Joseph Ratzinger: The word became love and truth in the Church

Author: Maurice Ashley Agbaw-Ebai

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Boston College
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Joseph Ratzinger: The Word became Love and Truth in the Church

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Submitted by: Maurice Ashley Agbaw-Ebai (AMDG)

Mentor: Dr. Barbara Radtke
Co-Mentor: Prof. Margaret Guider, OSF
DEDICATION

To

Bishop Francis Teke Lysinge,

With Filial Love and Gratitude
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Introduction – The Origins of an Inquisitive Interest

To all intents and purposes, the name Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger is difficult to ignore as it means different things to different people. Born April 16, 1927, this native Bavarian son has come to epitomize the flashpoint of a certain brand of post-Conciliar Catholicism that continues to rankle and confound even his most ardent critics and detractors. To many, he represents the spiritual dimension of a Catholicism that is impervious to the liberal ethos of the post-modern world, a brand of Catholicism that is counter-cultural and radically faithful to the core teachings of Christ and his gospel message, as handed down through the living tradition of the Church. A hardcore academic right down to his boots, Ratzinger’s unapologetic focus on the Catholic identity invited some harsh criticisms that are considered by his adherents and admirers as the price he has had to pay for being a theological conservative.

Ratzinger is not oblivious to the criticisms that have been levied against him. His diagnosis is that faith and obedience are the necessary remedies to the crisis of Christian identity that have marked Catholicism. In a now famous sermon that he delivered in the mass Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice, Ratzinger surreptitiously said:

We must not remain children in faith, in the condition of minors. And what does it mean to be children in faith? St Paul answers: it means being ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine’ (Eph. 4:14). This description is very timely! How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking! The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed by these waves – flung from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth. Every day new sects spring up, and what St Paul says about human deception and the trickery that strives to entice people into error (cf. Eph.4: 14) comes true. Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,’ seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times.¹

In a sense, the above citation is a synthesis of the theological battles fought in the course of over four decades by Ratzinger the theologian, Ratzinger the prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and Pope Benedict XVI.

There are many who view Ratzinger as Catholicism’s unfortunate Patriarch, who prevented the Church from evolving with the times, from responding meaningfully to changes in the post-modern world. To this group, Ratzinger has been nothing but bad news. In their view, Ratzinger’s positions seem to be for a Church that has become ossified and petrified in a ghetto that no longer gives life and meaning to many. From Christological to moral questions; from ecclesiological to liturgical changes, and others, Ratzinger’s positions have been interpreted as being rigid and closed in, as if the Church was meant to be a museum of admiration that was closed to any ongoing response to the living experiences of Christians.

Cardinal Ratzinger’s role as the chief theologian of the Church in his capacity as the Prefect of the CDF did not make things any easier for his public image. His battles with liberation theologians in Latin America; feminists theologians in the West; theologians known for their work on inculturation and inter-religious dialogue in Asia, Oceania and Africa; ecumenists in Protestant parts of Europe and elsewhere; theologians who understood and interpreted Vatican II in terms of discontinuity with the past; and a predominantly hostile liberal culture of the secular West, all contributed to building the unflattering image of Ratzinger as “Cardinal NO;” the “Panzer-Cardinal,” and God’s Rottweiler!

However, close friends and admirers of Ratzinger have often defended this son of Bavaria, describing him as a soft-spoken and amiable character, with a shy public demeanor. The question remains: Why did Ratzinger seldom undertake a defense of his person? Emery De Gaal suggests:
(Ratzinger’s) shyness in defending his own person both in public and within academia is partially explained in terms of his temperament. In an age of mass culture, where people are formed and informed by an abstract/virtual reality concretized in the mass media, disregard for one’s public image comes close to suicide. The question arises whether a Christian can care about the media’s perception and still remain a disciple of Christ. The Truth shines on its own conditions. It requires our words in order to be conveyed, but it does not need human cosmetics in order to convince. Were one to clad the truth in appealing trappings, one would betray the truth.  

This position of the self-evidence and ultimate triumph of truth could very well provide an insight into Ratzinger’s reticence in defending himself in the face of the press hostility and unprecedented media attacks on his image and character.

**In the Beginning**

My personal interest in Joseph Ratzinger moved from curiosity to outright surprise and bewilderment in the wake of the loud hue and cry that followed the release of the document *Dominus Iesus – On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, on August 6, 2000. I was in the second year of my formation to the Catholic priesthood. I was struck by the largely negative reaction from the many parts of the developed world that greeted that document. Inquisitiveness eventually led to admiration, as I began reading the writings of Ratzinger. His books, such as the *Introduction to Christianity* became for me an academic and spiritual journey, for relating to his writings affected me in ways that I could only judge to be spiritually enriching. This thesis is therefore an attempt at synchronizing the spiritual and academic influence that Joseph Ratzinger has had on my intellectual and spiritual development as an individual, but even more so, as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Scope of the Work

The aim of this thesis therefore, is to study the convictions of Ratzinger the theologian, with specific reference to his ecclesiological positions, commitments or convictions. It is my humble opinion that understanding Ratzinger’s systematic approach to the question of the Church is crucial in analyzing his impact on Catholicism and the world, especially on the many fronts where he engaged issues from the perspective of the faith and as a theologian.

This thesis explores Benedict from the inside, from the internal theological and formative forces and convictions that shaped him and contributed to his making the decision that shook the world on February 11, 2013. Besides the media speculations and obvious embarrassing stories that emerged from the papal household, such as the theft of his private papers by his own butler; the belated effort by the communication machinery bogged down in the realm of endless bureaucratic ritual and unable to come to terms with a Pope who seemed more inclined to the religious dimension of his papacy than staging theatrical media drama. It is my strong conviction that, for a man who had withstood so much pressure and opprobrium throughout most of his ecclesiastical career, Ratzinger’s renunciation of papal power came about through the lens with which he had often judged and discerned situations – the life of the Church, the gift of the Church and what was best for this Church that had meant all to Ratzinger. His remarkable final public address, delivered on February 27, 2013, captures this sentiment. It reads in part:

When, on 19 April almost eight years ago I accepted to take on the Petrine ministry, I had the firm certainty that has always accompanied me: this certainty for the life of the Church from the Word of God. At that moment, as I have already expressed many times, the words that resounded in my heart were: Lord, what do You ask of me? It is a great weight that You are placing on my shoulders but, if You ask it of me, I will cast my nets at your command, confident that You will guide me, even with all my weaknesses. And eight years later I can say that the Lord has guided me. He has been close to me. I have felt His presence every day. It has been a stretch of the Church's path that has had moments of joy and light, but also difficult
moments. I felt like St. Peter and the Apostles in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. The Lord has
given us many days of sunshine and light breezes, days when the fishing was plentiful, but also
times when the water was rough and the winds against us, just as throughout the whole history
of the Church, when the Lord seemed to be sleeping. But I always knew that the Lord is in that
boat and I always knew that the boat of the Church is not mine, not ours, but is His. And the
Lord will not let it sink. He is the one who steers her, of course also through those He has
chosen because that is how He wanted it. This was and is a certainty that nothing can tarnish.
And that is why my heart today is filled with gratitude to God, because He never left—the
whole Church or me—without His consolation, His light, or His love.¹

These profound words of inspiration mirror the character of a churchman who placed
the good of the Church before his own personal interest. It was a significant message
to those in the Church, especially within the clerical ranks that tended to pursue
careerism, even at the detriment of the Church’s mission of spreading the gospel.
Within the context of the infighting that had rocked the Roman Curia under Benedict
XVI’s watch that came to a head with his butler stealing and revealing his private
papers to the media, the former pontiff appeared to be far above the moral mendacity
in the Roman Curia that had become a house divided within itself with the brazen
maneuvering and infighting that was embarrassing the Church. It is important to make
the distinction between the sincere love of the Church by Benedict and the
administrative setbacks he faced, which were all counter-productive to his vision of
the Church as a community of love and truth.

All these raise some posers: could Benedict have done things differently?
Could he have reduced the damage by opening up more to the global Church? It is
difficult not to answer in the affirmative. In a Church of over 1.2 billion people,
many found it stretches credulity that honest and good people were lacking to serve
the global needs of the Church in Rome. The problem should therefore lie in two
possible directions: Firstly, it could be that Benedict did not see the reform of the
Roman Curia as a priority that needed his attention. Being a man given over to a

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¹ Benedict XVI, Final Address at “General Audience at St. Peter’s Square,” Vatican Website, February
27, 2013, Accessed January 15, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-
xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130227.html
spiritual-ecclesiology, Benedict might have imagined that by focusing on the teaching ministry, which is no doubt, the primary duty of every bishop and more so the bishop of Rome, the Roman Curia would eventually follow the gospel-oriented lead, and stop hindering the work of the Church by internal fights. At last, that did not happen.

On the other hand, it could very well be that this was another instance of Benedict paying the high price for the euro-centric focus of his papacy. The case can be made that the “Italianization” of the Roman Curia accelerated under Benedict XVI’s watch. John Paul II clearly tapped into the resources of the global Church for Roman Curia appointments. For example, from 1984 – 1998, under John Paul II, an African, Cardinal Bernadin Gantin of Benin Republic, headed the Congregation for Bishops, supervising episcopal appointments in the non-missionary Latin Rite dioceses throughout the world. From 1993 – 2002, Cardinal Gantin served as Dean of the College of Cardinals, the first, and so far the only, non-European Cardinal ever to hold that position. Benedict XVI personally visited his tomb in Ouidah, Benin Republic, which is frequently visited by other pilgrims, during a papal visit to Benin Republic in November 2011. During that visit, Benedict described Africa as the spiritual lung of the Church.

It therefore came as a surprise to many when in the same month of November 2011, Benedict XVI announced the creation of twenty-two new cardinals for a consistory in February 2012, out of which sixteen were from Europe, seven from Italy alone, and none from Africa, the spiritual lung of the Church! Benedict XVI seemed to have noted the criticism in the world press, and in November of 2012, announced the creation of six new cardinals with none from Europe. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja and Baselios Thottunkal of the Syro-Malankara Rite of India, distinguished prelates from the global south, were in this group. The question therefore remains: did
Benedict’s euro-centricism obscure the attention he paid to the global dimension of the Church? Did this hinder his exercise of the Petrine office in ways that facilitated the domination of certain cultural patterns in the exercise of the ecclesial ministry of the Curia, a ministry that is indispensable in the life of the Bishop of Rome?

Undoubtedly, Europe has served global Catholicism in remarkable and enduring ways. The global Church is indebted in spirituality, academic culture, canon law, and many other areas, to the patrimony of the European Church. That notwithstanding, it is reasonable to ask: With the global consciousness that has followed the revolution of social media, should a global Church not be tapping into its global resources to meet the ever-challenging conditions that the Church finds itself at present? Is it out of place to expect this from a Church that is by nature, universal?

This thesis is divided into Three Chapters. Chapter One considers Ratzinger’s Bavarian roots in terms of the effects these had on his theological imagination, particularly his experience of Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s. Ratzinger’s vision of liturgical ecclesiology was definitely affected by the religious piety of his native Bavaria. Foundational to this first chapter is the conviction that the human being is often subjected to and formed by varied life-formative experiences and encounters. The public display of Catholic faith in Bavaria, the rituals and public processions, the times and seasons of Catholic life that affected even the daily menu of Bavarians, instilled in Ratzinger a deep conviction that Catholicism was not just a cultic liturgical expression, but a deep transforming experience that oriented all to a communion.

Chapter Two examines the theological attitudes that shaped Ratzinger’s ecclesiology, which are helpful in understanding his theological assumptions. This chapter considers Ratzinger’s theological formation in Augustine and Bonaventure, Ratzinger’s theological mentors. In Augustine, Ratzinger saw the Church as the
people and house of God, formed by the spirit of Caritas. This Church is universal and the central act of worship is the Eucharist. In Bonaventure, Ratzinger found a transcendental and spiritual vision of the Church and history that is determined by a vision that is eschatologically triumphant, with a Christo-cosmic consciousness that spans the life of the Church, from ecclesia ab Abel – the Church of the Just, to the ecclesia contemplativa – the final and definitive form of the Church’s existence. This triumph of the Church can only come about through patient endurance of suffering and rejection on the part of the Church, after the pattern of Christ.

Chapter Three proposes theological insights and implications from understanding the Church from the perspective of the Bavaria, Augustine and Bonaventure of Joseph Ratzinger, with the aim of offering the Church of today lessons that could be helpful to the Church’s contemporary evangelical efforts.

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Chapter 1: Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger of Bavaria

From the Church of St. Boniface to Vatican II

The human being is often subjected to multiple experiences and encounters. Primarily, a profound understanding of the human being demands diverse and authentic efforts at understanding a person’s culture. This holds true for Joseph Ratzinger. This chapter uses a biographical-theological methodology that, while considering the socio-cultural contexts and formative influences, extrapolates theological themes that became dominant in the ecclesiology of Joseph Ratzinger.

This methodology ties in with the overarching goal of this work, which is a theological analysis, and not merely a collection of historical data. If history is useful in understanding Ratzinger, it is precisely because the realities he faced as an adolescent and young adult shaped his theological convictions. As evidenced in the subsequent analysis, history is a school of theological formation and maturation for Ratzinger. Historical events provide the setting in which he discovered the promptings of God and the invitations and challenges the Church had to encounter in its mission in bringing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. What kind of person is Joseph Ratzinger? What role did his native Bavaria play in forming his ecclesiological imagination? Let us begin with the background on Catholic Bavaria.

Situated in the Southern Region of Germany, author Matthew Bunson argues that two things stand out about Bavaria: its picturesque landscape dominated by rolling green hills and snow-capped mountains that saw to the growth of quiet pastoral life; and secondly, especially noticeable in the villages and towns, the many churches with bell towers, symbols of the local faith. The Bavarians stayed committed to the Catholic Church and devoted to the papacy, even in the brutal and

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5 Matthew Bunson, We Have A Pope! Benedict XVI, (Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor 2005), 119.
bloody days of the Protestant Reformation. In fact, Bavaria became a cradle for Catholic Reformation following the Council of Trent. As Bunson asserts, “the Catholicity of Bavaria is deep, cultural and tangible.” 6 To date, Bavaria is a place with many visible Catholic symbols and public rituals of Eucharistic and Marian processions.

Early 20th century Bavaria maintained its Catholic character, of a largely conservative Catholic faith. It was into this culture that Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927 in the little village of Marktl am Inn. This day happened to be Holy Saturday, a fact that Ratzinger would later interpret as a symbol of the faith that looks to the light of Easter morn, while living in the darkness of the night of the resurrection. From his earliest experiences therefore, young Ratzinger was surrounded by the Catholic faith. The family prayed the rosary and went to daily mass. This formed the young Ratzinger in the Church’s cycle of liturgical seasons that structured the Catholic culture of Bavaria. What lessons emerge from Ratzinger’s Bavarian roots?

1.1 Bavaria and Cultural Catholicism

The most prominent effect was that of a deep sense of Catholicism as a formative presence. The public display of Catholic faith in Bavaria, the rituals and public processions, the times and seasons of Catholic life that even affected the menu of Bavarians, instilled in Ratzinger a deep conviction that Catholicism was not just a cultic liturgical expression, but a deep life-forming force that oriented all to a communion. Ratzinger recalls about life in his native Bavaria:

The life of farmers was still organically structured in such a way that it enjoyed a firm symbiosis with the faith of the Church: birth and death, weddings and illnesses, sowing time and harvest time – everything was encompassed by the faith. Even if personal life and opinions by

6 Bunson, 120.
no means always corresponded to the faith of the Church, nevertheless no one could conceive of dying without the Church or of experiencing the great events of life without her.”

Bavarian Catholicism was not an isolatory experience. It was a community experience that nourished the faith of the individual who was drawn into the community. Stephen Mansfield observes:

The deeply pious brand of Bavarian Catholicism that Ratzinger knew in his youth loved liturgy out of the Church and into the lives of the people. On holy days, village life became liturgy. There were symbols and rituals and processions all designed to celebrate and welcome the risen Christ. This sense of the holy community never left Ratzinger and formed the defining vision of his life: the people of God in a setting of beauty, physically living out the rituals of faith in their homes and hamlets.

This theme of the liturgy as a community-forming experience will feature time and again in Ratzinger’s writings, a testimony to the enduring legacy of his native Bavaria in Joseph Ratzinger. When Ratzinger’s biography was presented to the German-speaking world at a press conference in a Bavarian monastery, the man who introduced Cardinal Ratzinger said, “You have always made it clear that heaven and earth are bound together in a special way in Bavaria.” It would not be out of place to conclude that of all Ratzinger’s early influences, it was clearly the Church and the religious dramas of Bavarian culture that most shaped him.

A larger-than-life figure of Catholic Bavaria was St Boniface, the Apostle of Germany. Boniface came as a missionary from Exeter, England, and pioneered the evangelization of the Christian faith in Germany. Many legends abound that credit Boniface as the source of the traditions of the Church that grew up in the spiritually fertile Bavarian soil and became globalized, such as the Christmas tree and the Advent wreath. Even the Protestant reformer Martin Luther retained the symbol of the Christmas tree in honor of Boniface who conquered Germany for Christ. As a boy, Ratzinger grew up in the environs of a church that was established thanks to the

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9 Ibid. 23
10 Ibid.16.
evangelical work of Boniface. As Mansfield suggested, “the legends of this great man would have filled Ratzinger’s early imagination, would have framed his childhood dreams the way all young boy’s heroes define what they one day hope to be.” It comes as no surprise, then, that in the very first paragraph of his autobiography, Milestones, Ratzinger mentions Boniface, acknowledging the Anglo-Saxon hero “who gave the whole of what was then Bavaria its ecclesial structure.”

Like Boniface, Ratzinger’s scholarly formation was put in the service of the faith of the Church, in order to spread the message of the Church. Like Boniface, Ratzinger served as an archbishop in Bavaria. And like Boniface, Ratzinger sought to refocus the faith in Europe, only this time, not against the pagan tribes as did his predecessor, but in engaging the forces of militant secularism that endeavored to exclude the faith from the public life of Europe.

Bavaria taught Ratzinger that to be Catholic is to be immersed in a communal faith life. Imbibing this, Ratzinger consistently asserted the necessity of “protecting” this communal life from what he would perceive to be unsettling internal and external forces. Many a time, however, these “external” forces would be theologians that Cardinal Ratzinger would differ with on issues ranging from ecclesiology to Christology, from moral theology to ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.

