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## *Verbum abbreviatum* and *silentium Dei* in Benedict XVI's Writings and the Object and Method of Biblical Exegesis<sup>1</sup>

*Verbum abbreviatum* i *silentium Dei* u Benedykta XVI a przedmiot  
i metoda egzegezy biblijnej

*Once, when I was giving a lecture at the university, expounding ideas I had taken over from our contemporaries, I suddenly felt like I had nothing to say, that I was standing before my students with empty hands and an empty soul.*  
(E. Husserl)<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with the development of biblical exegesis in the light of the theory of knowledge and methodology, which operates on the concepts of *verbum abbreviatum* and *silentium Dei*, which Benedict XVI caused to be included in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. These terms describe the object of biblical exegesis as a theological discipline. The article commences with an analysis of the use and understanding of *verbum abbreviatum* in *Verbum Domini* and continues with an addendum on the motif of *silentium Dei*. The disproportion

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the article on *silentium Dei* is based on a talk entitled *The Silence of God and the Christological Interpretation of Scripture* given at the international conference *Biblia Benedicti. Hermeneutical and Exegetical Legacy of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI* (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, 25–26.10.2023). The text of this talk has not been published.

<sup>2</sup> K. Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik: Denk- Und Lebensweg Edmund Husserls*, Den Haag 1977, p. 331; L. Shestov, *In Memory of a Great Philosopher: Edmund Husserl*, transl. G.L. Kline, "Russkiye Zapiski" 12 (1938), pp. 126–145, <http://www.angelfire.com/nb/shestov/sar/husserl1.html> [access: 5.06.2024]; cf. K. Michalski, *Logika i czas. Próba analizy Husserlowskiej teorii sensu* [Logic and Time: An Attempt to Analyse Husserl's Theory of Sense], Warszawa 1988, p. 7.

between the two corresponds to the different roles that the concepts play in the construction of the document. For *silentium Dei* is merely a supplement – as important as it is – to the theology of the Word. Together with the concept of *verbum abbreviatum* it forms the descriptive part of the article. The third part is a search for an answer to the question of what biblical exegesis deals with, and therefore what its formal object is, which leads to the fundamental epistemological problems of biblical exegesis. These are considered in the light of an analysis of the aforementioned concepts in the thought of Benedict XVI and in the document mentioned above. The phenomenological approach seeks to answer the question of what biblical exegesis is and what its methodological consequences are. The phenomenological treatment of Scripture as the object of exegesis aims to integrate the theological aspect into exegetical considerations and to show exegetical procedures as intrinsically linked to the theological interpretation of the Bible. In the methodology of Scripture exegesis, this offers the possibility of constructing a methodological project that, on the one hand, makes use of all research procedures, allows the elimination of ideological elements incorporated into the research, and, on the other hand, preserves the theological sense of exegetical research. In the last part of the article, the author analyses various attempts to frame the problem of theological exegetical method in biblical studies, and offers his proposal based on all the considerations of the topic.

KEY WORDS: *Dei Verbum*, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *verbum abbreviatum*, *silentium Dei*, biblical exegesis, methodology of biblical exegesis, phenomenology

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł prezentuje możliwości rozwoju egzegezy biblijnej z punktu widzenia teorii poznania oraz metodologii, które wychodzą od dwóch pojęć – *verbum abbreviatum* i *silentium Dei* – jakie pojawiają się w adhortacji *Verbum Domini* dzięki wpływowi Benedykta XVI. Te dwa terminy są istotne dla opisanego przedmiotu egzegezy biblijnej jako nauki w obszarze nauk teologicznych. Analiza użycia i rozumienia *verbum abbreviatum* w adhortacji *Verbum Domini* stanowi pierwszą część niniejszego artykułu. Drugą część jest dopowiedzeniem na temat motywu *silentium Dei*. Dysproporcja między nimi odpowiada różnorodności ról, jakie pełnią w konstrukcji dokumentu. *Silentium Dei* jest bowiem ważnym, ale tylko dopowiedzeniem do teologii Słowa. Razem tworzą one opisową część artykułu. Część trzecia jest poszukiwaniem odpowiedzi na pytanie, czym zajmuje się egzegeza biblijna, a więc jaki jest jej przedmiot formalny. W ten sposób przechodzi się do zasadniczych problemów epistemologicznych egzegezy biblijnej. Rozpatrywane są one w świetle analizy wyżej wspomnianych pojęć w myśli Benedykta XVI i we wzmiankowanym dokumencie. Przyjęte podejście fenomenologiczne jest jedną z dróg prowadzących do odpowiedzi na pytanie, czym zajmuje się egzegeza biblijna, oraz metodologicznych konsekwencji tej odpowiedzi. Fenomenologiczne ujęcie Pisma Świętego jako przedmiotu egzegezy biblijnej ma na celu włączenie aspektu teologicznego do rozważań egzegetycznych oraz ukazanie zabiegów egzegetycznych jako wewnętrznie powiązanych z teologiczną interpretacją Biblii. W sferze metodologii egzegezy Pisma Świętego daje to możliwość zbudowania projektu metodologicznego, który z jednej strony wykorzysta wszystkie procedury badawcze, pozwoli wyeliminować ideologiczne elementy włączane do badań, a z drugiej strony zachowa teologiczny sens badań egzegetycznych. W ostatniej części artykułu autor analizuje różne próby ujęcia problemu teologicznej metody

egzegetycznej w badaniach biblijnych, by opierając się na dotychczasowej refleksji, przedstawić własną propozycję.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *Dei Verbum*, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *verbum abbreviatum*, *silentium Dei*, egzegeza biblijna, metodologia egzegezy biblijnej, fenomenologia

The “abbreviated” Word of God (*Verbum Dei abbreviatum*) is a Christological formula that is neither obvious nor easy to understand today. It was recalled by Pope Benedict XVI in his homily at the 2006 Midnight Mass. He spoke of the Word of God made small in the Child born in Bethlehem and made simple and graspable to the human mind, in contrast to the word of Sacred Scripture that “had become long.”<sup>3</sup> He further developed this thought in the Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (hereafter: VD),<sup>4</sup> which closed the work of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (5–26.10.2008) on the theme: “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.” He brought this issue up again in an address at the Wednesday General Audience on 16 January 2013.<sup>5</sup> Evidently this theme does not emerge in Benedict XVI’s during his pontificate by chance. Since neither the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the XII General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops nor the *Propositiones* thereof employ the expression *verbum abbreviatum*, we can assume that the commission preparing the post-synodal exhortation drew on the idea mentioned by Benedict XVI in his 2006 Nativity homily, which he also made reference to in his 2013 catechesis. Obviously, Ratzinger was recurrently concerned with that idea, even if indirectly. The question therefore merits our attention and necessitates an investigation into the role of this concept in Christology and the epistemology of biblical exegesis.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, *Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord*, 24.12.2006, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20061224\\_christmas.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061224_christmas.html) [access: 10.06.2024]; cf. Benedictus XVI, *Homilia in solemnitate Nativitatis Domini*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 99/1 (2007), pp. 11–14, especially pp. 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html) [access: 10.06.2024]; cf. Benedictus XVI, Adhortatio Apostolica Postsynodalis *Verbum Domini*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 102/11 (2010), pp. 681–787, especially pp. 692–693. See D. García Guillén, *Verbum abbreviatum*, “Facies Domini” 4 (2012), pp. 31–72, especially pp. 32–35.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20130116.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130116.html) [access: 10.06.2024].

A perusal of *Verbum Domini*, with its logocentric Christology and theology of Scripture at the centre,<sup>6</sup> leads one to regard paragraphs 20–21 as highly relevant to the structure of the exhortation. Without the relationship between God the Father and the Word, an essential aspect of which is God’s silence as a necessary form of His manifestation in the Logos, the Christological interpretation of Scripture as a revelatory and salvific event could not be complete.

The theme of God’s silence in the Logos “appears as an important expression of the Word of God” (VD 21). We will consider it in view of another theological *topos*, somewhat more developed in the exhortation, revealing the relationship of the Word incarnate in the flesh and the Word incarnate in Scripture.

The inquiry into *verbum abbreviatum* and *silentium Dei* referenced in Joseph Ratzinger’s writings will offer an answer to the question of the epistemological status of biblical exegesis. The critical point of these considerations is the question of the possibility or even necessity of placing these terms in a theological context. One must simply find out: Is biblical exegesis a branch of theology? Is the knowledge (understanding) that is worked out in biblical exegesis a scientific cognition? Where does it take (if it has one, because we are not yet prejudging anything) its scientific value from? Can (in case it can, then why?) the relationship of biblical exegesis to theology be considered more essential to its identity than, for example, its relationship to history, literary theory or sociology? These are questions relevant not only to biblical exegesis but to theology as a whole because we are asking what is the source of theology: is it Scripture (the written word) or rather the transmission of the church’s understanding of revelation (Tradition). By asking about the epistemological status of exegesis, we want to put this age-old problem outside its perennial context. In doing so we hope to shed somewhat new light. We take as our guiding idea the statements penned by Ratzinger. “The biblical word bears witness to the revelation”<sup>7</sup> – he averred in one of his lectures. And, elaborating on this thought, he added: “The Bible bears witness to the revelation, and yet the concept of revelation as such goes beyond that. In practical terms, this means that a passage can signify more

<sup>6</sup> J. Królikowski, *Theology of the Word of God in the Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini by Benedict XVI*, “Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 31/2 (2023), pp. 61–84, especially pp. 62–64.

<sup>7</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God’s Word. Scripture – Tradition – Office*, transl. H. Taylor, San Francisco 2008, pp. 122; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Problem podstaw i drogi egzegezy dzisiaj* [The Problem of the Foundations and Path of Exegesis Today], [in:] J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Słowo Boga. Pismo – Tradycja – urząd* [The Word of God. Scripture – Tradition – Office], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2008, pp. 89–123, especially p. 120.



than its author himself was able to conceive in composing it.”<sup>8</sup> We ask about the nature of this “more”: Is it a hermeneutical “surplus of meaning”<sup>9</sup> as in Paul Ricœur’s (1913–2005) theory of interpretation, or is it a (qualitatively) new fact: the unique and crucial event of the Incarnate Word that contains and transcends all the words that make up the “witness to the Revelation”? This way of looking at Scripture is reflected in *Verbum Domini*: “the word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to revelation” (VD 18).<sup>10</sup>

The analysis of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition is highly sensitive, particularly against the backdrop of the polemics and dialogue between Catholics and Protestants; keep in mind that the lecture from which the words concerning the relationship between Revelation and the Bible are taken was given to students at the Lutheran Center for Religion and Society in New York, i.e. a Lutheran academic centre.<sup>11</sup> We can therefore assume that Ratzinger sought more than merely a Catholic interpretation of the question of the relationship of Revelation to Scripture. We, too, would like to model our approach on that of Ratzinger, which is why we do not intend to ask about confessional Catholic exegesis, but about the Christian relationship to Scripture.

That is also the reason why this article focuses attention on the epistemological status of biblical exegesis and its consequences expressed against the theological background of biblical interpretation. We refrain here from presenting the *status quaestionis*; we will refer to it in the last part of these considerations to facilitate the formulation of the answers to the questions raised.

<sup>8</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God's Word...*, op. cit., p. 123; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Słowo Boga...*, op. cit., p. 120. This is a 1989 publication reprinted in German in 2005 (J. Ratzinger, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit. Zur Frage nach Grundlagen und Weg der Exegese heute*, [in:] *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, ed. J. Ratzinger, Series: *Quaestiones Disputatae* 117, Freiburg 1989, pp. 15–44).

<sup>9</sup> P. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth, TX 1976; cf. P. Ricœur, *Teoria interpretacji: dyskurs i nadwyżka znaczenia*, transl. K. Rosner, [in:] P. Ricœur, *Język, tekst, interpretacja* [Language, Text, Interpretation], Warszawa 1989, pp. 61–187.

<sup>10</sup> “Verbum Dei enim in sacra Scriptura nobis se tradit, ut inspirata revelationis testificatione” (Benedictus XVI, *Adhortatio Verbum Domini*, p. 700).

<sup>11</sup> P. Hünemann, T. Söding, *Introduction*, [in:] J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God's Word...*, op. cit., p. 9; cf. P. Hünemann, T. Söding, *Wstęp*, [in:] J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Słowo Boga...*, op. cit., pp. 9–13, especially p. 11.

## *Verbum abbreviatum in Verbum Domini*

In the *Verbum Domini* apostolical exhortation, the “Christology of the Word” is the theological foundation, laid, as the document says, on the phrase “the word was ‘abbreviated’” (*Verbum brevians factum*, VD 12). It is emphasised that *Verbum* and *Logos* have a decidedly Christological meaning here: *Filius ipse est Verbum, est Logos*.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the humanity of Jesus related to the Word of God takes on its full meaning as the perfect realisation of the will of God the Father because Jesus Christ “knows the Father and he keeps his word [...]. In a perfect way, he hears, embodies and communicates to us the word of God” (VD 12).<sup>13</sup> Jesus is thus the Logos of God not only ontologically, but also through his perfect, filial obedience in the bond that exists between the Father and the Son, in the history of their relationship. Jesus Christ as the Word of God interpreted in terms of being a person (*ut Personam adesse*) “is the true light which men and women need” (VD 12).<sup>14</sup> It is important, therefore, for a proper understanding of the 2010 Exhortation to establish the basis of the idea of *verbum abbreviatum* both in the sources referred to in the document and in the theological writings of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI.

In presenting the origins of *verbum abbreviatum*,<sup>15</sup> the Exhortation draws on Origen of Alexandria (d. 254) and his work *De Principiis*,<sup>16</sup> written during the reign of Alexander Severus (222–235).<sup>17</sup> The work is not well-preserved, its

<sup>12</sup> Benedictus XVI, Adhortatio *Verbum Domini*, p. 692.

<sup>13</sup> Benedictus XVI, Adhortatio *Verbum Domini*, p. 693.

<sup>14</sup> “Dei Verbum est lux vera, qua indiget homo” (Benedictus XVI, Adhortatio *Verbum Domini*, p. 694).

<sup>15</sup> W. Linke, *Logos Wcielony i słowo przepowiadane. Teologia Słowa Bożego i praktyka przepowiadania słowa Bożego w „Verbum Domini”, „Lumen fidei” i „Evangelii gaudium”* [Logos Incarnate and the Preached Word. The Theology of the Word of God and the Practice of Preaching the Word of God in “Verbum Domini,” “Lumen Fidei” and “Evangelii Gaudium”], “Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne” 33/1 (2015), pp. 104–123, especially pp. 109–117.

<sup>16</sup> Benedictus XVI, Adhortatio *Verbum Domini*, p. 692. cf. J. Szymik, *Syn jako hilasterion. Ekumeniczny wymiar chrystologii J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [The Son as the Hilasterion. The Ecumenical Dimension of the Christology of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], “Communio.” *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny* 37/4 (2017), pp. 7–31, especially pp. 16–17. This clue in research on the history of the concept of *verbum abbreviatum* seems to have come from Henri de Lubac, who suggested that the author of this concept was Origen and that it was popularised in the West by St Jerome (see F. Manns, *Miscellanea: L’origine du thème ‘Verbum abbreviatum’, ‘Antonianum’* 56/1 [1981], pp. 208–210, note 3); Origen, *De Principiis*, transl. F. Crombie, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0412.htm> [access: 15.06.2024].

<sup>17</sup> H. Pietras, *Wprowadzenie* [Introduction], [in:] Orygenes, *O zasadach* [On Principles], transl. S. Kalinkowski, Kraków 1996, pp. 5–37, especially pp. 35–36; Origen, *De Principiis*,

published text consists of parts in Greek, interspersed with additions from Latin, which makes its study difficult. In *Verbum Domini*, however, it is not quoted,<sup>18</sup> but paraphrased. Footnote 34 points to the Sources chrétiennes edition of Origen's work as the source text.<sup>19</sup> In this footnote, we find two terms intended by the authors of the document to express the idea of abbreviating the word of God<sup>20</sup> and to convey the sense of the adjective *abbreviatus*. These are the verbs *παχύνεται* or *βραχύνεται* with the subject *ὁ λόγος*. They are by no means synonymous; their meanings are very remotely related. For while the latter means 'to shorten something,' 'to make smaller,' the meaning of the former is almost antonymous. The *Greek-Polish Dictionary* edited by Zofia Abramowiczówna equates the meaning of the word *παχύνω* with 'to fatten,' and in the passive voice as 'to grow fat; to become fat.' The figurative meanings may imply a lack of manners, may point to coarseness, lack of education or to being crude, without finesse.<sup>21</sup> In this sense it occurs in the Septuagint.<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey

op. cit.; Berthold Altaner and Alfred Stuiber (*Patrologia. Życie, pisma i nauka Ojców Kościoła* [Patrology. Life, Writings and Teachings of the Fathers of the Church], transl. P. Pachciarek, Warszawa 1990, p. 292) narrow the time window in which this work was written to the years 222–230.

<sup>18</sup> W. Linke, *Logos Wcielony i słowo przepowiadane...*, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Origène, *Traité des principes*, vol. 1, eds. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Series: Sources chrétiennes 252, Paris 1978, pp. 126–129. Footnote 34 to *Verbum Domini* gives the page range "127–129," which means that the Latin text from the beginning of subsection eight in the second chapter of Book One, a text crucial to understanding the issue under study, is not included.

<sup>20</sup> A counterpart to the idea of the abbreviation of the Word is St Justin Martyr's concept of the seeds of the Logos (*logoi spermatikoi*) leading to the Full Logos (*ho pas Logos*); the concept was developed by Czesław S. Bartnik (*Historia ludzka i Chrystus. Szkice z chrześcijańskiej wizji dziejów* [Human History and Christ. Sketches from the Christian Vision of History], Katowice 1987, pp. 152–153), see J. Szymik, *Teologia Słowa Bożego* [Theology of the Word of God], [in:] *Ku mądrości teologii* [Toward the Wisdom of Theology], eds. K. Góźdz, E. Sienkiewicz, Szczecin 2008, pp. 231–236, especially pp. 234–235. The reasons why Benedict XVI preferred the *verbum abbreviatum* model can be found in J. Ratzinger, *Kościół. pielgrzymująca wspólnota wiary* [Church. Pilgrim Community of Faith], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2005, p. 193. See J. Szymik, *Najgłębsze pragnienie Boskiego Nauczyciela. Ekumenizm według J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [The Deepest Desire of the Divine Teacher. Ecumenism according to J. Ratzingere/Benedict XVI], "Studia Oecumenica" 13 (2013), pp. 71–90, especially pp. 85–86.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Abramowiczówna (ed.), *Słownik grecko-polski* [Greek-Polish Dictionary], vol. 3, Warszawa 1962, p. 458. Cf. L. Rocci, *Vocabolario greco italiano*, Firenze 1993, p. 1448; *παχύνω*, <https://outils.bibliissima.fr/fr/eulexis-web/?lemma=%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%87%CF%8D%CE%BD%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B9&dict=LSJ> [access: 16.06.2024].

<sup>22</sup> R. Mazur, R. Bogacz, *Słownik analityczny do Biblii greckiej* [Analytical Dictionary for the Greek Bible], vol. 3, π-ω, Kraków 2021, p. 1950.

W.H. Lampe, on the other hand, noted that in patristic literature the word took on the meaning of “make corporeal,” which might indicate that the term’s sense is close to that of incarnation. He quoted the phrase ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ μένων λόγος παχύνεται<sup>23</sup> from Sermon II (*On the Annunciation of the Lord*) of Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. ca. 638).<sup>24</sup> In the original language, the thought is expressed in a slightly more complex way: ἐντεῦθεν ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος μένων θεὸς καὶ θεοῦ λόγος παχύνεται (“henceforth the Word of God remained God and the Word of God became material”). A similar statement can be found in a Greek-speaking author, John Damascene, living one century later (d. ca. 749). In his *Nativity Hymn* he wrote: ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων λόγος παχυνθεὶς σαρκί<sup>25</sup> (“in the end the Word became material as flesh”). The editor of the text in *Patrologia Graeca* 96 has translated the finite verb using a participle, and the whole phrase reads “in extremis Verbum inpinguatum carne.” This edition also quotes a translation by Jacques de Billy de Prunay (1535–1581), known in Latin as Jacobus Billius, a Benedictine monk, abbot of l’Abbaye de Saint-Michel-en-l’Herm and l’Abbaye Notre-Dame-de-Ré (popularly known as des Châteliers) and a Christian humanist who published his translations of the writings of John of Damascus in Paris in 1577. This translator rendered this expression less literally, but with an even clearer reference to the incarnation of the Word of God: *postea hac se ipse texit*.<sup>26</sup> However, it is not the writings of these Byzantine authors, who straddled late antiquity and early Middle Ages, that will clarify for us the origins of the theological theme of *verbum abbreviatum*. Besides, in *On Principles* I 2,8 the fundamental problem posed by Origen was the question of how God’s *substantia* and/or *subsistentia*<sup>27</sup> can be reflected in something other than God.

<sup>23</sup> G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, p. 1054.

<sup>24</sup> Sophronius Hierosolymitanus, *Orationes VIII juxta editions Ant[oni]. Ballerini, Angeli Maii, Jacobi Gretseri, Franc[isci]. Combefissii, Joan[ni]. Bapt[isti]. Cotellerii, ex Actis Sanctorum Bolland[istarum]. et Bibliotheca Patrum*, [in:] *Procopii Gazaei opera quae reperiri potuerunt omnia*, vol. 3, Paris 1863 (PG 87, part 3), cols. 3201–3364, especially col. 3233 C.

<sup>25</sup> Joannes Damascenus, *Carmina et Cantica*, [in:] *Joannis Damasceni opera omnia quae extant*, vol. 3, ed. M. Lequien, Paris 1864 (PG 96), cols. 818–856, especially col. 820 C. John Damascene’s *Carmen in theogoniam* was also published in the *Anthologia Graeca Carminum Christianorum* compiled by Wilhelm von Christa and Matthaios Paranikas, Lipsiae 1871, pp. 205–209, especially p. 206, vv. 28–29.

<sup>26</sup> Joannes Damascenus, *Carmina et Cantica*, op. cit., col. 820 D.

<sup>27</sup> The notion of *substantia* seems to correspond to the term ὑπόστασις used in Heb 1:3 (which is the text referred to by Origen here). Of greater concern is the term *subsistentia*. It probably corresponds to οὐσία treated as a synonym of the first term (cf. F. Copleston, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy], vol. 1: *Grecja i Rzym* [Greece and Rome], transl. H. Bednarek, Warszawa 1998, pp. 343–344; G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej* [History of Ancient Philosophy], vol. 2: *Platon i Arystoteles* [Plato and Aristotle], transl. E.I. Zieliński,

Of particular importance in this area is the role of the Son of God that Origen aimed to describe precisely.<sup>28</sup> Jesus Christ as the Logos and/or Wisdom of God is a figure of his essence and consequently reveals the essence of God – this is Origen's answer to the question he explored.

Origen, however, developed other interesting themes, not mentioned in *Verbum Domini*, that are worth our consideration. First and foremost, it is the idea of Jesus Christ, who speaks throughout Scripture as God's Logos.<sup>29</sup> This synthetic conclusion is rooted in Origen's conviction that all Scripture is a table set by Wisdom, which is to be interpreted Christologically.<sup>30</sup> This implies an organic (somatic) conception of Sacred Scripture, which is to be regarded as one body because of the unity of the Spirit present in it.<sup>31</sup> Another basis for the unity of all Scripture is the unity of the revelation given to the patriarchs, prophets and apostles, for they all know the same Christ, even if the ways of knowing Him were different: while the patriarchs, prophets knew Him in the manner of the promises, the apostles saw the fulfilment of those promises.<sup>32</sup> Therefore,

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Lublin 2001, pp. 416–419). *Subsistentia* should not be interpreted here as 'existence' (*esse*). Aristotle distinguished between τὸ δὲ τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος and τὸ εἶναι ἄνθρωπον (Aristotle, *Anal. Post.*, II,7; 92b 10, see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, ed. and transl. H. Tredennic, [in:] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics. Topica*, eds. and transl. H. Tredennic, E.S. Forster, London–Cambridge 1960, p. 196). However, he did not use the noun as 'existence.' Cf. S. Gawarek, *Śladami istnienia. Wprowadzenie do zagadnień metafizycznych w świetle doktryny św. Tomasza z Akwinu* [Traces of Existence. Introduction to Metaphysical Issues in the Light of the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas], Warszawa 2022, pp. 351–356. The editors of Origen's treatise in Sources chrétiennes take a different view of this issue. In a footnote they express the belief that it was Rufinus of Aquileia who duplicated the term (Origène, *Traité des principes*, vol. 2, eds. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Series: Sources chrétiennes 253, Paris 1978, p. 46, note 46).

<sup>28</sup> "Et uide ne forte, quoniam filus dei, qui et uerbum eius est et spientia dicitur et qui solus nouit paternum, et reuelat quibus uult, id est qui capaces uerbi ipsius et sapientiae fiunt, secundum hoc ipsum, quod intelligi atque agnoscere facit deum figuram substantiae uel subsistentiae eius dicatur exprimere" (Origène, *Traité des principes*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 126). Cf. J. Zieliński, *Jerozolima, Ateny, Aleksandria. Greckie źródła pierwszych nurtów filozofii chrześcijańskiej* [Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria. Greek Sources of the First Currents of Christian Philosophy], Wrocław 2000, pp. 248–249.

<sup>29</sup> M. Szram, *Wokół osoby i myśli Orygenesesa* [Around the Person and Thought of Origen], Lublin 2021, p. 94 (literature in note 3).

<sup>30</sup> Origenes, *Commentarium in Epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos* (8,17), [in:] *Origenis opera omnia*, vol. 4, ed. J.-P. Migne, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1862 (PG 14), cols. 837–1292, especially col. 1182 C.

<sup>31</sup> Origène, *Commentaire sur saint Jean*, vol. 2: *Livres VI et X*, ed. and transl. C. Blanc, Series: Sources chrétiennes 157, Paris 1970, p. 446.

<sup>32</sup> M. Szram, *Wokół osoby i myśli Orygenesesa*, op. cit., p. 95.

in Scripture (although Origen does not make a distinction, the model for him here is the Old Testament) Wisdom, that is, Christ, is hidden (*ἀποκεκρυμμένη*) by means of mystery (*ἐν μυστηρίῳ*). This is a literal quotation from 1 Cor 2:7, except that Paul the Apostle refers to Christian preaching and the revelation given in Jesus Christ, whereas Origen refers this theological model to the Christ-wisdom relationship and Scripture. In this view, Scripture too, and not only the revealed Son of God, is that mystery through which God reveals himself and in which he is at the same time hidden. This is possible because Christ–Wisdom – Christ–Logos – and Scripture are mutually inclusive. As Mariusz Szram argues, Origen equated the Logos Incarnate with Scripture. “For Origen there are not two Logos, but only one signifying simultaneously the person of the Son of God and the Word of Scripture.”<sup>33</sup> The allegorism of Origenes’ interpretation is thus not due to the local and incidental obscurity of the Old Testament text. His first rationale for its application to the exegesis of Scripture is the conviction that the Christian hermeneutical frame of reference requires an ongoing transposition of “the letter”<sup>34</sup> of Scripture to its Spirit, that is, the divine power that is at work in the text when it is read Christologically. “The letter” is, for Origen, distinct from the biblical text, and should be understood rather as the incomplete – because achrilological – sense of the text.<sup>35</sup>

It was Philo of Alexandria who first equated the Logos with God’s mind.<sup>36</sup> Origen added a strictly Christian element to it – the incarnation of the Logos: “Son of God, though placed in the very insignificant (*brevissime*) form of a human body, in consequence of the resemblance of His works and power to the Father, showed that there was in Him an immense and invisible greatness (*magnitudinem*).”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the *brevitas* of the Logos employed in the passages of *On Principles* refers exclusively to the incarnation and its relationship to

<sup>33</sup> M. Szram, *Wokół osoby i myśli Orygenesesa*, op. cit., pp. 102–103. He cited the material for this conclusion in notes 48–51, p. 103.

<sup>34</sup> The corporeal sense of Scripture is considered by Origen as not independent and sufficient, but rather as a “covering and veil of spiritual truths” (*ἐνδυμα τῶν πνευματικῶν*; in Latin *uelamen spiritualium sensum*, Origène, *Traité des principes* [4.2.8], vol. 3, eds. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Series: Sources chrétiennes 268, Paris 1980, p. 334; see the explanation in Origène, *Traité des principes*, vol. 4, eds. H. Crouzel, M. Simonetti, Series: Sources chrétiennes 269, Paris 1980, p. 191, note 71; Orygenes, *O zasadach*, op. cit., p. 344).

<sup>35</sup> M. Szram, *Wokół osoby i myśli Orygenesesa*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>36</sup> D. Mrugalski, *Logos. Filozoficzne i teologiczne źródła idei wczesnochrześcijańskiej* [Logos. Philosophical and Theological Sources of the Early Christian Idea], Kraków 2006, pp. 139–141; M. Szram, *Wokół osoby i myśli Orygenesesa*, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*, op. cit.; cf. Orygenes, *O zasadach*, transl. S. Kalinkowski, op. cit., p. 73. The Latin text reads: “Filius Dei brevissime insertus humani corporis formae ex

the manifestation of God in visible and humanly intelligible. It is a long way from here to connect this statement of Origenes with the Logos–Scripture relationship. It appears, then, that the genesis of *verbum abbreviatum* must be sought elsewhere, outside Origenes' work cited above.

Shortly after the year 252, when an epidemic was raging in North Africa,<sup>38</sup> Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) wrote the treatise *On the Lord's Prayer*.<sup>39</sup> His work was inspired, as Paul Monceaux has already noted, by Tertullian's text of the same title.<sup>40</sup> In paragraph 28, Cyprian pointed out a specific feature of the *Lord's Prayer*, namely, its synthetic character: in the *Lord's Prayer*, God “condensed in His teaching all our prayer in one saving sentence” (*omnem precem nostram, salutari sermone breviavit*).

This formulation has nothing to do with Christology or the theology of the Incarnation. The Bishop of Carthage had already outlined earlier in his work (beginning of paragraph 9) God's economy of condensing what is long and complex in “the Word of God” (*Dei Sermo*) and becomes short through our Lord Jesus Christ, who briefly collected everything and gave us a compendium of heavenly doctrine (*colligens [...] fecit grande compendium*).<sup>41</sup> In this argument, *sermo* simply means “word”;<sup>42</sup> there is no reference to the Logos. Thus, Cyprian

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operum virtutisque similitudine Dei Patris in se immensam atque invisibilem magnitudinem designabat per hoc” (Origène, *Traité des principes*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 128).

<sup>38</sup> T. Kotula, *Afryka Północna w starożytności* [North Africa in Antiquity], Wrocław 1972, pp. 188–190; K. Harper, *Los Rzymu. Klimat, choroby i koniec imperium* [The Fate of Rome. Climate, Disease and the End of the Empire], transl. G. Smółka, Oświęcim 2021, pp. 159–168.

<sup>39</sup> P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion arabe*, vol. 3: *Saint Cyprien et son temps*, Paris 1902, p. 311; L. Bayard, *Saint Cyprien, Correspondance*, Paris 1925, p. 53; Cipriano (Santo), *Obras. Tratados, Cartas*, ed. J. Campos, Series: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 241, Madrid 1964, p. 199; M.L. García Sanchidrián, *Introducción*, [in:] Cipriano de Cartago, *Cartas*, ed. M.L. García Sanchidrián, Madrid 1998, pp. 9–25, especially p. 20; G.F. Diercks (ed.), *Sancti Cypriani episcopi epistularium*, vol. 3: *Prolegomena, codices, editiones, indices*, Series: Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 3, Turnhout 1999, p. 708.

<sup>40</sup> P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique...*, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>41</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord's Prayer*, transl. R.E. Wallis, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050704.htm> [access: 15.06.2024]; Cyprianus, *De oratione Dominica*, [in:] *Sancti Cypriani Thascii Caecilii opera omnia*, Parisiis 1844 (PL 4), cols. 519–544, especially col. 538 A; M. Simonetti, C. Moreschini (eds.), *Sancti Cypriani episcopi opera*, part 2: *Ad Donatum, De mortalitate, Ad Demetrianum, De opere et eleemosynis, De zelo et livore, De Dominica oratione, De bono patientiae*, Series: Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 3A, Turnholti 1976, p. 107.

<sup>42</sup> M. Simonetti, C. Moreschini, *Sancti Cypriani episcopi opera...*, op. cit., p. 94. As Moreschini points out in his commentary on *De Dominica oratione*, this is the end of the general

does not mention explicitly the abbreviating of the words of Scripture in Jesus Christ as *Sermo Dei* – God’s personalized address in Jesus Christ to humanity and to the individual human being; this “abbreviating” is a procedure of divine pedagogy. This shortness of the word differs from Origen’s smallness of the Incarnate Word, which moves it closer to the vocabulary of *Verbum Domini*. We do not find here the synthesis that is characteristic of the Christology of the Logos in *Verbum Domini*. It is therefore not quite equivalent to the theological idea of *verbum abbreviatum*. Still, credit must be given to Cyprian for pointing out the pedagogical facet of *brevitatis verbi*, which is a reference to the idea of recapitulation proposed by Irenaeus of Lyons (d. ca. 202). He wrote that Jesus Christ encapsulates the promises given through the prophets,<sup>43</sup> who are the members of Christ.<sup>44</sup> He describes the incarnation as the act in which the Word of God dwelt in the Son of Man, so that man would become accustomed to receiving God.<sup>45</sup> The same thought comes to the fore in another work of Irenaeus as a Christological article of faith: “The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, [...] who also at the end of the times, to complete and gather up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man.”<sup>46</sup> This way of thinking Henry Pietras sees already in Pseudo-Barnabas: “1) Scripture is the written Word of God; 2) Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate; conclusion: all Scripture speaks of Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Consider that St. Cyprian of Carthage’s understanding of Scripture stemmed

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introduction to the treatise. These words are followed by commentaries on individual passages of the *Lord’s Prayer*; see Cipriano, *Opuscoli*, vol. 2: *L’unità della Chiesa Cattolica, La preghiera del Signore, La condizione mortale dell’uomo, Le opere di carità e l’elemosina, A Demetriano, La virtù della pazienza, La gelosia e l’invidia, A Fortunato*, eds. A. Cerretini, S. Matteoli, C. Moreschini, C. Dell’Osso, M. Veronese, Roma 2009, p. 76, note 12.

<sup>43</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. Haer.* III 16,3. Cf. T. Dekert, *Teoria rekapitulacji Ireneusza z Lyonu w świetle starożytnych koncepcji na temat Adama* [The Theory of Recapitulation of Irenaeus of Lyons in the Light of Ancient Concepts on Adam], Kraków 2007, pp. 30–36.

<sup>44</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. Haer.* IV 33,10.

<sup>45</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adv. Haer.* III 20,2. See J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, vol. 3, Katowice 2016, p. 298.

<sup>46</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Epid.* 6; Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, transl. A. Robinson, [https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching\\_the\\_demonstration\\_of\\_the\\_apostolic\\_preaching.html](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching_the_demonstration_of_the_apostolic_preaching.html) [access: 15.06.2024]; cf. Ireneusz z Lyonu, *Wykład nauki apostoelskiej*, transl. W. Myszor, Series: Źródła Myśli Teologicznej 7, Kraków 1997, p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> H. Pietras, *Początki teologii Kościoła* [Origins of Church Theology], Series: Myśl Teologiczna 28, Kraków 2000, p. 133.



from the had good criteria for a Christological (typological) exegesis of the Old Testament that he employed.<sup>48</sup>

Cyprian essentially designated Jesus as *Dei sermo et Dei ratio*, which can be viewed as two Latin forms corresponding to the Greek ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος.<sup>49</sup> We find it already in the first two paragraphs of Tertullian's *Liber de oratione*, on which Cyprian relied. Tertullian explains this three-part designation, expanded by the phrase "the Spirit of God" attributed to Jesus: *Dei spiritus et Dei sermo et Dei ratio approbatus est Dominus noster Iesus Christus, spiritus quo valuit, sermo quo docet, ratio qua venit* ("our Lord Jesus Christ has been approved as the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, and the Reason of God: the Spirit, by which He was mighty; the Word, by which He taught; the Reason, by which He came").<sup>50</sup> Tertullian, as Bertrand de Margerie has shown, developed a synthetic account of the principles of biblical hermeneutics,<sup>51</sup> among which the most significant is the principle of the unity of Scripture, which is Christological in its entirety. This is so, Tertullian believed, because Christ is the marrow or core of all Scripture (*medulla Scripturarum*).<sup>52</sup> The French polyhistor stated that, for Tertullian, all hermeneutical rules are summarised in Christ, true God and true man, as the core of Scripture, the thought that gives direction (*pensée directrice*) to all of Tertullian's exegesis.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> M. Simonetti, *Między dosłownością a alegorią. Przyczynek do historii egzegezy patrystycznej* [Between Literalism and Allegory. A Contribution to the History of Patristic Exegesis], transl. T. Skibiński, Kraków 2000, p. 238.

<sup>49</sup> Tertullien, *De baptismo. De oratione/Von der Taufe. Vom Gebet*, Series: Fontes Christiani 76, ed. D. Schleyer, Turnhout 2006, p. 218, note 100.

<sup>50</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer*, transl. S. Thelwall, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0322.htm> [access: 15.06.2024]; cf. "Omnia de carnalibus in spiritualia renovavit nova Dei gratia superducto Evangelio, expunctore totius retro vetustatis, in quo et Dei spiritus et Dei sermo et Dei ratio, approbatus est Dominus noster Iesus Christus, spiritus, quo valuit, sermo, quo docuit, ratio quo venit" (Tertullian, *De baptismo* 1.2; see Tertullien, *De baptismo...*, op. cit., p. 218). In this sentence, Tertullian drew on the ambiguity (or rather capacity) of the noun *ratio*. Dietrich Schleyer translates it by *Weisheit* ('wisdom,' cf. *ibid.*, p. 219). Henryk Pietras here translates *Dei ratio* by "Rozum Boży [God's reason]" or "Myśl Boża [God's thought]" (H. Pietras [ed.], *Odpowiedź na Słowo. Najstarsi mistrzowie chrześcijańskiej modlitwy* [Response to the Word. The Earliest Masters of Christian Prayer], Kraków 1993, p. 33). The phrase "z myśli – bo jest przyjmowana [from thought – because it is received]" is not a formal equivalent in the translation (*ibid.*, note 3).

<sup>51</sup> B. de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse*, vol. 2: *Les premiers grands exégètes latins*, Paris 1983, pp. 26–33.

<sup>52</sup> B. de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse*, op. cit., pp. 47–52.

<sup>53</sup> B. de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse*, op. cit., p. 51.

This theological concept developed by ancient Christian theologians is referred to by Peter Cantor (d. 1197), a representative of Parisian monastic theology. He committed himself to exegesis,<sup>54</sup> which transpires in his cursory commentary on the Old and New Testaments, the biblical encyclopaedia *Abel* (from the first entry), or *Distinctiones*, where the many levels of meaning of the biblical text were employed,<sup>55</sup> in his *Unum ex quattuor* with their harmony of the four Gospels, and *De tropis loquendi*, a grammatical and lexicographical treatise which aims at resolving (apparent) contradictions of the biblical text. He also wrote a textbook of moral theology based on Scripture, known under the incipit *Verbum abbreviatum*.<sup>56</sup> This incipit is not coincidental, as Peter set himself the goal of containing the multitude of words of Scripture in one, not very extensive, work. He concentrated on moral themes according to the principle that true Christian religion is based on faith and good morals (*est de fide et bonis moribus*): reading (*lectio*) and discussing (*disputatio*) relate to faith, and preaching (*predicatio*) to morals'. He pointed out that *lectio* and *disputatio* are necessary conditions for preaching.<sup>57</sup> Thus, on an exegesis of the monastic type, he draws practical conclusions, intended for preachers and, what follows, for all members of the Church, for whom the abundance of the biblical text is too great to memorize and reflect on. *Lectio* and *disputatio* are therefore necessary for practical reasons, since *paucitas* is the way in which this richness is not crushed but lifted up.

Peter equated the principle of this abbreviation with the analogy between Scripture and the incarnate Word of God. "For if the Word sent to us from the womb of the Father, even if [he is] the indescribable Son of God, 'whom the whole world cannot contain', willed to be described in the small size (*breuitate*) of the virgin womb, how much more the word of Scripture (*sacre Pagine*), which he willed to leave to us in the abundance (*in arram et pingus*) of his love, in an abridged form, in which his ways and paths we would discover."<sup>58</sup>

Concluding this part of our discussion, let us notice that footnote 34 in *Verbum Domini* misguides the search for the content of the expression *verbum abbreviatum*. For while Origen poses a philosophical problem (the relation of

<sup>54</sup> M. Boutry, *Introduction*, [in:] Petri Cantoris, *Verbum abbreviatum. Textus conflactus*, Series: Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 196, Turnhout 2004, pp. VII–LVI, especially p. X.

<sup>55</sup> G. d'Onofrio, *Historia teologii* [History of Theology], vol. 2: *Epoka średniowieczna* [The Medieval Age], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2005, p. 270.

<sup>56</sup> G. d'Onofrio, *Historia teologii...*, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>57</sup> Petri Cantoris, *Verbum abbreviatum...*, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Petri Cantoris, *Verbum abbreviatum...*, op. cit., p. 7.

substance to *subsistentia* – the subsistence of God), which according to him is resolved in Christ, Benedict XVI aims at resolving a strictly theological question: how in the incarnate Son of God God is revealed. This has implications for understanding the relationship between the incarnate Logos of God and the person of Jesus Christ. Scripture becomes an event (rather than a narrative of events) when Christ – the climactic event of revelation<sup>59</sup> – is read as a humanly engaging event whose purpose is the realisation of man's vocation to communion with God.<sup>60</sup> The theology of Scripture as God's word to man is the hermeneutical guideline of exegesis if that exegesis is to read the intention of the word. The exegesis of a plurality of words leads to the Word Abridged or else it is not a theologically directed exegesis. Benedict XVI explains his understanding of this problem in his address to the representatives of the cultural world delivered at the Bernardine College in Paris on 12 September 2008, where he notes that Scripture plays an important role in building this divine-human community. It also builds up the ecclesial community:

Scripture requires exegesis, and it requires the context of the community in which it came to birth and in which it is lived. This is where its unity is to be found, and here too its unifying meaning is opened up. [...] [Christianity] perceives in the words the Word, the Logos itself, which spreads its mystery through this multiplicity and the reality of a human history. [...] the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a transcending and a process of understanding, led by the inner movement of the whole and hence it also has to become a process of living. Only within the dynamic unity

<sup>59</sup> "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4)" (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 1965 [hereinafter DV], no. 2, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html) [access: 15.06.2024]). "Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, 'now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son' (Heb. 1:1–2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1–18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as 'a man to men.' (3) He 'speaks the words of God' (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4)" (DV 4).

