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## Authentic Renewal of the Church vs. False Renewal: Intellectual Struggles of Joseph Ratzinger in the Years 1965–1966

Autentyczna odnowa Kościoła a odnowa fałszywa.  
Intelektualne zmagania Josepha Ratzingera w latach 1965–1966

**ABSTRACT:** In some publications one can find a claim about a radical shift of views of Joseph Ratzinger which was supposed to transform a progressive theologian into a conservative guardian of faith. Some even speak of two Ratzingers, and link this change to his becoming a bishop or the prefect of Congregation for the Faith. Others point out that there was a distinct evolution of Ratzinger, linked to the 1968 events. According to the author of the article, in the years 1965–1966 there could have been a certain development in Ratzinger's theology on the renewal of the Church. This research hypothesis has been confronted with the texts of the German theologian. The first part of the article shows the painful experience of Ratzinger who already at the end of the Second Vatican Council saw a misperception of the ideas and documents of the Council. The second part analyses the problem of a false, superficial renewal that is far from the intention of Ratzinger and the Council. Next, the criteria of an authentic renewal formulated by this theologian in the aforementioned period are explored. The problem of a distinction between an authentic and a false renewal seems particularly relevant today.

**KEYWORDS:** Joseph Ratzinger, renewal, the Church, the Second Vatican Council, false renewal, the missionary spirit, the faith of simple believers, the cross of Jesus Christ, human renewal

**АБСТРАКТ:** В некоторых публикациях появляется тезис о радикальной смене взглядов Josepha Ratzingera, яка мала przekształcić progresywnego teologa w konserwatywnego strażnika wiary. Niektórzy próbują mówić o dwóch Ratzingerach, a także łączyć tę zmianę z objęciem urzędu biskupiego czy też podjęciem obowiązków

prefekta Kongregacji Nauki Wiary. Inni stawiają tezę o wyraźnej ewolucji J. Ratzingera związanej z wydarzeniami roku 1968. Zdaniem autora artykułu w latach 1965–1966 mógł dokonać się pewien rozwój teologii Ratzingera w odniesieniu do kwestii odnowy Kościoła. Ta hipoteza badawcza została skonfrontowana z tekstami niemieckiego teologa. W pierwszej części artykułu ukazane zostało bolesne doświadczenie Ratzingera, który już pod koniec Soboru Watykańskiego II spotyka się z błędną recepcją zamysłu i dokumentów soboru. W drugiej części poddany został analizie problem odnowy fałszywej, powierzchownej, dalekiej od intencji soboru i samego Ratzingera. Następnie zbadane zostały kryteria autentycznej odnowy formułowane przez niemieckiego teologa we wspomnianych latach. Problem rozróżnienia między odnową autentyczną a fałszywą wydaje się dzisiaj szczególnie aktualny.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Joseph Ratzinger, odnowa, Kościół, Sobór Watykański II, fałszywa odnowa, misyjność, wiara prostych wiernych, krzyż Jezusa Chrystusa, prawda, odnowa człowieka

The renewal of the Church is one of the important issues in the 20th century Catholic theology. It even found its way into the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. This topic, of both theoretical and practical significance, encourages a deep reflection and provokes disputes in which opposing positions collide. One important issue is the problem of distinguishing between authentic renewal, leading to the development of the Church, and false renewal, threatening her destruction.

In his book, John Allen writes about the radical change Joseph Ratzinger was to undergo under the influence of the events that started off in the late 1960s. He points to the excesses of Protestant theological students in 1968, but also to the significance of the 1971 and 1972 years. He also claims that this radical change was linked to Ratzinger's career as a theologian.<sup>1</sup> For the author of this

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.L. Allen Jr., *Cardinal Ratzinger. The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith*, New York–London 2000, pp. 78, 83–84. A similar view of the radical change of the former theological reformer can be found in Hans Küng (*Kardinal Ratzinger, Papst Wojtyła und die Angst vor der Freiheit. Nach langem Schweigen ein offenes Wort* (1985), [in:] *Katholische Kirche – wohin? Wider den Verrat am Konzil*, eds. N. Greinacher, H. Küng, München 1986, p. 392). Cf. also U.F. Schmäzle, *Bekehrung oder Neurose? Der Weg der Kirche nach dem II. Vatikanum unter dem Anspruch der Selbstevangelisierung*, [in:] *Das Konzil war erst der Anfang. Die Bedeutung des II. Vatikanums für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. K. Richter, Mainz 1991, p. 121. Of course, numerous theologians, such as Michael A. Fahey, Gerd Lohaus, David A. Seeber, Rudolf Frieling, Gerhard Nachtwai point to the continuity of J. Ratzinger's thought. Cf. M.H. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger. Life in the Church and Living Theology. Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*, San Francisco 2007, p. 193. However, also among authors noting the continuity of J. Ratzinger's theological reflection, we find emphasis on the importance of 1968.

article, it is the years 1965–1966 that seem relevant. A certain development of the future pope's theology regarding the question of the renewal of the Church might have taken place then. In any case, this issue is worth researching.

