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## Liturgy and the Moral Path: *Via Ethica* in the Context of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Thought\*

Liturgia i moralność: *Via ethica* w kontekście myśli  
Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to demonstrate the organic interconnection between liturgy and the Christian moral path (*via ethica*) in the context of contemporary moral challenges, particularly within the realities of postmodernism and digital culture. The subject of investigation is the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI on the worship of the Church and its relationship to the *via ethica*, examined within the framework of demonstrating the credibility of Christianity. In existing studies of his thought, this connection has been indicated, but not adequately considered in terms of fulfilling the tasks of fundamental theology/new apologetics. This gives the present study a novel dimension and allows for a clearer delineation of the relationship between liturgy and ethos as a bridge for dialogue with the contemporary world. The introduction outlines the research context and formulates the problem of the relationship between the Church's worship and the moral path. The first part of the article presents the concept of the *via ethica* and its connection with the liturgy, particularly in the light of the Christ's *pro-existentia*. The second part examines the shaping of the *via ethica* in the perspective of the liturgy, with particular emphasis on the concept of the "logization" of the life – proposed as an alternative to the "algorithmization" of existence. The third part identifies dialogicality as a structural analogy between the

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worship of the Church and the Christian ethos – an analogy that may serve as a bridge for those inquiring into the credibility of Christianity from a moral standpoint. The conclusion summarizes the main findings, highlighting the role of the liturgy as an important hermeneutical tool in theological and pastoral reflection on the *via ethica*.

**KEYWORDS:** ethos, morality, divine worship, credibility of Christianity, imitation to Christ, *logization*, digital age, algorithmization of life, fundamental theology, new apologetics

**ABSTRAKT:** Celem artykułu jest ukazanie organicznego powiązania pomiędzy liturgią a etosem chrześcijańskim (*via ethica*) w kontekście współczesnych wyzwań moralnych, szczególnie w realiach postmodernizmu i kultury cyfrowej. Przedmiot badań stanowi myśl Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI dotycząca kultu Kościoła i jej związku z *via ethica*, poddana analizie w perspektywie możliwości ukazywania wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa. W opracowaniach jego myśli relacja ta była wielokrotnie wskazywana, jednak nie ściśle pod kątem realizacji zadań teologii fundamentalnej czy nowej apologii, co nadaje niniejszemu badaniu nowatorski akcent i pozwala na czytelniejsze nakreślenie powiązań istniejących pomiędzy liturgią a etosem jako płaszczyzny dialogu ze współczesnym światem. We wprowadzeniu zarysowano kontekst badań oraz postawiono problem związku między kultem Kościoła i moralnością. W pierwszej części artykułu przedstawiono koncepcję *via ethica* oraz jej związek z liturgią, przede wszystkim w świetle Chrystusowej proegzystencji. Druga część analizuje kształt *via ethica* w perspektywie liturgii, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem koncepcji „logizacji” egzystencji – jako propozycji alternatywnej wobec „algotymizacji” życia. W trzeciej części wskazano na dialogiczność jako strukturalną analogię istotną zarówno dla kultu Kościoła, jak i dla etosu chrześcijańskiego – mogącą stanowić odpowiedź dla osób pytających o wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa w perspektywie moralności. W zakończeniu zebrano główne wnioski, podkreślając rolę liturgii jako ważnego narzędzia hermeneutycznego w teologicznym i duszpasterskim namyśle nad *via ethica*.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** ethos, moralność, kult Boży, wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa, naśladowanie Chrystusa, logizacja, kultura cyfrowa, algotymizacja życia, teologia fundamentalna, nowa apologia

## Introduction

The Christian ethos<sup>1</sup> continues to draw attention. On the one hand, it is subject to criticism due to its opposition to relativism. On the other hand, there is a renewed interest in this *via ethica* (the Christian moral path). The

<sup>1</sup> The subject of this article pertains to the faith and discipline of the Catholic Church. Although, according to the teaching of the Magisterium, many of the issues discussed below are also relevant to other Churches and ecclesial communities to varying degrees (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, August 6, 2000, 17, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/)

growing concern over the risks posed by the rapid digitalization of reality<sup>2</sup> has sparked in many a desire to seek an alternative to the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure and a life increasingly controlled by algorithms.<sup>3</sup> For many, this alternative is found in Christianity and the moral principles it upholds.<sup>4</sup>

In light of the phenomenon outlined above, there arises a need to discover and describe various attractors<sup>5</sup> of the *via ethica* within a new context. This may help both theologians and pastors to present the Christian path with renewed freshness, and also support all seekers in gaining a deeper understanding of it. The aim of this article is to identify such a role in the liturgy of the Church<sup>6</sup> – based on the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI.<sup>7</sup>