<sup>60</sup> "Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14–15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself" (DV 2).

of the whole are the many books one book (CCC 120). The Word of God and his action in the world are revealed only in the word and history of human beings.<sup>61</sup>

In his habilitation thesis submitted in 1955, Joseph Ratzinger wrote about St Bonaventure's theological understanding of revelation and history:

The event of revelation takes place [...] always in the duality of *verbum incarnatum* and *verbum inspiratum*, the historical message and the ever new radiation of divine light, and, to use Bonaventure's terminology once again, in the interaction of the visible and the invisible.<sup>62</sup>

As can be seen in Benedict XVI's approach to *Verbum abbreviatum*, this idea of the close relationship between the Incarnate Word and the inspired word – assimilated from the Seraphic Doctor – was creatively developed throughout his life. This theological topos is balanced in the exhortation by the thought of Hugo of St. Victor: "All divine Scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ" (VD 39).<sup>63</sup>

### *Silentium Dei in Verbum Domini*

The silence of God by which God speaks is linked in VD 21 with the cross. This is, as it were, a response to André Neher's linking of God's silence in Auschwitz as a symbol of the extermination of the Jews and the genocide committed during the Second World War. In this understanding of silence in the face of suffering, it is man who is silent.<sup>64</sup> In *Verbum Domini*, on the

<sup>61</sup> Benedict XVI, *Meeting with Representatives from the World of Culture*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080912\\_pariji-cultura.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_pariji-cultura.html) [access: 15.06.2024].

<sup>62</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Rozumienie Objawienia i teologia historii według Bonawentury. Rozprawa habilitacyjna i studia nad Bonawenturą* [Understanding Revelation and the Theology of History according to Bonaventure. Habilitation dissertation and studies on Bonaventure], eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. J. Merecki, Series: Opera Omnia 2, Lublin 2014, p. 91.

<sup>63</sup> Hugo de S. Victore, *De arca Noe morali* 2,8, [in:] *Hugonis de S. Victore Opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 2, Parisii 1880 (PL 176), cols. 618–680, especially col. 642 C–D.

<sup>64</sup> A. Neher, *L'exil de la parole. Du silence biblique au silence d'Auschwitz*, Paris 1970, p. 17. See C. Rzęchowski, *Milczenie Boga w Torze* [The Silence of God in the Torah], [in:] *Fenomen milczenia w kulturze i języku: materiały interdyscyplinarnego sympozjum poświęconego pamięci profesor Jolanty Rokoszowej zorganizowanego przez Wydział I Filologiczny PAU* [The Phenomenon of Silence in Culture and Language: Materials of the Interdisciplinary

other hand, God is silent. This silence, then, is not an aspect or attribute of human communication, including the words of Scripture, but something that pertains to the Logos Incarnate, which we said above is a synthesis of the words of Scripture infinitely superior to the sum of those words – *Verbum abbreviatum*. God speaks in silence to His Son, and He responds to Him with obedience, despite the overwhelming pain. “God’s silence prolongs his earlier words” (*Dei silentium eius verba producit*) (VD 21).<sup>65</sup> This is in the context of the *revelation process* (*in christiannae revelationis processu*), in which the silence of God in the speech of the Word of God is a very important sign – an element of the code of revelation (*silentium ut insignis apparet Dei Verbi locutio*). The Logos Incarnate is also the silence of God full of meaning, telling who God is as the Unspeakable. This thought, although new in its formulation, is deeply embedded in Ratzinger’s theology.

In the 1959 printed version of his dissertation, Ratzinger wrote.

What is New Testament in the New Testament consists not in the novelty of the book, but in the spirit that animates the book. “Revelation” is thus here, we emphasise again, synonymous with the spiritual apprehension of Scripture; it consists in the God-given act of this apprehension and not merely in the objective letter.<sup>66</sup>

Also the Gospel or the letters of Paul the Apostle taken as “the letter itself” are nothing other than “Judaism” and the Old Testament, “for truly the New Testament is only where the letter is overcome by the spirit.”<sup>67</sup> This is how, at the Bonaventure school, the young Ratzinger learns the idea of the inadequacy of the written word for the realisation of the Word through which God reveals himself to the world. This is an important approach insofar as it does not lead to a negation of Scripture or a belittling of its role, but provides the basis for a theological hermeneutic based on an understanding of revelation as a necessary complement to the “work of the text” if its understanding is to be integral and Christian, rather than reduced to literalism, which Bonaventure associates – following a tradition going back to Justin Martyr and Origen – with biblical interpretation in Judaism. In the word of Scripture, in addition to what it says,

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Symposium Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Jolanta Rokoszowa Organised by the Philological Faculty I of the PAU], Kraków 2018, pp. 9–14; C. Rzęchowski, *Milczenie i filozofia* [Silence and Philosophy], “Studia Redemptorystowskie” 19 (2021), pp. 105–112.

<sup>65</sup> Benedictus XVI, *Adhortatio Verbum Domini*, op. cit., pp. 681–787, especially p. 702.

<sup>66</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Rozumienie Objawienia i teologia historii...*, op. cit., pp. 456–457.

<sup>67</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Rozumienie Objawienia i teologia historii...*, op. cit., p. 456.

there is and the word signifies what it does not say, but what it is – the very fact of God establishing communication with man by means of a linguistic instrument. The words that Benedict XVI used in an interview with Regina Einig<sup>68</sup> fit perfectly into this theological model. When asked about the figure of St Joseph, the Pope summarises the Gospel texts concerning this figure by stating: “His silence is at the same time his message. It expresses his ‘yes’ to what he took upon himself.”<sup>69</sup> With this model, we can better understand what for Ratzinger is this silence of the word that completes the communicative aspect. It is the interpersonal relationship involving the subjects who compose it in an event that is historical but also transcends history. Thus we find in Ratzinger the source of the conviction that the fateful aspect of the written word is interpretatively so important that its omission distorts not only the sense of the written word, but the sense of the revealing Word.

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict XVI writes about Jesus’ cry of abandonment on the cross.<sup>70</sup> He does not seem to see the role of God the Father in this scene and does not look for the meaning of his silence, but focuses on the transference of Jesus’ voice to the whole corporate subject of his body, the Church, and perhaps even more broadly, to the whole of anguished and struggling humanity to preserve hope. It is a very positive view, focused on what is being said. There is no room in this view for the question of the unspoken, of silence. Ratzinger’s earlier reflections shed more light. “[W]hat does the Lord’s Cross mean? It is the form of that love which has totally accepted man and has therefore descended even into his guilt and his death.”<sup>71</sup>

Jesus Incarnate is unknowable to His contemporaries except by faith. Although they see Him, witness the signs He performs, listen to His teaching, they share with those who have not believed in Him the experience of the

<sup>68</sup> Published in “Die Tagespost” on 1 April 2021, p. 33–34.

<sup>69</sup> Benedict XVI, *His Silence Is Also His Way of Expressing Himself*, [in:] Benedict XVI, *What is Christianity?: The Last Writings*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2023, p. 202; Benedykt XVI, R. Einig, *Jego milczenie jest zarazem jego słowem. Wywiad o św. Józefie* [His Silence Is Also His Word. Interview on St Joseph], transl. D. Chodyniecki, [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo? Testament duchowy* [What is Christianity? A Spiritual Testament], Kraków 2023, pp. 255–262, especially p. 256.

<sup>70</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection*, transl. P.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011, p. 213; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, vol. 2: *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do Zmartwychwstania*, transl. W. Szymona, Kielce 2011, pp. 228–231.

<sup>71</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, transl. B. McNeil, San Francisco 2008, p. 55; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Bóg Jezusa Chrystusa. Medytacje o Bogu Trójjedynym* transl. J. Zychowicz, Kraków 1995, p. 59.

cognitive elusiveness of what is essential in His mystery. The Incarnate Word not only speaks of Himself, but is also silent about Himself, because silence is a way of communicating the unspeakable. “[B]elieving is entering into the abode of Christ, into the abiding reality of Christ, to which Scripture bears witness but which Scripture itself by all means is not.”<sup>72</sup> This is a consequence of the relationship of the Bible to Revelation: “The biblical word bears witness to the revelation but does not contain it in such a way that the revelation is completely absorbed in it and could now be put in your pocket like an object. The Bible bears witness to the revelation, and yet the concept of revelation as such goes beyond that.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, it must be recognised that when we look at the Bible as God “speaking,” He speaks, i.e. reveals Himself, also through His non-speaking, i.e. silence. Hans Urs von Balthasar put the mystery of this word-silence of God this way: “The Word, seen from the human perspective, is only silence and twilight, it is nevertheless, as John shows, the last glorification of divine love. Only the Cross is the last exegesis of God, who once and for all shows himself to be Love.”<sup>74</sup> Silence, then, is the undermining of the exclusivity of the Word as the reality in which God opens himself as God, in which the purpose of Revelation is realised.

Robert Woźniak, speaking of the “word of the Cross” (cf. 1 Cor 1:17–18), states that it is a dialogue between Christ and the Father in which “though the Father is a hidden God, he is present at his Son.”<sup>75</sup> Sławomir Zatwardnicki signals that exegesis must take into account the unknowability of God.<sup>76</sup> “The Word, even of Christ himself, does not reveal the whole mystery, but is a gateway towards it, through which one enters into the interior of what is ineffable. Scripture bears witness to Christ, but one must still come to Him in order to have life.”<sup>77</sup> Drawing on Anna Ngairé Williams and her interpretation of the

<sup>72</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God's Word...*, op. cit., p. 57; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Słowo Boga...*, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>73</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God's Word...*, op. cit., pp. 122–123; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Słowo Boga...*, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> H. Urs von Balthasar, *Bóg jest swym własnym egzegetą* [God is His Own Exegete], transl. Z. Hanas, “Communio.” *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny* 6/3 (1986), pp. 58–64, especially p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> R.J. Woźniak, *Różnica i tajemnica. Objawienie jako teologiczne źródło ludzkiej sobości* [Difference and Mystery. Revelation as a Theological Source of Human Selfness], Poznań 2012, p. 493.

<sup>76</sup> S. Zatwardnicki, *Katafaticzność i apofaticzność słowa Bożego w świetle misterium Wcielenia* [The Cataphatic and Apophatic Nature of the Word of God in the Light of the Mystery of the Incarnation], “*Collectanea Theologica*” 92/4 (2022), pp. 39–92, especially p. 60.

<sup>77</sup> S. Zatwardnicki, *Katafaticzność i apofaticzność...*, op. cit., p. 58.

thought of St Thomas Aquinas, Zatwardnicki notes that in an analogous way of speaking about God, “metaphor both conceals and reveals, but even where it conceals – it does so for a purpose that is in itself already revealing.”<sup>78</sup> It is the “silence” of the word, its apophatic nature, that leads to the revelation of the mystery. “In the cataphasis of Christ’s words is hidden the apophasis – the words are the gateway that introduces the ineffable mystery – Christ himself.”<sup>79</sup>

## Object of cognition in exegesis

Our reflections on *Verbum abbreviatum* and *silentium Dei* led to an understanding that Scripture is more than just a record of a certain message. Hence, the question that we need to ask: what should biblical exegesis be concerned with to avoid reductionism that downgrades Scripture to a purely textual dimension. This part of the discussion will deal with the formal object of biblical exegesis.

The formal object of theology based on revelation is defined by Gerhard L. Müller as the knowledge of “God Himself as the author of revelation, and in Him the unity of the various aspects of faith (*fides quae creditur*) that are explored by reason enlightened by faith.”<sup>80</sup> He is not naïve to assume that we have simple access to it; rather, he is aware that this knowledge requires cognitive submission to the intellect. The first of the current tasks of theological epistemology, he says, is to demonstrate “that human reason, in its references to the world (sensuality, links with culture, contextuality, historicity, the social dimension), is fundamentally open to transcendence and that human reason can be the hearer of actual verbal revelation in history.” This entails another task, which is the need to identify the relationship “between revelation’s claim to truth and its historical structure, as well as between the historical and social conditions of access to its personal claims and to its content.”<sup>81</sup> A cognitive approach can show us how to accomplish these tasks, a cognitive approach that has the potential to extract from the adventitiousness of factual data their necessary and supra-factual meaning. Such an approach is a phenomenological reduction, which has found its prominent place in twentieth-century theology,<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> S. Zatwardnicki, *Katafatyczność i apofatyczność...*, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>79</sup> S. Zatwardnicki, *Katafatyczność i apofatyczność...*, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>80</sup> G.L. Müller, *Dogmatyka katolicka* [Catholic Dogmatics], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2015, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup> G.L. Müller, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. e.g. W. Słomka, *Teologia jako refleksja nad doświadczeniem chrześcijańskim: studium w świetle fenomenologicznej metody Husserla* [Theology as Reflection on Christian



despite Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) sceptical view of the possible connections between phenomenology and theology.<sup>83</sup>

The turn that phenomenology made in philosophical thinking in the twentieth century was the rehabilitation of reflection on the origins of objective cognition,<sup>84</sup> which made it possible to go beyond the limits set by Kantian subjectivism. The theory of cognition proposed by Roman Ingarden (1893–1970) provides a counterweight to what he called psychophysiological theory<sup>85</sup> and critical cognitive realism.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, Ingarden advocates a form of cognitive idealism which, according to him, is based on eidetism, a Husserlian variety of apriorism.<sup>87</sup> Robert Sokolowski describes eidetic intuition as a variety of intentionality through which “we recognize identity in the manifold of manifestations, but this identity and manifold is different from the manifold and identity in which we apprehend individual things.”<sup>88</sup> This requires reaching “the feature without which the existence of things would be unthinkable,”<sup>89</sup> and transcending

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Experience: A Study in the Light of Husserl's Phenomenological Method], “*Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*” 12/1 (1974), pp. 45–60; A. Półtawski, *Realizm fenomenologii. Husserl – Ingarden – Stein – Wojtyła* [Realism of Phenomenology. Husserl – Ingarden – Stein – Wojtyła], Warszawa 2001, passim; K. Tarnowski, *Fenomenologia i teologia* [Phenomenology and Theology], [in:] *Metafizyka i teologia. Debata u podstaw* [Metaphysics and Theology: Debate at the Grassroots], ed. R.J. Woźniak, Kraków 2008, pp. 32–49; S. Kowalczyk, *Nurt fenomenologiczno-egzystencjalny w polskiej współczesnej filozofii Boga* [The Phenomenological-Existential Current in Polish Contemporary Philosophy of God], “*Vox Patrum*” 52 (2008), pp. 505–511; A. Szulc, *Stein i Heidegger – dwie fenomenologie* [Stein and Heidegger – Two Phenomenologies], “*Zeszyty Naukowe Centrum Badań im. Edyty Stein*” 11 (2014), pp. 31–39; R.J. Woźniak, *Praca nad dogmatem. Wybrane aspekty odnowy teologii dogmatycznej* [Working on Dogma. Selected Aspects of the Renewal of Dogmatic Theology], Series: Myśl Teologiczna 105, Kraków 2022, pp. 208–241.

<sup>83</sup> M. Heidegger, *Fenomenologia i teologia* [Phenomenology and Theology], transl. J. Tischner, “*Znak*” 31/1–2 (1979), pp. 120–134.

<sup>84</sup> P. Łaciak, *Husserlowski transcendentalizm w ujęciu Jacques'a Derrida* [Husserl's Transcendentalism according to Jacques Derrida], “*Sztuka i Filozofia*” 14 (1997), pp. 42–59, especially p. 47.

<sup>85</sup> R. Ingarden, *U podstaw teorii poznania* [Underlying Theories of Cognition], Warszawa 1971, p. 43.

<sup>86</sup> R. Ingarden, *U podstaw teorii poznania*, op. cit., pp. 71–77.

<sup>87</sup> R. Ingarden, *U podstaw teorii poznania*, op. cit., p. 245. Eidetism as based on the proto-fact, which is the *ego*, the cognitive subject, see D. Franck, *Dwa ciała. Wokół fenomenologii Husserla* [Two Bodies. Around Husserl's Phenomenology], transl. J. Migasiński, A. Dwulit, Warszawa 2017, pp. 69–79.

<sup>88</sup> R. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge 2000; R. Sokolowski, *Wprowadzenie do fenomenologii* [Introduction to Phenomenology], transl. M. Rogalski, Kraków 2012, p. 184.

<sup>89</sup> R. Sokolowski, *Wprowadzenie do fenomenologii*, op. cit., p. 185.

empirical universals, i.e. those regularly occurring in the sensory perception of entities of a particular category, and moving on to eidetic universals, i.e. those features that are necessary for the existence of a particular object. The distinctions made by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) in his introduction to *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* are important: between what is a matter of facts (*Tatsache*) and what is the essence (*Wesen*), and between the real and the unreal.<sup>90</sup> Eidetic intuition is a way of grasping the essential, of rejecting the incidental regularities of everyday cognition, the factuality that exist outside of things, are therefore in this sense unreal and thus cognisable in the sense of phenomenological reduction. It is irreality in Husserl's sense that guarantees that they are objects of cognition constituting units of meaning whose sense does not include mental acts or other subjective experiences.<sup>91</sup> The category of objects of thought developed by Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) can be applied to them.<sup>92</sup> This does not, however, imply the unreality of the object of cognition, but defines the type of cognition. Leszek Kołakowski calls this state of affairs the invalidation of the dichotomy of facts and values, of descriptive and value judgements.<sup>93</sup> According to Władysław Stróżewski, the cleansing of perceptions of irrelevant traits also concerns the essence of the world given in colloquial, spontaneous cognition or the natural attitude of the thinking subject.<sup>94</sup> For the point is to approach the world as a phenomenon, to first make an eidetic insight into this

<sup>90</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, vol. 1: *Allgemeine Einführung in Die Reine Phänomenologie*, ed. W. Biemel, Series: Husserliana. Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke 3, Den Haag 1950, p. 7; cf. E. Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, transl. F. Kersten, Dordrecht 1998; cf. E. Husserl, *Idee czystej fenomenologii i fenomenologicznej* [Ideas of Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy], vol. 1, transl. D. Gierulanka, Warszawa 1967.

<sup>91</sup> E. Husserl, *Aufgabe und Bedeutung der „Logischen Untersuchungen“*, [in:] *Phänomenologische Psychologie. Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, ed. W. Biemel, Series: Husserliana. Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke 9, Den Haag 1962, pp. 20–46, especially 22; cf. E. Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology*, transl. J. Scanlon, Nijhoff 1977; cf. K. Świącicka, *Husserl*, transl. S. Walczewska Warszawa 1993, p. 124.

<sup>92</sup> K. Michalski, *Logika i czas...*, op. cit., p. 19; cf. A. Drozdek, *Bolzano i ontologia zdań w sobie* [Bolzano and the Ontology of Sentences in Themselves], "Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria" 9/4 (2000), pp. 105–116, especially p. 107.

<sup>93</sup> L. Kołakowski, *Husserl i poszukiwanie pewności* [Husserl and the Search for Certainty], Warszawa 1991, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> W. Stróżewski, *O metodzie fenomenologii* [On the Method of Phenomenology], [in:] *Jak filozofować? Studia z metodologii filozofii* [How to Philosophize? Studies in the Methodology of Philosophy], ed. J. Perzanowski, Warszawa 1989, pp. 78–95, especially p. 82.

primordial cognitive reality.<sup>95</sup> The need to link phenomenological cognition with the concreteness of sensory experience and its continuity comes to the fore in the work of Husserl's continuators, who can be considered cognitivists. Their programme originated in the circle of Francisco Varela (1946–2001).<sup>96</sup> Among those inspired by phenomenology, there were also radical critics of the reality of empirical knowledge and the laws of nature built upon it, such as Nancy Cartwright (1944–).<sup>97</sup> In our considerations, the most relevant development of phenomenology seems to be that presented by Claude Romano, who links its practice to the development of phenomenological realism, respect and interest in things and reflection on the language of description of cognitive experience.<sup>98</sup>

Husserl's relation to historicity is a somewhat complex matter. We must take as our starting point his statement: "I fully recognise the extraordinary value of history in the broadest sense for the philosopher."<sup>99</sup> However, the generality of this statement allows for much, including a critique of historicism.<sup>100</sup> Husserl himself made no secret of how much his discussions with Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) meant to him in the formation of his attitude to the historicity of cognition.<sup>101</sup> The result of these disputes and inspirations was the recognition

<sup>95</sup> T. Bekrycht, *Fenomenologia – wprowadzenie w lekturę tekstu Edmunda Husserla „Phänomenologie (Der Encyclopedia Britannica Artikel)”* [Phenomenology – an Introduction to Edmund Husserl's text "Phänomenologie (Der Encyclopedia Britannica Artikel)"], "Filozofia Publiczna i Edukacja Demokratyczna" 4/2 (2015), pp. 92–202, especially pp. 98–99.

<sup>96</sup> W. Marciszewski, *Empyryzm, racjonalizm, irracjonalizm po przetomach naukowych XX wieku* [Empiricism, Rationalism, Irrationalism after the Scientific Breakthroughs of the Twentieth Century], [in:] *Przewodnik po epistemologii* [Guide to Epistemology], ed. R. Ziemińska, Kraków 2013, pp. 423–493, especially pp. 460–461.

<sup>97</sup> A. Grobler, *Metodologia nauk* [Methodology of Sciences], Kraków 2008, pp. 290–291; N.T. Massoni, M.A. Moreira, *Epistemologia de Nancy Cartwright: uma contribuição ao debate sobre a natureza da ciência atual*, "Ensaio Pesquisa em Educação em Ciências" 16/3 (2014), pp. 95–119. The inconsistencies or developments of her thought are illustrated, for example, by Mariusz Mazurek (*Modele w koncepcjach nauki Nancy Cartwright* [Models in Nancy Cartwright's Concepts of Science], "Edukacja Filozoficzna" 54 [2012], pp. 187–204).

<sup>98</sup> P. Zagórecki, *Ocalić fenomenologię z Claude'em Romanem* [Saving Phenomenology with Claude Romano], "Logos i Etos" 60/2 (2022), pp. 203–220.

<sup>99</sup> E. Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science, and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, transl. Q. Lauren, New York–Evanston–London 1965, p. 129; cf. E. Husserl, *Filozofia jako nauka ścisła* [Philosophy as Rigorous Science], transl. W. Galewicz, Warszawa 1992, p. 61.

<sup>100</sup> G. Łuka, *Husserlowska krytyka historyzmu jako krytyka faktyczności* [Husserl's Critique of Historicism as a Critique of Facticity], "Studia Filozoficzne" 1–2 (1982), pp. 57–75.

<sup>101</sup> W. Płotka, *Logos fenomenologii. Problematyka rozumu we fryburskim okresie twórczości Edmunda Husserla* [Logos of Phenomenology. Problem of Reason in the Freiburg Period of Edmund Husserl's Work], Biblioteka UKSW, Warszawa 2009, p. 130.

that the historicity of cognition – whether it is present or past – impinges on its content. Historicity, in Husserl’s terms, is the ‘history of reason’. In turn, he emphatically rejects historicity as one form of facticity, and thus an element to be reduced in the process of phenomenological reduction.<sup>102</sup>

We have already touched on the concept of intentionality, which plays an important role in Husserl’s philosophy. It denotes an attribute of a certain group of experiences which are essentially acts of becoming aware of something, of directing oneself towards the object to be known.<sup>103</sup> Since the sense or meaning<sup>104</sup> “is the way in which the object is given to consciousness,”<sup>105</sup> and this sense is inseparable from the object but is distinct from it, as an intentional cognitive experience of the object,<sup>106</sup> we come to know the object through its sense taking into account the subjective (intentional) attitude. One can speak of objects of intentional reference (noemata) as a third sphere of being between the real and the ideal.<sup>107</sup>

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1907–1961) pointed out that radicalism, understood as reaching into the suprasubjective (transcendental) realm, is achieved when philosophy recognises “as the fundamental philosophic problem this presumption on reason’s part,” when it confronts the inevitability of inductive thinking, the necessity of referring to generalisations as organising categories of knowledge.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, induction “makes no guesses about the causes of events.”<sup>109</sup> The suspension of all investigated intentionalities<sup>110</sup> and

<sup>102</sup> A. Gielarowski, *Kryzys kultury – kryzys człowieka. Fenomenologiczna krytyka kultury: Husserl, Lévinas, Henry* [Crisis of Culture – Crisis of Man. A Phenomenological Critique of Culture: Husserl, Lévinas, Henry], Kraków 2016, pp. 85–96.

<sup>103</sup> D. Zahavi, *Fenomenologia Husserla* [Husserl’s Phenomenology], transl. M. Święch, Kraków 2012, p. 21.

<sup>104</sup> On the identity of these concepts, see E. Husserl, *Ideen...*, op. cit., p. 303. cf. D. Łukasiewicz, *Znaczenie i prawda w świetle niektórych prac Edmunda Husserla* [Meaning and Truth in the Light of Some of Edmund Husserl’s Works], “Principia” 13–14 (1995), pp. 203–212.

<sup>105</sup> K. Michalski, *Logika i czas...*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>106</sup> K. Michalski, *Logika i czas...*, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>107</sup> W. Płotka, *Studia z fenomenologii poznania. Transcendentalna filozofia Edmunda Husserla a problem wiedzy* [Studies in the Phenomenology of Cognition. Edmund Husserl’s Transcendental Philosophy and the Problem of Knowledge], Gdańsk 2015, p. 30.

<sup>108</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. D.A. Landes, London–New York 2012, p. 73; cf. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji* [Phenomenology of Perception], transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, Warszawa 2001, p. 82.

<sup>109</sup> A. Morton, *A Guide Through the Theory of Knowledge*, Malden–Oxford–Victoria 2007, p. 48; cf. A. Morton, *Przewodnik po teorii poznania* [A Guide Through the Theory of Knowledge], transl. T. Baszniak, Warszawa 2002, p. 116.

<sup>110</sup> D. Zahavi, *Fenomenologia Husserla*, op. cit., pp. 20–32.

their neutralisation – as a basic postulate of the phenomenological theory of cognition – consists in making one's own intentionalities the object of contemplation.<sup>111</sup> The object of cognition, therefore, is in phenomenological reductionism a consciousness that is intentionally oriented towards what is studied, freeing itself from the regularity of facts, and concentrated on eidetic universals. For phenomenological reductionism narrows the field of research in this respect necessarily to the realm of the object. "In objective thinking, therefore, there is no room for another person and for a multiplicity of consciousnesses. If I constitute the world, I cannot think another consciousness, because it too would have to constitute it, and at least this other view of the world I myself would not be constituting."<sup>112</sup> The objectivity of knowledge in Merleau-Ponty goes hand in hand with its linguistic nature, since thinking is linguistic, which implies a link between thought and word,<sup>113</sup> contemplation and conceptualisation.<sup>114</sup> In this context, it is worth recalling what Husserl says early on in his philosophical activity about logos as a concept that links inseparably language and communication on the one hand, and the sphere of designators on the other:

Λόγος in the developed language means now the word and speech itself, now the thing mentioned in speech. It is again thought in the form of sentences produced by the speaker for the purpose of communication or for himself, so to speak, the spiritual sense of the linguistic affirmative sentence, that which also cannot be thought without grammar, simply calls the affirmative, precisely as that which is judged by the grammatical expressive sentence, also the sense of names. Particularly in the case of general words, logos means the attribution of general concepts to them as sense.

[...] All these meanings of the word logos, on the other hand, take over, especially wherever scientific interests are involved, a distinct sense in which the idea of

<sup>111</sup> R. Sokolowski, *Wprowadzenie do fenomenologii*, op. cit., pp. 59–60; W. Fasching, *Intentionality and Presence: On the Intrinsic Of-ness of Consciousness from Transcendental-Phenomenological Perspective*, "Husserl Studies" 28/2 (2012), pp. 121–141.

<sup>112</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji*, op. cit., p. 327. "By introducing reductions, Husserl seems to prepare the language of phenomenology to describe 'what appears' as something that always remains in the relation between the self and the world" (M. Waligóra, *Wstęp do fenomenologii* [Introduction to Phenomenology], Kraków 2013, p. 63).

<sup>113</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Proza świata. Eseje o mowie* [Prose of the World. Essays on Speech], transl. S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1976, p. 93.

<sup>114</sup> A.J. Ayer, *Filozofia w XX wieku* [Philosophy in the Twentieth Century], transl. T. Baszniak, Warszawa 2000, pp. 270–271.

the norm of reason stands out. Logos is then once the name of reason itself, as a power, then of that which is rational, namely thinking fully understood or directed towards rational truth. Logos also specifically signifies the power of constructing legitimate concepts, and in doing so it signifies the rational creation of concepts, as well as the correct concepts themselves.<sup>115</sup>

This extensive quotation should be considered crucial in the context of our analyses, as it reveals the deep and, as it were, organic connection between the linguistics and objectivity of cognition in Husserl. The use of the category of spiritual sense (*geistiger Sinn*) is particularly relevant and inspiring for us. It is a term used by Husserl on the verge of being figurative, but he demonstrates the necessity of this calculated semantic abuse to describe the status of the logos in the construction of the object of cognition, which is simultaneously linguistic and noematic, and cannot preserve its existence by losing one of these aspects of its existence. Already in the “Preparatory Considerations” (in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*), Husserl makes the connection between logos as spiritual sense (*geistiger Sinn*) and spiritual act (*geistiger Akt*), in which speaking and thinking are united.<sup>116</sup> While it is difficult in Husserl’s work to make a clear distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and meaning (*Bedeutung*), this is not because of a lack of tools (for these were created by Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), but because Husserl wants to present the relationship of these concepts and the validity of their interchangeable use.<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, however, a distinction can be made in his texts between meaning, that is, a statement revealing some object of cognition (apophantic), and sense, which has the same apophantic capacity, as it were, in itself, in potency.<sup>118</sup>

The comments on phenomenology outlined above form the basis for an analysis of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2014 document *The Inspiration and*

<sup>115</sup> E. Husserl, *Ergänzende Texte*, [in:] *Formale und Transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*, ed. P. Janssen, Series: Husserliana. Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke 17, Den Haag 1974, pp. 339–460, especially pp. 356–357, cf. E. Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, transl. D. Cairns, Hague 1969.

<sup>116</sup> E. Husserl, *Formale und Transzendente Logik*, [in:] *Formale und Transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*, op. cit., pp. 3–335, especially p. 22 (Polish translation: E. Husserl, *Logika formalna i logika transcendentalna. Próba krytyki rozumu logicznego* [Formal and Transcendental Logic. An Attempt at a Critique of Logical Reason], transl. G. Sowinski, Warszawa 2011, p. 17).

<sup>117</sup> M. Moryń, *Transcendentalizm, intencjonalność, język. O Husserlowskiej koncepcji sensu* [Transcendentalism, Intentionality, Language. On Husserl’s Conception of Meaning], Poznań 1998, p. 95.

<sup>118</sup> M. Moryń, *Transcendentalizm, intencjonalność, język...*, op. cit., p. 130.

*Truth of Scripture*. It made a bold attempt to use the phenomenological method of studying biblical texts in order to grasp the notion of biblical inspiration, one of the key concepts in the theology of Scripture.<sup>119</sup> This was a most valid idea, as it brought biblical research out of the confines of an epistemology fed by the belief in the immediacy with which the object of knowledge is given to us. It remains an open question, however, to what extent the basic demands of the phenomenological method were realised in the document itself.

Another thought by Sokolowski is worth recalling here. He points out that the reading of Scripture requires what the American philosopher with Polish roots calls the most basic fulfilment of Scripture in Christ: a revision and deepening of the understanding of God as God; that is how the expectation of meaning is born, which conditions the manifestation of meaning in reality viewed in the phenomenological perspective.<sup>120</sup> Within the framework of traditional theological language this philosophical approach means that “the Deity of Christ transcends the expectation that he fulfils,”<sup>121</sup> which is a linear juxtaposition that does not distinguish the peculiar point of singularity that is the Incarnation of the Son of God nor reveals what is essential in the view of both *Dei Verbum*<sup>122</sup> and *Verbum Domini*,<sup>123</sup> a text that contained a call for a new reflection on biblical inspiration to which the Pontifical Biblical Commission wished to respond.

The Commission’s review of the biblical texts in terms of how the God-hagiographer relationship is reflected in them is flawed by a certain inadequacy of the declared method and the tasks pursued. This very feature of the research conducted by the esteemed expert panel leads to the conclusion that in the Old Testament the hagiographers’ relationship with God is “seen in various ways,” while in the New Testament it is “always mediated by the Son of God,

<sup>119</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, transl. Th. Esposito, S. Gregg, Collegeville, PA 2014; cf. Papieska Komisja Biblijna, *Natchmienie i prawda Pisma Świętego. Słowo, które od Boga pochodzi i mówi o Bogu, aby zbawić świat* [Inspiration and Truth of Scripture. The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God to Save the World], transl. H. Witczyk, Kielce 2014 (hereafter: ITSS), no. 51.

<sup>120</sup> R. Sokolowski, *Bóg wiary i rozumu. Podstawy chrześcijańskiej teologii* [The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology], transl. M. Romanek, Kraków 2015, pp. 212–214.

<sup>121</sup> R. Sokolowski, *Bóg wiary i rozumu...*, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>122</sup> *Constitutio dogmatica de Divina Revelatione*, [in:] *Documenti. Il Concilio Vaticano II*, Bologna 1966, pp. 494–523.

<sup>123</sup> Benedictus XVI, *Adhortatio Verbum Domini*, pp. 681–787.

the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>124</sup> Admittedly, the conclusion of the key synthesising section on inspiration in this text seeks common ground, but it does so through analogy, reducing the differences between forms of inspiration to the dynamics of “the plan of divine revelation.”<sup>125</sup> Ultimately, then, inspiration finds its basis in a mission (message) from God, which is not always grounded in the mission of the Son of God (cf. John 20:21). Thus, the intention of the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to ground the study of inspiration in a phenomenological approach failed, for they made the biblical text the object of their inquiry in order to derive from it the concept of inspiration as the basis for reading the text as Scripture. This could not succeed, since the text itself does not and cannot contain this scriptural feature as a necessary element. The emergence of an anthology of ancient religious and religion-related texts is not necessarily conditioned by the action of divine grace, and so in a phenomenological reduction of the concept of the biblical text, we will not reduce it to inspired Scripture.

The question of inspired Scripture does not make the slightest sense in philology, history, literary theory, sociology or any science other than theology. Therefore, biblical exegesis searching for the meaning and significance of Scripture must be placed within the scope of theology. Consequently, a serious question arises: is there anything in theology that could be its object of knowledge? From Descartes (1596–1650) onwards, we are entitled to pose this question as rooted in the critical function of philosophy, which assumes the existence only of that which it has direct experience of.

Since I have now learned that bodies themselves are perceived not, strictly speaking, by the senses or by the imaginative faculty, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived because they are touched or seen, but only because they are understood, I clearly realize [*cognosco*] that nothing can be perceived by me more easily or more clearly than my own mind.<sup>126</sup>

This reference to the thinking subject – the reduction of knowledge to the knowledge of one’s own mind – was a turning point in philosophy, a complete novelty because the epistemology of Nicolaus of Cusa (1401–1464), with its

<sup>124</sup> ITSS 51. This dichotomy is also repeated in ITSS 52. The plurality of forms of inspiration is also mentioned in ITSS 140.

<sup>125</sup> ITSS 52.

<sup>126</sup> R. Decartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, transl. M. Moriarty, Oxford 2008, p. 24; R. Decartes, *Medytacje o pierwszej filozofii*, vol. 2, transl. M. Ajdukiewicz, K. Ajdukiewicz, S. Swieżawski, I. Dąmbska, Kęty 2001, pp. 55–56.



inherently irrational (or surrealist) approach,<sup>127</sup> provided a solid basis for subject-centred approach.<sup>128</sup> Theology defines itself vis-à-vis this approach as hermeneutics, which has its relevance to exegetical issues. Jürgen Werbick presents the metaphoricity of religious texts as a model for the transfer of understanding from the intelligible to the non-intelligible.<sup>129</sup> He states:

From the Christian point of view, what is the object of interpretation can [...] apply as a criterion only intuitively, i.e. as a reality in interpretations that interpret this intuition as 'the thing of Scripture', or through external identification (by the Teaching Office). This occurs through an intuitive and/or authoritative interpretation of what the texts say on matters of principle. However, the criterion is not some quantity independent of any interpretation. The criterion itself is already the fruit of interpretation, the normative interpretation of the one who is the essential Interpreter, the Logos of God.<sup>130</sup>

It is an approach that bridges the gap between the role of the *verbum abbreviatum* in its Christological understanding and the hermeneutical understanding of theology, in which the Logos makes the subject. What is needed, then, in order to preserve this character of theology and, within it, the exegesis of Scripture, is a description that objectifies the object of interpretation. If we regard *verbum abbreviatum* as a form of objectification of subject-oriented reflection, this is possible within the phenomenological reduction of Scripture given as an object with all the baggage of its various forms of facticity. Judycki says that "consciousness is filled with a peculiar kind of intuition," which is an intellectual intuition.<sup>131</sup> Among the tasks of theologians is the interpretation of Scripture,<sup>132</sup> or rather the interpretation of Scripture is one of the main, if not the fundamental task of the theologian. The exegetes, in turn, fall into the

<sup>127</sup> R. Wilkołek, *Poszerzając granice racjonalności. Epistemologiczna teologia Mikołaja z Kuzy (1401–1464)* [Widening the Boundaries of Rationality. The Epistemological Theology of Nicolaus of Cusa (1401–1464)], Kraków 2023, pp. 68–74.

<sup>128</sup> J. Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicolas of Cusa*, Grand Rapids, MI–Cambridge 2013, p. 64.

<sup>129</sup> J. Werbick, *Wprowadzenie do epistemologii teologicznej* [Introduction to Theological Epistemology], transl. G. Rawski, Kraków 2014, p. 199.

<sup>130</sup> J. Werbick, *Wprowadzenie do epistemologii teologicznej*, op. cit., pp. 203–204.

<sup>131</sup> S. Judycki, *Epistemologia*, vol. 1, Poznań–Warszawa 2020, p. 479.

<sup>132</sup> J. Wicks, *Wprowadzenie do metody teologicznej* [Introduction to Theological Method], transl. J. Ożóg, Kraków 1995, p. 34.

wider category of theologians.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, we cannot define exegetical method outside the realm of theological methods. If, then, we treat theology as a way of contemplating the created world as the effect of God's loving decision, conducted "through the prism of the Creator (*sub ratione Dei*),"<sup>134</sup> then the data concerning the object of cognition given through the senses (the biblical text) have a role analogous to the knowledge of geology in the theology of creation.

This approach to epistemological questions quite surprisingly converges with the conclusions reached by philosophers who combined Thomism with the idea of Christian humanism: Jacques Maritain (1882–1976) or Werner Jaeger (1888–1961). Jaeger credits Maritain with demonstrating the need to define humanism in its new sense, leaving to himself the task of pointing to the ancient sources of theocentric humanism: the *paideia* of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.<sup>135</sup> This humanism was defined in opposition to its anthropocentric (considered inhuman by the French philosopher)<sup>136</sup> understanding. Maritain referred directly to Descartes as someone responsible for the emergence of the modern world order, which he considered bankrupt. The humanism that Maritain wanted to create from elements of the Christian tradition he called the humanism of the Incarnation.<sup>137</sup> However, on the ground of neo-Thomism, it was not possible to go beyond a language involving the Logos Incarnate. In this sense, the inspiration of phenomenology seems more valuable and forward-looking.

A brief review of phenomenological cognitive presuppositions leads to the conclusion that cognition that goes beyond the study of sense impressions, of what Ingarden described as the scope of a psychophysical theory of cognition, aims at creating a bridge between epistemological presuppositions and a theological approach to exegesis. We can take our consideration of the role of *verbum abbreviatum* and *silentium Dei* ascribed to them in the theology of Scripture by Benedict XVI as a premise for the conclusion that a methodological basis for correct and cognitively valid research is needed in exegetical studies, the

<sup>133</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, *Pismo duszą teologii* [Scripture the Soul of Theology], transl. A. Baron, M. Dobrzyński, R. Robak, Kraków 1997, pp. 73–81.

<sup>134</sup> P. Roszak, *Extra scientiam nulla theologia? Rola poznania naukowego w dyskursie teologicznym* [The Role of Scientific Cognition in Theological Discourse], [in:] *Teologia w dialogu z innymi naukami. Spotkania-kontrowersje-perspektywy* [Theology in Dialogue with Other Sciences. Encounters-Controversies-Perspectives], ed. D. Wąsek, Kraków 2021, pp. 31–55, especially p. 51.

<sup>135</sup> W. Jaeger, *Humanizm i teologia* [Humanism and Theology], transl. S. Zalewski, Warszawa 1957, pp. 39–41.

<sup>136</sup> J. Maritain, *Religia i kultura* [Religion and Culture], Warszawa 2007, p. 135.

<sup>137</sup> J. Maritain, *Katolicyzm i filozofia* [Catholicism and Philosophy], "Verbum" 1/4 (1934), pp. 470–509, especially pp. 478–482.

premise of which is to return from the biblical text to Scripture. However, it must be pointed out emphatically that there is no Scripture without the text. It is not possible without linguistic, historical, formal-literary matter and a network of intertextual or socio-cultural connections. In the exegesis of Scripture, therefore, there must be room for a description of the text that goes as deep as possible, and is equally comprehensive and extensive, of a text that is Scripture, although it does not exhaust the content of the concept of Scripture.

Scripture is the object of cognition in biblical exegesis rather than (exclusively) the biblical text, just as legal exegesis is concerned with cognition of the law and not the text of a code, statute or other normative texts. Activities around textual cognition belong to, but do not replace, disciplines related to exegesis. Philology, textual criticism, history, literary theory, historical sociology, cultural anthropology, etc. all have their own methods and objects of study. The demand for homogeneity of epistemological rules within the same science (even with differences between methodologies) is understandable and has been present in biblical studies since the 17th century; it is based on the project for the renewal of science formulated by Francis Bacon (1561–1626). Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679),<sup>138</sup> John Locke (1632–1704)<sup>139</sup> or, drawing on Descartes, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677)<sup>140</sup> started from the assumption that the Bible should be treated in the same way as other sources in historical research. This is how the Bible became the object of historical research, and biblical research was reduced to historical research. If, on the other hand, we are talking about a biblical exegesis that cannot be reduced to the sum of philological, historical, theoretical-literary, sociological, anthropological, etc. studies of the Bible, we should define its own object of cognition, which must be different from the

<sup>138</sup> T. Holden, *Hobbes on the Authority of Scripture*, [in:] *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 8, eds. D. Garber, D. Rutherford, Oxford 2018, pp. 68–95, especially pp. 71–78.

