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Christological “Once for All” of the Revelation versus Marian Dogmas in Joseph Ratzinger’s Theology¹

Chrystologiczne „raz jeden” objawienia a dogmaty maryjne w teologii Josepha Ratzingera

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to show Marian dogmas in their relationship to Scripture as a testimony of revelation and to Tradition. In the first part, the author clarifies Ratzinger’s account of the relationship between the uniqueness of revelation in Christ and its continuity, as well as the links between Scripture preserving the “once for all” of revelation with Tradition, in which revelation is always present. The second part addresses the question of the Church’s memory, in which the Holy Spirit, guiding to all truth, also revealed the Marian aspect of revelation. Furthermore, the dynamic concept of Tradition demanded by the promulgation of the Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950 is presented. In the last and most important part of the article, the author extracted from the work of the Bavarian theologian those contents of Mariology which, originating from the seeds of the inspired texts, shed light on the “once” of revelation and its testimony in Scripture. The example of Marian dogmas serves the purpose of outlining the creative though strained relationship between the two poles of revelation: uniqueness and continuity.

KEYWORDS: Marian dogmas, Mariology, “once for all” of revelation, continuity of revelation, dynamic concept of Tradition, Scripture versus Tradition, revelation versus Scripture, Immaculate Conception, Assumption, Christology versus Mariology

ABSTRAKT: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie dogmatów maryjnych w ich związku z Pismem Świętym jako świadectwem Objawienia oraz z Tradycją. Najpierw przedstawiono

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Ratzingera ujęcie relacji między jednorazowością Objawienia w Chrystusie a jego ciągłością oraz więzi między Pismem chroniącym „raz jeden” Objawienia a Tradycją, w której Objawienie pozostaje zawsze teraźniejsze. Następnie zaprezentowana została kwestia pamięci Kościoła, w której Duch Święty prowadzący do pełni prawdy odsłonił również maryjny wymiar Objawienia. Kolejno przedstawiono dynamiczną koncepcję Tradycji, jakiej domaga się ogłoszenie dogmatów maryjnych z 1854 i 1950 roku. W ostatniej i najważniejszej części artykułu wydobyto z twórczości bawarskiego teologa te treści mariologii, które wyrósłszy z ziarna tekstów natchnionych, rzucają światło na „raz jeden” Objawienia oraz jego świadectwo w Piśmie. Na przykładzie dogmatów maryjnych zarysowano twórczy i niewolny od napięć stosunek dwóch biegunów Objawienia, jednorazowości i ciągłości.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: dogmaty maryjne, mariologia, „raz jeden” Objawienia, ciągłość Objawienia, dynamiczna koncepcja Tradycji, Pismo Święte a Tradycja, Objawienie a Pismo Święte, Niepokalane Poczęcie, Wniebowzięcie, chrystologia a mariologia

Introduction

Joseph Ratzinger's work attracted a widespread interest, which resulted in numerous publications whose authors endeavoured to characterise the most salient features of his Mariology. By way of an example, the following authors undertook research that corresponds with the topic explored in this article.

Mary Frances McKenna focused on “the female line in the Bible,” an important theme in Ratzinger's Mariology. The female line runs parallel to the masculine line and is indispensable for the realisation of salvation history. The author found that Ratzinger's reflections expand the understanding of salvation history presented in *Dei Verbum*, and even develop the ecclesial Tradition. Biblical women were portrayed by the German theologian as representatives of Israel and the Church. McKenna emphasised that Ratzinger wished to point out the proper place of Mariology and Marian devotion in Catholic theology and faith. She also accentuated that due to the perspective adopted by Ratzinger other important theological issues concerning not only Mariology, but also Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology or the interpretation of Scripture can be addressed.²

Rainer Hangler extracted from Ratzinger's work the significance of locating the reflection on the Mother of the Lord within the whole of the Christian

² M.F. McKenna, *Innovation within Tradition: Joseph Ratzinger and Reading the Women of Scripture*, Minneapolis, MN 2015; cf. also M.F. McKenna, *The Female Line in the Bible: Ratzinger's Deepening of the Church's Understanding of Tradition and Mary*, “Religions” 11/6 (2020), article no. 310.

faith. He emphasised that the Bavarian theologian read the New Testament Marian texts against the background of the female protagonists of Old Testament salvation history. Mary becomes a personification for both the chosen people and the Church.³

Boris Vulić, analysing Ratzinger's heritage, drew attention to the relationship of Marian dogmas to Scripture, mainly to the Old Testament theology of woman and the People of God. Ratzinger's fundamental biblical and Marian thesis is the personal concretisation of Israel and the Ecclesia in Mary. In order to demonstrate the harmony of Marian dogmas with revelation, it is necessary to read Scripture in its unity and totality (canonical exegesis), taking into account the Christological centre, as well as interpret it in line with the Tradition of the Church and the analogy of faith and typology.⁴

Jerzy Szymik considers the most original feature of Ratzinger's Mariology to be the link between Marian devotion and cordiality. Marian Christocentric piety is a way of the heart, not of distanced rationalism. The rightful place restored to Mary in theology and spirituality makes it possible, at the same time, to restore the full truth about God, Christ, the Church (with its Marian and not only Petrine dimension) and man. Mariological content, Szymik claims, is organised by the Bavarian theologian around two pairs of concepts: grace-faith and Christology-ecclesiology. The Mary-Church relations (Ratzinger writes about the transitivity of the mystery of Mary and the Ecclesia) is a consequence of the Mary-Christ relation. Mary is the daughter of Zion, the fruit of the piety of the People of the Covenant.⁵

Adam Wojtczak highlighted the roots of Ratzinger's methodology in Scripture interpreted as a whole and in patristic thought, as well as the organic connection with the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, especially its perspective on the history of salvation. Among the motifs typical of the Mariological reflection of Benedict XVI, he included the lineage of women in Scripture and the Church, which, starting from the women of Israel, finds fulfilment in Mary. Wojtczak finds inspiring the typological interpretation of Mary as the "Daughter of Zion," who is a model of fidelity to the word of God.⁶

³ R. Hangler, *Die Mariologie von Joseph Ratzinger/Papst Em. Benedikt XVI. Ein Überblick*, "Studia Nauk Teologicznych" 12 (2017), pp. 113–129.

⁴ B. Vulić, *Marija, Kristova majka, u svjetlu jedinstva i harmonije Svetoga pisma u misli J. Ratzinger / Benedikta XVI*, "Diacovensia" 27/3 (2019), pp. 453–474.

⁵ J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, vol. 3, Katowice 2015, pp. 221–242.

⁶ A. Wojtczak, *The Characteristic Aspects of Benedict XVI's Teachings on Mary*, "Gregorianum" 95/2 (2014), pp. 327–348.

This article is intended as part of the research on Ratzinger's understanding of Mariology and its place in the whole of theological reflection,⁷ though from a different perspective. The author aims to show Marian dogmas (or more broadly, Marian doctrine and cult) in their relationship to Scripture as a testimony of revelation and to Tradition. The Bavarian theologian emphasised the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ ("yesterday" of revelation) and, at the same time, pointed to the persistence of revelation ("today" of revelation) in the entity that received revelation on its pilgrimage through history, namely the Church. This raises the question about the relation between Marian dogmas and the Christological dimension of revelation, and between these dogmas that could only appear in the Tradition of the Church and Scripture securing the "once for all" of revelation in Christ.

In the first section, I will present Ratzinger's concept of the relation between the uniqueness of revelation and its continuity, while in the second I will show his understanding of the bond between Scripture securing the uniqueness of revelation and Tradition ensuring its continuity. In the next section, I will address the important question of the Church's memory, in which the Marian dimension of revelation could be recognised. The promulgation of the last two Marian dogmas demands a dynamic approach to Tradition, which will become the content of the fourth section. In the final section, which seems the most important for the research topic, I will answer the question of how Marian doctrine protects the message of Scripture and at the same time reveals what could not be discovered on the basis of *sola Scriptura*. In this way, using the example of Marian dogmas, the creative though strained relationship between the two poles of revelation, the uniqueness and continuity, will be outlined, in which the structure of dynamically approached Tradition will be manifested.

The "once," or "once for all," of revelation in Christ

Ratzinger, having researched the documents of the Fathers of the Council of Trent and the Tridentinum,⁸ came to the conclusion that they retained the same direction that was previously typical of patristic and medieval theology; the latter the Bavarian theologian had learnt while studying St Bonaventure's

⁷ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole*, "Communio" [English edition] 30/1 (2003), pp. 147–160.

⁸ Cf. H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum. Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lebrentscheidungen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2009, nos. 1501–1505 [hereinafter cited as DH].

concept of revelation.⁹ According to this traditional vision (not without the significant influence of Ratzinger as a conciliar expert), rediscovered at the Second Vatican Council, revelation signifies the approach of God to man and is "greater than what was merely written down," also greater than the words of Scripture, while Scripture is the significant witness to revelation.¹⁰ This approach left room for the ongoing revelation of the Holy Spirit working in the Church over time.

Ratzinger noted that St Benedict's conviction that all monks should participate in the community, since the Lord can reveal even to the younger what is better, served in the Middle Ages not only to delimit the principle of *auctoritas*, but also expressed the belief in the actuality of revelation. The revelation has its *palai*, but it also has its "today" related with the activity of the Holy Spirit present in the Church "today." From the perspective of faith, the primeval event is obligatory and authoritative, but not because of historical antecedence, but because of the action of God manifested in it. This, in turn, also has its ongoing presence, which remains in a dynamic and constantly redefined relation with the primeval event.¹¹

⁹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *A Life*, vol. 1: *Youth in Nazi Germany to the Second Vatican Council 1927–1965*, transl. D. Livingstone, London 2020, pp. 336, 349 (Polish translation: J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, transl. W. Wiśniowski, Częstochowa 2005, pp. 80, 106).

¹⁰ J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *A Life...*, op. cit., pp. 349–351 (J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., pp. 106–107); cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, San Francisco, CA 2002, p. 153 (Polish translation: J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat. Wiara i życie w dzisiejszych czasach. Z kardynałem Josephem Ratzingerem Benedyktem XVI rozmawia Peter Seewald*, transl. G. Sowinski, Kraków 2001, pp. 139–140); J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji. Teologiczna nauka o zasadach* [Faith in Scripture and Tradition. A Theological Teaching on the Principles], vol. 2, Series: Opera Omnia 9/2, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. J. Merecki, Lublin 2018, p. 718 [hereafter referred to as JRO 9/2]; T. Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Oxford 2008, p. 50: "Moreover, Ratzinger underscored the principle that *actio* (action) is an antecedent to *verbum* (speech), reality to the tidings of it. For him it is important to understand that the level of reality of the Revelation event is deeper than that of the proclamation event, which seeks to interpret God's action in human language." The necessity of Tradition (and at the same time the objection to *sola Scriptura*) was derived by Ratzinger precisely from the fact of the non-identity of revelation and Scripture – cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji. Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, vol. 1, Series: Opera Omnia 9/1, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. J. Merecki, Lublin 2018, pp. 356–357 [hereinafter cited as JRO 9/1].

¹¹ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 454; R. Popowski, *Palai*, [in:] R. Popowski, *Wielki słownik grecko-polski Nowego Testamentu. Wydanie z pełną lokalizacją greckich haseł, kluczem polsko-greckim oraz indeksem form czasownikowych* [Great Greek-Polish Dictionary of the New Testament. Edition with Full Localization of Greek Entries, Polish-Greek Key and Index of Verb Forms], Warszawa 1995, pp. 456–457. An instruction from the Rule of St. Benedict

The static concept of revelation, according to which the revelation ended with the death of the last of the Apostles, had to be revised, taking into account precisely the pneumatic perspective and the historical dimension of Christianity, the young Ratzinger believed.¹² He criticised this static view precisely from the position of a historical Christian awareness that did not know it; he also accentuated its inconsistency with the message of the Bible, in which revelation is not a system of sentences, but an event of a new relationship between God and men. As such, it is both something accomplished and something happening; it is accomplished because of the fact that this relationship has been realised in Christ in the highest way, in turn it is present because this relationship is to be actualised again and again. Accepting the fact that revelation closed with the end of the apostolic era would have to lead to equating revelation with the sum of the teachings that God has given to mankind over a period of time, so that one could now only accept them by faith and draw conclusions from them.¹³

Ratzinger insisted that this view corresponds to a historical and intellectualist notion of revelation proper to modernity, which is completely erroneous. Revelation is not the sum of sentences, since the revelation is Jesus Christ himself.¹⁴ From this Christological and personalist view, it follows that one must take into account the two poles of revelation, which has its “yesterday” and its “today.” Since “God has given us his Son, himself, his whole Word,” so that he can offer nothing more, “in this sense revelation has ended”. In turn, because “the Word is God himself, and all words point to the Word,” the Word can never be just the past, yes it will be “the present and the future, and always anchor our lives in eternity and at the same time open to it”. For us Christians, “Christ is both

in the thought of St. Bonaventure becomes a dogmatic and historical axiom justifying the development of dogmas in the course of history. In his view of *revelatio*, Bonaventure also referred to St Augustine and to the New Testament letters, from which he took over, without dogmatic reflection, the charismatic concept of revelation (cf. 1 Cor 14:30 and Phil 3:15) – cf. J. Ratzinger, *Rozumienie objawienia i teologia historii według Bonawentury. Rozprawa habilitacyjna i studia nad Bonawenturą* [Understanding Revelation and the Theology of History According to Bonaventure. Habilitation Dissertation and Studies on Bonaventure], Series: Opera Omnia 2, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. J. Merecki, Lublin 2014, pp. 628–632 [hereinafter cited as JRO 2].

