfold. This is a transformation undergone not in isolation, but always in the context of the ecclesial community comprised of many who seek to hear the Word together. The hearing of this word culminates in the sacramental life of the Church where the Word is given in the flesh, in love. Upon reception of this Word in the flesh, the one who has been transformed by this love, seeks to respond in love, in the flesh. For Bakhita, as Benedict portrays her story, she first heard about the possibility of a new kind of *Paron*, but that level of hearing involved only words that could easily fade away. Not until she "heard" that word of promise in deeds as well as words, did that promise begin to take flesh. She encountered that word in the action taken by her owner in giving her freedom. And she continued to experience that freedom she discovered in Christ in the context of prayer, especially in the sacramental encounter with Christ. In using St. Josephine Bakhita as a kind of icon of hope, Benedict points to the theological reality that hope is not a mere idea of progress that one assents to in the intellectual realm, but an experience of the whole person as the person comes into contact with God who has come close in Jesus Christ. The encounter with the person of Christ is the true source of hope, in Ratzinger's view. It is to this Christological shape of hope as Benedict sees it, that we turn now.

Hope in Entering the “I” of Christ

In *The Yes of Jesus Christ*,⁴⁶⁹ Ratzinger describes the “situation today” wherein people are torn between the desire for God and the impulse to be “free” from God to seek the more immediate needs and desires of our hearts. As such, “we cannot break from God, but neither do we have the power to break through to God: with our own resources, we cannot build the bridges that would lead to a definite relationship with this God.”⁴⁷⁰ In light of this dilemma on the human side of that chasm, Ratzinger explores the Christian proposal that uncovers the power of the love God has for humanity in his creative “assent,” one might call it, that God makes to humanity. Since “human beings cannot completely dispel the strange twilight that hangs over the question of the eternal,” he explains “God must cross over to them and talk to them if real relations are to be established with him.”⁴⁷¹ God definitively says “yes” to humanity in the Incarnation and on the Cross. Drawing upon Josef Pieper’s definition of love in the affirmation, “it is good that you exist,”⁴⁷² he explains the power of this utterance when God directs it to humanity. To receive that word that is “yes” from God, that *Word* that is the origin of creation itself, when it is uttered in the context of man’s isolation from God, this utterance becomes another creative act, and from those words, a new creation emerges. In order to be able to live, human beings need this affirmation. “Biological birth is not enough,” he

⁴⁶⁹ Benedict, *The Yes of Jesus Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love* (New York: Crossroad, 2005).

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 89.

writes. “Man can only accept his personality, his ‘I’ in the power of the approval of his being that comes from another, from ‘you’.”⁴⁷³ For Ratzinger, man is first able to fully accept this personality in the person of Christ who fully receives approval from the Father. In the person of Christ, then, it becomes possible for the I-Thou affirmation of God for humanity, begun in creation and which continues to unfold in salvation history, to reach its fulfillment in the eschaton.⁴⁷⁴ What allows this affirmation to ultimately take place and come to fulfillment is the dialogical structure of the relationship between God and humanity.

The eschatological dimension of this dynamic of entering into the “I” of Christ becomes clearer as Ratzinger explains the link that exists within Jesus’ own teaching about himself in John’s gospel. The bread of life discourse of the sixth chapter and the narrative of the raising of Lazarus in the eleventh, mutually inform each other in this regard.⁴⁷⁵ For Ratzinger, to enter into communion with Jesus is to enter into communion with God who both transcends history and who has taken flesh within it as well. This communion serves as a kind of bridge, then, between history and eternity, death and eternal life. In the narrative of Lazarus’ death and resuscitation in John 11, Ratzinger notes that even before Jesus’ own resurrection, there is a promise of the bridge across death. His *word* to Martha, “I am the resurrection” is spoken in conjunction with his *deed* of raising his friend from the dead. The consistency of his word and deed signifying an underlying presence that spans earthly and transcendent reality is echoed also in eucharistic terms. Ratzinger

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁷⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 117.