<sup>139</sup> F. Copleston, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy], vol. 5: *Od Hobbesa do Hume'a* [From Hobbes to Hume], transl. J. Pasek, J. Pasek, P. Józefowicz, Warszawa 2009, p. 108. Although there is no explicitly critical attitude towards the Bible as a book of special status in Locke, Adam Grzeliński's statement that in proving the existence of God Locke "refers to the evidence of Thomas rather than Anselm of Canterbury and Augustine; his proof is the argumentation of a common-sense natural philosopher" (A. Grzeliński, *Doświadczenie i rozum. Empiryzm Johna Locke'a* [Experience and Reason. John Locke's Empiricism], Toruń 2019, p. 345) makes it clear that he assumed a rationalist-empiricist critical stance towards the Bible. It is worth recalling the role that Locke played in distancing himself from simple cognitive realism, which was deeply present in the Renaissance tradition before Descartes. See G. Gottfried, *Teoria poznania od Kartezjusza do Wittgensteina* [Theory of Cognition from Descartes to Wittgenstein], transl. T. Kubalica, Kraków 2007, pp. 80–83.

<sup>140</sup> M.C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, Oxford 2010, pp. 23–25.

historical source, the literary work, the material for learning about historical (and therefore inaccessible in field or survey research) forms of cultures and social life. The object of the study of exegesis is, in the light of what we said earlier about phenomenological reduction, Scripture seen especially in terms of what makes it Sacred Scripture. In this context, *verbum abbreviatum* in its Christological sense as it is spoken of in *Verbum Domini*, and the idea of *silentium Dei* present in the same document, lead us to conclude that the object of biblical exegesis is the act of God's communication (*locutio Dei*), even if it is expressed in His silence. The cognition that is prepared on the basis of textual research, however, is not exhausted in it; it seeks to reflect on this very act of communication. This does not only apply to scientific cognition, but also – as Michal Klinger shows in the juxtaposition of John 8:2–9 and Tadeusz Rózewicz's poem *The Unknown Letter* – to poetic intuition.<sup>141</sup>

In human cognition, the qualities and dispositions<sup>142</sup> of the subject play an important, almost decisive role. The thinking subject disposes of certain cognitive tools (in the sense of natural as well as cultural endowment) and occupies a certain point of view (in which the historical background of the subject plays no small part). These contribute to the production of cognitive effects.<sup>143</sup> Those elements of the cognitive perspective whose source is the subject's world of values and worldview also play their role.<sup>144</sup>

## Biblical theological exegesis and its subject matter

Robert Woźniak's statement that "Scripture in its totality from the first to the new covenant is an expression of the remembrance of Jesus Christ as the supreme historical revelation of God,"<sup>145</sup> can be regarded, in contemporary language, as the thought behind the idea of *Verbum abbreviatum*, which presupposes a Christocentric *lectio exegetico-theologica*. The opportunity for such a Christocentric interpretation of Scripture is not always recognised in exegetical circles. Biblical scholars in the first post-Vatican II period often looked to *Dei Verbum* as a justification for widening the margin of freedom in the choice of

<sup>141</sup> M. Klinger, *Strażnik wrót. Próby z hermeneutyki teologicznej* [Gatekeeper: Rehearsals from Theological Hermeneutics], Kraków 2019, pp. 56–59.

<sup>142</sup> S. Rainko, *Rola podmiotu w poznaniu. Zarys zagadnień* [The Role of the Subject in Cognition. Overview of Issues], Warszawa 1971, p. 99.

<sup>143</sup> S. Rainko, *Rola podmiotu w poznaniu...*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>144</sup> S. Rainko, *Rola podmiotu w poznaniu...*, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>145</sup> R. Woźniak, *Praca nad dogmatem...*, op. cit., p. 40.

research methodology. At present, they are faced with a major methodological challenge, as it is becoming urgent to develop an apparatus that would make it possible to speak of theological exegesis not just as a postulate, but as a concrete proposal for conducting research. The study of Christian typology is not sufficient as a basis for working out what the exhortation *Verbum Domini* suggests in paragraphs 34–36. In particular, the warning against the danger of cognitive dualism in the approach to Scripture (VD 35) should become a guideline in the search for a method that allows for an integral and coherent reading of the Bible in the Church. A taste of this dualism is found, for example, in the dichotomy of exegesis and biblical theology, whose shared duty is to present a coherent explanation of the plain meaning of the biblical text as their resultant.<sup>146</sup> A condition for the coherence of exegesis and theological interpretation is that a theology of revelation adequate to contemporary epistemological models is at the heart of the definition of Scripture as an object of exegetical study.

In asking about the shape of theological exegetical method, it is necessary to return to the foundation of the theology of revelation as proposed by Karl Rahner in *The Hearer of the Word* and his other works. Epistemologically, he founds theology on man's listening to the word of God and his subjective conditioning.<sup>147</sup> For the listener who is ontologically oriented to the possibility of divine revelation, which is the free initiative of God,<sup>148</sup> there is no other possibility of experiencing it but the historical form of it, where its historicity is related to the historicity of man and to God's action in history.<sup>149</sup> Revelation and salvation are dialectically related: the salvific event points to the object of revelation, and salvation "becomes materially determined only in the event of revelation."<sup>150</sup> Although not identical, in Rahner's view salvation and revelation are two realities happening in the same event. This in turn presupposes an interpretive, hermeneutical point of view:

<sup>146</sup> R.W. Wall, *Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context*, [in:] *Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. J.B. Green, Grand Rapids, MI 2010, pp. 372–396, especially p. 377.

<sup>147</sup> K. Rahner, *Słuchacz słowa. Ugruntowanie filozofii religii* [Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion], transl. R. Samek, Kęty 2008, p. 23; cf. K. Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, transl. J. Donceel, London–New York 1994.

<sup>148</sup> K. Rahner, *Słuchacz słowa...*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>149</sup> K. Rahner, *Słuchacz słowa...*, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>150</sup> K. Rahner, *Teologia i antropologia* [Theology and Anthropology], [in:] K. Rahner, *Pisma wybrane* [Selected Writings], vol. 1, transl. G. Bubel, Kraków 2005, pp. 46–67, especially p. 54.

this pronouncement of God, which we call His Revelation, requires our ability to hear Him in order for it to actually happen. [...] [W]hen the pronouncements that God addresses to us exist only in the pronouncements that we receive in our mind. [...] In order for them [the events of our historical environment of which Rahner speaks above – W.L.] to be [the events of our historical environment] there is a verbal interpretation of pure facts, which interpretation is not an external element of these events, but an internal, constitutive element of them, indispensable for them to be considered as events of Revelation.<sup>151</sup>

The subject-oriented approach to revelation includes an exegetical and an interpretive aspect. Exegesis is linked to interpretation not only by the fact that in interpretation we find the output of exegesis consisting in the clarification of philological, literary and historical issues of the text. Exegesis is adapted to a particular interpretation, which constitutes an exegetical pre-understanding, an exegetical hermeneutics. Theological exegesis is then that one aware of its own perspective, which is, in the case of ecclesiastical theological exegesis, the fundamental focus of the ecclesiastical subject: salvation revealed and salvific revelation, i.e. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, “who became short” in order to include all the words of Scripture.

Ratzinger himself proposed several guidelines for theological exegesis. The first is a critical reference to the philosophical presuppositions of any exegetical method. The second, a consequence of the first, is a correspondingly broad notion of historicity, in which there is room for the history of exegesis itself. The third indication for theological exegesis is the appreciation of philology, literary theory and hermeneutic philosophy (even more than philosophical hermeneutics), since it speaks of the ‘philosophical implications of the interpretative process’. Ratzinger felt that it was necessary to elaborate on the message conveyed by the Christian tradition of biblical interpretation (not just the Catholic tradition, as he mentions the Reformation tradition). He was more concerned with how to approach the text and the process of interpretation than with the interpreted content. He assumes that Occam’s razor is necessary to cut through unnecessary hypotheses (especially concerning hypothetical sources and *Sitz im Leben*). Finally, he points to the contextual conditions of exegesis (its inevitable historicity and ecclesiality) as a fundamental determinant. It is not possible to practise theological exegesis without the (ecclesiastical) interpretive

<sup>151</sup> K. Rahner, *Kościelna chrystologia między egzegezą a dogmatyką* [Ecclesiastical Christology between Exegesis and Dogmatics], [in:] K. Rahner, *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 253–283, especially p. 260.

subject being part of it.<sup>152</sup> In this view, which was presented by Ratzinger at the end of the 1980s,<sup>153</sup> we do not find the postulate of Christological exegesis explicitly presented, although Ratzinger's hermeneutics of faith is mature.<sup>154</sup> He emphasises the role of faith: "It is only through faith that we can freely accept the testimony of God and acknowledge him as the transcendent guarantor of the truth revealed by him."<sup>155</sup> Zatwardnicki, in his work on this hermeneutics, points out that after 2010 the analogy between Scripture and the Incarnation cannot be overlooked in this hermeneutics.<sup>156</sup>

René Laurentin (1917–2017), a dogmatist and Mariologist, faced the problem in his work written some 20 years after the Second Vatican Council: how to reconcile faith with exegesis?<sup>157</sup> In his answer, he drew attention to the dimension of the believer's interpersonal relationship with the Word of God. He conceives of this faith as an irrational act, not based on any certainty of meaning or any certainty of reasoning.<sup>158</sup> He defines exegesis as the application to the Bible of an empirical critical method.<sup>159</sup> He considers the methodology of biblical studies in a form characteristic of the time of the book: with the dominant role of historical criticism,<sup>160</sup> but also with an alternative methodological proposal to it, namely semiotic analysis.<sup>161</sup> Method in exegesis represents, in the French

<sup>152</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God's Word...*, op. cit., p. 123; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Stowo Boga...*, op. cit., p. 121–123.

<sup>153</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, op. cit., p. 15–44.

<sup>154</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *God's Word...*, op. cit., p. 123–124; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Stowo Boga...*, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>155</sup> Benedict XVI, *Poznanie prawdy. Wykłady papieskie* [Knowing the Truth. Papal Lectures], Kraków 2017, p. 87.

<sup>156</sup> S. Zatwardnicki, *Hermeneutyka wiary w nauczaniu papieża Benedykta XVI* [Hermeneutics of Faith in the Teaching of Pope Benedict XVI], Wrocław 2014, pp. 118–122. See also R. Voderholzer, *Die biblische Hermeneutik Joseph Ratzingers*, "Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift" 56 (2005), pp. 400–414, especially p. 410.

<sup>157</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, transl. M. Masini, Brescia 1986, p. 5 (the original appeared in print in 1984).

<sup>158</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., pp. 151–153.

<sup>159</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>160</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., pp. 95–117.

<sup>161</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., pp. 118–148. On the method of semiotic analysis see, for example, O. Genest, *Analyse sémiotique et Bible. Situation et questions disputées*, "Laval Théologique et Philosophique" 36/2 (1980), pp. 115–128; Groupe d'Entrevernes, *Analyse sémiotique des textes. Introduction – théorie – pratique*, Lyon 1985, passim. It is worth noting that Laurentin, writing from a French perspective, underestimates the more widely used semantic analysis based on the research of James Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford 1961), see P. Sacchi, *Problemi teologici e problemi linguistici nell'opera del Barr*, [in:] J. Barr, *Semantica del linguaggio biblico*, transl.

theologian's view, a rational element that is insufficient for understanding the text being read. For the Bible, as written by believers and for believers,<sup>162</sup> requires faith as the key, and yes, irrational element constituting the object of understanding.<sup>163</sup> However, it is hard to resist the impression that Laurentin

P. Sacchi, Bologna 1980, pp. VII–XXXVIII; W. Egger, *Metodologia del Nuovo Testamento. Introduzione allo studio scientifico del Nuovo Testamento*, transl. G. Forza, Bologna 1991, pp. 95–124; H. Langkammer, *Metodologia Nowego Testamentu* [Methodology of the New Testament], Opole 1991, pp. 130–139; H. Langkammer, *Metody lingwistyczne* [Linguistic Methods], [in:] *Metodologia Nowego Testamentu* [Methodology of the New Testament], ed. H. Langkammer, Pelplin 1994, pp. 235–270, especially pp. 252–261; J. Czerski, *Metody interpretacji Nowego Testamentu* [Methods of New Testament Interpretation], Opole 1997, pp. 131–138. It is significant that the relevant chapter (or subsection) does not appear in J. Czerski, *Metodologia Nowego Testamentu* [Methodology of the New Testament], Opole 2012. This is a testimony to the displacement of the semantic approach by more dynamic varieties of linguistic approaches (pragmatics, narratology, rhetorical analysis), and at the same time an illustration of the process of rapid change in the methodology of biblical studies, which found its way to the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

<sup>162</sup> This is a reference to the view of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) from *Über die erste Urkunden des menschlichen Geschlechts. Einige Anmerkungen* ([in:] J.G. Herder, *Werke zu zehn Bänden*, eds. M. Bollach et al., vol. 5: *Schriften zum Alten Testament*, ed. R. Smend, Frankfurt am Main 1993, pp. 9–178, especially p. 29) that the Bible is a book written by the people, about the people and for the people; cf. P. Ziolo, *Metaforyczność poezji hebrajskiej w ujęciu J.G. Herdera* [Metaphoricity of Hebrew Poetry according to J.G. Herder], “Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny” 48/3 (1995), pp. 193–199; M. Górecka, *Biblia Lutra. Biblia w literaturze niemieckojęzycznej* [Luther's Bible. The Bible in German-language Literature], “Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN” 4 (2009), pp. 136–145, especially pp. 140–141; P. Zarychta, *Biblia w literaturze niemieckiej od Średniowiecza po Klasycyzm Weimarski* [The Bible in German Literature from the Middle Ages to Weimar Classicism], [in:] “Cóż za księga!” *Biblia w literaturze niemieckojęzycznej od Oświecenia do współczesności* [“What a Book!” The Bible in German-language Literature from the Enlightenment to the Present], eds. M. Kłańska, J. Kita-Huber, P. Zarychta, Kraków 2010, pp. 21–56, especially pp. 47–48. After Daniel Weidner (*Einleitung: Lektüren im Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, [in:] *Urpoesie und Morgenland. Johann Gottfried Herders Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, ed. D. Weidner, Berlin 2008, pp. 9–21, especially p. 13), Marek Karczewski (*Język raj? Walory starożytnego języka hebrajskiego w świetle «Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie» [1782/1783] Johanna Gottfrieda Herdera* [Language of Paradise? The qualities of the ancient Hebrew language in the light of Johann Gottfried Herder's “Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie” (1782/1783)], “Studia Elbląskie” 10 [2009], pp. 123–134, especially pp. 126 and 133, note 63) defends the thesis that Herder never questioned that the Bible is the word of God and not a product of human culture. In the monumental work by Henning graf Reventlow (*Storia dell'interpretazione biblica*, vol. 4: *Dall'Illuminismo fino al XX secolo*, transl. E. Gatti, Casale Monferrato 2004, pp. 223–237), one searches in vain for clarity on the matter of the theological status of the Bible with Herder. These words became (whether intended or not) the manifesto of an Enlightenment, non-theological approach to the Bible.

<sup>163</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., p. 160.



makes a certain reversal in his reasoning, since he states a little further on that faith is the experience of the thinking subject (the believing exegete).<sup>164</sup> It remains, then, in the interactive game between author and reader, to choose the direction in which to continue to follow the author's thought, but closer to it remains the subjective direction, for it is ultimately the "experience of faith" that lies at the root of biblical texts and interpretation.<sup>165</sup> Ultimately, then, the goal of reading and interpreting Scripture is, for him, a multilevel reading of the text: scientific (objective), traditional (he does not count it as scientific and reproaches it for neglecting scientific forms of exegesis, to which he counts only historical criticism and semiotic analysis),<sup>166</sup> catechetical (transmission of the fundamental dogmatic and moral teaching of the Bible), prophetic (motivating function) and contemplative (charismatic and mystical).<sup>167</sup> Thus, one can actually find in Laurentin's proposal (contrary to the conciliatory attitude declared by him) a confirmation of the inevitable methodological dichotomy between scientific exegesis and other forms of reading the Bible. More precisely, one could say that only scientific exegesis (understood by him in a very narrow and inadequate way for the state of knowledge at the time, as we have tried to show in the footnotes) is scientific. Other forms of biblical reading are based on personal, irrational and charismatic experience of faith. In spite of these very important limitations, this proposal contains a very interesting aspect in the context of our research, unhappily abandoned by the author: the intuition that faith constitutes the object of exegesis.

A similar direction in the development of theological exegesis was proposed by Thomas Söding (1956–), who suggested that scientific exegesis should take

<sup>164</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>165</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>166</sup> From the late 1960s, following Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), both Ernst Fuchs (1903–1983) and Gerhard Ebeling (1912–2001) developed the line of research we know as the reception history or history of influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). Its positive presentation and evaluation was given by Prosper Grech (*La nuova ermeneutica: Fuchs e Ebeling, "Augustinianum"* 12 [1972], pp. 277–296). This is further evidence that Laurentin, in his search for a solution to the methodological problem of theological exegesis, stopped at the state of exegesis in the early 1960s. See A. Tronina, *Historia oddziaływania tekstu. Wirkungsgeschichte* [History of Textual Influence. Wirkungsgeschichte], [in:] *Metodologia Nowego Testamentu*, ed. H. Langkammer, op. cit., pp. 207–231; S. Szymik, *Historia oddziaływania tekstu (Wirkungsgeschichte) a studium Nowego Testamentu* [History of Textual Impact (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) versus Study of the New Testament], "Roczniki Teologiczne" 51/1 (2004), pp. 127–140; J. Czernski, *Metodologia Nowego Testamentu*, op. cit., pp. 213–221; S. Szymik, *Współczesne modele egzegezy biblijnej* [Contemporary Models of Biblical Exegesis], Lublin 2013, pp. 119–131.

<sup>167</sup> R. Laurentin, *Come riconciliare l'esegesi e la fede*, op. cit., pp. 181–182.

the development of the reader of the Bible as its goal and the growth of Scripture with the reader as its perspective (after Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Iob* I,3). Its own task, in this context, is to show how Scripture as a whole and its individual parts “grew” and how it was shaped (in the historical sense – the process of creation, in the literary sense – the composition of the text, in the communicative sense – the intention). This requires, he believes, a shift of attention from the author’s intention to the *sensus textus* and *receptio lectoris*.<sup>168</sup> This means an exegesis that is not only preceded and conditioned by hermeneutics, but it becomes hermeneutics because in this way it enters creatively into the area of theology: it describes the experience of the Logos of all being<sup>169</sup> in human knowledge of the world: the reading and interpretation of Scripture is the privileged place of encounter with Jesus Christ-God, who descends into human cognitive limitations, from the “above” of glory to the “below”<sup>170</sup> of the historicity and social character of human approach to truth.

In Poland, a systematic reflection on theological exegesis between 2005 and 2012 was led by Artur Malina (1965–), who first posed the question of the object of biblical interpretation, which he defined as “the text [...] as it has reached its final editing [...] and in the context of the larger whole which it co-creates together with other textual units.” The object of exegesis thus described is shared by various forms of study, so that, for example, the socio-cultural context, which is present only in part of the methods of scientific textual study, is absent from this view.<sup>171</sup> The inspired text as the object of exegesis is also described by Malina elsewhere.<sup>172</sup> However, this is not a complete definition of the object of biblical exegesis because ultimately the scholar concludes

<sup>168</sup> T. Söding, *Fare esegesi, fare teologia. Un rapporto necessario e complesso*, [in:] *Ascoltare, rispondere, vivere. Atti del Congresso Internazionale “La Sacra Scrittura nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa” (1–4 dicembre 2010)*, ed. E. Borghi, Milano 2011, pp. 77–87, especially p. 86.

<sup>169</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2004, p. 67; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*, transl. Z. Włodkowska, Kraków 1994, p. 148.

<sup>170</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ...*, op. cit., p. 60; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Bóg Jezusa Chrystusa*, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>171</sup> A. Malina, *Egzegeza w kontekście* [Exegesis in Context], [in:] *Interpretacja (w) dialogu. Tożsamość egzegezy biblijnej* [Interpretation (in) Dialogue. The Identity of Biblical Exegesis], eds. A. Kucz, A. Malina, Kielce 2005, pp. 70–78, especially p. 70.

<sup>172</sup> A. Malina, *Najnowsze kanony (w) interpretacji początków chrześcijaństwa* [Recent Canons (in) the Interpretation of the Origins of Christianity], “Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne” 45/1 (2012), pp. 65–83, especially p. 69.

that this role is fulfilled by “the dialogue between God and man.”<sup>173</sup> Thus, we can see that the referenced text leads the reader away from the analysis of the biblical macro-text to the theological event of communication, the form and nature of which is Revelation. This continuum is set as its foundation on a juxtaposition of diachronic and synchronic methods (Laurentin’s optics, but enriched by the knowledge of the development of different methodologies in biblical studies in the twenty years 1985–2005). Malina continued his reflection on theological exegesis in his article *Quid sit anima theologiae*,<sup>174</sup> in which he focused on clarifying the question of the relationship between theology and scientific exegetical study. This strand of his reflection closes with an article which is a development of a paper delivered on 16 November 2011 in Kraków at the session dedicated to *Verbum Domini*.<sup>175</sup> He refers to the appeal contained in the exhortation to develop a theological exegetical method. He begins by presenting an exegesis that does not claim to be theological. He identifies it with the work of Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834), especially with his concept of hermeneutics, in which general hermeneutics subsumed biblical hermeneutics.<sup>176</sup> In exegetical practice, this means that the interpreter of the biblical text has no methodological mandate to conduct research as a person of faith. The methodological exclusion of a faith perspective would in theory be supposed to be supplemented by the approach of a theologian using the results of exegetical work. In practice, however, this is impossible because of the dichotomy of exegesis and theology adopted in the Enlightenment, which cannot mutually relate since exegesis asks about the meaning of biblical texts at different stages of its formation and theology asks about the meaning given to them by God.<sup>177</sup> Malina undermines the understanding of religion that refers to Schleiermacher and his experiential conception of the object of cognition and interpretation,<sup>178</sup> while he explicitly postulates that the supernatural reality to

<sup>173</sup> A. Malina, *Egzegeza w kontekście*, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>174</sup> A. Malina, *Quid sit anima theologiae*, [in:] *Wierność i aggiornamento. Wokół recepcji Soboru Watykańskiego II* [Fidelity and Aggiornamento. Around the Reception of the Second Vatican Council], ed. G. Kucza, Katowice 2006, pp. 74–86.

<sup>175</sup> A. Malina, *Egzegeza teologiczna Biblii* [Theological Exegesis of the Bible], [in:] *Hermeneutyka Pisma Świętego w Kościele. Wokół adhortacji Verbum Domini Benedykta XVI o Słowie Bożym w życiu i misji Kościoła* [Hermeneutics of Scripture in the Church. Around the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* by Benedict XVI on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church], eds. R. Pindel, S. Jędrzejewski, Kraków 2012, pp. 37–54.

<sup>176</sup> A. Malina, *Egzegeza teologiczna Biblii*, op. cit., pp. 39–42.

<sup>177</sup> A. Malina, *Egzegeza teologiczna Biblii*, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>178</sup> I. Mädler, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: zmysł i smak nieskończoności* [Friedrich Schleiermacher: Sense and Taste of the Infinite], [in:] *Filozofia religii. Od Schleiermachera do Eco*

which the believing Bible scholar refers should be considered a unique and at the same time objective fact.<sup>179</sup> He concludes his reflection by stating the necessity of presumptions that are appropriate “for the nature of the object under study,” that is, a biblical hermeneutics as Ricœur understood it. We refer first of all to the hermeneutic period in the thought of the French philosopher, in which “the issue of the text is the object of hermeneutics.”<sup>180</sup> This “issue of the text” constitutes faith understood in opposition to any psychologising reduction.<sup>181</sup> It is not related to the psychological fiction of the recipient, that is, the interpreter of the text. It is the text, according to Ricœur, that interprets itself by reference to its own tradition.<sup>182</sup> Ricœur defines the tradition by reference to the work of Werner H. Schmidt (1935–) on the origin and development of the Priestly source (P), especially in terms of Gen 1:1–2:4a.<sup>183</sup> This exegete presents the text of the poetic narrative of the creation of the world as the result of the internal growth of the theme and its framing. Ricœur therefore draws attention to the dynamics of the formation of meaning (i.e. the process of interpretation) in the text itself, in which the text expresses itself:<sup>184</sup> the reality described anew is not an arbitrary reality, but a reality belonging to the world of the reader.<sup>185</sup>

In biblical exegesis, the hermeneutic circle is understood as the interplay between the interpretation of the text and the self-understanding of the subject interpreting that text, which is resolved in the foundational role of the text in relation to the community, i.e. a form of asymmetry in the text-community relationship: “faith is nothing other than the confession of this asymmetry.”<sup>186</sup> This is how, on the ground of a philosophical analysis of the interpretative

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[Philosophy of Religion. From Schleiermacher to Eco], eds. V. Drehsen, W. Gräß, B. Weyel, transl. L. Łysień, Kraków 2008, pp. 11–18, especially p. 14.

<sup>179</sup> A. Malina, *Egzegeza teologiczna Biblii*, op. cit., pp. 51 and 53.

<sup>180</sup> P. Ricœur, *Naming God*, [in:] *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, transl. D. Pellauer, Minneapolis, MN 1995, p. 221; cf. P. Ricœur, *Nazwać Boga*, transl. R. Grzywacz, Kraków 2011, p. 53.

<sup>181</sup> P. Ricœur, *Nazwać Boga*, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>182</sup> P. Ricœur, *Egzegeza i hermeneutyka* [Exegesis and Hermeneutics], transl. S. Cichowicz, [in:] P. Ricœur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie* [Existence and Hermeneutics: Treatises on Method], Warszawa 2003, pp. 348–359, especially p. 356.

<sup>183</sup> W.H. Schmidt, *Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964, pp. 160–191.

<sup>184</sup> P. Ricœur, *Egzegeza i hermeneutyka*, op. cit., pp. 356–357.

<sup>185</sup> P. Ricœur, *Refleksja dokonana. Autobiografia intelektualna* [Reflection Made: Intellectual Autobiography], transl. P. Bobowska-Nastarzewska, Kęty 2005, p. 31.

<sup>186</sup> A. LaCocque, P. Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, transl. D. Pellauer, Chicago–London 1998, p. xvii; cf. A. LaCocque, P. Ricœur, *Przedmowa* [Preface], [in:] A. LaCocque, P. Ricœur, *Mysleć biblijnie* [Thinking Biblically], transl. E. Mukoid, M. Tarnowska, Kraków 2003, pp. 5–16, especially pp. 13–14.

process, we can arrive at what Malina does not elaborate: how to justify his postulate of the objectification of faith in the revealing God and the content of this revelation. God, in Ricœur's understanding, is a biblical figure who speaks to us,<sup>187</sup> but it is not a fictional character of some literary text, but an authoritative voice in relation to which the recipient (the reading community) self-identifies, defines its existence. "In the act of speaking, the subject recognises itself in the medium of speech, marking reality by means of signs and at the same time itself as belonging to a symbolic universe."<sup>188</sup> We arrive at this situation, in which the subject interpreting Scripture defines himself vis-à-vis God revealing himself in the written text, by going through the experience of reading the concrete semantic units of the biblical text as building the unity of the biblical *corpus*.<sup>189</sup> In this way, building on Ricœur's work, we can broaden the Husserlian horizon that boils down to the object-subject relationship, without rejecting the conceptual and methodological apparatus developed by Husserl<sup>190</sup> that makes possible the turn towards the thing, towards the object in biblical exegesis.

A relatively recent opinion in the discussion on the mutual relationship of methods in biblical and theological research was voiced by Marcin Kowalski (1977-).<sup>191</sup> He proposed to the community of dogmatic theologians a common methodological platform (socio-rhetorical criticism) as, on the one hand, useful, in his view, also in dogmatic theology, and, on the other hand, providing guidance for the formation of the theological-dogmatic hermeneutics needed for

<sup>187</sup> P. Colin, *Herméneutique et philosophie réflexive*, [in:] Paul Ricœur, *Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, eds. J. Greisch, R. Kearney, Paris 1991, pp. 15–35, esp. 35.

<sup>188</sup> A. Warmbier, *Tożsamość, narracja i hermeneutyka siebie. Paula Ricœur'a filozofia człowieka* [Identity, Narrative and the Hermeneutics of the Self. Paul Ricœur's Philosophy of Man], Kraków 2018, p. 233.

<sup>189</sup> A. LaCocque, P. Ricœur, *Przedmowa*, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>190</sup> P. Ricœur, *The Later Wittgenstein and the Later Husserl on Language*, "Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies" 5/1 (2014), pp. 28–48; cf. P. Ricœur, *Husserl i Wittgenstein o języku* [Husserl and Wittgenstein on Language], transl. M. Drwięga, "Principia" 16–17 (1996–1997), pp. 59–69; A. Przyłębski, *Znaczenie fenomenologii Husserla dla hermeneutyki* [The Significance of Husserl's Phenomenology for Hermeneutics], "Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria" 18/4 (2009), pp. 305–318, especially pp. 313–316.

<sup>191</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie. Wyzwania i implikacje płynące z metodologicznego rozwoju nauk biblijnych i teologii systematycznej* [Separation – Yes, Divorce – No. Challenges and Implications Flowing from the Methodological Development of Biblical Sciences and Systematic Theology], [in:] *Dogmat i metoda. Wprowadzenie do badań interdyscyplinarnych w teologii dogmatycznej* [Dogma and Method. Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research in Dogmatic Theology], ed. R.J. Woźniak, Kraków 2021, pp. 537–569.

the assimilation of data from biblical activities.<sup>192</sup> It assumes that a separation of dogmatic theology and exegesis is necessary, but that dialogue and cooperation between the two is possible and necessary. This is the result of an earlier assumption, the same one that emerges in Joseph Ratzinger's reflection approving the indispensability of the historical-critical method as a tool; Ratzinger, seeing the main problem in the fact that the meaning of Scripture is reduced to the past, emphasises the indispensability of this method, which he motivates by the structure of Christian faith based on the historical fact of the Incarnation.<sup>193</sup> Pablo Blanco Sarto (1964–) is probably right when he points out that the formation of the German theologian's reflection on the nature and methods of exegesis came to life under the influence of the Protestant world.<sup>194</sup> As far as the role of historical criticism is concerned, Kowalski probably goes a little

<sup>192</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie...*, op. cit., p. 559.

<sup>193</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, transl. A.J. Walker, New York 2007, pp. XV–XVI; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, vol. 1: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia*, transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2007, pp. 8–9. cf. M.M. Waldstein, *The Self-Critique of the Historical-Critical Method: Cardinal Ratzinger's Erasmus Lecture*, "Modern Theology" 28/4 (2012), pp. 732–747; S. Zatwardnicki, *Aprioryczne założenia i filozoficzne uwarunkowania metody historyczno-krytycznej według Benedykta XVI* [A-priori Assumptions and Philosophical Influence of the Historical-Critical Method According to Benedict XVI], "Scriptura Sacra" 16 (2012), pp. 141–164; S. Zatwardnicki, *Pismo Święte czytane w Kościele duszą teologii. Benedykta XVI troska o stan katolickiej egzegezy* [The Holy Scripture Read in the Church as the Soul of Theology. Benedict XVI's Concern about the State of the Catholic Exegesis], "Teologia w Polsce" 7/2 (2013), pp. 173–188; S. Zatwardnicki, *Metoda historyczno-krytyczna a hermeneutyka wiary. Propozycja syntezy w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera (Benedykta XVI)* [Historical-Critical Method a Hermeneutics of Faith. A Proposal for a Synthesis according to Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)], "Ateneum Kapłańskie" 162/1 (2014), pp. 74–94; S. Zatwardnicki, *Granice metody historyczno-krytycznej w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera (Benedykta XVI)* [Limitations of the Historical-Critical Method According to Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)], "Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny" 67/2 (2014), pp. 143–165; S. Zatwardnicki, *Apostazja współczesnej egzegezy. Benedykt XVI o niewystarczalności metody historyczno-krytycznej* [Apostasy of Modern Exegesis. Benedict XVI on the Insufficiency of the Historical-Critical Method], "Teologia i Człowiek" 28/4 (2014), pp. 185–204; I.G. Ajibola, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Hermeneutics for Christians Faith Enhancement: An Appraisal*, "Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies" 5/2 (2015), pp. 97–113; B. Pitre, *Verbum Domini and Historical-Critical Exegesis*, [in:] *Verbum Domini and Complementarity of Exegesis and Theology*, ed. S. Carl, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, pp. 26–40.

<sup>194</sup> P. Blanco Sarto, *Mysł teologiczna Josepha Ratzingera* [Theological Thought of Joseph Ratzinger], "Teologia w Polsce" 7/2 (2013), pp. 23–43, especially pp. 26–27. However, even the influence of Romano Guardini on Ratzinger should be taken into account, see G. Bachanek, *The Rationality of Faith: Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger*, "Colleganea Theologica" 90/5 (2020), pp. 607–620, especially p. 614.

further than Ratzinger, since he considers the historical method as 'governing' theology if it wants to aspire to the status of a scientific discipline.<sup>195</sup> Kowalski's postulates thus remain rather limited, since they focus on the conditions for the interchangeable use of methods between biblical studies and dogmatic theology and the development of a hermeneutic of analogies between the two (taking into account the differences and specificities of the disciplines).<sup>196</sup> It is a minimalist programme, abandoning the search for an exegetical method that will have within its purview the theological message of the biblical text. One may think that this is the fruit of a negative evaluation of the methodological approach of Karl Barth (1886–1968), whose theology Kowalski describes after Anthony C. Thiselton (1937–2023)<sup>197</sup> as a Christological exegesis of the biblical text.<sup>198</sup> The Swiss dogmatist points to the need to overcome the paradigm derived from Schleiermacher equating religion with religious experience. Barth counters it with the assumption that God's action takes precedence over human experience and that the content of Scripture is God's thought about man. This type of thinking was highly influential in shaping the theology of Revelation at the Second Vatican Council, but met with criticism from, for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, who accused him of a narrow and coercive approach to Revelation, in which there was no room for the autonomy of nature as a starting point for the theological knowledge of God.<sup>199</sup> Kowalski, however, does not develop this critique of von Balthasar and his appreciation of the natural theology, but embeds the *iunctim* of biblical and systematic theology in the Church.<sup>200</sup> In this way, he remains faithful to his presuppositions, since he leaves biblical research of an exegetical nature outside the sphere of this *iunctim*, where there is room for an ecclesiastical hermeneutics that makes it possible to apply the fruits of biblical research to the reality of the contemporary world.<sup>201</sup>

After a review of the methodological proposals linking theology and biblical studies at the level of methodology put forward in the post-conciliar period, although the list is obviously not complete, one may be tempted to formulate

<sup>195</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie...*, op. cit., p. 565.

<sup>196</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie...*, op. cit., pp. 561–568. As his inspiration Kowalski points to the article by J.B. Green, *Scripture and Theology. Uniting the Two So Long Divided*, [in:] *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, eds. J.B. Green, M. Turner, Grand Rapids, MI 2000, pp. 23–43.

<sup>197</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, Grand Rapids, MI 2009, p. 187.

<sup>198</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie...*, op. cit., p. 563.

<sup>199</sup> T.G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, New York–London 2005, pp. 223–233.

<sup>200</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie...*, op. cit., p. 566.

<sup>201</sup> M. Kowalski, *Separacja – tak, rozwód – nie...*, op. cit., pp. 567–568.

some conclusions, which themselves may constitute a set of presuppositions for theological exegetical method. Already in his doctoral thesis published in 1955, Raymond E. Brown, writing about the and its role in the interpretation of Scripture, set out clear criteria for it to be considered embedded in the field of critical research. Firstly, *sensus plenior* must be derived from the literal sense, and secondly, it must be embedded in the economy of salvation attested in the interpretive tradition. As far as the Old Testament texts are concerned, this tradition is constituted by: the New Testament, patristic exegesis, the Magisterium of the Church, the liturgy and (which he admits with some hesitation) the opinion of theologians.<sup>202</sup> The existence of a fuller sense in a text is suggested, according to Brown, by: 1) exaggeration in the description of the human capacity when taken literally, 2) incompatibility with the context of some narrative (“an element of brusqueness or strangeness in an otherwise simple narrative,” 3) exaggerated emphasis (hyperbole) of some element of the narrative, 4) a messianic import on second-level texts (which are transcriptions of earlier texts, such as 1–2 Kings, Ezra).<sup>203</sup> These are criteria and indications that very much narrow the category of *sensus plenior*. Taken *à la lettre* they reduce the category to the history of textual influence and the history of exegesis. However, they can provide a starting point for developing a theological exegesis with a Christological orientation. They provide a good counterbalance to attempts to reactivate historical forms of such exegesis (allegorism, typology).<sup>204</sup> In the apologia presented by Paul C. Boles, Origen’s allegory is a tool that can be used to concretise (incarnate) in history beyond the history of revelation. In his polemic with Daniel Boyarin he claimed that the understanding of history in Origen goes further, linking the historical reference of the text, the historical reality of the reader/hearer and the historical descent of the Logos into humanity.<sup>205</sup> Leroy A. Huizenga of the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, seeks a way to link allegorizing interpretation with the intertextual explorations of contemporary exegesis.<sup>206</sup> This exegete approaches the exegetical

<sup>202</sup> R.E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*, Baltimore, MD 1955, pp. 145–146. See R.E. Brown, ‘*The Sensus Plenior in the Last Ten Years*’, “*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*” 25/3 (1963), pp. 262–285; M.W.I. Dunn, *Raymond Brown and the sensus plenior Interpretation of the Bible*, “*Studies in Religion*” 36/3–4 (2007), pp. 531–551.

<sup>203</sup> R.E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*, op. cit., pp. 146–147.

<sup>204</sup> P.B. Decok, *Allegorising: The Revelation of an Old Method of Interpretation*, “*Acta Theologica Supplementum 11*” 28 (2008), pp. 1–19.

<sup>205</sup> P.C. Boles, *Allegory as Embodiment: The Function of History in Origen’s Genesis Homily*, “*Journal of Theological Interpretation*” 10/1 (2016), pp. 87–101, especially p. 100.

<sup>206</sup> L.A. Huizenga, *The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory*, “*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*” 38/1 (2015), pp. 17–35, especially pp. 31–32.



tradition of the ancient Church with a mixture of admiration and distrust. He delights in the boldness of thought of the exegetes of the patristic era, but he also harbours a suspicion that, in following this method, it is necessary to go beyond the common-sense boundaries outlined by Brown, and to bend the text to the framework of typology. From the perspective of the analyses of VD 21, we can say that the tacit presence of the Word, by bringing us into the horizon of interpretation, frees us from this fear.

When Scripture is understood as an object (historical, linguistic, literary, etc.) subjected to reflection carried out within the framework of the model of the three-stage reduction,<sup>207</sup> then it will become apparent, as Sokolowski postulated, that it is reduced to an object that is identified with the *verbum abbreviatum* in its Christological view as introduced by Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini. Silentium Dei*, understood as the fullness of Father-Son communication that passes through and transcends language, completes this picture of the object of biblical exegesis and reveals its supralinguistic nature. However, it does not do so in a way that invalidates linguistic mediation or subtracts from its dimension of factuality. Language refers back to history, social ties and the institutions in which these are realised. In this sense, biblical exegesis necessarily needs research into the factuality of the text. However, this does not change the general situation. From the perspective of the phenomenological view, we do not arrive, by way of this research, at the question of the meaning and significance of the text as a canonical mega-whole (Scripture), nor of the biblical books (Scriptures) or their constituent elements. We are speaking here of relatively autonomous units in any sense: units identified in historical-critical studies, semantic units in a structural sense, rhetorical compositional units, narrative units or others. In the case of such relatively merely autonomous units with an autonomous sense or meaning, one cannot speak of their own sense. This is because the sense must have reference to the actual totality enjoying the autonomy of the literary work. Of course, in special situations, such as the psalms, the actual autonomy of the individual psalms must be taken into account, not just that of the Psalms. In the case of the Book of Lamentations, on the other hand, there must be a serious discussion of the level of autonomy of the individual works. There are, in fact, more such special situations, and these are cited only by way of example. The general principle must be respect for the biblical text, taking into account its internal diversity, which does not allow for a scheme of research activities to be too easily presented as applicable to all of Scripture.

<sup>207</sup> E. Coreth, P. Ehlen, G. Haeffner, F. Ricken, *Filozofia XX wieku* [Philosophy of the 20th Century], transl. M.L. Kalinowski, Kęty 2004, pp. 11–17.

Such diverse cognitive activities are indispensable at the level for which they are appropriate. Without them, making sense of the whole of Scripture and individual Scriptures would be based on *a priori* assumptions arising from attributing to the whole the characteristics of some part of that whole. Such approaches must be rejected because they are *a priori*, and occur at the level of research that is appropriate to deductive processes (where they can be carried out) and inductive processes (where some form of generalisation must be supported). What we call “methods and approaches” in the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* can be applied to different forms in the biblical text, depending on the history of the particular text and its linguistic and literary features, its interaction with other texts (from within and outside the biblical corpus). The method whose aim is to reveal the meaning and significance of Scripture and the Writings, should be continued until the meaning and significance is worked out. In this sense, in biblical studies we have only one method, which is comprehensive and inclusive.<sup>208</sup> It is not necessarily bound to phenomenological assumptions if we find another way or refine the one suggested in this article. We have spoken of approaches to the text as developed in Christian antiquity: one might mention by way of example the proof “from Scripture”<sup>209</sup> in the works of St Anselm of Canterbury.

In the preface to the *Monologion*, Anselm stated that he adopted such a method “that nothing in Scripture should be urged on the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should, in an unadorned style, with common proofs and with a simple argument.”<sup>210</sup> On this path he concludes that “[t]his Word itself is not the likeness (*non esse ipsorum similitudinem*) of created beings, but

<sup>208</sup> This is a radically different approach from the one based on the distinction between Revelation in history and Revelation in the text postulated by Artur Sanecki (*Współczesna lektura Biblii: między historią a teologią* [Contemporary Reading of the Bible: Between History and Theology], [in:] *Biblia i kultura – dialog czy konflikt?* [Bible and Culture – Dialogue or Conflict?], eds. R. Pindel, S. Jędrzejewski, Series: Hermeneutica et Judaica 1, Kraków 2008, pp. 37–55, especially p. 54) as requiring a radically different methodological approach in biblical studies.

<sup>209</sup> A.P. Stefańczyk, *Wprowadzenie* [Introduction], [in:] Anselm of Canterbury, *O prawdzie. O wolności woli. O upadku diabła* [On Truth. On Freedom of the Will. On the Fall of the Devil], transl. A.P. Stefańczyk, Kęty 2011, pp. 5–42, especially p. 14.