As a young theologian, Joseph Ratzinger participated in the Second Vatican Council as an advisor to Cardinal Joseph Frings and as the Council's official theologian. One can see his hopes for the Council and his arduous patient work on the conciliar documents.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the publications of 1965–1966 reveal Ratzinger's considerable concerns for the inadequate reception of these documents and misunderstanding of the conciliar renewal. It seems therefore worthwhile to examine the texts from these years on the issues of authentic renewal and false renewal. Although there are studies dealing to some extent with the renewal of the Church in Ratzinger's thought, they do not focus on this crucial period.<sup>3</sup> The problem of the distinction between authentic and false renewal is not just a historical issue, but is becoming particularly topical today.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bachanek, *Książdz Profesor Joseph Ratzinger na Soborze Watykańskim II* [Professor Joseph Ratzinger at the Second Vatican Council], [in:] *Studia Soborowe. Historia i recepcja Vaticanum* [Studies on the Council. History and Reception of Vatican II], ed. M. Białkowski, Toruń 2014, pp. 93–122.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. Ayres, P. Kelly, T. Humphries, *Benedict XVI: A Ressourcement Theologian?*, [in:] *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, eds. G. Flynn, P.D. Murray, New York 2011, pp. 423–439; A. Czaja, *Wyznawać moc Ducha w historii. Myśl papieża Benedykta XVI ku odnowie Kościoła* [Confessing the Power of the Spirit in History. The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI Towards the Renewal of the Church], [in:] *Crux Christi – spes nostra. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana Księdzu Biskupowi Janowi Kopcowi z okazji 60-lecia urodzin, 35-lecia presbiteratu, 15-lecia sakry biskupiej i 25-lecia pracy naukowej* [Crux Christi – spes nostra. A Memorial Book Dedicated to Bishop Jan Kopiec on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday, 35th Anniversary of His Presbyterate, 15th Anniversary of His Episcopal Sacraments and 25th Anniversary of his Academic Work], Series: Opolska Biblioteka Teologiczna 101, eds. K. Dola, N. Widok, Lublin–Opole 2007, pp. 183–193; P. Sawa, *Benedykta XVI teologia odnowy Kościoła. Wokół eklezjologii nowej ewangelizacji* [Benedict XVI's Theology of Church Renewal. Around the Ecclesiology of the New Evangelization], "Studia Pelplińskie" 49 (2016), pp. 245–267; J. Babinski, M. Kuczyńska, *Odnowa teologii szansą dla Kościoła i wiary. Projekt Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [The Renewal of Theology as an Opportunity for the Church and Faith. Project of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], "Studia Theologica Varsaviensia" 60/2 (2022), pp. 10–53; P. Beyga, *Wybrane aspekty odnowy liturgii w teologicznej refleksji Josepha Ratzingera pięćdziesiąt lat od zakończenia II Soboru Watykańskiego* [Selected Aspects of the Renewal of Liturgy in Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Reflection Fifty Years after the End of the Second Vatican Council], "Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny" 24/1 (2016), pp. 89–100; K. Gózdź, *Kościół jako znak chrześcijańskiej odnowy* [The Church as a Sign of Christian Renewal], [in:] *Dlaczego jeszcze jestem w Kościele* [Why Am I Still in the Church?], eds. K. Gózdź, S. Kunka, Lublin 2013, pp. 109–122; S. Wiedenhofer, *Die Theologie Joseph Ratzingers/Benedikts XVI. Ein Blick auf das Ganze*, Regensburg 2016; H. Verweyen, *Joseph*

When it comes to terminology, the Second Vatican Council uses in the documents the following verbs: *renovare*, *purificare* and *reformare* and the nouns formed from them; the verb *renovare* is used by far most frequently.<sup>4</sup>

## A painful experience of division, anxiety and disillusionment

In the last year of the Council, on 18 June 1965, during a lecture to students in Münster, Ratzinger insists that the Church faces a clear polarisation, a formation of two opposing sides. On the one side there are the supporters of anti-modernist Catholicism who criticise both the weakening of the central authority, the renewal of the Church, and the Second Vatican Council. On the other side stand the proponents of progressivism, treating the Council's decisions as unsatisfactory compromise and demanding not to stop halfway. The theologian clearly identifies with neither of these two groups. He considers himself to be one of those who fought for the renewal of the Church and who now recognise serious problems that result from its misunderstanding and improper implementation. He holds a similar opinion to that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who before the Council wrote an important book *Schleifung der Bastionen* (1952), while in the last year of the Council published *Rechenschaft*,<sup>5</sup> in which he nudged the Church in a different direction, calling for a deep reflection on Christianity, because a superficial understanding of renewal as opening up to the world, broadening the horizons or searching for an comprehensible language proves to be clearly insufficient.<sup>6</sup>