¹² Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 381–382, 499. Cf. DH 3421: “*Revelatio, obiectum fidei catholicae constituens, non fuit cum Apostolis completa.*” *Dei Verbum* nowhere claims that revelation ends with the death of the last of the Apostles – cf. G. Daly, *Revelation in the Theology of the Roman Catholic Church*, [in:] *Divine Revelation*, ed. P. Avis, Eugene, OR 1997, p. 37.

¹³ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 502–503.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii* [Jesus of Nazareth. Studies on Christology], vol. 2, Series: Opera Omnia 6/2, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, Lublin 2015, pp. 680–681 [hereafter referred to as JRO 6/2].

the One who has come and the One who is coming. Therefore, we believe in the Redeemer already present, and at the same time we await Him: Maranatha!"¹⁵

In Ratzinger's thought, there is a connection between the "today" of revelation and what happened "once for all" (*ephapax*),¹⁶ since the historical event happened by God's will "once for all" (cf. Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). For the Christian faith, the "yesterday" associated with the historicity of the Incarnation is just as important as the "always" resulting from the one-off/unique event retaining its present.¹⁷ Christ cannot be divided into the earthly Jesus and the Lord of glory. The beginning established in Jesus of Nazareth continues throughout human history, and it is only in the progression of history that all the possibilities of this already established encounter between man and God can unfold.¹⁸

The Bavarian theologian transposes the approach to revelation as accepted at the Council of Trent into the categories of modern theology, using for this purpose the distinction between material and formal principle. As Aaron Pidel writes, the constancy and progression of revelation are related to the fact that "revelation is fixed in its 'material principle' (*das Materialprinzip*) by virtue of the closed biblical canon, yet open in its formal principle by virtue of the canon's progressively unfolding meaning [...]."¹⁹ These statements by a Jesuit require modification. It seems characteristic of Ratzinger's work that he constantly emphasised distinction between revelation and its testimony in the form of a written (Scripture) or oral (*regula fidei*) canon. He treats the explication of revelation as the moment of closure for this "once for all" stage, and in this way the canon functions as a permanent norm for the Church throughout her history. However, if we are not to reduce revelation to a set of theses, it must be assumed that this norm is the permanent reality of revelation secured by these theses,²⁰ and not the canon itself. Ratzinger claimed that:

¹⁵ JRO 6/2, pp. 681–682.

¹⁶ Cf. R. Popowski, *Ephapax*, [in:] R. Popowski, *Wielki słownik grecko-polski Nowego Testamentu...*, op. cit., pp. 247–248.

¹⁷ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 366, 381–382, 503; B. Ferdek, *Objawienie w doktrynie kard. Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [Revelation in the Doctrine of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], "Studia Theologiae Fundamentalis" 1 (2010), pp. 174–175. Cf. H. Seweryniak, *Teologiczna droga Josepha Ratzingera – papieża i współczesnego ojca Kościoła* [The Theological Path of Joseph Ratzinger – Pope and Contemporary Father of the Church], [in:] *Niedźwiedź biskupa Korbiniana. W kręgu myśli teologicznej Benedykta XVI*, eds. H. Seweryniak, K. Sitkowska, P. Artemiuk, Płock 2011, p. 40.

¹⁸ JRO 9/1, p. 502.

¹⁹ A. Pidel, *Christi Opera Proficiunt: Ratzinger's Neo-Bonaventurian Model of Social Inspiration*, "Nova et Vetera" [English edition] 13/3 (2015), p. 703.

²⁰ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 503.

[...] Although Revelation is completed according to its material principle, it is and remains present according to its reality. In other words: we are dealing here with a view according to which, although Revelation has its ἐφάναξ, because it has been accomplished in historical facts, it also has its continuous “today”, because what has happened once remains in the faith of the Church still alive and effective, and the Christian faith never refers only to what is past, but at the same time to what is present and past.²¹

The biblical message about Jesus is not an archival confirmation of an event that could be encapsulated in that history, but is a witness to the Lord’s permanent presence in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17). The Word develops in history and at the same time is protected from human speculation insofar as it is linked to a historical basis.²²

If Jesus’ preaching already constituted an interpretation of Scripture by virtue of his authority, all the more so must ecclesiastical preaching retain the character of interpretation. Tradition is therefore “bound” by the original event and its written testimony under inspiration. The Church, by virtue of the Lord’s spiritual authority, continues to interpret Scripture – not merely through exegesis, but in faith, worship and life. Ratzinger takes into account both the importance of the Church’s authoritative office, which draws its power from the presence of the Spirit and the “present” with Christ, and emphasises the right of the office of Scripture’s testimony drawing its solemnity from the “once for all” of salvation history.²³ The function of the “office” of Scripture in this double criteriology is worth emphasising here – Ratzinger points to the understandable *littera scripturae* as an important criterion in maintaining the balance between “yesterday” and “today.” While it is not absolute, it is a relatively independent criterion:

What can be unequivocally discerned scientifically or in a simple reading in the Scriptures functions as the real criterion to which the statements of the Teaching Office must also be subjected. What is at stake here, of course, is the fundamental component, knowledge, which is not the judge of faith, but which also exists in faith as a critical instance and, as such, has an essential task: to take care of the purity of the ἐφάναξ, of the testimony once given, to defend

²¹ JRO 9/1, p. 382.

²² Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 386.

²³ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 366. Cf. Y. Congar, *Tradycja i tradycje* [The Tradition and Traditions], vol. 2: *Esej teologiczny* [Theological Essay], transl. A. Ziernicki, Poznań–Warszawa 2022, p. 250.

the *sarx* of history against the arbitrariness of gnosis, which wants to become independent again and again.²⁴

In the Magisterium of the Church, one should not see a "second" authority existing "alongside" Scripture; indeed, this office belongs intrinsically to Scripture. According to Ratzinger, the *viva vox* of the Church, for which Scripture is the measure and boundary, safeguards Scripture from manipulation, protects its perspicuity (*perspicuitas*) and the authority of its reliable response to divine revelation.²⁵ Thus, *vis-à-vis* the Church and the word of God, there are two moments: (i) the Church is the place where the word of God mediated by the Church lives; (ii) the Church stands *vis-à-vis* the received word of God, which becomes the basis of its existence. It is both a word within and above the Church, and thus becomes the critical instance for a particular form of ecclesial existence. Therefore, as Ratzinger writes, the empirical form of the Church, its *hic et nunc*, must be assessed in the light of the universal Church (the Church of all times and places) and above all from the perspective of the exemplary expression of the Church's faith in Scripture. In order to place her "body" at the disposal of the word of God, the Church should submit herself to his judgement.²⁶

²⁴ JRO 9/1, p. 367. cf. N. Bossu, S. Advani, *Resolving the Dualism between Exegesis and Theology: Joseph Ratzinger and the Rediscovery of Tradition. A Case Study of the Purification of the Temple (Jn 2:13–25), "Alpha Omega" 23/1 (2020)*, pp. 76–77. Thus, Luther's desired independence of Scripture as an unambiguous criterion versus the Church in some sense exists, which should find its due place in Catholic theology – cf. JRO 9/1, p. 366. In this approach, of course, it is not a matter of literalness, which can even be a betrayal of fidelity to the text, as it can cause one to lose sight of the Bible as a whole – cf. J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, San Francisco, CA 1985, p. 118 (Polish translation: J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *Raport o stanie wiary. Z Ks. Kardynalem Josephem Ratzingerem rozmawia Vittorio Messori*, transl. Z. Oryszyn, J. Chrapek, Kraków–Warszawa 1986, p. 101).

²⁵ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 332–333. It is also worthwhile to refer to the joint study by Ratzinger and Rahner – cf. J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego. Formułowanie – przekaz – interpretacja* [On the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Formulation – Transmission – Interpretation], vol. 1, Series: Opera Omnia 7/1, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, Lublin 2016, pp. 181–183 [hereinafter cited as JRO 7/1].

²⁶ Cf. JRO 9/2, p. 791. The International Theological Commission (*Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council*, 3.1 and 8.1) noted the inseparability, but at the same time the need to distinguish between the Church-mystery and the Church-historical subject.

Scripture and Tradition and the bond of uniqueness and continuity of revelation

As the Bavarian theologian points out, the idea of an unwritten Apostolic Tradition appeared late in Catholic theology and is not constitutive of the concept of Tradition; it has also been challenged by historical research, including that on the history of the canon of Scripture, which is by no means derived from information obtained from the Apostles.²⁷ According to Ratzinger, Tradition is made up of a number of elements which must be seen together,²⁸ and which he presents in such a way as to dismiss the understanding of Tradition as an oral transmission of the truths of the faith, a transmission that was supposed to go back to the apostolic period:

(1) Scripture, which must not be contrasted with Tradition, for it is an element of Tradition, and Tradition transcends Scripture. The transcendence of the principle of Scripture is already determined by the very distinction between the Old and New Testaments, which are rather living words interpreting “Scripture” (i.e. the Old Testament), whereby the Old Testament books can only be “Scripture” in a Christological reinterpretation, the criterion of which is found in the New Testament writings. Interpreted christologically, the Old Testament constituted the Scripture of the early Church, in which the bond of Scripture with Tradition must be recognised.²⁹ It should be emphasised that, in the light of the event of Christ, the Old Testament was opened to a new interpretation in the spiritual reality of Christ, who came in the Holy Spirit and reveals what the disciples could not bear while he was in their midst (cf. John 16:12n).³⁰ The “surplus” of the reality of revelation as compared to Scripture is one of the sources of the reality of Tradition.³¹

(2) The Old Testament Scriptures as a tool of Tradition remained open to further ecclesiastical interpretation. This found expression in the Synoptics’ account of Jesus, in the acceptance and development of Paul’s formulas and in John’s interpretation of the Event of Christ. The New Testament canon bears witness to the presence of the Lord in the power of the Spirit, hence His word can be understood as present and can still develop. On the other hand, it remains bound to a historical basis from which separation could result in the “gnosis” of human speculation. The New Testament canon remains inherently open

²⁷ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 388.

²⁸ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 385.

²⁹ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 385.

³⁰ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 359.

³¹ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 364.

and lives in each Christian present.³² Ecclesiastical preaching is an explication of revelation; it is an explanation of the Old Testament in relation to Christ, and of the events of Christ in the light of *Pneuma* and in the light of Christ's ongoing presence in the Church – His Body.³³

(3) The idea of apostolic succession, whose function is to safeguard the given word against the inclinations of arbitrary Gnosis. The bishop as witness protected against alleged unscriptural, secret apostolic traditions mentioned by the Gnostics. The point of *successio apostolica* is that the personal presence of the witness is the primordial form of the presence of the word, safeguarding the primordial word to which he had to remain faithful and which he was to proclaim and interpret. Ratzinger explained that "the Tradition is understood as a witness in which a single word is assimilated into each present and precisely in this way faithfully preserved," whereby "history shows ever more clearly the intrinsic (and indelible) tension between preservation and making present."³⁴

(4) The concept of *regula fidei* (and later, inaccurately synonymous with it, the *symbolum*) as the first "canon" of the Church. Until the Middle Ages, there was a conviction that Scripture should be interpreted according to the *fides* of the Church expressed in the verbal formula. It was not a question of the material completion of Scripture by the creed, but rather a hermeneutical issue: Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of and for the sake of the rule of faith. Although the content of the rule was taken from Scripture (which might at first suggest the principle of *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*), "the canon within the canon" was established by the authority of the Church as an expression of her faith explaining Scripture. The *κανὼν τῆς πίστεως* is something more than the sum of theses/assertions, proving that Scripture can only interact in the faith of the Church, especially since the rule of faith was related to the liturgical and sacramental life in which the Church put its faith into practice and experienced the salvific action of the Lord.³⁵ Ratzinger links this placing of ecclesial *fides* above *scriptura* to the impossibility of objectifying revelation, which in the New Testament is *Pneuma vis-à-vis grammata*.³⁶

³² Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 385–386. The New Testament writings are "the interpretation of the 'Law, Prophets and Writings' [...] from the standpoint of the story of Jesus," while the Old Testament writings remained open and constituted for the disciples a testimony in favour of Jesus himself, as Holy Writings revealing his mystery" – J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *A Life...*, op. cit., pp. 262–263 (J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., p. 62).

³³ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 361, 364.

³⁴ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 386.

³⁵ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 386–387.

³⁶ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 364.

(5) The presence of the Holy Spirit in the time of the Church. Awareness of the Spirit's activity developed from the promise of sending the Paraclete recorded in the fourth Gospel. This conviction was expressed in the idea of the inspiration of the ecumenical councils and – in medieval theology and the debates of the Council of Trent – in the understanding of *revelatio* as a factor in the development of dogmas.³⁷ Ratzinger insisted that the pointing to the presence of the Spirit in the Church can be considered as the lasting core of these claims. “As present at every moment, the Spirit takes care that the revelation once given is preserved, which sometimes – precisely in order to remain the same – must be uttered in a different way.”³⁸

For our considerations, most significant is the fact that Scripture and Tradition are linked in terms of uniqueness and continuity. Scripture safeguards the “once for all” of the historic and salvific events and thus protects the faith from going astray, while Tradition, on the other hand, makes it possible for the faith to be realised and to develop “today.” Giving the floor to Ratzinger:

Scripture provides the link to history, to the one-time event of Christ and to his message; it provides a wall of defence, protecting the faith from being diluted in the speculations of arbitrary thought. Tradition, on the other hand, embodies the living “today” of the faith, which must be realised, developed and preserved anew in every time; it preserves the Church from the mummification of what is past. Taken together in this way, Scripture and Tradition embody the interplay of uniqueness and continuity that is essential to the Christian faith.³⁹

The theme of the actuality of revelation resounded in Ratzinger's critique of the working schemata given to the Fathers of Vaticanum Secundum. The Council expert opposed the intellectualistic view of revelation in the drafts *Constitutio-num et Decretorum*, because “revelation is not a dead and fossilised *depositum*, known only from the outside to a greater or lesser extent,” but it “lives in the Church and that the increasing knowledge of revelation is at the same time its inner development.”⁴⁰ Also in his commentary on *De Fontibus Revelationis*, Ratzinger emphasised that revelation being more than its testimony in Scripture is something living which embraces Scripture and develops it.⁴¹

³⁷ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 388.