conjoins these realities when he writes, “The bond with Jesus is, even now, resurrection. Where there is communion with him, the boundary of death is overshoot here and now. It is in this perspective that we must understand the Discourse on the Eucharist in John 6. Feeding on Jesus’ word and flesh, that is, receiving him by both faith and sacrament, is described as being nourished by the bread of immortality. The resurrection does not appear as a distant apocalyptic event but as an occurrence that takes place in the immediate present. Whenever someone enters the ‘I’ of Christ, he has entered straight away into the space of unconditional life.”⁴⁷⁶ This “space of unconditional life” that is hoped for beyond this life, is simultaneously entered into in this life in the sacramental encounter of the Church with the Lord, in the Eucharistic liturgy. And this encounter is possible only because of what is accomplished in history in the death and Resurrection of Jesus. To see more closely how Ratzinger sees the entrance into the “I of Christ” is contingent on the Resurrection of Christ, we turn now to the key to this link, in my estimation- the fact that the Resurrection of Christ is the moment in history wherein the dialogue between God and humanity is fulfilled.

V. Dialogical Fulfillment of Resurrection

To help formulate an overview of Ratzinger’s thought on Jesus’ Resurrection, it is useful to start with his own attempt at such an overview that he offered recently, looking back on his now decades old treatment of eschatology. In his present day foreword for that thirty year-old work, his starting place is the

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

scriptural witness itself wherein he recalls the challenge posed to Jesus by the Sadducees on the possibility of resurrection from the dead. Jesus calls them “greatly misled” in denying the resurrection since God had already revealed Himself in the scriptures of the Jewish people as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and is therefore “not God of the dead but of the living” (Mk 12:26). Benedict sees in Jesus’ answer to the Sadducees a key to understanding properly the whole of the Christian mystery that includes both the foundations of creation as well as the vision of life after death in the *eschaton*. “This theological interpretation,” that Jesus offers, he argues, “is just as much a dia-logical interpretation of the human being and human immortality.”⁴⁷⁷ He then explains in a footnote the following distinction: “‘theo-logy’ discloses a discourse about *theos*, God. A ‘dia-logical’ interpretation is a sharing of the *logos* in the form of a conversation (*diálogos*).”⁴⁷⁸ What seems to have passed away in death, from the perspective of the Sadducees, which is that of an earthly and historical perspective, has indeed *not* passed away, from the perspective of scripture as Jesus interprets it. The whole of human history, in fact, is present within the context of the dialogue that is eternally taking place within God. Since there would be no creation nor human history if these had not emanated from within God who is a communion of relations and therefore characterized by dialogical dynamics, all of creation and history finds its principle of coherence precisely within this dynamic of dialogue. It is for this reason, therefore, that the Christian understanding of the ground of the possibility of human immortality resides in the fact that we exist from

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., xx.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., footnote #5.

the very beginning in the mind of God. He says that we exist at all only because “we are inscribed into God’s memory. In God’s memory, we are not a shadow, a mere recollection. Remaining in God’s memory means we are alive in a full sense of life. We are fully a ‘we’.”⁴⁷⁹ Benedict gives, then, in this one description of human existence being sustained from within the mind, the memory of God, the grounding for both the origins and the “end” of human existence. Even before his own death and Resurrection, Jesus is interpreting the history of Israel as foundational for the promise of eternal life for us. The grounding for this hope for eternal life is a structure of creation and history that is, at its base, dialogical and conversational. The “we” of humanity that possesses the potential for eternal life does so based on the fact of our very existence being within God and in relation to God. This potential for humanity that Jesus points to in his own teaching ministry is fulfilled for humanity, is opened up to all, however, not until his own death and Resurrection.

For Ratzinger, the Christian is drawn into a foretaste of eschatological fulfillment and the inner dynamic of new creation insofar as he or she participates in the paschal mystery of Christ. Participation in the liturgy is the entrance *par excellence* of the members of the Church into the “I” of Christ”. For Ratzinger, to “enter into the ‘I’ of Christ” is fundamentally to enter the dialogical relationship between divinity and humanity. It is to enter into the story of that unfolding relationship as it has occurred throughout the narrative of salvation history that is fulfilled in the death and Resurrection of Jesus. He emphasizes this dialogical

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

dynamic that unfolds through salvation history when he discusses the New Testament understanding of the link between the Resurrection of Christ and the possibility of eternal life for all of humanity. In one such explanation of the Resurrection in his second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict takes as a starting point St. Paul's formula of the confession of faith given in *1 Corinthians* in which Paul asserts, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (15:3). He takes those two elements of interpretation- that the death was "for us" and that it was "in accordance with the scriptures," to be essential to the Christian meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection.⁴⁸⁰