<sup>210</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium and Monologium*, transl. S.N. Deane, [s.l.] 2006, p. 25, <https://www.saintsbooks.net/books/St.%20Anselm%20of%20Canterbury%20-%20Proslogium%20and%20Monologium.pdf> [access: 16.06.2024]; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *Monologion. Proslogion*, transl. T. Włodarczyk, Warszawa 1992, p. 3.

the reality of their being (*veram simplicemque essentiam*), while created beings are a kind of likeness of reality" (*Monologion* 31).<sup>211</sup> Anselm sees in the word a thought-object, the effect of an intellectual process that we might call a form of pre-phenomenological reduction, whose first subject is God, the "supreme Spirit" who "is thus eternally mindful of himself, and conceives of himself after the likeness of a rational mind" (*Monologion* 32).<sup>212</sup> In the same way, in the Introduction to *Cur Deus homo*, his starting point is "as if nothing were known of Christ [...] by plain reasoning" (*remoto Christo*).<sup>213</sup> However, in view of the fact that the word (*verbum*) is, for Anselm, the "expression, through which all things were created" (*locutione, per quam facta sunt omnia, Monologion* 29).<sup>214</sup> From the speech act in the process of meditation (reduction), Anselm thus arrives at a mental being in which the true and simple essence of God can be found. In *On Truth* 1, the student poses the problem of whether the Supreme Truth described by Anselm in *Monologion* 18<sup>215</sup> can be identified with God.<sup>216</sup> This leads to the need to pose the question of truth in a statement (*veritas in enuntiatione*) that is true not in terms of factuality (signifying "what is"), but rectitude/correctness (*rectitudo, On Truth* 2).<sup>217</sup> Therefore, in dialogues in which truth is defined as rectitude/correctness (*rectitudo*) comprehensible by the mind alone (*mente sola*),<sup>218</sup> it refers to evidence from Scripture. This definition of the

<sup>211</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium and Monologium*, op. cit., p. 55; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *Monologion...*, op. cit., p. 76 (the translation has been modified to be closer to the original).

<sup>212</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium and Monologium*, op. cit., p. 57; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *Monologion...*, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>213</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*, transl. S.N. Deane, [s.l.] 2005, p. 7; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *O wcieleniu. Wybór pism* [On the Incarnation. Selected Writings], transl. A. Roslan, Poznań 2006, p. 47. Cf. E.I. Zieliński, *Wiara poszukująca zrozumienia: św. Anzelm z Aosty* [Faith Seeking Understanding: St Anselm of Aosta], [in:] *Przewodnik filozofii średniowiecznej. Od św. Augustyna do Joachima z Fiore* [A Guide to Medieval Philosophy: From St Augustine to Joachim of Fiore], ed. A. Kijewska, Kraków 2012, pp. 137–154, especially p. 151.

<sup>214</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium and Monologium*, op. cit., p. 54; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *Monologion...*, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>215</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion...*, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>216</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues: On Truth, On Freedom of Choice, On the Fall of the Devil*, transl. T. Williams, Indianapolis, IN 2002, p. 3; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *O prawdzie. O wolności woli. O upadku diabła*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>217</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues...*, op. cit., p. 6; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *O prawdzie. O wolności woli. O upadku diabła*, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>218</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues...*, op. cit., pp. 20, 27; cf. Anselm z Canterbury, *O prawdzie. O wolności woli. O upadku diabła*, op. cit., pp. 13, 90, 105. It does not seem acceptable to interpret this *rectitudo* as "the conformity of mind and revealed

truth of an utterance was formulated for the purpose of an analysis that is not a logical meditation on a concept, but an analysis of the text of Scripture and the identification of God with truth (John 14:6).<sup>219</sup> Coloman É. Viola points out that this method stems from the embedding of all the issues taught in monastic schools concerning the *sacra pagina*.<sup>220</sup> Thus, in the didactic process, Anselm developed a model of exegesis of the biblical text in which the interpretative tools he was familiar with (philosophical logical-transcendental analysis) lead to the capture of the true and simple essence of God. It is therefore possible to base the methodological approach that is the subject matter of our research on different starting points, which would, however, require drawing a long line connecting ancient or medieval proposals with current epistemology and methodology. We have therefore taken phenomenology as our starting point. Anselm's thought was recalled for a historical reason: the problem of theological exegetical method is set at the very beginning of the medieval intertwining of philosophy, exegesis and theology.

## Summary

The central problem posed in this study was to determine the role played by the Christologically understood *Verbum abbreviatum*, which Pope Benedict XVI introduced in the Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, in shaping the concept of the object of theological exegesis. This, in turn, became the starting point for the search for an answer to the question of what exegetical method we will be able to call theological. We have tried to show that such an exegesis must have a formal theological object, which is Scripture understood personally and not objectively, as is often, not to say famously, the case in exegetical methodological reflection. In the process of looking at Scripture phenomenologically, we see the possibility of reducing it to a Christological concept embedded in Scripture,

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truth" (T. Grzesik, *Anselm z Canterbury*, Warszawa 2004, p. 59). It seems a result of the conviction that Anselm regarded faith as a matter of subjective convictions, rather than a deposit objectified in Revelation (cf. e.g. B. Burlikowski, *Anselm z Aosty próba racjonalizacji wiary* [Anselm of Aosta's Attempt to Rationalise Faith], Warszawa 1971, pp. 189–197). This philosopher does not provide examples of reasoning of this kind not to spoil the intention of rational justification of faith that he pursued consistently throughout his work.

<sup>219</sup> A.P. Stefańczyk, *Wprowadzenie*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>220</sup> C.É. Viola, *Anselm z Aosty. Wiara i szukanie zrozumienia* [Anselm of Aosta. Faith and the Search for Understanding], transl. E.I. Zieliński, Lublin 2009, p. 20.

such as *Verbum abbreviatum*. This notion is not the only one that could fulfil this role, but following Benedict XVI, it can be considered to fulfil the full task of linking the text of the Bible to the reality of faith and the religious bond that objectifies what is often considered the content of the subjective experiences and options (ideological, worldview) of the exegete. Thanks to the inspiration drawn by exegetes from Ricœur's hermeneutics, the question of reference to Christ speaking in Scripture and through Scripture is transferred to the interpretive subject and his self-understanding. In the model presented here, the text is left the role of reference point for the subject's self-determination on the way to the Word. Understanding the text involves everything, but also exclusively what the text reveals. All the problems of the text should be solved to the extent of the possibilities provided to researchers by the various fields of knowledge. The types of research cited earlier create a wide range of issues and research methods adequate to their solution, but which are not specific to the methodological *instrumentarium* of exegesis. If we are to speak of a peculiar relay race in which the study of the Bible is handed over like a baton marking the continuity of a team's relay race, its transmission does not take place between the exegete studying the Bible with methods borrowed from the empirical sciences, the humanities, communication, literature, etc., and the theologian. Rather, it is a relay in which the results of the study of the biblical text pass from the hands of historians, sociologists or literary scholars into the hands of those who are concerned with the interpretation of Scripture, that is, of the book in which and through which God speaks to man and to the community. In order to give this exegesis the possibility of inscribing itself in theology, or at least laying the foundations of a dialogue between the two, it is necessary to exclude from it contexts and ideologies that do not inscribe themselves in the theology of revelation, that place themselves outside the cognitive self-giving of God to man.

Benedict XVI's thought refers back to the Christology of the Logos<sup>221</sup>: incarnate and living for ever. Without the question of the living and saving Jesus Christ in the Church, exegesis is left with no other way of making the fruits of its labour valid for the readers of the Bible than some ideology that actualises the message of the text in the world of the reader. The alternative to this often uncritical adaptation of the content of our exegetical analyses to our world is

<sup>221</sup> A very interesting approach to the question of the Logos, bringing Ratzinger closer to considerations starting from a philosophical approach to mathematics, was presented by Małgorzata Pagacz (*Mathematics as a Way Towards the Creative Logos: Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Understanding of Scientificity*, "Collectanea Theologica" 92/2 [2022], pp. 107–130).

to ask: “Rabbi, where are you staying?” (cf. John 1:38), asked by a contemporary disciple in relation to Christ’s dwelling in today’s world, and pointing to the embedding of exegetical work in the mission of preaching the gospel of Jesus the Saviour, the same yesterday and today (cf. Heb 13:8) and forever new, because He is the newness of the world he makes new (cf. Rev 21:5).

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## Jesus as *hilastērion*: The Aspect of Propitiation in St Thomas Aquinas' Commentaries and Joseph Ratzinger's Writings

Jezus jako *hilastērion*.

Motyw przebłagania według komentarzy św. Tomasza z Akwinu  
i pism Josepha Ratzingera

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to explore the aspect of propitiation (*hilastērion*) present in St. Thomas Aquinas' and Joseph Ratzinger's writings and to show it against the background of the whole soteriological reflections of both theologians, as well as to emphasise the novelty of their soteriology. In the first part, the author discusses the thought of St Thomas, accentuating the systematic teaching on salvation in *Summa theologiae*. Drawing on Aquinas' *Commentaries*, the author then goes on to present Jesus as propitiation, in whose blood the mystery of redemption is accomplished. In the second part of the article, analysing Joseph Ratzinger's writings, key soteriological terms and the biblical word *hilastērion* are explained. The study offers the following conclusions: the idea of propitiation (*hilastērion*) in *Commentaries* complements the whole of Thomas' soteriology demonstrated in *Summa theologiae*. On the other hand, in Ratzinger's writings the soteriological thought takes no systematic form, yet the aspect of *hilastērion* becomes for Joseph Ratzinger a symbol of the realisation of redemption.

**KEYWORDS:** *hilastērion*, mercy seat, propitiation/atonement, St Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Ratzinger, soteriology, redemption, Aquinas' biblical commentaries, soteriology in *Summa theologiae*

**ABSTRAKT:** Celem autora artykułu jest przedstawienie motywu przebłagania (*hilastērion*) obecnego u św. Tomasza z Akwinu i Josepha Ratzingera oraz ukazanie go na tle całości rozważań soteriologicznych obu teologów, a także zaakcentowanie oryginalności ich soteriologii. W pierwszej części autor zajął się myślą św. Tomasza, zwracając uwagę na systematyczny wykład dotyczący zbawienia obecny na kartach

*Sumy teologii*. Następnie, odwołując się do *Komentarzy* Akwinaty, ukazał Jezusa jako *przebłagalnika*, w którego krwi dokonuje się tajemnica odkupienia. W drugiej części artykułu, analizując pisma Josepha Ratzingera, przedstawił kluczowe terminy soteriologiczne oraz dokonał interpretacji biblijnego słowa *hilastērion*. Przeprowadzone badania pozwalają na wyciągnięcie następujących konkluzji: idea przebłagania (*hilastērion*) obecna w *Komentarzach* współgra z całością soteriologii Tomasza zawartą w *Summa theologiae*. Z kolei myśl soteriologiczna Ratzingera nie przybiera wprawdzie postaci systematycznej, jednak motyw *hilastērionu* staje się dla niemieckiego teologa symbolem realizacji odkupienia.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *hilastērion*, przebłaganie, św. Tomasz z Akwinu, Joseph Ratzinger, soteriologia, odkupienie, komentarze biblijne Akwinaty, soteriologia *Summa theologiae*

## Introduction

The Greek term *hilastērion*<sup>1</sup> (Hebrew *kapporeth*<sup>2</sup>) means the mercy seat, the lid covering the Ark of the Covenant; it also denotes propitiation. For the Old Testament worship, it was one of the key objects in the temple over which Yahweh appeared in the cloud: “the point of contact’ between God and man, the place of the mysterious presence of the Most High – God became as close here as was possible in the created world.”<sup>3</sup> The object itself played a key role on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*. Then the priest sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of animals that had previously been offered in sacrifice, “instead of men deserving death.”<sup>4</sup> In the Letter to the Romans, St Paul applied this very term to Jesus, calling him *hilastērion* “propitiation/atonement” (Rom 3:23–26a).<sup>5</sup> It is this very aspect that Joseph Ratzinger drew on in his own vision of soteriology. Ratzinger also pointed to Chapter 10 of the Letter to the

<sup>1</sup> See *Hilastērion*, [in:] W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago–London 1958, pp. 375–376.

<sup>2</sup> See *Kapporeth*, [in:] *Wielki słownik hebrajsko-polski i aramejsko-polski Starego Testamentu* [The Great Hebrew-Polish and Aramaic-Polish Dictionary of the Old Testament], vol. 1, eds. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J.J. Stamm, Warszawa 2001, p. 467.

<sup>3</sup> J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, vol. 2, Katowice 2012, pp. 46–47. The motif of *hilastērion* is brought out and commented on in the second volume of the monograph dedicated to Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI by Jerzy Szymik, a Silesian theologian and poet (ibidem, pp. 31–51); this is also the title of one of the volumes of his poems; see J. Szymik, *Hilastērion. Wiersze z lat 2009–2014* [Hilastērion. Poems from 2009–2014], Katowice 2014.

<sup>4</sup> J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> C.K. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary. New Testament*, 2014, p. 432 (Kindle); cf. C.K. Keener, *Komentarz historyczno-kulturowy do Nowego Testamentu*, transl. Z. Kościuk, Warszawa 2000, pp. 318–319.

Hebrews as a key passage in the perspective of the new worship and the question of propitiation/atonement understood as one of the elements of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

Extending the analysis by the most recent translations of St Thomas' commentaries on the letters to the Romans and Hebrews, this article is intended to show the idea of *hilastērion* by juxtaposing the thought of Aquinas and Ratzinger in a soteriological perspective. Ratzinger's text, showing the Old Testament rite in the light of the Paschal events, was the immediate inspiration for my research on this theme. The importance of the aspect and its topicality,<sup>7</sup> is the second reason for taking up the issue. Thomas Aquinas is quoted alongside Ratzinger due to the fact that Aquinas addressed this question in his extensive and multifaceted soteriology.

The aim of this article is then, firstly, to present the aspect of propitiation present in Thomas Aquinas' and Joseph Ratzinger's writings; secondly, to show it against the background of the soteriological considerations of both theologians; thirdly, to emphasise the novelty of their soteriology.

It should be noted that though the whole teaching on salvation and redemption in the New Testament texts is copious and multifaceted,<sup>8</sup> theology

<sup>6</sup> C.K. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary...*, op. cit., p. 708 (Kindle); cf. C.K. Keener, *Komentarz historyczno-kulturowy do Nowego Testamentu*, op. cit., pp. 518–522.

<sup>7</sup> The *status quaestionis* of the issue under study points primarily to exegetical and biblical works; for an example see D.P. Bailey, *Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of Hilastērion in Romans 3:25*, PhD Thesis, Apollo – University of Cambridge Repository 1999, <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/5e62c841-fce8-49ba-80e2-55feed1dbf38> [access: 17.02.2024]; M. Tiwald, *Christ as Hilastērion (Rom 3:25). Pauline Theology on the Day of Atonement in the Mirror of Early Jewish Thought*, [in:] *The Day of Atonement. Its Interpretations in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions*, eds. T. Hieke, T. Nicklas, Leiden 2012, pp. 189–209; A. Weiß, *Christus Jesus als Weiheschenk oder Sühnemal? Anmerkungen zu einer neueren Deutung von hilastērion (Röm 3,25) samt einer Liste der epigraphischen Belege*, "Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft" 105/2 (2014), pp. 294–302; V. Zywiets, *Representing the government of God: Christ as the hilastērion in Romans 3:25*, Master of Arts, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 2016.

<sup>8</sup> See P. Artemiuk (ed.), *Wiarygodność chrześcijańskiego orędzia zbawienia* [Credibility of the Christian Message of Salvation], Płock 2015; M. Paluch, *Traktat o zbawieniu* [A Treatise on Salvation], [in:] J. Szymik, M. Paluch, *Traktat o Bogu Jedynym. Traktat o zbawieniu*, Warszawa 2006, p. 235. For soteriological terminology in Scripture see J. Kudasiewicz, *Biblia księgą zbawienia* [Bible as the Book of Salvation], [in:] *Biblia o odkupieniu* [Bible on Redemption], ed. R. Rubinkiewicz, Lublin 2000, pp. 16–22. Helmut Hoping states that there is no shortage of attempts in theology that treat soteriology superordinately; in this way Christology becomes a function of soteriology; cf. H. Hoping, *Einführung in die Christologie*, Darmstadt 2004, pp. 19–22.

has not developed one soteriological concept, so the variations in this matter are discernible even in the typology of soteriological models.<sup>9</sup>

## Thomas Aquinas' understanding of propitiation

Aquinas' soteriology has been described as a well-balanced synthesis,<sup>10</sup> outstanding in its richness and multiplicity. In his search for new ways in soteriology, St Thomas, as Jean-Pierre Torrell put it, "without renouncing the heritage of

<sup>9</sup> See T. Dola, *Problem komplementarności współczesnych modeli soteriologicznych* [The Problem of Complementarity of Modern Soteriological Models], Opole 1994, pp. 6–7; for example, Waclaw Hryniewicz distinguishes two models: descending and ascending. The former "emphasises the initiative of God himself," while the latter "emphasises the role of Christ's human nature, united in solidarity with all men and acting on their behalf"; W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha. Zarys chrześcijańskiej teologii paschalnej* [Christ our Passover. An Outline of Christian Paschal Theology], vol. 1, Lublin 1987, p. 289; while Gustav Aulén advocates a tripartite typology, where the criterion is the figure of Christ: the patristics describe him as *Christus Victor*, the Middle Ages as *Christus victima*, and modernity as *Christus exemplar*; G. Aulén, *Die drei Haupttypen des christlichen Versöhnungsgedankens*, "Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie" 8 (1931), pp. 501–538; Lothar Ullrich identifies the incarnational, staurocentric or paschal and practical-emancipatory model; L. Ullrich, *Soteriologische Modelle in der Dogmengeschichte. Eine Skizze als Orientierungshilfe*, "Theologisches Jahrbuch" 1988, p. 244; the Australian Jesuit Gerald O'Collins proposes three aspects of redemption: deliverance from evil, cleansing from guilt, and the transforming power of love; G. O'Collins, *Jezus nasz Odkupiciel. Chrześcijańskie ujęcie zbawienia* [Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian View of Salvation], transl. J. Pocij, Kraków 2009; finally, Michał Paluch makes an attempt at systematisation by proposing two models explaining salvation: those related to Christ's death (sacrifice, redemption, atonement, vicarious propitiation) and those related to the whole life (and resurrection) of Christ; M. Paluch, *Traktat o zbawieniu* [Treatise on Salvation], op. cit., pp. 287–417. For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar puts forward five aspects of salvation: the self-surrender of the Son, the exchange of places, the liberation of man, the removal of evil and the initiating love of God; see H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. 3: *Die Handlung*, Einsiedeln 1980, pp. 221–224.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, in collaboration with M. Konrad, H.P. Weber, Paderborn 2002, p. 267. On the Christology of the Viennese cardinal, see P. Artemiuk, *Chrystologia „zstępująca” kard. Christopha Schönborna* [Cardinal Christoph Schönborn's "descending" Christology], Tarnów 2011. In this part of the article I refer to selected excerpts from the monograph (pp. 217–251); see: P. Roszak, *Soteriologia zastugi i przyjaźni. Św. Tomasz z Akwinu wobec Cur Deus homo św. Anzelma* [Soteriology of Merit and Friendship. St Thomas Aquinas on St Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*], "Teologia w Polsce" 8/1 (2014), pp. 19–36; P. Roszak, *Odkupiciel i przyjaciel. U podstaw chrystologii soteriologicznej św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle Super Psalmos* [Redeemer and Friend. The Foundations of the Soteriological Christology of St Thomas Aquinas in the Light of *Super Psalmos*], Poznań–Warszawa 2020.

tradition, largely liberated himself from the overly tight yoke of authority by creating his unique teaching.”<sup>11</sup> His thought, grounded in the images of the New Testament, accentuates all their richness, avoiding one-sided definitions.<sup>12</sup> An attempt to grasp Aquinas’ conception should begin by describing the multiplicity of these soteriological aspects, in order to raise the question of the centre around which these aspects are arranged.

### Aspects of redemption

Saint Thomas opens his soteriological considerations in *Summa theologiae* with the same question as Saint Anselm did, namely: Why did God become man? Christoph Schönborn noted, however, that Aquinas nowhere mentioned Anselm nor quoted his works; though *Summa theologiae* shares some teaching of the father of scholasticism, but no direct references can be identified. Aquinas rather drew on the authority of St Augustine, without exploring directly the thoughts by Anselm.<sup>13</sup> However, it is impossible not to notice two significant changes between the theories of the two scholastics. In Anselm’s thought, man first appears righteous, then loses his righteousness through sin, and finally regains it anew thanks to God who gives a ransom. St Thomas, on the other hand, as if with this scheme in mind, presents Christ as “the Just One who pays this ransom with his own blood, even though he himself was not at fault.”<sup>14</sup> The second difference lies, according to Ch. Schönborn, in the distinction between “possibility” and “being guilty.” Anselm believed that man should be just for the sake of God’s justice; however, man fails because of his sin. Therefore, Christ,

<sup>11</sup> J.-P. Torrell, *Święty Tomasz z Akwinu. Mistrz duchowy* [Saint Thomas Aquinas. Spiritual Master], transl. A. Kuryś, Poznań 2003, p. 151; Christoph Schönborn, reviewing the work of W. Mostert, *Menschwerdung. Eine historische und dogmatische Untersuchung über das Motiv der Inkarnation des Gottessohnes bei Thomas von Aquin*, Tübingen 1978, points out that Aquinas’s entire theology is soteriological; Ch. Schönborn, *Beschprechung*, “Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie” 26 (1979), pp. 618–626; on the Christology of St Thomas, see M. Przanowski, *Krótkie wprowadzenie do współczesnego teizmu kenotycznego* [A Brief Introduction to Contemporary Kenotic Theism], Warszawa 2018; M. Przanowski, *Unizony Bóg w myśli św. Tomasza z Akwinu* [The Humble God in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas], Toruń 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, op. cit., p. 242; for a concise characterisation of Thomas Aquinas’ Christology, see G. Kraus, *Jesus Christus – Der Heilsmitler. Lehrbuch zur Christologie*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 346–381.

<sup>13</sup> See Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>14</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 270.

the God-Man offered an atonement for man to satisfy justice. Thomas, on the other hand, argues that God is not the only one who can atone for guilt; sinful man could also do so: “God, however, is the only one who can offer a salvific remedy, respecting the authentic freedom of man.”<sup>15</sup>

[The incarnation frees] man from the thralldom of sin, which [...] “ought to be done in such a way that the devil should be overcome by the justice of the man Jesus Christ,” and this was done by Christ satisfying for us. Now a mere man could not have satisfied for the whole human race, and God was not bound to satisfy; hence it behoved Jesus Christ to be both God and man.<sup>16</sup>

The Incarnation, bringing with it liberation from the bondage of sin, teaches man to use freedom in the right way. According to Schönborn, St Thomas emphasises the skilful use of freedom, which is a fruit of redemption.<sup>17</sup>

St Thomas’s holistic vision of the various dimensions of redemption is a novelty. Aquinas no longer focused, as Anselm or Luther did, on a single aspect, but provided grounds for their multiplicity and, for the first time, put forward the question of the ways in which the suffering of Christ operated.<sup>18</sup> For Anselm the “way” was the atonement, for Luther it was the exchange of places, while Aquinas proposed four *modi*, “ways,” discussing them separately in four consecutive articles of *Summa theologiae*. These are: merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption. Article 5 answers the question of whether it is exclusively proper to Christ to be the Redeemer or rather to God the Father himself. The whole concludes with the sixth question: did Christ’s Passion brought about our salvation efficiently?<sup>19</sup> “It is here that Thomas excellently surpasses all that has been said so far on the subject by emphasising a strictly theocentric point of view.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 1 a. 2, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/> [access: 8.04.2024] [hereafter referred to as Thomas Aquinas, *ST*]; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 24: *Tajemnica Wcielenia Słowa Bożego*, transl. S. Piotrowicz, Londyn 1962, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 46–49; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 25: *Bóg–Człowiek Syn Maryi*, transl. S. Piotrowicz, Londyn 1964, pp. 149–315; q. 39–39 – Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26: *Droga Zbawiciela*, transl. S. Piotrowicz, Londyn 1968, pp. 7–38.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 48 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., pp. 156–168).

<sup>20</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 271.

The first *modus* is the aspect of merit. Thomas quoted three objections that clarify the background. The first objection suggests that suffering is not an act of freedom. If only voluntary acts can be meritorious, then nothing can be merited by suffering. Secondly, if Jesus' whole life passes under the sign of merit, why should his passion have any special place. Thirdly, the root of all merit is love, and this, after all, reveals the whole life of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> The procedure for refuting these objections is anchored by Aquinas in Phil 2:6–11: God exalted Jesus because of his suffering, and with him, exalted all those who believe in him. The glorification of Christ, Schönborn pointed out, has a communal dimension:

is not made in relation to Him as this one particular Person, but has in view the Head of the Church and thus the new humanity. This idea of the unity of Christ with the Church, of the Head with the members, *totus Christus* – as Augustine said – is relevant to any soteriology as a pre-biblical thought. No one lives only for himself, no one is an isolated island. Every act has some meaning for everyone. And this applies incomparably more to good than to evil (cf. Rom 5:12–19).<sup>22</sup>

Thomas cites the following evidence in relation to the merit of Jesus' passion. First, the suffering itself cannot merit salvation, only when one bears it willingly. Secondly, the whole life of Christ merited. "From the beginning of His conception," noted Aquinas, "Christ merited our eternal salvation; but on our side there were some obstacles, whereby we were hindered from securing the effect of His preceding merits: consequently, in order to remove such hindrances, it was necessary for Christ to suffer."<sup>23</sup> Thirdly, the Passion of Christ was, for our sake, "suitable" in the sense of "fittingness": "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?" (cf. Luke 24:26).<sup>24</sup>

Investigating the aspect of atonement, Thomas Aquinas began with an objection, namely that, after all, one cannot repent for someone else; since everyone is responsible for himself, so only he can be responsible for his own actions. The same is true of punishment: everyone can atone only for himself. Aquinas responds to these objections: "He properly atones for an offense who offers something which the offended one loves equally, or even more than he detested the offense. But by

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 1 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 157).

<sup>22</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 2 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 157).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 3 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 157).

suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race.”<sup>25</sup> While St Thomas does not use the word “punishment,” the term “atonement” appears with him, for which, as the Viennese theologian comments, there are three reasons:

firstly, the immensity of love; secondly, the value of Jesus’ life – He alone takes the place of us all; and thirdly, the quality of suffering. Suffering comes last here. The first rationale is thoroughly positive: the love with which God has loved people. But suffering is not forgotten either: it affected Him as wholly innocent, undeserved and with all its intensity. For these three reasons, Christ’s suffering is the atonement for all sins (1 John 2:2).<sup>26</sup>

The third aspect of salvation present in the thought of the author of *Summa theologiae* is sacrifice. According to Schönborn, there are “the worst possible misunderstandings” in the interpretation of this issue.<sup>27</sup> They result from a misinterpretation of the sentence: “Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God” (Eph 5:2). Sacrifice was understood as the destruction of something very precious. Thomas, echoing Augustine’s teaching, chooses a middle way. “Thus a true sacrifice,” Augustine explained in *The City of God*, “is every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship, and which has a reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed.”<sup>28</sup> Sacrifice, by uniting us with God, builds the communion. This has been the case since Old Testament times, when people, united with God and with each other, gathered after the sacrifice for a meal, a sign of a restored community (cf. Exod 24:11). In the New Testament times, this union is seen above all in the Eucharist, which builds the community of faith.<sup>29</sup>

The aspect of redemption appears last and is, according to the Viennese theologian, to some extent problematic if one does not take into account its figurative character: “Man has sold himself doubly: on the one hand as a slave

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 2 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 159).

<sup>26</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>27</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>28</sup> Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* X, 6, vol. I; Augustine *The City of God*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm> [access: 12.04.2024]; cf. Augustyn, *O państwo Bożym*, transl. W. Kor-natowski, Warszawa 1977, p. 448.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ch. Schönborn, *Pokarm życia. Tajemnica Eucharystii* [Food of Life. The Mystery of the Eucharist], transl. B. Widla, Warszawa 2006, pp. 55–67. For an explanation of the sacrificial character of the Mass, see *ibidem*, pp. 68–81.



of sin, and on the other as guilty of sins committed.”<sup>30</sup> With human freedom in mind, St Thomas interpreted redemption and the ransom as a liberation, which enables people to control their lives anew. In relation to Christ, this means that his suffering is a payment in which, instead of money, Christ gives himself for us. And it is not a ransom given to Devil, but only to God, for the sake of communion with Him.

Because, with regard to God, redemption was necessary for man’s deliverance, but not with regard to the devil, the price had to be paid not to the devil, but to God. And therefore Christ is said to have paid the price of our redemption – His own precious blood – not to the devil, but to God.<sup>31</sup>

The four articles in which Thomas presented how Christ, through merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption, acts in his humanity for salvation, are followed by Article 5 on the work of redemption as an act of the whole Trinity. Finally, Thomas returns to the causes of salvation:

Christ’s Passion, according as it is compared with His Godhead, operates in an efficient manner: but in so far as it is compared with the will of Christ’s soul it acts in a meritorious manner: considered as being within Christ’s very flesh, it acts by way of satisfaction, inasmuch as we are liberated by it from the debt of punishment; while inasmuch as we are freed from the servitude of guilt, it acts by way of redemption: but in so far as we are reconciled with God it acts by way of sacrifice.<sup>32</sup>

### Propitiation in the light of St Thomas’ commentaries

With regard to the question of propitiation, a commentary on the relevant passage in the Letter to the Romans (Rom 3:23–26a) is found in Lecture 3 (Rom 3:21–26),<sup>33</sup> numbers 299 to 311. Aquinas, analysing St Paul’s text on

<sup>30</sup> Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 274.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 4, ad. 3 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 165).

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 6, ad. 3 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 168).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Rom> [access: 10.04.2024] [hereafter referred to as Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*]; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Wykład Listów św. Pawła: List do Rzymian* [Interpretation of the Letters of St Paul:

divine righteousness, in no. 302 first points to its cause: “*the justice of God is through the faith of Christ Jesus, i.e., which he delivered.*”<sup>34</sup> It follows, as Thomas observes, that man cannot earn justification, “*as if faith exists from ourselves.*”<sup>35</sup> In the act of justification “by which we are made just by God, the first motion of the mind toward God is through faith,”<sup>36</sup> meaning that “faith, as the first part of justice, is given to us by God.”<sup>37</sup> This faith is formed by charity and applies to everyone, not just Jews. The key is the human heart, not “fleshly observances.”<sup>38</sup> In the following numbers (305–306), Aquinas points to the need for justification arising from the sin that all have committed. Therefore, people “need the glory of God, i.e., the justification that redounds to God’s glory.”<sup>39</sup> However, it is not possible for man to obtain justification by himself; “they need some other cause to make them just.”<sup>40</sup> According to Thomas, the word “justified” testifies to this. “Such justification exists without the law, i.e., that it does not come from the works of the law, when he says being justified freely, i.e., without the merit of previous works.”<sup>41</sup>

The second observation concerns the cause of justification. It takes place – firstly – through redemption.

From this slavery a man is redeemed, if he makes satisfaction for sin. For example, if a man owes a king a fine for some guilty action, the one who paid the fine would be said to have redeemed him from the debt. Now, this debt involved the whole human race, which was infected by the sin of the first parent. Hence no other person could satisfy for the sin of the entire human race except Christ alone, who was immune from all sin.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, Aquinas points to the source of the efficacy of redemption, and this is Jesus: “For Christ’s satisfaction was efficacious for justifying and redeeming by the fact that God had assigned him to this in his plan, which he designates

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Letter to the Romans], Series: Dzieła Wszystkie Tomasza z Akwinu 64, transl. J. Salij, Toruń–Warszawa–Poznań 2023, pp. 129–134.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 131–132.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom* 307; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

when he says *whom God has proposed to be a propitiation*.<sup>43</sup> According to Thomas, the key term is the word “proposed.” It signifies the placing of Jesus in lieu of all sinners, for the human “the human race had no way of making satisfaction unless God himself gave them a redeemer and satisfier.”<sup>44</sup> This expression is confirmed in other Old and New Testament passages. In the Psalms (111:9 and 79:9), reference is made to the redemption which the Lord sends, being the answer to the people’s request. In the First Letter of John (2:2), on the other hand, Jesus is called “a propitiation.” This event is foreshadowed by a passage in Exodus (25:17) in which the command to make an atonement appears. According to Thomas, it signifies that “Christ, [was] placed on the ark, i.e., the Church.”<sup>45</sup>

The third theme that emerges in this section of Thomas’ analyses is the question of the efficacy of redemption. It was accomplished “through faith in his blood, i.e., faith concerning his blood poured out for us.”<sup>46</sup> Thomas explains it as follows:

in order to satisfy for us, it was fitting that he undergo the penalty of death for us, a penalty man had incurred by sin [...]. This death of Christ is applied to us through faith, by which we believe that the world has been redeemed by his death [...]. For even among men payment made by one man does not benefit another, unless he considers it valid. And so it is clear how there is justification through faith in Jesus Christ, as has been stated above. (Rom 3:22)<sup>47</sup>

In Thomas’ commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, in Chapter 10 we find the first lecture on the new worship.<sup>48</sup> Aquinas’ key statements concern the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice over the Old Testament sacrifices. Thomas emphasised that the author of the letter sees the failure of “the condition and

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom* 308; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom* 309; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 132–133.

<sup>48</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, transl. F.R. Larcher, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/SSHebrews.htm> [access: 13.04.2024], nos. 479–499 [hereafter referred to as Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*]; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Wykład Listów św. Pawła: List do Hebrajczyków* [Interpretation of the Letters of St Paul: Letter to the Hebrews], Series: Dzieła Wszystkie Tomasza z Akwinu 68, transl. P. Chojnacka, Toruń–Warszawa–Poznań 2023, pp. 221–229. On the authorship of the Letter to the Hebrews, see M. Healy, *List do Hebrajczyków* [Letter to the Hebrews], Series: Katolicki Komentarz do Pisma Świętego, transl. E. Litak, Poznań 2023, pp. XVI–XX.

rite of the Old Law,”<sup>49</sup> which “did not cleanse perfectly.”<sup>50</sup> This is evidenced, firstly, by the fact that “there was frequent repetition of the same sacrifices,”<sup>51</sup> which were offered every year, which means, according to Aquinas, that the people were not cleansed. Secondly, since there was an annual recollection of the sins of the people in the Old Testament, this means that they were not removed in any way.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas called the rite of sacrifice, even as solemn as on the Day of Atonement, after the Apostle, a shadow, “an obscure and imperfect representation of heavenly things.”<sup>53</sup> He emphasised that no animal blood has the power to take away sins. He states: “But if any sins were remitted, it was due to the power of Christ’s blood.”<sup>54</sup> In doing so, Aquinas mentioned four types of sacrifices offered in the Old Testament:

the sacrifice (*sacrificium*) was either of inanimate things, such as bread or incense, and then it was called an offering (*oblatio*); or of animate things, and then it was offered either to placate God, and was called a holocaust (*holocaustum*), which was most fitting, because it was completely burned and gave honor to God, or it was offered for cleansing from sin, and was called a sacrifice for sin (*sacrificium pro peccato*). But this latter had two parts: for one part was burned on the altar and the other was granted to the ministers for their own use; or it was for God’s benefits and was less fitting, because only one third was burned, one third given to the ministers, and one third to the ones who made the offering; and this was called a holocaust of peace (*sacrificium pacificorum*).<sup>55</sup>

After this specification of the Old Testament sacrifices, Thomas concludes: “Now the offering of Christ’s body in the New Testament corresponds to all of these, because God was placated by the body of Christ, i.e., in offering Himself on the cross.”<sup>56</sup> And he adds: “by it we are introduced to eternal goods, and merit God’s benefits.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>52</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 223.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 223.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 483.; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 223.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 486; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 224.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 224.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 224.

Commenting on Heb 10:5 (“sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, and then adds: but a body you have prepared for me”), Thomas points out that this refers to preparation for sacrifice. The body was to be “most pure, to wipe away all sin” (cf. Exod 12:5), because “it would suffer and be immolated” (cf. Rom 8:3). “That body is a true sacrifice (*hostia*) and a true oblation (*oblatio*),”<sup>58</sup> according to the words of the Letter to the Ephesians: “He has delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness” (Eph 5:2). Thomas, considering the sentence “In burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure” (Heb 10:6), emphasises that the Old Testament sacrifices in themselves never pleased God and were not accepted, they nevertheless took place and were practised because “they were a figure of Christ Whose passion was accepted by God, for He was not pleased with the killing of animals but in faith in His passion.”<sup>59</sup>

In terms of the priestly ministry, which is realised during the offering of sacrifices, Aquinas distinguished between the Old and New Testament priests. Regarding the ancient rites, he stated: “there were two solemn sacrifices in the Law: one on the day of atonement offered by the high priest alone; the other was the continual sacrifice, where one lamb was offered in the morning and another in the evening”<sup>60</sup> (cf. Num 28:4). Both sacrifices prefigured Christ and “the eternity of Him Who is a lamb without blemish.”<sup>61</sup> Referring directly to His salvific act, Aquinas stated that Jesus, “*offered one sacrifice*, because He offered Himself once for our sins, and sat down at the right hand of God, not as a minister always standing, as the priests of the Old Law, but as the Lord [...]; *at the right hand of God* the Father with equal power in the divine nature, but with the more important goods in the human nature [...]; *and this forever*, for He will not die again”,<sup>62</sup> because he rose from the dead (cf. Rom 6:9).

Thomas emphasised the unique and unrepeatable nature of Christ’s sacrifice. The expression “a single sacrifice” (Heb 10:14) indicates the reason for which, Jesus “sits as Lord and not as a minister similar to the priests of the Old Testament, who could not take away sin by one sacrifice and, consequently, had to offer many others frequently [...]; but the sacrifice which Christ offered takes away all sins”<sup>63</sup> (cf. Heb 9:28). And the whole phrase, “by one offering he has perfected for all time” (Heb 10:14) means that Christ “did [this] by reconciling

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., pp. 224–225.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 488; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 497; Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 229.

us and uniting us to God as to our principle; those who are sanctified, because Christ's sacrifice, since He is God and man, has power to sanctify for every"<sup>64</sup> (cf. Rom 5:12).

The conclusion of Thomas' analysis is as follows:

Sins are remitted in the New Testament by Christ's sacrifice, because the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins; therefore, in the New Testament, in which sins and iniquities are forgiven, as the authority indicates, there is no offering to be repeated for sins [...]. Therefore, where there is forgiveness of sins, there is no longer any offering for sin. For this would be to demean Christ's sacrifice.<sup>65</sup>

Aquinas' soteriology found in *Summa theologiae* takes a systematic form, centred on four *modi*, which Thomas discussed separately. These are: merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption. In Article 5 of *Summa theologiae* (q. 46 a. 5), crucial for this teaching, Aquinas presented redemption as an act of the whole Trinity. Selected excerpts from Thomas' commentaries on the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Hebrews provide a soteriological supplement and a theological interpretation of the question of propitiation/atonement. Aquinas saw Jesus as the *propitiation* in whose blood he accomplishes atonement and redemption. Commenting on Chapter 10 of the Letter to the Hebrews, Thomas points to the uniqueness and uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice, which, unlike the Old Testament sacrifices, has the power to cleanse mankind from sins. He also saw in the salvific act of Jesus a sacrifice that needs not to be repeated.

### *Hilastērion* in Ratzinger's soteriology

Substantial soteriological themes can be found in volume 6/2 of Ratzinger's Opera Omnia,<sup>66</sup> where he explores such soteriological concepts as salvation,

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>66</sup> Ratzinger's soteriology has nowhere taken a systematic form. His writings include sketches, entries developed for theological lexicons and valuable intuitions. On Ratzinger's Christology and soteriology see G. Bachanek, *Tajemnica grzechu pierworodnego w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera* [The Mystery of Original Sin by Joseph Ratzinger], "Studia Theologica Varsaviensia" 49/1 (2011), pp. 171–190; J. Szymik, *Prawda i mądrość. Przewodnik po teologii Benedykta XVI* [Truth and Wisdom. A Guide to the Theology of Benedict XVI], Kraków 2019, pp. 121–177; T. Söding (ed.), *Tod und Auferstehung Jesu. Theologische Antworten auf*

redemption, mediation, atonement/satisfaction (part D). Ratzinger was aware of the difficulties posed by their very definition, for he stated:

Redemption is the central term of the Christian faith; it is also one of the words most devoid of content; even the faithful find it difficult to discover any reality in it. If they juxtapose the hardships of their daily lives, their struggles, trepidations and uncertainties with the Christian message, it often seems almost impossible for them to recognise this redemption as something real. Besides, the words with which the message of faith is spoken here have become bleak: atonement, substitution, sacrifice – all these seem to have no real connection with the experiences and views of today's existence.<sup>67</sup>

### Explanation of key terms

However, regardless of the arising problems, Ratzinger attempted to describe the basic soteriological terms in a biblical-historical and theological perspective. The very first remark that Joseph Ratzinger noted next to the word “salvation” is crucial. He stated:

“Redemption,” like “salvation,” is a translation of the Greek term *soteria*. While “redemption” illuminates the more negative side of the Christ event, “salvation” more strongly expresses its positive sense. This is compounded by the fact that “redemption” has become a theological term which presents Christ's act

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*das Buch des Papstes*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2011; for a collection of homilies on salvation, see Benedykt XVI, *Blask zbawienia. Homilie papieskie* [Splendor of Salvation. Papal Homilies], Kraków 2018; see also: J. Skarczyński, *Soteriologiczne znaczenie posłuszeństwa w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [Soteriological Meaning of Obedience by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], Doctoral dissertation, University of Silesia, Katowice 2021; on contemporary soteriology see K. Kałuża, *Zbawienie przez Krzyż? O niektórych problemach współczesnej soteriologii* [Salvation Through the Cross? On Some Problems of Contemporary Soteriology], “Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego” 33 (2013), pp. 173–198; H. Szmulewicz, *Chrystus drogą człowieka. Argumentacja soteriologiczna we współczesnej refleksji teologicznej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kontekstu antropologicznego* [Christ the Way of Man. Soteriological Argumentation in Contemporary Theological Reflection with Special Reference to the Anthropological Context], Kraków 2013.