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congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\_con\_cfaith\_doc\_20000806\_dominus-iesus\_en.html), ecumenical studies would exceed the intended scope of the reflection undertaken.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Law et al., *Accenture Life Trends 2025* (Accenture, October 24, 2024), 6, accessed January 31, 2026, <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/accenture-com/document-3/Accenture-LifeTrends2025-Report.pdf#zoom=40>; IPSOS, *Predictions 2025 Report* (February 28, 2025), 6, 32, accessed January 31, 2026, <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-12/ipsos-predictions-2025-survey-report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> John Mark Comer, *Praktykowanie Drogi: być z Jezusem, stać się jak Jezus, robić to, co Jezus* [Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus, Become Like Him, Do as He Did], trans. Elżbieta Siewniak (Szaron, 2024), 256.

<sup>4</sup> Tanjil Rashid, “Finding Their Religion: Why Gen Z Are Turning to Faith,” *Financial Times*, May 21, 2025, accessed January 31, 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/94460660-1fe1-411b-8649-cc886742c410>.

<sup>5</sup> This article proposes the use of the concept of an “attractor,” drawn from the theory of dynamical systems. As Józef Życiński notes, an attractor (from the Latin *attrahere* ‘to attract’) is a set or point that, during a specific process, “attracts” points from its environment; cf. Józef Życiński, “Naturalistyczne a chrześcijańskie interpretacje ewolucji,” *Forum Teologiczne* 9 (2008): 49 (although the definition originates from a text developed in a different context, its technical nature allows it to be applied in presented theological reflection). Analogously, liturgy can serve as a point of moral stabilization in the life of a believer, even in the context of contemporary cultural turbulence – and at the same time constitute an element of the argument for the credibility of Christianity, which will be examined in this study.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of liturgy used in this work is understood in the broad context of the public worship of the Catholic Church. Its fullness is attained in the Eucharist, with which other rites are closely connected: “The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it. The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ himself. . . In this light, the Eucharist shows itself as the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel” (Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_presbyterorum-ordinis\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html)).

<sup>7</sup> The meaning of the term “world” in the context of modernity, in the light of the reflections of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI – which will frequently appear in the present text – can be

Why liturgy? The well-known and frequently repeated maxim from the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, states that although the liturgy does not exhaust the entirety of human activity, it is nevertheless the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and, at the same time, the font from which all her power flows.<sup>8</sup> It is worth checking the validity of this statement in contemporary conditions.

The choice of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI as the guide for this reflection is motivated by the relevance of his message in the context of contemporary global expectations. Furthermore, for some time now, the study and promotion of Ratzinger's prophetic thought has been the mission of the Lublin School of Fundamental Theology, from which the author of this text originates. The publication of one of the two complete language editions of Joseph Ratzinger's collected works (Opera Omnia series) at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin serves as an additional incentive to further explore and disseminate his scholarly legacy.<sup>9</sup>

The following text will be based on an analysis of Joseph Ratzinger's theological writings, primarily those contained in Volume 11 of the Opera Omnia series (which focuses on liturgy), while also considering other writings and selected papal documents of Benedict XVI that provide insights into the understanding of the Christian *via ethica*. Although the rich intellectual legacy of the Bavarian Theologian continues to be explored and developed, there remains a lack of analyses and broader perspectives on the connection between liturgy and *via ethica* discussed in this article – not only as part of the description of an ethical category or an aspect of liturgical theology,<sup>10</sup> but as an element of the credibility of Christianity – and thus inscribed in fundamental theology and the related trend of the new apologetics.<sup>11</sup>

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found in Krzysztof Kaucha, "‘Life without God and against God’: Joseph Ratzinger on Christianity and the (Secularized) World," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 32, no. 1 (2023): 113–37, <https://doi.org/10.52097/wpt.8525>.

<sup>8</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 9–10, [http://vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html).

<sup>9</sup> Krzysztof Kaucha, *Ratzinger: Apologetics for (Not Only) Our Time*. Lublin Theological Studies 11 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2024), 9 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it happens that also in some researches analyzing understanding of Christian moral path in Joseph Ratzinger's writings there is no mention of this connection. For instance cf. D. Vincent Twomey, "Joseph Ratzinger on the Foundations of Moral Theology," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 109, no. 435 (2020): 304–15.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Marian Rusecki, Jacenty Mastej, and Krzysztof Kaucha, *Metodologia teologii fundamentalnej* (Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2019), 145 ff.; Przemysław Artemiuk,

Themes discussed in the text, such as *pro-existence* and the logization of existence, have already found their place in theological literature.<sup>12</sup> However, an attempt to explicitly emphasize these categories as part of the argument for the credibility of Christianity, which will be undertaken in this reflection, may be valuable and can bring a fresh perspective to the discourse.