³⁸ JRO 9/1, pp. 388–389.

³⁹ JRO 7/1, p. 417.

⁴⁰ JRO 7/1, p. 132.

⁴¹ Cf. JRO 7/1, p. 142.

Obviously, the reception of revelation is not tantamount to the object of reception, but, as Ratzinger maintained, it is impossible to separate the process of understanding from that which is understood – hence the division into history as a past and the subsequent process of explanation should be considered oversimplified. In his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, Ratzinger wrote that Tradition develops (Latin: *proficit*) as the understanding or perception of the source reality increases (Latin: *crescit perceptio*). This is made possible by the support of the Holy Spirit who, by expanding and deepening the Church's memory, leads her to all truth (cf. John 16:13) enabling an increase in the understanding of the transmitted words and realities. The Council Fathers enumerated three factors of growth: the contemplation and meditation of the faithful (cf. Luke 2:19, 51), deep understanding as a result of spiritual experience, and official preaching stemming from the charism of truth.⁴²

Vatican II pointed to a triad of events involving oral proclamation (*praedicatio oralis*), examples (*exempla*) and organised action (*institutiones*) of the Apostles. It is not the teaching of Christ alone that constitutes the genesis of Tradition (as the Council of Trent asserted), but also the behaviour and deeds of the One with whom the Apostles lived generate tradition. The provenance of Tradition is Christological and pneumatological, since the Apostles learned or received all that they were then to transmit to succeeding generations, not only from the Lord, but also through the help of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ As Tracey Rowland notes, the language of gift and communication was used by the Apostles to preach – "Proclamation is presented as part of the giving activity of God."⁴⁴

⁴² Cf. J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego. Formułowanie – przekaz – interpretacja*, vol. 2, Series: Opera Omnia 7/2, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. E. Grzesiuk, Lublin 2016, pp. 672, 674–675, 990–991 [hereafter referred to as JRO 7/2]; M. McCaughey, *Through the Lens of the Pure in Heart: Ratzinger's Theological Approach and the Interpretation of Revelation*, "Annales Theologici" 32/1 (2018), p. 127; T. Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith...*, op. cit., p. 65; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 8 [hereinafter referred to as DV]. Also, the importance of the Fathers of the Church is considered not from the perspective of the statically understood traitors of the apostolic messages, but from the point of view of the dynamically understood Tradition. The writings of the Fathers are the living present and manifestation of Tradition, the manifestation of the perpetuation of the mystery of Christ in ecclesial life, the expression of an actualising and assimilating understanding of what was handed down at the beginning – cf. JRO 7/2, pp. 676–677. The dynamic understanding of revelation in Catholic theology originates from the Tübingen school – cf. G. Daly, *Revelation in the Theology...*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁴³ Cf. JRO 7/2, pp. 666–667.

⁴⁴ T. Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith...*, op. cit., p. 51.

With regard to the influence of the Holy Spirit on the creation of Scripture, Ratzinger notes the significant change introduced by the fathers of Vaticanum Secundum with regard to the statements of Tridentinum. The Tridentine formulation *Spiritu Sancto dictante* was replaced by *Spiritu Sancto suggerente* (cf. John 14:26). The guidance of the Paraclete “is not a ‘dictation’ but a *suggestio*, a retrospective understanding of the unspeakable in what was once spoken, which goes to a depth of events that cannot be measured by the concepts of *praedicatio oralis* [...] and *dictare*.” In this way, the conciliar document departs from a doctrinal approach/account of revelation. Revelation concerns the whole man and, as such, encompasses both what was spoken and what the Apostles were able to express, as well as what remained unspoken and which gave character to the Christian existence created by them, which consequently also goes beyond verbal expressions and cannot be merely a process of transmitting words.⁴⁵ The same Holy Spirit acting in the Church era makes it possible to grasp the depth of what has happened:

The ineffable, the spiritual experience of the whole Church, her communion with the Lord and his Word in faith, prayer and love, contributes to the growth of the understanding of the historical beginning, as well as updating again and again in the contemporary faith the history of its source and expressing what the Word meant from the beginning and what was to be understood in changing times by the people living in them.⁴⁶

Ratzinger accentuates the Christological dimension of Tradition, which originates from the sending of the Son by the Father. This primordial *παράδοσις* is continued in the permanent presence of Christ in the Church. Therefore, the primary reality communicated in Tradition is the whole mystery of Christ, preceding all explications (including those inspired). The Tradition then exists as the indwelling of Christ by faith, and as such also precedes detailed explications.⁴⁷ We can therefore say that for Ratzinger Tradition means man’s bond with the unique history of Christ, confirmed in Scripture (as the instrument of Tradition), which is present in the Church through the Spirit, experienced in the Church in faith and prayer, and expounded in preaching.⁴⁸ For a revelation

⁴⁵ Cf. JRO 7/2, p. 667; DV 7; T. Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith...*, op. cit., p. 52; M. Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study*, Grand Rapids, MI 2014, p. 14.

⁴⁶ JRO 7/2, pp. 672–673. Cf. A. Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, London 2007, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 364–365.

⁴⁸ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 390.

once given to remain the same, it sometimes requires being provided in a new way, which, according to Ratzinger, is precisely the concern of the Paraclete.⁴⁹

In order to confirm that Ratzinger held these views throughout his life, it suffices to refer to the Exhortation on the word of God. The author of *Verbum Domini* appreciates the meaning and value of living Tradition and Scripture in the Church, the interpretation of which he derives from the profound bond between the Holy Spirit and the word of God. The word of God, spoken in time, gave itself and entrusted itself to the Church, so that salvation can reach people in every time and place. Referring to the Second Vatican Council, Benedict XVI writes that the Tradition initiated by the Apostles is a living and dynamic reality developing in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although its truth remains eternal and unchanging, the understanding of the matters and words handed down can grow. Therefore, a living Tradition is important for a deeper understanding of the truth revealed in Scripture.⁵⁰

Memory of Mary – *memoria Ecclesiae* – Mary in the memory of the Church

If revelation is conceived as an accumulation of supernatural information, faith is reduced to merely accepting what has already been received in the past. If, however, ultimately the revelation is believed to be Christ himself, the Logos, then a question opens up concerning the memory of the Church in which this all-embracing Word will be comprehended. The Logos will always remain greater than the words; the words will never exhaust Him. Words can only participate in the inexhaustibility of the Word and reveal Him to some extent to successive generations of believers. The outline of a theology of memory, according to Ratzinger, was first given in the Fourth Gospel, in which memory is shown to be much more than a mere computer-like storage for accumulated information.⁵¹

When that which is stored in it meets that which is new, then that which has passed away also receives light, and now that which could not be seen at all

⁴⁹ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 387. It is worth adding that theology, too, requires a constantly new assimilation, since the eternal, unchanging truth of God must be experienced and expressed again and again within each generation – cf. *ibid.* p. 227.

⁵⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, no. 17 [hereafter referred to as VD]. Cf. M. Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture*, Grand Rapids, MI 2014, pp. 198, 212.

⁵¹ Cf. JRO 6/2, pp. 680–681; JRO 9/1, pp. 359, 364.

before is revealed and made known in it. It remains the same, and yet it grows. In the words we discover the Word more and more, and in this way it is always the same revelation, but to each succeeding generation it is revealed and opened in its fullness, in its life, as new in each present.⁵²

For our considerations those statements by Ratzinger are of importance which point to the connection between John's "recollection" leading to a fuller discovery of Christ and Luke's account of the process of recollection taking place in the life of Christ's mother. In the episode of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38), the evangelist shows a confused Mary in a dialogue with the word, inwardly wrestling with it to pursue the meaning of Gabriel's greeting (verse 29). In the two pericopes of the next chapter, about the shepherds' prostration (Luke 2:8–20) and the finding of the "lost" twelve-year-old Jesus (Luke 2:41–52), Mary's memory is shown to be more than merely preserving recollections of things past. She explores the inner dimension of the events that are a "word" for her, and, perceiving them in connection with others, she assembles them as if one mosaic, so that the whole message becomes visible (cf. verse 19 and 51).⁵³

In his commentary on Mary's reaction to the words spoken by the Twelve found in the temple, Ratzinger drew attention to the element of darkness or even passion connected to the mystery of God, and to the need to mature to the words of Jesus kept in the heart and not yet comprehended at that stage:

Jesus' divine mission bursts through the boundaries of all human criteria and repeatedly becomes, in human terms, a dark mystery. Something of the sword of sorrow of which Simeon had spoken (cf. Lk 2:35) becomes palpable for Mary at this hour. The closer one comes to Jesus, the more one is drawn into the mystery of his Passion. [...] Jesus' saying is on too lofty a plane for this moment in time. Even Mary's faith is a "journeying" faith, a faith that is repeatedly shrouded in darkness and has to mature by persevering through the darkness. Mary

⁵² JRO 6/2, p. 681; cf. M. McCaughey, *Through the Lens of the Pure in Heart...*, op. cit., p. 130.

⁵³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 1, Series: Opera Omnia 6/1, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. M. Górecka, W. Szymona, Lublin 2015, p. 293 [hereafter referred to as JRO 6/1]; J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth. The Infancy Narratives*, transl. P.J. Whitmore, New York 2012, Kindle Location 437–447 [hereafter referred to as JN]; VD 27, 87; Benedict XVI, Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 33; J. Ratzinger, *Wzniosła Córa Syjonu. Rozważania mariologiczne*, transl. J. Królikowski, Poznań 2002, pp. 68, 104–105, 128 [hereinafter referred to as WCS]; J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., pp. 230, 240; J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, H. Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, transl. A. Walker, San Francisco, CA 2005, p. 115.

does not understand Jesus' saying, but she keeps it in her heart and allows it gradually to come to maturity there.⁵⁴

In this way, characteristic of the *Virgo audiens*, she learns to understand and perceive in God's plan the profound thought that connects seemingly unrelated matters. This would not be possible, Benedict XVI emphasised, without the silence that must accompany the reception of the Word of God and without the humility, patience and time that constitute the "soil" for the seed of the word.⁵⁵ "For every member of the faithful Mary is the model of docile acceptance of God's word" (VD 87), and Mary, "the one who hears and keeps the Word in exemplary fashion"⁵⁶ is also "the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God" (VD 27),⁵⁷ keeping and passing it on,⁵⁸ without separating reason from heart⁵⁹, but applying the word to life.⁶⁰ In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Emeritus added that Mary "holds her heart and mind in harmony and seeks to understand the context, the overall significance of God's message," and thus "becomes an image of the Church," which tries to understand the word of God "in its entirety and guards in her memory the things that have been given to her."⁶¹ This requires recognition that the words of Jesus transcend human measure, and correct exegesis must humbly acknowledge it.⁶²

Benedict XVI referred the importance of the Mother of the Word not only to personal devotion, but also to scientific theological reflection. "I would

⁵⁴ JN, Kindle Location 1421–1439; cf. WCS, pp. 68, 103, 105, 128, 132 and p. 67 (commentary on: John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 14).

⁵⁵ Cf. JRO 6/1, p. 293; VD 66, 87; WCS, pp. 105, 133. In *Mater Verbi* Benedict XVI sees the synthesis of the stages practised in *lectio divina* – VD 87. *Mater laetitiae* also reflects the essential connection between the word of God and joy or happiness – VD 124. Cf. also: A. Riches, *Deconstructing the Linearity of Grace: The Risk and Reflexive Paradox of Mary's Immaculate Fiat*, "International Journal of Systematic Theology" 10/2 (2008), p. 193.

⁵⁶ J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 306 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 273).

⁵⁷ Cf. VD 88 (on the indissoluble bond between the Word of God and Mary).

⁵⁸ Cf. JN, Kindle Location 1444.

⁵⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI. Cappella Papale for the Opening of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls* (5.10.2008), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20081005_apertura-sinodo.html [access: 13.10.2023].

⁶⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Biblical Commission* (23.04.2009), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090423_pcb.html [access: 13.10.2023].

⁶¹ JN, Kindle Location 447.

⁶² Cf. JN, Kindle Location 1439.

encourage scholars as well to study the relationship between *Mariology and the theology of the word*,” he wrote in *Verbum Domini*, because “[t]his could prove most beneficial both for the spiritual life and for theological and biblical studies,” since “what the understanding of the faith has enabled us to know about Mary stands at the heart of Christian truth” (VD 27).