With time, Ratzinger’s Bavarian Catholic outlook took on a self-sufficient European colouring, adopting almost a quasi-revelatory status, in which Ratzinger viewed differing attempts at multiculturalism and equiculturalism as a consequence of the cultural relativism of the post-modern world. In his classic, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger remarks, “I am convinced that at bottom it was no mere accident that the Christian message, in the period when it was taking shape, first

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11 Mansfield, 16.
entered the Greek world and there merged with the inquiry into understanding, into truth.”13 One finds here a clear obeisance to the primacy of Hellenization of the faith. More recently, in his Regensburg Lecture of September 2006, Benedict argued against what he classified as attempts at de-Hellenization and de-Christianization of the Christian faith. A citation from the text is noted:

In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis, which Hellenism achieved in the early Church, was an initial Inculturation, which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to Inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieu. This thesis is not simply false, but it is coarse and lacking in precision.14

The argument for a pristine inculturation is false precisely because, as Ratzinger says elsewhere in the lecture, Christianity took on “its historically decisive character in Europe.”15 James Schall explains that Benedict’s argument flows from the conviction that reason is something that all cultures either have or should have in common. This reason is derived from Greek philosophy, though it was not simply identified with Greece. Therefore, since reason is assumed to be a universal commonality, to “get behind” the Hellenization of the faith will be a wrong turn. As Schall declares, “either the un-Christianized culture itself have elements of the same reason that philosophy knows, or it will have, as a cultural basis, un-philosophical positions that need to be reordered in reason (…) The effort to get behind the Hellenization of Christianity to a pure form without this presumed burden of reason is itself contrary to the workings of faith in its initial and formative period.”16 In a word,

13 Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004), 78. In a footnote citation on this same page, Ratzinger maintains that he finds significant Acts 16:6-10, in which the Holy Spirit forbids Paul “to speak the word in Asia” and the Spirit of Jesus does not allow Paul to go into Bithynia. The vision of the Macedonian saying “Come over to Macedonia and help us,” intended to underlie the crossing of the gospel to Europe, to the Greeks, is, Ratzinger argues, a divinely arranged necessity.
15 Ibid. 29.
Benedict’s position could be described as a defense of reason and its synthesis with the Christian faith, a synthesis that he sees as being providential.

1.2 Cultural Liturgical Formative Influence

A second formative influence on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology that was influenced by his Bavarian roots is his perception of the liturgy as the center of the life of the Church, that is, the hallmark of liturgical ecclesiology. As a young boy growing up, Ratzinger already had a fascination for the various feasts of the liturgical calendar. He was intrigued by the Corpus Christi processions that took place in such public and festive fashions in his native Bavaria. Ratzinger recalls:

The Church year gave the time its rhythm, and I experienced that with great gratitude and joy already as a child, indeed, above all as a child (…) Every new step into the liturgy was a great event for me. It was a riveting adventure to move by degrees into the mysterious world of the liturgy, which was being enacted before us and for us there on the altar. It was becoming more and more clear to me that here I was encountering a reality that no one had simply thought up, a reality that no official authority or great individual had created. This mysterious fabric of texts and actions had grown from the faith of the Church over the centuries. These words portray a deep liturgical formation from his Bavarian culture already underway in the developing mind of the then young Joseph Ratzinger. When the liturgy of the angels was celebrated in a darkened church lit only by candles, young Ratzinger’s heart captured the visual images and the sense of the holy mystery that permeated the celebrations. Stepping into a beautifully decorated and warm Church from a harsh winter outside left a lasting impression in the young Ratzinger. When on Easter morning the blackened windows of the church were suddenly opened to the brilliant morning light upon the pastor singing, “Alleluia, Christ is Risen!” Ratzinger remembered and understood. Added to all these was the deeply religious atmosphere of Ratzinger’s home that was filled with symbols of faith, and family devotion, at the behest of Ratzinger’s parents. In précis, all these images built up an inner temple of

17 Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 18 – 20.
faith in the young Ratzinger, who was always enthralled by these liturgical changes. The liturgy was a privileged religious experience for the young Ratzinger.

Later as Cardinal Prefect, Ratzinger would become increasingly critical not of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II but of their implementation. He consistently argued that Vatican II and the outlawing of the Tridentine Mass was a problem that needed a solution; and since it was practically untenable to disavow Vatican II, a conscious effort should be made to correct the problems arising from its implementation. A liturgy that had served the saints of the past could not be outlawed after Vatican II. Ratzinger also became a vocal critic of how the call to “active participation” by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was implemented, which to him amounted to a liturgy that was being “manufactured” or “created” by the community. In a pre-Christmas speech to the Roman Curia in December 2005, Ratzinger captured the divisions within the church between those who saw Vatican II as a rupture with the past, (hermeneutic of rupture and discontinuity) and those who understood it as an integral part of the constant renewal of the Church’s unchanging mission, (hermeneutic of reform and continuity). Benedict obviously saw the latter hermeneutic as the proper framework of interpreting Vatican II.

### 1.3 The Theologizing of Political Power

A third life-forming factor on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology was the experience of Nazism in his native Bavaria and Germany as a whole. His father was a resolute anti-Nazi retired police officer, and tried to instill anti-Nazism in his family. The history of Nazism and World War II is well known. What is interesting is the interpretation Ratzinger gave to this very sad page of the history of his native Germany. What formative impact did the war have on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology? This remark is telling:
No one doubted that the Church was the locus of all our hopes. Despite many human failings, the Church was the alternative to the destructive ideology of the brown rulers; in the inferno that had swallowed up the powerful, she had stood firm with a force coming to her from eternity. It has been demonstrated: the gates of hell will not overpower her. From our own experience we now knew what was meant by ‘the gates of hell,’ and we could see with our own eyes that the house built on rock had stood firm.  

To Ratzinger, Nazism had thrived in Germany because it offered hope for a better and more prosperous society. It had promised a more stable and economically powerful Germany, building on the shattered dreams of post-World War I. For Ratzinger, the “the inability of the republic we had at that time to create political stability and hence engage in convincing political action became apparent even to a child in the turbulent clash of the parties. Nazism gained ascendancy by declaring itself the only alternative to the threatening chaos.” Ideas therefore became a strong point of reflection for the adolescent Ratzinger. How did the German nation succumb to the inferno of causing another world war? False ideas, false hopes, Ratzinger would respond.

Ratzinger became keenly aware, following the tragedy of World War II, that political might, or whatever form of power that humanity employs, is not a guarantee of the veracity of these ideas. Truth is a reality that stands above the subjective calculations and utilitarian ego of political ideologies. If Germany fell to Hitler, it was because Germany allowed a false truth to take on the attractiveness of power, wrongly understood as political willfulness. The German nation allowed politics to take on a totalizing hope that became totalitarian, barbarously vicious and destructive. Nazism therefore became for Ratzinger a lesson on truth and what he describes as the “splendor of power,” which “signifies being able to do what you want, enjoying what you want, having everything at your disposal and being able to choose the place of honor.” This understanding of power is a caricature of power, a form of deceit.

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18 Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 42.
19 Ibid. 12.
reminiscent of Satan’s seductive “being like God” proposal at the dawn of human history.
1.4 Bavaria and Global Catholicism at Vatican II

From the preceding analysis, what emerges is that Bavaria was a theological, cultural, social, political formative ground for Ratzinger. His understanding of Catholicism as a culture-forming and culture-challenging presence; his appreciation of the primacy of the liturgy in the life of the church; and his passion for truth not enslaved by power dominance and political game-play, were all lessons that Catholic Bavaria taught Ratzinger. His thoughts no doubt matured. But the seeds were planted on the soil of his Bavarian mind and experience. It is self-evident that theology cannot be purified from the social realities of the theologian, irrespective of how hard the theologian tries. Theology is always context-specific. The challenge is to be able to widen the frontiers of your worldview as you transit unto the global stage, such as Vatican II. Whether Joseph Ratzinger was able to transcend the particularities of Bavaria and Western Europe constituted a difficulty that Ratzinger often found difficult to overcome.

It was from this Bavarian soil, widened with a professorial work at Bonn and Munster that Ratzinger left for the Second Vatican Council, as a theological expert for Josef Cardinal Frings of Cologne. It is said that he was the shadow figure behind most of the critical speeches made by the cardinal in the aula of the Council. As a young theologian, Ratzinger depended on renowned theologians like Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Gerard Philips and Karl Rahner for support and teamwork. Though having played an active role in the Council especially in the composition of Dei Verbum and Gaudium et Spes, the later Ratzinger will grow increasingly critical of the Council, especially the liturgical reforms of Vatican II.

As early as 1964, Ratzinger was having uneasy feelings about the direction the reforms advocated by the Council were taking. He remarks in his Memoirs:
The impression grew steadily that nothing was now stable in the Church; that everything was open to revision. More and more the Council appeared to be like a great Church parliament that could change everything and reshape everything according to its own desires (…) The disputes at the Council were more and more portrayed according to the party model of modern parliamentarism. 21

The question then became one of change and the development of doctrine, compounded by the researches of the historical-critical method that was engaging theological faculties at just the same time that Joseph Ratzinger began his teaching career at the University of Munich. Bultmann and Heidegger were the large sources of theological debates: just what might remain of Christianity, of the Jesus of faith, when all the religious myths of the Bible have been stripped away?

On the other side of the fence were men like Karl Barth, who vigorously defended traditional Christianity. Barth was once asked what he knew to be certain about Christian faith, granted the clear achievements of the historical-critical method? His response sent advocates of the demythologization into apoplexy: Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so! 22 This was the polemical tense climate in which Joseph Ratzinger began his career, and from which he participated in the Second Vatican Council.

Obviously, the question of the fruits of modern historical scholarship bothered Ratzinger back in the 60s, and continued throughout his career and vocation in the Church. He wanted to be a churchman, a man of God who lived in conformity to the life of Jesus Christ. At the same time, Ratzinger wanted to be a scholar who brought the tools of modern scholarship to the study of the Fathers and the Bible. Ratzinger never overcame this dilemma. His favorite professor in the seminary was Wilhelm Maier, a professor of New Testament studies who had propounded the two-source theory of the synoptic gospels. Recedat a cathedra – let him leave his chair –

21 Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 132-133.
22 Mansfield, 55.
were the quaint words in the decree from Rome that had fired Maier. Yet in spite of these reservations about Maier’s orthodoxy, Ratzinger’s large-heartedness reflects in his description of Maier as “a man of deep faith and a priest who took great pains in the priestly formation of the young men entrusted to him.”

Ratzinger had this gracious appreciation for Maier, in spite of the latter’s bitterness of soul against those who ousted him from his earlier professorship. Ratzinger loved him and had compassion for the pains his professor went through, and even saw in him a gifted mentor for priests. Ratzinger would live in the crucible of the tension between traditionalism and modern scholarship approach to the Fathers and the Bible all the days of his public life in the Church.

Paradoxically, Ratzinger was often accused as treating many as Maier, in his handling of theologians. His love for Maier could indicate two things: either a later change in his nature (the so-called later Ratzinger), or a nuanced nature of a man who though feeling sympathetic, found it difficult to hold himself back from keeping the boundaries of orthodoxy, which was what the Church expected of him as the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. Ratzinger’s view of orthodoxy could best be summarized by an incident that happened during his time at Munich. There had been debates among Catholic faculties about the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven. Pius XII wanted to consult the best minds on this important subject that he will later define as a dogma.

One of Ratzinger’s favorite professors, Gottlieb Söhngen, rejected the idea of the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven, and said so in numerous scholarly gatherings. A Lutheran friend asked Söhngen in one of the several debates: “But what will you do if the dogma is nevertheless defined? Won’t you then have to turn your

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23Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 51.
back on the Catholic Church? Söhngen thought for a moment and then answered in words that have remained with Ratzinger: “If the dogma comes, then I will remember that the Church is wiser than I and that I must trust her more than my own erudition.” Ratzinger added this comment to the narrative: “I think that this small scene says everything about the spirit in which theology was done here – both critically and with faith.”

Ratzinger certainly believed that the wisdom of the Church ought to be trusted, even in the face of new ideas, and that the theologian had to defer to the wider Church in his or her discernment, painful as this might be.

For Ratzinger, pastorality was the primary category of discernment and reflection of Christian truth. In his view, the pastoral vision of the Church should inform scholarship and not the other way round. Ratzinger maintained that the wisdom of the Creed took precedence over every new “scientific” finding, if by that was meant a hasty jettisoning of biblical and ecclesial tradition: “I credit biblical tradition with greater truthfulness than I do the attempts to reconstruct a chemically pure historical Jesus from the test tube of historical reason.” The Jesus of the Gospels and the Ecclesial Tradition continues to outlast the Jesus of academic reconstructions. The Jesus of the Gospels is the real Jesus that I can entrust myself to. However, critics repeatedly pointed to the fact that even the Creed was a product of historical consciousness, of the early church wrestling with Christological questions that finally took form in the symbol of the faith, the Creed. How much of such ecclesial “wrestling” Ratzinger was willing to concede to remains an open question.

Ratzinger who had been filled with expectant joy at the beginning of the Council became deeply troubled. He believed in the reform of the Church, but not when it exceeded the historical boundaries of Christianity. He wanted to bring the

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24 Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 59.
wisdom of the past in a new, contemporary form to the problems of the present. Ratzinger never moved away from the conviction that the reforms of the Council had been hijacked by an agenda that needed a course correction.

To further understand Joseph Ratzinger demands a study of his encounter with Augustine and Bonaventure, which constitutes the next chapter of this thesis.
Chapter 2: Ratzinger and his Theological Masters

To study Ratzinger in the context of his theological formation is to delve into the deepest recesses of what formed the Bavarian eminent churchman. Already in chapter one, it became obvious that theology is the lens through which Ratzinger reads history. Ratzinger sees the world and the many questions that especially plague post-modernity from a perspective of theo-history, a sociological category that is clearly a faith hermeneutic. It is therefore critical to pay attention to the orientations and attitudes that shaped Ratzinger’s theological formation. These attitudes shall contextualize his interpretation of Augustine and Bonaventure, bringing into sharper focus his points of agreement, departure and usage of sources in building his doctrine of the people and house of God in Augustine and the different ages of the life of the Church in Bonaventure.

2.1 Theological Matrixes of Joseph Ratzinger

Clearly, it would be incredulous to maintain that the young Ratzinger held all the theological matrixes treated in this section with utmost certitude and clarity. These matrixes are discernable in Ratzinger’s life, as he matured in his theological formation and thinking. The matrixes highlighted here are not exhaustive. They are meant to serve as road signs for understanding the development of Ratzinger’s ecclesiology and how he engaged Augustine and Bonaventure. They are also noticeable on how Ratzinger played out in the global stage of Catholic ecclesiology. They provide a map into the mind of a brilliant young theologian struggling to find his way in his Church and the world. They portray a Ratzinger in quest for God, confident that in finding God he would have found himself. These matrixes or theological temperamental structures reflect themselves in the theological controversies that marked Ratzinger’s theological career. Most importantly, they enable us understand Ratzinger as he
would have loved to be understood and read. They provide inlets into Ratzinger’s theological exegetical preferences and the conclusions that he drew, that obviously had far reaching implications for the Church and the world, especially as he ascended the hierarchical ladder of Roman Catholicism. Some of these attitudes include the following: theological formation as life’s decisive path; theological formation as living with the Church Fathers; theological formation as a journey with the Scriptures; theological formation as a cloudy path; theological formation as an encounter with beauty; and theology and the path of history. The proceeding paragraphs examine these themes in greater detail.

2.1.1 Theological Formation as Life’s Decisive Path

To begin with, theology to Ratzinger is a matter of encountering faith that gives light and direction to one’s life choices, to the drama of life. Theological learning is “not to learn a trade but to understand the faith, and this presupposes, using the words of Augustine, that the faith is true, that, in other words, it opens the door to a correct understanding of your own life, of the world, and of men and women.”

Theological formation is therefore an experience in the truth, a journey into truth. It presupposes an objective truth that anyone can discover and open up to. It’s utility is about living according to the journey of truth, which is an experience. It is fundamentally an interior reality, a movement from within that shines in the life of the theologian who has encountered, in the firm ground of faith, life’s decisive path.

To Ratzinger, the study of theology as a decisive search for life’s path is foundational and takes precedence over all other attitudes, in that it provides a basis for reflection and a common ground which the very discipline of theology calls for. He provides an interesting pattern with this insight:

I am referring to the statement in the Letter to the Galatians in which Saint Paul describes the distinctive element of Christianity as a personal experience which revolutionizes everything and at the same time as an objective reality: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20) (…) Beginning on the outside, this apologia pro vita sua leads him, so to speak, father and farther inward (…) This inner event is at one and the same time wholly personal and wholly objective. It is an individual experience in the highest degree, yet it declares what the essence of Christianity is for everyone.27

To place Paul’s revolutionary “no longer I” as a model for theological formation is significant in that it points to conversion as the fulcrum of theological research. The theologian is one who is willing to let go of his or her own preferences and embark on a new path in the course of theological inquiry and discernment. The theologian is not an ossified entity, tied to a tight set of ideological positions of left, right and center. Conversion becomes the key issue here: a theologian is a Christian open to conversion, one who is willing to embrace another path, letting go of the security of one’s own ego and individualistic self-serving preferences. Ratzinger further comments:

(…) Conversion in the Pauline sense is something much more radical than, say, the revision of a few opinions and attitudes. It is a death-event. In other words, it is an exchange of the old subject standing on itself. It is snatched away from itself and fitted into a new subject. The ‘I’ is not simply submerged, but it must really release its grip on itself in order then to receive itself anew in and together with a greater ‘I’.28

Consequently, the fundamental intuition for the theologian is that of allowing the self to enter into the larger we of the faith, of the community, and by so doing, make room for a subjective transformation of the self into the community’s “we”: “Conversion does not lead into a private relationship with Jesus, which in reality would be another form of mere monologue. It is delivery into the pattern of doctrine (…). This is the sole guarantee that the obedience which we owe to the truth is concrete.”29 The task of the theologian, therefore, becomes rooted in the vocation of baptism, in which theology is understood as living out the primeval baptismal summons to live with, and

28 Ibid. 51.
29 Ibid. 59.
serve the community of faith, and by so doing, discover the path to the theologian’s own human and Christian fulfillment. The nucleus of the theologian’s work is therefore the theologian’s own conversion, which becomes the ground for the theologian’s own theology. The theologian loses the self to find the self in the community of faith, hope, and love, the community of the Church.

In this context, studying Joseph Ratzinger the theologian often comes across as a kind of retreat or spiritual exercise. Again and again, Ratzinger demonstrates that his theological endeavors were a service to the path of the transformative power of faith. Theological formation was a deeply religious and spiritual experience for Joseph Ratzinger. The personal life of the theologian was not and could not be extrinsic to his theological research and learning. A theologian is a synthesis of what it means to be a saint, always struggling on the way to perfection, and a scholar.

2.1.2 Theological Formation as Living with the Church Fathers

Quite unmistakably, Ratzinger’s theological methodology was one of thinking with the Church Fathers - *sentire cum ecclesia*, to use the ancient maxim. He remained faithful to the perspective of the Church Fathers and the great doctors of the Church. He manifested an adulating reverential nod to the patristic era, which became for him a veritable and dependable compass of theological imagination, learning and creativity. He pointedly observes:

> I have never tried to create a system of my own, an individual theology. What is specific, if you want to call it that, is that I simply want to think in communion with the faith of the Church, and that means above all to think in communion with the great thinkers of the faith. The aim is not an isolated theology that I draw out of myself but one that opens as widely as possible into the common intellectual pathway of the faith.  