The first part of the article introduces the concept of *via ethica* as a foundational framework, followed by an exploration of the relationship between liturgy and experience in the thought of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. The subsequent section examines the formative influence of liturgy on Christian ethics. Finally, the structural analogy between liturgy and *via ethica* will be highlighted, particularly through the lens of dialogicality, as a potential bridge to contemporary ways of thinking.

## 1. Definition of *Via Ethica*: Experiencing God in the Liturgy as a Path to Affirming *Via Ethica*

In this article, the term *via ethica* will be defined in accordance with the proposal of the accomplished Polish theologian and scholar Henryk Seweryniak,

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*Renesans apologii* (Płocki Instytut Wydawniczy, 2016); Wiliam Levada, "The Urgency of a New Apologetics for the Church in the 21st Century," April 29, 2010, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20100429\\_levada-new-apologetics\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20100429_levada-new-apologetics_en.html).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Daniel Galadza, "Logikē latreia (Romans 12:1) as a Definition of Liturgy," *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 52, nos. 1–2 (2011): 109–24; Marek Kluz, "Moral Reorientation through the Emulation of Christ in the Teachings of Joseph Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI," *Teologia i Moralność* 18, no. 34 (2023): 199–211, <https://doi.org/10.14746/TIM.2023.34.2.13>; Agnieszka Łoza, "Logos jako zasada hermeneutyczna w teologicznej refleksji nad nowym ateizmem" (PhD diss., Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 2018); Bogusław Migut, "Logocentrism of the Liturgy as Presented by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI," *Collectanea Theologica* 93, no. 4 (2023): 229–49, <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2023.93.4.12>; Roland Millare, *A Living Sacrifice: Liturgy and Eschatology in Joseph Ratzinger* (Emmaus Academic, 2022), 163–97; Krzysztof Porosło, "'Ofiara zgodna z Logosem' – teologia ofiary w ujęciu J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI," in *Chrześcijaństwo religią Logosu: Teologia Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, ed. Krzysztof Porosło (Wydawnictwo Scriptum, 2023), 35–58; Kamil Sochacki, "Josepha Ratzingera antropologia i antropogonia liturgiczna" (master's thesis, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, 2015); Jerzy Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, vol. 2 (Księgarnia św. Jacka, 2012); Sławomir Zatwardnicki, *Od teologii objawienia do teologii natchnienia: Studium inspirowane twórczością Geralda O'Collinsa i Josepha Ratzingera* (Wydawnictwo Academicum, 2022), 690–94, 729–31, 736, <https://doi.org/10.52097/acapress.9788362475919>.

which is based on a contextual perspective and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church: in the face of contemporary consumerism, the Church – despite the risk of losing popularity – continues to uphold moral objectivism and advocates for the relevance of the path outlined by the commandment of love and the Decalogue. Grounded in the dignity of the human person, it defends human life from conception to natural death and points to holiness as the perspective for growth toward authentic humanity. On this foundation, Christians build interpersonal unity and solidarity – aligning with the ethos of human rights. At the same time, Catholic doctrine emphasizes that the full development of the human person and the formation of the family cannot be achieved solely through respect for freedom and the mutual recognition of rights associated with this ethos. For Christianity, the core essential ethical principle is the ethos of imitating Jesus Christ. Shaping human attitudes through the path of Christ's imitation constitutes the *via ethica par excellence*.<sup>13</sup>

The justification for this definition can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is “the perfect man,” who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way. Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.<sup>14</sup>

For the sake of conceptual clarity and systematization, it is important to recognize that the notion of the *via ethica* synthesizes two distinct academic disciplines, which, when considered together, outline a path that claims credibility in the contemporary world. The first of these is philosophical ethics, which in this case bases its normativity on personalism.<sup>15</sup> The second is moral theology, which builds upon the rationality of personalist ethics while seeking additional justification in Revelation.