According to Benedict XVI, the Fourth Gospel is based precisely on the kind of “recollecting” typical of the conduct of the Mother of the Lord herself. With the difference that the evangelist “deepens still further the notion of remembrance, as the remembrance of the ‘We’ of the disciples, that is, of the Church.” Such recollection “is not a purely psychological or intellectual process, but a pneumatic event,” not just something private, but because of the Church as the subject of this recollection, “it transcends the sphere of our own human understanding and human knowledge.” What takes place here is “the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who shows us the connection of Scripture, the connection of words with reality, and so leads us «into all truth».”⁶³ This is not an invention or transformation of history (that would be gnosis), but entering into a deeper dimension of events that does not distance us from reality, but allows us to see the truth hidden in the fact. Ultimately, it is about such an attestation of Christ that would lead the reader to the Person of the Lord who not only was (in the past) but also is (in the present), for He is the One who says of Himself “I am” (John 8:58).⁶⁴

For the Bavarian theologian, the most important aspect seems to be the intertwining of personal (cf. John 19:35) with communal (cf. 1 John 1:1–2a) recollection, “since the recollection, which is the basis of the Gospel, is purified and deepened by being incorporated into the memory of the Church, it transcends indeed a mere banal memory based on facts.”⁶⁵ In John’s Gospel there are pericopes explicitly indicating that it was only after the Resurrection and

⁶³ JRO 6/1, p. 293; cf. T. Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith...*, op. cit., p. 60.

⁶⁴ Cf. JRO 6/1, pp. 290, 292–294; N. Bossu, S. Advani, *Resolving the Dualism...*, op. cit., p. 61; M. Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation...*, op. cit., p. 236. Ratzinger draws on the work of Martin Hengel (*Die Johanneische Frage. Ein Lösungsversuch mit einem Beitrag zur Apokalypse von Jörg Frey*, Tübingen 1993, p. 322), except that he considers the five factors listed by him for the composition of the Gospel text in a different order, showing the relationship of history and the reminiscent “theologising” of what happened – cf. JRO 6/1, pp. 290–291. Cf. also: Cf. H. Witzcyk, *Natchnienie, prawda, zbawienie* [Inspiration, Truth, Salvation], Poznań 2020, p. 169.

⁶⁵ JRO 6/1, p. 291. Ratzinger adopted the concept of the bond between the individual “I” with the common “I” of the Church from Henri de Lubac. “I believe” makes it possible to transcend subjectivity and to enter, in the memory of the Church, into a knowledge that transcends time and boundaries – cf. JRO 9/2, p. 830.

the glorification of Christ, in the memory of the Church precisely, that the disciples became capable of grasping the depth of words and historical events and discovering God's intended meaning of Scripture (cf. John 2:17, 22; 12:16). The process that takes place in the *memoria Ecclesiae* is tantamount to entering into the inner aspect of events thanks to the connection of speech and activity of God; the unity of Logos and fact is exposed, the mystery of Jesus is revealed, in whose destiny the Scriptures are fulfilled.⁶⁶

In Ratzinger's conviction, it is in this understanding of the Church's recollection that the Lord's announcement from the Upper Room is realised: "But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth" (John 16:13a).⁶⁷ This process, however, does not end with the emergence of New Testament literature. A rereading of the gift of revelation will take place throughout ecclesial Tradition, as the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit allows previously covered meanings to be unveiled.⁶⁸ If Tradition always presupposes a supra-individual entity that transmits Tradition, then in the case of *traditio Jesu* the *tradent* of the memory is the Church. Without it, it would only be possible to speak of the Tradition of Jesu as a commemoration rather than a reality that is both historical and history-making.⁶⁹

Ratzinger could probably approve the statement of Jean Guitton, a French philosopher, that "Mary, whose considerations developed over time, became the object of considerations developing over the centuries."⁷⁰ This process, which marked the New Testament texts, must apply even more extensively to the entire history of the Church.⁷¹ In an interview with Peter Seewald, Ratzinger admitted that in the Gospels Mary "is quite marginal," in Matthew she still "plays almost no part," but in John's Mariology "the role of the Mother has been more clearly worked out." It could be said, the interviewer argued, that

⁶⁶ Cf. JRO 6/1, pp. 291–292; S. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Grand Rapids, MI 2009, p. 80; N. Bossu, S. Advani, *Resolving the Dualism...*, op. cit., pp. 72–73, 76.

⁶⁷ JRO 6/1, p. 293.

⁶⁸ Cf. JRO 6/2, p. 681.

⁶⁹ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 440; M. McCaughey, *Through the Lens of the Pure in Heart...*, op. cit., p. 130; M. Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation...*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁷⁰ J. Guitton, *Maryja* [Mary], transl. T. Dmochowska, Warszawa 1956, p. 32.

⁷¹ There are, according to Ratzinger, not only Old Testament theology, New Testament Old Testament theology and New Testament New Testament theology, but also ecclesiastical New Testament theology (this means "more" dogmatics in relation to biblical theology is referred to as Tradition) – cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 362–363.

“people were discreet so long as she was alive. And obviously she herself was always discreet.”⁷²

It could be assumed, against a suspicious critical exegesis, that Luke turned his attention to Mary (who was one of his sources) and through her to the wider circle of Jesus’ natural relatives (“brothers of the Lord”), who first preserved, then passed on and interpreted theologically such a tradition.⁷³ For Ratzinger, it is noteworthy that the messages of the Nativity and Pascha are of different importance, and he points out that the former, initially private, was only incorporated into the official preaching of the Church at a certain stage in the development of the Creed in Christ. It was then, when a place had been prepared for them and when the time necessary for inspiring proper reverence had elapsed, that these traditions had to be integrated.⁷⁴

Ratzinger highlights the role of the Nativity narrative in the development of Christological reflection, as well as the mutual illumination of the “mystery of Mary” and the profession of faith in Christ:

It seems natural to me that it was only after Mary’s death could the mystery be made public and pass into the shared patrimony of early Christianity. At that point it could find its way into the evolving complex of Christological doctrine and be linked to the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God [...]. The mystery of his origin illuminated what came later, and conversely the developed form of Christological faith helped to make sense of that origin. Thus did Christology develop.⁷⁵

In Ratzinger’s view, there is also another theological basis for the inclusion of the private tradition in the official tradition of the Church. The point is that the concept and birth of Christ constitute a new beginning in the history of salvation, for which the only cause is the creative word of God. As a result of God’s special intervention, a new creation appears, a new “Adam” coming from

⁷² J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 296 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 272–273); cf. JN, Kindle Location 237; Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, transl. M.J. Miller, A.J. Walker, San Francisco, CA 2010, p. 168: “[Mary] figures in the Bible, in Luke and in John, relatively late, but with great radiance and clarity, and she has therefore always been a part of Christian life.”

⁷³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church’s Marian Belief*, San Francisco, CA 1983, p. 45 [hereinafter referred to as DZ] (Polish translation: WCS, pp. 32–33); [hereinafter referred to as WCS]; JN, Kindle Location 224–237, 657, 1001–1017.

⁷⁴ Cf. DZ, p. 45; WCS, p. 33.

⁷⁵ JN, Kindle Location 663–668.

God (cf. Luke 3:38). The powerless, rejected and barren Israel, which becomes a concrete reality in Mary, bears fruit in accordance with Isaiah's promise (cf. Isa 54:1), and Mary becomes a sign of openness to God's grace.⁷⁶

The last two dogmas and the dynamic nature of Tradition

As Ratzinger noted, in the period between the end of the Second World War and the Second Vatican Council, there were "two movements that had—albeit in very different ways—certain 'charismatic features'."⁷⁷ The first was the Marian movement and the second was a current arising from the liturgical, ecumenical and biblical movement.⁷⁸ The liturgical movement sought an objective religiosity, based on the sacraments and based on the Bible or the ancient Church, and was characterised by a theocentrically oriented Trinitarian prayer (through Christ to the Father). The Marian movement, on the other hand, emphasised rather the personal and the subjective aspect, favoured a different concept of meditation (through Mary to Jesus) and was influenced by Our Lady's apparitions.⁷⁹

The Council was entrusted with the task to elaborate the relations between these movements and to show the way to fruitful integration and development without losing their specific character.⁸⁰ The famous 1963 vote resulting in the inclusion of Mariology in the Constitution on the Church can be considered, in the opinion of a former conciliar expert, as an attempt to answer the question of the meaning and priority of the two currents,⁸¹ as well as the

⁷⁶ Cf. DZ, p. 48; WCS, p. 34; JN, Kindle Location 617–632.

⁷⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 147; WCS, p. 113.

⁷⁸ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 148; WCS, p. 113. Ratzinger himself admitted that he grew up in a Christocentric piety fed by the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. Marian piety and theological formation were not integrated together because Mariology still lacked inner strength – cf. Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Light of the World...*, op. cit., p. 168; Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Ostatnie rozmowy* [Last Conversations], transl. J. Jurczyński, Kraków 2016, p. 106.

⁷⁹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 148; WCS, p. 114; J. Frings, *Das Konzil und die moderne Gedankenwelt*, Köln 1962, pp. 31–37.

⁸⁰ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 149; WCS, pp. 114–115. Cardinal Joseph Frings was to be the one to issue the call to find a meeting point between the two movements – cf. WCS, p. 130; cf. also: P. Blanco, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger: Nuclear Ideas*, "Theology Today" 68/2 (2011), p. 166.

⁸¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 150; WCS, p. 115.

proper place of the mystery of Mary and Marian dogmas.⁸² The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the living Tradition of the Church, in which the movements characterised above developed their wings, influenced the course and outcome of the Council debates. They took place in the perspective of the aforementioned bipolarity, which was reflected in the two currents described by Ratzinger, and which ultimately caused, especially under the influence of the Marian movement, the Council to develop a new account of Tradition.

The debates at the Council took a dramatic turn with the submission of the document speaking of Scripture and Tradition as sources of revelation. The historical-critical method undermined the notion of Tradition understood as an oral transmission, existing alongside Scripture, that can be dated back to apostolic times itself and able to constitute the second source of historical knowledge.⁸³ The first millennium knew nothing about the Immaculate Conception,⁸⁴ the doctrine of the *assumptio corporalis* of the Mother of God was not known before the fifth century, and the first news of the Assumption is not a written version of a tradition previously transmitted orally.⁸⁵ The discussion on the dogma of the bodily Assumption of Mary proved to be so very difficult because of the problem of modern biblical exegesis and the question of how history and spirit relate to each other in the structure of faith.⁸⁶ This dogma is

a new knowledge that only then emerges, and then the centuries-long struggle to understand it begins, until finally, in 1950, the Church declared that it was knowledge in the Holy Spirit, which must be counted among the essential contents of revelation. Tradition as its own material principle cannot be demonstrated on this very basis, but it shows itself again as a process of spiritual assimilation and unfolding of the mystery of Christ in the historical struggles of the Church.⁸⁷

The struggle for the final form of *Dei Verbum* was linked, among other things, to a new view of the phenomenon of Tradition; this new view was initiated by the 1854 and 1950 dogmas, which, in the absence of proof from Scripture,

⁸² Cf. JRO 7/1, pp. 299–300, 338.

⁸³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., pp. 103–104.

⁸⁴ Cf. DZ, p. 62; WCS, p. 42.

⁸⁵ Cf. JRO 7/1, p. 145. Ratzinger referred to the research of the patrologist Berthold Altaner of Würzburg – cf. J. Ratzinger, *Milestones. Memoirs 1927–1977*, transl. E. Leiva-Merikakis, San Francisco, CA 1998, p. 58; J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *A Life...*, op. cit., p. 298 (J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., pp. 67–68); WCS, p. 48.

⁸⁶ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., p. 104.

⁸⁷ JRO 7/1, p. 145.

were deduced from the idea of growth, progress and the sense of faith. Consequently, the idea of material Tradition was abandoned in favour of the process of Tradition. At the same time, however, the question of the criteria for the profession of faith was raised and the criterion of *sola Scriptura* (research by Josef Rupert Geiselmann), positively understood, came to the fore: Scripture as the unequivocal and indisputable place of apostolic Tradition (i.e., Scripture interpreted according to the assumptions of the historical-critical method) now appeared to be the only counterweight to the Church's Teaching Office.⁸⁸

Of interest to us is the assessment Ratzinger expressed in connection with the appeal in the case of the last two dogmas to the infallibility in matters of faith of the Church, which as a whole cannot err in its faith. Thus, in his opinion:

The awareness of the faith of the people of God becomes the first criterion of Tradition. Irrespective of the importance of this criterion, there is a danger here that [...] what was to be the criterion of Tradition will perhaps disappear, [...] and that at the same time as this positivism of the consciousness of the whole Church there will be a positivism of the Teaching Office which, by virtue of the present of the Spirit, will cease to perceive the Christological ἐφάπαξ and thus distort the basic structure of Christian Tradition.⁸⁹

The two poles mentioned earlier, between which an imbalance could occur, are clearly juxtaposed here. The Christological "once for all" could be overshadowed, distorting the structure of the Tradition.

In his commentary on DV 10, the Bavarian theologian wrote that Scripture and Tradition are an asset entrusted to the Church – they constitute the deposit of the word of God, the preservation and realisation of which is a matter

⁸⁸ Cf. JRO 7/2, pp. 633–634; JRO 7/1, p. 619; J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., pp. 104–105; S. Zatwardnicki, *One Source of Revelation and Two Currents of the Revelation Transmission and Cognition: The Apological Dimension of Joseph Ratzinger's Theology*, "Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny" 28/2 (2020), pp. 78–84. It is noteworthy that Ratzinger as a young theologian neither included Mary and Her bodily Assumption in the entries of the lexicons, nor did he mention Her in the later Eschatology; cf. E. de Gaal, "Exaltation in the Second Adam": *Heavenly Mindedness and the Young Joseph Ratzinger in His 1950s Contributions to the Lexikon Für Kirche und Theologie*, [in:] *Engaging Catholic Doctrine: Essays in Honor of Matthew Levering*, eds. R. Barron, S.W. Hahn, J.R.A. Merrick, Steubenville, OH 2023, p. 507.