In examining Benedict's analysis of these two parts of the Paul's confession of faith, we can detect the dialogical principle at work again in both instances. For Benedict, I would argue, Paul's proclamation is fundamentally a dialogical reality. First, behind the Resurrection is a divine action *for* humanity. Jesus' death on the cross is God's most perfect word of love to humanity and the power of that love is not recognized by humanity until the Resurrection that follows the death. Secondly, the Resurrection is the fulfillment of the saga of salvation history that is marred early on by the disobedience of humanity in the fall of Adam. The rupture of the relationship between God and humanity is attempted to be corrected through the giving of the law and the prophets until finally, in Jesus, a New Adam emerges who is a human being able to be once again obedient to and living in union with God, as humanity is created to be. The Resurrection is the fruit of this obedience and

⁴⁸⁰ Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth. Part Two, Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, 251.

thereby represents *the* moment of a new creation that is also the eschatological fulfillment of all of salvation history. Benedict explains, "It [the Resurrection of Jesus] belongs in the context of God's ongoing relationship with his people, from which it receives its inner logic and its meaning. It is an event in which the words of Scripture are fulfilled; it bears within itself Logos, or logic; it proceeds from the word and returns to the word; it surrounds the word and fulfills it."⁴⁸¹ At the very heart of the meaning of Christ's free gift of self-sacrificing love on the cross, then, is *Logos*- an event of communication. And if it is communication, then it is a communication between two parties- God and humanity. It is for this reason, that the two aspects of Paul's confession- both that the death and Resurrection that mark the pinnacle of the relationship between God and man that is salvation history was "in accordance with the scriptures;" and that the death and Resurrection was "for our sins"- indicates the communicative or dialogical nature of the paschal mystery. Jesus' death and resurrection form an event of communication at the center of which is a word *from God and for humanity*. He explains, "Because his death has to do with the word of God, it has to do with us, it is a dying 'for.'"⁴⁸² If the original sin of refusing to listen to God's word ended in the isolation of death for humanity, it is in the "yes" of God to humanity and humanity back to God, in Jesus' death, that eternal life is made possible for humanity. Only in this event of the perfect dialogue between God and humanity is the disruption of that dialogue (which death signifies) overcome.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 252.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 252-3.

Resurrection as re-creation in history

For Ratzinger, it is essential to emphasize that the Resurrection of Jesus that is a perfection of the human/divine dialogue, happens in history and is not merely an abstract idea proposed to the intellect. Furthermore, in describing how essential it is that it was not merely one isolated event of a person who died and then came back to life, Benedict emphasizes the radical uniqueness of this event and its meaning for the whole of human history. He writes, "Even if man by his nature is created for immortality, it is only now that the place exists in which his immortal soul can find its 'space', its 'bodiliness', in which immortality takes on its meaning as communion with God and with the whole of reconciled mankind."⁴⁸³ It is here in the context of the death and Resurrection of Jesus then that the Christian understanding of both creation and eschatology begin to converge. What was begun in the moment of creation that came about through the effectiveness of the Word of God being uttered now comes to fulfillment. In the Resurrection of Jesus, Benedict notes, there is not only an interesting and dramatic moment in history, but it is a moment of a kind of "evolutionary leap" in the very heart of being that takes place. There is an "ontological leap" that occasions "opening up a dimension that affects us all, creating for all of us a new space of life, a new space of being in union with God."⁴⁸⁴

Resurrection of the dead in the Christian vision, then, is not simply about individuals living after death on a spiritual plane. It is also bodily. As such, it points

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 274.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

to the eschatological fulfillment of what the human person was created for “in the beginning.” For Ratzinger, resurrection is about communion with both God and the rest of created humanity. It has both human and divine consequences. It is both individual and communal. It is both eternal as well as historical. The resurrected self enters into eternity only because eternity has entered into temporality.

Ratzinger’s reliance on the *Logos* both in his theology of creation as well as his eschatology makes it possible to hold these dimensions together since the *Logos* is both spoken from eternity and always remains in eternity, while also spoken in and communicated in creation, in history. Since the *Logos* is spoken in history, it enters into a realm of the contingent, because it depends on the receptivity of free humanity to what is spoken. The direction the response takes on the part of humanity remains an open question. When it comes to the eschatological question of the final judgment, then, the fragility of the nature of this dialogue between God and humanity comes into clarity. Having established the “fact” of the resurrection, then, Ratzinger also takes up the question of how that fact is responded to by humanity who remains free to enter into the dialogue or to refuse it. It is to this question that we now turn.