Clearly, Ratzinger’s goal, he argues, has been an immersion into and an updating of the insights of the great theologians and spiritual masters of the Church, making them

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contemporaneous with the present-day Church. Starting from present circumstances and challenges to the faith, his theological orientation leads to a systematic investigation into possible insights from the past that could be meaningful and helpful to the present. In this way, theology appears as a structural continuum of the religious experiences and insights of the past and present, in a bid to give meaning and hope to the future. The severing of the link with the past is one of the unfortunate realities of contemporary theology, Ratzinger argues:

In the course of a few years a new awareness has arisen that is so filled with the burning importance of the present moment that it regards any recourse to the past as a kind of romanticism that might have been appropriate in less stirring times but has no meaning today (…) The Fathers have been pushed far into the background; a vague impression of allegorical exegesis remains behind and leaves a bad taste and, indeed, a feeling of superiority that regards it as progress to keep yesterday as far as possible from today and so seems to promise an even better tomorrow.31

More pointedly, therefore, the question becomes what normative value the Fathers of the Church should have on contemporary theology or should they be relegated to the purely historical, a museum, an archive, that might be beautiful to behold but not allowed any influence in the present? Herein lies the obvious tension between ressourcement and aggiornamento, between a return to the sources while facing the problems of today for the fate of tomorrow. Ratzinger consistently argues for the relevance of the Fathers, even if such a position only compounded the question and made it all the more acute. On this score, Ratzinger had the good company of earlier tradition and councils on his side. The First Vatican Council made this declaration:

(...) In matters of faith and morals pertaining to the instruction of Christian Doctrine, that must be considered as the true sense of Sacred Scripture which Holy Mother Church has held and holds, whose office it is to judge concerning the true understanding and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures; and, for that reason, no one is permitted to interpret Sacred Scripture itself contrary to this sense, or even contrary to the unanimous agreement of the Fathers.32

While the Second Vatican Council did not repeat these same statements, it did not retract them. Making use of the findings of the historical-critical method that Pius XII

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31 Joseph Ratzinger, Principles of Catholic Theology, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1987), 134
32 Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Dei Filius, 1870, chap. 2, para. 4.
with *Divino Afflante Spiritu* had opened up to Catholic exegesis, Vatican II peacefully juxtaposed historical findings and the Fathers in terms of an ongoing understanding of scripture and theological interpretation:

> The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may increasingly feed her sons with the divine words. Therefore, she also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies.\(^{33}\)

Consequently, while theological inquiry cannot be fixated on the perspectives of the Fathers, they no doubt stand as primary authentic witnesses to the tradition, making them an indispensable source of inspiration, reflection and challenge to present-day theologians and exegetes. Ratzinger will add that their proximity to the origin of the Scriptures should also constitute a normative value.\(^{34}\) Ratzinger might not totally agree with the method of exegesis of the Fathers, since he is definitely positive about the gains made by the historical-critical method. On the other hand, he is eager to save what is best in the Fathers, without romanticizing the past. He also willing to challenge the excesses of the historical-critical method that seem to give the impression that critical thinking began with Kant! In précis, it is difficult to understand Joseph Ratzinger without paying attention to his theological deference to patristic theology.

### 2.1.3 Theological Formation as a Journey with the Scriptures

How did these orientations - theology as a living path and theology as an immersion into the thinking of the past doctors of the Church - lead Ratzinger to Augustine and Bonaventure? Ratzinger answers, the primacy of the scriptures, the word of God. This brings us to the third distinguishing mark of Ratzinger’s theological orientation. Scripture is the most fundamental thread line or linchpin with

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\(^{33}\) Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 1965, chap. 6, 23,

\(^{34}\) Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 137.
the past that opens up to the present. It serves as the point of departure and the link to
the past because Ratzinger takes scripture as true. He believes in the word of God
which he tries to understand, together with the great doctors of theology, in the light
of contemporary culture and challenges: “This gives my theology a somewhat biblical
character and also bears the stamp of the Fathers, especially Augustine.”
It is telling
that Ratzinger explicitly references Augustine as a motivation for the biblical
foundation of his theological formation, granted that the bishop of Hippo’s own
dramatic conversion story follows an intriguing and almost mythical encounter with
scripture in a garden in Milan, recorded in Augustine’s Confessions. Clearly, if a
literal encounter with scripture could lead to a resolution of the inner spiritual and
moral battles in Augustine, then scripture became for Ratzinger what it did and was
for Augustine, a place of encounter in which one hears the voice of God, which draws
the hearer to the obedience of faith. The life-transforming impact of the scripture in
the towering figure of Augustine became decisive for Ratzinger, not only pulling him
towards Augustine but also serving as a path for his own theological development.

For Ratzinger, also, it is within the living faith of the Church that the Scripture
becomes accessible. Sola scriptura cannot be a meaningful option, for “resorting to
the Bible in isolation as a mere historical document does not sufficiently
communicate to us an insight into what is essential.”
It is within the living context
of the Church, wherein the Scriptures is understood and lived, that one can gain an
accessible and meaningful understanding of the Scriptures. His approach to Scripture
is therefore ecclesio-centric, with the Church as hermeneutical locus of Scripture.

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35 Ratzinger, Salt of the Earth, 66.
36 Augustine, The Confessions, VIII, xii, 29.
The primacy of the scripture brings us to the fourth theological character of Ratzinger’s academic formation: theology as a mystical experience, a process that can be illumination and darkness simultaneously. In this sense of mystery, Ratzinger does not undertake theological inquiry with the certainty of providing all the answers to the questions of his life and that of his contemporaries. If anything, the study of scripture, placed in tandem with the great masters of the faith and the disposition to allow theology to direct one’s life, made room for theological formation as a place of darkness of understanding, to cite Augustine: “For a long time past I have been burning to meditate in your law (Ps. 38:4) and confess to you what I know of it and what lies beyond my powers – the first elements granted by your illumination and the remaining areas of darkness in my understanding – until weakness is swallowed up by strength.”\(^{38}\) Theology is therefore a path to understanding belief, which is never simply there, in a way that I can claim possession of it, a kind of ideological thingnification. Theological learning and formation is therefore a middle ground, a searching path that runs between belief and unbelief.

To Ratzinger, the capacity to understand takes a process of maturity that is not oblivious to suffering. The theologian is one who suffers in trying to understand faith and because of this suffering, can come to the partial light of truth. The darkness of understanding that is a common experience of theological formation means for Ratzinger, “it is never the case that we can say, ‘now we know everything; now the knowledge of Christianity is complete.’ There are unfathomable depths both in God and in human life, so that there are always new dimensions to faith.”\(^{39}\) Consequently, though unbelief can be attractive and compelling, the darkness of understanding that

\(^{38}\) Augustine, _The Confessions_, XI, ii, 2.

is part of the theologian’s experience is not a negation of the possibility of arriving at the certitude of what God has revealed in salvation history. On the contrary, it is a darkness that leaves open the door to the unknown, to the new, to God’s ongoing revelation and engagement with humans. The theologian is one who keeps this door open, a door that could be cloudy and dark because one is not able to see the full picture and gain complete understanding, and yet, one is certain that one is standing on a firm ground of meaning and life that has a future of hope and light.

2.1.5 Theological Formation as an Encounter with Beauty

The fifth theological hermeneutic of Joseph Ratzinger is the necessity of seeing theology as a contribution to a beautiful architecture. From his Bavarian background, Ratzinger encountered and was thrilled by liturgical beauty, of the change of seasons, of the solemnities and feasts of the faith, of the gothic architecture that marked Bavarian churches. Theological studies will then become for Ratzinger, an opportunity to make the beauty of God more accessible and encountered by the contemporary world, especially through the art, music and architecture of the Church.

The external beauty that the Christian meets in the liturgy and the Church’s works of art are pointers to the beauty of encountering God, and the work of the theologian is to make this beauty of art and music a step towards encountering the beauty of God. Ratzinger gives an apologetic status to the value of beauty to the theological enterprise and the life of the Church:

I have often said that I am convinced that the true apologetics for the Christian message, the most persuasive proof of its truth, offsetting everything that may appear negative, are the saints, on the one hand, and the beauty that the faith has generated, on the other. For faith to grow today, we must lead ourselves and the persons we meet to encounter the saints and to come in contact with the beautiful.  

40 Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, 38
To Ratzinger, the theologian can never avoid the question of beauty of art, music and the liturgy, for those are the primary areas of engagement between God and the believer. He emphatically remarked:

The complete absence of images is incompatible with faith in the Incarnation of God. God has acted in history and entered into our sensible world, so that it may become transparent to him. Images of beauty, in which the mystery of the invisible God becomes visible, are an essential part of Christian worship. Iconoclasm is not a Christian option.\(^\text{41}\)

This implies that physicality is a fundamental part of encountering the spiritual beauty of God. From the visible, the believer moves to the invisible and is caught up into an ecstasy of joy and delight. To end at the level of physical beauty amounted to a superficial experience of beauty, since true beauty is to live with God. Ratzinger resonated with the prayer of his master, Augustine:

Late have I loved you, O beauty, so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things that you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all.\(^\text{42}\)

Obviously, beauty for Ratzinger is not mere aestheticism. It is essentially centered on the figure of Christ, with the dominant icon being the suffering face of Christ, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, “He had neither beauty nor majesty, nothing to attract our eyes” (Is. 53:2). It is in the disfigured Face of the Suffering Servant that one finds the ultimate beauty, the beauty of love that goes to the very end, proving mightier than falsehood and violence.\(^\text{43}\) If Ratzinger is concerned about theological aesthetics, it is because he sees the truly beautiful as the encounter with Christ who loves and suffers, and by so doing, saves the world. In this sense, beauty saves the world.

### 2.1.6 Theology and the Path of History

The question of historical consciousness is central to the theological imagination of Joseph Ratzinger, in that he pays keen attention to the effects of


historical forces on the development and evolution of theology. Christianity takes the path of history, thereby placing a burden on the Christian theologian who must seek out new meaning for the Church in a given historical context.

To Ratzinger, theology is historical in that it seeks to open the various forces of history be they political, economic, social or moral, to the workings of grace, to the revelation of God. This perspective makes for what the Judeo-Christian tradition has referred to as salvation history. Ratzinger argues:

Salvation comes through history, which therefore, represents the immediate form of religious experience. History is thus a shelter (…) because this history is divinely established and it is precisely in the reception of the historical that that which transcends history – the eternal – becomes present.”

Consequently, for the theologian, the starting point of history is not so much the socio-political and economic forces that shape world history, but the seminal and enduring presence of God’s light that leads history towards a culmination with God. At the center of history, therefore, stand the human being and God, not politics and finance. This is Ratzinger description of the primacy of the spiritual in human history:

It is characterized simultaneously by both personalization (individualization) and universalization. The beginning and end of this new history is the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is recognized as the last man (the second Adam), that is, as the long-awaited manifestation of what is truly human and the definitive revelation to man of his hidden nature; for this very reason, it is oriented toward the whole human race and presumes the abrogation of all partial histories, whose partial salvation is looked upon as essentially an absence of salvation.

Clearly, Ratzinger links history and soteriology, giving a universalizing bent on the latter, with obvious consequences for ecclesiology. If Jesus of Nazareth is the center of history, then the Church, the community charged with bringing the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth, likewise takes on a central place in the community of nations, in world history. The Church becomes the embodied message of word and sacrament of Jesus to the community of the world, a redemptive presence that leaves

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45Ibid.156.
the window to God open, so that the fresh air of Jesus’s ministry might circulate and give life and meaning to men and women of all ages.

The Second Vatican Council gave an iconic description of this intertwining relationship between church and history, thereby setting the stage for a historical and contextual vision of ecclesiology that must have appealed to the Ratzinger of the Council, even if the later Ratzinger developed some ambivalence towards certain interpretations of the Council:

The joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation that is meant for every man and woman. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.  

Theology takes on the coloring of a faith reflecting on the happenings in the world, of the evolution of history, in Joseph Ratzinger. However, Ratzinger will point out that the hermeneutical key to the theology of history is the particular person of Jesus of Nazareth, in the words of the Council, a paragraph said to have been penned by Ratzinger as a member of the commission set out to rework *Gaudium et Spes*:

The Church firmly believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through His Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny. Nor has any other name under the heaven been given to man by which it is fitting for him to be saved. She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.

This sense of history helps explain Ratzinger’s affinity for Augustine and his moderate disdain for the Neo-Thomism of the world of the World War II that was mostly syllogistic. In Augustine, the historical person is shown suffering and struggling with the challenges of life, of culture, of the faith, of the times, of the collapse of the historical order of the Roman Empire, with the sack of Rome. It is an

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47 Ibid. 10.
experience of a living theology that seeks to respond to the challenging questions that historical forces were posing on the church, for example: was the sacking of Rome by the Barbarians in 410 AD a consequence of Rome having abandoned the pagan gods for the novelty of Christianity? Augustine will respond with *De Civitate Dei*! These are the flesh and blood issues that excited the young Ratzinger, and theology became for him a searching path for the questions plaguing history at the given moment.

The above matrixes have provided us with the framework from which one can understand the theological positions of Ratzinger: theology as a cloudy path; theology as an experience with the Fathers of the Church; theology as an encounter with beauty; theology and the Scriptures; theology as an orientation to life’s decisive path; and theology as a historical interaction. For a theologian of the stature of Joseph Ratzinger, this list is definitely not exhaustive. It does not provide a complete blue print of his theological engagements and conclusions, which had their formative basis in Augustine and Bonaventure, treated in the next section.

### 2.2 Ratzinger of Bavaria and Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354 – 430) remains a figure too interesting to be ignored in the history of Western Christianity. One can either admire him and esteem and appreciate his life and work, or one can hold him with scorn and contempt. But no one can ignore him all together. On almost all the major themes that have come to define Christianity, the fingerprints of this great bishop of Hippo are everywhere, for better and for worse. He shaped the way Western Christianity came to see God, politics, war, sin, grace, freewill, and the practice of religion. At his death, he left behind over 5 million words of writings.

As far back as 1969, Ratzinger remarked: “Augustine has kept me company for more than twenty years. I have developed my theology in a dialogue with
Augustine, though naturally I have tried to conduct this dialogue as a man of today.”

It follows from Ratzinger’s own Memoirs that the theme chosen for his doctoral thesis had been an essay competition “On the People and House of God in Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church.” To understand the implications Ratzinger sought to draw from these modern conceptions of ecclesiology – people of God and house of God, demands a critical approach to the very thorny question of what the Church as a people and a house meant for the bishop of Hippo. How did Augustine encounter the Church? What did that imply to him and why did he convert to Christianity? These are all necessary questions that form a useful and profound background for understanding Ratzinger’s interaction with Augustine.

2.3 The Centrality of Augustine’s Conversion Experience to Ratzinger

Augustine’s life is a drama of conversions, and it is only within this drama that his ecclesiological convictions can be understood as formative and meaningful. One cannot understand the relationship between Ratzinger of Bavaria and Augustine of Hippo without paying attention to the conversions that marked the latter’s dramatic life. Augustine is a pursuer of wisdom, a searcher and inquirer for answers to the many questions that unsettled a youth in Roman Africa, perhaps now as then.

The first major phase of his journey to Christianity was his embrace of Manichaeism. In becoming a Manichean, Augustine saw himself entering an elite class that will provide reasonable, convincing responses to the question of evil that dominated his imagination: “I searched for the origin of evil, but searched in a flawed way and did not see the flaw in my very search.” Obviously, the searching mind of Augustine became discontented with the dualistic explanation of Manichaeism

49Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 97.
regarding the source of evil. The question of the source of evil – *unde malum*, thereby generated a more crucial question for Augustine, that of the omnipotence of God, which became very unsettling for Augustine. He could not reconcile himself with a God that was not all-powerful.\(^{51}\) This intellectually unsecured state led Augustine to embrace Platonic philosophy.

Under the influence of the Platonic books, Augustine viewed evil as one small aspect of a universe far greater and more differentiated, with multiple purposes and a resilient God, than that of Manichaeism. Evil ceased to be the dominant category in Augustine’s cosmogony and religious imagination, ceding to God’s omnipotent creative love.\(^{52}\) With this conversion came the question that hunted the middle age Augustine: to what extent could a person be expected to work out his or her own salvation by his or her own power alone?

Augustine concluded that the rite of baptism was the new “philosophy,” the new liberating experience from his inner struggles that kept him somber and downcast. From the preaching of Ambrose, Augustine discovered the “wisdom of Christ” that eventually led him to the baptismal fount. After long hesitation and restlessness, Augustine had a dramatic experience at the Garden in Milan that led him to enter the Christian church through baptism.\(^{53}\) Augustine left this Garden for Christian baptism.

In Christianity, Augustine found the peace of his heart that settled the restlessness of his life.\(^{54}\) And it is precisely this flesh and blood struggle that fascinated and captivated Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger, who recalls in his *Memoirs*:

We then found the philosophy of personalism reiterated with renewed conviction in the great Jewish thinker Martin Buber. This encounter with personalism was for me a spiritual experience that left an essential mark, especially since I spontaneously associated such personalism with the thought of Saint Augustine, who in his Confessions had struck me with the power of all his


\(^{52}\) Ibid. VII, xv, 21.

\(^{53}\) Ibid. VIII, xii, 29.

\(^{54}\) Ibid. I, i, 1.
human passion and depth. By contrast, I had difficulties in penetrating the thought of Thomas Aquinas, whose crystal-clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made.  

The point of interaction between Augustine and Ratzinger became that of a lively human struggle with God, with the faith, in which the believer moves through different phases of questioning, doubting, struggling, acceptance and rejection, and finally submission to the obedience of faith, that cloudy path that is marked by continuous human uncertainties lived within word and sacraments in the community called Church. Ratzinger will therefore scour Augustine’s corpus for insights into the nature of the Church as the people and house of God.

2.4 The People and House of God in Augustine’s Doctrine on the Church

For Ratzinger, the theme of the people and house of God in Augustine binds together a number of vital issues for Western theology, such as the status of the Old Testament in relation to the New; the relation of law to sacrament; the attitude of Christians to a pagan state and paganism at large. More importantly, it places Augustine squarely in the trajectory of the history of religion in his age. Augustine’s Neo-Platonic philosophical heritage was therefore complemented, reformed and widened by his sense of Church, a sense that witnessed a continuous widening and deepening with every new controversy that the bishop of Hippo faced, be it with the Donatists, Pelagians or Julianists. These two factors, - Augustine’s philosophical background and his experience of the Catholic Church in North Africa with its adjacent theological controversies, - will constitute the presuppositions that defined Augustine’s ecclesiology, according to Ratzinger. That said, the crucial question for Ratzinger was not so much the sources of Augustine’s ecclesiology, but rather the

55 Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 44.  
57 Nichols, 30.
function that his ecclesiology performed.

Like every great theology, Ratzinger will argue, “Augustine’s grew out of a polemic against error, that here as elsewhere without error, movement of a living, spiritual kind is hardly thinkable.” Ratzinger identifies two starting-points for Augustinian ecclesiology: firstly, the concept of faith shapes Augustine’s understanding of the Church as the people of God, while the concept of love underlie its portrait of the Church as the house of God, since love is what makes for the binding charism of unity, without which a house falls apart.