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Ratzinger – Benedikt XVI. *Die Entwicklung seines Denkens*, Darmstadt 2007; E. Mushi, *Benedict XVI's Hermeneutics of Reform and Its Implication for the Renewal of the Church*, "Pacifica" 26/3 (2013), pp. 279–294.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. De Mey, *Church Renewal and Reform in the Documents of Vatican II: History, Theology, Terminology*, "The Jurist" 71 (2011), p. 371.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Rechenschaft 1965*, Einsiedeln 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern. Schriften zur Ekklesiologie und Ökumene*, vol. 2, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 8/2, ed. G.L. Müller, Freiburg im Breisgau 2010, pp. 1186–1187 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?* [What is the Renewal of the Church?], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Kościół – znak wśród narodów. Pisma ekumeniczne i ekumeniczne* [The Church – a Sign Among the Nations. Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Writings], vol. 2, Series: Opera Omnia 8/2, eds. K. Góźdz, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, Lublin 2013, pp. 1099–1100). In the publication in question, Ratzinger does not question Balthasar's earlier reflection when he wrote about the futility of surrounding one's own little world with a wall (J. Ratzinger,

For Ratzinger, these painful divisions were somewhat understandable, stemming from different interpretations of renewal and different expectations of it. He referred to the example of Martin Luther, experiencing a difficult confrontation with the Anabaptist movement, which claimed to draw on the Reformation, triggering a fanatical uprising in Münster.<sup>7</sup> However, Ratzinger seems to have indicated that this kind of division does not lead to positive results, remains sterile and brings destruction.

Participating in the Katholikentag in Bamberg on 14 July 1966, Ratzinger mentioned negative feelings present among German Catholics after the end of the Second Vatican Council. He explained that the disillusionment is in a way natural, since German Catholics cherished so great hopes for the Council. In the meantime, the time of the conciliar festivities came to an end, and it is necessary to return to everyday life. The question arises whether Ratzinger mentions here only the feelings of others or also his own experiences and feelings. “Let us express it openly – there is a kind of dissatisfaction, a feeling of sobriety, but also of disappointment, which sometimes comes after moments of joy and sublime celebrations.”<sup>8</sup>

But in addition to the natural return to everyday life, there were new difficulties in Christian life. There has been a weakening of the unity of Catholics.

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*Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., p. 1109); Christoph Schönborn encouraged us to avoid sharply contrasting Balthasar’s two works mentioned above, but to see in them first and foremost a confession of Christ. Cf. C. Schönborn, *Postłowie* [Afterword], [in:] H.U. von Balthasar, *Burzenie bastionów* [Demolishing the Bastions], transl. E. Marszał, J. Zakrzewski, Kraków 2000, pp. 67, 70; On Balthasar’s theology cf. W. Gałda, *Droga duchowa Hansa Ursa von Balthasara – lata 1940–1988* [Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Spiritual Path – the Years 1940–1988], “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne” 34/1 (2015), pp. 25–46.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., p. 1187 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., p. 1100).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil*, [in:], J. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Formulierung, Vermittlung, Deutung*, vol. 2, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 7/2, ed. G.L. Müller, Freiburg im Breisgau 2012, p. 1004 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Catholicism after the Council*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27659331.pdf> [access: 18.02.2024]; Polish translation: J. Ratzinger, *Katolicyzm po Soborze*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego. Formułowanie – przekaz – interpretacja* [On the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Formulation – Transmission – Interpretation], vol. 2, Series: Opera Omnia 7/2, eds. K. Góźdz, M. Górecka, transl. E. Grzesiuk, Lublin 2016, p. 893). Ratzinger referred to these negative feelings as *das Unbehagen, die Ernüchterung, die Enttäuschung*. In early 1966, Ratzinger devoted one of his lectures to the question of the meaning and significance of the Council’s provisions. The problem of the correct understanding of the Second Vatican Council was of clear concern to him at this time. Cf. P. Seewald, *Benedykt XVI. Życie* [Benedict XVI. Life], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2021, p. 479.

Some see the council as having accomplished too little by succumbing to the pursuit of diplomatic compromises. Others see the Council as handing the Church over to the spirit of an age immersed in the earthly and hence incapable of seeing God. In addition, Christianity seems to be weakening, although an increase in faith, hope and love was expected. Faith has become more vulnerable to criticism.<sup>9</sup> Persevering in the Christian faith has become more difficult, requiring more personal effort.

The disappointment contrasts with the enthusiasm accompanying Ratzinger at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. In his commentary on the first conciliar session, he accentuated the solemn atmosphere, the mysterious feeling of a beginning. He enjoyed the fact that the first session started with the issue of the liturgy; for him it was a confession of faith in the mystery of the Eucharist, in which the Church's ever new nuptials with her Lord take place, the Eucharist which is the source of the Church's life and the starting point of all renewal.<sup>10</sup>

## The problem of false renewal

In the lecture given to students in Münster, Ratzinger discussed at length the problem of Church renewal. He pondered on its definition, the difference between an authentic renewal that bears fruit and an illusory one that leads to the destruction of the Church. He considered a temptation the desire to adapt the Church to the average consciousness, to remove everything that seems annoying or bizarre. He called this aspiration a mere modernisation (*bloße Modernisierung*) far from an authentic renewal. Should the criterion for renewal be today's man and today's world, or Christianity itself? He compared an erroneous reform to an attempt to turn Christianity into a malfunctioning shop looking for customers and the Christian faith into a commodity changed according to human preferences. Faith, understood in this way, becomes unnecessary, theology becomes