VI. Human Freedom and Divine Love in the Final Judgment

If Resurrection and eternal life for the human person are about the fulfillment of the dialogue with God offered in Christ Jesus, and if it is true that God never quits speaking His Eternal Word to us out of love, is it really possible for the human person to definitively and once and for all refuse this dialogue? Could final judgment result in damnation, in Hell? Or is there always a chance of re-opening

this dialogue? The traditional doctrine of Hell and damnation, are of course very much called into question in the modern era and Ratzinger recalls the challenge implicit in keeping the traditional doctrine while finding a way to articulate it in more contemporary and personalist terms. He recalls the famous theological proposal of Origen in the third century that in the end, all would be saved. Ratzinger notes that this presumption arises out of the Platonic theory he operated out of that evil has no real substance and God's reality and being would ultimately overcome all distortions of this reality.⁴⁸⁵ Coming partially to Origen's defense, he reminds the reader that Origen proposed this as a *hypothesis*. But ultimately, the conclusion Origen made was one determined primarily by the metaphysical *system* he had worked out and which provided a framework for understanding aspects of the Christian faith. In this sense, the scriptural witness pertaining to the reality of hell was neglected by Origen. And so Ratzinger uses this scriptural witness as his starting point. There is no doubt that both the Old and New Testament testify to the reality of hell. But what is the nature of it? Proceeding from an essentially biblical basis, he argues that human freedom has a privileged place in the schema and that this freedom is always operative. And so while divine love is always offered to the free human being, it is not thrust upon him. While this freedom is respected, "what can be given to the creature, however, is love...and yet the freedom to resist the creation of that assent [to divine love], the freedom not to accept it as one's own, this freedom remains."⁴⁸⁶ The human person always remains free to receive this

⁴⁸⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 215.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

love, to hear this word of love spoken from God and allow it to transform him or else to reject it. Hell, then, in Ratzinger's schema reveals a great deal about the fragile dynamic that characterizes relationship- the offer of love, a word spoken of invitation to love and the uncertainty of the response. Whether it is rejected or embraced depends on the second party. The Word of love spoken from the divine "I" can be received or rejected by the human "Thou." It is a fragile process because it is dialogical in nature. The prospect of hell, or heaven for that matter, in Ratzinger's view, is not a matter of the unilateral action taken by the all-powerful juridical authority of God that either dispenses salvation or damnation as he sees fit, but rather Judgment takes on the tenuous character of a relationship, the outcome of which remains to be seen. For this reason, hell remains very much a reality for a free humanity. And yet, facing the reality of hell can be done in hope. This hope, he writes, "does not emerge from the neutral logic of a system...instead it derives from the surrender of all claims to innocence and to reality's perduringness, a surrender which takes place by the Cross of the Redeemer. Such hope, however, cannot be a self-willed assertion. It must place its petition into the hands of its Lord and leave it there."⁴⁸⁷ This is the hope that can "take on" Hell not as an endeavor of the isolated individual, but only as the one who is fundamentally in dialogue with the Word Himself who is spoken as love, in the face of death, on the Cross.

Hell and Heaven

For Ratzinger, in the absence of the ultimate hope that is based in dialogue with the Lord, hell becomes a very real possibility; indeed it becomes a likely

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 218.

outcome. Benedict explains near the end of *Spe Salvi*, “There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred and have suppressed all love within themselves. This is a terrifying thought, but alarming profiles of this type can be seen in certain figures of our own history. In such people all would be beyond remedy and the destruction of good would be irrevocable: this is what we mean by the word *Hell*.”⁴⁸⁸ On the other hand, he says, there are people who are so radically open to God and to their neighbors, that upon their death, they move directly into that fullness of communion with God and all the angels and saints in heaven. While that radical openness to relationship with God and others is possible just as is a radically closed disposition to that relationship, realistically, he says, neither of these situations is very common in the human condition. Most who reach the point of historical death have at least a degree of openness to the eternal fullness of that relationship with God and the rest of sanctified humanity, but there is also a need for a purification of heart before that communion can take place. It is for this reason that a *purgation* is required.