From the previous analysis that shed light on his conversion, it is not difficult to see why Augustine would have found faith as the primary factor in understanding the Church as the people of God. For someone who had struggled with so many ideologies and persons in his life, his mother Monica standing tall as that authority of faith, Augustine saw faith, the trust in the invisible, as that path by which one places one’s life in the invisible effects of the word and sacraments that make up the Church. The rites of the Church such as baptism bring about a new beginning with potentials for transformation not because of the physicality of the rites, but because of what they convey, that is, the interior life of a graced encounter with God. Faith in the invisible was therefore the doorway to the Church as this new people of God in Christ Jesus.

The significant tie in Augustine’s argument was that the localizing character of the Church of Donatus clearly indicates its inauthenticity. The true Church of Christ must be catholica in character, which was clearly not the case with the Church of the Donatists. The ecclesiological trend here is a move from a sacramental faith to a faith that is universal. Ratzinger sums up these anti-Donatists ecclesiological exegesis of Augustine thus:

59 Nichols, 34.
The multitude of nations who live within the earth’s girdle now stands forth as the single people of Abraham, brought together out of their mutually separating multiplicity and bound together in an inner unity through the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ.\(^{60}\)

It is this conviction about unity that opens the way to understanding why, for Augustine, the greatest sin of the Donatists was the lack of what Ratzinger refers to as “objective charity,” which “does not betoken a subjective attitude, but rather belonging to the Church, and more specifically to that Church which itself lives in Charity, that is, in Eucharistic love-relationship with other Christians in the whole world.”\(^{61}\) Thus, anyone who belongs to the Church participates in this visible life of caritas, even though this in itself is no guarantee for salvation.

Along this line of salvation, Ratzinger singles out a theme that dominated the ecclesial consciousness of Augustine: the presence of sinners in the Church. With the suppression of the Donatists, Augustine found himself faced with unwilling and internally uncommitted Christians. Similar to the effect of the 313 Edict of Milan that saw mass entrance of people into the Church, some of whom were everything but Christian at heart, Augustine noticed that there were more tares than wheat in his harvest at Hippo. He noticed that even if caritas was the mark of the visible Church, the Church of the sinners had become too dominant that one was left wondering whether any good man or woman was left! Ratzinger makes this conclusion from his examination of Augustine’s disturbed sermons about the weeds and the wheat:

Augustine can say: The Catholic Church is the true Church of the holy. Sinners are not really in her, for their membership is only a seeming reality, like that of the mundus sensibilis. But on the other hand, he can stress that it is no part of the Church’s business to discharge such sinners, just as it is not her affair to cast off this body of flesh. It is the Lord’s task, who will awaken her (at the End) and give her the true form of her holiness.\(^{62}\)

This clearly marks a shift towards the mature Augustine, the one capable of seeing the Church as a place of God’s merciful love that is patient, benign and redemptive. On

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\(^{60}\) Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, 133 – 134.

\(^{61}\) Ibid. 138.

\(^{62}\) Ibid. 146.
the other hand, it also introduces into Augustinian ecclesiology what Ratzinger refers to as the Church as an inner-dogmatic affair. The point here, Ratzinger argues, is that for Augustine, Donatism is not a heresy simply because it teaches re-baptism which is a departure from the universal Church. It is a heresy because it is *schisma inveteratum* – it has separated from the community, it has fractured *caritas* in its most profound sense. Augustine repeatedly stated:

> I am in the Church, whose members are all those Churches about which we know in truth from Holy Scripture that they originated and grew by the activity of the apostles. I will never give up *communio* with her, neither in Africa nor anywhere else, so help me God.⁶³

In this way of professing his faith, Ratzinger maintains that Augustine became the doctor of catholicity.⁶⁴ It is within the context of this schismatic experience that the crucial model of the Church as the People and House of God emerges for Augustine.

Furthermore, Ratzinger underlines three fundamental principles of this model of the Church as the people and house of God in Augustine: Firstly, this refers to Israel the first people called by God, the people of the promises; secondly, Israel was not called to be a closed unit on itself but to be a sign for the future spiritual Church. Hence, the people and house of God refers to the spiritual Church of all those baptized in Christ Jesus. The third is much more specific, the people and house of God is the heavenly and eschatological counterpart of the spiritual Church. It is the Church that continues in heaven.⁶⁵ Clearly for Augustine, the heavenly Church will be the perfect Church, devoid of all the trappings of sensual struggles. It is the Church of the longing, the desire of those on the way who are often entombed by uncertainties and failures. It is also significant that Augustine saw the people and house of God as inclusive of Israel, given the context of the Manichean rejection of the Old Testament, a position Augustine fought against with much zealotry.

Ratzinger’s Bavarian architectural sense plays out in another interesting insight that he draws upon in his theology of the people and house of God in Augustine: the mosaic art of church-buildings in the North Africa of Augustine’s age. This was a rich invitation to theological reflection for Ratzinger. One of Augustine’s mosaics had the inscription *Ecclesia mater*. In this sense, the Church building is the visible form of Mother Church. Yet as Ratzinger is quick to point out, for Augustine, the stone and mosaics are an image of the true house, the living stones of God’s people: *ecclesia dicit locus, quo ecclesia congregatur*. In this people, the Spirit of God makes a dwelling, just as it did in the temple of Zion of old. What binds the bricks of this house of God is the bond of mutual charity, without which the house cannot be constructed.\(^6\) Charity is therefore the internal form of the house of God.

As could have been expected, Ratzinger finally turns to Augustine’s great apology for the Christian Church against the pagan world, *De Civitate Dei*. In AD 410, *Roma aeterna* had fallen into the hands of the Goths. Devastated pagan sensibility, mostly from the aristocratic class, reacted by calling for a restoration of the pagan cult, of the offering of sacrifices to the ancient gods of Rome, in order to restore the welfare of the Roman state. Augustine responded differently, with an interesting twist about the meaning of sacrificial worship.

At the core of Augustine’s argument is that sacrificial worship is the offering of human life, lived according to the precepts of God. Sacrificial worship is right living. If the Romans offered sacrifices while living sinful lives, such sacrifices were at best demonic. A right offering is only possible through a life of self-surrender to God. Ratzinger expatiates:

> Through sin, man’s point of spiritual contact with God has ceased to govern his being and behavior. His relationship with God has been destroyed. Hence his need for a Mediator, who will share mortality with us, but blessedness with God, and out of his own *misericordia*, mercy,

will assume our *miseria*, wretchedness, to withdraw us from subjection to demons and replace us in relationship to God.\(^{67}\)

Consequently, in his saving act, Christ has become the sacrifice that we should have offered but could not. Adam Nichols, O.P., puts it succinctly: “It is this sacrifice of the Mediator, which is to be, in the polis that no human being lives outside, the true worship, the cultus of the City of God.”\(^{68}\) But how does this sacrifice of the Mediator become that of the house of God, whose body, the Church, he is the head?

Tracing Augustine’s analysis through Justin, Athanasius and other Anti-Arian Church Fathers, Ratzinger provides an interesting pneumato-ecclesio response:

We are united with Christ by faith whereby his Spirit dwells in us; yet the Spirit of Christ is not other than the grace of Christ, the *caritas* which is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; in referring to such caritas we overstep the boundaries of the individual to enter the realm of the community, the Church which is Christ’s body. And while that *ecclesial Corpus Christi* is not directly accessible to us, it may be found in its holy sign, its sacrament, the Eucharist.\(^{69}\)

In this text, one finds clearly, for the first time, what will later become a central leitmotif in Ratzinger’s own ecclesiology, which is that of “Eucharistic ecclesiology.”

In this sacrament of the true sacrifice of the Christian Church lies the inner *Leib-Christi-Sein* of the holy people of God in Christ Jesus and their existence as a body of Christ. Central to this existence lies *caritas*, which is the Spirit of Christ. Clearly, that which is most interior is most exterior, in the living out of this *caritas*, this Spirit of Christ. Ratzinger observes:

> Charity is the unity of the Church, and more; it is the real, sober, working love of the Christian heart. And that means that every act of genuine Christian love, every work of mercy is in a real and authentic sense sacrifice, a celebration of the one and only *sacrificium christianorum*.\(^{70}\)

In effect, the moral life of the Christian is shaped and lived from and for the Eucharistic fellowship. The Christian Church and the Eucharist are therefore linked through the centrality of charity. This *caritas*, love, Augustine will maintain, can be humanity’s unifying force only if men and women recognize God as the *summum*

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\(^{67}\) Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* 173.

\(^{68}\) Nichols, 47.


\(^{70}\) Ibid. 213.
A love that is severed from God is self-acting and selfish. On the other hand, the love that animates *civitas Dei* is from God, a love that hopes for something beyond. There are two contrasting loves of the cities: the *cupido* of the earthly city and the *caritas* of the heavenly city. Consequently, as Nichols rightly observes, “the City of God has its pilgrim colony on earth: the community which, by its self-offering in outward signs in the *communio caritas*, comes before God in the sacrament of Christ’s body.” To Ratzinger, this consciousness of the *earthly colony* of the City of God has a meaningful political implication for historical theology, by providing a framework for the debate about the relationship between Church and State, politics and the gospel, already discussed in the first chapter, when we considered the theological implications Ratzinger drew from the experience of Nazism in his native Germany.

In summary, Ratzinger’s Augustine gives us an ecclesiological picture in which the Church is visible and universal, against the spiritual invisibility of the Donatists. It also shows the central nexus of the Church’s life to be caritas, the Spirit of Christ, against the schism of Donatism and the neo-paganism that greeted the sack of Rome, in which history becomes the field of battle between the *corpus Christi* and the *corpus Diaboli*, and the entire history of humanity and the Church is read along the lines of this duality.

Visibility, universality and *caritas* are therefore the three identity markers that emerge from Ratzinger’s study of the people and house of God in Augustine, a theme that encapsulates the prolific theological baggage of the bishop of Hippo. These three markers will find their most concrete form in the Eucharist, the sacrificial worship of the Church that is celebrated in the Spirit of Christ, leading us to a fourth

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71 Augustine, *The City of God*, XXIII, 6, 1.
72 Nichols, 49.
ecclesiological theme, that is, Eucharistic ecclesiology. These markers, visibility, universality, caritas and the Eucharist, will become dominant in the ecclesiological conclusions of Ratzinger, especially in his critique of the post-conciliar Church and the hostile secularism of post-modernism, as will be seen in chapter three. Before then, what did Ratzinger learn from Bonaventure, the Franciscan Doctor?

2.5 Ratzinger and Bonaventure the Seraphic Doctor

Ratzinger took up the study of Bonaventure at a time when in Germany and by extension Europe, theology was focused on the concept of salvation history. The predominant streak of thought of the theology of salvation history then was that God’s saving plan is worked out and intermingled with world history. Catholic theologians weaved this sense of history with metaphysics, a subject so important to Catholic theology. Protestant theologians rejected this joining of faith and metaphysics that they saw as a problematic Hellenization of the Christian faith.73 Ratzinger turned to Bonaventure to address this problem. In his own words:

Therefore, I was to try to discover whether in Bonaventure there was anything corresponding to salvation history, and whether this motif – if it should exist – had any relationship with the idea of revelation. I went to work with both zeal and joy.74

Ratzinger made the case that revelation is not the Bible itself, but the act of God in revealing God’s self through the Bible. He drew the conclusion from his study of Bonaventure that revelation is something more than what is written down. Revelation is the active ongoing presence of the Spirit in the life of the Church. To understand the Bible therefore requires tradition and the immediate work of the Spirit.

Ratzinger’s Habilitation committee found this reading of Bonaventure to be too modern and liberal, a product of the existentialism of Heidegger and Bultmann. It

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74 Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 104.
did not help matters that a member of the committee who was an expert on scholasticism felt offended that not only was he not consulted, but that a neophyte should be making such a daring proposal about the theology of revelation. Ratzinger’s thesis was rejected in the first sitting, a decision that almost wrecked the academic career of this young and promising theologian. Ratzinger had found in Bonaventure insights that pushed revelation beyond the propositional model that was the acceptable model of revelation before the Second Vatican Council. He recalls the whole dilemma of this finding of his in his Memoirs:

If Bonaventure is right, then revelation precedes Scripture and becomes deposited in Scripture but is not simply identical with it. This in turn means that revelation is always something greater than what is merely written down. And this again means that there can be no such thing as pure sola scriptura (‘by Scripture alone’), because an essential element of Scripture is the Church as understanding subject, and with this the fundamental sense of tradition is already given.\textsuperscript{75}

This position of Ratzinger was judged by Ratzinger’s panel to be, in his own words, “a dangerous modernism that had to lead to the subjectivization of the concept of revelation.”\textsuperscript{76} Ratzinger continued to affirm the contrary, but reworked the thesis according to the directives of the committee by carefully removing the contested section. The second submission saw the thesis on The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure accepted, and in February 21, 1957, Ratzinger was named full professor of fundamental theology and dogma at the University of Freising. Legend has it that the section of the thesis that was rejected provided the resources of what became Dei Verbum at Vatican II!\textsuperscript{77} Certainly, the language is very similar to the theology of revelation put forth by Dei Verbum. Ratzinger himself lends credence to this legend in his Memoirs when he writes: “these insights, gained through my reading of Bonaventure, were later on very important for me at the time of the conciliar...”

\textsuperscript{75} Ratzinger, MILESTONES, 109.  
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. 109.  
\textsuperscript{77} Rausch, 52.
discussion on revelation, Scripture and tradition.”  
Could this be an example of heresy today, orthodoxy tomorrow? Perhaps.

Central to Bonaventure’s theology on the Church is the figure of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132 – 1202), a mystic and apocalyptic writer. Born at Celico, Italy, Joachim underwent a deeply religious conversion while on a visit to the Holy Land. He returned to Italy, residing at first at the Abbey Casamari. He later moved to Fiore where he established a monastery with a group of disciples who had gathered around him. His three main works were *Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti*, the *Expositio in Apocalipsim*, and the *Psalterium Decem Cordarum*. In these works, Joachim developed a Trinitarian philosophy of history in which he viewed history in three great periods of ages, of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

The Age of the Father (*ordo conjugatorum*) corresponded to the Old Testament, characterized by life under the Mosaic Law; the Age of the Son, (*ordo clericorum*) ran from between the advent of Christ and 1260, in which God’s grace is mediated through the rites and sacraments of the Church, mediated by priests; the Age of the Holy Spirit (*ordo monachorum*) which Joachim proclaimed would begin in the mid-13th century, introduced by St. Francis and his community. In this Age of the Spirit, a new dispensation of universal love will flourish that will render irrelevant ecclesiastical organization. To Joachim, only in this Third Age will we understand the full meaning of revelation, followed by an epoch of peace and tranquility. It is the new religious orders led by the Franciscan Order that will convert the entire world. It is the Franciscans that would represent the new people of God, the *ecclesia contemplativa*, arising out of the tribulations of the last days. Bonaventure became

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80 Ibid. 459.
81 Rausch, 53.
superior when the prophecies of Joachim were tearing the Order apart.

In February 1257, Bonaventure had been called from his successful teaching career as professor at Paris to replace the departing General, John of Parma. John’s withdrawal had not been entirely voluntary. He had created an extraordinary difficult situation for the Franciscan Order by his decisive stand in favor of the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore. The untenability of John’s, and the so-called Spiritual Franciscans who saw themselves as representing the beginning of the new Age of the Spirit, became evident with the ecclesiastical condemnations of some of the writings of Joachim of Fiore. Added to these condemnations was the question of what the unadulterated will of Francis could mean at the time? It appeared that Francis’ undiluted will could not be realized on earth. It was in this context that the youthful Bonaventure was called to become the seventh successor to Francis.

Bonaventure was a dedicated adherent to Augustinianism, and believed that philosophy was not possible without the supernatural light of faith. By delving into the theology of Bonaventure, Ratzinger was bringing together two larger-than-life traditions of the Christian Church, that is, the Augustinian and the Franciscan movements. In the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (1273), Bonaventure offers a penetrating exposition of the problems that precipitated the downfall of John of Parma, namely, the questions of Joachimism and Spiritualism: the former, its apocalyptic and eschatological nature; the latter, the application of the radical call of poverty and simplicity by Francis. Consequently, the work, by its very nature, had to take on a fundamental treatment of the theology of history.

### 2.6 The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure

Ratzinger’s study of Bonaventure focused on the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, which presents Bonaventure’s theology of history. The interpreters of Joachim
maintained that the Church, built on the sacramental and ministerial pattern, was shortly to enter a new charismatic condition of unmediated access to grace. This was to be the reign of the Holy Spirit, heralded by Francis of Assisi.\textsuperscript{82} To Ratzinger, therefore, the \textit{Collationes} was a theological response to a situation of crisis that threatened Church unity. As Ratzinger remarks, “it is above all at times of greatest crisis in human history that we find men and women concerned with the theology and philosophy of history.”\textsuperscript{83} Within this conflictual context, Bonaventure will reinterpret Joachim back into tradition against the Joachimites that were interpreting him against the tradition, thereby preserving the unity of the Franciscan Order.\textsuperscript{84} The achievement of unity within the Franciscan Order was a major achievement of the Seraphic Doctor.

On the whole, Ratzinger’s encounter with Bonaventure is primarily a study of eschatology, the ultimate destiny of the world and the role played by the Church in bringing about that destiny. The starting point of this theology of history and the Church becomes for Bonaventure the Genesis account of creation, in which the six days of creation, the \textit{Hexaemeron}, become the six periods of salvation history: Adam-Noah; Abraham; David; Babylonian Captivity and Return; Christ; and the \textit{Finis Mundi}. The first four periods correspond to the Old Testament, while the last two are of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{85} Bonaventure thereby provides a vital link between theology and history by looking at theology through the epochal events that marked salvation history. Ratzinger remarks on this:

\begin{quote}
In this way, Bonaventure arrives at a new theory of scriptural exegesis that emphasizes the historical character of the scriptural statements in contrast to the exegesis of the Fathers and the Scholastics that had been more clearly directed to the unchangeable and the enduring.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

This link between theology and history is therefore the framework for the

\textsuperscript{82} Nichols, 53.
\textsuperscript{83} Joseph Ratzinger, \textit{The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure}, (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), V.
\textsuperscript{85} Ratzinger, \textit{The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure}, 17.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. 7.
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ecclesiological conclusions that Ratzinger draws from Bonaventure’s *Hexaemeron*, in the sense that it opens up a new horizon for the Church. The Church becomes in Bonaventure not just a Church of the present, but of the future, a Church not limited to the historical limitations of time and space. It becomes a Church that takes up an image of a pilgrim, a seed with potency for growth.