Nevertheless, the essence of the *via ethica* remains that Jesus Christ is the model of moral perfection worthy of imitation.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Ratzinger fully agrees

<sup>13</sup> Henryk Seweryniak, *Teologia fundamentalna*, vol. 2, Biblioteka “Więzi” 258 (Towarzystwo “Więź”, 2010), 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), nos. 520–21, accessed January 31, 2026, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>15</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn* (Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969), 23 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Elementarz etyczny* (Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy „Znak”, 1979), 15–19.

with this perspective, seeing in Christ the fullness of humanity and the ultimate paradigm of existence – one that finds its measure in *pro-existence*:

The event of the crucifixion appears there as a process of opening, in which the scattered man-monads are drawn into the embrace of Jesus Christ, into the wide span of his outstretched arms, in order to arrive, in this union, at their goal, the goal of humanity. But if this is so, then Christ as the man to come is not man for himself but essentially man for others; it is precisely his complete openness that makes him the man of the future. The man for himself, who wants to stand only in himself, is then the man of the past whom we must leave behind us in order to stride forward. In other words, this means that the future of man lies in “being for.”<sup>17</sup>

The deepest meaning of the *via ethica* is therefore the imitation of Christ. However, the best way to imitate is to follow someone one has met – through a dynamic experience rooted in relationship. This is particularly important in the context of contemporary man, for whom authentic experience is becoming one of the key trends.<sup>18</sup>

Sacramental Christian cult can be the space for the above-mentioned reality. In Joseph Ratzinger’s theology – liturgy appears as a revealed experience of encounter between man and God which enables the deepest *communio* to occur in the interpersonal community.<sup>19</sup> The Creator meets the created being in a human way: through the transformation of material reality into a sign of the certainty of the one and true God. Thanks to the word (sacramental *form*) – elements of the natural world acquire binding power. The ambiguity of matter is purified by the Lord and Creator of all things, who imparts it a specific property.<sup>20</sup>

Man exists as a communion of the material and spiritual elements. The Creator called him to life as a spiritual-corporeal unity. He perceives reality

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 2nd ed., trans. J.R. Foster (Ignatius Press, 2004), 240.

<sup>18</sup> Law et al., *Accenture Life Trends 2025*, 71 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern. Schriften zur Ekklesiologie und Ökumene*, 2nd revised ed., ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, vol. 1, *Gesammelte Schriften* 8/1 (Herder, 2015): 237; Mariusz Biliniewicz, “Inner Dynamics of Divine Worship: Joseph Ratzinger on Liturgical Development,” *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 22, no. 1 (2014): 23, <https://doi.org/10.52097/wpt.2767>.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie: Die sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Gesammelte Schriften* 11 (Herder, 2008), 203–10.

through his bodily senses. Therefore, by the will of the Creator, the spiritual world becomes tangible to man through the sacramental signs, which use matter perceptible to the senses.<sup>21</sup>

In this way, the experience of liturgy can serve as an inspiration for adopting a specific lifestyle: the encounter in the Church's worship with the living God (present in the Eucharist, the power of the sacraments, in His word, in the priestly ministry, in the experience of communal prayer . . .)<sup>22</sup> and accepting this experience gives existence a specific shape: it allows one to experience an encounter with Christ, in whose footsteps one can follow with certainty. From this perspective, the *via ethica* ceases to be a cold moralism, based solely on rules that facilitate social life: Christian life is not primarily an a priori commandment, but an adventure of imitating the One who, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6), becomes tangible in the liturgy.

## 2. The Shape of the Christian *Via Ethica* in the Light of Liturgy

The preceding reflections invite a further question: does the liturgical encounter of believers with Christ imply any specific moral attitudes? Joseph Ratzinger's answer is, of course, affirmative. However, the way in which he understands this implication – arising from his concept of liturgy as an experience of God's presence – proves to be particularly compelling.

According to Ratzinger, the shape of the Christian *via ethica* can best be drawn from the opening verses of chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans. There, St. Paul addresses the theme of integrating the entirety of Christian existence into a *logiké latreia*; this means “rational worship,”<sup>23</sup> which corresponds to the

<sup>21</sup> Cassian Folsom, *Człowiek współczesny a liturgia: Diagnoza, skutki i leczenie choroby toczącej liturgię rzymską*, ed. Krzysztof Porosło, trans. Dominik Jurczak et al., Modlitwa Kościoła 24 (Tyniec Wydawnictwo Benedyktynów, 2018), 110–12.