⁸⁹ JRO 9/1, p. 389. Yves Congar, too, saw the danger of assuming the autonomous life of Tradition vis-à-vis the deposit established "once for all," especially the scriptural testimony – cf. Y. Congar, *Tradycja i tradycje...*, op. cit., pp. 251–252, 327.

for the whole people of God, not just the hierarchy.⁹⁰ The statement about the role of the Church's Teaching Office in authentic explanation of the word of God must be read in line with this background. Exegesis is not limited to the Teaching Office, but is a ministry encompassing the whole actualisation of the word and is a function of the whole Church, bishops and laity.⁹¹ Here, a critique of the sense of faith that is interesting for the subject of our research emerges:

In so doing, we should consider it a fortunate decision of the Council that, while emphasising the contribution of the "laity" to the efforts for the purity of the Word, it did not refer to the theory of the sense of faith, which, in connection with the 1854 and 1950 dogmas, helped to make clear the role of the universal Church in confessing the Word. For this theory has too many underdeterminations in it to be regarded as a non-dangerous expression of the issue we are discussing.⁹²

Ratzinger's conviction here is that the function of the Church should rather be to preserve, to be faithful to what has already been received. It is for this reason that DV 10 states that the holy People "holding fast" (Latin: *iugiter perseverat*) in the teaching of the Apostles and thus disavow novelties contrary to the faith. This servile character of the Church's Teaching Office in relation to the word of God is regarded by Ratzinger as a *relecture* by the Council of previous statements of the Magisterium.⁹³

Geiselman, on the other hand, seemed to Ratzinger to over-emphasise the pole of uniqueness, considering Tradition to be the living presence of Scripture, i.e. merely its translation into the present of the Church.⁹⁴ After the Council, there was a hackneyed popularisation⁹⁵ of Geiselman's theses and the sufficiency of Scripture "was interpreted in the direction of biblicism removing the patristic legacy into the background," and "biblicism transformed itself into historicism." In this way, the Church ceased to appear as a living organism and "lacked space for the dynamics of a developing faith."⁹⁶ Neither the older dogmas of Christianity *consensus quinquaesecularis* nor, still less, the Marian

⁹⁰ Cf. JRO 7/2, p. 685.

⁹¹ Cf. JRO 7/2, p. 686.

⁹² JRO 7/2, p. 686.

⁹³ JRO 7/2, p. 686 (quotation and paraphrase).

⁹⁴ JRO 9/1, p. 447.

⁹⁵ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., p. 106; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 153; WCS, p. 116.

⁹⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 153; WCS, pp. 116–117.

dogmas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could be derived from *sola Scriptura*. To say, on the one hand, that Scripture contains all revealed truth and, on the other hand, that the 1950 dogma is revealed truth would lead to such a flexible understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture that the concept would lose all meaning.⁹⁷

Ratzinger pointed to a dangerous moment in history that determined the emergence of the idea of Oral Tradition. Still medieval theologians distinguished Scripture as the material principle of revelation from the formal principle of revelation, and therefore "could accept the material *sola scriptura*, i.e. conceive of Scripture as the only material principle of faith, without the need for the dubious construction of the material Oral Tradition." The idea of *paradosis agrafos* must have arisen when revelation was "erroneously identified with its material principle," for it then became necessary "to accept the material fullness of revelation." The Bavarian theologian claimed that this "erroneous objectification of the concept of revelation is the basis of both the former Protestant biblicism and the post-Tridentine material interpretation of the concept of Tradition."⁹⁸ For even in the statements of the Tridentinum, the pre-Tridentine understanding of revelation was still making itself known,⁹⁹ according to which "Scripture is the material principle of revelation, which is not completely objectified in it" and therefore, "to be revelation it needs interpretation."¹⁰⁰

Another change in the structure of Tradition came with the de-historicization of Tradition and the recognition that revelation could include what the whole Church at a certain time began to recognise as revealed, disregarding the "once for all" of revelation. The gap in the historical justification of the 1854 and 1950 dogmas sought to be filled by dogmatic considerations, the result of which can be presented as follows:

In order to prove that a given claim belongs to Tradition, it is not necessary to have a longitudinal section going back to the beginning, but a transverse section through the consciousness of the Church at any moment of her history *is* sufficient, since whatever the whole Church has recognised as revealed *is* also revealed and belongs to authentic Tradition. This de-historicization of the concept of Tradition meant at the same time – although not openly expressed – a minimisation of the Fathers.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Cf. JRO 9/1, pp. 354–355.

⁹⁸ JRO 2, p. 635.

⁹⁹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Moje życie*, op. cit., pp. 106–107.

¹⁰⁰ JRO 2, pp. 634–635.

¹⁰¹ JRO 9/1, pp. 447–448.

Marian dogmas at the service of revelation attested in Scripture

Ratzinger saw the two poles of revelation in their mutual connection. It is the "once for all" of revelation that enables it to persist in Tradition, while through Tradition, in turn, what was already budding in Scripture as the testimony of revelation and original Tradition can unfold. Mariology, argued Ratzinger in *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, "comprises [...] the necessary integration between Scripture and Tradition." All "Marian dogmas have their clear foundation in sacred Scripture. But it is there like a seed that grows and bears fruit in the life of Tradition just as it finds expression in the liturgy, in the perception of the believing people and in the reflection of theology guided by the Magisterium."¹⁰⁷ Aaron Pidel adds that this development is only possible when it takes place in continuity with the original meaning, and the guarantor of this continuity is the People of God as the living subject of Scripture.¹⁰⁸ But what grows out of the seeds inherent in the Bible ultimately also serves the "office" of Scripture, and this way enables fuller access to revelation. Thus, Mariology secures the pole of uniqueness and shows its openness to future development: "the faith of the Church sees in

vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050916_40-dei-verbum.html [access: 17.10.2023].

¹⁰⁷ J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report...*, op. cit., p. 107 (J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *Raport o stanie wiary...*, op. cit., pp. 90–91). Cf. J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 227. In a television interview, Benedict XVI stressed that over the centuries Christians had increasingly entrusted themselves to Mary and felt that she was their Mother. Even those who found it difficult to comprehend Jesus is the Son of God entrusted themselves to His Mother. In response to the charge: "But this doesn't have any Biblical foundation!" the Pope referred to St Gregory the Great: "In reading,' he says, 'grow the words of Scripture.' That is, they develop in lived reality. They grow and more and more in history this Word develops. We see how we can all be grateful because there is truly a Mother; we have all been given a Mother" – Benedict XVI, *Interview with His Holiness Benedict XVI on the TV Programme entitled "In His Image. Questions on Jesus" broadcast by Rai Uno* (22.04.2011, Good Friday), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110422_intervista.html [access: 17.10.2023] (Polish translation: Benedykt XVI, *Moc samej miłości. Wywiad z Benedyktem XVI, transmitowany przez pierwszy kanał telewizji RAI w programie Na Jego obraz. Pytania na temat Jezusa* [22 kwietnia 2011 r., Wielki Piątek], [in:] Benedict XVI, *Mystagogia Benedicti. Wprowadzenie w tajemnice roku liturgicznego. Wielki Tydzień* [Mystagogia Benedicti. An Introduction to the Mysteries of the Liturgical Year. Holy Week], ed. A. Demitrów, Biskupów 2021, p. 275).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. A. Pidel, *Christi Opera Proficiunt...*, op. cit., pp. 704–705.

these beginnings something living, that conforms to its own constitution only insofar as it develops.”¹⁰⁹

In the following section, those motifs of Marian dogma and Mariology will be extracted from Ratzinger’s work which, having grown out of the seeds of the inspired texts, shed light on the “once for all” of the revelation and its witness in Scripture.

The feminine principle in the structure of the biblical faith

As Cardinal and Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Ratzinger attempted to provide a perspective to expose what is permanent in the Marian devotion, and to show the place of Mariology in the overall pattern of Scripture and the faith of the Church.¹¹⁰ Ratzinger advocated a movement from the end to the beginning, from the Marian image in the New Testament to the Old Testament, certain motifs of which were applied to express the mystery of Mary. He justified such a *modus operandi* on the grounds that the Old Testament is contained in the New, and the New is based on the Old, of which it is an interpretation in the light of the event of Christ.¹¹¹

According to the theologian, “all consequent Marian piety and theology is fundamentally based upon the Old Testament’s deeply anchored theology of woman, a theology indispensable to its entire structure.”¹¹² It is expressed by the following images taken from the Old Testament:

(i) The figure of Eve. Mary’s supra-individual role as woman is portrayed in John’s Gospel. Jesus initiates in the hour of the Cross a new family with the prominent role of the new Eve in it. The figure of Eve is the necessary complement to Adam-man, who could not be good without her (cf. Gen 2:18). Although she gave the fruit of death, woman is the antithesis of death – as the bearer of the key of life, she is brought closer to the God-Life from whom all life comes. This relationship recurs, Ratzinger believes, in the dogma of the Assumption.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ DZ, p. 38; WCS, p. 29.

¹¹⁰ Cf. DZ, pp. 8, 11; WCS, pp. 5, 14.

¹¹¹ Cf. DZ, pp. 11, 32; WCS, pp. 14, 25.

¹¹² DZ, p. 13; WCS, p. 15; L. Bouyer, *Mystère et ministères de la femme*, Paris 1976.

¹¹³ Cf. DZ, pp. 13, 18; WCS, pp. 15, 17; J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., pp. 303–305 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 272–273).

(2) Great mothers (especially Sarah and Hannah, the mother of Samuel, but also Rachel) who played a role in the Old Testament. Their infertility turns out to be a blessing, they also point to the promise that brings life.¹¹⁴

(3) The Daughter of Zion – in this image the prophets expressed the mystery of election and covenant, and above all God's love for Israel. Israel was referred to as woman, virgin, beloved, bride (wife) and mother, and what the whole nation was turned out to be represented by the great women of Israel, mothers and saviours, whose fertile infertility expressed what creation is and what election is, and what Israel is as the People of God. God's marriage covenant with the people revealed that this relationship does not belong only to God, but also to Israel – a woman who is at the same time virgin and mother.¹¹⁵ This in turn means that

to God, the One, is joined, not a goddess, but, as in his historical revelation, the chosen creation, Israel, the Daughter of Zion, the woman [...]. Of course this line of development in the Old Testament remains just as incomplete and open as all the other lines of the Old Testament. It acquires its definitive meaning for the first time in the New Testament: in the woman who is herself described as the true holy remnant, as the authentic daughter Zion, and who is thereby the mother of the saviour, yes, the mother of God.¹¹⁶

In Ratzinger's conviction, in Luke's portrait of Mary presented in the scene of the angelic greeting, she appears as the true Zion, the true Israel and the People of God.¹¹⁷ Discussing the issue of *populus Dei*, Ratzinger pointed out the dangers of understanding and experiencing it in masculine and institutional terms only. The *Ecclesia* is feminine, and Mary opens up a dimension of the mystery of the Church which is more than a people, a structure and an activity, since in it the mystery of conjugal love lives with the motherhood resulting from this love. Thus, Mariology makes it possible to recover an essential element of the Church,

¹¹⁴ Cf. DZ, pp. 12, 19; WCS, pp. 14, 17–18.

¹¹⁵ Cf. DZ, pp. 12–13, 21; WCS, pp. 14–15, 19–20. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 55; J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 233; J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, H. Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, op. cit., p. 14: "The mystery of Mary means precisely that God's Word did not remain alone; rather, it assimilated the other – the soil – into itself, became man in the 'soil' of his Mother, and then, fused with the soil of the whole humanity, returned to God in a new form." The motif of the soil also appears in: WCS, pp. 127–128, 143–144.

¹¹⁶ DZ, pp. 23–24; WCS, p. 20.

¹¹⁷ Cf. DZ, p. 43; WCS, pp. 31–32, 91, 99–100; P. Blanco, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger...*, op. cit., p. 166.

to which both the Bible and the Fathers of the Church draw attention. Besides, the Marian element attracts attention to the emotional sphere indispensable for the bond *ex toto corde* with God or Christ.¹¹⁸

The liturgy of the Church allows two more images to be added to those mentioned above, extending the Old Testament theology of the woman:

(4) the great deliverers (“woman-savior”) (Esther and Judith). As in the case of the great mothers, here too infertility and powerlessness prove to be the place where God reveals his power, and the woman still, despite her sins, appears to be the mother of life. Ratzinger also points out that in the Old Testament the woman is never a priestess but plays the role of prophetess and deliverer.¹¹⁹

(5) The figure of wisdom present in the later layer of Old Testament texts. Wisdom expresses both the pure prefiguration of God’s creative will and the pure response he sought. The New Testament does not allow a complete identification of Christology with the continuation of the wisdom motif, especially since *sophia* in Hebrew and Greek is of the feminine gender. The mysterious remnant indicates, Ratzinger maintains, that wisdom signifies the pure response flowing from God’s creation and election, in which God’s love finds a dwelling place.¹²⁰ In wisdom, the connection between Word and response can be grasped, and Mary appears as the epitome of the true Israel. In the light of the New Testament, wisdom draws attention

to the creature, to the true Israel, who is personified in the humble maid whose whole existence is marked by the attitude of *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*. *Sophia* refers to the *Logos*, the Word who establishes wisdom, and also to the womanly answer which receives wisdom and brings it to fruition. The eradication of the Marian interpretation of sophiology ultimately leaves out an entire dimension of the biblical and the Christian mystery.¹²¹

Ratzinger concludes his reflections so far by stating the indispensability of the biblical figure of woman in the structure of faith. In the Old Testament she expresses the reality of creation and the fruitfulness of God’s grace, yet with the fulfilment of the scriptures and the realisation of the hope of the

¹¹⁸ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 153; WCS, pp. 117–119, 129; J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report...*, op. cit., pp. 106–107 (J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *Raport o stanie wiary...*, op. cit., p. 91); J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., pp. 233, 239.