Benedict notes the opinion of “some recent theologians”⁴⁸⁹ when he explains the notion that “the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour. The encounter with him is the decisive act of judgement. Before his gaze all falsehood melts away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves. All that we build during our lives can

⁴⁸⁸ Benedict, *Spe Salvi*, #45.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, #47.

prove to be mere straw, pure bluster, and it collapses. Yet in the pain of this encounter, when the impurity and sickness of our lives become evident to us, there lies salvation. His gaze, the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation ‘as through fire’.⁴⁹⁰ It is in this *encounter* with Christ whose *identity* is both Savior and Judge that the *work* of God’s justice as well as His mercy is expressed. This work of both justice and mercy unfolds as a “painful transformation” that occurs in the course of the encounter with Christ. Benedict situates the transformation in the context of the true nature of hope that relies on both justice and mercy, or “grace”, as he calls it: “The judgement of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace. If it were merely grace, making all earthly things cease to matter, God would still owe us an answer to the question about justice—the crucial question that we ask of history and of God. If it were merely justice, in the end it could bring only fear to us all.”⁴⁹¹ It is worth noting here that the two-fold nature of divine judgment that reveals itself first as justice and then as mercy is consistent with the entire mode of Ratzinger’s theological reflection that is narrative and unfolding in character. Because the final judgment is based on the unfolding of the relationship between God and humanity as it plays out in the context of salvation history, justice is accomplished but it also gives way to the fulfillment of justice that is God’s mercy. Neither *justice* nor *mercy* is a mere concept to be grasped. One cannot be understood without the other and neither can be understood if they are not attended to throughout the course of the unfolding

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

narrative of salvation history. The flexibility of this mode of doing theology to which Joseph Ratzinger has become accustomed in the course of his career, is able to handle the apparent contradictions that would arise if this theological reflection were being done in more propositional terms that required precise and self-contained definitions of divine justice and divine mercy as mere *ideas* that could be analyzed a-historically. Rather, his salvation-historical approach to these questions allows for the dynamic of understanding a particular theological problem always in the context of the *relationship* between God and humanity that is always unfolding.

Another dimension of this unfolding relationship between God and humanity as it culminates in final judgment, is that the relationship is always a communal one of the whole of humanity relating to God and with one another. It is for this reason, he explains, that even after death, the bonds of love among the faithful still exist and they remain an essential dimension of how a given person undergoing divine judgment enters into that encounter with the Lord. This is done never in isolation, but always in the context of the web of human relations that the person enjoyed while alive on earth. While each individual person does undergo a particular judgment, they do so, potentially with the support of other aspects of love in their lives. Benedict explains, “The souls of the departed can, however, receive ‘solace and refreshment’ through the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving. The belief that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death—this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today. Who would not feel the need to convey to their departed loved

ones a sign of kindness, a gesture of gratitude or even a request for pardon?"⁴⁹²

Certainly, on a phenomenological level, that need among the bereaved to want to speak that word of love to and on behalf of their beloved departed exists, but theologically a question remains: how can this "word" spoken by other people become a word that is effective in the unfolding of the beloved's reception of divine justice and mercy? Benedict takes up this problem when he asks,

Now a further question arises: if 'Purgatory' is simply purification through fire in the encounter with the Lord, Judge and Saviour, how can a third person intervene, even if he or she is particularly close to the other? When we ask such a question, we should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, not even after death. In the interconnectedness of Being, my gratitude to the other—my prayer for him—can play a small part in his purification. And for that there is no need to convert earthly time into God's time: in the communion of souls simple terrestrial time is superseded. It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain.⁴⁹³

This touching of the heart of another, even across the chasm of death that is marked by the gap between history and eternity, can be done in love, most perfectly when that love is grounded in the heart of Christ and in the context of ecclesial prayer wherein the Church prays from within "the I of Christ."