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil*, op. cit., p. 1005 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Catholicism after the Council*, op. cit.; J. Ratzinger, *Katolicyzm po Soborze*, op. cit., p. 893).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Die erste Sitzungsperiode des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Ein Rückblick*, Köln 1963, pp. 8–9, 25–26 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Pierwsza sesja Soboru Watykańskiego II* [The First Session of the Second Vatican Council], [in:] 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. 258, 265).

devoid of content and the Church ceases to be missionary.<sup>11</sup> Commenting on the last session of the Council, Ratzinger seems to have described this form of misguided renewal as seeking modernity instead of truth.<sup>12</sup>

Ratzinger's position, however, does not imply opposition to change. In a somewhat schematic comparison, he rejected both strict conservatism and liberalism as false forms of renewal. He emphasised that Christ the Lord, in effecting the renewal of the Old Testament, indicated the way of renewal in general. This renewal of Jesus differs on the one hand from the renewal attempts of the Pharisees and the Qumran group, and on the other hand from the attitude of the Sadducees. Applying this comparison to the situation of the contemporary Church, Ratzinger recognised the attitude of Pharisaism in the emphasis on practices and literal statements, a strict conservatism that loses the essence and fails to meet the requirements of truth. On the opposite, the error of the Sadducees is liberalism, which tries to bring the faith closer to the world by removing from it everything that the world refuses to accept.<sup>13</sup>

The problem of a misinterpreted renewal is not just a matter of intellectual considerations. It concerns the very depth of Christian life. Ratzinger asked frankly, even himself, whether the spiritual shortcomings of the reformers would not destroy the effort of renewal: "Success may also be prevented by our spiritual insufficiency, by the lack of a truly Christian power which flows from the sources of faith and must be more than the comfort of being modern

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 1186–1191, 1200–1201 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1099–1104, 1112–1113). Ratzinger noted the inconsistency of the proponents of modernisation, on the one hand criticising the Constantinian breakthrough or the medieval theology of the empire, and on the other demanding today the fusion of the Church with the world. He also paid attention to the radicalism of the reformers as a result of their fascination with the modern world, their lack of caution and patience (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1005–1007).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, Köln 1966, p. 75 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Ostatnia sesja soboru* [Last Session of the Council], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 502). A similar thought concerning the danger of the Church's reformers succumbing to the tendencies prevalent in secular society, e.g. by rejecting absolute truth or demanding that the Church be governed according to the principles of liberal democracy, is formulated by Avery Dulles (*True and False Reform*, "First Things" 135 [2003], pp. 16–17). Dulles referred to some extent to the work of Yves Congar, *True and False Reform of the Church*, transl. P. Philibert, Collegeville, MN 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 1195–1202 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1107–1112). In later years, Ratzinger develops his reflection on the cultural pressures on the Church and theology.

because that is what others are.”<sup>14</sup> It seems that in these words of the then young theologian one can see a warning against the temptation to conformism and to avoid criticism.

With great insight, Ratzinger pointed out the temptation to treat renewal as a justification for one’s own convenience and cowardice. Some believers do not dare to renounce Christianity outright, but neither do they want to accept its requirements. Even if this attitude is not conscious, it means dismantling Christianity. In a similar context, Ratzinger cites the example of the people of Corinth. Saint Paul fought for Christian renewal, for a translation of the Old Testament into the New Testament, but to his regret he faced a radical distortion of his teaching in Corinth, where freedom from the Law was understood in a way contrary to the apostle’s intentions.<sup>15</sup> In a commentary on the last session of the Council, Ratzinger accentuated the temptation to water down and depreciate the sound doctrine, by which he probably meant the abandonment of a deep faith and moral demands in favour of what seems easier.<sup>16</sup>

Ratzinger insisted that the Church’s opening up to the world cannot be tantamount to rejecting the scandal of the cross. Turning away from the cross leads not to the renewal of the Church, but to its end. The Second Vatican Council could not, nor did it wish to, erase the scandal of the Christian faith. That scandal is God’s care for humanity, the Incarnation, the Cross and the message of the Resurrection. The Council wanted to restore the Christian faith to its simplicity, the simplicity of great love. What the Council wanted to remove was the secondary scandals of the preachers of the faith that obscure the primary scandal, which cannot be removed. In these secondary scandals, Ratzinger recognises a defence of concrete social situations and some anachronism. The right attitude towards the achievements of the conciliar renewal should be gratitude to the Triune God for His gifts, not boasting of human achievements. Ratzinger warned against this new triumphalism. Boasting about the human work would be more dangerous than “the fan of peacock’s feathers or the tiara.” The Council is not a pretext for boasting, but it must

<sup>14</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Ergebnisse und Probleme der dritten Konzilsperiode*, Köln 1965, p. 82 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Osiągnięcia i problemy trzeciej sesji* [Achievements and Problems of the Third Session], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, op. cit., p. 411).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 1187, 1189 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1100, 1102).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, Köln 1966, p. 75 (J. Ratzinger, *Ostatnia sesja soboru*, op. cit., p. 502). Ratzinger’s opposition to the dilution and relativisation of the deposit of faith is pointed out by Jarosław Babiński and Marzena Kuczyńska (*Odnowa teologii szansą dla Kościoła i wiary*, op. cit., p. 18).



be understood as a task. The Church has been called to set out on a journey towards the Lord. Joseph Ratzinger seems to have connected this new triumphalism with the temptation to reject the cross. The Church's proper place is at the cross of the Lord. This place is indicated by Simon of Cyrene, who first helped to carry the cross and then began to understand that he was able to do so thanks to Christ, that it was the Lord himself who carried it.<sup>17</sup> The warning against triumphalism is at the same time a warning against a lack of humility, overestimating the importance of one's own person and one's own action.