<sup>67</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Odkupienie – coś więcej niż frazes* [Redemption – More than a Platitude], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii* [Jesus of Nazareth. Studies in Christology], eds. K. Góźdz, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, vol. 2, Opera Omnia 6/2, Lublin 2015, p. 863.

unilaterally from the perspective of the concept of original sin and the doctrine of the atonement assigned to it, whereas “salvation” has never become a proper component of the specialised language of theology, but precisely for this reason it has always offered a more open horizon, so that the new formulation of the essence of Christ’s work initiated by this concept has led to the negative statements on the classical doctrine of redemption being supplemented and deepened with positive aspects.<sup>68</sup>

In defining the essence of salvation, Joseph Ratzinger points to the person of Jesus and his work. He emphasised that

salvation is not accomplished by any human endeavour, but by the event of the action of God who becomes present in Christ. Salvation in the proper sense of the word is an act of God which is directed towards man and by his personal action, by his graciousness, makes him a participant in salvation.<sup>69</sup>

In the following sentences, Ratzinger elaborates on what the Christocentrism of salvation is based on. “His salvific significance rests ultimately not on some separable word or work from Him, but on the fact that person and act, person and word constitute an indivisible unity in Him. He *is* the word, He *is* the act of God penetrating us.”<sup>70</sup> Christ is therefore salvation, which means that “salvation is a Person.”<sup>71</sup> Ratzinger emphasises: “wherever Christ (and through Him God) reigns, there is salvation.”<sup>72</sup>

For soteriology, the idea of mediation remains a key category. Ratzinger, from the dogmatic perspective, first pointed to a fundamental doctrinal text, the *Letter to Flavian (the Tome)*, in which Pope Leo I interprets Christ’s mediation ontologically, “from the perspective of the two natures by which Christ is at the same time fully man and fully God, so that in his person a bridge has been thrown over the infinite abyss separating Creator and creature and the one has been united with the other.”<sup>73</sup> Ratzinger then quoted the Letter to the

<sup>68</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie* [Salvation], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 823.

<sup>69</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 824.

<sup>70</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 825.

<sup>71</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 825.

<sup>72</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 825.

<sup>73</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik* [Mediator], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 828; cf. *Letter 28 (The Tome)*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3604028.htm> [access: 11.05.2024].



Hebrews to support the soteriological argumentation. He showed at the same time that Christ's "humanity is not a suspended state of being, but a living reality realised through suffering and love."<sup>74</sup> Such a point of view makes it possible to remove "the opposition between incarnational theology and the theology of the cross, ontological and actual thinking."<sup>75</sup> In the perspective of the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ appears as a priest sacrificing himself. His act of self-giving, of proto-existence, of being for others, ultimately turns out to be a Passover – a passage. For Ratzinger, this was a fundamental law of biblical revelation.

The fact that Christ not only offers the sacrifice, but "is" the sacrifice, and thus leaves no area of his being to himself, but as a whole constitutes an act of surrender to the Father, reveals the deepest essence of Christ's mediation, in which the problem of ontology and actualisation, of being and history, is annulled. His being is an act and His act is being, and both, being and act receive their proper depth and dignity from the other.<sup>76</sup>

Substitution, the vicarious sacrifice, on the other hand, according to Ratzinger, remains a fundamental biblical term which, however, is underdeveloped in theology.<sup>77</sup> The idea of substitution has a strong Old Testament foundation, which reaches its fullness in the event of Jesus Christ. Because of it, "New Testament theology is first and foremost a theology of substitution."<sup>78</sup> According to Ratzinger, it reaches its highest form in the writings of Paul and John. The former "shows the whole previous history of Israel in a new light, reinterprets it by giving it its ultimate meaning,"<sup>79</sup> which it finds in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. In John, in turn, there is an extension of Christ's vicarious ministry to all Christians: "By this we have come to know love, that He laid down His life for us. We too should lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16). Ratzinger also recalled John's account of the events of the Upper Room, where he shows "the Lord performing to his disciples the slavish service of washing

<sup>74</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik*, op. cit., pp. 828–829.

<sup>75</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik*, op. cit., p. 829.

<sup>76</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik*, op. cit., p. 829.

<sup>77</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo* [Substitution/Vicarious Sacrifice], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 833–844.

<sup>78</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo*, op. cit., p. 837.

<sup>79</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo*, op. cit., p. 839.

their feet and thus giving them a practical sign of what Christian existence is henceforth and forever to consist in.”<sup>80</sup>

Atonement in a Christological perspective means that “the subject of the atonement is God Himself, who, on the initiative of His great love, repairs the disturbed legal order when, by His creative mercy, He justifies man and so restores justice, which is also grace.”<sup>81</sup> According to Rom 3:25 and 1 John 2:2; 4:10, the atonement is made through the cross, taking a descending form: “a movement going from top to bottom – as an expression of that ‘mad’ love of God which gives itself in humiliation in order to save man.”<sup>82</sup> Ratzinger drew another conclusion from this:

In Christianity, worship and even existence as a whole is also given a new direction through the atonement – the dimension of the gift defines the whole structure of Christian existence. However, the atonement also includes a truly human component stemming from the real humanity of Jesus Christ, by virtue of which He is the very representative of humanity before the Father.<sup>83</sup>

In the idea of the atonement, Joseph Ratzinger saw its connection with Old Testament theology of worship and its influence on the theology of martyrdom. With a fundamental difference, however.

The Jewish martyr is merely one who vicariously bears the fate of others, while Christ is at the same time a witness to the incomprehensible love of God who has taken over the fate of others (all). Thus, at the same time, the one-sidedness of the austere top-down construction is annulled and Christ appears here as the Ebed of Yahweh, as the man in whose Passover on the cross the blessed exodus of humanity returning to unity with God is accomplished.<sup>84</sup>

### *Hilastērion* – the most compelling image of propitiation

Ratzinger analyses this theme in the same part of *Jesus of Nazareth* in which he reflects on the death of the Saviour. He adopted three perspectives: the exegetical perspective to explain the words uttered on the Cross; the historical perspective

<sup>80</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo*, op. cit., p. 840.

<sup>81</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie* [Atonement], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 845.

<sup>82</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie*, op. cit., p. 845.

<sup>83</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie*, op. cit., p. 845.

<sup>84</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie*, op. cit., pp. 845–846.

to examine the credibility of the event; and the soteriological perspective to address the question of the salvific dimension of Christ's death. Ratzinger wants to unveil "how the early Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, slowly penetrated more deeply into the truth of the Cross, in order to grasp at least remotely why and for what purpose it happened."<sup>85</sup> And he adds at the same time: "with the Cross of Christ, the old Temple sacrifices were definitively surpassed. Something new had happened."<sup>86</sup> Ratzinger justifies this thesis by citing selected texts from the Old and New Testaments and interpreting them.

Firstly, Joseph Ratzinger paid attention to the thought present in the Psalms concerning the inadequacy of animal sacrifices. This is a prophetic critique that foreshadows a different, new kind of worship. "God did not want to be glorified through sacrifices of bulls and goats, whose blood is powerless to purify and make atonement for men."<sup>87</sup> In the passion events of the Master of Nazareth, the new worship becomes a reality. "In the Cross of Jesus, what the animal sacrifices had sought in vain to achieve actually occurred: atonement was made for the world."<sup>88</sup> As St Paul put it: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal to us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:19–20). Although there were discrepancies about the validity of the Mosaic Law among the early Christians,<sup>89</sup> when it came to the cultic sacrifices, an agreement was kept. From the perspective of Jesus' death, they had lost their meaning. "Christ had taken their place."<sup>90</sup> Although the nascent Jerusalem Church went to the

<sup>85</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, transl. Ph.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011, p. 229 (Kindle); cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, eds. K. Góźdz, M. Górecka, transl. M. Górecka, W. Szymona, vol. 1, Opera Omnia 6/1, Lublin 2015, pp. 540–541.

<sup>86</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 229; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

<sup>87</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 229–230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

<sup>88</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

<sup>89</sup> M. Rosik, *Church and Synagogue (30–313 AD). Parting of the Ways*, Berlin 2019, pp. 75–83; cf. M. Rosik, *Kościół a Synagoga (30–313 po Chr.). Na rozdrożu*, Wrocław 2016, pp. 89–98.

<sup>90</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

Temple and saw it as a place of prayer and preaching,<sup>91</sup> “its sacrifices, though, were no longer relevant for Christians.”<sup>92</sup>

Secondly, Ratzinger, pointing to the New Testament attempts to interpret the event of the Cross in the perspective of the new cult as “the true atonement and the true purification of this corrupted world,”<sup>93</sup> first mentioned the passage from the Letter to the Romans (3:25), which remains a mark of early Judeo-Christian tradition referring to Jesus as *hilastērion* (Hebrew: *kapporeth*). In Jewish tradition, *kapporeth* meant the lid covering the Ark of the Covenant. It was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement during the expiatory sacrifice with the expiatory blood.<sup>94</sup> Early Christians interpreted this Old Testament rite in a Christological key. Ratzinger explains it as follows:

It is not through the blood of animals touching a holy object that God and man are reconciled. In Jesus' Passion, all the filth of the world touches the infinitely pure one, the soul of Jesus Christ and, hence, the Son of God himself. While it is usually the case that anything unclean touching something clean renders it unclean, here it is the other way around: when the world, with all the injustice and cruelty that make it unclean, comes into contact with the infinitely pure one – then he, the pure one, is the stronger. Through this contact, the filth of the world is truly absorbed, wiped out, and transformed in the pain of infinite love. Because infinite good is now at hand in the man Jesus, the counterweight to all wickedness is present and active within world history, and the good is always infinitely greater than the vast mass of evil, however terrible it may be.<sup>95</sup>

Ratzinger is of the opinion that the Christian interpretation of this rite protects against the accusation of the cruelty of God, in which it is suggested that, because of the purity of the Creator's image, notions of propitiation should be eliminated. In this context, he emphasised that calling Jesus *a hilastērion*

<sup>91</sup> M. Rosik, *Church and Synagogue (30–313 AD). Parting of the Ways*, op. cit., pp. 68–75; cf. M. Rosik, *Kościół a Synagoga (30–313 po Chr.). Na rozdrożu*, op. cit., pp. 81–89.

<sup>92</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

<sup>93</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 231; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

<sup>94</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 231; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., pp. 541–542.

<sup>95</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 542.

means “the real forgiveness accomplished on the cross functions in exactly the opposite direction.”<sup>96</sup> In what specific way? Ratzinger explains it as follows:

The reality of evil and injustice that disfigures the world and at the same time distorts the image of God – this reality exists, through our sin. It cannot simply be ignored; it must be addressed. But here it is not a case of a cruel God demanding the infinite. It is exactly the opposite: God himself becomes the locus of reconciliation, and in the person of his Son takes the suffering upon himself. God himself grants his infinite purity to the world. God himself “drinks the cup” of every horror to the dregs and thereby restores justice through the greatness of his love, which, through suffering, transforms the darkness.<sup>97</sup>

Thirdly, it is not only the passage in the Letter to the Romans that testifies to a new understanding of worship, but also the theology of priestly prayer found in the Gospel according to St John<sup>98</sup> and the Letter to the Hebrews and the interpretation of worship present therein in terms of the theology of the Cross. This issue is dealt with by Joseph Ratzinger in far greater depth. From the Letter to the Hebrews, he selects Chapter 10, which describes the Old Testament worship as a “shadow” (Heb 10:1) devoid of the power to remove sins (Heb 10:4). The New Testament text adapts Psalm 40, interpreting it as a dialogue between the Son and the Father in which “the Incarnation is accomplished and at the same time the new worship of God is established.”<sup>99</sup> Ratzinger drew attention to the modification of the original text made by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: “a body have you prepared for me,” whereas the psalmist had said: “but you have given me an open ear.” This represents “the conclusion of a threefold development in the theology of worship.”<sup>100</sup>

In explaining this change, Ratzinger first addressed the question of obedience:

<sup>96</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 542.

<sup>97</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 231; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 542.

<sup>98</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., pp. 436–453.

<sup>99</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

<sup>100</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 232–233; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

Obedience had already replaced the Temple sacrifices here: living within and on the basis of God's word had been recognized as the right way to worship God. In this respect, the psalm was reflecting a strand of Greek thought from the period immediately prior to the birth of Christ: the Greek world also sensed more and more acutely the inadequacy of animal sacrifices, which God does not require and in which man does not give God what he might expect from man. So here the idea of spiritual sacrifice, or "sacrifice in the manner of the word" was formulated: prayer, the self-opening of the human spirit to God, is true worship. The more man becomes "word" – or rather: the more his whole existence is directed toward God – the more he accomplishes true worship.<sup>101</sup>

Ratzinger stressed that in the Old Testament (from the Books of Samuel to the Book of Daniel) one can find a regularly appearing idea that concerns "love for God's guiding word, the Torah. God is rightly venerated when we live in obedience to his word and are hence thoroughly shaped by his will, thoroughly godly."<sup>102</sup>

However, obedience to the Word is always insufficient on man's part. The human will often takes the upper hand. Ratzinger expressed this condition in the following words:

The deep sense of the inadequacy of all human obedience to God's word causes the urgent desire for atonement to break out again and again, yet it is not something we can accomplish by ourselves or on the basis of our "rendering of obedience." Repeatedly, therefore, alongside talk of the insufficiency of sacrifices and offerings, the longing for them to come back in a more perfect form breaks out anew (cf., for example, Ps 51:18–19).<sup>103</sup>

According to Joseph Ratzinger, the version of Psalm 40 given in the Letter to the Hebrews fulfils "this longing: the longing that God will one day be given what we cannot give him, and yet that it should still be our gift."<sup>104</sup> Ratzinger interpreted the exchange in terms of Christology:

<sup>101</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 233; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

<sup>102</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 233; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

<sup>103</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 234; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., pp. 543–544.

<sup>104</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 234; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

The psalmist had prayed: "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire; but you have given me an open ear." The true Logos, the Son, says to the Father: "Sacrifices or offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me." The Logos himself, the Son, becomes flesh; he takes on a human body. In this way a new obedience becomes possible, an obedience that surpasses all human fulfillment of the commandments. The Son becomes man and in his body bears the whole of humanity back to God. Only the incarnate Word, whose love is fulfilled on the Cross, is perfect obedience. In him not only does the critique of the Temple sacrifices become definitive, but whatever longing still remains is also fulfilled: his incarnate obedience is the new sacrifice, and in this obedience he draws us all with him and at the same time wipes away all our disobedience through his love.<sup>105</sup>

Ratzinger noted that man is unable, based on his own morality, to truly glorify God. St Paul emphasised it in the dispute on the subject of justification. Ratzinger insisted that:

Yet the Son, the Incarnate One, bears us all within himself, and in this way he gives what we ourselves would not be able to give. Central to the Christian life, then, are both the sacrament of Baptism, by which we are taken up into Christ's obedience, and also the Eucharist, in which the Lord's obedience on the cross embraces us all, purifies us, and draws us into the perfect worship offered by Jesus Christ.<sup>106</sup>

According to Ratzinger, in this New Testament interpretation of Psalm 40, the conviction of the early Church comes to the fore, "how man can become just before God and, conversely, how he can understand God aright, the mysterious and hidden one, insofar as this is possible to man at all."<sup>107</sup>

The soteriology present in Ratzinger's writings nowhere takes a systematic form. What appears here are sketches, entries developed for theological lexicons and valuable intuitions. Among them, the interpretation of the term *hilastērion*. In the context of Jesus' death on the cross, Joseph Ratzinger draws on the interpretation of this event found in other New Testament writings (Rom, Heb). Using the temple aspect of propitiation, he portrays Christ as *hilastērion*, the new and only sacrifice that took away the sins of the world.

<sup>105</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 234–235; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

<sup>106</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 235; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

<sup>107</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 236; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

## Conclusions

The author of the Letter to the Romans called Jesus the propitiation/atonement (*hilastērion*). This aspect was taken up by Joseph Ratzinger in his Christology; he saw it as one of the essential dimensions of the doctrine of salvation. Inspired by this approach, the aspect of propitiation/atonement was explored both in the biblical commentaries of St Thomas and the writings of Ratzinger. By juxtaposing the thought of Aquinas and Joseph Ratzinger, the entire soteriological considerations of both masters were presented.

The aim of this article was, firstly, to show the aspect of propitiation present in Thomas Aquinas and Ratzinger; secondly, to present it against the background of the whole soteriological teaching of both theologians; thirdly, to emphasise the novelty of their soteriology.

For Thomas, selected commentary passages from the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Hebrews are theological interpretations of the atonement issue, referring to biblical texts. They constitute an important soteriological addition, taking a biblical form. According to Aquinas, Jesus is the *propitiation* in whose blood the mystery of redemption is accomplished. St Thomas accentuates the uniqueness and singularity of Christ's sacrifice, which has the power to purify humanity from sins. The idea of propitiation composes itself with Aquinas' soteriology, present in *Summa theologiae*. There it takes a systematic form, centred on four *modi*, which Thomas discussed separately. These are: merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption. The aspect of propitiation present in the biblical commentaries is an important supplement.

In addressing the question of salvation, Ratzinger drew attention to key soteriological terms. His thought takes the form of sketches, by intuition, without being developed into a definitive or systematic form. The interpretation of the term *hilastērion* is unique in Ratzinger's Christology. Ratzinger analysed the idea of propitiation in a profound, biblical and stylistically exquisite way. He saw in the symbolism of *hilastērion* the fulfilment of the redemption accomplished by Christ's death on the cross.

The aspect of propitiation, according to Ratzinger, already present in the Psalms and therefore in the Old Testament texts, points to the inadequacy of animal sacrifices. Ratzinger identified in these passages the foreshadowing of the one sacrifice that will be accomplished by the blood of the Messiah. Drawing on the New Testament attempts to interpret the event of the Cross in the perspective of the new cult, Ratzinger insisted that *hilastērion* remains a sign of the early Judeo-Christian tradition pointing to Jesus. In his view, the Christian interpretation of the rite of propitiation refutes the accusation of



God's cruelty; moreover, it indicates real forgiveness, which has its source in the mystery of the Cross.

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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:] *Cruc 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* [Cruc 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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## “Life without God and against God”\*: Joseph Ratzinger on Christianity and the (Secularized) World\*\*

„Życie bez Boga i przeciwko Bogu” –  
chrześcijaństwo a (zsekularyzowany) świat  
w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera

**ABSTRACT:** Despite all the efforts of responsible Christians to withstand secularization, the process as shown by various parameters appears to be unstoppable. Joseph Ratzinger developed a much-desired comprehensive, theological understanding of secularization. His theology of the world and his vision of the modern times is presented here succinctly at the time that the Western world seems to dispense with God and even live against Him. First, the article recalls Ratzinger’s 1965 text on the meanings of the term “world.” Any serious thought about the world should first deal with the question of how it is conceptualized. Ratzinger responded by presenting the Christian understanding of the world and confronted it with various philosophical positions and scientific visions. He demonstrated the superiority of Christianity as having the exclusivity of possessing “good news” for humankind. Further, this article offers a comparison of the Christian and increasingly secularized worlds. While denouncing the project of building a secular world (the modern Tower of Babel) and challenging the tenets of the advocates of secularization, Ratzinger also enumerated elements uniting the global community. Finally, the article quotes an important text by Ratzinger brought back to the public attention during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which he juxtaposed two main mechanisms propelling human history: the development

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\* J. Ratzinger, *Ministers of Your Joy: Meditations on Priestly Spirituality*, transl. R. Nowell, London–New York 1989, p. 72.

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of a world without God and the operation of the providential “hand of God.” The clash of the belief in God with that of a life without God started at the dawn of history and will continue to the end of time. Ratzinger’s understanding of the world and secularization is realistic, intellectually principled, and very often dramatic, but concurrently full of Christian hope and optimism. His theology rebuts and reverses the common understanding of the terms “liberal” and “conservative.”

**KEYWORDS:** Joseph Ratzinger, world, Western world, secularization, Christianity versus science, Christianity versus secularization, Tower of Babel, COVID-19, hand of God, Christian optimism

**ABSTRAKT:** Odpowiedzialni chrześcijanie pragną odpowiedzieć na sekularyzację. Jednak ani pomiary jej parametrów, ani mnożenie programów pastoralnych nie powstrzymują sekularyzacji. Potrzebne jest jej kompleksowe i poważne (głębokie teologicznie) zrozumienie. Joseph Ratzinger miał takie rozumienie sekularyzacji. Celem artykułu jest prezentacja jego (skondensowanej) teologii świata i sposobu postrzegania przez niego czasów współczesnych, w których świat Zachodu zdaje się żyć bez Boga, a nawet przeciwko Niemu. Artykuł rozpoczyna się przypomnieniem krótkiego tekstu Ratzingera z 1965 roku, poświęconego podstawowym znaczeniom słowa „świat”. Każde poważne myślenie o świecie powinno odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czym jest świat. Ratzinger odpowiadał na nie, przedstawiając chrześcijańskie rozumienie świata oraz konfrontując je z różnymi stanowiskami filozoficznymi i naukowym obrazem świata. Wskazywał na wyższość chrześcijaństwa; tylko chrześcijaństwo ma dla świata „dobrą nowinę”. W dalszej części artykułu prezentuje porównanie chrześcijaństwa z ciągle sekularyzującym się światem. Chociaż Ratzinger krytykował projekt budowy zsekularyzowanego świata (współczesnej wieży Babel) i zadawał promotorom sekularyzacji poważne pytania, to jednocześnie wskazywał elementy wspólne dla wszystkich ludzi na świecie. W końcowej części artykułu przywołany został ważny tekst Ratzingera, przypomniany publicznie w czasie pandemii COVID-19, w którym wyjaśnił on współistnienie dwóch głównych mechanizmów napędzających ludzką dzieje: budowania świata bez Boga i działanie opatrnościowej „ręki Boga”. Starcie się wiary w Boga z życiem bez Boga zaczęło się na początku ludzkiej historii i będzie trwało do jej zakończenia. Ratzingera rozumienie świata i sekularyzacji jest realistyczne, intelektualnie odważne, bardzo często dramatyczne, lecz jednocześnie pełne chrześcijańskiej nadziei i optymizmu. Jego teologia prowadzi do zakwestionowania potocznego rozumienia pojęć „liberalny” i „konserwatywny”, a nawet do odwrócenia ich znaczeń.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Joseph Ratzinger, świat, świat Zachodu, sekularyzacja, chrześcijaństwo a nauka, chrześcijaństwo a sekularyzacja, wieża Babel, COVID-19, ręka Boga, chrześcijański optymizm

Today, many Christians in the Western world seem to be deeply confused. They experience a kind of split, dualism, ambivalence and spiritual crisis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Rybicki, *The Theology of Spirituality: Its Growing Importance Amid the Transformations of the Modern World and the Church*, “Verbum Vitae” 37/2 (2020), pp. 398–403.

Even if they know the whole world (as God’s creation) to be good, they are confronted with the modern world as functioning increasingly without God and even against Him. Pastors of the Church and theologians are at their tether’s end; they also seem to be disoriented. Measurements of the parameters of secularization and the development of new pastoral programs as the Church’s response have been of no avail.<sup>2</sup> Worse, some of them compromise more or less with the world’s rationale, which runs counter to the Gospel and the moral principles of the Christian faith. Worse still, today’s Christianity is divided and confused: there are liberal and conservative Christians, while many are simply indifferent. Liberals and conservatives are at loggerheads. They denounce each other on the grounds of the same Scripture. The clergy and theologians minds are beset with conflicting thoughts and ideas that have emerged recently: condemnation of the world and the technological progress by the Catholic anti-modernism, theology of secularization as something liberating and willed by God, modern culture as anti-culture and anti-civilisation (John Paul II), “rainbow” theology. Many Catholics were astonished by the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Church.<sup>3</sup> This document deepened the discordance among bishops and raised serious doubts about the authority of the Church’s Magisterium.

In this chaos, which started a long time ago, Joseph Ratzinger’s voice must be heard and remembered. His entire theological output can be viewed as a distinct voice coming from a true Christian, a profound thinker and pastor, and a responsible theologian always engaging in a constructive dialogue with the world and about the world, notably the world of today. We often find him engaging in a polemic with the world and expressing a strong criticism of it, articulated on behalf of Christianity and the Church.<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger, however, does

<sup>2</sup> P. Mąkosa et al., *Religiosity and Secularisation of Polish Youth in the 21st Century. Quantitative Research Analysis*, “Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej” 22 (2023), pp. 186–202; D. Lipiec, *Pastoral Care as the Church’s Response to the Phenomenon of Secularization*, “Diacovensia” 28/1 (2020), pp. 95–106.

<sup>3</sup> Dicastery For the Doctrine of the Church, *The Declaration Fiducia Supplicans on the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings* (December 18, 2023), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_ddd\\_doc\\_20231218\\_fiducia-supplicans\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddd_doc_20231218_fiducia-supplicans_en.html) [access: 14.10.2021].

<sup>4</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, transl. B. McNeil, San Francisco 2006; J. Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, San Francisco 2009; J. Ratzinger, *Western Culture Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2019; J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe. The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, transl. B. McNeil, San Francisco 2010. Cf. T. Rowland, *The World in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, “Journal of Moral Theology” 2/2 (2013), pp. 109–132.

not seek to win a discussion or an argument; rather, he tackles with the most fundamental issue of understanding the world (as it truly is) and the current historical moment from the perspective of the Christian faith.

This article's purpose is to summarize Ratzinger's main reflections on the world and modern times, marked by growing secularization. The source material for this article is Ratzinger's intellectual oeuvre, currently available only in German<sup>5</sup> and Polish.<sup>6</sup> Wherever possible, the quotations are taken from Ratzinger's texts published in English.<sup>7</sup>

## What is the world?

The word and the accompanying concept of the world are fundamental in all languages and cultures. It is unequivocal and occurs in diverse contexts. Ratzinger drew people's attention to how fundamentally the West and the East differ in their understanding of the world despite being two parts that make it up. He was among very few Western theologians who explained how the great religions of Asia view the world.<sup>8</sup> While taking part in the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger wrote in 1965 a short text which was a draft of cardinal Joseph Frings' speech at the 135th General Congregation on Scheme XIII.<sup>9</sup> The text criticizes the scheme heavily. The future Pope Benedict XVI

<sup>5</sup> J. Ratzinger, Series: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. G.L. Müller, Freiburg im Breisgau 2009–2022.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ratzinger, Series: *Opera Omnia*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, Lublin 2012–2022.

<sup>7</sup> Otherwise, quotations have been translated into English by Tomasz Pałkowski from the Polish edition of all works by Ratzinger's *Opera Omnia*. In these cases, the corresponding pages in the German version (JRGS) are given in brackets.

<sup>8</sup> "The world (and man with it and all personhood) is understood [in Asian religiosity] as the finite *appearance* of the infinite, appearance only and not being. This is where the turnabout occurs: if the world is only appearance, then ultimately it is not something separate or independent at all alongside the sole Absolute, which is the only reality. There remains the identity of a single true Being, from which only empty appearance separates us. In this way, of course, the contrast with Israel's faith is now fully and radically demonstrated" (J. Ratzinger, *Fundamental Speeches from Five Decades*, ed. F. Schuller, transl. M.J. Miller, J.R. Foster, A.J. Walker, San Francisco 2012, p. 46).

<sup>9</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Należy wyjaśnić pojęcia „lud Boży” i „świat”!* [*Szkic przemówienia na 135. Kongregacji Generalnej 24 września 1965 r. na temat schematu XIII*] [The Terms 'God's People' and 'World' Need to Be Clarified!"] (A Draft Speech at the 135th General Congregation on Scheme XIII, September 24, 1965), [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego. Formułowanie, przekaz, interpretacja*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, vol. 1, Series: *Opera Omnia* 7/1, Lublin 2016, pp. 247–249 [hereafter referred to as JR00 7/1] (J. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Formulierung*,

demonstrated the crucial referents of ‘world’ in Christian understanding: all created things (the whole creation), all human products whose number is constantly growing (by the way, Ratzinger contends that the Church does not realize how profoundly they change and will change the human condition), the recipient of Divine Love, and finally the present standing of the world, especially the time which “resists the work of Christ” in it.<sup>10</sup>

The central issue springing to mind facing the many answers to the question about the nature of the world boils down to the question whether the world should be conceived with or without man? This issue is of paramount importance. In other words, we should ask: is man an insignificant “product” of the world’s evolution or is man crucial to understanding the universe whose evolution led to the appearance of man and the history of humankind? Ratzinger believes that today’s scientific and technological reasoning favours the first solution, which obviously has specific and very significant ramifications. Such thinking implies that for all practical purposes man does not exist, that man does not matter in large-scale processes taking place in nature. Man is, all in all, a tiny and imperceptible particle of matter amidst a great many biological organisms. Therefore, one can hardly speak of a sense in his existence that would transcend the boundaries of the world’s immanence: an immanence of cosmos and the universe. A mindset in which man is practically of no consequence to the world is appalling, is it not? Ratzinger recalls the obvious fact that fundamental human rights that form the ideological substrate of modernity were formulated clearly in the Age of Enlightenment. One of them is Immanuel Kant’s principle that treating a human being as a means to an end is despicable. Ratzinger points out that today this principle is violated – up to the point of endorsing experiments on human embryos.<sup>11</sup>

In religious thinking, especially biblical and Christian, the world is conceived as a universe that includes man. This is quite obvious because it is through man that the universe perceives itself. Hence for Ratzinger and Christianity, man is

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*Vermittlung, Deutung*, ed. G.L. Müller, vol. 1, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 7/1, Freiburg im Breisgau 2012, pp. 283–286 [hereafter referred to as JRGS 7/1].

<sup>10</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Należy wyjaśnić pojęcia „lud Boży” i „świat”!*..., op. cit., p. 248 [JRGS 7/1, p. 285].

<sup>11</sup> “[N]o one has the right to use some other person, however poor or weak he may be, simply as the means to God knows what end, however high it may be. With reference to experiments on humans—and also precisely to experiments on embryos—that has now become a really significant truth, a truly important safeguard of human dignity. The basic law of human rights is just this, that no human being may become the means to any end but must retain his own inalienable dignity” (J. Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, transl. H. Taylor, San Francisco 2002, p. 110).

the key to understanding the world's beginning, purpose and meaning. That is the reason why understanding man leads to understanding the world. The definitive solution to man's own dilemma was accomplished by God in Jesus Christ – and this is the core of Christianity. For Ratzinger, Christianity is “the most radical humanism,” which proclaims the most intimate bond between God and man: the whole of humanity and the entirety of its historical existence.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps most succinctly Ratzinger encapsulated the core of Christianity as the most radical humanism in these words: “The substance of the Christian Gospel is this: man is so important to God that he himself suffered for him.”<sup>13</sup> Only God's totally self-sacrificing love can serve as a solid basis for people opening up to one another and positively building (evolving) the world and evolving man.<sup>14</sup> With Ratzinger's thought in mind it should be said that the most intimate bond – the bond of love – connects God not only with man but also with the whole world and the whole universe. This is because the Christian Gospel accommodates both humans and the world – it is a Gospel for all that exists.

For all that exists... Which brings up the question whether there is one world or whether there are or multiple worlds. Is the hypothesis of the existence of a so-called multiverse true? Obviously, we are not interested here in the metaphorical sense of the word “multiverse.” In the metaphorical and everyday sense there are many “parallel” and separate worlds that will never come together. Case in point: nearly extinct geographically separated cultures will never come

<sup>12</sup> “Must we not much rather claim Jesus enthusiastically as *man* and treat Christology as humanism and anthropology? Or should the real man, precisely because he *is* wholly and properly such, be God, and God be the real man? Ought it to be possible for the most radical humanism and faith in the God who reveals himself to meet and even merge here?” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, ed., transl. J.R. Foster, San Francisco 2004, p. 109).

<sup>13</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, vol. 2, Series: Opera Omnia 6/2, Lublin 2015, p. 879 [hereafter referred to as JROO 6/2] (J. Ratzinger, *Jesus von Nazareth. Beiträge zur Christologie*, ed. G.L. Müller, vol. 2, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 6/2, Freiburg im Breisgau 2013, p. 961 [hereafter referred to as JRGS 6/2]).

<sup>14</sup> “In the history of humanity, the destruction of the brotherhood [of all people] is always the work of an evil power, never the work of God's power. Justification of true brotherhood always has a Christian element in it” (J. Ratzinger, *Lud i dom Boży w nauce św. Augustyna o Kościele. Rozprawa doktorska oraz inne opracowania nauki Augustyna i teologii ojców Kościoła*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, Series: Opera Omnia 1, Lublin 2014, p. 590 [hereafter referred to as JROO 1] (J. Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche. Die Dissertation und weitere Studien zu Augustinus und zur Theologie der Kirchenväter*, ed. G.L. Müller, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 1, Freiburg im Breisgau 2011, p. 633 [hereafter referred to as JRGS 1]).

into contact. Also, there is a lot of truth in the claim that every person, with his or her history and inner self, is, as it were, a distinct world.

So long as the multiverse hypothesis is not proven we can very reliably assume that the world is one. Despite its extreme complication, the world is one, whole, and real. If something exists, it belongs to the world. Ratzinger argues that man, humanity and cultures must have always had and still have some primary attitude to the world, even if intuitive. Somehow man always relates to the world (reality) as a whole – to existence. It has always been, remains and will be this way. According to Ratzinger, this postulate springs from rationality and common sense. He admits that the basic relationship of people with the world (reality) has never been homogeneous; rather, it is imbued with, materialistic, religious, polytheistic, monotheistic, atheistic, dualistic, pantheistic, or mysterious apprehensiveness with the last element mentioned presupposing that there is a hidden, mystery in the world and even more so beyond it.

## Does science know where the world is heading? Christianity does

Ratzinger insists that today, especially in the West, the dominant attitude to the world is scientific, technological, empirical, pragmatic, yet consequently destructive. The acquisition of competence, proficiency and knowledge is the prevailing attitude, with the core assumption that the world (reality) is inherently chaotic and formless, and that it must be subordinated to human needs and ambitions.<sup>15</sup> In the Western secularized world naturalism has come to the fore; it says that the world (or the multiverse) is just what it is, and there is no sense in trying to find a “secret compartment” in it or beyond it – another dimension or mysteriousness [Yet, searching for multiple worlds is looking for a secret compartment]. If we were to follow Ratzinger’s way of reasoning, at this point we could ask whether naturalism is not too easy an escape from having

<sup>15</sup> “We are inclined today as a matter of course to suppose that only what is palpably present, what is ‘demonstrable,’ is truly real. But is it really permissible to do this? Should we not ask rather more carefully what ‘the real’ actually is? Is it only the ascertained and ascertainable, or is ascertaining perhaps only one particular method of making contact with reality, one that can by no means comprehend the whole of reality and that even leads to falsification of the truth and of human existence if we assume that it is the only definitive method?” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., pp. 32–33). See R. Millare, *The Renewed Christocentric Synthesis in Joseph Ratzinger’s. Logos-centric Symphony*, “Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 31/2 (2023), pp. 246–249.

to wonder what the world is, how it was formed, what its destiny is, and what governs it. Can we claim with all responsibility that the world as such is far from extraordinary, enigmatic, or even mysterious?

Today, as Ratzinger believes, the following trends are being revived, much as they were practised in antiquity: deification of cosmic forces (“deification of the cosmic cycle”), fear of the universe, utter determinism or chaos, unpredictability and obviously fear of death as an absolute annihilation.<sup>16</sup> In light of scientific data/assumptions/theories, death is also the fate of the universe. Yet, Ratzinger makes it clear that Christianity is not afraid of such forecasts.<sup>17</sup> He seems to ask: What permanent sense of the world (universe) can one extract from the sciences alone if all they do is predict its demise?

Ratzinger echoes Johann Baptist Metz, saying that “everything changes, whether God exists or not.”<sup>18</sup> If He exists, the conception of the world also changes – completely. This conception changes even further becoming very optimistic, if one believes in the Christian God. From Ratzinger’s writings it clearly follows that Christianity has and has always had its own conception of

<sup>16</sup> “It [believing in God] is a profession in the fullest sense of this word, that is, it is not the registration of one view alongside others but an existential decision. As a renunciation of the gods, it also implies the renunciation both of the deification of political powers and of the deification of the cosmic cycle” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 58); “The world is now seen as something rational: It emerges from eternal reason, and this creative reason is the only true power over the world and in the world. Faith in the one God is the only thing that truly liberates the world and makes it ‘rational.’ When faith is absent, the world only *appears* to be more rational. In reality the indeterminable powers of chance now claim their due; ‘chaos theory’ takes its place alongside insight into the rational structure of the universe, confronting man with obscurities that he cannot resolve and that set limits to the world’s rationality. To ‘exorcise’ the world—to establish it in the light of the *ratio* (reason) that comes from eternal creative reason and its saving goodness and refers back to it—that is a permanent, central task of the messengers of Jesus Christ” (J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, transl. A.J. Walker, New York 2007, p. 174).

<sup>17</sup> “If we hold on to Christ, he is the one who guides us through the dark night of death and gives us eternity, which we can conceive of as something that we have always desired but will never attain: true and complete fulfilment, happiness that need not be afraid of the end or falling apart” (J. Ratzinger, *W rozmowie z czasem*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, vol. 3: *Wybrane wywiady*, Series: Opera Omnia 13/3, Lublin 2018, p. 1222 [hereafter referred to as JROO 13/3]; J. Ratzinger, *Im Gespräch mit der Zeit. Interviews – Stellungnahmen – Einsprüche*, ed. G.L. Müller, vol. 3, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 13/3, Freiburg im Breisgau 2016, p. 346 [hereafter referred to as JRGS 13/3]).

<sup>18</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love: Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers Delivered on December 12, 2000*, [https://www.piercedhearts.org/benedict\\_xvi/Cardinal%20Ratzinger/new\\_evangelization.htm](https://www.piercedhearts.org/benedict_xvi/Cardinal%20Ratzinger/new_evangelization.htm) [access: 5.11.2020].



the world. Christian faith explains that the whole world comes from the personal God, Logos and Creator – that the world is in His “hands” and His love.<sup>19</sup> And it will always be so. Consequently, Christianity has a concrete, original and proper attitude to the world.<sup>20</sup> Since the world is a gift of love from God the Creator, since it is based on Logos, our attitude to it is and should be one of respect and the desire to know it through reason. Logos is the guarantor of the world to be logical and reasonable.

Christianity does not deify the world; nor is it pantheism in any version. Ontologically, the world is something different than God and it has a real autonomy. Ratzinger writes: “Christian belief in God means that things are the being-thought of a creative consciousness, of a creative freedom, and that the creative consciousness that bears up all things has released what has been thought into the freedom of its own, independent existence.”<sup>21</sup>

Ratzinger sees the world as an essential structure based on freedom and autonomy, which profit, in a sense, in the world of inanimate matter. This freedom-based structure is a perfection of the world. In the eyes of Christianity, the world is autonomous, independent and governed by laws; it exists for real, it is evolving; it was formed in a very complicated evolutionary process and is not an illusion, as the Asian religions claim. Ratzinger captures this thought in a very interesting and succinct manner: “Freedom is evidently the necessary structure of the world, as it were, and this again means that one can only comprehend the world as incomprehensible, that it must be incomprehensibility.”<sup>22</sup>

The entirety of the world encompasses its temporal and ontological dimensions: the beginning of everything as well as the end and destiny – therefore,

<sup>19</sup> “The Christian picture of the world is this, that the world in its details is the product of a long process of evolution but that at the most profound level it comes from the Logos. Thus it carries rationality within itself, and not just a mathematical rationality—no one can deny that the world is mathematically structured—not, that is to say, just an entirely neutral, objective rationality, but in the form of the Logos also a moral rationality” (J. Ratzinger, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 139); “From the standpoint of Christian faith one may say that for *history* God stands at the end, while for *being* he stands at the beginning” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 125).

<sup>20</sup> “We now begin to discern a first vague outline of the attitude signified by the word *credo*. It means that man does not regard seeing, hearing, and touching as the totality of what concerns him, that he does not view the area of his world as marked off by what he can see and touch but seeks a second mode of access to reality, a mode he calls in fact belief, and in such a way that he finds in it the decisive enlargement of his whole view of the world” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 29).

<sup>21</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 83.

the purpose and meaning of being. The Christian conception does not challenge scientific research, but in dialogue with science it asks questions about the legitimacy, assumptions and validity of the so-called scientific vision of the world, especially when this picture – derived from empirical knowledge – is absolutized by scientists. These questions concern truth: the truth of the world as a whole. Christianity does not build a scientific vision of the world as this within the purview of science; instead, it offers its understanding of the world as a whole following from Divine Revelation. In doing so and in order to have a broad picture, Christianity applies faith and rationality (*ratio*), the latter having become intellect (*intellectus*) or wisdom.

For Christianity, there is no ontological duality or intrinsic contradictions, because “the world and God do not exist eternally side by side.” Time and eternity intermingle. Ratzinger says very briefly: “Eternity is not timelessness but dominion over time.”<sup>23</sup> While believing in Jesus Christ as the Omega point, the Christian concept of the world reconciles its evolution and the scientific predictions of the annihilation of its present aeon with the world’s definitive renewal in the Eschaton. Ratzinger writes:

The Christian message expects at one and the same time both decay – in conformity with the way of the cosmos itself, and plenitude – in the new power coming from without, namely Christ. Of course, faith does not see in Christ something simply external, but the proper origin of all created being which, therefore, while coming “from without” can fulfil what in the cosmos is most deeply “within.”<sup>24</sup>

Christian faith is the hope for redemption of the whole world (not redemption *from* the world!), which already started in the world’s time.<sup>25</sup> For Ratzinger, this

<sup>23</sup> “If God really *became* man, then this is a dramatic breakthrough that nothing can surpass. In that case, the world and God are not just eternally alongside each other; only then has God *acted*” (J. Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, transl. M.J. Miller, M.J. O’Connell, San Francisco 2011, p. 43); “Eternity does not stand by the side of time, quite unrelated to it; it is the creatively supporting power of all time, which encompasses passing time in its own present and thus gives it the ability to be. It is not timelessness but dominion over time. As the Today that is contemporary with all ages, it can also make its influence felt in any age” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 162).

<sup>24</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, transl. M. Waldstein, A. Nichols, Series: Dogmatic Theology 9, Washington, DC 1988, p. 193.

<sup>25</sup> “The Christian hope for salvation, despite the radical spirituality of its assumption, envisages not redemption from the world but redemption of the world itself—this starts in the time

belief unveils the meaning of the world and being, the ultimate truth of being, which surpasses the “faith” of materialism and idealism, and atheism as well.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it is not true that Christianity arose from the need for an optimistic vision of the world in response to its unquestionable harshness or even meaninglessness; Christianity does not result from wishful thinking. Messianic and apocalyptic expectations, as well as other expectations and desires of the people living in the time of Jesus, most certainly played a vital role in making the Christian faith authentic, but they could not have “invented” Jesus and Christianity.

The conclusion at point of our considerations is that Ratzinger believes that Christianity alone has “good news” for the world. The Christian vision of the world is realistic and very optimistic, since it proclaims the meaningfulness of the world and its transformation in the Eschaton. Such an understanding of the world carries a special guarantee: the Resurrection of Jesus, which opened up a novel way of being for the whole of being.