<sup>22</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

<sup>23</sup> “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (*logikén latreian*). Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:1–2). All biblical quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. The Greek term *logiké latreia* is semantically rich and may be also rendered as ‘rational’ or ‘reasonable’ (Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* [Lexham Press, 2020]). In the context of Joseph Ratzinger's theology, however, the most fitting translation appears to be “rational,”

Bavarian theologian's thesis about the presence of two kinds of gravity within the human person – a concept already postulated by the Church Fathers. On the one hand, human existence tends to gravitate downward – toward what is material, tangible, and empirically verifiable. On the other hand, a second kind of gravity appears to draw the person upward – toward what is greater and transcendent, ultimately toward God and the perfect harmony found in relationship with the Absolute.<sup>24</sup>

The “rational worship” referred to in the Letter to the Romans – which flows from the liturgy and permeates the entirety of human existence – begins with the recognition of the anthropological condition described above. Accordingly, Christian worship does not shy away from humble gestures such as kneeling or the confession of the Confiteor. These practices are not intended to base faith on fear, but rather to acknowledge the human condition – a reality from which human thought often attempts to flee by retreating into postures and fictions, the countless masks that, in many cases, are only stripped away by death. Christianity opts for realism – a realism that is not always easy, but that ultimately proves to be rational.<sup>25</sup>

But this is not the end of the matter. Apostle Paul's expression “rational worship” is etymologically connected to the term *Logos*, which refers to Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Proximity of Eternal Wisdom.<sup>26</sup> On this basis, Joseph Ratzinger coins the neologism *to logize existence (logisieren)* – a term that signifies shaping one's humanity in the light of the liturgical experience. In this sense, the liturgy provides the form of the *via ethica*.<sup>27</sup>

The term *logization* expresses two interrelated directions. First, it is associated with the rationality, meaningfulness, and harmony that Christian worship offers to the believer. Immersion in the depth of authentic liturgical experience enables the human person to encounter elements of the truth about the world as it existed before original sin – while simultaneously offering a foretaste of the reality to come: the heavenly Jerusalem. This transformation engages the

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due to its reference to the Logos (see Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie*, 57–61), cf. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, 54–64.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube in Schrift und Tradition: Zur Theologischen Prinzipienlehre*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, vol. 1, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 9/1 (Herder, 2016), 101.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Künder des Wortes und Diener eurer Freude: Theologie und Spiritualität des Weibesakraments*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Gesammelte Schriften* 12 (Herder, 2010), 567–68.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI, “Homily at the Midnight Mass in the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord,” The Holy See, December 24, 2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121224\\_christmas.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121224_christmas.html).

<sup>27</sup> Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie*, 149.

whole person – mind, will, and body. *Logized* gestures and liturgical postures, the sounds of instruments, and the art that serves the liturgy allow the individual to enter more deeply into the mystery of their own existence. Silence – as an act of listening and a form of interiorizing the Word of God – makes it possible to pause and become aware that there is such a thing as an *interior*: the depth of the human heart into which the Lord enters in the liturgy, and which becomes the place where He desires to dwell. The opening of the “eyes of the heart,” invited through the language of symbols and gestures, allows for a vision not only of what can be weighed and measured, but also of the divine radiance in creation. This makes it possible to include Creator within the scope of reason’s perception. It enables one to become increasingly conformed to the image of God and fosters fruitful dialogue – resonating both inwardly and outwardly – through the “Amen” so frequently repeated in the liturgical rites. The above interpretation, although it may seem deeply connected to a mystagogical description, is worth noting and emphasizing in the context of demonstrating the credibility of Christianity through access to authentic experiences, the role of which is important for contemporary people.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the profound beauty present in liturgy – and radiating from it into the broader realm of culture – can act like an arrow that, through aesthetic experience, wounds the human soul, opening it to a deeper understanding of rational arguments. According to the Bavarian Theologian, this cultural effect of *logization* proves to be of particular importance: the overwhelming plurality of content in the modern world dulls human sensitivity. Rational arguments often fall into a void, losing their persuasive power amidst the noise of information overload.<sup>29</sup> The deep beauty of the liturgy, however, has the potential to touch the heart and create a space of communion in which the Living God – and His truest argument: love – can be perceived by a *logized* human sensitivity.<sup>30</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky’s well-known dictum that “beauty will save the world” thus gains renewed relevance in the contemporary age, becoming a concrete reality in the Church’s worship.<sup>31</sup>

The term *logization* carries yet another layer of meaning. It may be defined as a process of becoming conformed to the Logos – the Incarnate Son of God.

<sup>28</sup> Law et al., *Accenture Life Trends 2025*, 71 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Ignatius Press, 2005), 36–37.

<sup>30</sup> Francis, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi* on the Liturgical Formation of the People of God, The Holy See, June 29, 2022, no. 10, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html).

<sup>31</sup> Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 41.