⁴⁹² Ibid., #48.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Conclusion: Eternal Dialogue

In this meditation on the last things in *Spe Salvi*, then, we see a profound interconnectedness of the various aspects of Ratzinger's theology. A theological anthropology is offered that insists upon a true identity for humanity that is constituted of solidarity among people and established at a spiritual level, a level that is fulfilled in prayer and love for one another. This prayer is made possible and fulfilled in the person of Christ. And the solidarity into which we are able to enter, through Christ, is one that stretches across the order of creation and history into eternity. For Ratzinger, there is no proper understanding of eschatological realities without seeing them through the lens of the identity and work accomplished by Christ whom he sees as the perfection of the dialogue between God and humanity. We recall here from the second chapter of this thesis that Ratzinger sees revelation "basically as dialogue". And if Christ is the fullness of the revelation of God then, as I argued in the third chapter, Christ is the dialogue itself- both the speaking of God to man and man's response back to God. Ratzinger's Christology, drawing from his study of Bonaventure, has Christ at the center of history and as the fulfillment of the plan of God for humanity's salvation, precisely as Word. Christ, the Word made flesh in history, is also the Word who continues to speak from eternity calling the whole of history into the life of the Father. This Logo-centric understanding of Christology- that is only understood within the "I of Christ" actualized for humanity in the life of the Church- further elucidates matters as they pertain

to eschatology. It is exactly because of the framework of the *Logos* in this regard, because of the communicative and dialogical way of understanding Christ and salvation history, that certain tensions implicit in eschatology can remain creative and enlightening even though they always escape the precise grasp of human understanding. The communicative, dialogical framework of Ratzinger's theology allows for this tension. For Ratzinger, the *eschaton* is nothing other than the fulfillment in eternity of the narrative of salvation history that has been shaped throughout by the dialogue between God and humanity.

Epilogue

We come, then, to the end of this exploration of the thought of Joseph Ratzinger. We have concluded with an examination of the last things. But in this examination we see still at work, the first things. There has been a constant dynamic at work throughout his thought and it is this dynamic that, in my estimation, allows the whole of his work to cohere. The dynamic has been one of dialogue both within God, in all eternity, but also between God and humanity in history. The dialogue that is at the very heart of reality is dialogue that has bridged the chasm between eternity and history. There is a simplicity at the core of Ratzinger's articulation of the Christian mystery. God speaks. Humanity listens... or not. To the degree that humanity does listen to the Word spoken by God, then there is the possibility of responding to the Word, thereby fulfilling what it means to be truly human. In this speaking and listening, a relationship is established, a transformation occurs, a story is told. But this simplicity can be deceiving. It is not a simplicity of a one-dimensional exposition of Christianity. Quite the contrary. For Ratzinger, as I have attempted to demonstrate, there is always a tension at work in this reality of the Christian vision. Precisely because God is not only logical but dialogical- so too is all of reality, not only logical, but dialogical.

There is a certain fragility in a dialogue. There is mystery emerging as the dialogue unfolds. It cannot simply be grasped and then walked away from. It must be lived from within and to remain in touch with reality, it is necessary to remain *within* this dialogue- with our fellow human beings, with the tradition that has

preceded us, with those in heaven who have gone before us, with the story of Scripture that has been told to us, with the experience of the liturgy that is the perfection of that dialogue in daily life. Throughout it all, in all the ways that we remain “within” the dialogue of human existence, we get our bearings as to how this dialogue really works by looking to the figure of Jesus Christ- the one who is the dialogue itself, in one person- the one who is both the Eternal Word of God spoken to humanity and humanity’s perfect response back to God.

Not long ago, as I was nearing the end of the editing process for this dissertation, I had a brief conversation with a student at a Jesuit university. We had just concluded celebrating a 10pm mass on a Tuesday night. I had not seen him at that mass before. He was in his senior year and he was a theology major. He asked if we could speak for a moment and I agreed. He asked what he ought to do since he had recently noticed that the more he got into his theological studies, the less he was drawn to prayer. His spiritual life was drying up as he was nearing the completion of his theology degree. When he was a freshman, he said, he prayed often, went on retreats, even seriously considered becoming a Jesuit one day. It was because of this devotion that he had decided to study theology in the first place. And now, that devotion seemed to have faded. There was a sadness and a longing in his voice. As he described his predicament, an immediate rush came over me of all that I had been studying and writing about in the last year and a half based on the preaching and theology of Joseph Ratzinger. This is why Benedict has done what he has done, it struck me. This is why he has undertaken theology in such a manner- for people like this young man before me. For Ratzinger, theology is an attempt to

give words to what the Word has spoken in history and to what ordinary people have experienced of that Word in their lives. Theology is meant to describe and deepen the sense of what, exactly, this encounter is comprised. And when theology is done well, it ought to lead one directly back into that encounter and not away from it so that Christianity can be examined from a safe, “objective” distance. To my mind, Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, does theology well. It is my hope that having reflected upon his thought, I might do a little better at it myself.

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