## Christianity in relation to a world “without God and against God”: The demarcation line

In Ratzinger’s opinion, the root cause of today’s many misfortunes and sufferings is a “life without God and against God” – when God is blotted out or deliberately declined. Secularism, which is most evident in Europe, is a “mutilation of human existence.”<sup>27</sup> One of Ratzinger’s pivotal texts, offering a synthetic comparison between Christianity and the secularized world, goes like this:

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of this world but ultimately leads to a salvific transformation of this world” (JROO 6/2, pp. 826–827 [JRGS 6/2, p. 905]).

<sup>26</sup> “The meaning of the world is the ‘you’, though only the one that is not itself an open question but rather the ground of all, which needs no other ground” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., pp. 43–44); “The Christian belief in God is not completely identical with either of these two solutions [the materialistic solution and the idealistic solution] ... Christian belief in God means that things are the being-thought of a creative consciousness, of a creative freedom, and that the creative consciousness that bears up all things has released what has been thought into the freedom of its own, independent existence. In this it goes beyond any mere idealism. While the latter, as we have just established, explains everything real as the content of a single consciousness, in the Christian view what supports it all is a creative freedom that sets what has been thought in the freedom of its own being, so that, on the one hand, it is the being-thought of a consciousness and yet, on the other hand, is true being itself” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 82).

<sup>27</sup> “If secularism wants to oust religion, this is a mutilation of human existence” (JROO 13/3, p. 1208 [JRGS 13/3, p. 1331]).

Life without God and against God, which at first seemed so enticing and liberating, has created in reality only great sadness and increasing anger. Man rages against society, against the world, against himself and against others; his life seems to him like botched handiwork, man like a mistake on the part of evolution. He has lost the element that is really essential for his life, and everything tastes like salt to him – of death and bitterness. Man is destined to breathe the infinity of eternal love – if he cannot he is in prison and deprived of light.<sup>28</sup>

It is of little avail to ponder what appeared in Western culture first: Was it life without God (religious indifference, neo-paganism) or life against God (militant atheism)? Both in the past and now, these two tendencies go hand in hand and reinforce each other. Ratzinger points out that when Western culture sets the course “without God and against God” and when it blatantly “resists the work of Christ,” it becomes downright diabolical: it permits profits to be drawn and enjoyed from human weaknesses and obsessions.<sup>29</sup> For Ratzinger, it is no surprise that in such a diabolical setting people’s eternal temptations are revived: egoism, avarice, greed and “all defects that devastate the life of individuals and the world.”<sup>30</sup>

Ratzinger is of the opinion that doubtless the contemporary Western world has become what it is a few centuries ago because of its desire for freedom and the struggle for liberty and equality. This is why the world is rife with

<sup>28</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The Ministers of Your Joy*, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>29</sup> “There is something diabolical in the coldblooded perversity with which man is corrupted for the sake of money and profit is drawn from his weakness, his temptability and vulnerability in the face of temptation. Western culture is hellish when it persuades men that the sole aim of life is pleasure and self-interest” (J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on The State of the Church*, transl. S. Attanasio, G. Harrison, San Francisco 1985, p. 188).

<sup>30</sup> “The deepest poverty is the inability of joy, the tediousness of a life considered absurd and contradictory. This poverty is widespread today, in very different forms in the materially rich as well as the poor countries. The inability of joy presupposes and produces the inability to love, produces jealousy, avarice—all defects that devastate the life of individuals and of the world” (J. Ratzinger, *The New Evangelization*, op. cit.); “We are also coming to understand more and more clearly that the apparent liberation of love and its conversion into a matter of impulse mean the delivery of man to the autonomous powers of sex and Eros, to whose merciless slavery he falls victim just when he is under the illusion that he has freed himself. When he eludes God, the gods put out their hands to grasp him; he can only be liberated by allowing himself to be liberated and by ceasing to try to rely on himself...; we are threatened no less than the people of ancient times by the tendency to make absolutes of power, bread, and Eros” (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit., p. 60).

revolutions, wars, humanisms and liberalisms.<sup>31</sup> For all that, freedom has not been attained – why, it is even slipping away. The same goes for equality and brotherhood. Ratzinger notes that the freedom of the individual is nowadays increasingly arrogated by holistic management systems that are developed to proliferate good and freedom, but – paradoxically – they take them away.<sup>32</sup> In his opinion, the modern-age and today’s totalitarianisms grew from revolutions and anarchist slogans which though expressing freedom led to the ruthless terrors of state ideologies and the dictates of political parties.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Ratzinger asks very important questions: Why is humanity and the modern “liberated” world still stuck between “the Scylla of anarchy and the Charybdis of totalitarianism”?<sup>34</sup> Why is there in the world – which was supposed to be perfectly free – so much “manipulation of our souls”? Why is there so much “talk of this world” and “troubled waters of our information and ideologies” and so little freedom?<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “The ‘absolute’ character of Christianity is not directed ‘against’ others, but its idea is to be ‘for,’ whereby it achieves unity that is greater than all those humanisms and liberalisms could envisage in their relativizing coordination: unity arising from God’s root of the substitute love of the new Adam, in whom we all have become the ‘one’ new man; we are called in our life by his love to constantly become him anew” (JROO 6/2, p. 953 [JRGS 6/2, p. 1041]).

<sup>32</sup> “Even in the radical market philosophy there exists a mechanical-materialistic mindset, where individual freedom becomes part of a reliable holistic mechanical system governed by infallible laws. Pure liberalism cannot overcome Marxism” (JROO 13/3, p. 1123 [JRGS 13/3, p. 1241]).

<sup>33</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Zmartwychwstanie i życie wieczne. Studia o eschatologii i teologii nadziei*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. J. Kobienia, Series: Opera Omnia 10, Lublin 2014, pp. 529–532; J. Ratzinger, *Auferstehung und ewiges Leben. Beiträge zur Eschatologie und zur Theologie der Hoffnung*, ed. G.L. Müller, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 10, Freiburg im Breisgau 2012, pp. 566–569; “These concepts do not allow for the fact that, in the meantime, leftist intelligentsia itself became a *power* and now it corrupts people’s minds using all tricks of the trade; also, the fact that not every institution with its proper law becomes a *power* in the sense always used here” (J. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji. Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. J. Merecki, vol. 1, Series: Opera Omnia 9/1, Lublin 2018, p. 248; J. Ratzinger, *Glaube in Schrift und Tradition. Hermeneutik und Theologische Prinzipienlehre*, ed. G.L. Müller, vol. 1, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 9/1, Freiburg im Breisgau 2016, p. 280).

<sup>34</sup> See JROO 13/3, p. 1123 [JRGS 13/3, p. 1241].

<sup>35</sup> “In this era, in which so much manipulation of our souls occurs through advertising and by all sorts of other means, it is all the more important to perform the humble service of truth, in which the essential thing, the word of God, remains alive among us” (J. Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today: Selected Writings*, eds. P. Az-zaro, C. Granados, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2017, p. 304); “Leading to green pastures, to living waters, means leading to the place where God’s word is; conducting

Ratzinger argues that the Western world has merged democracy – which is oriented towards freedom and intent on safeguarding it – with the ideology of relativism which holds that its precepts are absolute and enforces them by virtue of the ever more severe positive law. Relativism entertains the idea that it is a new, unfailing “soteriology” – that it will save the world from all conflicts by suppressing every universal truth as potentially antagonizing and hence detrimental. Ratzinger believes that this is not soteriology but the first step towards disintegration of the Western world. He writes: “Frankly, democracy still exists by virtue of inviolable truths and values that are respected by everyone; otherwise, it dissolves into anarchy and invalidates itself.”<sup>36</sup> Ratzinger calls to attention that initially the ideas of national socialism in Germany were accepted as democratic and liberating values. This harsh history lesson should lead to a conclusion that without a universal and lasting truth an equitable social life is not possible.<sup>37</sup> The advantage of Christianity over the world “without God and against God” consists precisely in its proposal of the most universal and lasting truth (and value at the same time) as the foundation of social life – God.

Was it in the Western world alone that “life without God and against God” emerged? Was it invented there or was it an experiment? Ratzinger says no. He contends that the need to choose between belief in God and belief in

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beyond all the talk of this world, beyond all the troubled waters of our information and ideologies, to the living water, to the words that really give us life and make the world green and fruitful again ... We must offer the fresh water as God gave it to us, certain that his word is truth and that we need the drink of truth in order to live” (ibidem, p. 108).

<sup>36</sup> JR00 13/3, p. 1117 [JRGS 13/3, p. 1234]. “But who is to say what reason is? Must we simply assume that the majority is also an incarnation of greater rationality? All in all, a democratic system can function only if some core values—let us call them human rights—are regarded by all as binding and the majority restrains from violating them ... Democracy cannot function in isolation from values; therefore it cannot be neutral towards values” (J. Ratzinger, *Kościół – znak wśród narodów. Pisma eklezjologiczne i ekumeniczne*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, vol. 1, Series: Opera Omnia 8/1, Lublin 2013, p. 395; J. Ratzinger, *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern. Schriften zur Ekklesiologie und Ökumene*, ed. G.L. Müller, vol. 1, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 8/1, Freiburg im Breisgau 2015, pp. 432–433).

<sup>37</sup> “Bishop Hermann Dietzfelbinger ... pointed out that a shift has taken place from the question of truth to the question of value and went on to recall that the ideas of nascent National Socialism had managed to legitimate themselves under the guise of constructive and liberating ‘values.’ The statement of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker which the Bishop cited in his speech deserves to be repeated here: ‘I maintain that in the long run only a truth-oriented society, not a happiness-oriented society, can succeed.’” (J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, transl. A.J. Walker, San Francisco, p. 38).

something or oneself, or in human capabilities, is a ubiquitous dilemma of man and humanity. This choice was already faced by biblical Adam and Eve, who decided to turn away from God. This choice threatens modern man and recurs in the life of nearly all modern people and in every recurring generation.<sup>38</sup>

When addressing the subject of justifying Christian hope, Ratzinger puts forward an argument concerning the vision of the whole history contained in the Book of Revelation. He writes:

While the course of history depends on human decisions, in this vision it appears as a perpetual recurrence of the episode of building the Tower of Babel. Again and again, the human race tries to use its technological capabilities to fashion a bridge to heaven – that is, make itself God by its own devices. People try to grasp this ultimate freedom, this boundless health, unlimited power, which they take to be the essence of the divinity they would like to fetch from the unattainable height of the Radically Different One to their own existence – “bring it back.” These aspirations, which involve human activities in all periods of history, rely, however, on untruth – on “fettering the truth.” Man is not God but a finite and limited being; man cannot by any authority whatsoever make himself what he is not. Therefore, all these attempts must, notwithstanding their original scale, lead to a fall because their basis is not firm.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> “Again and again, mankind will be faced with this same choice: to say yes to the God who works only through the power of truth and love, or to build on something tangible and concrete—on violence” (J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, transl. Ph.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011, p. 111); “To bow low before God can never be unmodern, because it corresponds to the truth of our being. And if modern man has forgotten this truth, then it is all the more incumbent on Christians in the modern world to rediscover it and teach it to our fellowmen” (J. Ratzinger, *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, ed. M.J. Miller, transl. J. Saward et al., Series: Collected Works / Joseph Ratzinger 11, San Francisco 2014, p. 130).

<sup>39</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie do chrześcijaństwa. Wyznanie, chrzest, naśladowanie*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. R. Biel, M. Górecka, Series: Opera Omnia 4, Lublin 2017, p. 390 [hereafter referred to as JROO 4] (J. Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum. Bekenntnis – Taufe – Nachfolge*, ed. G.L. Müller, Series: Gesammelte Schriften 4, Freiburg im Breisgau 2014, p. 441 [hereafter referred to as JRGS 4]). Although this text appears in JROO 4 (*Introduction to Christianity*), it cannot be found in an English edition: J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, op. cit. As JROO editors inform (JROO 4, p. 826 [JRGS 4, pp. 941–942]), Ratzinger’s remarks on the Christian hope (which will also appear later on in this article) originally come from his book *Auf Christus schauen. Einübung in Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe* (which has had many editions, for example, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2007). This book contains retreat reflections that Ratzinger addressed to priests of the Communion and Liberation movement in 1986 in Collevallenza, Italy.

Therefore, it becomes valid to ask questions arising on the above: What makes people choose a life “without God” and “against God”? Are their motives not merely negative? Perhaps they do not consist only in the negation and rejection of the existence of God along with – religion, monotheism, and Christianity? Can, however, negation itself provide someone with a permanent basis?

Ratzinger holds that in order to effectively overcome the original sin (i.e., the turning away from God) and the “logic” guiding the builders of the Tower of Babel which appears in almost every generation, a “new Adam” – Jesus Christ was needed. In contradistinction to the first Adam, Jesus is always turned to God – the Father. He always chooses the Father. As a result, Jesus is the true Man and the beginning of a new humanity – this is what Christianity believes and this is what makes Christianity. Ratzinger argues that the “demarcation line separating Christian faith from the contemporary world” lies precisely in the belief in Jesus or in the rejection of Him.<sup>40</sup>

## The intersecting points shared by Christianity and the (ever more) secularized world

It would be inconsistent with Ratzinger’s reasoning in mind to simply state that there is such a definitive demarcation between Christianity and the world “without God and against God” that one should actually speak of two parallel, distinct and non-intersecting worlds.

According to Ratzinger, the world itself is such common ground, a locus of unity and equality. The world is one and the same for all. In its core and primordial aspect – as autonomous creation, cosmos, nature, Earth, evolution, lapse of time – the world is homogeneous, “democratic,” and the same for all. The “core” world, as opposed to its later aeon (where more and more human artefacts can be found), has no distinct enclaves for the good and the evil, the righteous and the unjust. No doubt the locus of unity of Christianity and the secular world is also human nature: being man, humanity, human existence. At its core, human nature is one and the same although changing culture and events influence it;<sup>41</sup> it does not predestine some to persist in religious belief

<sup>40</sup> “[T]he question of the approachability of the Absolute, or of his own ability to speak, has become again the question separating Christian faith and the modern world, so that the real defining feature of the Christian claim and at the same time the polytheistic character of modern atheism” (J. Ratzinger, *Fundamental Speeches...*, op. cit., p. 45).

<sup>41</sup> In 1979 Ratzinger wrote (in German) a short foreword to the book *Theologie, Gemeinde, Seelsorger* (eds. W. Friedberger, F. Schnider, München 1979), where he stated that two facts



in God and others to reject or ignore Him. All people are the same in their humanity: in their ups and downs, successes and failures, faithfulness, and unfaithfulness.

Christians and religious people in general find it hard to say whether people living "against God" see any resemblance to themselves in Christians – whether and possibly where they find themselves when they meet Christians. Ratzinger would probably agree that Christians can say with certainty that they find a piece of themselves in the world "without God and against God." They see who they could be and what causes they would support were it not for the grace of Christian faith – the grace of Christianity appearing in the world. Christians know that being Christian is not a protective armour keeping the increasingly secular world at bay; nor does it banish the temptation that biblical Adam and Eve faced. The temptation resulting from hubris to be like God constantly puts all people in harm's way, Christians being no exception here. Ratzinger writes:

He [Jesus] descended also for the sake of us who are not in the last place, descended in order to heal our pride; for pride is the real sickness of man. It was the sin of Adam, who wished he did not need God anymore but wanted to be like a God himself and wanted to vie with God. And that is, after all, the temptation of our time, too, that we would like to vie with God, that we wish we did not need God any more. We can manage by ourselves. But by thinking and living this way, by leaving him out and thinking that we do not need him, we put ourselves in the wrong place, namely, in the place of the lie. In reality we do need him; we cannot exist without him. And precisely this is the greatness of man, that God alone suffices for him. He came as Saviour to heal us.<sup>42</sup>

To round off this section, we should add that due to today's globalization even the world of the present aeon – despite engendering numerous divisions – also

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should always be taken into account: the immutability of human identity (human nature) and the reality of changes occurring in it as a result of changes in the world, caused mainly by secularization. Ratzinger writes: "At first glance, it seems almost impossible that the lives of people in the age of computers and nuclear fission should be determined by the same Gospel in which the fishermen on Lake Gennesaret once found answers to their questions" (J. Ratzinger, *Głosiciele Słowa i studzy Waszej radości. Teologia i duchowość sakramentu święceń*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. M. Górecka et al., Series: Opera Omnia 12, Lublin 2012, p. 431); "Changing the world does not change a person's identity, but it changes the ways of experiencing and expressing being human. Likewise, the Christian faith does not change in its essence, but the ways of reaching it and the forms of transmitting it are different" (ibidem, p. 432).

<sup>42</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God...*, op. cit., pp. 71–72.

brings much unity and equality. Both religious and irreligious people along with militant atheists, live in the same world: they are influenced by the same achievements and problems. Moments that unite everyone, including Christianity and the ever more secular world, are spectacular signs of the times: big crises, threats, slumps, wars, natural disasters, and calamities. This list will no doubt be supplemented by the pandemic triggered by the COVID-19 virus and its mutations. Does this pandemic and other tragic catastrophes in history confirm that there is definitely no God (and that there is no other choice than “life without God and against God”), or does the opposite is true?

### Christianity and the tragic catastrophes: The “hand of God”

During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which eventually drove many countries into a total lockdown, when churches and other places of religious worship were closed or when a small number of the faithful were allowed to take part in holy services (also during Holy Week and Easter), when everyone was utterly surprised, confused and overwhelmed by the large number of victims, in Poland in March 2020, Fr. Professor Jerzy Szymik drew our attention to Ratzinger’s reflection on the “hand of God,” which comes from the retreat that he – as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – delivered to priests of the Communion and Liberation movement in 1986 in Collevalenza, Italy.<sup>43</sup>

This reflection has already been alluded to in this article, more specifically, in its fragment concerning the biblical vision of world history contained in the Book of Revelation. It is necessary to refer to its latter part, quoting verbatim because probably no one could summarize Ratzinger’s highly abundant reflections aptly; all the more so that even today some pastors of the Church and Christian theologians are very much confused about the pandemic, or even “withdrawn”: they either cannot read it as a sign of the times, or they are simply afraid to do so because they would have to speak many truths that are unpopular in today’s world, which is becoming more and more secular.

Obviously, when Ratzinger voiced and wrote down his reflections in 1986, he could not have had in mind the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus; yet,

<sup>43</sup> J. Szymik, *Epidemia. Ludzka furia i Boska ręka*, 23 March 2020, <https://www.ekai.pl/ks-gerzy-szymik-epidemia-ludzka-furia-i-boska-reka> [access: 14.10.2021]; see JROO 4, pp. 381–399 [JRG 4, pp. 431–451].

his thoughts are universal: they elucidate the logic inherent in the coexistence of all dramatic escalations of evil and people's suffering in history alongside God's agency, His fatherly love and Providence. The crucial excerpt from this reflection reads as follows:

Besides this historical factor – the Sisyphean efforts to bring Heaven to Earth – the Apocalypse discerns the other force in history: the hand of God. Above all, it appears as a punishing hand, but God does not create suffering – nor does he want the misery of his creation. He is not an envious God. In fact, this hand is a force resisting the power of action that is grounded in untruth and self-destruction, yet bringing hope to history. This hand of God prevents man from attaining ultimate self-annihilation. God does not allow the destruction of his own creation, which is the sense of his operation when the Tower of Babel is erected and of all interventions referred to in the Apocalypse. What is rendered here as Divine punishment is not an externally inflicted scourge, but a manifestation of the intrinsic legalism of human action, which opposes truth and thus tends towards nothingness, towards death. The "hand of God," which is evident in the intrinsic opposition of being against its own annihilation, makes this drifting towards nothingness impossible; it carries the stray sheep back to the pasture of existence – to the pasture of love. Even when this state of being extricated from the thorn bush we have sought out and being carried back causes pain nonetheless, it is an act of our salvation, a hope-giving event. Who could overlook the hand of God today, which seizes man by the outermost edge of his fury of destruction and perversion, thus keeping him from moving forward? ... The Book of Revelation says, after all, that human history will not sink, despite all atrocities, into the night of self-destruction; God will not have it torn out of his hands. Divine judgements and great hardships in which humanity is immersed are not extinction, but they serve to save man. Also, in the "post-Auschwitz" era, after the tragic catastrophes in history, God remains God; with his indestructible goodness he is still good; he is still the Saviour in whose hands the destructive and horrible work of man is transformed by his love. Man is not the only actor, so death does not have the final say in history. The fact remains that there is an Other acting, that he alone is the robust and solid anchor of hope, which is stronger and more real than all horrors of the world.<sup>44</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic corroborates Ratzinger's words. It also supports the vision of the world's history depicted in the Book of Revelation and the Book

<sup>44</sup> JROO 4, pp. 390–391 [JRGS 4, pp. 441–442].

of Genesis. Shepherds of the Church in particular are obliged to assist people in reading the current signs of the times, signs from Heaven (especially those on the most global level, which affect everyone), which in a sense are “born” of the world itself and its progress. Pastoral workers in general cannot limit themselves to organisational activities only during the pandemic, although this is obviously of utmost importance.

Modernity is new and unique indeed, but it also conforms to the biblical formula of history actualized by God and people themselves – as shown by Ratzinger. When the modern world started to quickly accelerate its scientific and technological progress, when the idea emerged that it had almost unlimited possibilities of development, then came... the pandemic. It almost brought the world to a stop (it literally ended many human lives), something that seemed quite impossible in a fast-paced world. In addition, at the initial stage of the pandemic, rumours were widely circulating that it was the result of scientific experiments that got out of hand, knowingly or not. Later on, this issue was no longer raised, or people would speak only of its natural origin. Could it be that in our time it has transpired in dramatic circumstances (and for many, tragically), that the progress of humanity also involves advances in the production of biological weapons, basically, “progress” in the production of death?

Christians can and should ask this question of the modern world, especially when it is evidently denouncing God and the work of Christ. They should point to the increasingly secular world (and to its builders and defenders) facts about the causes of the pandemic and other contemporary pandemic “diseases” of mankind, and no less horrific ones, be it abortion or euthanasia. The secular world should clearly see its own consequences: it has become inhuman and one that almost definitively excludes the uncomfortable and the weak. In parallel to its obvious achievements for the good of humanity it has created a destructive, barbaric and diabolical world. How can this secular world defend itself? How can it be defended by its architects and builders? If one fights for a world “without God and against God,” one must see the truth about the consequences of this world and relate to it.

From the perspective of the Christian faith, as Ratzinger almost prophetically reminded us, however long and dramatic the coronavirus pandemic may be, and whatever pandemics and misfortunes will befall humanity, “Man is not the only actor, so death does not have the final say in history.”<sup>45</sup> God is in control.

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<sup>45</sup> JROO 4, p. 391 [JRGS 4, p. 443].

## Conclusion

Ratzinger's theology of the world in many ways resembles the theological thought of the past: the ambivalent attitude to the world in Johannine tradition, the thought of Tertullian and Saint Augustine.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps it is closest to Leibniz's thought. Ratzinger would disagree with Leibniz, who said that we live in the best of all possible worlds because the world is what humanity chooses it to be (man and the world are autonomous!), since it is people who, on numerous occasions, have made it a traumatic and infernal place to be: recall world wars, the Holocaust, and recent Russian aggression against Ukraine. However, like Leibniz, Ratzinger certainly sees the world as a basic structure based on freedom and real autonomy, which exist, in a sense, in the world of inanimate matter. To both Leibniz and Ratzinger, this freedom-based arrangement is an ontological perfection of the world: we live in a truly perfect world which points to its perfect Creator – God.

However, trying to find similarities between the past thought and Ratzinger's theology can be misleading or even inappropriate. Tertullian, Augustine and Leibniz did not live in times of intense secularization. This is why Ratzinger's understanding of secularization is so important – he is a man of our times by all accounts. Many Christians and theologians believe that secularization began just a few decades ago.<sup>47</sup> Ratzinger holds that increased secularization in the West began several centuries ago. Right now, we are witnessing another wave of secularization which – from a strictly theological perspective – started in Paradise; the construction of the Tower of Babel was its next stage. In Ratzinger's eyes, the world of today differs radically from the world of the past because it is increasingly filled with products of humanity; this propels secularization. The more secularized the world, the more dissociated it becomes from Christianity, and vice versa. If Ratzinger often speaks and thinks of the clearly divergent paths that religions have taken in history, the same applies to the increasingly secularized world and Christianity: their paths have essentially diverged and continue to remain discrepant.

Ratzinger recalls that on numerous occasions Christianity has been able to demythologize the world, falsify myths, illusions, errors, ideologies, propaganda, and lies. It has been able to demythologize false notions of the world and

<sup>46</sup> T. Rowland, *The World in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, op. cit., pp. 109–115, 132.

<sup>47</sup> For example: D. Lipiec, *Pastoral Care...*, op. cit., p. 95.

liberate people from them in the Truth because this is where liberation lies.<sup>48</sup> Ratzinger believes that not only has Christianity frequently demythologized the world, but it has been the best antidote to mythical thinking about the world. The question of whether Christianity will be able to also demythologize the world remains open to him, for the power of creating modern myths (secularization as the only option for the world, as the “salvation” of the world is a modern myth) and reviving those of the past is so tremendous that it can be hardly assumed with complete certainty that Christianity will succeed yet again. Ratzinger argues that although the contemporary world sometimes resists the work of Christ very firmly, it does not and will not cease to be the receiver of God’s love. Christianity believes that the world is autonomous but at the same time – whether the world wants it or not – that its history involves the saving love of God and His fatherly “hand.” Although at first this may seem like a paradox, the COVID-19 pandemic confirms it.

And one more thing. Ratzinger’s thinking suggests questioning the common understanding of the terms “liberal” and “conservative” and even inverting them. In the Western mainstream language and thinking of today, “liberals” are good and “conservatives” are bad; while “liberals” fight for freedom, liberation and progress, “conservatives” hinder freedom, liberation and progress. Reading Ratzinger, it seems to be quite the opposite. If “liberals” fight for freedom from all constraints – such as God, religion, faith, morality and even natural sex – they are “conservatives”: they belong to the past and cling to the past. They perpetuate the old pattern of human self-soteriology, which is in comparison to Christianity only an irrational and childish myth. They have not left the realm of original sin yet; they represent the axiological stubborn conservatism. If “conservatives” are genuinely conservative and their belief in God is conscious, they are liberals and true progressivists. Liberation and true progress are about staying faithful to constant truth about man, that man is not and cannot be a saviour: only God can save man. “Life without God and against God” – Ratzinger insisted – is not a positive revolution, but a “mutilation of human existence.” In his eyes Christianity deserves to be called a positive revolution. Christianity radically refutes the myth of self-salvation and happiness without God. Therefore, it has the power to move forward and lead the whole world forward.

*Translated by Tomasz Pałkowski  
Proofread by Monika Szela*

<sup>48</sup> “Faith ‘demythologizes’ the world, discloses the fallacy of racism and social dogmas as lies, turns people away from them in order to guide them to the truth that liberates (see John 8:32)” (JROO 1, p. 594 [JRGS 1, p. 637]).

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## *Credo in Patrem*: Paterological Elements in the Teaching of Benedict XVI

*Credo in Patrem*. Elementy patrylogiczne  
w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to present the paterological elements in the teaching of Benedict XVI. These elements appear as relevant when the Pope discusses other truths of faith. Thus, the papal teaching on God the Father presents Him in *nexus mysteriorum* of the truths of faith. The article consists of three parts, which correspond to the historical periods in which the truth about God the Father was gradually revealed. The first part discusses the concept of God's "fatherhood," which, based on human experience, recognises God as the origin and source of all existence. Additionally, the care and goodness of God towards human beings in the Old Testament proves God's qualities of a father, and thus the universal brotherhood of all human beings and the necessity of caring for creation as a gift originating in God's love. The second part of the article reveals the fullness of the revelation about God the Father made in his Son, Jesus Christ. God not only can be called Father, but is indeed Father. The life and teaching of the incarnate Son remained in constant reference to the Father, a fulfilment of his will, and the particular event that revealed this truth to the apostles was the prayer of Jesus. Christology, then, as the Pope makes clear, is the necessary hermeneutical key to paterology. The last part of the article discusses the sanctification of people in baptism. Through this sacrament, people become sons and daughters of the Father in the only-begotten Son and, like Jesus, can address God with the word "Abba." The mystery of God the Father impels us to discover the other as a brother and to take concrete actions through which, already here on earth, the brotherhood of Christians is made a reality.

**KEYWORDS:** Benedict XVI, God the Father, Son, paterology (patriology), creation, brotherhood, fraternity, prayer

**ABSTRAKT:** Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie elementów patrylogicznych obecnych w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI. Elementy te pojawiają się jako istotne podczas

omawiania przez papieża innych prawd wiary. Tym samym papieska nauka o Bogu Ojcu ukazuje Go w *nexus mysteriorum* prawd wiary. Artykuł składa się z trzech części, które odpowiadają stopniowemu objawieniu w historii prawdy o Bogu Ojcu i jej przeżywaniu. Pierwsza część omawia odniesienie do Boga pojęcia „ojcostwa”, które bazując na ludzkim doświadczeniu, widzi w Bogu początek i źródło wszelkiego istnienia. Również troska i dobroć Boga względem ludzi objawione w Starym Testamencie pozwalały na dostrzeżenie w Bogu przymiotów ojca, a tym samym powszechnego braterstwa wszystkich ludzi i konieczności troski o stworzenie jako dar mający swoje źródło w miłości Boga. Druga część artykułu ukazuje pełnię objawienia o Bogu Ojcu, które dokonało się w Jego Synu, Jezusie Chrystusie. Bóg nie tylko może być nazywany Ojcem, ale rzeczywiście nim jest. Życie i nauczanie wcielonego Syna pozostawały w stałym odniesieniu do Ojca, stanowiły wypełnienie Jego woli, a szczególnym wydarzeniem, które odsłoniło tę prawdę apostołom, była modlitwa Jezusa. Zatem chrystologia, co wyraźnie ukazuje papież, stanowi konieczny, hermeneutyczny klucz do patrylogii. Ostatnia część artykułu omawia usynowienie ludzi, które dokonuje się w chrzcie świętym. Przez ten sakrament ludzie stają się synami i córkami Ojca w Jednorodzonym Synu i tak jak Jezus mogą się zwracać do Boga słowem „*Abba*”. Tajemnica Boga Ojca przynagla do odkrycia drugiego człowieka jako brata, a także podjęcia konkretnych czynów, poprzez które urzeczywistnia się – już tu na ziemi – braterstwo chrześcijan.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Benedykt XVI, Bóg Ojciec, Syn, patrylogia (paterologia), stworzenie, braterstwo, modlitwa

## Introduction

The Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, reminds us of the gradual revelation of God in history, the realisation of the economy of revelation, which reaches its goal and peak in the manifestation of the Son. Through Him, humanity has access anew to the Father in the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> A theological analysis of Benedict XVI's teaching in the context of the doctrine of God the Father reveals the momentous significance of this theme and formulates concrete demands for the Christian life and for growth to holiness, the high measure of life that is the destiny of every human being. The *status quaestionis* shows that in the works on the teaching of Benedict XVI, the topic of God the Father has not been explored as a separate, systematic study. It is touched upon in the context of the papal teaching on the Trinity or in studies concerning the work of Joseph Ratzinger, that is, until his election to the Holy See. It therefore seems all the more important to address

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 1965, no. 2.

the theme of God the Father in the papal magisterium, especially as this theme plays an important role in a deeper understanding of the other truths of faith.

Creation is the first space of God's unveiling, the space in which He calls the world into being, especially man, and reveals His qualities to him. After the fall of man, the history of salvation enters a new stage, during which God reveals his love and care for human beings. This all makes up the gradual unveiling of God and the realisation of his plan towards the incarnation of the Son. For this reason, it is Christology that plays a key role in paterology,<sup>2</sup> since man has access to the Father only in and through the Son. In turn, he himself can be understood more deeply only through this relationship to the Father which is constitutive of him. It is a special and unique relationship which at the same time opens up a new area of man's relationship with God. Realising and experiencing it is an important task for Christians, because from it arises the relationship between human beings. These three essential stages: the revelation of God in the Old Testament, the revelation of the Father in the Son, and the living out of this mystery by Christians, mark the three main points of this article.

## Revelation of the Father in the Old Testament

Experiences of fatherhood and motherhood are among the most primordial of human experimentation. They were often transferred to God or gods, on whom man felt a dependence. They could have a positive dimension – denoting care, concern or kindness shown to man, or a negative dimension – man felt fear, degrading dependence or the need to make sacrifices so as to gain favour with the gods.

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<sup>2</sup> On the concept of paterology, cf. E. Kasjaniuk, *Patrylogia* [Paterology], [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka* [Catholic Encyclopaedia], vol. 15, eds. E. Gigilewicz et al., Lublin 2011, col. 66–68. The publication by J.D. Szczurek *Bóg Ojciec w tajemnicy Trójcy Świętej* [God the Father in the Mystery of the Holy Trinity] (Kraków 2003) also deserves special attention. The author takes up the subject of God the Father in dogmatic theology in a systematic way and thus fills the hitherto existing gap. Cf. M. Jagodziński, *The Father in the Communion of the Holy Trinity*, "Teologia w Polsce" 13/1 (2019), pp. 5–17; S.M. Powell, *The Trinity in the German Thought*, Cambridge 2001; R.J. Woźniak, *Primitas et plenitudo. Dios Padre en la teología trinitaria de San Bonaventura*, Pamplona 2007; J.P. Krueger, *God the Father in the Western Tradition: Bringing Augustine and Bonaventure into Conversation with Modern Theology*, <https://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/etd%3A429/datastream/PDF/view> [access: 2.04.2024].

The Old Testament, too, knows the mechanism of transferring man's life experiences into the understanding of God. However, this is not an uncritical process, as the qualities transferred to God are often deepened and purified. A proper analogy<sup>3</sup> requires such an expanded understanding, as exemplified in the Old Testament by the very idea of fatherhood, which emphatically rejects what is the essence of human fatherhood, namely the idea of a physical, bodily origin.

Benedict XVI repeatedly points to the fatherhood of God, an understanding of which has its genesis in the theology of creation. Fatherhood is attributed to God primarily on the basis of the special relationship that exists between the creature and the Creator, who is its origin and source of existence. However, an important methodological clarification must be made at this point. Although in the Pope's teaching – where God is referred to as Father by virtue of creation – there is no *explicit* explanation that paternity is referred to the one God, the texts are unambiguous. The Old Testament is not familiar with the fullness of the revelation about the Father, which was only disclosed by Jesus Christ; therefore, it cannot be claimed that creation is the exclusive work of the first person of the Trinity. This matter was clearly settled at the Fourth Lateran Council, which affirmed that creation is an act of the whole Trinity.<sup>4</sup>

This position does not invalidate the method of appropriation and its value, since appropriation is more than a determination of the relationship God enters into with the world, where the Father is credited with that which pertains to power, thus creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>5</sup> In view of the above, it is also impossible to consider that the Old Testament is the epoch of God the Father. It is the stage

<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. Kowalczyk, *La Trinità, la famiglia umana e la comunità religiosa. Opportunità e limiti delle analogie trinitarie*, "Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny" 29/1 (2021), pp. 163–187.

<sup>4</sup> "The Trinity is the Creator of all creation. Creation is an act of God – the Trinity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation, but one principle. The three divine persons are the one origin of all things, the Creator of all things. [...] The work of creation is the work of the Triune God" (H. Szmulewicz, *Z miłości i z nicości. Zarys teologii stworzenia* [Out of Love and out of Nothingness. An Outline of the Theology of Creation], Tarnów 2007, pp. 30–31). Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Creation and Trinity*, "Communio. International Catholic Review" 15/3 (1988), pp. 285–293; Fourth Lateran Council, *Confession of Faith*, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm#1> [access: 20.05.2024]; cf. Sobór Laterański IV, *O wierze katolickiej* [On the Catholic Faith], [in:] *Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych. Tekst grecki, łaciński, polski* [Documents of the Universal Councils. Greek, Latin and Polish Texts], vol. 2, eds. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2003, pp. 221–224.

<sup>5</sup> The doctrine of appropriation is interestingly discussed by Gilles Emery in his publication *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, transl. F.A. Murphy, Oxford 2007; cf. G. Emery, *Teologia trynitarna świętego Tomasza z Akwinu*, transl. M. Romanek, Kraków 2014, pp. 493–531. The author shows the development of this doctrine and its significance

of salvation history in which the one and only God is revealed. Appropriation as a cognitive and linguistic method plays a positive role in theology, making the divine persons seem more visible and more cognisable to the human mind.<sup>6</sup> An example of its use by Benedict XVI is the greeting of the Poles at the end of one of his general audiences: “Today we contemplate the Most Holy Trinity [...] the Creator and merciful Father; [...] the Only-Begotten Son, [...] the Holy Spirit who moves all things.”<sup>7</sup> This greeting corresponds to the structure of the *Credo*, the origin of which is linked to the administration of the sacrament of Baptism.

It is precisely this kind of papal teaching about the Father as Creator that has its proper sense and cognitive value for paterology, even though the term “paterology” itself does not appear in papal teaching. The Pope does, however, use the method of appropriation to emphasise the goodness and love of the Father that are revealed in the act of creation; he explicitly attributes the work of creation to Him when he speaks of the contribution that Christians can make to the understanding of the relationship between God, human beings and the whole created world: “They contemplate the cosmos and its marvels in light of the creative work of the Father and the redemptive work of Christ, who by his death and resurrection has reconciled with God ‘all things, whether on earth or in heaven’ (Col 1:20).”<sup>8</sup> The catechesis on creation read in the light of the mystery of the Father emphasises the dignity of man, reveals his duties towards the created world, and leads to an authentic ecology, including especially a “human ecology.”

Benedict XVI refers to the theme, present in the Old Testament, of seeking the face of God as the express desire of man to see God as He is. This sincere and deep desire is expressed by the psalmist: “Of You my heart says: ‘Seek His face!’ I seek, O Lord, your face; your face do not hide from me” (Ps 27:8–9). The Pope poses the question: what is the face of God in question? Judaism completely forbade the creation of images of God because He cannot be portrayed. In this it differed radically from the cults of neighbouring peoples that

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for the understanding of the Trinity itself. Cf. J.B. Ku, *God the Father in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Series: American University Studies VII/324, New York 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J.B. Ku, *God the Father in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, op. cit. p. 530.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 7.06.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20090607.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20090607.html) [access: 20.05.2024].

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation. Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 2010*, 8.12.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliii-world-day-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html) [access: 20.05.2024].

were known to the Israelites.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Hebrew term *pānîm*, referring to the face of God and the desire to see Him, appears as many as 100 times in the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup>

What then is the message of the motif of seeking the face of God? Two fundamental truths about God are expressed in it. The first, as it were, is to defend against the attempt to reduce Him to an object, a figure or an image and wants to show the newness of the God of the Israelites. The second truth is much deeper and, in the statement “the face of the Lord,” emphasises the personal dimension of God. He is the real “Thou” who can be addressed as a person. He is the one who has the power to listen to man, to see him, to respond to his requests.<sup>11</sup> God’s radical transcendence and holiness do not exclude His closeness to man. He is not bound to a place or time, but remains in relationship with man, as evidenced by the biblical texts that mention the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The idea of a name in the Bible plays an important role, so that God himself reveals His name to man. From the point of view of the economy of salvation, this is crucial, since from the revelation given to Moses a new stage in the history of the Israelites begins. This revelation, which nevertheless preserves the mystery and transcendence of God, shows Him as present in the midst of His people, entering into the network of human relationships.<sup>12</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that this is the origin of the reference to God of the term “father,” which, as already mentioned, expresses the truth of God as the source of all existence and emphasises his proximity and care. Catechesis on creation faces many challenges today, such as the confrontation of faith with empirical sciences, Enlightenment currents and sometimes even ecological

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20130116.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130116.html) [access: 20.05.2024].

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, op. cit.; T. Tułodziecki, *Widzenie Boga w świetle Księgi Psalmów* [Seeing God in the light of the Book of Psalms], “Verbum Vitae” 16 (2009), pp. 107–122.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. T. Tułodziecki, *Widzenie Boga w świetle Księgi Psalmów*, op. cit. p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Mass of the Lord’s Supper*, 1.04.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100401\\_coena-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100401_coena-domini.html) [access: 20.05.2024]. “The entire history of salvation is a journey of love, mercy and benevolence: from Creation to the liberation of the People of Israel from slavery in Egypt, to the gift of the Law on Sinai, to the return to the homeland from the Babylonian captivity. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was always the close God who never abandoned his People.” (Benedict XVI, *First Sunday of Advent. First Vespers Presided by His Holiness Benedict XVI*, 1.12.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121201\\_vespri-avvento.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121201_vespri-avvento.html) [access: 20.05.2024]).



currents, or the overemphasis on grace in relation to the reality of creation.<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI teaches that also atheism and ideological closure to the truth about the Creator are dangers that ultimately directly threaten man. They lead to the oblivion of human values.<sup>14</sup> “A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism.”<sup>15</sup> The rejection of the Creator therefore harms creation and the foundations of its development most profoundly.

The truth about God as Creator and Father is therefore one of the first and fundamental truths which is at the centre of the faith of Israel and also of Christianity. Moreover, this truth, as the Pope reminds us, is what unites all Christians, “in spite of the incomplete ecclesial communion”<sup>16</sup> and for this reason alone should, as having its origin in the event of baptism, be subjected to deeper analysis in ecumenical dialogue.