¹¹⁹ Cf. DZ, pp. 20–21; WCS, pp. 18–19, 21.

¹²⁰ Cf. DZ, p. 26; WCS, pp. 21–22.

¹²¹ DZ, pp. 26–27; WCS, p. 22.

Old Testament in Christ, the figure of woman is also highlighted. Hitherto the woman was seen typologically in Israel and embodied temporarily in the heroines of Israel, in the New Testament she finds her fulfilment in the person of Mary.¹²² Therefore

To deny or reject the feminine aspect in belief, or, more concretely, the Marian aspect, leads finally to the negation of creation and the invalidation of grace. It leads to a picture of God's omnipotence that reduces the creature to a mere masquerade and that also completely fails to understand the God of the Bible, who is characterized as being the creator and the God of the covenant – the God for whom the beloved's punishment and rejection themselves become the passion of love, the cross. Not without reason did the Church Fathers interpret the passion and cross as marriage, as that suffering in which God takes upon himself the pain of the faithless wife in order to draw her to himself irrevocably in eternal love.¹²³

Mariology, therefore, defends the biblical image of God creating and then uniting himself in a spousal relationship with his people, who, as endowed with his grace, respond to God's love. Mariology also allows the principle of *solus Christus* to be dismissed by showing not Christ himself, but Christ being Head and Body. In this way, it makes it possible to see that the doctrine of grace does not invalidate creation by attributing sole efficacy to God, but is a definitive "yes" to the creation redeemed, called and endowed with relative autonomy.¹²⁴

¹²² Cf. DZ, pp. 27–28; WCS, p. 22; cf. also: WCS, p. 72; G. Mansini, *Ecclesiology*, Washington, DC 2021, p. 130: "Types not only indicate but prepare for the future. It is a mistake to see in Sarah and Rebecca and Rachel nothing but bare signs of a future church to which they contribute nothing. The history they enact, together with Hagar and Leah, Tamar and Ruth, establishes the pattern of revelation, and by their cooperation with God they contribute to its dynamism, a dynamism not perfected, of course, except in Christ. The point, however, is that they are not empty signs of what is to come, but contribute to its coming. They contribute to its coming, moreover, precisely as women. Their maternity is entirely essential to embedding the design of salvation in history. What is said of Mary must be said of all the great and valiant women of the Old Testament, because they find their perfection in her, and that is that the Lord is more dependent on woman than he is on man for the incarnation."

¹²³ DZ, pp. 28–29; WCS, pp. 22–23.

¹²⁴ Cf. DZ, p. 70; J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 155; WCS, pp. 62, 122.

Unity of Scripture and continuity of the People of God (canonical exegesis)

If the New Testament is an interpretation of the Old in the light of Jesus of Nazareth, whose word, life and Passover mark the difference between the two Testaments, Mary in turn is the centre of the union of the two Testaments. She embodies the continuity of the blessed poor of Israel and is even, as Ratzinger writes commenting on the scene of the Annunciation, “the people of God” bearing fruit through the gracious power of God bringing forth a new creation from the old.¹²⁵ So

In her very person [...] Mary binds together, in a living and indissoluble way, the old and the new People of God, Israel and Christianity, synagogue and church. She is, as it were, the connecting link without which the Faith (as is happening today) runs the risk of losing its balance by either forsaking the New Testament for the Old or dispensing with the Old. In her, instead, we can live the unity of sacred Scripture in its entirety.¹²⁶

In Ratzinger’s considerations, canonical exegesis, reading the Bible in its entirety and taking into account the typological interpretation, appears to be an important issue.¹²⁷ Only then can it be seen that along with the line going from Abraham, through the patriarchs up to the Servant of Yahweh, a line is also drawn from Eve, through the great figures of the Old Testament.¹²⁸ It is

a journey that cannot be minimised from a theological point of view, however unfinished and therefore open-ended it may be in its affirmations; however incomplete it may be, like the whole of the Old Testament, which continues in anticipation of the New and of its response. But as the Adamic line receives its meaning from Christ, so in the light of the figure of Mary and in the position held by the *Ecclesia*, the meaning of the feminine line in its inseparable union with the Christological mystery becomes clear.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Cf. DZ, pp. 32, 43; WCS, pp. 25, 32.

¹²⁶ Cf. J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report...*, op. cit., p. 107 (J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *Raport o stanie wiary...*, op. cit., p. 91); cf. J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 227.

¹²⁷ Cf. DZ, pp. 32–33, 69; WCS, pp. 25–26, 60; VD 34, 38, 41. Ratzinger maintains that the principle of reading the Bible in its totality is linked to the principle of reading it as a present reality – cf. DZ, p. 69; WCS, p. 60.

¹²⁸ Cf. DZ, p. 70; WCS, p. 62.

¹²⁹ DZ, pp. 70–71; WCS, pp. 62–63.

The rejection of the feminine principle in its relationship and unity with Christology is a selection that rejects the totality that makes the truth about God and man unspeakable.¹³⁰ In the unity of the two Testaments, Ratzinger sees at the same time the condition of the inviolability of the doctrine of creation and of grace. Where there is a separation of the Old and New Testaments, there the doctrine of grace becomes isolated from the doctrine of creation.¹³¹ The inability to read Scripture in its totality (e.g. dividing the New Testament into supposedly more important layers of the more ancient – at the expense of St. Luke and St. John, the two New Testament Mariologists) makes Mariological reflection impossible. Then the accents in the totality of Christian reality cannot be properly distributed, and without Mariology the experiential place of unity also disappears, as the Church loses her personal concreteness.¹³²

Without Mariology, both the unity and the *differentia specifica* between the People of God of the Old and New Covenants cannot be properly understood. In the New Testament, believers become a people in the sacrament of the Eucharist when they form the Body of Christ. This Pauline expression must be understood in the context of the union of "one flesh," which presupposes the mystery of marital union (cf. Gen 2:24; 1 Cor 6:17). Therefore, the Eucharistic and Christological mystery of the Church expressed by the term "Body of Christ," which "remains within the proper measure only when it includes the mystery of Mary: The mystery of the listening handmaid who – liberated in grace – speaks her *Fiat* and, in so doing, becomes bride and thus body."¹³³

The unity of the two Testaments is also manifested in Marian cult and therefore also in the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The dogma finds its origin in the cult of Mary, the papal bull containing the dogma is a statement of a theological and not of a historical nature, and the dogmatization itself also may be an act of veneration.¹³⁴ The Evangelist Luke assumed

¹³⁰ Cf. DZ, p. 71; WCS, p. 63.

¹³¹ Cf. DZ, p. 33; WCS, p. 26.

¹³² Cf. DZ, pp. 33, 71; WCS, pp. 25–26, 63.

¹³³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 153; WCS, p. 118. Of course, Mary transcends this "Bridegroom–Bride" or "Head–Body" relationship on account of the fact that, vis-à-vis Christ, she is first and foremost Mother; thus Mariology goes beyond the framework of ecclesiology – cf. WCS, p. 120.

¹³⁴ DZ, pp. 74–75; Cf. WCS, pp. 48–49. This character distinguishes the last two dogmas from the earlier ones, although there was also a doxological feature in those, cf. WCS, p. 48. Congar explained that the sacred liturgy venerating the Mother of God gives a deeper understanding of Her and Her role, which cannot be reduced to the knowledge that is a result of theological and exegetical research and reasoning; cf. Y. Congar, *Tradycja i tradycje...*, op. cit., p. 305.

the veneration of Mary in the Church of his time and saw this veneration as pertaining to the Church of all times (cf. Luke 1:45, 48). In worshipping Mary, therefore, the Church is not inventing something new, but is doing what she was instructed to do, and *vice versa*: to be silent in this worship would be to move away from the biblical word and praise of God.¹³⁵ According to Ratzinger, Elisabeth's words are a prophetic foreshadowing that "Christians will also give praise to God by rejoicing over people in whom he has shown how great and how good he is."¹³⁶ The theologian emphasises that

The earliest form of Marian devotion once more reflects the unity of the Testaments which is characteristic of the whole Marian theme: The God of Israel is named by men to whom he has manifested his greatness and in whose lives he becomes visible and present. They are as it were his *name* in history, through them he himself possesses names, and through and in them he becomes more accessible.¹³⁷

The expectation to see God in pure form, above the human faces, would be a hubristic purism and attempt to invent God. Mary enters into the name of God in a special way, so that without her we do not adore God adequately.¹³⁸ The 1950 dogma is a canonization pointing to an eschatological perfection, and worship refers to her Person who lives in God. This veneration is therefore linked to the veneration of the fathers of faith, whom God Himself included in His name. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, according to the words of Jesus, is the God of the living and not of the dead, and the fact that the patriarchs belong to the name of God is proof of the resurrection (cf. Mark 12:26–27).¹³⁹ "The right to veneration includes the certitude of the conquest of death, the certitude of the resurrection."¹⁴⁰

Ratzinger addressed the question as to why Mary was to be taken to heaven not only with a soul but also with a body. He asserted that Mary represents the Church and her final salvation which is a reality and not merely a promise. Besides, "being the Mother of God" of the One who is Life (and "the death of death") "is really a "new birth" (*nova nativitas*): a new way of giving birth

¹³⁵ Cf. DZ, p. 75; WCS, pp. 49, 97–98, 132.

¹³⁶ Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 295 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 271).

¹³⁷ DZ, p. 75; WCS, p. 49.

¹³⁸ Cf. WCS, p. 98.

¹³⁹ Cf. DZ, pp. 75–76; WCS, pp. 49–50.

¹⁴⁰ DZ, p. 76; WCS, p. 50.

inserted into the old way." Mary's life is pure beginning, it was not conceived to die but to live, and it points to the Assumption.¹⁴¹

The biblical image of God and the mystery of the Incarnate Word

Ratzinger highlighted the problem that his contemporaries find it difficult to recognise the Virgin birth. The rejection of the possibility of such an action of God stems from an assumed Cartesianism that strips the body and birth of what is human and reduces it to merely biological, and from the acceptance of an *apriori* relationship between God and the world according to which God's activity in matter is not permissible and He cannot encounter earthly history because His influence is limited to the realm of the spirit.¹⁴² The dogma of the ever-Virgin Mary portrays God as reaching even into biological matters. By showing that God marks the whole human being, including physical, biological and material life, the error of Manichaeism is dismissed, Ratzinger explained to interviewer Seewald.¹⁴³

In the part of *Jesus of Nazareth* with infancy narratives, Ratzinger noted, following Karl Barth, that "there are two moments in the story of Jesus when God intervenes directly in the material world: the virgin birth and the resurrection from the tomb, in which Jesus did not remain, nor see corruption. These two moments are a scandal to the modern spirit." God does not work only in the spiritual domain, in ideas or thoughts, but also in the material, in which He can manifest His creative power. "In that sense, these two moments – the virgin birth and the real resurrection from the tomb – are the cornerstones of faith." God shows Himself to have power also over matter, "and through the conception and resurrection of Jesus Christ he has ushered in a new creation. So as the Creator he is also our Redeemer."¹⁴⁴

Belief in the birth *ex Maria virgine* is a theological statement, and the biblical witness to this event

¹⁴¹ Cf. DZ, pp. 76–78; WCS, pp. 36, 50–52. The connection with the Immaculate Conception can also be pointed out: "where the totality of grace is, there is the totality of salvation. Where grace no longer exists in the fractured state of *simul justus et peccator*, but in pure 'Yes', death, sin's jailer, has no place" – DZ, p. 77; WCS, p. 51.

¹⁴² Cf. DZ, pp. 59–60; WCS, pp. 39–41.

¹⁴³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 303 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 278).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. JN, Kindle Location 705.

is not an idyllic nook of devotion, a tiny, private chapel of the two evangelists, an optional extra. [...] The alternatives are simple: does God act or not? [...] The affirmation of Jesus' birth from the Virgin Mary intends to affirm these two truths: (1) God really acts—realiter, not just interpretative, and (2) the earth produces its fruit—precisely because he acts.¹⁴⁵

Mary is both Virgin and Mother, and this is, according to Ratzinger, the fundamental Marian dogma in which the two truths are united. She can be called the Mother of God because a purely human Christ, as Nestorius wanted, cannot be built on the bodily element of the Incarnate Word. The separation of God from birth and motherhood as a full embodiment would negate the reality of the Incarnation, whereas the Virgin birth is the necessary beginning for the One who, also as man, is the Son of the Father and thus gives lasting and universal meaning to the messianic hope. The event of “becoming of man” extends all the way to the flesh, or, from the other side, the flesh extends all the way to the centre of the Person of the Logos, so that the whole life of Jesus is incorporated into a filial exchange with the Father. Because of this unity, Mary is the real “Mother of God” (and not merely an instrument), and her motherhood is united to the mystery of the Incarnation and it enters into this mystery.¹⁴⁶

Thus the christological affirmation of God's Incarnation in Christ becomes necessarily a Marian affirmation, as *de factaffirmatione* it was from the beginning. Conversely: only when it touches Mary and becomes Mariology is Christology itself as radical as the faith of the Church requires. The appearance of a truly Marian awareness serves as the touchstone indicating whether or not the christological substance is fully present.¹⁴⁷

Without Mary, God's entry into history would not have achieved the purpose expressed in the Creed, which reveals God with us and for us.¹⁴⁸ If motherhood were merely a purely biological fact, then its theological significance would have

¹⁴⁵ DZ, p. 60; WCS, p. 41.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. DZ, pp. 34–35; WCS, pp. 26–27, 29, 35–36.