Each day during the Eucharist, which constitutes the most central element of the Christian cult, the community enters into an *anamnesis* – the liturgical remembrance of Christ’s Paschal mystery, understood in its specific theological sense: not as a passive recollection but as a real participation in which the believer is drawn into the Mystery itself. The priest pronounces the words of Consecration – the very words of Christ spoken at the Last Supper: This is my Body, given for you; this is my Blood, shed for you. Do this in memory of me (see Mark 14:24 and parallels). The phrase “for you” carries a profound theological weight. The Greek term *hyper* (Latin: *pro*) means not only “for” but also “for the benefit of,” or “on behalf of” and “in defense of.”<sup>32</sup> In these words lies a permanent call to *pro-existence* – a mode of life modeled on Christ’s own self-gift. The invitation: This do in memory of me, refers not only to the sacramental memorial of Christ’s mystery through the Eucharistic signs, but also to an ongoing transformation of mind and heart, a movement from self-centeredness to a life lived *for others*.<sup>33</sup>

In this context, liturgy that is authentically lived always extends beyond the ritual act itself – it becomes the wellspring of mission and service, aimed at the transformation of the world. The person who has been *logized* in the Christian worship, who carries Christ within his or her heart, comes out from the sacred rites with a renewed desire to bear witness – in word and in deed. The reception of God’s gift – and of the Giver Himself in the Eucharist – marks a liturgical moment; while communion with Christ (*par excellence* through Eucharistic communion) becomes a way of life.<sup>34</sup>

In light of *logization* as a process of becoming conformed to the Logos – the “moral rhythm”<sup>35</sup> of being attuned to Christ – the moral life of a Christian represents a rational worship. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Benedict XVI underscores that this perspective safeguards against reducing the Christian *via ethica* to merely one among many moral conceptions based solely on intellectual reasoning:

<sup>32</sup> Remigiusz Popowski, *Słownik grecko-polski Nowego Testamentu*, 3rd revised ed., Prymasowska Seria Biblijna (Oficyna Wydawnicza “Vocatio”, 2007), 624.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus von Nazareth: Beiträge zur Christologie*, Gesammelte Schriften 6/1 (Herder, 2013), 518–19.

<sup>34</sup> Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie*, 150–51.

<sup>35</sup> The notion of “rhythm” in theology deserves attention and has recently received increasing scholarly interest – see, for instance, Alexandria Eikelboom, *Rhythm: A Theological Category*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford University Press, 2018).

This appeal to the moral value of spiritual worship should not be interpreted in a merely moralistic way. It is before all else the joy-filled discovery of love at work in the hearts of those who accept the Lord's gift, abandon themselves to him and thus find true freedom. The moral transformation implicit in the new worship instituted by Christ is a heartfelt yearning to respond to the Lord's love with one's whole being, while remaining ever conscious of one's own weakness. This is clearly reflected in the Gospel story of Zacchaeus (*Lk* 19:1–10). After welcoming Jesus to his home, the tax collector is completely changed: he decides to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay fourfold those whom he had defrauded. The moral urgency born of welcoming Jesus into our lives is the fruit of gratitude for having experienced the Lord's unmerited closeness.<sup>36</sup>

The coherence between professed and celebrated faith and the everyday life of believers presents a significant challenge – one that even Christians themselves often struggle to meet. Religiosity, too, can become disordered within the human person, at times contradicting its own true nature – something that demands continual vigilance. However, it is a fallacy to claim that the rejection of God would bring about peace or produce a better *via ethica*. The historical experience of communist totalitarian regimes in the not-so-distant past offers a striking refutation of this thesis.<sup>37</sup> *Logization*, understood as a process of being conformed to Christ – who is our peace, proclaiming peace to those who were far off and to those who were near (see *Eph* 2:14, 17) – remains, in every era, an open path toward recognizing the inherent dignity of every human person and contributing to the building of a more morally grounded world.

His Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is “truly” life.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, The Holy See, February 22, 2007, no. 82, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html).

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, “Homily at the Midnight Mass in the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord.”

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* on Christian Hope, The Holy See, November 30, 2007, no. 31, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html).

Finally, it should be added that the *logization* of existence presents itself as a compelling alternative to the “algorithmization” to which the human person may be subjected in today’s world. The growing awareness that social behavior is, to some extent, determined by the self-perpetuating machinery of financial or technological progress – or even shaped by artificial intelligence employed for various utilitarian ends – gives rise to a deep need to break free from these new forms of bondage.<sup>39</sup> A conscious conformation to the Logos – rather than passive submission to the trends of a technicized culture – emerges as the better path, and at the same time as the seed of a “new” culture: a culture of the heart, a culture of the future.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. A Formal Analogy Between Liturgy and the *Via Ethica*

Cultural transformations in the context of postmodernity have led to an absolutization of freedom (understood according to a wide range of definitions) as a measure of value – or, alternatively, to the use of the term as a kind of ideological slogan.<sup>41</sup> This article does not seek to offer an extensive analysis of this phenomenon, but in its final section aims to highlight its influence on theology – particularly in the context of evangelization and apologetics – while also pointing to the possibilities offered by liturgy in responding to the tendencies that emerge from it.