Discussing the results of the third session of the Council, Ratzinger noticed a difference between the event of the Council and its portrayal by the media. In this media portrayal, the disputes, polemics and gamesmanship were most evident. According to Ratzinger, this is a superficial image that does not convey the meaning and scale of the events. The actual Council is a clash with the inadequacy of human efforts, the courage to ask the most difficult questions, and above all a gift; at the same time, it is a difficult task requiring great patience.<sup>18</sup> It seems that as a theologian, he recognised here a problem of improper understanding of the Church, of noticing only its human side, which leads to superficiality in describing the reality of renewal. Interestingly, in his reflections Ratzinger never writes directly about God, i.e. he does not mention His name, although the presence of the Lord in the event of the Council and His action are not subject to any doubt.

With regard to the last session of the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger spotted errors in the introduction of the liturgical reform. As he writes: "here and there an escape into liturgical joy of creation becomes apparent, to which the deepest demands of worship escape sight, and in this way the great intentions of a true reform are minimised and discredited."<sup>19</sup> An overestimation of the importance of one's own action, an excess of creation, combined with a failure to see the liturgy as a great and undeserved gift of God, leads to a reform that fails.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil*, op. cit., pp. 1020–1025 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Catholicism after the Council*, op. cit.; J. Ratzinger, *Katolicyzm po Soborze*, op. cit., pp. 907–911).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Ergebnisse und Probleme*, op. cit., pp. 82–83 (J. Ratzinger, *Osiągnięcia i problemy*, op. cit., pp. 411–412). The problem of the "Council of the media" and the "hermeneutics of unbelief" is noted and described by Sławomir Zatwardnicki (*Hermeneutyka reformy – hermeneutyka wiary* [Hermeneutics of the Reform – Hermeneutics of the Faith], "Teologia w Polsce" 10/2 [2016], s. 160).

<sup>19</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, op. cit., p. 75 (J. Ratzinger, *Ostatnia sesja soboru*, op. cit., p. 502).

It is worth mentioning here that Ratzinger tends to avoid any personal criticism. When addressing the issue of false renewal, he never named specific theologians, liturgists or priests. He tried to focus on the problem and not on the individuals who commit fundamental errors.

## Criteria for genuine renewal

In 1965, Ratzinger attempted to define a renewal: “Christian renewal does not want to replace Christianity by something different and better, but wants to restore Christianity itself in its own never-aging novelty [...] its aim is to bring about the radiance of the Church in its original strength and purity.”<sup>20</sup> This expression indicates that true renewal is not a race after what is fashionable and up-to-date, but the restoration of the Church to that original novelty which is not subject to the aging process, does not become outdated, and corresponds to the biblical *καινός* rather than *νέος*.

## Renewal as a journey towards Christ

Ratzinger strongly emphasises the connection of renewal with the person of Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> he shows the renewal of the Church as a journey towards Christ. The Church is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hence it cannot become modern according to its fancy. The measure of the times is Christ, not the other way around. A concession because of the need not to be outdated, a mere modernisation, is a false renewal, at first impressive, but ultimately proves to be an obstacle binding the Church to the era. True renewal is an attempt to reject the “weeds” in order to return to the fundamental event of Christ’s death and resurrection. And at the same time, it is a way forward towards Christ, who will return on the day of the Parousia. “The Church wants to go out to meet the Lord in order to be free for his new vocation.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., p. 1188 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., p. 1101).

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger’s Christocentrism in understanding the renewal of Vatican II is emphasised by T. Rowland (*Ratzinger’s Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, New York 2008, p. 31).

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Die pastoralen Implikationen der Lehre von der Kollegialität der Bischöfe*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, Düsseldorf 1970, pp. 223–224 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Duszpasterskie implikacje nauki o kolegialności biskupów* [Pastoral Implications of the Teaching on the Collegiality of Bishops], “Concilium.

Ratzinger's Christocentrism is linked to his theocentric attitude. The essential criterion to which he points is God himself. True renewal is the search for the simplicity of God himself, false renewal is succumbing to comfort, that is, to bad simplicity which is the absence of richness, life and fullness.<sup>23</sup>

### Renewal in the service of truth

Authentic renewal moves towards and serves the truth. It wants to reveal true Christianity by accepting its demands. Its criterion is not the demands of modern people, but the reality itself that comes from God. Ratzinger points to the New Testament as the measure of the Church and her renewal.<sup>24</sup> In his view, theology should be based on the whole of the sources.<sup>25</sup> It cannot be practised without the Bible, the Church Fathers or the great theologians of the Middle Ages.