But returning to the essence of the biblical message about God, it seeks to reveal the closeness and omnipotence of God, of which Psalm 103, quoted by the Pope, speaks: “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (Ps 103:13–14).<sup>17</sup> For this reason, referring to the theology of creation and biblical revelation, Benedict XVI links these two titles of God – the Creator and Father – as does the author of Deuteronomy: “Is he not your father who begot you, the one who made and established you” (Deut 32:6 USCCB; cf. Mal 2:10; Isa 64:7). “There is but one fatherhood, that of God the Father, the one Creator of the world, ‘of all that is seen and unseen.’”<sup>18</sup> Creation is the work of God, and the space

<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. Rossa, *Teologia stworzenia w katechezie i przepowiadaniu w świetle publikacji J. Ratzingera – Benedykta XVI „Na początku Bóg stworzył...”* [The Theology of Creation in Catechesis and Preaching in the Light of J. Ratzinger – Benedict XVI’s Publication “In the Beginning God Created...”], “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne” 32/1 (2013), pp. 138–141.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, no. 78, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

<sup>15</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 78.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, 15.11.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121115\\_chrstuni.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121115_chrstuni.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

<sup>17</sup> “Consequently God’s fatherhood is infinite love, tenderness that bends over us, frail children, in need of everything. [...] It is our smallness, our frail human nature that becomes an appeal to the Lord’s mercy, that he may show his greatness and tenderness as a Father”; Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20130130.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130130.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to Cameroon and Angola. Vespers Celebration*, 18.03.2009, <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/march/documents/>

of His self-revealing, self-revealing.<sup>19</sup> It is through creation – the visible world – that God reveals certain of His qualities to man, and the world becomes a pathway leading to God and the discovery of His fatherhood. This conviction was clearly expressed by the inspired authors (cf. Wis 13:1–9; Rom 1:18–25), and is reiterated by the Pope when he teaches that creation is God’s great gift of in which He reveals Himself, His great goodness to man.<sup>20</sup>

It has been pointed out that one of the essential messages of the motif of “seeking the face of the Lord” is the conviction that God, who has a face, is a personal being. It is also linked to the fatherhood of God as Creator. Calling God as Father because of creation not only shows Him as the source and origin, but also emphasises the special dignity of every human being. In his teaching, Benedict XVI draws attention to the special dignity of every human person, which has its origin in the design of the Father, the Creator. “The profound truth of our existence is thus contained in this surprising mystery: every creature, and in particular every human person, is the fruit of God’s thought and an act of his love.”<sup>21</sup> In catechesis on creation, the presentation of the proper image of God the Father can be crucial, especially in the context of pointing to the love of God as the proper beginning of creation. Every human being is wanted and loved from the beginning, and his or her life has meaning and immeasurable value. Showing the Creator as Father sheds light on man’s deepest identity, as the Pope reminded us when he emphasised in his teaching that “at the origin of every human being there is not something haphazard or chance, but a loving plan of God.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, man himself is created in God’s image

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hf\_ben-xvi\_spe\_20090318\_vespri-yaounde.html [access: 21.05.2024]. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Meeting for Peace in Assisi*, 27.10.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111027\\_assisi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111027_assisi.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J.K. Pytel, *Samookazanie się Boga przez stworzenie świata* [God’s Self-Revelation Through the Creation of the World], “Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne” 10 (1997), pp. 277–278.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. The Great Hallel. Psalm 136 (135)*, 19.10.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111019.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111019.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the 49th World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, 18.10.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/vocations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20111018\\_xlix-vocations.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/vocations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111018_xlix-vocations.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Valencia (Spain) on Occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families. Homily of the Holy Father*, 9.07.2006, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20060709\\_valencia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060709_valencia.html) [access: 21.05.2024].

and likeness, which means that he can only discover himself and realise himself in a relationship of love.<sup>23</sup>

To know one's own dignity is at the same time to discover the dignity of every person. Man can arrive at this truth by way of reason, but – as Benedict XVI teaches – discovering God the Father is about something more. It is also about discovering a brotherhood that “originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first.”<sup>24</sup> This issue would require a separate study, but what is crucial to it is to touch upon the mystery of the Creator, the Father: “fraternity presupposes that all men and women have a common Father, God the Creator.”<sup>25</sup> By relating his existence to God, man discovers the supernatural dignity of every human life and the truth of fraternity, since every human being comes from the same Father.

## The Fullness of the Father's Revelation in the New Testament

The Old Testament theme of seeking and discovering the face of God is realised in Jesus Christ, and in a way that radically exceeds all expectations. In him, the revelation of God reaches its climax. As Son, he not only tells us something about God, since he himself is God, but fully reveals the Father to us. The radical newness of the New Testament, as Benedict XVI emphasises, is that God can be seen, has his face of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word who comes from the Father.<sup>26</sup> From the Incarnation of the Son, a new history begins, “shaped by His ‘yes’ to the Father.”<sup>27</sup> Towards Him was the whole history of

<sup>23</sup> “The strongest proof that we are made in the image of the Trinity is this: love alone makes us happy because we live in a relationship, and we live to love and to be loved. Borrowing an analogy from biology, we could say that imprinted upon his ‘genome’, the human being bears a profound mark of the Trinity, of God as Love.” (Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 7.06.2009, op. cit.).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps*, 8.01.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090108\\_diplomatic-corps.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090108_diplomatic-corps.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, op. cit. Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.05.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120516.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120516.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 10.12.2008, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20081210.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20081210.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. A. Sosnowski, *Relacja Ojca i Syna w ujęciu kard. Josepha Ratzinger* [The

salvation manifested in words and deeds intrinsically connected to each other, as the Pope recalled, referring to the teaching of the Constitution *Dei verbum*.<sup>28</sup> Jesus is the mediator and fullness of all Revelation.

In the transition from the Old to the New Testament, the paterological principle of continuity in the development of the revelation of the mystery of the Father becomes apparent. What was intuited and read in the Old Covenant from the economy of salvation about the fatherhood of God foreshadowed the fuller revelation of the person of God the Father.<sup>29</sup> Both continuity and novelty can thus be discerned here, as the fatherhood of God in relation to human beings remains radically different from the revealed relationship of the Father in relation to his only-begotten Son.

The truth about the Father becomes available through the Son and in the Son; one cannot have the Father without the Son. In Jesus Christ, God has truly become close, has revealed his face. This is well expressed in Benedict XVI's recalled dialogue between Jesus and Philip. When Jesus announces his departure to the Father, he poses to his disciples the question of faith, which ultimately comes down to knowing the Son. Philip's request, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied" (John 14:8), expresses the desire to see, to know God. The desire of many people can be found in this question. In the answer given to Philip, the Pope hears words addressed to everyone who seeks the face of God: "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), he also sees in them an introduction to the heart of Christological faith.<sup>30</sup> The knowledge of the Son is always a participation in the knowledge of the Father. "God's Son made man has let us know the Father, he has let us know the hidden face of the Father through his visible human face."<sup>31</sup> This is only possible because the

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Relationship of the Father and the Son According to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger], [in:] *Jezus Chrystus*, eds. G. Baran, P. Łabuda, J. Królikowski, Series: Scripturae Lumen 7, Tarnów 2015, pp. 287–302.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Silence and Word; Path of Evangelization. Message for the 46th World Communications Day*, 24.01.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120124\\_46th-world-communications-day.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120124_46th-world-communications-day.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J.D. Szczurek, *Bóg Ojciec w tajemnicy Trójcy Świętej*, op. cit. pp. 36–37. cf. A.W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, Eugene, OR 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, op. cit.; Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli*, 22.05.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_reg\\_20110522.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20110522.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, *Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI*, 1.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20130101\\_world-day-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20130101_world-day-peace.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

Son comes from the Father, from His essence, as the Pope teaches: Jesus is “the abbreviated Word, the short and essential Word of the Father who has told us all about him.”<sup>32</sup> Contemplating the human face of Jesus, man is at the same time always contemplating his Deity, his eternal Sonship, which necessarily leads to the mystery of the Father.

It is a moment of coming to the centre of Christian theology and the structure of its cognitive acts. It is radically Christocentric, as is the teaching of Benedict XVI. The person and work of Jesus Christ constitute the main principle of theological epistemology and at the same time the goal of this cognition,<sup>33</sup> which is why Jesus Christ is at the centre of papal preaching. At the same time, Christology is the methodological foundation of paterology, since the knowledge of the Father is necessarily linked to the manifestation and knowledge of the Son. Benedict XVI, referring once again to Jesus’ conversation with Philip, emphasises that, according to Christ’s words, it is only in him that we may contemplate the Father,<sup>34</sup> and the term “Father” leads to the Christological mystery, since it is “the key to the Mystery of Christ.”<sup>35</sup> The inseparable link between paterology and Christology reveals the true depth of what the *nexus mysteriorum* expresses.

John the Evangelist relayed the speech of Jesus which He delivered shortly before His Passion. Jesus there beseeches the Father for his disciples and for the future Church, speaking of the work he had done. This work was the revelation of the Father to men: “I have revealed your name to men” (John 17:6). In the person of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God’s name, which was given to Moses, the one who did not see God but saw God’s glory pass before him

<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. Szymik, *Teologia według J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI. Rozumienie, natura, sens* [Theology According to J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. Understanding, Nature, Meaning], “*Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN*” 12 (2017), p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council “Cor Unum”*, 13.11.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20091113\\_corunum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091113_corunum.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. The Prayer and the Holy Family of Nazareth*, 28.12.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111228.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111228.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. “It is in the Lord Jesus that the benevolent face of the Father, who is in heaven, is fully revealed. It is in knowing him that we may also know the Father (cf. Jn 8:19; 14:7). It is in seeing him that we can see the Father, because he is in the Father and the Father is in him (cf. Jn 14:9,11). He is ‘the image of the invisible God’ and as the hymn of the Letter to the Colossians describes him” (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.01.2013, op. cit.).

(cf. Exod 33:18–23),<sup>36</sup> is completed. The Christological key to paterology once again demonstrates its irreplaceability. As John the Evangelist teaches: “no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John 1:18). God can only be known by one who remains with Him in a relationship, a real relationship, and therefore ultimately only the Son, the Only-Begotten, who has always been in the bosom of the Father, can claim the true knowledge of God, and He knows the fullness of the truth about Him, for He remains with Him in “an intimate communion of being.”<sup>37</sup>

Benedict XVI clearly expresses this truth of faith in the Father, which has its Christological foundation: “On what is this faith in God the Father based? It is based on Jesus Christ: he himself and his history reveal the Father to us, enable us to know him as much is possible in this world.”<sup>38</sup> The Pope pointed out, however, that the revelation of the Father’s name made by Jesus is not just a new word about God, but a reality, the manifestation of the Father’s new presence among his people.<sup>39</sup> God not only can be called Father, but actually is. For this reason, Christian preaching is not the proclamation of words or ideas, but of the Person, the reality of the Incarnate Word, who remains constantly “ontologically open to the relationship with the Father.”<sup>40</sup> Where one proclaims Christ, one proclaims at the same time the Father from whom He proceeds and whose will He fulfils. It is also a proclamation in the power of the Spirit, who is sent by the Father at the request of the Son: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16–17). Being a witness to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit means being on a mission to proclaim the fullness of the truth about Jesus as Son. As St John the Evangelist reminds us, the Holy Spirit is the One who leads to the fullness of truth and strengthens in the mission of preaching (cf. John 16:13;

<sup>36</sup> “God had revealed his name to Moses by the burning bush, that is, he had made it possible to call on him, had given a tangible sign of his ‘being’ among human beings. All this found fulfilment and completion in Jesus: he inaugurated God’s presence in history in a new way” (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 16.01.2013, op. cit.).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. The “jewel” of the Cry of Exultation*, 7.12.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111207.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111207.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 8.01.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20120108\\_battesimo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20120108_battesimo.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>39</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 25.01.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120125.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120125.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. Year for Priests*, 24.06.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20090624.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090624.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

Acts 1:8). As the Gift of the Father and the Son, He is the *Vinculum amoris* constantly leading to the knowledge of the Father and the Son.

The Gospels present only one story from Jesus' childhood – the account of the journey to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph for the Passover feast – which we find in the Gospel of St Luke. What is at the centre of this account is Jesus' relationship to the Father, his special awareness of being a Son and of being in that which belongs to the Father (cf. Luke 2:41–50). For what is most surprising is Jesus' response to Mary's anxious words: "Son, why have you done this to us?" (Luke 2:48). It reveals that from his earliest years Jesus was aware of his unique relationship to the God he calls Father. His decision to stay in the temple was not just an expression of piety, an interest in the place, but above all "the result of his close relationship with the Father."<sup>41</sup> He is even surprised that Mary and Joseph sought Him out. "His answer to the question of why he had done this to his father and mother was that he had only done what the Son should do, that is, to be with his Father. [...] He had stayed where the Son ought to be, that is, with the Father, and he stressed who his Father was."<sup>42</sup> Jesus' response remains a mystery to Mary and Joseph. The intrinsic mystery of God transcends any human understanding, and at the same time God speaks to man in human language, revealing himself to him.

The episode of the twelve-year-old Jesus staying behind in the temple reveals the inner life of God. After Jesus begins his public activity and calls his disciples, his prayer is the event in which he reveals to his disciples in a special way his unique relationship with the Father.<sup>43</sup> It permeates the whole of Jesus'

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 27.12.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20091227.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20091227.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>42</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience. The Prayer and the Holy Family of Nazareth*, 28.12.2011, op. cit. "His true origins are in the Father, God; he comes totally from him [God], but in a different way from that of any of God's prophets or messengers who preceded him" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 2.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20130102.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130102.html) [access: 22.05.2024]).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. A. Sosnowski, *Modlitwa Jezusa jako klucz do chrystologii w nauczaniu Josepha Ratzingera* [The Jesus Prayer as a Key to Christology in the Teaching of Joseph Ratzinger], [in:] *Kościół Chrystusa* [The Church of Christ], Series: *Scripturae Lumen* 11, eds. J. Królikowski, P. Łabuda, G.M. Baran, Tarnów 2021, pp. 545–556; A. Sosnowski, *Das Gebet Jesu in der Lehre vom Papst Benedikt XVI*, "Teologia w Polsce" 12/2 (2018), pp. 265–283; H. Hoping, *Das Geheimnis des Sohnes. Zur Christologie Josepha Ratzingers*, [in:] *Ein hörendes Herz. Hinführung zur Theologie und Spiritualität von Josepha Ratzinger/Papst Benedikt XVI*, eds. M.Ch. Hastetter, H. Hoping, Series: Ratzinger Studien 5, Regensburg 2012, p. 65; Ch. Schönborn, *Zu den Quellen des christologischen Denkens im Werk von Josepha Ratzinger*, [in:] *Zur Mitte der Theologie im Werk von Josepha Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI*, eds. M.H. Heim, J.C. Pech, Series: Ratzinger Studien 6, Regensburg 2013, pp. 104–108.

existence; everything he does, teaches and lives is permeated by prayer, that is, by a constant dialogue with the Father. By praying, He feels His paternity, He reveals His inner relationship with the Father. "In prayer, Jesus lived in uninterrupted contact with the Father in order to fulfil completely his plan of love for mankind."<sup>44</sup> The evangelist Luke repeatedly emphasises the importance of prayer in the life of Jesus. It encompasses all phases of His ministry, teaching, and fills His days and nights. Jesus prays before the most important events, and prayer initiates His "stepp[ing] out of the hidden life in Nazareth into his public ministry."<sup>45</sup> This is not an example of the prayer of a pious Jew, although no doubt Jesus assimilated the way of prayer and learned its role at home in Nazareth, but it is a peculiar prayer, the prayer of the Son. To such an extent does Jesus' attitude seem unique that the disciples, seeing it, themselves ask Jesus to teach them how to pray (cf. Luke 11:1).

The Passover of Jesus was the moment towards which all his teaching and activity was heading. The Gospels portray it as one constant prayer of Jesus. The events from the Last Supper to the last words on the cross are presented by the Evangelists as Jesus' prayer addressed to the Father. On that evening, when Jesus – priest and victim – offers himself as a sacrifice, he fulfils the Father's work to the end and makes requests to him: that the Father may glorify the Son in his hour, so that the apostles and those who through them will believe in him may be one as he is one with the Father (John 17:1–26).<sup>46</sup> Jesus' prayer thus transcends the boundaries of time and embraces the whole future of the Church. The whole Church was involved in the Son's dialogue with the Father in that special hour when the fullness of time had come.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.11.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111130.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111130.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.11.2011, op. cit.; Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Basilica of St Sabina*, 6.02.2008, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20080206\\_ash-wednesday.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080206_ash-wednesday.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. "Only when we attain that silence of the Lord, his being with the Father from which words come, can we truly begin to grasp the depth of these words. Jesus' words are born in his silence on the Mountain, as Scripture tells us, in his being with the Father. Words are born from this silence of communion with the Father, from being immersed in the Father" (Benedict XVI, *Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the International Theological Commission*, 6.10.2006, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20061006\\_commissione-teologica.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061006_commissione-teologica.html) [access: 22.05.2024]). Cf. P.T. Gadenz, *The Gospel of Luke*, Series: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, Grand Rapids, MI 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 25.01.2012, op. cit. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Mass of the Lord's Supper*, 1.04.2010, op. cit.



There is one scene of Jesus' prayer that always arouses special anxiety and evokes great emotion, namely his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when the apostles fell asleep. It is a place in Scripture where, like no other, it is possible to delve into the mystery of Jesus – God and Man.<sup>47</sup> The Evangelists highlight Jesus' posture in prayer: according to Matthew and Mark's account, Jesus falls to the ground, and according to Luke, he prays, kneeling. The evangelist also adds that during this great trepidation Jesus was sweating blood (cf. Luke 22:44). Mark, on the other hand, preserves a single word, "Abba,"<sup>48</sup> which expresses the deepest truth of the relationship between the Son and the Father.

Two elements are therefore essential in this prayer, and Benedict XVI draws attention to both. The first is the unity of the will of the Father and the Son. The whole human will of Jesus is shaken, experiencing terror in the face of the cross to come. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will!" (Matt 26:39 USCCB). At this point, Jesus incorporates his human will into the will of the Father, which is also the will of the Son, according to his words: "For this I was born and for this I came into the world" (John 18:37 USCCB). Christ transforms "no" said to God by Adam into a "yes" said by the Son to the Father.

And Jesus draws our will – which opposes God's will, which seeks autonomy – upwards, [...] and unite[s] it with the Father's will: "Not *my* will but *yours*". In this transformation of "no" into "yes", in this insertion of the creatural will into the will of the Father, he transforms humanity and redeems us. [...] My will exists, but the will of the Father is crucial because it is truth and love.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> "But what does this mean? What is 'my' will as opposed to 'your' will? Who is opposing whom? The Father and the Son? Or perhaps the man Jesus and God – the Triune God? Nowhere else in Scripture do we ponder so profoundly the mystery of Jesus as in the prayer of Gethsemane. It is therefore no coincidence that the struggle of the early Church to understand the figure of Jesus Christ found its final form in the devotional meditation on the prayer of Gethsemane" (J. Ratzinger, *Jesus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 1, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. M. Górecka, W. Szymona, Series: Opera Omnia 6/1, Lublin 2015, p. 491). Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 1.02.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120201.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120201.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>48</sup> On this word cf. J. Jeremias, *Abba. Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte*, Göttingen 1966.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience. Easter Triduum*, 20.04.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20110420.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110420.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. The "jewel" of the Cry of Exultation*, 7.12.2011, op. cit.; Benedict XVI, *Holy Mass and Eucharistic Procession to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. Homily of His Holiness*,

Jesus, true God and true man, the Son, shows the primacy of the divine will before the human will. This primacy is man's greatest affirmation. He is great not when he says "no" to God, but when, like the Son, he says "yes" to God. "Through his prayer, he made his own humanity, and the humanity of us all, part of his filial relation to the Father."<sup>50</sup> This hour, therefore, begins the return of man to paradise, the land that man has left; it reveals as fully as possible the truth of Jesus, Son and man.

The second element of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, revealing His mystery, is the words in which He addresses God. Mark preserved the word "Abba" in his Gospel (cf. Mark 14:36). Its use must have been surprising, since this Aramaic or Hebrew phrase was not used to express man's relationship to God. No Jew, not even the most pious Jew, would use it to refer to God. But the word "Abba" is spoken by the only-begotten Son, who addresses the Father at a special hour. As the Pope teaches, the word "Abba," equivalent to the affectionate "Dad," conveys Jesus' intimacy with the Father, their love, trust and confidence.<sup>51</sup> Within himself, Jesus talks to God as the Son talks to the Father, and in this prayer one can perceive the Trinitarian mystery.<sup>52</sup> This dialogue is not a theatre, but reveals the inner relations, the inner mystery of God, who really is Father and Son.

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3.06.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100603\\_corpus-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100603_corpus-domini.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Austria on the Occasion of the 850th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Shrine of Mariazell*, 8.09.2007, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070908\\_vespri-mariazell.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070908_vespri-mariazell.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. "In the unity of the divine person of the Son, the human will finds its complete fulfilment in the total abandonment of the I to the You of the Father, called Abba. [...] On the Mount of Olives, Jesus brings the human will back to the unreserved 'yes' to God; in him the natural will is fully integrated in the orientation that the Divine Person gives it. Jesus lives his life in accordance with the centre of his Person: his being the Son of God. His human will is drawn into the I of the Son who abandons himself totally to the Father. Thus Jesus tells us that it is only by conforming our own will to the divine one that human beings attain their true height, that they become 'divine'; only by coming out of ourselves" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 1.02.2012, op. cit.). Cf. Benedict XVI, *Mass of the Lord's Supper. Homily of His Holiness*, 5.04.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20120405\\_coena-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120405_coena-domini.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 1.02.2012, op. cit. Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 8.10.2008, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20081008.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20081008.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. Easter Triduum*, 20.04.2011, op. cit.

So the whole Passover of Jesus, his passion, is one great act of prayer, a “yes” said to the Father. The words of Jesus, spoken from the cross, may therefore be scathing: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15:34 USCCB). A proper reading of them reveals an entirely different meaning, and the reference to Psalm 22 points to Jesus’ total entrustment to the Father. However, this is a difficult lesson, which the evangelists say was not understood by those standing at the foot of the cross. The words of Psalm 22 are an appeal to God. In them, their author expresses all his suffering over the apparent absence of God. For the psalmist is fully aware that God is present, even though at times he seems silent and unresponsive at a moment that particularly calls for it. Jesus prays this psalm to God, feeling the human drama of death, yet he is fully aware of the proximity of the Father. He has taken upon himself the anguish of people of all times – suffering and calling upon God.<sup>53</sup> “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15:34) are not the words of a man lost and abandoned by God, but words full of trust and hope in God’s ultimate victory, they are words of consent to the realisation of His plan, even when it would seem that all is lost.

In analysing the Pope’s teaching on God the Father, it is still necessary to return to the earthly life and activity of Jesus. The Garden and the Passion of Jesus are the ultimate fulfilment by Him of the Father’s will, His ultimate *fiat* towards Him, but the “yes” Jesus said to the Father goes back to the very beginning of His earthly life. In teaching, He repeatedly emphasises that He came to fulfil the Father’s will, revealing Himself as the One sent by the Father to bear witness to His love towards all people in the fullness of time.<sup>54</sup> Jesus united his will to that of the Father by undertaking and fulfilling a mission; he himself said that his food was to do the Father’s will, and therefore he does what is pleasing to the Father and communicates what he has received from him, thus revealing the Father and his way of acting and behaving towards people.<sup>55</sup> “The Father entrusted to the Son the mission of giving mankind eternal life by loving it to the point of supreme sacrifice.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus, as it were,

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 8.02.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120208.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120208.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Basilica of St Sabina*, 6.02.2008, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 47th World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Witness Awakens Vocations*, 13.11.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/vocations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091113\\_xlvii-vocations.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/vocations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091113_xlvii-vocations.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, 27.04.2006, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/april/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060427\\_pont-comm-biblica.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060427_pont-comm-biblica.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>56</sup> Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 23.11.2008, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20081123.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20081123.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

learns to love people by looking to the Father and points to the primacy of His love. “[A] son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also. [...] because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me” (John 5:19–30 USCCB). He does likewise when he insists that the teaching he preaches is not His. He comes from the Father and lives for Him; in this profound identification of the Father and the Son, the teaching of the Son is the teaching of the Father.<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI notes that “Jesus acts and teaches, always starting from a close relationship with God the Father.”<sup>58</sup> The Father is the source and centre of the Son’s message and of all his works.

This is why the Pope calls Jesus the Angel of God the Father: “Jesus Christ, the Son of God was therefore also called the ‘Angel of God the Father’: he is the Messenger par excellence of God’s love.”<sup>59</sup> The Greek term *angelos* means precisely a messenger, a messenger of God, and the New Testament repeatedly speaks of Jesus as a messenger of the Father. “Especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus often speaks of himself in relation to the Father who sent him into the world.”<sup>60</sup> In turn, the only motive for the Father’s action is love. It constitutes the essence of God Himself and expresses the meaning of all His works. All the saving works of God, and most fully the sending of the Son, reveal this unfathomable love of the Father and the irrevocability of His faithfulness. “In the Son, the ‘Father of mercies’ (2 Cor 1:3) is made visible; ever faithful to his fatherhood.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience. Munus docendi*, 14.04.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20100414.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100414.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>58</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 28.11.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20121128.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121128.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli*, 5.04.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_reg\\_20100405\\_easter-monday.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20100405_easter-monday.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>60</sup> Benedict XVI, *Holy Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 13.05.2007, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070513\\_conference-brazil.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070513_conference-brazil.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Visit at the Cathedral of Cotonou*, 18.11.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111118\\_cattedrale-cotonou.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111118_cattedrale-cotonou.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. “The Apostle illustrates the way in which the Father’s plan of salvation is brought about in Christ, in his beloved Son. He writes: “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7). The sacrifice of the Cross of Christ is the unique and unrepeatable event with which the Father showed his love for us in a luminous way, not

The Pope reminds us that God's fidelity is rooted in his plan for creation and for calling man into an extraordinary relationship with himself. He recalls and analyses the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians in which Paul the Apostle speaks of the mysterious plan for the salvation and election of men and their predestination to holiness (cf. 1:3–14). The Father's love precedes creation and thus every human response. It is a plan for the realisation of selfless love embracing every human being. All are chosen in the Son before creation, that is, they exist in the great loving plan of the Father.<sup>62</sup> St Paul's hymn attributes the initiative of the plan of salvation to the Father, and then emphasises the action of the Son, who makes this plan a reality in history, and the Holy Spirit, "who impresses his 'seal' upon the whole work of salvation."<sup>63</sup> The mystery of creation and predestination to holiness, that is, participation in the inner life of God himself, is the work of the whole Trinity, although it must be remembered that the One who became man and by his death reconciled humanity with the Father is Jesus Christ the Son. In doing the will of the Father, in obedience to Him, one must not therefore commit the error of subordinationism, which claims the Son is subordinated to the Father. The will of the Father and the will of the Son are the same will. Subordination, therefore, does not imply the inferiority of the Son's deity to the Father.

From the above analyses, it can be seen that Benedict XVI's teaching, based on the biblical witness, emphasises the revelation of the Father through the mediation of the Son. The Pope also points to the place in the New Testament where it is the Father who reveals the Son. This is the event of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. When Jesus stands in the midst of sinners, he is accompanied by the presence and approval of the Father and by the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove. The Father's voice will also accompany him at the transfiguration on Mount Tabor. This voice proclaims the truth about Jesus as Son and is an expression of the sacrifice the Father makes of Himself, giving up His Son for the salvation of the world. God comes down to declare to men his boundless

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only in words but in practice. God is so real and his love is so real" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 20.06.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/latest/sub\\_index/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120620\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/latest/sub_index/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120620_en.html) [access: 22.05.2024]). Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 21st World Day of the Sick*, 2.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/sick/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20130102\\_world-day-of-the-sick-2013.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/sick/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20130102_world-day-of-the-sick-2013.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 5.12.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20121205.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121205.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 6.07.2005, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20050706.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20050706.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

love.<sup>64</sup> The voice of the Father announces the Son and his mission. The Son, who is totally immersed in the Father, has become man, the announcement of the new creation.<sup>65</sup>

## God the Father in relation to His adoptive sons

The prayer of Jesus was the event in which his unique relationship with the Father was most fully revealed to his disciples. It aroused not only amazement, but the disciples' desire to enter into this communion of the Father with the Son. It is for this reason that one of them asks: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The first word of this prayer is precisely the word "Father." The Son introduces the disciples to the inner mystery of God, teaches them to turn to the Father as he did. Christianity is therefore a religion of trust and love for the Father, who first loved man and sent the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, as St Paul teaches, sent into human hearts, calls out "Abba, Father!" (cf. Gal 4:6); through Him, and not through the spirit of fear and slavery, men have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, in whom they cry out: "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15).

In Christ, the second dimension of God's fatherhood towards human beings was revealed, that is, that in God being Father has two references. The first dimension has its origin in the catechesis of creation and was already revealed in the Old Testament. It is the fatherhood of God and, at the same time, the brotherhood of men, which has a universal, universal dimension. The Pope points out that this dimension, however, is not God's final word:

Nonetheless this is still not enough. The Spirit of Christ opens us to a second dimension of God's fatherhood, beyond creation, since Jesus is the "Son" in the full sense of "one in being with the Father", as we profess in the Creed. [...] Jesus in his turn accepts us in his humanity and even in his being Son, so that we too may enter into his specific belonging to God. [...] he makes us turn to God saying "Abba!", Father!<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Feast of the Baptism of the Lord*, 10.01.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100110\\_battesimo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100110_battesimo.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 8.02.2012, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 13.01.2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2013/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20130113\\_battesimo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20130113_battesimo.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 23.05.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120523.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120523.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Mission Sunday 2010*, 6.02.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/2010/documents/20100206\\_mes\\_20100206\\_ms\\_sunday.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/2010/documents/20100206_mes_20100206_ms_sunday.html)

Christ thus brings man into a completely new relationship with God, and this is only possible because he is the Son and wants to include all men in his relationship with the Father. “The newness of our dialogue with God is revealed in Jesus: the filial prayer that the Father expects of his children.”<sup>67</sup> So it is clear that Christianity, and therefore the idea of brotherhood, is open to all, but at the same time creates a new circle, a new community gathering around the Eucharist.<sup>68</sup> The idea of Christian brotherhood does not denote a weakening of ecclesial structures and the identity of the baptised; on the contrary, Christian fraternity presupposes a community gathered around Jesus, a community of faith and sacraments. Only thus can it be lived and realised as a *communio*.

The relationship of Jesus the only-begotten Son to God is utterly unique, with a relationship that is not exclusive but inclusive, inclusive and open to the adopted sonship of Christians. In order to distinguish the relationship of the only-begotten Son from the adopted sons, Jesus instructs his disciples to address the Father with the words: “Our Father.” This is a prayer to God the Father and at the same time a common prayer, “praying-with-others, praying with the Church,” with all the adopted sons.<sup>69</sup> Reflecting on this mystery, who the Father and the Son are and what man’s relationship to God is, was from the very beginning the focus of the Church fathers<sup>70</sup> and continues to this day.

The becoming of a son in the Son, accomplished by virtue of baptism, embraces all who wish to respond positively to God’s love. Through immersion in water, a new birth of man into a unique friendship with God, whom he will

[www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/missions/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20100206\\_world-mission-day-2010.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/missions/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100206_world-mission-day-2010.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>67</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 7.03.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120307.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120307.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>68</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo* [Christian Brotherhood], transl. J. Merecki, Kraków 2007; W. Łużyński, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo w świeckim społeczeństwie. Refleksje na podstawie nauczania Josepha Ratzingera* [Christian Brotherhood in the Lay Society. Reflections on the Basis of Joseph Ratzinger’s Teaching], “Teologia i Człowiek” 45/1 (2019), pp. 69–86; K. Gózdź, *Idea braterstwa* [Idea of Brotherhood], [in:] K. Gózdź, *Logos i Miłość. Teologia Josepha Ratzingera – Benedykta XVI* [Logos and Love. The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI], Lublin 2018, pp. 165–176.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 3.10.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20121003.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121003.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>70</sup> Cf. P. Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*, Oxford 1994; H.U. von Balthasar, *Einleitung*, [in:] Richard von Sankt-Victor, *Die Dreieinigkeit*, Einsiedeln 1980; W. Wołyńiec, *Teologia Ojca w „poprawionym Credo” Synodu w Antiochi w 341 roku* [The Theology of the Father in the “Revised Creed” of the Synod of Antioch in 341], “Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 21/1 (2013), pp. 43–54.

henceforth call Father. In baptism we are inserted into the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, inserted into the life of Jesus, the Son, his passion, death and resurrection.<sup>71</sup> Again, as in Jesus' relationship with the Father, it is not theatre, it is not mere words, but a reality that transforms human existence and gives it a new direction. This means that the Christian's building of a relationship with the Father has its stages. It is a relationship that "is built up through events," like the relationship of parent to child,<sup>72</sup> but its beginning is the gift of God – the gift of new life in the sacrament of baptism.

Man then truly becomes a son of God, and begins a journey of maturing in faith in which he will address God – "Abba."<sup>73</sup> Thanks to the reconciliation with the Father that Jesus accomplished and which is realised in the sacrament of baptism, man becomes a participant in the filial relationship of Jesus with the Father and can address God as Jesus does.<sup>74</sup> The dignity of man thus acquires a new dimension, based not only on creation, but also on the filial condition of man which is the fruit of the saving work of Jesus and the insertion of men through the Son in his relationship to the Father.<sup>75</sup> This relationship, although real – as the Pope reminds us – will only become full when man sees the face of God as it is: "we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed" (1 John 3:2 USCCB).<sup>76</sup>

Jesus, praying at the Last Supper, spoke of the revelation of the Father's name to his disciples and then asked the Father for their unity, so that the world would believe that Jesus had been sent by the Father. The sign of the disciples'

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Mass and Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism*, 9.01.2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20110109\\_battesimo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110109_battesimo.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. P. Blanco-Sarto, *El inicio del camino. Fe, bautismo y pertenencia a la Iglesia en el pensamiento de Joseph Ratzinger*, "Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny" 28/2 (2020), pp. 49–61.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 14.03.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20100314.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20100314.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 3.01.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20100103.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20100103.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Mass and Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism*, 13.01.2013, op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Holy Mass on the Occasion of Priestly Ordinations*, 29.04.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20120429\\_ordinazioni.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120429_ordinazioni.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. "The Christian rediscovers his true identity in Christ, 'the first-born of all creation' in whom 'all things hold together' (cf. Col 1,15ff.). In identifying with him, in being one with him, I rediscover my personal identity as a true son or daughter who looks to God as to a Father full of love" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 3.10.2012, op. cit.).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 3.10.2012, op. cit.



credibility before the world is to be their unity, like the unity of the Father and the Son (cf. John 17:6–26). This unity, therefore, is not a worldly product, an effort of the disciples, but comes from the divine unity, comes from Heaven, as the Pope teaches, and has a real and perceptible effect on earth.<sup>77</sup> The task of the disciples is to proclaim God, to continue in the world the work of Christ, and thus to reveal the name of God to people. “The Church can walk ‘in the world’ without being ‘of the world’ (cf. John 17:16) and can live the mission entrusted to her so that the world may believe in the Son and in the Father who sent him. Therefore the Church becomes the place in which the mission of Christ itself continues.”<sup>78</sup> The Church must therefore undertake a constant reflection on the mystery of God in order to then go and proclaim this truth “to the ends of the earth.” It is a mission commissioned by Christ himself, which is carried out in history, awaiting the final fulfilment of the Father’s plan.

The preaching of God as Father may encounter some difficulty related to the experience of human fatherhood. A positive experience can influence an analogous image of God the Father. However, it happens that the experience of an earthly father evokes negative associations. Benedict XVI, when speaking about the Father of Jesus and the Father of Christians, addressed this issue by analysing the first words of the Creed. The proclamation of God as Father, the image of God as Father, can become problematic “without credible models of reference.” Then even the imagining of God as a father is not an easy task and sometimes even difficult to overcome.<sup>79</sup> The very word “father” can evoke painful memories or arouse genuine fear. A second, currently serious problem,

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 25.01.2012, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 25.01.2012, op. cit. Cf. A. Sosnowski, *Konsekwencje wiary w Boga Ojca w nauczaniu Kard. Josepha Ratzingera* [The Consequences of Faith in God the Father in the Teaching of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger], “Częstochowskie Studia Teologiczne” 41 (2013), pp. 135–150. “Christians long for the entire human family to call upon God as ‘Our Father!’ In union with the only-begotten Son, may all people learn to pray to the Father and to ask him, in the words that Jesus himself taught us” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, no. 79).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.01.2013, op. cit.; cf. K. Daly, *Reshaping Fatherhood: Finding the Models*, “Journal of Family Issues” 14 (1993), pp. 510–530; M. Wójtowicz, *Męskość wobec zagrożenia ponowoczesności* [Masculinity against the Dangers of Postmodernity], “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne” 41/2 (2022), pp. 135–138; K. Zielińska-Król, *Ojcostwo na początku XXI wieku – kryzys ojcostwa i „nowe” ojcostwo* [Fatherhood at the Beginning of the 21st Century – the Crisis of Fatherhood and the “New” Fatherhood], “Roczniki Nauk o Rodzinie” 60/5 (2013), pp. 83–94.

as the Pope notes, is the complete absence of the father, his total absence from the child's life.<sup>80</sup>

However, the proclamation of God the Father, given the above difficulties, is not doomed to failure, but should be a proclamation of true fatherhood, the fatherhood of God the Father. This fatherhood is a model and at the same time a critique of human fatherhood, which sometimes does not grow up to its proper measure. Biblical revelation can be an important help in overcoming these difficulties – it reveals the mystery of God and thus what it really means to be a father, it shows the face of a God whose love has no bounds, who offers the total gift of his Son.<sup>81</sup> God's salvific action in the world's history reveals his goodness, tenderness and faithfulness.

Biblical revelation and the salvific work of Christ, which reveals man's true dignity and vocation, demand a positive response from him. Man, created in God's image and likeness, can only realise himself fully by relating to God. What is needed, therefore, according to the Pope, is a constant conversion, which is nothing other than the return of man to God, the merciful Father. Without Him, man enslaves himself, the expected autonomy becomes slavery.<sup>82</sup> Acceptance of the Father is the opening of man to "You" of God and to "we" of the brothers. It includes the double – vertical and horizontal – dimension of man's existence. It is not the opening to God but the closing to Him that is the cause of man's alienation. "In fact, it is not God's presence that alienates man but his absence: without the true God, Father of the Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 23.05.2012, op. cit. "Yes, I thank God because I have been able to experience what 'family' means; I have been able to experience what 'fatherhood' means, so that the words about God as Father were made understandable to me from within; on the basis of human experience, access was opened to me to the great and benevolent Father who is in Heaven" (Benedict XVI, *Mass of Thanksgiving in Remembrance of the Pope's 80th Birthday*, 15.04.2007, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070415\\_80-genetliaco.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070415_80-genetliaco.html) [access: 26.05.2024]).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.01.2013, op. cit.; "From Jesus himself, from his filial relationship with God, we can learn what 'father' really means and what is the true nature of the Father who is in heaven. Critics of religion have said that speaking of the 'Father', of God, is a projection of our ancestors in heaven. But the opposite is true: in the Gospel Christ shows us who is the father and as he is a true father we can understand true fatherhood and even learn true fatherhood" (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 23.05.2012, op. cit.).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 6.02.2008, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20080206.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080206.html) [access: 26.05.2024].

illusory hopes become an invitation to escape from reality.”<sup>83</sup> The Pope therefore points out that the escape from God, is an escape from the truth of man and the beginning of his enslavement. If man’s life is not enlightened by the hope of eternal life, he loses his proper reference to created reality. This reality points to its Creator and the catechesis on creation is supplemented by the mystery of election and adoption as sons.

The adoption denotes a gift, it is a grace that the Father gives to man through the salvific work of Christ. It must be remembered, however, that this gift is also a commitment for man to shape his life after the example of the Son. His life is one of constantly being in the Father’s house and constantly saying “yes” to Him, an obedience which, though demanding, ultimately leads to the resurrection, to life at the right hand of the Father.<sup>84</sup> Man must, like the Son, incorporate his will into the will of the Father, conform it to the will of the Father.<sup>85</sup> The term “obedience” has pejorative overtones, but in relation to the Father, who is Love, it actually means the realisation of man’s true identity. Benedict XVI taught:

Christians have always known from experience that, in abandoning themselves to the will of the Father, they lose nothing, but instead discover in this way their deepest identity and interior freedom. [...] Our world today needs the testimony of this experience precisely because of its desire for “self-realization” and “self-determination.”<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Basilica of St Sabina*, 6.02.2008, op. cit.

<sup>84</sup> “The ‘sequela’ of Christ is not only the imitation of his virtues, it is not only living in this world, as far we are able, as Christ lived, in accordance with his words, but it is a journey that has a destination. And the destination is the right hand of the Father. There is this journey of Jesus, this following of Jesus which ends at the right hand of the Father” (Benedict XVI, *Eucharistic Concelebration with Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, 15.04.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100415\\_pcb.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100415_pcb.html) [access: 22.05.2024]).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 27.06.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120627.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120627.html) [access: 22.05.2024]. Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 30.05.2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120530.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120530.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>86</sup> Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Austria...*, 8.09.2007, op. cit.

The adoption, becoming sons, therefore, involves a baptismal commitment, but also bearing witness to the truth about God before others. A life fully lived is the most effective *apologia* of God, the Father Almighty.

The importance of the horizontal dimension of the gift of the Father's love should be further noted. God calls man not only to be a beloved child in his Son, but also to recognise others as brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>87</sup> The Pope reminds us that to become a child of God is to enter into the great family of God, it is to recognise the other not as a stranger but as a brother or sister. The brotherhood and unity of the human race, having its origin in creation, is open to a deepened human relationship. Through Baptism, man is introduced into a new, more permanent family – as the Pope said – “the family of believers, to the Church, to a family that has God as Father and in which all recognize one another as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.”<sup>88</sup> Faith in the Father therefore creates a model of society, a society of brothers and sisters. It is not an ideology or a state-decreed way for people to function and relate to each other, but a reality based on the profound awareness that every baptised person is a child of the one Father.<sup>89</sup> The brotherhood of Christians can become the basis for building the common good. The discovery of proper brotherhood, like the actual fatherhood of God, does not allow one to see the other as a competitor and a threat to one's own freedom.

## Conclusions

The systematic analysis of Benedict XVI's paterological statements have made it possible to synthesise the Pope's teaching on God the Father. Though scattered, the role and importance of these statements cannot be neglected, for they reveal the mystery of God the Father at the very centre of *nexus mysteriorum* of the truths of faith.

The centre and fullness of the Revelation is the person of Jesus Christ, and the main Christological title, “Son,” connotes relations. The Son always

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2011)*. *One Human Family*, 27.09.2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20100927\\_world-migrants-day.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100927_world-migrants-day.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>88</sup> Benedict XVI, *Mass in the Sistine Chapel and Administration of the Baptism*, 11.01.2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20090111\\_battesimo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090111_battesimo.html) [access: 22.05.2024].

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, 3.01.2010, op. cit.

points to the Father, is open to him. Theological reflection on the mystery of the Son and his preaching should place greater emphasis on the relationship between the Father and the Son, for it is the key to understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI showed that the proclamation of the Son is always a proclamation of the Father; there is not one without the other. Therefore, the Father and the Son are interrelated and constitute the hermeneutical and methodological key in theological reflection and preaching. The Pope, analysing biblical revelation, accentuated the fact that Jesus lives in a permanent relationship with the Father; He came to do His Father's will and to reveal His name to men. Christ, the Incarnate Son, thus points to the ability of every human person to establish and develop relationships, to the inalienable dignity and the prospect of self-realisation that takes place by opening oneself to "you" of the Father. It is not this opening, but the lack of it, that causes the alienation of the human person. The proclamation of God as Father is a call for the opening of man to this relationship which, as in the case of Christ, constitutes the ultimate victory and ensures the dwelling in the Father's house. The proclamation of the true Father, though fatherhood often evokes negative experiences, can heal people who discover the mystery of the Father – full of love and mercy.