The absolutization of freedom is often accompanied by the claim that anthropological categories such as guilt or the need for forgiveness were imposed by Christianity as a means of control and a limitation of individual liberty.<sup>42</sup> For people raised within a predominantly Christian cultural context and unfamiliar with broader research in the study of religions, this perspective may appear plausible. What often fails to enter the public consciousness is the wide range of religious or quasi-religious expressions – some highly rationalized, others more obscure – across various epochs and cultural milieus (such as ritual washings, the transference of guilt onto animals or other entities and a variety of magical

<sup>39</sup> Comer, *Praktykowanie Drogi*, 250.

<sup>40</sup> Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos* on the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ, The Holy See, October 24, 2024, nos. 9, 14, 20, 26, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Józef Życiński, *Bóg postmodernistów: Wielkie pytania filozofii we współczesnej krytyce moderny* (Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 2001), 130–31.

<sup>42</sup> Nowak and Ziemiński, *Chrześcijaństwo*, 123.

rites), all of which point to a universal human need for reconciliation and the remission of guilt.<sup>43</sup> It is against this backdrop that Christianity is sometimes accused of undermining human freedom by proclaiming the reality of divine mercy and forgiveness.

In addressing the aforementioned criticisms, a helpful – because visible and accessible even to non-practicing individuals – point of reference may be found in the structural analogy between Revelation and the Church’s worship, as well as between worship and the Christian *via ethica*. Within European culture, the liturgy remains, even for non-believers, a relatively intelligible point of orientation.<sup>44</sup> Its very structure can thus serve as a key to understanding the depth of Christian morality, revealing that it – like the Church’s worship – is fundamentally grounded in the idea of human freedom and dignity.

In the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, Christian cult is, above all, characterized by its responsive nature. The Church’s worship is fundamentally dialogical: it is always an invitation to offer a response – something that can be perceived even by those who participate in liturgies only occasionally. This is not merely an attempt to engage or “activate” the participants, but rather a reflection of the deep reality that lies behind what may at first appear to be brief acclamations or simple responses.

The characteristic word-response structure of the worship (which is expressed very clear in German, creating a kind of wordplay: *Wort-Antwort*) reflects the fundamental nature of the entire Christian Revelation. The Word of God – the Logos – in the aforementioned *pro-existence* – becomes present in liturgy and invites a response. The process of Revelation – just like the Church’s worship – presupposes both the word and the response. The complete manifestation of God’s presence and the receptive listening of the community appear as a unified whole.<sup>45</sup> The depth of this relationship is illustrated by Benedict XVI during the Maundy Thursday Mass in 2009:

Through this gift of his love, he transcends all distance and makes us truly his “partners” – the nuptial mystery of love is accomplished . . . What happened at the hour of the Last Supper, and what has been renewed ever since, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist? God, the living God, establishes a communion of peace with us, or to put it more strongly, he creates “consanguinity” between himself and us.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie*, 203–4.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press, 2007), 516 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Ratzinger, *Theologie der Liturgie*, 175–76.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, “Homily at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper,” The Holy See, April 9, 2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20090409\\_coena-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090409_coena-domini.html).

From this position, it is easier to present to those who question or doubt the Christian understanding of freedom (or at least begin an argument from the experience of worship as a pictorial element that is representative of Christianity): also, the *via ethica* is an *Antwort* – a response extended to life, to a *logizied* existence. In its essence, the Christian ethos is rooted not in fear or guilt, but truly elevates the person to new heights: God invites and creates space for a response – a lifelong “Amen.”

This space is radically given to humanity: God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Its depth is embodied in the words and actions of Christ: the quintessence is found in the gesture of washing feet on Maundy Thursday – a gesture that is repeated annually in the Church’s liturgy during the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. For Ratzinger, to be a Christian is to believe – and to believe is, in other words, to allow oneself to have one’s feet washed by Jesus – to permit God’s servant love to touch us, enabling us to live the *via ethica*.<sup>47</sup> The ethos, in this context, is fulfilled in human life through the realization of Christ’s words: “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).<sup>48</sup>

Hence, for Ratzinger, the question of God is ultimately a question of a rationally responsible free decision: one that persists during the liturgy and equally in daily life – and, through the connection of both, touches something beyond time – the eschatological reality. The practice of life depends on the “yes” or “no” to God.<sup>49</sup> The Creator, of course, proposes a specific ethos – but its authentic affirmation always takes place precisely as a life’s “Amen”: the *via ethica* is consistent with the rationality, logic, and harmony of the world<sup>50</sup> – visible, though disturbed by sin. Understanding and accepting it, however, is connected to the voluntary acceptance of the Christian faith, in the light of which the whole reality – including the cosmos and its various constellations – exists as the space of the covenant: the space of the affirmation of love between God and the human who responds to Him.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Journey Towards Easter: Retreat Given in the Vatican in the Presence of Pope John Paul II* (Crossroad, 1987), 99.