According to Aidan Nichols, Ratzinger understood the renewal of the Church at the time of the Council as a need to return to the sources, *ressourcement*, rather than adaptation, *aggiornamento*.<sup>26</sup> This is a valuable insight if we understand both terms in the contemporary sense. But until 1966, Ratzinger did not use the term *ressourcement*. Instead, he applied the term *aggiornamento* to denote renewal, and put much effort to make this term properly understood. Thus, in a text published in 1965, Ratzinger points out the difficulty of rendering the sense of *aggiornamento* in German. By translating it as *Anpassung*, we may make the mistaken impression as if the Church wished and could make

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Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny” 1–10 [1965–1966], pp. 66–67). In this Polish translation, the relationship of freedom to Christ is somewhat less well delineated: “She [the Church] wants to go out to meet the Lord, to be free and to listen to his new call.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., p. 1202 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., p. 1113).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 1191–1193 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1103–1106).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Weltoffene Kirche? Überlegungen zur Struktur des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 986 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Kościół otwarty na świat? Refleksje nad strukturą Soboru Watykańskiego II* [The Church Opened up to the World? Reflections on the Structure of the Second Vatican Council], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 877).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI. An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, London 2007, p. 68. For an extensive discussion of the issue of the theological *ressourcement* movement, see: G. Flynn, P.D. Murray (eds.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, New York 2012.

adaptation to the present time the criterion of her existence and her message. Meanwhile, it is about something else, a rethinking of the truth entrusted by God to the Church so that it can be heard and penetrate the heart. However, a purely external action is not enough, but an internal process of translating the message is necessary so that it can be truly accepted and truly proclaimed today.<sup>27</sup> It is not a question of adapting to the current time, but of rediscovering in a deeper way the divine truth entrusted to the Church. Ratzinger is struggling for the true meaning of the Church's renewal, rather than focusing on a specific date. *Aggiornamento* seems to be understood by Ratzinger as an orientation towards God's truth, in which he probably saw Christ himself first. Nevertheless, already during the lecture in Münster, he used the term *aggiornamento* cautiously. Ratzinger quotes Balthasar, for whom *aggiornamento* is only part of the work of the Church's renewal, namely the opening up to the world.<sup>28</sup> Ratzinger's position can be more easily understood if we take into consideration the change in the meaning of the term *aggiornamento* over the years. Pope Paul VI, in his speech at the end of the Council, on 18 November 1965, warned that some people were using the term in a sense that was totally alien to John XXIII, allowing for the relativisation of dogmas, law, structures and traditions of the Church.<sup>29</sup> The term, which initially meant for Ratzinger the reality of renewal strictly linked with the truth, came to be interpreted in an increasingly shallow and superficial way.

Ratzinger is sometimes referred to as a theologian of the second-generation *ressourcement*. His criticism of Neo-Scholasticism, his striving to do theology in the context of prayer, charity and in relation to the liturgy, his emphasis on the importance of Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, his sensitivity to the links between Christianity and the surrounding culture are all pointed

<sup>27</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Angesichts der Welt von heute, Überlegungen zur Konfrontation mit der Kirche im Schema XIII*, "Wort und Wahrheit" 20 (1965), p. 493. On the basis of a later statement, however, corresponding to the sense of the 1965 text in question, we can see two poles in his understanding of *aggiornamento*. The discovery of what is authentically Christian and the "translation" for the modern world. Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 942–943 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wypowiedzi Soboru o misjach poza Dekretem misyjnym* [Statements of the Council on Missions outside the Missionary Decree], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 838).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 1186–1187 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1099–1100).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. P. De Mey, *Church Renewal*, op. cit., p. 390.

out.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that the young Ratzinger did not seek to identify himself strictly with a particular school of theology. He wanted to do theology honestly for the good of the Church. He sought its renewal. He did not seek conflict. In the 1965 texts, we see a theologian who realised that disagreement is unavoidable. A misunderstanding of the renewal of the Church forced him to make his position clear. He could not remain silent in the face of attempts to detach the Church renewal from the truth.

### From human renewal to Church renewal

Christian renewal is first and foremost a renewal of the human being, a transformation from selfishness to the love of God. It presupposes faith and the desire to be more fully Christian. The element of renewal is part of the essence of Christianity because it is the New Testament, the transformation of the old man into the new. This renewal of man has not happened once and for all, but is a constant transition from the man as he is to the man he should become. Without this focus on human renewal, the new forms of liturgy lose their meaning. Nevertheless, although Christian renewal must begin with the renewal of Christians, it must also find its expression in the renewal of the Church in a stricter sense, since man is not an individual isolated from others.<sup>31</sup> Human renewal is, in other words, a journey towards holiness. The Council's teaching on the universal call to holiness is obviously very close to Ratzinger. He sees here the condition and the beginning of an authentic renewal of the Church.