Understanding this future destiny of the Church demands a closer spiritual exegesis of Scripture. It is through the senses of Scripture that we make meaning of our future as Church. Ratzinger makes a telling observation:

> Scripture points to the future, but only the one who has understood the past can grasp the interpretation of the future because the whole of history develops in one unbroken line of meaning in which that which is to come may be grasped in the present on the basis of the past (...). In this way, the exegesis of Scripture becomes a theology of history, the clarification of the past leads to prophecy concerning the future. \(^8^7\)

The clear intention here is to make the Church’s present and future intelligible by relating it to the past, as recorded in Scripture. Through this way of exegesis, Bonaventure hopes for a new age of salvation within history. Between the 5th and the 6th ages, that is, between Jesus Christ and the final consummation of history, there will be space for what Ratzinger refers to as an “inner-historical transformation of the Church.” \(^8^8\) What is the sign of his epochal transformation?

For Bonaventure, the figure of Francis of Assisi marks the new era for the Church, the sign of the new age, the Angel of the Seals foretold in the Apocalypse. The situation of peace before the final storm indicated in Apocalypse 7 has begun with Francis. Consonant with Joachim of Fiore’s prophecy that the Angel of the Seal would receive full power to renew the Christian religion, Francis marked with the seal of the living God, *the stigmata*, the very impress of Christ crucified. He is the apocalyptic angel from who would come the final People of God, the 144,000 who


\(^8^8\) Ibid. 14.
are sealed. This final people are the community of contemplative men and women, in whom the form of life realized in Francis, will become the general form of life. The lot of this people will be the peace of the 7th day that is to precede the Parousia of the Lord.\footnote{Ratzinger, \textit{The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure} 54 -55.} One perceives an over-stated significance of the importance of the religious life to the final destiny of the global Church.

While Ratzinger acknowledges that Francis definitely saw himself in some primitive eschatological mood of Christianity expressed in the statement “the Reign of God is at hand” (Mk. 1:15), Ratzinger is hesitant to imagine Francis as strictly identifying the final era with the Franciscan Order. Ratzinger makes a cautious observation worth paying attention to, especially as eschatology continues to find increasing adherents especially in the Pentecostal and other new age circles:

Though this new people of God may rightfully be called Franciscan, and though it must be said that it is only in this new people that the real intention of the Poverello will be realized, nonetheless, this final Order is in no way identical with the present Order of Franciscans. It may be that the present Order was originally destined to inaugurate the new people immediately. But even if this had been the case, the failure of its members has frustrated this immediate determination. For the present, the Dominican and the Franciscan Orders stand together at the inauguration of a new period for which they are preparing, but which they cannot bring to actuality by themselves. When this time arrives, it will be a time of \textit{contemplatio}, a time of the full understanding of Scripture, and in this respect, a time of the Holy Spirit who leads us into the fullness of the truth of Jesus Christ.\footnote{Ibid. 55.}

In effect, though the era of Francis marks a high point in the life of the Church, the final age of the world will find the Church a contemplative Church, \textit{ecclesia contemplativa}. In this Church, Francis’ own manner of life will triumph. The Poor Man of Assisi, maintains Ratzinger, the \textit{simplex}, the \textit{idiota}, will turn out to have more penetration into God than all the learned of his time, because Francis loved God more.\footnote{Ibid.161-162.} Unlike Augustine for whom Christ is the end of ages, for Bonaventure, history is oriented towards the future with Christ at the center of the ages. What lessons did Ratzinger draw from Bonaventure’s theology of history that shaped his understanding
of the Church and its place in the world?

Firstly, with Christ as the center of the ages, his life, especially his passion, becomes the pattern for the Church. The Mystical Body, Ratzinger maintains, must go through similar suffering of its Head. The Church cannot attain fullness without the undergoing suffering and rejection in the pattern after its Head and Founder. The rejection of the Church by the world is part of the great phase towards the final age, towards the Sabbath rest.\textsuperscript{92} Suffering and rejection are inextricably linked to the being and mission of the Church.

Furthermore, Ratzinger’s prizing of the institutional dimension of the Church is heavily Bonaventurian. Ratzinger remarks: “without feeling any infidelity towards the holy Founder, Bonaventure could and had to create institutional structures for his Order, realizing all the while that Francis had not wanted them.”\textsuperscript{93} The implication is that Bonaventure must have realized that Francis’ own eschatological form of life could not exist as an institution in this world. It could only be realized as a breakthrough of grace in the individual until such a time of the God-given hour when the world and the Church would be transformed into its final form of existence.

To answer critics of the institutional model of the Church, criticisms Ratzinger attributes to “mere desire for criticism,” Ratzinger puts forth Bonaventure, arguing that through institutionalization, Bonaventure was able to preserve the eschatological character of what could be preserved.\textsuperscript{94} This in no way implies that Ratzinger is blind to the self-serving temptation of institutional Catholicism. His frequent criticism of the bureaucracy of the post-modern German Church is a corrective balance to any accusations of a blind eye on the part of Ratzinger. In \textit{Called to Communion} published a decade before his papacy, Ratzinger made a very provocative observation

\textsuperscript{92} Ratzinger, \textit{The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure}, 28.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. 50.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 51.
that encapsulates his vision of Church bureaucracy. He stated inter alia:

Nowadays the opinion surfaces occasionally even in ecclesiastical circles that a person is more Christian the more he or she is involved in Church activities. We have a kind of ecclesiastical occupational therapy; a committee, or at any rate some sort of activity in the Church, is sought for everyone. People – according to this way of thinking – must constantly be busy about the Church, they must always be talking about the Church, or doing something to or in her. But a mirror that reflects only itself is no longer a mirror; a window that no longer lets us see the wide open spaces outside, but gets in the way of the view, has lost its reason for being (…) The more administrative machinery we construct, be it the most modern, the less place there is for the Spirit, the less place there is for the Lord, and the less freedom there is. 95

The above remark is helpful in that it raises the red flag on the tendency to slide into institutionalism that could easily be self-serving and lifeless. Ratzinger’s position is not to throw the baby away with the bath water, but a telling reminder that the water was meant to clean the baby, the most important thing.

The third significant lesson from Bonaventure is the triumph of the Church of the Just, ecclesia ab Abel. The Church that was invisible in the lives of the saints beginning from Abel the Just to after the time of Christ will triumph at the consummation of the ages. As Ratzinger points out, “the historical ascent of the Church from the Patriarchs at the beginning to the People of God of the final days is simultaneously a growth of the revelation of God.”96 Truth therefore will triumph over falsehood, good over evil, in this Church of the Perfect. Two things stand out from this ecclesial triumph: Firstly, if the Church dates back to Abel, then the Church is a mutatio ecclesiae, a Church that undergoes changes, which, to Bonaventure and Ratzinger, happens according to the seven seals of the Apocalypse: the white horse symbolizes Christ; the red horse is the age of the martyrs; the black horse is the time of the heretics; the pale horse is the age of the false Christians and at the same time, the founding of religious orders; the earthquake is the age of the persecution by the anti-Christ; silence is the age of the eternal vision.97 The history of salvation is the

97 Ibid. 104.
history of the Church, in which Christ marks a new age. Ratzinger makes a very
telling conclusion about this triumph of the Church of the Perfect:

With this it becomes decisively clear that the revelation of the final age will involve neither the
abolition of the revelation of Christ nor a transcendence of the New Testament. Rather, it
involves the entrance into that form of knowledge which the Apostles had; and thus it will be
the true fulfillment of the New Testament revelation which has been understood only
imperfectly up till now. And so the final age will be truly and in the full sense of the word, the
New Testament. 98

Ratzinger’s belief that the final age is that of the New Testament is indicative of his
approach to issues that marked his time as prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine
of the Faith, such ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and new age spiritualties. He
was not just conserving for the sake of conservation. He ardently believed that the
Church was already in the age that awaits the final consummation of salvation history,
the Sabbath rest of the Church. He ardently believed that the truth about the mission
of the Church should prevail at the age of the perfect.

On the other hand, Ratzinger disagreed with the sense of inner-historical
eschatology that could be deduced from Bonaventure’s reading of the time after
Francis. He was uncomfortable with the idea of the contemplative Church that
replaces the mediatorial role of the hierarchy, because he saw in this interpretation of
Bonaventure signs of a messianic hope, almost as lofty and exulted as the experience
already contained in the Christ-event. Ratzinger was also suspicious of the category of
the “church of the poor” that stood as the foundation of the Age of the Spirit,
especially as this was interpreted as intrinsically pious and destined to replace the
mediatorial priestly class of the Church, a church of the poor that archived the
sacramental economy and the centrality of the Christ event. 99 Ratzinger did not
believe in the separation of the Church into categories of sacramentality and poverty.

It is possible to find in this reading of Bonaventure a key to Ratzinger’s

99 Rausch, 54.
lukewarm attitude to liberation theology. Maximilian Heim suggests that Ratzinger’s reading of Bonaventure “had key importance for Ratzinger in the later debate about the eschatological aspects of the Constitution on the Church and about the different ways in which it was received in ecumenical circles as well as by proponents of Latin American liberation theology.” Certainly, Ratzinger, even with this Bonaventurian background, could have understood what he considered to be the excesses of liberation theology differently. A much more pastoral accommodative approach could have been more helpful, especially when one recalls that Bonaventure, in resolving the conflict with the Franciscan Spiritualists, had not completely jettisoned the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore, but had reinterpreted Joachim in such a way that Christ once more became the center of history and not someone of the past – a position that was orthodox, while not discarding the novelty of the figure of Francis of Assisi. The difficulties that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Ratzinger’s watch had with Liberation Theology certainly did not help the course of the Church in that vast continent of Latin America.

For Ratzinger, the fulfillment of salvation history was beyond history and any traces of messianism within history came across as offering false hopes. Did this conviction make Ratzinger overlook the possibility of real, political, economic changes coming out of these seemingly cloudy theological positions? Maybe. It is always possible that some good might come from erroneous positions, especially when it is not a matter of doctrine per se but how the Church was responding to unjust economic and political structures of oppression, corruption, the violence of material poverty and hopelessness. That said, one might disagree with Ratzinger as to the existence of other possible theological intuitions, visions and experiences in shaping

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economic and world history. What is crucial here is to strive to understand why he stood for what he stood for, and Bonaventure’s theology of history is a helpful hint to understanding Ratzinger’s reading of history and the place of salvation history in history.

This chapter has laid out the basic theological matrixes that marked the life of Joseph Ratzinger the theologian. With the help of Augustine, these matrixes played themselves out in shaping Ratzinger’s conviction of the Church as a visible, universal, house of God whose greatest and binding norm is caritas, embodied in a Eucharistic ecclesiology. In Bonaventure, the Church emerges as the place of salvation history within history, that passes through suffering but finally triumphs thanks to its remaining in the truth of Christ. As Joseph Komonchak observes about this Ratzinger’s Bonaventurian theological vision, “the gospel will save us, not philosophy, not science and not scientific theology.”

Nevertheless, Ratzinger did not completely agree with Bonaventure’s reading of salvation history, because he saw in it signs of this-worldly messianism that was simply unattainable. William Patenaude sheds light on this position:

History must be viewed hermeneutically as the telling of an organic, unified drama (indeed, a love story) about a community in time that finds full meaning only in recognizing its movement toward a Christological completion – that is, an ideal state that gives meaning to the present but remains always beyond the grasp of any individual or group.

Ratzinger will always be suspicious of any theological position that finds within history, the fulfillment of all human hopes and aspiration. Augustine never left him, even when Ratzinger met Bonaventure.

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However, Ratzinger saw in Bonaventure’s reintroduction into the tradition of the Church of Joachim of Fiore a wonderful path of doing theology – to place oneself within the larger context of the Church, to think with the Church about the history of the Church as it goes forth in history. The theologian is one that reflects with the larger good and pastoral life of the Church in view. He or she seeks to integrate theology into the life of the Church and should strive not to be extrinsic to the Church. Chapter three shall consider the practical applications and implications of these ecclesiological notions of Ratzinger for the mission of the Church in a world increasingly indifferent to religion.
Chapter 3: Insights for Ecclesiology from Bavaria, Augustine and Bonaventure

The first two chapters have considered Ratzinger from his Bavarian roots and his theological masters. This third chapter shall highlight the lessons that global Catholicism can learn by looking at Ratzinger from his Bavarian, Augustinian and Bonaventurian backgrounds. It will critically consider areas from Ratzinger’s ecclesiology that could be helpful to some present-day challenges to both Church and the world, considering the growing religious indifference and even hostility to Christianity in particular, in many parts of the world. What can Ratzinger offer the Church of today that is facing many challenges not foreign to Ratzinger?

With a keen sense of history, Joseph Ratzinger has always showed an uncanny understanding of the challenges facing the Christian faith in the contemporary world. With prophetic candor, he never shied away from offering a biting criticism of the excesses of the many cultural forces bent on excluding the Christian faith from the public life of the world. Ratzinger consistently argued against adapting the teachings of Christ to the spirit of the time, the Zeitgeist, and strenuously maintained that Christ’s teachings ought to be followed throughout history. In the inaugural homily of his pontificate, Ratzinger himself gives us a vivid and dramatic image of the present times that’s almost pessimistic. It is worth listening to Ratzinger’s feelings:

The pastor must be inspired by Christ’s holy zeal: for him it is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth’s treasures no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.103

Assuming his theological background in Augustine and Bonaventure and how he lived that out through challenging controversies of Christology, Ecclesiology, Liberation theology, Moral Theology and Militant Atheism, Ratzinger would have been the last person to think of the Petrine ministry as a job. Ratzinger never could have seen himself as the CEO of Roman Catholic International Inc., since ecclesiology for Ratzinger could not have been determined by the journal of Harvard Business School. Christ was and is a Priest, a Prophet and a King, not a CEO. Benedict believes with Augustine that the Church is the body of Christ formed by caritas, and with Bonaventure that the truths Christ taught the Church will guide her through the ages of history to a triumphant end, when the Church will be united with Christ her head, and God will become all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

Consequently, the keys of Peter are no mere mythic symbol to Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger. A firm believer who is convinced that the truth of the faith lived out with love in the Church will triumph at the final age (Bonaventure and Augustine), Ratzinger’s decision to step aside could only have been informed by his firm belief that worse things might happen to embarrass and confuse the Church's 1.2 billion faithful if he lacked the strength to govern. Knowing Ratzinger’s conviction of faith, truth and love, from hindsight, it very well could be that Benedict’s greatest contribution to ecclesiology was his candid recognition of what the Lord was telling him in the depths of his conscience, which he made known to the world on February 11, 2013. For someone to whom the metaphors of love and truth were dominant, Ratzinger must have definitely arrived at the point wherein he recognized that Jesus Christ, was telling him something about the future of his Church: it was time for a new leadership and a new direction. The Church was prepared to move forward. His love for the Church prevented any “sit-tightism” for Ratzinger.
On February 11, 2013, Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, shocked the whole world by doing what no one in living history had ever done; that is, stepping down from the papal ministry and the Office of Peter. Addressing the College of Cardinals, Benedict announced his resignation from the papacy in these words:

I have convoked you to this Consistory, not only for the three canonizations, but also to communicate to you a decision of great importance for the life of the Church. After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry. I am well aware that this ministry, due to its essential spiritual nature, must be carried out not only with words and deeds, but no less with prayer and suffering.  

These words took the world by storm, with media houses the world over interrupting their broadcasts to turn to Rome. Various reasons, conjectures, stories, justification and counter-justifications have been advanced as to why February 11, 2013 was possible in the life of Joseph Ratzinger and the Roman Catholic Church. Irrespective of the position one takes, what is undeniable is that this man took this office seriously. As a theologian, he had long reflected on the nature of the Petrine ministry and its place in the Catholic Church, the wider Christian community and the world at large. Taking Ratzinger at his word, he found the reason for this act in the examination of his conscience, which makes for an interesting reminiscence.

In February 1991, Ratzinger delivered an address entitled Conscience and Truth to the bishops of the United States, at Dallas, Texas. At some point, he cited the famous Letter to the Duke of Norfolk by John Henry Newman, in which the Englishman wrote: “Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts, (which indeed does not seem quite the thing), I shall drink – to the Pope, if you please, - still to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.”  

After a lengthy explication of Newman’s treatment on conscience based on this toast, Ratzinger makes the argument that primarily sees the Petrine Ministry as one of memory:

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104 Benedict XVI, Declaratio to College of Cardinals, 2013.
The true sense of this teaching authority of the Pope consists in his being the advocate of the Christian memory. The Pope does not impose from without. Rather, he elucidates the Christian memory and defends it. For this reason the toast to conscience indeed must precede the toast to the Pope because without conscience there would not be a papacy. All power that the papacy has is power of conscience.\textsuperscript{106}

With such an awareness already dominant in his thought way back in 1991, one could say that Benedict’s invocation of his examination of conscience that led to his resignation from the Petrine office was a profound theological process that had long been rooted in the mind of this theologian from Bavaria. His profound and broad reflection on the truths of the faith and the destiny of the Church convinced Ratzinger that the time for active ministry in the Church was over, and that the Lord was calling him to the more sublime form of contemplation, reminiscent of the contemplative age in the theology of Bonaventure. Retiring from active ministry, Ratzinger bequeaths a rich theological legacy that though not without its limitations, could be very useful for the Church of the new evangelization: the synthesis between faith and reason; liturgical theology; the divinization of political power; the question of change and the development of doctrine; the Church as a Community of love; and the centrality of love to Eucharistic theology. These insights are further developed in the subsequent sections.

3.1 The Synthesis of Faith and Reason in Hellenistic Form

Central to Ratzinger’s academic edifice is the synthesis of faith and reason, which mutually enrich each other. Ratzinger is keenly aware that both reason and faith can become pathological without the necessary corrective blend. He is also aware that reason manifests itself in profoundly different ways in non-Western cultures, precisely because reason is not an impersonal reality! Reason and faith are always embedded and embodied capacities, subjected to other factors of culture,

language and human experiences. Consequently, an exaggerated emphasis on the primacy and exclusivity of Hellenistic reason with the synthesis of faith could easily lead Christianity being viewed as a Western religion, undercutting the very universality that Ratzinger seeks to argue for the usage of reason. Yves Congar, O.P. speaks to this point when he writes:

> But the church’s mission, transmitting grace as the responsibility of its catholicity, should live and assimilate the new elements *in the church* in such a fashion as to create, not a sort of Chinese or Hindu enclave within Latin Catholicism, but a genuine development of catholicity. This means the nurturing of the reality of the *Una Catholica* lived out according to this particular dimension of humanity represented by the Chinese or the Hindu world. 107

This view of Congar challenges the Church to discover in other cultures real, substantial possibilities and openings that lead to the evangelization of life, and even genuine theological critical thinking and new insights. Catholicism takes on the model of a seamless garment, with all the parts contributing to the catholic whole. This openness also pushes the Church to pay attention to the prevenient work of the Spirit in other cultures, the God who as it were, goes ahead of the Church in being present in the conscience of all humans and is reflective in the songs, poetry, stories, myths, dance, *et cetera*, of different peoples and cultures. Thus, while Bavaria’s public and traditional pieties were positively formative, the long-term consequences on the euro-centric mind-set of Ratzinger that fuses Bavaria and Rome has its pros and cons on the latter’s ecclesiological foundations and orientations.