¹⁴⁷ DZ, p. 35; WCS, p. 27. It should be added to this, however, that although Marian dogmas grow out of Christology, they do not form Mariology, but are part of Christology. In Ratzinger's view, it was only ecclesiology, though also inseparable from Mariology in itself, that could determine Mariology – cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., pp. 154–155; WCS, pp. 119–120. Cf. also: J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 232.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. WCS, p. 87.

to be questioned (cf. Mark 3:33–35 and Luke 11:27–28). The hermeneutics of faith, however, makes it possible to see the theological reality of the correlation of Christ and his mother existing from the beginning. The history of salvation leads to the mystery of the spousal union between Creator and creature, and according to this, the relationship between Christ and the Church constitutes the hermeneutical centre of Scripture. In this perspective, Mary's motherhood receives theological significance; Mary pronounces her *fiat* as "Israel in person" and "the personal concretisation of the Church," and in this way realises "the deepest content of the covenant" of God with humanity.¹⁴⁹

We can therefore say that the affirmation of Mary's motherhood and the affirmation of her representation of the Church are related as *factum* and *mysterium facti*, as the fact and the sense that gives the fact its meaning. The two things are inseparable: The fact without its sense would be blind, the sense without the fact would be empty. Mariology cannot be developed from the naked fact, but only from the fact as it is understood in the hermeneutics of faith.¹⁵⁰

Mary is the personification of the Church and the anticipation of what the Church is, and the Church reveals Mary's theological significance and "universal dimension." Ratzinger writes of the "interchangeability" of Mary and the Church, their mutual transition into each other.¹⁵¹

As Mariology serves Christology, so too does Marian devotion serve the cult of Christ. Ratzinger addresses the accusation that excessive Marian devotion would be detrimental to Jesus by pointing out that in the missionary areas, especially in South America, it was Mary who found her way into people's hearts and opened up access to Christ, who only then became close to those people. Thanks to this, they were able to see the true God's face, which was later corrupted by the Spanish conquerors.¹⁵² With their radical understanding of the *solus Christus* principle, Protestants failed to see "that the face of Christ

¹⁴⁹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 155; WCS, pp. 108–109, 120–121, 129, 131; J. Ratzinger, *Znak Kany* [Sign of the Cana], transl. L. Balter, "Communio" [Polish edition] 27/1 (2007), pp. 6–7; P. Blanco, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger...*, op. cit., pp. 166–167.

¹⁵⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 156; cf. WCS, p. 121.

¹⁵¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 353 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 326–327); cf. WCS, p. 100.

¹⁵² Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., pp. 300–301 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 275–276). Conversely, where Marian devotion is disappearing (e.g. in South America), the void is filled by political ideologies, which, according to Ratzinger, indicates that Marian devotion is "no mere piety" – J. Ratzinger, V. Messori,

himself appears in the face of his Mother, and its true message becomes clear in this way.”¹⁵³

Promise and fulfilment in salvation history (typological interpretation)

One of the objections to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was that it would entail the denial of the universality of divine grace. Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and Karl Barth in the twentieth century took the position of radically opposing the Law and the Gospel, and viewed the relationship between God and man on a dialectical basis to defend pure grace and the sinner's unmerited justification.¹⁵⁴ Ratzinger, however, referred to the doctrine of correspondence “binding Old and New Testaments in an interior unity of promise and fulfillment. As a form of interpretation typology includes analogy, similarity in dissimilarity, unity in diversity.”¹⁵⁵

In the birth of Jesus fulfilling the promises of the Old Testament, the inner bond of expectation and accomplishment is revealed, and the action of God is shown.¹⁵⁶ Yes, there are elements of discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants manifest in the prophecies of judgment, but there is also the admonition of the Holy Remnant of Israel, which was to be saved and, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, did indeed survive (cf. Rom 11:5), indicating continuity. The Bavarian theologian sees this Holy Remnant in Mary, in whom the Old and New Testaments remain one.¹⁵⁷

The Ratzinger Report..., op. cit., p. 106 (cf. J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *Raport o stanie wiary...*, op. cit., pp. 89–90).

¹⁵³ J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 302 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 277). The healings and miracles that take place at Marian shrines are also an expression of the trust Mary enjoys, and the faithful “[t]hrough Mary they are able to look upon the face of Christ and of God, so that they are able to understand God.” Such facts prove that “the mystery of the Son and the mystery of God are made accessible to men in a special way through the Mother” as “Mary is the open door to God.” “Faith becomes such a living thing in this trust that it spills out into the physical, everyday realm and thereby permits the kind hand of God to become actually effective, through the power of the kindness of this Mother” – J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., pp. 306–307 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 282–283).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. DZ, p. 63; WCS, p. 42. K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1/2: *Die Lehre Vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena Zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, Zollikon–Zürich 1945, pp. 158–159.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. DZ, p. 63; WCS, pp. 42–43.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. DZ, p. 67; WCS, p. 89.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. DZ, p. 65; WCS, p. 43.

She is the New Covenant in the Old Covenant; she is the New Covenant as the Old Covenant, as Israel: thus no one can comprehend her mission or her person if the unity of the Old and New Testaments collapses. Because she is entirely response, correspondence [*Entsprechung*], she cannot be understood where grace seems to be opposition and response, the real response of the creature, appears to be a denial of grace [...].¹⁵⁸

Thus, not only in God's eternal intention, but also in history, continuity can be seen as the word of God finding a real response is at work. Ratzinger recognises that grace and the word without a real positive response would be an 'empty game' and a 'monologue of God'. What belongs to the nature of woman – being 'opposite' to the other from whom one comes – culminates in Mary; in her created being she becomes the answer.¹⁵⁹

The content of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is freedom from original sin, which can only be known theologically. Ratzinger proposes to refer to a typological interpretation of Scripture.¹⁶⁰ The Letter to the Ephesians includes a description of the new Israel, the Church, which Christ presents to Himself to be "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). This scriptural image of the *Ecclesiae Immaculatae*, developed by the Fathers of the Church, comprises the teaching of the Immaculate Conception anticipated as ecclesiology. The image of the Church refers secondarily to Mary as the beginning and personal concreteness of the Ecclesia, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is an application to the Person of Mary of a statement originally referring to the antithesis of the old-new Israel.¹⁶¹

It entails the conviction that the rebirth of the old Israel into the new Israel, of which the Epistle to the Ephesians spoke, achieves in Mary its concrete accomplishment. It proclaims that this new Israel (which is simultaneously the true old Israel, the holy remnant preserved by the grace of God) is not only an idea, but

¹⁵⁸ DZ, p. 65; WCS, pp. 43–44.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. DZ, p. 67; WCS, pp. 43–44. Cf. WCS, p. 20: The Church "possesses a certain relative independence from Christ: the independence of the bride, who, although she has achieved in love a spiritual bond, nevertheless remains face to face with Christ."

¹⁶⁰ Cf. DZ, p. 68; WCS, pp. 44–45.

¹⁶¹ Cf. DZ, p. 68; J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 154; WCS, pp. 45, 118–119.

a person. God does not act with abstractions or concepts; the type, of which the ecclesiology of the New Testament and the Fathers speak, exists as a person.¹⁶²

The biblical basis for such a justification of personification can be found in St Luke's (and, though differently, St John's) typological identification of Mary with Israel. The Evangelist compares the believing and listening Virgin with the true Daughter of Zion. According to Ratzinger, "It is no less part of the framework of biblical theology than the systematic interpretation of the Adam-Christ type is part of the doctrine of original sin."¹⁶³

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception shows that in a background marked by sin, Mary is an exception, since in her there is a new beginning, made on the initiative of God, who "has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness" (cf. Luke 1:48). The words "full of grace" found in the angelic greeting, read in the light of her unique adherence to Christ (which is the content of the 1854 dogma) prove to be something that encompasses and defines the whole life of the Mother of the Lord, whose "Yes" is contained in the prior love of God. During a protracted debate within the Church, a conviction developed that Mary's relationship with Christ was stronger than her relationship with Adam, and that Christ's destiny was an essential distinctive trait of her life, in accordance with God's prior idea.¹⁶⁴

The preservation from original sin is not only about chronology (justification earlier than for other persons); the axiological sense must be emphasised above all, as Ratzinger repeated after Rahner. The dogma of 1854 is a statement pointing to the relationship between God and man. Where original sin appears as a contradiction between the will of God and the will of man, there is a pure "Yes" to God in Mary and a pure "Yes" of God to her. And it is precisely "[t]his correspondence of God's 'Yes' with Mary's being as 'Yes' [that] is the freedom from original sin."¹⁶⁵ At the same time, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception

reflects ultimately faith's certitude that there really is a Holy Church – as a person and in a person. In this sense it expresses the Church's certitude of salvation. [...] The doctrine of the *Immaculata* testifies accordingly that God's grace was

¹⁶² DZ, p. 68; WCS, p. 45.

¹⁶³ DZ, p. 68; WCS, pp. 45–46, 101 (quoted from p. 46).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 304 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 279–280); J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 153; WCS, p. 92.

¹⁶⁵ DZ, p. 70; WCS, p. 46.

powerful enough to awaken a response, that grace and freedom, grace and being oneself, renunciation and fulfilment are only apparent contradictories; in reality one conditions the other and grants it its very existence.¹⁶⁶

Also the Assumption, understood in a typological perspective, means that the new Israel will no longer be rejected, for it has been brought to heaven.¹⁶⁷

Relatio bilateralis between Marian dogmas and Scripture

The above reflections can be summed up by Ratzinger's statement about the distinct structure of Marian dogmas, which "cannot be deduced from the individual texts of the New Testament; instead they express the broad perspective embracing the unity of both Testaments." In the opinion of the Bavarian theologian, "[t]hey can become visible only to a mode of perception that accepts this unity, i.e., within a perspective which comprehends and makes its own the 'typological' interpretation."¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Mariology should not be built on the basis of New Testament elements, but should be based on the three great Marian dogmas (in fact there are four, the first two being combined by Ratzinger into the dogma of the Virgin-Mother), whose spiritual content can then be explained on a biblical basis.¹⁶⁹ All the Marian dogmas help to maintain the balance and fullness of the Catholic faith, as Ratzinger explained to Vittorio Messori:

These dogmas protect the original faith in Christ as true God and true man: two natures in a single Person. They also secure the indispensable eschatological tension by pointing to Mary's Assumption as the immortal destiny that awaits us. And they also protect the faith – threatened today – in God the Creator, who (and this, among other things, is the meaning of the truth of the perpetual

¹⁶⁶ DZ, p. 70; WCS, p. 47.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. DZ, p. 81; WCS, p. 53.

¹⁶⁸ DZ, p. 32; WCS, pp. 25–26.

¹⁶⁹ DZ, p. 9; cf. WCS, p. 26. Mariology cannot be a "duplicate of Christology," and that which is specifically Marian is to be seen in relation to that which is Christological – together they are to form a whole – cf. DZ, p. 9; J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 152; cf. WCS, pp. 13, 125. Also when it comes to Marian devotion, Ratzinger emphasises that it cannot refer to or reduce to partial aspects of Christianity; it is to be a path to openness to the totality of the mystery – cf. J. Ratzinger, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine...*, op. cit., p. 152; cf. WCS, p. 125.

virginity of Mary, more than ever not understood today) can freely intervene also in matter.¹⁷⁰

It is worth recalling in this context Ratzinger's statement on the relationship between Scripture and dogma. Dogma as an interpretation cannot override the meaning of Scripture, nor is it true that only the Church's interpretation should be clear and the object of interpretation itself unclear. It is not *relatio unilateralis*, but a two-way relationship must be assumed: Scripture to be interpreted according to dogma, and dogma to be interpreted according to Scripture. If Tradition is a form of making Scripture present, then dogma too, as an objectified Tradition (and in this sense something materially transcending Scripture) participates in this process, and therefore needs an interpretation made possible only by returning to the source.¹⁷¹

Here he [Ratzinger – SZ] hints that the distinct functions of Scripture (the interpreted) and dogma (the interpreter) correspond roughly to the twofold structure of Revelation, which is simultaneously "once only" and "forever." In other words, the material closure of the biblical canon finds its justification in the historical unrepeatability of the Incarnate Word, while the open-endedness of dogmatic interpretation corresponds to the limitless diffusion of His presence by the Spirit.¹⁷²

I will refer to the 1950 dogma as perhaps the most difficult case for demonstrating the mutual clarification of Scripture and a Marian dogma.¹⁷³ Benedict XVI claimed that the Assumption "is an ancient feast deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture: indeed, it presents the Virgin Mary closely united to her divine Son and ever supportive of him."¹⁷⁴ Ratzinger's understanding of the content of this dogma was helped by the theology of baptism developed in the Letter to the

¹⁷⁰ J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 107 (J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *Raport o stanie wiary...*, op. cit., p. 90); cf. J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 227.