<sup>48</sup> Jerzy Szymik, “Ogniem jest: Chryścijaństwo jako *religio vera* według Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI,” in *Teologia fundamentalna w twórczości Josepha Ratzingera*, ed. Krzysztof Kaucha and Jacency Mastej (Wydawnictwo KUL, 2017), 109.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Auferstehung und ewiges Leben: Beiträge zur Eschatologie und zur Theologie der Hoffnung*, Gesammelte Schriften 10 (Herder, 2012), 619.

<sup>50</sup> Jacency Mastej, *Jezus jest Sensem: Fundamentalna chrystologia sensu inspirowana twórczością Josepha Ratzingera* (Wydawnictwo KUL, 2024), 244.

<sup>51</sup> Ratzinger, *Jesus von Nazareth*, 467–68.

Placing emphasis on the above – within the Ratzingerian framework – can become a source of effectively bridging the gap to contemporary mentality. Presenting with renewed zeal the open arms of Christ – that invite man as a partner in dialogue to rise to the height of the Savior’s open heart – can open the human heart’s eyes to the truth not only of Christianity but also of the anthropological truth concerning sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8) – for which the liberating fulfillment is the Christian ethos: following in the footsteps of the Risen One.

## Conclusion

In light of search within the *via ethica* (the Christian moral path) for an alternative to relativistic tendencies and the threat of a life increasingly controlled by algorithms, the article argues for the credibility of Christianity, demonstrating the relationship between the *via ethica* and liturgy, which constitutes the summit of ecclesial activity and the source from which the power of the Church flows.<sup>52</sup>

At the outset, the concept of the “attractor” was introduced, taken from the theory of dynamic systems, as a comparison useful in grasping the connection between the *via ethica* and liturgy. In simplified terms, it refers to the state (or set of states) towards which the system inclines over time. An example could be a dripping faucet – in this case, the rhythm of the dripping becomes the attractor. Even if at the beginning (or due to a random cause, such as the faucet being moved), the drops fall irregularly – after some time, they stabilize and fall into a rhythm.

In light of the above reflection, it can certainly be stated that the stable attractor of the Christian *via ethica* is liturgy. Based on the thought of Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, it has been demonstrated that the Church’s worship connects the believer with the essence of the Christian ethos, which is the imitation of Christ – through the very important thread in contemporary understanding: experience. Thanks to this coherence, the relationship between the *via ethica* and liturgy can be viewed as a manifestation of Christianity’s credibility.

In the article, an additional manifestation of the rational shape of the Christian moral path, which is achieved by its connection with the worship of the Church, is also emphasized. In this context, the concept of the *logization* of existence (taken by Joseph Ratzinger from the Pauline expression *logiké latreia*

<sup>52</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 9.

‘rational worship’ in the Letter to the Romans) becomes central. It denotes the liturgy-related process of the Christian’s imitation of Christ – the Incarnate Logos. This imitation can give the sense of life and offer a coherent “moral rhythm” as an alternative to the algorithmization of existence.

The article also highlights the structural analogy between liturgy and the *via ethica*, based on dialogue and emphasizing the importance of human freedom. Sensitivity to these values, from the perspective of fundamental theology and the new apologetics, becomes a sort of bridge, a shared foundation, enabling discussion with those questioning the moral sense of Christianity – even if they have only a superficial experience of the form in which the Church’s worship is contained. Just as liturgy itself invites the believer to an inward and outward response to God’s call (as Ratzinger illustrates through the wordplay: *Wort-Antwort*), so too the Christian ethos is revealed *par excellence* not as a system of precepts, but as a dynamic lifelong response, seen as following in the footsteps of the Risen One. This does not diminish moral principles, but rather reveals their fullness in the liberating decision to imitate the Savior’s path.

In light of these analyses, the connection between liturgy and the *via ethica* constitutes not merely part of the description of an ethical category or an aspect of liturgical theology, but an element of the credibility of Christianity. Christian worship thus appears as a valuable hermeneutical key not only for understanding Christian morality but also for engaging in dialogue with contemporary people seeking answers to the question of the sense of life.

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