However, Ratzinger does not seem to envisage the evangelical and ecclesial fruitfulness and vitality of an inculturation that opts for the Jewishness of the faith as a springboard. He tends to regard this as veiled attempts of a relativistic mind-set that will eventually undercut the achievements of the synthesis between Athens and Rome. While Ratzinger might have some justification for his position, as Schall

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explains, Richard Gaillardetz argument, vis-à-vis Ratzinger’s Hellenistic claim, is worth paying attention to:

There is another way of reading our Christian origins, however, one that acknowledges the distinctive and even prominent role played by Hellenistic culture but which does not tie Christianity decisively to its Western forms. This alternative reading also gives prominence to the Greek New Testament but to a much different purpose.\(^{108}\)

It is useful to bear in mind that Christianity is a translated religion, based on the fact that the Christian New Testament was written in Greek and not the Aramaic of Jesus.

To be fair to Ratzinger and give him the best charitable reading, his emphasis for the primacy and irrevocability of Hellenism in the evolution of the Christian faith is largely due in part to Patristic considerations. It goes without saying that the Fathers constitute an integral part of the theological imagination of Joseph Ratzinger. To argue for the Hellenistic roots of the faith as being Divinely providential is to argue for the legacy of the Fathers, a legacy that has enduring consequences for the Church of today and tomorrow: the achievement of the Canon of Sacred Scripture; the *regula fidei* or *symbola*, synthesized in both the Apostolic and Nicaea-Constantinopolitan Credos; the fundamental form of the liturgical life of the Church; and, likewise of profound significance, the comprehension of faith as a *philosophia* that placed the faith under the rubric of *credo ut intelligam*. This gave birth to what we know today as theology, which continues to preserve the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the faith.\(^{109}\) The handiness of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome gives a uniform commonality of the testimony of the Fathers, giving testimony to an experience of ecclesial ecumenism, since the Fathers of both East and West belong to the entire Christian Church.


Nevertheless, it can be argued that every culture should be allowed the possibility of a direct relationship with Jerusalem precisely because of unforeseen forms of evangelical life that might be consequent from such interactions. Just as one could not envisage a priori the results of the synthesis between Rome, Athens and Jerusalem, it is presumptuous to rule out any genuine novelty from 21st century inculturation efforts. While human reason is common to all cultures, the manner in which reason reveals itself and the forms it takes are different and distinct. It could very well be that Ratzinger never really got to accept that.

That said, the absolutization of reason closes the door to faith and other sources of human inspiration, motivation and existence. It fails to raise questions and seek answers to many troubling questions of human existence, such as the question of love and of suffering. As Blaise Pascal once famously declared, “the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we know this in countless ways (...) it is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by reason.”110 Here is a genuine openness to other human motivations that need not be subjected to the laboratory of Hegelian absolute rationalism. Two centuries later, John Henry Newman made this argument:

The heart is commonly reached, not through reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons inflame us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, and deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.111

One finds here a positive broadening of the horizons, which, while admitting the place of reason, opens reason to other critical and profound life influences and sources. To this, Ratzinger adds:

It is not the lesser function of the faith to care for reason as such. It does not do violence to it; it is not external to it, rather, it makes it come to itself. The historical instrument of the faith can liberate reason as such again so that by introducing it to the path, it can see itself once again.

Reason will not be saved without faith, but faith without reason will be human.\textsuperscript{112} Faith and reason are presented as two complimentary bedrocks for a free and democratic society.

Mindful of these observations, Ratzinger’s advocacy for the place of reason in faith is not limited to the external secular world. It bears similar implications for Christianity’s self-understanding. Ratzinger points out:

The ancient religion did eventually break up because of the gulf between the God of faith and the God of the philosophers, because of the total dichotomy between reason and piety (…) The Christian religion would have to expect just the same fate it were to accept a similar amputation of reason and were to embark on a corresponding withdrawal into the purely religious.”\textsuperscript{113}

Reason therefore, plays a fundamental role in Christian self-understanding and identity, even if the Christian is challenged to go beyond the limits of reason to encounter the relationality, love and community of God.

Furthermore, the argument for reason is handy when Ratzinger confronts the question about the unicity and universality of the Christian religion. He maintains:

The Church Fathers found the seeds of the Word, not in the religions of the world, but rather in philosophy, that is, in the process of critical reason directed against the (pagan) religions, in the history of progressive reason, and not in the history of religion (…) The Fathers did not associate Christianity primarily with the realm of religion and did not regard it as one of many religions; rather, they associated it with the process of reasoning and discernment.\textsuperscript{114}

For Ratzinger, the decision of the Fathers to opt for philosophy, for reason, against the religions of the Greco-Roman world, is significantly indicative not only of the limitations inherent in the religions and their ability to communicate and transmit the revelation of the God of Jesus Christ, but more importantly, reveals that which is unique about the Christian religion. To turn to reason showed the inherent catholicity of the Christian religion. It is helpful to keep in mind the distinction between \textit{ratio}, which is mere reason, and \textit{intellectus}, the ability to see things spiritually, which goes

\textsuperscript{113} Ratzinger, \textit{Introduction to Christianity}, 139.
\textsuperscript{114} Ratzinger, \textit{On the Way to Jesus Christ}, 72 – 73.
further than reason. In précis, reason prevent religion from becoming mere habit, and challenges the Christian to live according to the claims of religious truth.

3.2 The Primacy of Receptivity in the Liturgy

For Ratzinger, the most profound disposition to the liturgy is a spirit of receptivity, in which the community celebrates in a manner that is open to the Lord. Liturgy is not a community of self-entertainment. It is worship, which is cosmic, at the center of which is the cross of Christ. Ratzinger emphatically remarked to Peter Seewald:

The essential point is to avoid celebrating the liturgy as an occasion for the community to exhibit itself, under the pretext that it is important for everyone to involve himself, though in the end, then, only the ‘self’ is really important. Rather, the decisive thing is that we enter into something that is much greater. That we can get out of ourselves, as it were, and into the wide-open spaces. For the same reason, it is also very important that the liturgy itself not be tinkered with in some way.¹¹⁵

Evident in this cautious remark is that deep sense of Bavarian piety that sees the liturgy as an encounter in which the believer receives God’s life and love, in a spirit of receptivity and openness, according to which the believer lives according to God’s will and God’s revelation, as Augustine will argue in the City of God, as seen in the second chapter of this thesis. Two insights flow from these liturgical convictions of Joseph Ratzinger worth highlighting here: the significance of typology and the posture of celebrating the liturgy ad orientem.

The significance of typology in Ratzinger’s theology finds its noted expression in the soldier piercing Jesus’ “side” as he hung dead on the cross (Jn. 19:34). To Ratzinger, Jesus is the new Adam who enters into “sleep,” and a new humanity of the Church, the new people of God in Christ, is born, through blood and water. Christ’s body is also the new temple. The tearing of the Temple curtain at the

moment of Jesus’s death signified that this building had ceased to be the place of the encounter for God and humans in this world.

Such an interpretation is very troubling from the perspective of Judaism, keeping in mind that “the temple is the expression of the human longing to have God as a fellow occupant, the longing to be able to reside with God and thus to experience the perfect way of living, the consummate community, which banishes loneliness and fear once and for all.” From the moment of Jesus’ death, therefore, his body, which was given up for us, is the new true temple. The Psalm verse, “sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but a body you prepared for me” (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5), is now decisively fulfilled. Typology, richly present in the thoughts of the Fathers, reaches its climax and fulfillment in the ritual of the liturgy, which is an entry into the body of Christ. Ritual and ecclesiology have a definitive and meaningful encounter.

The second implication will be Ratzinger’s sympathy for the Tridentine liturgy with its ad orientem posture. It is a sign, Ratzinger argues, of turning to the Lord who comes, symbolized in the rising sun. He maintains that “the cosmic symbol of the rising sun expresses the universality of God above all particular places and yet maintains the concreteness of divine revelation. Our praying is thus inserted into the procession of the nations to God.” Therefore, ad orientem symbolizes the liberation of humanity from a self-serving and idolatrous fulfillment.

For Ratzinger, the posture of the East is a necessary remedy to what he perceived as the excessive and exaggerated self-turning and inward-looking trends of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. He argues:

The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle (...) The common turning toward the East was not a ‘celebration toward the wall.’ It did not

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mean that the priest ‘had his back to the people. The priest himself was not regarded as so important. For just as the congregation in the synagogue looked together toward Jerusalem; so in the Christian liturgy the congregation looked together toward the Lord. 119

The East points to the Lord as the objective recipient of every liturgical action. However, not everyone is convinced of the inadequacy of the Reform Rite of Vatican II to spiritually mediate the presence of the Lord who comes in the liturgical action. Many Catholics continue to find spiritual meaning and fulfillment in the present form. This fact must not be taken for granted. However, present liturgical excesses that reduce the liturgy to spectacular dramas deserve some hearing of Ratzinger’s objections. Conversely, it must also be remarked that even the Tridentine liturgy in its most baroque presentation could be an exaggerated form of theatrical drama.

In a sense, the primary objective of the liturgical reform and renewal was to free the liturgy from being entangled in a web of human creativity, so that worship, which is turning to the Lord, becomes central. Ratzinger maintains:

Through the sacrifice of Christ and its acceptance in the Resurrection, the entire cultic and sacerdotal heritage of the Old Covenant has been handed over to the Church (...) the priesthood of the Church is a continuation and an acceptance of the Old Testament priesthood, which in this radically new and transformed state finds its true fulfillment. 120

Herein lies the exercise of the true priestly character of the entire Church, in which all the figures of the Old Testament are fulfilled. Along these lines of thought, it is obvious that for Ratzinger, the Church’s worship is not a congregational gathering. It is an act of the priesthood of the entire people of God. From this flows the implication that the Mass is the center of ecclesial identity. This understanding of the Mass as a central identity marker for Catholicism is a childhood intuition of Ratzinger’s Bavaria, which he has carried all along, with beautiful reminiscences of the past that gives joy to the present of his liturgical and ecclesial theology. This centrality of the Eucharist is also an Augustinian influence on Ratzinger, since Augustine had argued

in the *City of God*, that the Eucharist was the true worship, against the worship of the
demons by the adherents of the early city.

Critics have been quick to point out that Ratzinger’s affinity for the Tridentine
liturgy does not justify what they consider to be the dismantling efforts that he pushed
for regarding the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. The great merit of such openness in
the liturgy was that it recognized the catholicity of the Church. At Vatican II,
Catholicism really became a world-Church, and one would have expected such a
global consciousness to reflect itself in the way the Church worships. Granted that
Ratzinger consistently argued for the reform, which meant in clear terms, a return to
the missal of St. Pius V, one could deduce a great hesitation on his part to appreciate
the rich diversity and enrichment of the Roman Church by other non-European
cultures.

### 3.3 Bavaria and the Enduring Lessons of Power Politics and the Church

Joseph Ratzinger never forgot the effects of Nazism on the German nation,
which he saw as a consequence of the idolization of political power. Perhaps as many
African states continue to grapple with the establishment of democracy, marked by all
forms of political maneuvers and chicaneries, corruption and bad governance, some
lessons from Bavaria might be helpful to the African context, while paying attention
to the particularities of Nazism.

In a homily delivered to the Catholic members of the Bundestag in the Church
of St Boniface in Bonn, on November 26, 1981, Ratzinger took up the question of the
caricaturing of political power that degenerates into an abyss of falsehood and
brutality. He argued: “the state is not the whole of human existence and does not
embrace the whole of human hope. Men and women and their hopes extend beyond
the thing that is the state and beyond the sphere of political activity.”¹²¹ The danger, said Ratzinger to the Catholic representatives is that such an approach to politics distorts faith, making room for the universal primacy of the political. It becomes a politics of enslavement, a mythological politics in which the myth of the divine state rises up once again, because men and women cannot renounce the totality of hope.¹²² Such political messianism offers false hopes because it equates the human longing for the wholeness of being, the wholeness of human aspiration and destiny, with what political power can offer.

Opposing this political brand, Ratzinger proposes “rational politics” in which the politician recognizes the limits of political power, and eschews the false hopes of a political paradise that can only fuel the fear of the collapse of their promises and of the greater void that lurks behind it; the fear of their own power and cruelty, from which there is no escape. Rational politics, Ratzinger argues, is one that is informed by faith that liberates men and women. It offers the objectivity of reason to politics, by offering God as the better alternative.¹²³ The implications this position might have for a professed atheist might open up interesting perspectives. Nevertheless, to draw Ratzinger’s thought to its logical conclusion could mean that rejecting the hope that faith offers amounts to rejecting the reasonableness of politics.

It is important to point out that to place such a faith-hermeneutic of politics on a par with the achievements of liberal democracy and the fruits of the Enlightenment does not resolve the continuous tension between faith, reason and politics in the public square. Nevertheless, it creates a space for dialogue and encounter that could yield fruits of mutual tolerance and understanding, healthy for any democratic society.

¹²² Ibid. 2.
¹²³ Ibid. 4.
Arguing for the pre-political foundations of the democratic constitutional state, for example, Jürgen Habermas points to solidarity as the basis for public power and government action. Political power, in his view, understands itself as a “nonreligious and post-metaphysical justification of the normative bases of the democratic constitutional state. This theory is in the tradition of a rational law that renounces the strong cosmological or salvation-historical assumptions of the classical and religious theories of the natural law.”\textsuperscript{124} The question that emerges from this position of Habermas, to put it quite pointedly from the faith hermeneutic propounded by Ratzinger could be: should the faith be perceived as a ruling authority antecedent to the public system of liberal democracy, law, or political ideology, sometimes as destructive as Nazism, to keep in mind our context? In other words, how do we reconcile the position of religion as a sustaining force, advocated by Ratzinger, with that of the primacy of solidarity as the basis of constitutionality put forth by secular humanism and sociology, as the most compelling political theory? This becomes quite acute in the context of the Western world that is witnessing a continuous growth in religious indifference.

An interesting dynamic comes into play when the question of the collapse of the democratic system is evoked, as has been obvious in many historical contexts in the contemporary world, which has witnessed two world wars; a cold war; economic depressions; breakdown in moral behavior in many aspects of society which has given birth to the so-called culture wars, \textit{et cetera}. Following the recent economic meltdown that plagued the global economy, the question of ethics in the public sphere had an attractive and even urgent resurgence. Habermas describes this ethical collapse in these words:

The transformation of the citizens of prosperous and peaceful liberal societies into isolated monads acting on the basis of their own self-interest, persons who used their subjective rights only as weapons against each other. We can also see evidence of a crumbling of citizen’s solidarity in the larger context, where there is no political control over the dynamic of the global economy and the global society.  

The unsettling question for secular enlightenment’s achievements from such an observation by Habermas could be a perceived skepticism of the achievements of liberal democracies based on reason and constitutionality. As Habermas himself remarks, “(…) even today, there is a ready audience for the theory that the remorseful modern age can find its way out of the blind alley only by means of the religious orientation to a transcendent point of reference.” Once more, the place of God and religious convictions in protecting and providing a bed for democratic societies is here considered, a question that becomes all the more acute as large parts of the world seek solutions to the feeling of despair, hopelessness and frustration that is becoming a mark in the lives of many a youth, especially in Europe.

Addressing both houses of Britain at Westminster Hall, on Friday September 17, 2010, Benedict XVI took up the question of the ethical foundations of society at length, with a view of openness to the hermeneutic of faith in political discourse. In terse prose and taking the incident of St Thomas More as a springboard he forcefully raised the bar of this conversation:

(…) And yet the fundamental questions at stake in Thomas More’s trial continue to present themselves in ever-changing terms as new social conditions emerge. Each generation, as it seeks to advance the common good, must ask anew: what are the requirements that governments may reasonably impose upon citizens, and how far do they extend? By appeal to what authority can moral dilemmas be resolved? These questions take us directly to the ethical foundations of civil discourse. If the moral principles underpinning the democratic process are themselves determined by nothing more solid than social consensus, then the fragility of the process becomes all too evident - herein lies the real challenge for democracy. The inadequacy of pragmatic, short-term solutions to complex social and ethical problems has been illustrated all too clearly by the recent global financial crisis. There is widespread agreement that the lack of a solid ethical foundation for economic activity has contributed to the grave difficulties now being experienced by millions of people throughout the world.

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125 Habermas & Ratzinger, 35.
126 Ibid. 37.
The question this argument raises is one of motivation: what motivates one to act ethically in the public sphere? Can we find the motivation to act ethically in society from the law, or are there other sources of motivation such as faith or the transcendental dimension of human life? Taking the question of the law, for example, Habermas argues that the law cannot constitute a sufficient motivational stimulant in a democratic constitutional state:

A legal obligation to vote would be just as alien as a legal requirement to display solidarity. All one can do is suggest to the citizens of a liberal society that they should be willing to get involved on behalf of fellow citizens whom they do not know and who remain anonymous to them and that they should accept sacrifices that promote common interests.\(^{128}\)

Two trends emerge from these seemingly irreconcilable perspectives: a faith hermeneutic of Ratzinger and a hermeneutic of the political virtue of solidarity lived out in constitutional law according to Habermas.

From a historical background, it can be argued that the perspective of Ratzinger’s experience of World War II confronts the very question of the power of politics and the power of God. If power to do what one likes is a falsification of power; if Nazism symbolized a travesty of power, then one cannot remain silent in the face of the consequences that flow from such distortive and destructive usage of power. One is therefore faced with the powerlessness of God in the face of human power, since God seems unable to place a halt on human destruction of the world. How then could the world be redeemed if the redeemer does not have power? Must the Christian faith succumb to this form of political power if it is to achieve anything in the world? Were the concessions made to Hitler by some in the Church the only option the Church had in the context of Nazi Germany? It could very well have been that Nazism was a time that the Church was called to embrace the royal way of the cross, which became a missed opportunity for the Church.

\(^{128}\) Habermas & Ratzinger, 30.
Ratzinger remarks that “over and again the powerful of the world have offered the Church power, and, along with this power, they have naturally tried to impose the methods of their power as well (...) The power typical of political rule or technical management cannot be and must not be the style of the Church’s power.”\(^{129}\) Ratzinger is not hereby condemning all political power. He is raising a red flag at the equation of Church power with civil power and of God’s power with civil power as well as the absolutizing of human power in general that this entails, giving this form of political power a character of redemption.

Addressing the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishop’s Conferences of Latin America in Mexico, May 1996, Ratzinger starkly remarked: “the fact is that when politicians want to bring redemption, they promise too much. When they presume to do God’s work, they do not become divine but diabolical.”\(^{130}\) Such stern words could apply as well to the hierarchy of the Church, especially in many African nations, who turn to seek economic favors from the many political despots that govern Africa.

In *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger points out that Israel’s faith, contained in the Shema, - Hear, O Israel, Yahweh, thy God, is an only God, challenges the absoluteness and the worship of political power:

> In this sense the profession *there is only one God* is, precisely because it has itself no political aims, a program of decisive political importance: through the absoluteness that it lends the individual from his God, and through the relativization to which it relegates all political communities in comparison with the unity of the God who embraces them all, it forms the only definitive protection against the power of the collective and at the same time implies the complete abolition of any idea of exclusiveness in humanity as a whole.\(^{131}\)

This line of thought guards against the worship of power in its many aberrations.