We can find an example of the renewal of the Church, which begins with the renewal of an individual, concrete person, in the story of St Teresa of Avila. Before her conversion, she lived in a modern monastery that renounced the old forms of asceticism, open to the world, a monastery in which the isolation was interpreted freely and the visits of incoming guests were received without restriction. But when Teresa experienced the closeness of Christ, she realised that her earlier life had been a flight from the greatness of her vocation and the

<sup>30</sup> Cf. L. Ayres, P. Kelly, T. Humphries, *Benedict XVI*, op. cit., pp. 423–439. The relevance of the ideas and methods of *ressourcement* to *Vatican II* is discussed by David Grummett (*Movements of Ressourcement in Theology: Foundations for a Council of Renewal*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, eds. C. Clifford, M. Faggioli, Oxford 2023, pp. 44–60). For a selection and discussion of the texts of the theologians most representative of this trend see P. Kelly (ed.), *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook*, London 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 1191–1193 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1103–1105).

need for conversion. She rejected conforming to her times, she renounced herself in order to give herself unreservedly to the Church in Christ. In this context, Ratzinger formulates a difficult question: “Did the Council – so the faithful ask – not go in the opposite direction, did she not turn away from conversion to distortion?”<sup>32</sup> Ratzinger’s answer seemed to be to distinguish between the Second Vatican Council as such and the wrong forms of implementing the conciliar reforms.

### Serving the faith of the simple believers

Ratzinger drew attention to the faith of the simple believers. He criticised the black and white contrast between the achievements of the Council and the pre-conciliar Church. He mentioned the complaints of listeners weary of sermons built according to a repetitive pattern. Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, living at the turn of the Old and New Testaments, show the importance of the faith of simple people, which was not distorted by the legalism of the Pharisees or the liberalism of the Sadducees. This faith must be served. “The faith of those who are simple of heart is the Church’s most precious treasure; serving it and living it is the most important task of ecclesial renewal.”<sup>33</sup> In these words, one can see Ratzinger’s strong conviction that renewal must not lead to the destruction or weakening of the faith of the faithful, but that this faith is to be supported and strengthened.

Can it be said that this is a new criterion for authentic renewal, not formulated by Ratzinger before? He had already written earlier about the importance of simple-hearted people who, by persevering patiently in the faith, can save the Church. The faith of the faithful makes the statements of the Council possible and gives them meaning.<sup>34</sup> In his commentary on the last session of the Council, however, Ratzinger referred to concrete painful experiences, the context of the

<sup>32</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil*, op. cit., p. 1005 (J. Ratzinger, *Catholicism after the Council*, op. cit.; J. Ratzinger, *Katolicyzm po Soborze*, op. cit., p. 894).

<sup>33</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, op. cit., p. 77 (J. Ratzinger, *Ostatnia sesja soboru*, op. cit., p. 503). Ratzinger cited the following stereotypical sermon pattern, seeing in it probably the egocentrism of the preacher and the danger of confusing the listeners: “You have been told – I, however, tell you” (J. Ratzinger, *Ostatnia sesja soboru*, op. cit., p. 502).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Sentire ecclesiam*, “Geist und Leben” 36 (1963), pp. 321, 323 (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Sentire ecclesiam*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 281, 284).

difference between a false and an authentic renewal is clearly present here, and the importance of the criterion of service to the simple believers is highlighted. The reference to the person of Mary is an encouragement that renewal should be based on respect and concern for the faithful, for their faith and salvation, and not on pride and violence imposing their own ideas. Ratzinger drew attention to the need for humility that accompanies authentic renewal. Its absence, the attitude of arrogance, the conviction of one's own intellectual superiority can lead to the destruction of the Church.

Authentic renewal serves the unity of the Church. Recognising the problem of divisions against the background of the implementation of the liturgical reform, Ratzinger encourages Christian love expressed in the Church's internal tolerance. He saw its absence as a signal of a crisis in the renewal of the liturgy. On the one hand, he defended such elements of liturgical renewal as the introduction of national languages, the priest's orientation to face the community or the demand for simplicity. On the other hand, he pointed to the role of beauty in the liturgy, the Semitic and Greek elements preserved for centuries in the Latin liturgy, or the importance of placing the tabernacle at the high altar, thus pointing to Christ as the presider of the liturgy. He warned against the new ritualism of newly invented forms and asked whether every service must be celebrated *versus populum*. He insisted that placing the presider's chair where the tabernacle was previously located is an expression of clericalism.<sup>35</sup> Ratzinger drew a clear distinction between the conciliar reform of the liturgy and its practical implementations, and noted that some of these implementations had given rise to the scorn of the faithful and sharp divisions.

### Reinvigorating the missionary ministry involving a readiness to suffer and martyrdom

Ratzinger understood the opening of the Church to the world as a missionary orientation. In 1966, he emphasised the specificity of the Second Vatican Council, which, unlike the other councils, seemed to encourage the opening of the Church to the world. The importance of this call prompts reflection on whether it is justified and what it actually means. In the pursuit to find some justification for this opening, Ratzinger turns to Christology. In the person of

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Der Katholizismus nach dem Konzil*, op. cit., pp. 1006–1015 (J. Ratzinger, *Catholicism after the Council*, op. cit.; J. Ratzinger, *Katolicyzm po Soborze*, op. cit., pp. 894–903).