¹⁷¹ Cf. JRO 9/1, p. 388; A. Pidel, *Christi Opera Proficiunt...*, op. cit., p. 707.

¹⁷² A. Pidel, *Christi Opera Proficiunt...*, op. cit., p. 707.

¹⁷³ Ratzinger "offers an explanation of the title of the Immaculate Conception and the dogma of the Assumption, taking as a starting point the liturgy, the biblical texts and related categories" – P. Blanco, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger...*, op. cit., p. 166.

¹⁷⁴ Benedict XVI, *Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Angelus* (15.08.2007), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20070815_assunzione.html [access: 5.10.2023] (Polish translation: Benedykt XVI, *Światło Maryi rzuca blask na dzieje całej ludzkości. Rozważanie przed modlitwą Anioł Pański* [15.08.2007], [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Mystagogia Benedicti...*, op. cit., p. 206).

Ephesians. Its author argued that God has also “has raised us up with Jesus, and in Christ Jesus he has enthroned us with him in the heavenly realm (Eph 2:6).” In this way, through the sacrament, the future of Christians was anticipated.¹⁷⁵

The dogma says, then, that in Mary’s case what baptism ensures for us all, that is, dwelling “enthroned” with God “in heaven” (God is heaven!), has already been put into effect for Mary. Baptism (being united with Christ) has achieved its full effect. [...] [Mary] has entered into full community with Christ. And part of this community is another corporal identity, which we cannot imagine. In brief: the essential point of this dogma is that Mary is wholly with God, entirely with Christ, completely a “Christian.”¹⁷⁶

Ratzinger recalled other words of the Apostle: “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). This assurance, the Bavarian theologian believed, points to the existence of a kind of “assumption” of the baptised as described in Eph 2:6, which implies that baptism makes it possible to participate not only in Christ’s rising from the dead but also in his ascension into heaven.¹⁷⁷ If the baptised already live their hidden but real life in the glorified Lord,

[t]he formula of the “assumption” of Mary’s body and soul loses every trace of all speculative arbitrariness in this perspective. The Assumption is actually only the highest form of canonisation. She gave birth to the Lord “with the heart before her body” (Augustine), and therefore faith, i.e., the interior substance of Baptism according to Luke 1:45, can be predicated of her without restriction, realizing in her the very quintessence of Baptism. Thus it is said that, in her, death was swallowed up by Christ’s victory.¹⁷⁸

Thus, by the way, this veneration was biblically explained: “Precisely this devotional element, so to speak, was the driving force behind the formulation of this Dogma. The Dogma appears as an act of praise and exaltation of the Holy Virgin.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 305 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 280–281); DZ, p. 80; WCS p. 52.

¹⁷⁶ J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 305 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 281); cf. WCS, p. 138.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. DZ, p. 80; WCS, p. 52.

¹⁷⁸ DZ, p. 80; WCS, p. 52.

¹⁷⁹ Benedict XVI, *Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Parish Church of St. Thomas of Villanova*, Castel Gandolfo (15.08.2012), https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/20120815_homily_01_12_12_it.html.

Summary

1. Ratzinger emphasises that revelation is greater than the words of Scripture, this in turn being the testimony of revelation. Revelation has its “yesterday” and its “today,” and both poles are equally important for Christian faith. For faith, the source event remains authoritative because of the action of God manifested in it, which nevertheless has an ongoing presence and remains alive and effective in the faith of the Church. Revelation is accomplished insofar as it is realised in the Incarnate One, as an event of the relationship between God and man; revelation, in turn, is accomplished because this relationship is realised again and again, and it is only in history that all the possibilities of the already established encounter between human beings and God unfold. The revelation is Christ himself, and in this sense the revelation has ended, but because Christ is also the One who comes, the revelation continues. Because it took place in history, revelation has its ἐφάπαξ which, together with its biblical explication, functions as a permanent norm for the Church. Tradition is thus “bound” not by the canon itself, but rather by the enduring reality of foundational revelation and its inspired witness. The Bavarian theologian therefore emphasised both the importance of the office of the Church and the office of Scripture; the former derives its solemnity from the Lord’s permanent presence in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17), the latter from the “once for all” of the salvation history. This means that, in striking a balance between the poles of “yesterday” and “today,” *littera scripturae* is an important criterion to which the statements of the Church’s Teaching Office must also be subjected.

2. The Lord is present in the Church in the power of his Spirit, as the New Testament canon testifies. Therefore, the word of the Lord can be understood as present and subject to development. On the other hand, the word is linked to the historical basis attested in Scripture. History shows an increasing tension between preserving the word and assimilating it in Tradition with actualising it in the present. Thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, once given and still the same revelation is manifest in a different way and thus preserved. Ratzinger shows the link between Scripture and Tradition in terms of the interplay of uniqueness and continuity. Scripture provides the link to the “once for all” of the historical event of Christ, while Tradition embodies the

vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120815_assunzione.html [access: 5.10.2023] (Polish translation: Benedict XVI, *Kiedy otwieramy się na Boga, nasze życie staje się bogate i wielkie. Homilia w uroczystość Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny w kościele parafialnym pw. św. Tomasza z Villanova, Castel Gandolfo* [15.08.2012], [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Mystagogia Benedicti...*, op. cit., p. 238).

living "today" of faith, still being realised and developed anew. Tradition can develop because the perception of the source reality and the understanding of the matters and words handed down grow with the aid of the Paraclete who guides to all truth (cf. John 16:13). The Spirit of Truth allows retrospective insight into the depths of what has already happened (the unspoken in the spoken). In the spiritual experience of the whole Church, the understanding of the historical beginning grows. In Ratzinger's view, Tradition is the bond between man and the unique history of Christ confirmed in Scripture and present through the Spirit in the Church. A living Tradition is important for a deeper understanding of the truth revealed in the inspired texts.

3. The all-embracing Logos, always greater than the biblical words involved in the inexhaustibility of that Word, will be comprehended in the memory of the Church. The *Memoria Ecclesiae* is unveiled in John's Gospel, and the process of "recollection" present therein, leading to a fuller discovery of Christ, can be contrasted, according to Ratzinger, with Luke's account of the process of recollection that characterises the Mother of Christ. Mary is a figure of the Church listening to the word of God and trying to understand the word in its entirety. In the Fourth Gospel, personal and communal recollection are combined, and this process allows us to enter the inner aspect of events by linking God's words and actions. The evangelist's aim is to bear witness to Christ in such a way that leads to the discovery in the present of Him who says of Himself "I am" (John 8:58). In the process of ecclesial recollection, which will then continue in the Tradition of the Church, the promise of guidance by the Paraclete towards all truth is fulfilled (cf. John 16:13). In this truth there is a place for the mystery of the Mother of Christ alongside the mystery of Christ. The texts of the New Testament already reflect the gradual discovery of Mary, about whom secrecy was kept during her lifetime. The accounts from family traditions, initially private, were eventually incorporated into the official preaching of the Church. In this way, the mystery of the beginning illuminated future events, and the faith developed in Christ made it possible to grasp the profound meaning of the beginning. Mary thus played a role in the development of Christology and is permanently associated with it.

4. One of the tasks of the Second Vatican Council was to work out the relations between the two spiritual currents, liturgical and Marian, that had emerged in the living Tradition of the Church. The debates of the Council were marked by the bipolarity expressed in these two currents; the Council fathers considered how history and spirit relate to each other in the structure of faith. Particularly under the influence of the Marian movement and the last two dogmas, which could not be justified historically, a new dynamic approach

to Tradition had to be developed. The young Ratzinger pointed out that in the promulgation of the 1854 and 1950 dogmas, the awareness of the faith of the People of God came to the fore. The danger which the conciliar expert perceived in connection with the affirmation of the sense of faith was that the pole of the “today” associated with the present action of the Spirit was overemphasised at the expense of the Christological “once for all.” The dehistoricization of Tradition associated with the recognition that revelation can include what the Church has at some point in history discovered as revealed could, in his view, lead to a distortion of the basic structure of Tradition. On the other hand, the Bavarian theologian, with reference to the reception of Geiselman’s research, pointed to the other extreme. This would be to emphasise the pole of uniqueness in such a way as to postulate the sufficiency of Scripture itself. The elder Ratzinger viewed the sense of faith more favourably, allowing that the faith shared by the whole people could guide the Church’s Teaching Office. He judged that the opposition to Marian dogmas stemmed from a historicism that viewed Tradition statically.

5. The indissoluble link between the Bible and Tradition is perpetuated in Mariology. Although Marian dogmas are rooted in the Bible, they are present there as seeds whose growth is only possible in Tradition. In turn, what grows out of the biblical seeds ultimately also serves revelation and its inspired witness. Marian doctrine thus, to a certain extent, safeguards the pole of the “once for all” and shows its openness to future development.

In his reflections on the mystery of Mary, Ratzinger moved from the New Testament to the Old. The main theme he emphasised was the theology of the woman, which he considered essential to the overall construction of biblical faith and theology. The figure of the woman points to the reality of creation and the fruitfulness of God’s grace resulting in a real response to God’s love and his word. Thus, Mariology opposes the self-effectiveness of God’s action and the principle of *solus Christus*, as it points to Christ as Head and Body. What was typologically presented in Israel in female protagonists, it found fulfilment in the New Covenant in the Person of Mary. Mariology, in Ratzinger’s view, reveals the mystery of conjugal love and motherhood present in the Church, and in this way makes it possible to recover the dimension of the Church in accordance with the Bible and the theology of the Church Fathers.

If the Event of Christ marks the difference between the Old and New Testaments, Mary in turn embodies the continuity between them. In her Person she unites the old and the new People of God, the synagogue and the Church. In this way, she averts the danger of rupturing the unity of Scripture (Ratzinger even writes that it is in Her where the synthesis of the Bible takes place) and the

bond between the doctrine of creation and grace. Through Mariology, both the unity of the People of God and the *differentia specifica* of the People of the New Covenant become clear. The New Testament "Body of Christ" is linked not only to the Eucharistic and Christological mystery, but also to the Marian mystery. The submissive Handmaid, by virtue of the divine grace given to her, says "Yes" and becomes the Spouse and the Body. Marian devotion, too, reflects the unity of the two Testaments, for in Mary, as in the heroes of faith of the Old Testament period, God reveals as "made present" in history in those who are, as it were, His name.

The dogma of perpetual virginity protects the image of the biblical God as marking the whole of human life, not only spiritual but also physical (against Manichaeism and Cartesianism). The belief in the birth *ex Maria virgine* is a theological statement attesting that God acts in a real way and that creation bears fruit as a result of this action. The incarnation means that the whole human life of Jesus is incorporated into the filial dialogue with the Father. From the unity of God and man in the Incarnate Word, it follows that the motherhood of the "Mother of God" is united to the mystery of the Incarnation. The Christological statement of the Incarnation of the Logos includes a Mariological dimension, and where Christology does not also become Mariology, Christological faith is not preserved. If the whole history of salvation leads to the spousal union of Christ and the Church, then in this perspective Mary appears in her motherhood as the Church personified. The Bavarian theologian also argued that Marian devotion makes it possible to see the real face of Christ in the face of the Mother.

Ratzinger pointed to the intrinsic unity of promise and fulfilment in Scripture. Due to the typological interpretation, it is possible to see the parallels between the two Testaments and to grasp the similarity in dissimilarity. The continuity between the Old and New Covenants can be seen in the Holy Remnant of Israel, personified in Mary. The Mother of God is the response of the creation to God's grace and the word of God, which refuses to be a monologue. Through the response identified as Mary, a continuity reflecting God's eternal design becomes perceptible in history. The Bavarian theologian emphasised that the teaching of the Immaculate Conception was anticipated as an ecclesiology and the dogma is the application to Mary of the antithesis of the old and new Israel. Mary turns out to be a type of Israel according to the New Testament (e.g. the evangelist Luke in his depiction of Mary as the Daughter of Zion) and the Fathers of the Church. Such an identification is, in Ratzinger's view, no less present in the Bible than the Adam-Christ typological interpretation. The 1854 dogma expresses the certainty of salvation of the Church, which exists as holy in Her.

Mariology should be developed on the basis of Marian dogmas explained on a biblical basis, not only on the basis of New Testament texts. Ratzinger wrote about the reciprocal relation between dogma and Scripture: inspired texts must be interpreted according to dogma, and dogmas must be interpreted by relating them to the inspired source. Dogmas must be incorporated into Tradition, which is understood as making present the revelation attested in Scripture. Explaining the 1950 dogma, Ratzinger referred to the baptismal theology present in the letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. In this perspective, the whole essence of baptism was realised in Mary and she had already entered into full communion, her body including, with Christ. The Bavarian theologian believed that, in the light of the New Testament texts, the dogma of the Assumption loses its speculativeness and arbitrariness, which, it is worth recalling, was protected against precisely by the office of Scripture.

* * *

Finally, it is worth adding that the perspective taken in the article on the relation between the two poles of revelation, from which the relation of Marian dogma with the Christological “once for all” of revelation is described, lends itself well to revealing Ratzinger’s understanding of the relation between private and public revelation, and also clarifies his opposition to the proclamation of the dogma of Mary “Co-redemptrix.”¹⁸⁰

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¹⁸⁰ Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, explained that this formula departs from the language of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, with which continuity must be maintained, and gives rise to misunderstandings and, despite some legitimate intentions behind the prefix “co,” obscures Christ’s “first” – cf. J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 306 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., pp. 281–282).

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