Political excessiveness becomes all the more striking vis-à-vis faith, when one recalls that for Ratzinger, faith is the ground that upholds the entire human existence, the source and destiny of human history. Taking a cue from Isaiah 7:9 – *If you do not*

\(^{129}\) Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 49.


\(^{131}\) Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 113.
believe, then you do not abide, Ratzinger argued for a more literal translation: If you do not believe (If you do not hold firm to Yahweh), then you will have no foothold. This differs from the Septuagint that reads: If you do not believe, then you do not understand, either. The acuteness of standing or foothold gives primacy to the invisible over the visible. The believer is capable of standing in this world, precisely because he or she knows that the true ground of all things, that which is most powerful, is God. Ratzinger makes a very idiosyncratic interpretation:

Christian belief means opting for the view that what cannot be seen is more real than what can be seen. It is an avowal of the primacy of the invisible as the truly real, which upholds us and hence enables us to face the visible with calm composure, knowing that we are responsible before the invisible as the true ground of all things. Such an attitude towards life challenges the radical positivism that tends to mark political power. This attitude of openness to God in political life is “the trustful placing myself on a ground that upholds me, not because I have made it and checked it by my own calculations but, rather, precisely because I have not made it and cannot check it.” The ground of faith is more solid than that of political messianism.

In the final analysis, the greatest flaw of Nazi political power was its flawed and false image of human beings and God. Its unbridled exercise of power helped unleashed the carnage of the Holocaust and other godless persecutions. True power, Ratzinger argues, must exhibit the self-restraining and submissive emptiness symbolized in the cross, “which is radically opposed to the unrestrained power of possessing all things, being allowed by all things, and being able to do all things.” In a word, true power is the power that guarantees the truth about human dignity and about the supremacy of God, “the God who judges and suffers, the God who sets limits and standards for us; the God from whom we come and to whom we are

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132 Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity, 74.
133 Ibid. 69 & 75.
134 Ratzinger, A New Song for the Lord, 51.
going.”\textsuperscript{135} The God who is infinitely greater than all our concepts of God, and yet, the God who in Jesus of Nazareth, has come so close that we can even kill him! Perhaps Ratzinger’s most significant contribution to the Church in Africa at present could be his reflection of this deification of political power.

The challenge of Ratzinger’s political theology for the Church in Africa is for the Church to rediscover its prophetic calling, to go beyond the securities of the stained glass windows of their churches and the often-boring statements put out before and after elections by many bishops conferences in Africa. Ratzinger’s political theology challenges the Church in Africa to regain the prophetic character of our common baptism, especially by the hierarchy of the African Church in which one tends to find a surplus of priestly vocations but an acute prophetic anemia.

3.4 The Question of Change and the Development of Doctrine

A visible trend that runs across the ecclesiological reflections of Ratzinger is the question of how to understand change in the Church: What are the limits to what can be changed in the Church? What categories of persons are capable of making changes in the Church? If the bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council could bring about profound substantial changes in the Church, why must they be the only ones? What about the theologians who at Vatican II had come to discover themselves as a kind of magisterium of the experts? As Ratzinger pointedly wondered, “how could bishops in the exercise of their teaching office preside over theologians when they, the bishops, received their insights only from specialists and thus were dependent on the guidance of the scholars?”\textsuperscript{136} In saying this, Ratzinger was not opposed to scholarly contributions to the faith. That would have been farthest from

\textsuperscript{135} Ratzinger, \textit{Introduction to Christianity}, 17.
\textsuperscript{136} Ratzinger, \textit{MILESTONES}, 133.
his thoughts, being himself a systematic theologian. His point of emphasis was that
the faith of the church and development of that faith could not become something of a
privileged space for academicians. The Gospels were not written for experts only, but
by people of faith and for people of faith, to stimulate the community to a life of faith.

This question of change and the development of doctrine encapsulate the
difficulties that Ratzinger had with certain theologians as Cardinal Prefect of the
Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, and in his own private reflections as a
theologian. Ratzinger clearly values the place of theologians in the Church. As Prefect
of CDF, he penned *Donum Veritatis – On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, in
May 1990 – a document that valued and situated the theologian’s task in the
community of faith. It is a candid treatise that recognizes the genuine difficulties that
theologians sometimes face, especially when they have to relate to their practical,
personal experiences of their life of faith, the world, and the voice of their conscience.

However, Ratzinger has seen so much of theologians that he recognizes that
occasions abound when theologians tend to be more interested in the editorials of the
*New York Times* than in the words of Scripture! The Church becomes a place wherein
new ideas are cooked up on Saturday night and tried out on Sunday morning!
Ratzinger vigorously resisted the idea of the Church as a place of experimentation of
the unbridled intellectualism of theologians. Change and the development of doctrine;
the role of the magisterium and theologians in interpreting change and development;
and the primacy of the faith of the simple people; - these are the key underlying issues
that shaped Ratzinger’s battle for the interpretation and reception of Vatican II.

Quite pointedly, how does Joseph Ratzinger view change and development in
the Church? Primarily, Ratzinger is a student of Newman when it comes to this
question. Marking the centenary of the death of Cardinal Newman, on April 28th 1990 in Rome, Ratzinger delivered a keynote address in which he remarked, *inter alia*:

Newman’s teaching on the development of doctrine, which I regard along with his doctrine on conscience, was his decisive contribution to the renewal of theology. With this he had placed the key in our hand to build historical thought into theology, or much more, he taught us to think historically in theology and so to recognize the identity of faith in all developments."\(^{137}\) What strikes Ratzinger as most profound is the personalism that marked Newman’s understanding of development, a personalism that Ratzinger links to Augustine, even going further to refer to Newman as one of the great “doctors of the Church.”\(^{138}\)

In his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Newman listed seven points which set the stage for the understanding of development of Christian doctrine: the development or change should preserve the substantial form throughout all the changes; secondly, the same principles of life and thought are continuously dynamic; thirdly the identical thing in change organically assimilates into itself new elements; fourthly, the development draws forth from its own principles new conclusions rendered imperative by its own growth; fifthly, the earlier stage already shows anticipations of later developments; sixthly, newer patterns of being are the result of clinging faithfully to original principles thrust into new contexts; and finally, at any moment the identical continuum is present with the vigor of life.\(^{139}\) What is fundamental to Ratzinger in these insights from Newman is the perpetuity of the substantial form throughout different historical epochs. If Ratzinger as a theologian and Prefect of CDF fought against certain forms of development such as Liberation Theology in Latin America, it was because he saw such currents as novelties that he found difficult to situate within an already present substantial form in the tradition of

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\(^{138}\) Ibid. 16.

the Church. Thus, organic development came to be the limit and norm for Ratzinger’s theology of change and development.

The downside of this position is that it rules out any possibility of genuine and original development and change. It reflects a projection from one’s own context unto that of others. Cardinal Ratzinger might not have grasped the fuller picture of the atrocities justified by the Church’s hegemony in Latin America that gave rise to repressive military regimes. It could very well be that the cultures of Spain and Portugal – the legacy of colonization, slavery and the racialization of societies, the decimation of indigenous peoples, the shadow side of missionary history, were read simply through the lenses of Bavaria, the Third Reich and the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps in spite of his good intentions, Joseph Ratzinger simply did not have ears to hear what the bishops of Latin America were saying, without interpreting it through the lens of European experiences. It is hard to reconcile this position with the Christian experience of God constantly creating and bringing out things old and new – like a teacher of the law, from his storeroom (Matt. 13:52). Perhaps a further push is needed to broaden this Newman-Ratzinger horizon, expanding the vision of organic development to a development that could be genuinely new and relevant.

In True and False Reform In The Church, the great conciliar French Dominican theologian, Yves Congar, brings forth helpful insights to this question of change and development. Congar argues that while the Church never loses what she once possessed, carrying as it were, her youthfulness and immaturity into old age, when the present becomes frozen in the past, it blocks the flow of life. The present and future of the Church means that, the Church has to be the present and future of the world. Congar singles out two temptations to guard against that which provide the

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140 Yves Congar, True and False Reform in the Church, (Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 2011), 149.
motive for why and how the Church need to be reformed, why and how we must understand and appreciate change and development in the Church, as the Church goes forth in history, in order not to fade into irrelevance.

Firstly, the Church must guard against the temptation to Pharisaism, meaning turning the means to an end.141 The Pharisees tended to forget the human being behind the observance and focused almost exclusively on the legal puritanical observances of the Torah. This possibility is likewise present in the new Israel of Jesus Christ, the Church, and this awareness should help keep the door of reform open, a door of getting back to the essentials of why we are a church, why we are a people called by God into the body of Christ, which is basically one of making the life of Christ known and lived in our world.

The second theological ground for the necessity of openness to change and development in the Church is what Congar describes as the temptation to become a Synagogue. He maintains, “as for the Synagogue of old, fidelity is often the reason given for turning away from change.”142 The challenging invitation is to be open to growth and adaptation, conscious all the time of the distinction between what is permanently valuable, such as the sacraments and the essential structure of the Church, and what by its nature can become obsolete, such as even the very formulation of a dogma in language that might not be meaningful to the sensibilities of the post-modern world.

At the risk of going too far afield from the focus on Ratzinger, it is helpful to mention, briefly, the four conditions of authentic reform postulated by Congar for avoiding schism in the Church: the primacy of charity and pastorality; the necessity of being in the whole – *Catholica*, that is, the *sentire cum ecclesia*; the need for

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141 Congar, 140.
142 Ibid. 149.
prudent patience on the part of reformers; and the importance of paying attention to
the tradition of the Church, which should safeguard against an excessively craving for
novelty.\textsuperscript{143} These insights are very helpful, especially as the Church grapples with the
challenges of secularism as manifested in religious indifference and a systemic and
growing militant atheism that endeavors to exclude religion from public life.

The second issue that helps define Ratzinger’s appropriation and interpretation
of Vatican II is the role of the magisterium and the theologian in the interpretation of
the change and development ushered by the Council. The thorny issue is the primacy
of the magisterium vis-à-vis other challenging factors and forces that seek to define
Catholic dogma and life, such as philosophical liberalism; public opinion; and the
plurality of cultures and languages. These tendencies crystallized into what Ratzinger
refers to as “a supreme magisterium of conscience in opposition to the magisterium of
the Church.”\textsuperscript{144} Based on this and the other aforementioned factors, theologians seem
to see themselves as a kind of magisterium of the experts who know better than the
bishops what is good for the faithful and best for the Church.

Nevertheless, excesses of some theologians notwithstanding, critics of
Ratzinger have voiced their dismay at the damage suffered by many theologians in the
70s and 80s under Cardinal Ratzinger’s watch at the CDF. Theologians like Jacques
Dupuis died with broken hearts and spirits after years of missionary service. Perhaps
Ratzinger never fully grasped the challenging and difficult contexts of abject misery,
moral, social, cultural and political decay from which many of these theologians were
doing theology. The European in Ratzinger might have been just too strong to allow
him see the full picture of Africa, Asia and Oceania.

\textsuperscript{143} Congar, 215 – 307.
\textsuperscript{144} Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian,
To Ratzinger, it is crucial that the work of the theologian is kept in a healthy balance so that the Church does not become a laboratory for theologians, but a privileged place of genuine faith and spiritual encounter, a theology that is done *sentire cum ecclesia!* The magisterium has a defining and crucial role in this process of development and change, for “if there occur a separation from the bishops who watch over and keep the apostolic tradition alive, it is the bond with Christ which is irreparably compromised.” That said, it is important to highlight that the tradition from the patristic era right up to the Council of Trent could be a necessary corrective to the practice of excessive heavy-handling on many theologians on the part of the magisterium. In Trent, for example, the theologians first took the floor and debated the issue under consideration, while the bishops listened. Thereafter, the bishops were able to make up their minds as pastors of the Church. Without the theologian, Catholic thought risked becoming ossified, locked in a hovel of crippling irrationalism and paralyzing obscurantism. Without the magisterium, chaos could become the order of the day. The Church needs the two wings of the theologian and the magisterium to fly to the divine heights that faith demands. Sometimes the flight might be rough. But the flight cannot take place with a single wing.

The third issue that formed Ratzinger’s relationship to the Council was the image of the faith of the simple people. Here again, one finds another clear Augustinian influence on Ratzinger – recall Augustine’s praise for Monica’s simple faith. As Jim Corkery observes in reference to Ratzinger:

Augustine’s extolling of the humble believer over the proud philosopher surfaces repeatedly; and the point is frequently made that it is not proud philosophical insight, but humble, purifying faith that is needed for knowledge of the truth, for knowledge of God.\(^{146}\)

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In this primacy of the faith of the simple, Bonaventure’s influence on Ratzinger is also clearly evident. Ratzinger recalls how Bonaventure, on seeing an elderly woman of deep faith, once exclaimed to his astonished brethren that this woman actually possessed more wisdom than the greatest scholars. Based on Augustine and Bonaventure, therefore, Ratzinger’s clear anxiety was that Christianity was fast becoming a thing of the experts. In a 1996 address to the doctrinal commissions of the Bishops’ Conferences of Latin America, Ratzinger cautioned:

> It seems to me that the questions from exegesis and the limits and possibilities of our reason, that is, the philosophical premises of the faith, indicate in fact the crucial point of the crisis of contemporary theology whereby the faith – and more and more the faith of simple persons as well – is heading towards crisis.

The preservation of this faith of the simple will increasingly become a leitmotif for Ratzinger, for as he argues, “the organ for seeing God is the heart. The intellect alone is not enough.” Could it be that this language of the “faith of the simple” was a tool that prevented adults from thinking as adults in the formation of faith? Was this “faith of the simple” a way of preserving an infantilized “adult faith” that excluded critical thinking from decision making in the Church? His critics seem to think so.

Precisely because truth, faith and love is a genuine spiritual encounter and experience of the believer with the risen Christ, Ratzinger saw as fundamental the protection of that religious experience of the simple, especially from dry intellectualism. In the final analysis, he writes:

> The Church lives, in sad as well as joyous times, from the faith of those who are simple of heart. It was they who passed the torch of hope on to the New Testament (...) Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary. The faith of those who are simple of heart is the most precious treasure of the Church. To serve and to live this faith is the noblest vocation in the renewal of the Church.

In a world hostile to the Christian experiment on many fronts, Ratzinger believes that the future of Christianity lies not primarily with the libraries of books which Christian

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reflection has produced, important as these are to giving an account of Christianity, but with this witnessing community of simple and clear faith, a creative majority.

To Ratzinger, this faith of the simple has almost a quasi-divine and revelatory status, in that it is the spectrum of operation of God and God’s interaction with humanity. He puzzlingly remarks that “not to be encompassed by the greatest, but to let oneself be encompassed by the smallest – that is divine.”¹⁵¹ This clear primacy of the little over the great, of the last over the first, fits Ratzinger’s narrative of divine love. He says:

In a world that in the last analysis is not mathematics but love, the minimum is a maximum; the smallest thing that can love is one of the biggest things; the particular is more than the universal; the person, the unique and unrepeatable, is at the same time the ultimate and highest things.¹⁵² Clearly here, the faith of the little ones has become for Ratzinger, a summons to theological personalism, with obvious implications for the inherent dignity of every man, woman and child, especially the children, the physical little ones of the Lord. It also points to the plurality that marks Christian thought, such as the very being of God, who is a community of persons. Theological personalism is not just an ecclesiological category. It points to the very being of God, to the community of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The personalism of the little ones of the faith, is paradigmatic of the personalism of the God of Jesus Christ. Ratzinger observes:

The Christian faith brings us exactly that consolation, that God is so great that he can become small. And that is actually for me the unexpected and previously inconceivable greatness of God that he is able to bow down so low. That he himself enters into a man, no longer merely disguises himself in him so that he can later put him aside and put on another garment, but that he becomes this man. It is just in this that we actually see the truly infinite nature of God, for this is more powerful, more inconceivable than anything else, and at the same time more saving.¹⁵³

Clearly, therefore, the simple and little ones constitute a deep theological inspiration and fulcrum for Ratzinger, since they embody the form that God has taken in saving

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¹⁵¹ Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity, 159.
¹⁵² Ibid.160.
¹⁵³ Ratzinger, God and the World, 31.
the world, which is, the kenosis, the self-emptying of God which is the act of the incarnation of God’s Son in history, at the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4). God is great and small! His critics have argued that the way some theologians were treated under Ratzinger’s watch at the CDF did not reflect this spirit of loving service of the little ones, of self-emptying.

However, it is important to point out that this attraction of the simple faith is not coterminous with closing the door to rationality. The faith of the simple is not an irrationally blind experience. If anything, Ratzinger’s position, taken from Newman, has been a genuine and systematic attempt at pointing out that the assent of faith is not only natural but also human and calls for clear-sighted understanding. Ratzinger is quick in pointing out that “faith speaks to reason, our understanding, because it expresses truth – and because reason was created for the sake of truth. To that extent, faith without understanding is no true Christian faith.”\(^{154}\) Clearly, the goal is to maintain a simple spirit while keeping a searching, understanding mind, in encountering the faith. Ratzinger makes an equalized comment that clarifies his theological priority and sympathy:

Of course, the Church needs intellectuals too, absolutely. She needs people who will put their spiritual powers at her disposal. She also needs generous wealthy people, who want to place the power of wealth at the service of what is good. But she still lives also on the enormous strength of those people who are humble believers. In this sense the great host of those who need love and who give love is indeed her true treasure: simple people who are capable of truth because, as the Lord says, they have remained children. Through all the changes of history they have retained their perception of what is essential and have kept alive in the Church the spirit of humility and of love.\(^{155}\)

In this context, one notices a new insight about the simple and lowly believer: the capacity and almost spontaneity to love and be receptive to the promptings and invitations of God. The simple of heart appear to be preferential receptors of the good news of Jesus Christ that they willingly transmit from one era to the next, through a

\(^{154}\) Ratzinger, *God and the World*, 47.

\(^{155}\) Ibid. 71.
witnessing of Christian love.

However, the passion to protect this simple faith sometimes aroused in Ratzinger a suspicious attitude to the genuineness of theologians he disagreed with, especially when Christological and Ecclesiological questions were concerned. He found it difficult to see that those who understood differently the dynamics of the home of the Church still felt the Church was that home, only that it needed perhaps, more windows for more air to come in and go out.

3.5 The Church as a Community of Love

For someone known previously as the panzer cardinal, Benedict XVI’s first encyclical took even his critics by surprise. Deus Caritas Est provides the basis for considering the applicability of Ratzinger’s ecclesiology. From the previous chapters, it should come as no surprise to any Ratzinger reader when one draws the conclusion that the Church is a mission of love, symbolized in coming forth from the pierced heart of Jesus, the Lamb of God who poured out his life for love of the world. It is by contemplating the pierced side of Christ that we begin to understand the mission of love that the Church essentially is and called to be. Love is the DNA of the Church, making the Church a mission of love, a mission that invites women and men to a new way of life, of love and truth:

In the meek and humble Heart of the Lord Jesus – the Heart ablaze with love, as the wisdom of tradition has taught us to invoke him – is found the full manifestation of the truth of God and man and woman, the center of our faith: Truth-Love. Love is therefore the heart of the Church’s existence, not in some external institutional sense, but in the sense that each Christian is challenged to put on love (Col. 3:14), for God is love (1 Jn. 4:8).