Jesus Christ, God opens himself by taking on human flesh. This opening of the Trinitarian mystery in Christ makes the existence of the Church possible. God, going beyond himself, offers himself to others. But Christ's act did not aim at leaving the world as it was; its objective was a marvellous exchange to transform the world, to enrich it by including it in a unity of love with God.<sup>36</sup>

Ratzinger called the Church a gesture of openness leading to a sacred exchange. The Church, as an instrument of Jesus Christ, is to realise Christ's opening, to move towards the *sacrum commercium*. Hence, the proper form of the Church's openness to the world is only missionary service and ministry of love. They are not mutually exclusive, but must occur together. The Council's opposition to conservatism is not progressivism, but missionary orientation. Ratzinger saw the centre of gravity in a missionary ministry that presupposes consent to suffering and martyrdom. Here he referred to the person of Christ, whom the Apocalypse presents as the slain Lamb opening the seals (Rev 5:3–5).<sup>37</sup> What is completely wrong, however, is the secularising opening of the Church to the world. The intention of the Council was not to make Christians comfortable or to succumb to the conformism of mass culture. The Council could not do such a thing because it remains faithful to the biblical message not to conform to the world (Rom 12:2).<sup>38</sup>

Ratzinger saw examples of this proper opening of the Church to the world in four basic forms. Firstly, in the conciliar openness in theology by reaching out to the whole of the sources, but also by considering the questions of modern man and the theology of other churches. Secondly, in a new theology of the laity centred around the universal call to the ministry of worship and missionary duty. Thirdly, in the idea in ecumenical dialogue, with non-Christians and with non-believers. Fourthly, in the acceptance towards the independence of the secular areas, in which he saw an opportunity for the Church to free herself from its previous connections and dependencies.<sup>39</sup> The reference to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council is evident here.

Ratzinger's statements from 1965–1966 the relationship of the renewal to the person of the Holy Spirit was barely mentioned. Nevertheless, he showed the

<sup>36</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Weltoffene Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 980–983 (J. Ratzinger, *Kościół otwarty na świat?*, op. cit., pp. 871–873).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Weltoffene Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 982–985, 1001–1002 (J. Ratzinger, *Kościół otwarty na świat?*, op. cit., pp. 873–876, 890–891).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Weltoffene Kirche?*, op. cit., p. 1001 (J. Ratzinger, *Kościół otwarty na świat?*, op. cit., p. 890).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Weltoffene Kirche?*, op. cit., pp. 985–1000 (J. Ratzinger, *Kościół otwarty na świat?*, op. cit., pp. 876–889).



relationship of the Church's openness to the Trinitarian mystery. He also drew attention to the necessity of acquiring the ability to test the spirits, through which it is possible to distinguish authentic renewal from mere modernisation, two realities which, superficially viewed, are similar to one another.<sup>40</sup> Ratzinger's reflection focuses on the need to distinguish between two realities that are similar to each other, but which bear radically different fruit.

When looking for criteria to distinguish between authentic and false renewal, Ratzinger first of all focused on the question of the purpose of renewal. What purpose does it serve? The intentions of the reformers, their close relationship to Christ, are also of importance. The external forms of authentic and false renewal can be very close to each other.

When it comes to language, in the 1965–1966 publications Ratzinger mainly used the term 'renewal' (*die Erneuerung*), but also applied the terms 'reform' (*die Reform*) and '*aggiornamento*.' In a positive sense, he wrote of 'authentic renewal.' He also employed the attributes 'good' or 'substantial.' In a similar sense, he described 'reformation.' In the negative sense, he used the attributes 'false' or 'erroneous renewal,' 'erroneous reform,' 'arbitrary reformism.'

Of course, this third part of the article cannot be read in isolation from the second part, which, dedicated to a false renewal, also formulates criteria for distinguishing the authenticity of a renewal, though in a negative form.

## Conclusions

Between 1965 and 1966, Joseph Ratzinger addressed the problem of false renewal in a series of publications. Alongside authentic renewal there are false understandings of this reality, such as the concept of pure modernisation, i.e. adapting the Church to the average consciousness of modern man, the temptation to reject the cross in favour of one's own convenience, the new triumphalism, seeing only the human side of the Church, the temptation to overestimate the importance of one's own action in the process of renewing the Church. False renewal is fostered by the conformism of the reformers.

Authentic renewal is first and foremost a search for God himself, setting out on the journey towards Jesus Christ. It begins with the renewal of a person who, having experienced the closeness of Christ, becomes ready for radical sacrifice. Authentic renewal is an attempt to find the true face of Christianity.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Was heißt Erneuerung der Kirche?*, op. cit., p. 1188 (J. Ratzinger, *Na czym polega odnowa Kościoła?*, op. cit., pp. 1100–1001).

It is both a gift and a task. It means abandoning the Church's conservative attitude in favour of a missionary attitude that never shies away from suffering and martyrdom. It wants to serve the faith of the simple believers. Through an attitude of fraternal love, it intends to strengthen the unity of the Church. It is accompanied by an attitude of humility.

This publication reveals the meaning of the term *aggiornamento*, used by Joseph Ratzinger between 1965 and 1966, and draws attention to the evolution of the term in the Church.

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