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The implications of the Church as a mission of love are inviting and challenging, especially when one recalls the many instances that the Church has not lived up to this ideal of love, both in the internal life of the Church, such as its treatment of women, those it considered heretics, the Jews, the burning of witches, the destruction of indigenous peoples and cultures in the process of evangelization, the role of the Church in colonialism and other historical epochal events like the slave trade and the holocaust. For an institution whose primary law is the law of love, one shudders at how far afield the Church went in these and other similar incidences.

However, to say that the Church is a mission of love, based on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology, implies that the starting point for understanding the Church in the world is the human person, strange as this might sound. There cannot be any separation between what is truly human and truly Christian. Love is the language of humanity. Love is the language that opens humanity to itself and to creation at large. As Vatican II rightly observed, “Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men.” In other words, Christianity is in the highest interests of human beings because at the heart of Christian anthropology is a creative love that sees the totality of the human being, material and spiritual.

Though Ratzinger argued for the primacy of love as shaping the identity of the human being and the Christian community, he once again succumbed to Augustine, this time, on the pessimism of the human person and his or her potentials. He frequently quoted Luther’s theology of the cross that prioritized grace over human achievement. To Ratzinger, though the human person is made for love and lives for love, human nature is inherently selfish and sinful. In 1985, Ratzinger told an interviewer that were he to retire as Prefect of CDF, he would return to the university

and devote the remainder of his life to writing about original sin, for “the inability to understand ‘original sin’ and to make it understandable is really one of the most difficult problems of present day theology and pastoral ministry.”

Perhaps this sober, pessimistic Augustinian vision helps explain Ratzinger’s lack of enthusiasm for Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.

Ratzinger contrasted “the very plausible idea of man (and woman) as a being called to subdue the world and free to decide his (or her) own fate with the Christological idea that man (and woman) are saved by Christ alone.” This risked the faith becoming a recondite philosophy. Thomas Rausch, S.J., makes a telling remark: “In criticizing the schema for an almost naïve optimism, Ratzinger was touching on a theme that would come to dominate his thought when he moved from the university to Rome.”

Ratzinger’s Neo-Augustinianism never left him, as he continued to see the world as the realm touched by sin, always in contrast to that of grace. He called *Gaudium et Spes* a counter syllabus to the famous Syllabus of Errors of Pius IX (1864). For Ratzinger, therefore, large portions of *Gaudium et Spes* represented an attempt by the Council to reconcile with modernity, a fatal attempt that Ratzinger would challenge till the very end of his academic career.

Another area wherein Ratzinger’s Augustinianism came to the fore was Ratzinger’s theological clash with a close friend of his, Karl Rahner. He opposed Rahner’s position that what is truly human is truly Christian, seeing it as the collapsing of God’s unique revelation in Christ into a more general revelation accessible to human reflection. To Ratzinger, this does not only deny the uniqueness of Christianity but also negates the witness of Scripture on the fallen state of man.

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161 Rausch, 50.

162 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 381.
humanity. He argues, “Man and woman are what they ought to be only by conversion, that is, when they cease to be what they are (...) A Christianity that is no more than a reflected universality may be innocuous, but is it not also superfluous? Consequently, the call to conversion takes precedence over the self-affirmation of the human person. The influence of Augustine here could not be more obvious. Jim Corkery’s comment is on the spot:

Ratzinger’s anthropological writings embody a distinctive position, a definite ‘take,’ on the relationship between nature and grace. This position emphasizes discontinuity over continuity; it indicates that the way of grace is the way of the cross; it puts the stress on grace healing and transforming nature (gratia sanans) more than on grace elevating and perfecting nature (gratia elevans). In itself, this is unsurprising, given Ratzinger’s preference for Augustine and Bonaventure over Aquinas. Thus, Ratzinger’s rejection of Rahner’s exultation of human nature is rooted in his Augustinian and Bonaventurian background, a position that placed him at odds with the dominant Western world that prided and exalted the human spirit. Notwithstanding, one would imagine that an important task for theology today is to let the men and women see the inherent beauty that comes with the gift of bodylines, with the total gift of life and to joyfully accept that gift. I know that I am a person loved by a creative God. I am grateful for being a human being, for the gift of my person. I am grateful that I am body and soul, man and woman, individual and community. The Christian message of love is therefore significantly anthropological.

3.6 Rediscovering the Centrality of Love in Eucharistic Theology

Ratzinger’s encounter with Augustine led him to develop a Eucharistic ecclesiology, as seen in the first section of chapter two. As Pope, he penned Sacramentum Caritatis, which emphasized the intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the Church: the Eucharist builds up the Church and the Church makes the

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163 Ratzinger, Principles of Catholic Theology, 166.
164 Corkery, 16.
Eucharist. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict taught that agape is another name for Eucharist and that in the Eucharist, “God’s own agape comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us (…) A Eucharist that does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.” The challenge today for ecclesiology is to translate this Eucharistic consciousness into daily living. The urgency of this challenge varies in the different parts of the global Church.

In Africa, for example, the challenge for Eucharistic ecclesiology is the promotion of justice, peace and reconciliation in a continent that has seen and continues to see tribal and national conflicts. What does it mean to celebrate the Eucharist in the context of the Rwandan genocide, the onslaught of the Boko Haram militant Islam in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic? What hopes does the celebration of the Eucharist bring to the many women who are daily raped in the North Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo? What does the Eucharist mean for Christians in Somalia? To live out the theology of Eucharistic *Caritas* in these contexts poses huge challenges for ecclesiological reflections.

Added to this atmosphere of violence is the growing trend of secularism that has already engulfed large parts of the Western world. Theology today cannot avoid the question of secularism and its different manifestations that seek not just to limit religion to freedom of worship, but also to quarantine its education and social influences to the barest minimum. The comment of Rodney Howsare is very forceful:

> It was obviously not that God had once been alive and had now died, nor was it even that most people had ceased to believe in God; it was that thought and action were not taking place in a world for which the God question made no real difference.

The Eucharist and the question of God in a context of militant secularism need to

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draw from the transformative potentials of Eucharistic ecclesiology.

St. Augustine made this observation in the *Confessions*: “Eat the bread of the strong, and yet you will not change me into yourself; rather, I will transform you into me.”\(^\text{168}\) Owing to the possibility of this spiritual transformation by Christ of the recipient of the Eucharist, the communicant is joined to other communicants, even if one does not readily like the other: “When I am united with Christ, I am also united with my neighbor, (…), in the everyday experiences of being with others and standing by others.”\(^\text{169}\) This gives the Eucharist a social dimension, for by becoming one with the other, I get involved in their life situations, in their *Weltanschauung*, thereby validating my love for Jesus Christ. It is very telling that the great socially committed saints such as Martin de Porres, Teresa of Calcutta, John of God, were great Eucharistic saints as well.

In addition, because the matter of the Eucharist, bread and wine, reflect the fruits of the world, in the light of the doctrine of creation, the world takes on a symbolic meaning in Eucharistic theology. The bread and wine, the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands, retain its dignity inasmuch as it is understood as a sign of God’s love. Eucharistic ecclesiology is essentially one of God’s love encountered in the self-giving of Jesus Christ, a love that keeps the window of the world open to God’s liberating breeze.

Another significant aspect of Eucharistic ecclesiology is that of the intrinsic unity of the Church. As Ratzinger says, “the Church does not arise from a loose federation of communities. She originates in the one bread, in the one Lord, and thanks to him she is first and foremost and everywhere the one and only Church, the

\(^{168}\) Augustine, *The Confessions*, VII, x, 16.
one body that comes from the one bread.”

Precisely because she emanates from the one bread of Christ, the unity of the Church transcends any human inventiveness.

A further noteworthy aspect of Eucharistic ecclesiology is the transformative potential that the Eucharist could unleash in the Church. Ratzinger points out five transformations that come about with the Eucharist: the bread of earth becomes the bread of God; secondly, through Jesus’ act of self-giving love, the violence of death, of the act of killing, is transformed and conquered by love; thirdly, by partaking in the one bread and one cup, men and women are transformed by Christ’s life-giving spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), in the sense that bodily existence and self-giving are no longer mutually exclusive but complimentary. To live is to be a self-gift. Fourthly, these transformed men and women become united in the new life of the resurrection; and finally, through this new united persons, all of creation must be transformed, become new, “that God may be everything to everyone” (1 Cor. 15:28), hence the missionary dimension of Eucharistic transformation. In a word, the Eucharist is an ongoing process of transformation, from what we are to what we are called to be in Christ.

This chapter has highlighted some themes that have emerged from the study of Ratzinger from the perspective of his Bavarian, Augustinian and Bonaventurian backgrounds: A healthy balance between faith and reason in all cultures; the question about how the Church ought to worship, which is liturgical theology; the question of political theology; the question of change and the development of doctrine; the question about the centrality of love in the life communion of the Church; and the question about the effective and affective presence of the Eucharist, are all questions that the Church of today continues to grapple with. The conclusions drawn from analyzing Ratzinger’s ecclesiology from the perspective of Bavaria, Augustine and

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170 Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, 118.
171 Ibid. 125 – 128.
Bonaventure will definitely not obtain universal acclaim. That would be far too ambitious a goal. This thesis has tried to understand Joseph Ratzinger in the light of the convictions that formed and defined him, in order to make sense of his ministry and momentous resignation of the papacy, his most likely enduring act.
Conclusion The Enduring Legacy of Benedict’s Resignation of the Papacy

Simon, Son of John, Do you Love me more than these others? (Jn. 21:15)

The scope and outcome of this thesis has definitely outpaced my initial thinking. Writing on a prolific figure like Joseph Ratzinger has its merits, one of which is the volume of available material on the subject. The downside of it is the ability to discern just what is necessary for the topic under consideration. An eclectic mind is crucial for any research on Ratzinger. Like all academic undertakings, this thesis bears a subjective element in accordance with the intention stated at the beginning, which is that of understanding the ecclesiological convictions of Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger of Bavaria, now simply Father Benedict, his preferred form of address.

This thesis has basically done three things. Chapter One has shown the influence of Ratzinger’s Bavarian cum Euro-centric background on his theology. Chapter Two treated the impact that Augustine and Bonaventure had on the ecclesiological formation of Ratzinger, and how that played out in certain theological attitudes that are crucial in understanding the ecclesiology of Ratzinger, the summit of which has been the understanding of the Church as the place of the encounter of love and truth in Jesus of Nazareth, an encounter that makes the Church a mission to the world. Chapter Three reflected on the theological insights and encounters that played out from Bavaria, Augustine and Bonaventure, and how Ratzinger sometimes proceeded in ways that were not always viewed positively by others in and out of the Church. This thesis would have achieved its aim if it helps the reader to understand in a more personal and profound manner, the ambivalence and eccentricism that marked the life of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. He is a disciple of Jesus Christ who firmly believes that Jesus is present in the history of the Church, the community gathered
around the risen Christ, with Christ at the center, following Bonaventure. He is convinced that this Church must always maintain a counter-cultural approach to the world, because the world is a fallen world in need of redemption by Christ, following Augustine. Above all, Ratzinger is convinced that the final destiny of the world and the Church is the triumph of Christ, the victory of the Lamb that was slain. It is the crucified One that emerges victorious, not the crucifiers. A man with such convictions, having reflected before God, could make the decision to step aside, because Ratzinger knew that it is Christ who is guiding the Church, and precisely because of Christ’s presence in the Church, the bark of Peter will continue to float, until the angel of the Apocalypse announces the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1). Beyond all other reasons, only a man with deep faith that the Church is in God’s hands could have made the decision that Ratzinger made, on February 11, 2013. Ratzinger’s resignation was an act of faith in Christ’s abiding presence in the Church. In fidelity to Bonaventure, Ratzinger believed that Christ is the center of the Church, and Christ will always hold the Church even when the Church faces the stormy waters of persecution, ridicule and rejection.

In Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger, Roman Catholicism had one of the greatest and finest theologians in centuries on the Chair of Peter. However, for all his intelligence, deep piety and holiness of life, Ratzinger never quite managed to contend with the bureaucratic challenges of administration that fatefully let him down on several occasions. Given Ratzinger’s respect for historical precedent and the sacramental nature of the Petrine office and the Church, Ratzinger’s decision to resign the Papal Ministry must have been a great wrestling match of conscience.

His resignation speaks of an uncommon courage and humility. By walking away from the ephemeral in favor of the spiritual “a life dedicated to prayer”, 
Benedict set a template for true leadership, not only in the spiritual world but in the secular too. Benedict’s renunciation of the papacy, in my view, created a new imagination of ministry in the Catholic Church. He showed that ministry was much more primary to the symbolic meaning of the office. He recast, in a more fundamental yet gentle way, the original commission of Christ to the apostles to preach the gospel to the ends of the world. The ministry of Peter was meant to serve the Church, and not the other way round! His resignation, while quite permissible from a theological and canonical standpoint, is nonetheless extremely revolutionary from a historical perspective. It represents a serious break with tradition insofar as the Chair of Peter has now become an office that can be judged by the same criteria by which modernity judges political office. Essentially, the papacy now runs the risk of having its image stripped of its sacredness in the eyes of the secular world.

Despite this continuing trend toward modernity, Benedict in his address to the clergy of the Rome Diocese on February 14, 2013, assured Catholics that 50 years after Vatican II, “the strength of the real Council has been revealed...and is becoming the real power, which is also true reform, true renewal of the Church.” But there are few if any signs of this new revival.

His resignation also brought to the world-stage the value of prayer, often overlooked in a post-modern mentality that is largely materialistic and empirical. It could very well mean that he has exchanged the Petrine ministry of governance for the Johannine ministry of prayer and contemplation, perhaps conscious that prayer and fasting are the only ways to triumph over the forces of evil that seek to engulf our world (Matt. 17:21). The value of prayer in the evangelical mission of the Church got a shot in the arm from Benedict’s resignation. His candour in admitting that, ‘my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the
Petrine ministry’ is worthy of commendation and his example without a parallel. By renouncing papal power to take up prayer, Benedict has shown that even though Jesus and the Church are not separable, they are not simply identifiable with each other, and that for the Christian, Christ could make more radical demands than the Church, especially the demand of letting go of all for Christ, especially that which we price as valuable to our ego and worth.

Between a choice to remain in high office though frail, and incapable of providing effective leadership, and the sacrifice to stand down for a more able shepherd, Benedict chose the latter. By putting the common good above self-interest, Benedict demonstrated that he has conquered the self; indeed, he has waged and won the first and the greatest of human struggles. Benedict, an intellectual of no mean order, read the signs correctly that, “today’s world, (is) subject to so many rapid changes and shaken by questions of deep relevance for the life of faith…”

In modo interiore, Ratzinger’s resignation was certainly a deeply emotional moment for me. How could such a man whose works have deeply influenced my faith and the formation of my person, especially my vocation to the priesthood, resign? I looked at all the books of Ratzinger that I had acquired through the years of my seminary formation, and everything appeared meaningless to me. Going through the research work of this thesis has been a profound katabatic and anabatic experience of purification and conversion from my own ego, to embracing that unattractive and yet, necessary path of letting go, of choosing the small, the useless, the idiota, which is the vocation of every genuine Ratzingerian. It has been like a retreat on love, in which I have discovered once more, the truths of those words of St. John: God so loved the world so much that he sent his only Son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16). And I have learnt that this life of the love of
God always entails the going out of the self, *ex-sistere*, whose ultimate signification is the embrace of the Cross, trusting that beyond the Cross is the experience of the Resurrection, that historicity of God’s eschatological action, which is the “perfect tense” of history. With the Resurrection, God has vindicated the vision of Jesus of Nazareth against the ideologies of political messianism and apocalyptic mythologies that dominated the Greco-Roman world. The relevance of the Church, that body in which the Word has become love and truth in the midst of the world, lies in the Church’s offering of this “perfect tense” Christic-vision as a “present tense” to the contemporary world. This encapsulates the ecclesiology of Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger of Bavaria.

At 8 p.m. on Feb. 28, 2013, Benedict XVI stepped down from the papal throne, less than three weeks after announcing his resignation. Earlier that evening, Father Benedict, as he now prefers to be called, stood from the balcony of Castel Gandolfo's papal residence, overlooking the thousands who had filled the lake town's small main square: "I wish still with my heart, my love, my prayer, my reflection, with all my inner strength, to work for the common good and the good of the Church and of humanity," Benedict told the crowds in off-the-cuff remarks just hours before his resignation would take effect.

As I watched Benedict on that window, words he had written earlier came to my mind: “Man is such that he cannot stand the person who is wholly good, truly upright, truly loving, the person who does evil to no one (…) People will crucify anyone who is really and fully human. Such is man. And such am I.”

It could very well be that his renunciation of papal power and embrace of the new position at the foot of the cross in prayer, for the good of the Church and the world, was the most

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172 Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 121.
fitting pattern of bringing to a close a life lived for God.

In this period of clear suffering for Ratzinger, the serenity and God-like courage which he displayed, showed once more, that the assistance from above is never lacking to the Just One. Only in standing hopelessly before God, is God’s true power allowed to shine more brightly. The grain of wheat must always die in order to bear fruit. One who lives for God must suffer. One who lives for God must be rejected. One who lives for God must be cast out. Such is the lot of the Just One, for justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, love and hate, beauty and ugliness, must have their time, especially in the life of the Church. And to love the Church entails being ready to suffer from and for her. In the life of the One who lives for God, justice, truth, love, and beauty are realized in the eschaton of the now, awaiting that consummation of the ages, when the Angel of the Apocalypse will sound the last trumpet, declaring, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

Deriving from this, it may be said that any man worth the honor of leading at any level must have the humility, the courage, and the selflessness to, in a manner of speaking, walk away from it all. It is in this context then that it can be said that, like great men who define real greatness by changing the spirit of their age, Joseph Ratzinger, by his decision to resign from the Papacy, altered the spirit of the age and defined in practical terms, the true meaning of leadership, for the Church and for the world.

Ratzinger’s world might have been best situated besides the Sea of Galilee, where together with his predecessor, Simon the Fisherman, this son of Bavaria heard the Lord Jesus, the love and meaning of his life say to him, “Feed my Lambs; Feed my Sheep” (Jn. 21: 15 – 17). If Ratzinger is declared a Doctor of the Church a
hundred years from today, it will be because the Church of the ages would have recognized in this Bavarian, a firm believer in God’s love, truth, goodness and beauty, with a rare gifted intellect - a gift that he placed at the service of the Church with all his generosity, his human limitations notwithstanding. It is Ratzinger, the soft-spoken and holy master of the faith that will continue to speak to the hearts of those who will encounter Jesus Christ, the Yes of God, in his body, the Church, her weaknesses notwithstanding, and by so doing, find the decisive path for their lives, Christ Our Joy, - the shibboleth of his prolific theological vocation.
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