The mystery of the Father should also play a greater role in catechesis on creation. The relationship between the creation and the Creator, who is the Father, shows that creation is good and wanted, and man was loved before he could consciously respond to this love himself. Man and his destiny do not appear as the work of chance, but are inscribed in the Father's plan of love. The discovery of the fatherhood of God was already made in the Old Testament and referred to Him as the beginning of all existence and proved that creation is good. Therefore, the topic of the Father in the theology of creation should be more accentuated in order to highlight the dignity of each person and, at the same time, to help realise the universal brotherhood of all human beings.

The dignity of all human beings and their brotherhood deriving from the mystery of their origin from the same Creator are thus emphasised and completed in Jesus by the mystery of the filiation in the only-begotten Son and by the mystery of brotherhood, which have their foundation in the sacrament of baptism. In this sacrament, people truly become children of God and brothers in Christ, acquiring a new vertical and horizontal dimension of humanity. This is a great affirmation of humanity and, at the same time, a call to take on the commitment resulting from this new dignity. The brotherhood based on a common Father can further stimulate a variety of activities aimed at safeguarding human rights and dignity, can motivate an even fuller commitment to charitable and missionary

activity. The other person does not appear as a competitor or as someone unimportant, but as a brother and a sister, members of one family of God's children.

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## Benedict XVI's Legacy to Youth

### Dziedzictwo Benedykta XVI dla młodzieży

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to explore the enduring legacy of Pope Benedict XVI in the context of World Youth Days through an analysis of five profound “invitations” he extended to young people. This article begins with an examination of how the Pontiff recognized the Church’s genuine “aliveness” and “youthfulness” in the Lord. It then looks at how he implored young individuals to manifest God’s presence, particularly in challenging circumstances or in places where faith might appear to be absent. The article goes on to discuss how the Pope encouraged the youth to respond to this call by opening their hearts to Christ, dispelling fear, and embracing Christian hope. In essence, young people were motivated to engage in active listening, prioritize moments of silence, make courageous resolute decisions, experience joy, and maintain trust. This article concludes with a demonstration of how these five “invitations” continue to serve as a perpetual reminder for younger generations to immerse themselves in the Word of God, seek contemplative moments, be willing to take calculated risks, nurture enduring happiness, and live with hope. Pope Benedict XVI’s legacy remains a poignant reminder and challenge for the youth as they strive to attain authenticity in their identity and professed faith. Though the Pontiff passed away in 2022, his teachings persist in inspiring and guiding young individuals as they cultivate a hopeful faith and find unwavering support within the Church to become joyful witnesses to Christ in the world. The author intends to shed light on the enduring significance of these teachings and their continued impact on the younger generations.

**KEYWORDS:** Benedict XVI, legacy, youth, World Youth Days, witness, God, Scripture, silence, risk, trust, faith, hope, joy and love

**ABSTRAKT:** Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie trwałości dziedzictwa Benedykta XVI w kontekście Światowych Dni Młodzieży poprzez analizę pięciu poważnych „zaproszeń”, które papież skierował do młodych ludzi. Autor rozpoczyna artykuł od przedstawienia, w jaki sposób papież rozpoznał prawdziwą „żywołność” i „młodość” Kościoła w Panu, a następnie, jak wzywa młodych ludzi do manifestowania Bożej

obecności, zwłaszcza w trudnych okolicznościach lub w miejscach, w których wiara może wydawać się nieobecna. Następnie autor omawia, w jaki sposób papież zachęcał młodzież do odpowiedzi na to wezwanie poprzez otwarcie serc na Chrystusa, wyzbycie się strachu i przyjęcie chrześcijańskiej nadziei. Benedykt XVI motywował młodych ludzi zasadniczo do aktywnego słuchania, uznawania wartości chwil ciszy, podejmowania odważnych i stanowczych decyzji, doświadczania radości i podtrzymywania zaufania. W ostatniej części artykułu autor pokazuje, w jaki sposób pięć „zaproszeń” służy jako nieustanne przypomnienie młodszemu pokoleniom, aby zanurzyli się w Słowie Bożym, szukali chwil kontemplacji, byli gotowi do podjęcia skalkulowanego ryzyka, pielęgnowali trwałe szczęście i żyli z nadzieją. Spuścizna papieża Benedykta XVI pozostaje poruszającym przypomnieniem i wyzwaniem dla młodzieży, która stara się osiągnąć autentyczność w swojej tożsamości i wyznawanej wierze. Choć papież odszedł w 2022 roku, jego nauczanie nie przestaje inspirować i prowadzić młodych ludzi, którzy kultywują pełną nadziei wiarę i znajdują niezachwiane wsparcie w Kościele, aby stali się radosnymi świadkami Chrystusa w świecie. Autor zamierza rzucić światło na nieprzemijającą wartość papieskiego nauczania i na jego wpływ na młodsze pokolenia.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Benedykt XVI, dziedzictwo, młodzież, Światowe Dni Młodzieży, świadectwo, świadek, Bóg, Pismo Święte, milczenie, ryzyko, zaufanie, wiara, nadzieja, radość i miłość

## Introduction

When one reflects on Benedict XVI's engagement with the youth during his papacy, it becomes evident that the World Youth Days emerged as an opportunity for extraordinary and transformative experiences for young people from all corners of the globe. His participation in these events helped the Church as a community of faith to give reason for her hope and to spread it in the world (see 1 Pet 3:15; Acts 1:8). In view of a contemporary zeitgeist that sometimes seems to ignore God's presence,<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict emphasized love, hope, and charity above all else. These values hold a central position in his three encyclicals and magisterial teaching. He does not shy away from grappling with challenging aspects of faith, while proposing a fresh Christian vision in that he uses terms like 'God *and* the world,' 'salt of the earth,' and 'light of the world.' For Pope Benedict, each conversation or interaction presents a providential opportunity to create a space for the Church's consolidation and renewal, especially among the younger generation of the faithful.

<sup>1</sup> The expression of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) – *etiamsi daremus non esse Deum* (as though God did not exist) – is surprisingly congruent with our contemporary context. See J.-P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of His Work De veritate religionis christianae 1640*, transl. J.C. Grayson, Leiden–Boston, MA 2004.



In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI extends a heartfelt invitation to Christians worldwide, encouraging them to celebrate, reflect upon, and embrace their cherished faith.<sup>2</sup> Young people, who joyfully embody this call, are exemplified in his engaging discourses at the World Youth Days and during papal audiences. The Pontiff emphasises that Christian faith surpasses a mere collection of beliefs; rather, it should be intricately woven into every aspect of personal and ecclesial life. On a particular occasion, he affirmed that “we live faith, not as a hypothesis, but as the certainty on which our life is based.”<sup>3</sup> It is a faith that matures and finds expression through one’s way of living. He draws inspiration from biblical figures such as Abraham and Mary, along with more contemporary examples like Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901–1925) and Chiara Badano (1971–1990) amongst others, whose lives exemplify the profound impact of living their faith to the fullest.<sup>4</sup>

The call to embrace a prophetic faith during challenging times brings to mind the remarkable Protestant theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), whose prison letters before the end of the last World War carry immense power in this context.<sup>5</sup> Confronted with such adversity, Bonhoeffer wrote that “the only way to be honest is to recognise that we have to live in the world as though God did not exist . . . however, despite all this . . . the God who makes us live in this

<sup>2</sup> See Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, 2012. For an extensive treatment of the Apostolic Letter, see M. Cozzoli, *Pensare, professare, vivere la fede: nel solco della lettera apostolica “Porta Fidei”*, Città del Vaticano 2012. See also G. Cucci, *La fede è un valore per l’uomo moderno?*, “La Civiltà Cattolica” 163/4 (2012), pp. 553–564; D. Paoletti, *La quaestio fidei sfida prioritaria oggi. Linee per una riproposta della fede cristiana come pienezza d’umanità*, “Miscellanea francescana” 3–4 (2012), pp. 447–464; E. Scognamiglio, *Perché un anno della fede? Rileggiamo la lettera apostolica Porta fidei*, “Asprenas” 60/1–2 (2013), pp. 9–36.

<sup>3</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, eds. S.O. Horn, V. Pfnür, transl. H. Taylor, San Francisco 2005, pp. 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day (15 March 2012)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120315\\_youth.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120315_youth.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. Faith in this sense requires a personal assent; however, it has a communitarian and an ecclesial dimension, too. See G. Lorizio, *Teologia fondamentale*, vol. 2: *Fondamenti*, Roma 2005, p. 373. On Frassati and Badano, see J. D’Cunha, *The Lived Theology of an Exemplary Youth: A Biographical Study of Pier Giorgio Frassati with the View to Nurture the Integral Growth of Youth*, Rome 2007; L. Frassati, *Mio fratello Pier Giorgio, una vita mai spenta*, Torino 2010; M. Magrini, *Thérèse e Chiara insieme sulla piccola via dell’amore*, Cinisello Balsamo 2013.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London 2001. See also F. Ferrario, *Mondo adulto e teologia della croce. L’immagine di Dio nelle lettere dal carcere di Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, “Protestantesimo” 61/3 (2006), pp. 245–256; J. Wiersma, *The Grotian Moment: The ‘pièce de résistance’ in Bonhoeffer’s letters and papers from prison*, “Grotiana” 12 (1991), pp. 62–77.

world without using Him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing.”<sup>6</sup> In line with these thoughts, Pope Benedict emphasises the significance of new evangelization in advancing the Christian faith. This endeavour requires creating a culture where faith can flourish, develop, and resonate. Our world stands at a critical juncture where individuals, diverse ideologies, and cultures must engage in honest discussions about the profound meaning of humanity in light of the Infinite. Faced with these realities, the Church’s mission lies in faithfully serving humanity and embodying God’s presence in the world, illuminating and proclaiming the Good News in a world desirous of guidance and hope.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI’s inspiring vision revolves around referring to the Church as “alive” and “young”!<sup>8</sup> Beyond being a mere source of light for humanity (*lumen gentium* reflecting Christ’s light) and facilitating salvation, the

<sup>6</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, op. cit., p. 118. See also G. Cavalleri, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: teologo e martire del Nazismo*, Milano 2016; C.M. Parisi, *La Stellvertretung in Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Cristo e la condizione dell’uomo chiamato a esistere con/per gli altri*, Roma 2016.

<sup>7</sup> See E. Borgman, *The Intrinsically ‘Weak’ Presence of the God about Whom Christianity Speaks*, [in:] *What does Europe Believe In*, eds. T. Dienberg, T. Eggensperger, U. Engel, Münster 2010, pp. 120–129. This theme also justifies Edward Schillebeeckx’s pioneering work entitled *Church: The Human Story of God*, London 1990. See also B. Przewozny, *Church as the Sacrament of the Unity of all Mankind in “Lumen Gentium” and “Gaudium et Spes” and in Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx and Rabner*, Roma 1979.

<sup>8</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass of Inauguration on 24 April 2005*: “The Church is alive and the Church is young. She holds within herself the future of the world and therefore shows each of us the way towards the future.” [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. See also Benedict XVI, *Address at the Celebration Welcoming the Young People. Apostolic Journey to Cologne on the Occasion of the XX World Youth Day. Cologne – Poller Wiesen, 18 August 2005*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20050818\\_youth-celebration.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050818_youth-celebration.html) [access: 26.05.2023], where he emphasised with the young people present: “I repeat today what I said at the beginning of my Pontificate: ‘If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation’ (*Homily at the Mass of Inauguration*, 24 April 2005).” By these words, he was highlighting and stating several fundamental issues: 1) Jesus Christ is the focus and fulcrum of every believer’s life – faith, hope, love, ideals, generosity, positive enthusiasm, youthful energy. God became human in Jesus, so that human beings can have the possibility to become like God, created as they are in his image and likeness; 2) his belief in youth as an ongoing forward process of discovering oneself, one’s infinite potentials and possibilities (Jesus will take nothing away from you). 3) Knowing oneself to enhance one’s personality.

Church's primary purpose is for believers to comprehend themselves as being "in" God. This proposition sets them apart from others. Amidst a dynamic and challenging landscape shaped by secularism, globalization, technology, and economic uncertainties, the Pope stressed the Church's responsibility to safeguard human dignity—the precious creation of the Creator—within all human endeavours.<sup>9</sup> In this visionary perspective, young people hold a special place within the Church, conveying the "hope" of God to humanity and embodying a vibrant Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit's strength.<sup>10</sup>

Research focused on the relationship between Pope Benedict and the youth appears to be limited in comparison to the more prevalent exploration of various theological and philosophical themes that characterized his extensive career. These themes notably encompass aspects such as faith and reason, postmodernism and relativism, culture and faith, the theology of the Church, liturgy, scripture, ecumenism, dialogue with non-Christian religions, and moral theology. To delve into this underrepresented area of study, scholars and researchers may find valuable primary sources in collections of the Pope's discourses directed towards the youth.<sup>11</sup> There are also secondary sources available for consultation, including books authored by individuals such as Federico Lombardi and Ciro García.<sup>12</sup> A selection of articles by renowned scholars like John L. Allen, Riccardo Cascioli, Catalin Dioguardi, Lorenzo Leuzzi, Mauro Parolini, and Riccardo Pedrizzi can provide supplementary insights into this subject matter.

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The fundamental text comes from Jesus saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

<sup>9</sup> See Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, no. 4; J. Joblin, *Face à l'incroyance: «Évangéliser le social»*, "Gregorianum" 94/4 (2013), pp. 815–832.

<sup>10</sup> We must mention here the decision of Pope Benedict to institute the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, which was declared during the celebration of the First Vespers of the Solemnity of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. The Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, dated 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 marked the official launch of the same Council. See R. Fisichella, *The New Evangelization. Responding to the Challenge of Indifference*, Leominster, UK 2012, pp. 1–7.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Tutti i discorsi di Benedetto XVI durante la XX Giornata mondiale della gioventù: Colonia 2005*, Roma 2005; Benedetto XVI, *In dialogo con i giovani*, Città del Vaticano 2006; Benedict XVI, *Niente è impossibile per chi si fida di Dio e si affida a Dio, guardate alla giovane Maria! Incontro con i giovani italiani a Loreto (1–2 settembre 2007)*, Città del Vaticano 2007.

<sup>12</sup> F. Lombardi et al., *I giovani di Benedetto. Una rilettura del pensiero di Ratzinger e il mondo giovanile*, Torino 2019; C. García, *La nueva evangelización en las JMJ de Benedicto XVI: Colonia – Sidney – Madrid, Burgos* 2011.

These resources collectively offer a foundation for the examination and analysis of Pope Benedict's interactions and engagement with the youth.<sup>13</sup>

This article explores five invitations presented by Pope Benedict, encouraging young people and the entire Church to earnestly “seek” and “find” in Christ the truth that guides them and fulfils their deepest longings. With poignant words from his homily at the beginning of his Pontificate on Sunday, 24 April 2005, the Pontiff affirms that “Christ takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.”<sup>14</sup> The invitation to open wide the doors to Christ becomes a compelling proposal for young people and all who have encountered him, urging them to overcome fear and embrace the hope that provides identity and stability. In this context, the enduring impact of Pope Benedict XVI on young people is encapsulated in five profound “invitations” that echo in his speeches addressed to the youth and the world: (i) to listen and become familiar with the Word of God; (ii) to seek silence; (iii) to take risks; (iv) to cultivate perpetual joy; and (v) to live in hope. Each section will be further divided into sub-points that elucidate the essence of each individual invitation, shedding light on Pope Benedict XVI's profound wisdom and teachings.

<sup>13</sup> J.L. Allen Jr., *New Pope takes Case to 1 Million Youth*, “National Catholic Reporter” 41/38 (2005), pp. 12–13; R. Cascioli, *Perché Benedetto XVI spera nei giovani*, “La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana” 8 Feb (2013), <https://lanuovabq.it/it/pdf/perche-benedetto-xvi-spera-nei-giovani> [access: 26.05.2023]; C. Dioguardi, *Benedetto XVI e i giovani. Un dialogo di fede e speranza*, Porta di Servizio 4 Jan (2023), <https://www.portadiservizio.it/2023/01/04/benedetto-xvi-e-i-giovani-un-dialogo-di-fede-e-speranza/> [access: 26.05.2023]; L. Leuzzi (ed.), *La carità intellettuale. Percorsi culturali per un nuovo umanesimo. Scritti in onore di Benedetto XVI*, Città del Vaticano 2007; M. Parolini, *Papa Benedetto XVI: Educare i giovani alla giustizia e alla pace*, <https://www.mauroparolini.it/papa-benedetto-xvi-educare-i-giovani-alla-giustizia-e-alla-pace/> [access: 26.05.2023]; R. Pedrizzi, *Benedetto XVI ed i giovani. Riflessione sul pontificato di Joseph Ratzinger*, 5 Jan 2023, <https://ladiscussione.com/215376/societa/benedetto-xvi-ed-i-giovani/> [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass Imposition of the Pallium and Conferral of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome*, St. Peter's Square, 24 April 2005, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

## “I urge you to become familiar with the Bible”

The first invitation extended to the youth revolves around the profound maturation of faith which can be acquired through attentive listening to the Word of God.<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict emphasises that when hearts are receptive and open to the Word of God, they expand and flourish. Young people are warmly encouraged to joyfully and reverentially “encounter” the Word of God.<sup>16</sup> In Benedict’s perspective, the Word is not a mere concept but a living person with whom one can form a personal relationship that leads into the depths of one’s being.<sup>17</sup> To “become familiar with the Word of God” signifies an openness of the human soul to receive the Divine with complete free will. It entails knowing the Word so intimately that there is no distinction between one’s own words and God’s. As the Word becomes increasingly familiar, it illuminates the heart, shaping and fulfilling the life of the person who embraces it. Pope Benedict XVI shared with his audiences key ideas related to the act of listening to the Word. These ideas implicitly serving as a pedagogy of faith highlight the transformative power originating from God’s Word and offer invaluable insights to enrich one’s spiritual journey.

*The Word as light for our path* is the first idea that echoes in the Pope’s emphasis on acknowledging the significance of listening to the Word. At the outset of the Christian life, an essential realization dawns upon individuals—the understanding of being called and bestowed with inherent dignity. In this divine

<sup>15</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message to Youth of the World on the Occasion of the 21<sup>st</sup> World Youth Day (9 April 2006)*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20060222\\_youth.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20060222_youth.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. This invitation recalls the first words of the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation of Vatican Council II: “*Dei verbum religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans.*”

<sup>16</sup> A recent study which sheds light on the power of the Word of God in Ratzinger’s life and works is that by Stefano Rossi, *La Parola di Dio nella vita e nel ministero del presbitero nel magistero di Papa Benedetto XVI*, Roma 2013. See also S.A. La Terra, *La Parola di Dio e l’esperienza spirituale dei giovani nei messaggi delle Giornate Mondiali della Gioventù del XXI secolo*, Roma 2014.

<sup>17</sup> This is a theme close to Benedict XVI’s heart. See for instance J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, transl. J.R. Foster, San Francisco 2004, pp. 204–205. A word has its beginning in the depths of a person (or God), from the depths of one’s mind and heart and then physically from the lungs, up to the vocal chords, the mouth, tongue and lips. So, a word is the very intimacy of the speaker. It is the full expression of them who speak. When one becomes personally familiar with the Word, it transpires God within him. 2 Tim 3:16: All Scripture is inspired by God. The original word for inspired is *theopneustos*, which can be passive (passive inspiration, inspired by God) or middle (= kind of reflexive), this active inspiration; it breathes God back to the reader!

encounter, God takes the initiative to call, and the person, especially a young person, becomes an attentive listener. This divine outreach, emanating from Benedict's goodness, calls for a heartfelt response, one that is freely and generously given. Pope Benedict XVI posed a significant challenge to young people: to listen attentively/closely and be receptive to the God who chooses not to remain hidden but to reveal himself and to speak.<sup>18</sup> To illustrate this point, the Pope draws upon the biblical verse from Psalm 119 [118] v. 105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Emphasizing the importance of listening and openness on the journey of faith, he underscores that the Word of God holds extraordinary significance. Unlike any other word, it is infused with ultimate truth, leading those who embrace it to fulfilment (see John 4:14; 6:35; 8:12; 10:10). This divine Word becomes a beacon of light for seekers yearning to quench their thirst for God, guiding them towards the best path suited for their lives. When one has (had) the privilege of listening to the truth spoken by God himself, one can no longer heed erroneous advice of the ungodly world (see Ps 1:1). Pope Benedict underscores the necessity and urgency of attentively listening to the Word, recognizing its life-changing and transformative power in the lives of believers.

This moves Benedict to speak of an *urgency to embrace the Word*, which means allowing the Word of God to take possession of oneself. Pope Benedict explains that it is not enough just to know the Word; there is a need to 'befriend' it as well. In this context, epistemology must be accompanied by affectivity, which translates into fostering a living relationship with God himself. Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI's predecessor, commented on the psalm verse we mentioned earlier, stating that "the one who prays pours out one's thanks for the Law of God that one adopts as a lamp for one's steps in the often dark path of life."<sup>19</sup> This is why young people should with "absolute priority" become acquainted with the Word, seeking guidance and illumination in their journey and decision-making. Scripture serves as the fountain that can quench the thirst of young hearts and provide solace. Pope Benedict's intention was to inspire young individuals to prioritise their connection with the Word of God by reading and praying with the Bible.

This in turn empowers the youth to *courageously propose the Word to others*. Engaging with the Word inspires individuals to establish connections and influence others. The invitation to "be familiar with the Bible" becomes more

<sup>18</sup> See Second Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 1 as well as in chapters Four and Five.

<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *General Audience, Wednesday 14 November 2001*, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_20011114.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20011114.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

meaningful in our world, where Christians, instead of exercising an *assuming* faith, must actively *propose and invite* others to encounter Christ anew. Paolo Asolan (1967–), an expert in pastoral theology, asserts that the idea of a “world without faith” greatly influenced Pope Benedict’s reflections and pastoral decisions.<sup>20</sup> This perspective is clearly evident in the address he delivered during an ecclesial convention in Rome: “Faith must never be *presupposed* but *proposed*. This is just how it is. Faith is not preserved in the world by itself, it is not automatically passed on to the human heart, but must always be proclaimed.”<sup>21</sup> The foundations of faith rest on the Word of God. Without the Word, there can be no faith. This is also affirmed by *Dei Verbum*, which proclaims that the Holy Council *listens* to the Word of God with awe and *proclaims* it with trust. It is in this context that we must understand the invitation “to be familiar with the Word.” A similar reality is expressed at the beginning of the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*:

It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied. Whereas in the past it was possible to recognise a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.<sup>22</sup>

Pope Benedict emphasises *the need to rediscover the power of the Word*.<sup>23</sup> He appreciated the evocation of the sense of God’s mystery, “captured” in awe.

<sup>20</sup> P. Asolan, *La fede non è più un presupposto ovvio*, [in:] *Pensare, professare, vivere la fede: nel solco della lettera apostolica “Porta Fidei”*, ed. M. Cozzoli, Città del Vaticano 2012, p. 15. See also P. Asolan, *La dimensione pastorale della teologia e l’insegnamento della pastorale in teologia*, “Lateranum” 77/1 (2011), pp. 201–220.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address at the Opening of the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, 13 June 2011, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110613\\_convegno-diocesi-rm.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110613_convegno-diocesi-rm.html) [access: 26.05.2023] [My emphasis].

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, no. 2. For a conclusive article about the question of the lack of faith in a world which is all the more secularised, see Y. Congar, *Une conclusion théologique à l’enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l’incroyance*, “La Vie Intellectuelle” 37 (1935), pp. 214–249.

<sup>23</sup> It seems that in this urge to push the youth towards the Word comes from Amos 8:11, “The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”

This is crucial to awaken within oneself the hunger for the Word. The German Pope believes that it is vital for young people and Christians alike to “rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples.”<sup>24</sup> This encompasses a profound experience of encountering Christ face to face through the Bible. The focus here lies in God’s initiative to enter history and draw near to humanity. The power of the Word is illuminated in the Jewish concept of “dabar,” which can be translated as both “the word” and “the act” in itself.<sup>25</sup> In other words, what God speaks, He brings into existence; his proclamation becomes his action. Moreover, the ultimate power of the word is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom God has conveyed everything, and there will be no other word than Him.<sup>26</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reinforces this, stating that “Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father’s one, perfect and unsurpassable Word.”<sup>27</sup>

Lastly, *the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Word*. The Pope also mentions the Holy Spirit, who guided the chosen people by inspiring the authors of the Sacred Scripture and also opened the hearts of believers to grasp its meaning.<sup>28</sup> The same Spirit is active in the celebration of the Eucharist when the priest, *in persona Christi*, pronounces the words of consecration, transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, thereby nourishing the faithful. To continue our earthly pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of Heaven, we require sustenance from both the Word and the Bread of Eternal Life, as each is indispensable and complements the other (see John 6:35).

These reflections bring us to the second challenge: while listening to God speaking to us through Scripture, we must place great importance on listening itself as an essential part of this dialogue between God and humans. The

<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, no. 3; see John 6:51.

<sup>25</sup> See G. Cappelletto, *Spiritualità dell’Antico Testamento: È in te, Signore, la sorgente della vita [Sal 36,10]*, Padova 2016 and also L. Fanin, *Spiritualità del Nuovo Testamento: un cammino per il credente*, Padova 2014.

<sup>26</sup> See Second Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican 2020, § 65.

<sup>28</sup> On the role of the Holy Spirit who was sent to reveal the mysteries to the hearts of the faithful and to teach all truth to the Church to the end of the ages, see J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, P. Hünermann, T. Söding, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, San Francisco 2008, p. 69. See also G.R. Allison, A.J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Nashville, TN 2020; Y. Congar, *Spirit of God: Short Writings on the Holy Spirit*, Washington, DC 2018; M.B. Yarnell, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?: Biblical Insights into His Divine Person*, ed. H.A. Thomas, Nashville, TN 2019.



pope once stated that “man in his own self, and of himself, cannot bring about this believing at all; it has of its nature the character of a dialogue. It is only because the depth of the soul the heart has been touched by God’s Word that the whole structure of spiritual powers is set in motion and unites in the Yes of believing.”<sup>29</sup> In the next part, we will discuss silence and contemplation as the most effective ways for a person to listen to God. Although Benedict rarely used the term ‘silence’ in his messages to the youth on particular world youth days, he refers to it in terms of a human heart that seeks to listen and understand.

### “Make space for silence”

A second invitation to young people is centred around choosing silence over all other activities. This advice has been reiterated on various occasions, but especially very clear on world communications day.<sup>30</sup> It is evident that the Pontiff considers silence to be a crucial aspect of dialogue and in line with Church tradition. Silence represents both openness and readiness, and it is as significant and essential as the Word itself. The Pope Emeritus held Saint Benedict (480–547), the Patron Saint of Europe in high regard, and drawing from his example and writings, he consistently emphasised that God is encountered in silence and tranquillity. In this section, we will emphasise the importance of silence, particularly in connection with proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the world. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of strength and witness, motivates young people to listen to and spread the Word of God. Reference will also be made to key features in this regard: interior silence, mutual communication, personal response, the silence of God and contemplation.

A central idea for Pope Benedict is the necessity of interior silence. He asserts that to grasp the significance of “making space for silence,” one must understand the vital relationship between silence and the Word. These two aspects of communication must be balanced, allowing for the possibility of alternating between them and integrating them harmoniously. The Pope explains that the quality of a dialogue and the bond between individuals depend on the relationship between words and silence. When words and silence

<sup>29</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the 40<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20120124\\_46th-world-communications-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20120124_46th-world-communications-day_en.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. This is a very important theme for Pope Benedict as can be seen in the preface to the book by R. Sarah, N. Diat, *La forza del silenzio. Contro la dittatura del rumore*, Siena 2017, pp. 9–11.

complement each other, a genuine and authentic dialogue ensues. However, if words and silence are mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, leading to confusion or creating a cold atmosphere. Silence is vital in the lives of young people (and everyone) because it is in silence that God speaks, and they can truly hear His voice. For Benedict, silence is an integral element of communication and should not be overlooked. In other words, if silence is not given its proper space, words, even if meaningful, will not convey their true and full message. The Pope emphasises that in moments of silence, young people can better listen and understand themselves. Silence provides the space where new ideas are born and can develop. It is also the moment when one gains a clearer insight into what one needs to say, what one expects from others, and how one chooses to express oneself.

Silence leads to full communication. When young people choose silence, they create space for the other person to talk and express themselves. Opting for silence means being free and unattached to one's own words and ideas, allowing oneself to be questioned through conversation. This approach fosters reciprocal listening, ensuring that their relationships reflect human maturity. In fact, in silence, young people can observe the most authentic communication between two individuals who love each other. Gestures, facial expressions, and body language are all signs through which they reveal themselves to one another. The Pope also highlights other instances in the lives of youths communicated through silence, such as joy, anxiety, and pain. Silence becomes the deepest and most effective means of expressing these experiences. Moreover, silence leads to active communication, demanding sensitivity and the ability to listen, which often reveals the true measure and nature of the relationship. In an age inundated with never-ending streams of messages and information, silence becomes essential for discerning what is truly important from what is not or is of lesser significance. Deep reflection helps the youth discover connections between seemingly disconnected events, evaluate and analyze messages, and share informed and relevant opinions, contributing to an authentic body of shared wisdom. To make this possible, it is crucial to create the right environment, a kind of ecosystem that maintains a balance between silence, words, images, and sounds.

Silence leads to a personal response. Many young people engage in personal conversations with others, raising questions that demand/require/necessitate meaningful answers. This stream of questions reflects humanity's inherent restlessness. Many individuals search relentlessly, not settling for superficial truths, but seeking answers that can provide meaning and hope in their lives. Search engines, AI and social networks have become the starting point of

communication for those who seek advice, ideas, information, and answers. In our time, the internet has become the platform for posing questions and seeking responses – individuals are bombarded with questions that were never asked before and that they were not consciously aware of. For the youth to recognise and focus on the genuinely important questions, silence becomes a precious commodity that enables them to exercise true discernment amid the deluge of stimuli and information they receive. In a complex and diverse world of communication, many find themselves pondering fundamental questions: Who am I? What can I know? What ought I to do? What can I hope for? The search for a convincing answer opens up the possibility of profound dialogue.<sup>31</sup> This dialogue can occur not only through an exchange of words but also through a call to silent reflection. Such reflection often leads to more eloquent responses than hasty answers and allows seekers to delve deeper into their being, opening themselves to the knowledge that God has inscribed in their hearts. The Pope explained that silence is the path to profound answers. He drew attention to various websites, applications, and social networks that facilitate reflection and questioning, but, above all, lead individuals to silence and offer opportunities for prayer, meditation, and the sharing of the Word of God.<sup>32</sup>

Another idea to which Pope Benedict draws attention is *the silence of God*. Silence needs to be given importance because it is God himself who employs it. As revealed in Scripture, God also communicates without the use of words: just as the cross of Christ speaks volumes, so God does speak through silence. The silence of God, the experience of the distance of the almighty Father, is a pivotal stage in the earthly journey of the Son of God, the incarnate Word. God's silence extends and complements his earlier words. In these moments of darkness, he speaks through the mystery of his silence (*Verbum Domini*, 21). The eloquence of the love of God reaches its zenith when he fully gives himself, as seen on Holy Saturday when "the whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began." The voice of God resounds, filling all of humanity with love.<sup>33</sup> The Pope explains

<sup>31</sup> See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, no. 1.

<sup>32</sup> A recent book on the liturgy asserts that meeting God, being awake in his presence, creating a space to receive his word and respond to it by means of the Holy Spirit all depend on silence. The latter promotes the participation of all and involves the whole person. One's interiority is enriched by one's prayer. See P. Desthieux, *Habiter le silence dans la liturgie*, Paris 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Holy Week, Holy Saturday, Office of Readings, Second Reading, From an Ancient Homily on Holy Saturday, <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/lent/holysaturdayor.htm> [access: 26.05.2023].

that since God speaks to us in silence, we, in turn, need to discover in silence the possibility to speak to God and about God. “We need that silence which becomes contemplation, which introduces us into God’s silence and brings us to the point where the Word, the redeeming Word, is born.”<sup>34</sup> It is at this point that the Pope introduces the idea that silence must lead to contemplation. Contemplation, as the fruit of silence, through its inner strength, compels an urgent call to mission and the essential duty to “proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,” so that others may have fellowship with us, and our unity will be with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

The final observation here pertains to *silence and contemplation*. The purpose of seeking silence and engaging in contemplation is not trivial. Through contemplation in silence, we immerse ourselves in the source of love, which directs us towards our neighbours. It enables us to understand their pain and offer them the light of Christ, the message of his life, and the salvific gift of complete love. According to the Pope, it is in silence that we recognise the culmination of God’s plan for salvation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Mediator. He is the ultimate revelation who unveils the true nature of God the Father.<sup>35</sup> Through his cross and resurrection, he has saved us from the bondage of sin and death, leading us to the freedom of being God’s children. In the contemplation of silence, the eternal Word, through whom the world was created, becomes increasingly present, and we gain a deeper awareness of the salvific plan that God is unfolding throughout history through his Word and actions. As Vatican Council II reminds us, this plan of revelation is manifested through both deeds and words, with inner unity: the deeds of God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teachings and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mysteries contained within them.<sup>36</sup> Mary, the person of silence, played a significant role in allowing the Word to bear fruit within her.<sup>37</sup> The Pope stresses that it is through the Word and silence that we learn how to communicate with God

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily, Eucharistic Concelebration with the Members of the International Theological Commission*, 6 October 2006, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20061006\\_commissione-teologica.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061006_commissione-teologica.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>35</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, P. Hünermann, T. Söding, *God’s Word...*, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Second Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, *Private Prayer in the Holy House*, Loreto, 1 September 2007, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/prayers/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_20070901\\_prayer-loreto.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/prayers/documents/hf_ben-xvi_20070901_prayer-loreto.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

and with others. In this perspective, faith and evangelization necessitate the power of the Word and the strength of silence working in harmony.

## “Do not be afraid to risk your lives for Jesus”

A third invitation to the youth involves a personal commitment and a risk that anyone takes when one becomes a disciple of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> The joy which the first Christians experienced was occasioned by this risk! They were never afraid to stand up for their faith through martyrdom. Their life project was marked by love, altruism and positivity. This stemmed from a spiritual rather than a mundane perspective. Pope Benedict explains that the priority was not one of personal profit, but one of self-giving and service to the community. Christians did not consider faith as a personal journey, but indeed as a journey together with Jesus and through him, with the community of the faithful.<sup>39</sup> This is the perspective through which we need to understand Pope Benedict's vision. The challenge which he poses to young people is for them to 'risk all' in order to receive many times more. He wants to make known that God's measure is far more generous than the human measure. It is worthwhile to lose all in order to later acquire all/(much) more in the Lord. This is the fullness of all that a person seeks for.

The logic which the Pope is trying to explain is very different from that offered by the world. It is when one gives more than when one receives that a person finds inner joy. It is when a young person is ready to embrace life as a total gift to Jesus that he finds happiness. The Pope is very clear in his address: “If you want to find joy, you need to risk!” Joy is the heart of the Christian experience. It is the joy of being together, the joy of being Christian, the joy of faith. In a world often characterised by sorrow and anxiety, joy is an important witness to the beauty and the reliability which the Christian faith offers. The Pontiff refers to a range of personal experiences and invites young people to boldly entrust themselves to Jesus' hands. A similar idea had already been expressed in his installation mass:

Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something

<sup>38</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? . . . No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.<sup>40</sup>

The Pope explains that it is for the young people's benefit that they turn towards Christian joy and strive to experience it in their hearts. The one thing that lasts is interior joy. For the question "how do we receive and keep this gift of deep and spiritual joy?" the Pope turns to the psalms and tells us "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4). In this perspective, Jesus also says: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matt 13:44). The discovery and cherishing of this spiritual joy are the encounter with the Lord. Jesus calls everyone to follow him and risk all their lives for him. This is the risk that leads to joy.

In this context, the Pope refers to the liturgy as the special place where the Church expresses the joy it receives from the Lord Jesus and which it transmits to the world. Every Sunday, the Christian community celebrates the central mystery of salvation which is the death and resurrection of Christ. Benedict explains that this is a very important moment for the disciples of the Lord because the sacrifice of love happens at that very moment. Sunday is the day when we meet with the Risen Christ, we listen to his word and we are sustained with his body and blood, as is in the psalms: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!" (Ps 118:24). Benedict continues that after Easter Vigil, the Church sings the Exultet, a joyful hymn to celebrate the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death: "Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven, . . ." The Christian joy is born from this knowledge that we are loved by God who became man, who gave himself for us and who won over evil and

<sup>40</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass Imposition of the Pallium...*, op. cit.

death. It means that we live a life of love for him. Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, a young Carmelite, wrote "Jesus, my happiness is in loving you."<sup>41</sup>

The Pope's main line of thought is that joy also has its place in times of trial. He acknowledges that sometimes in the depths of young hearts, they can still ask whether its truly possible to live happily amidst all the turmoil in life, especially those that are tragic and mysterious. However, he also shows how they are sometimes surprised that when they follow the Lord and place their hope in him, they are still led to joy. The Pope encourages young people to look for an answer in the experiences of other young people who found, in Christ, a light which gives strength and hope in difficult situations. An example of all this is the Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati who, even though he died at a young age, could write to his sister: "You ask me if I am happy. How could I not be? As long as faith gives me strength, I am happy. A Catholic could not be other than happy . . . The goal for which we were created involves a path which has its thorns, but it is not a sad path. It is joy, even when it involves pain."<sup>42</sup> He was described as "a young person with infectious joy, the joy that overcame many difficulties in his life."<sup>43</sup>

Another experience which Pope Benedict refers to is that of Chiara Badano, who, faced with cancer, says/said: "Jesus, if you desire it, I will desire it too." Whilst praying for a cure, she still prayed to God so that he enlightens young people with his Spirit and gives them the grace to see the light. "It was really a moment of God's presence. I was suffering physically, but my soul was singing."<sup>44</sup> The Pope explains that these are only two witnesses amongst many others who show that authentic Christians do not despair when they are sad, even when they are faced with challenges. Christian joy is not an escape from reality, but it is supernatural strength which helps us cope with the daily struggles of life. We know that the Crucified Christ and the Risen Christ is with us here and that he is always a faithful friend. When we join him in his sorrows, we share his glories. With him and in him, pain is changed into love. It is there that we find joy (Col 1:24). These closing remarks lead us now to the fourth invitation.

<sup>41</sup> St. Therese of Lisieux, *My Joy* [Jésus, ma joie c'est de t'aimer], [in:] *The Poetry of St. Therese of Lisieux: The Complete Edition*, transl. D. Kinney, Washington, DC 1996, PN 45 (21 January 1897).

<sup>42</sup> *Letter to his sister Luciana*, Turin 14 February 1925.

<sup>43</sup> Giovanni Paolo II, *Discorso ai giovani. Torino, 13 aprile 1980*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1980/april/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19800413\\_torino-giovani.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1980/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19800413_torino-giovani.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>44</sup> C. Badano, *Letter to Chiara Lubich*, Sassello, 20 December 1989, <https://www.chiaralucebadano.it/2016/07/30/chiara-lubich-e-chiara-badano/> [access: 26.05.2023].

## “Rejoice in the Lord, always”

Pope Benedict extends a fourth invitation, urging both the youth and all individuals to explore the path towards inner happiness.<sup>45</sup> Christians are joyful beings particularly because of encountering and realising the truth in Christ. It is this reality that leads them to true happiness. In his message to young people, the Pope recalls the words of St Paul to the community of Philippi: “Rejoice in the Lord, always, I will say it again, rejoice” (Phil 4:4). In the light of what has been presented so far, the encounter with Christ through Scripture and in silence, together with one’s gift of self out of love towards him, leads to joy! “Joy is at the heart of Christian experience,” continued the Pope, and “we can see the great attraction that joy exercises. In a world of sorrow and anxiety, joy is an important witness to the beauty and reliability of the Christian faith.”<sup>46</sup> He explains how human hearts are made for joy, that God is the source of true joy, that joy is contagious, that is conscious of others’ needs and that the world today needs witnesses to joy.

The nature of human hearts, Pope Benedict accentuates, is inherently destined for experiencing joy. He explains that the yearning for joy is etched in the heart of every human being. Apart from immediate and illusory pleasures, the heart seeks deep, meaningful and lasting joy. It is this Christian joy that yields hope and gives quality to human existence. This applies mostly for the period of youth which is a time when one tries to understand life, the world, others and one’s own being. The Pope encourages young people to look forward and acknowledge their great desires for happiness, friendship, sharing and truth so as to realise their ideals in worthwhile projects/undertakings. We find here the distinction which helps us understand what we are saying: between simple joys and entire joy. Whilst the two are most important we need to understand that simple joys lead to full joy. The Pope explains that it is God in his providence that gives everyone simple joys: the joy in living, the joy at the beauty of nature, the joy at a job well done, the joy when one is of service, the joy of sincere and pure love, amongst others. He says:

If we look carefully, we can see many other reasons to rejoice. There are the happy times in family life, shared friendship, the discovery of our talents, our successes, the compliments we receive from others, the ability to express ourselves and to know that we are understood, and the feeling of being of

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.



help to others. There is also the excitement of learning new things, seeing new and broader horizons open up through our travels and encounters, and realizing the possibilities we have for charting our future. We might also mention the experience of reading a great work of literature, of admiring a masterpiece of art, of listening to or playing music, or of watching a film. All these things can bring us real joy.<sup>47</sup>

Benedict clarifies that the endurance of joy is linked to its source, which he firmly states is God—the origin of true joy. He acknowledges that it is natural for young people to question whether their longings are mere illusions or ways to escape reality, and he believes that the answer lies in the very essence of joy itself. Despite the many difficulties and anxieties concerning their future that the youth may encounter, Pope Benedict assures them that there is a genuine possibility of experiencing true joy. He affirms/asserts that while individuals may pursue various paths in their quest for happiness, it is crucial to discern true joy from fleeting and deceptive pleasures. Ultimately, what matters, he clarifies, is that young people discover a profound and enduring joy in life that remains steadfast even during challenging times.

In reality, authentic joy, including the simple daily joys, finds its source in God. At first, this might not be evident, but God, who is a communion of eternal love, is also the infinite joy who did not remain closed in on himself but spread to those whom he loves and who love him! God created us in his own image and out of love to fill us with his own love, with his presence and his grace. God wants us to share in his divine and eternal joy, by showing us that the deep value and meaning of life lies in being accepted, welcomed and loved by God. This is not a fragile welcome, as any human encounter can be, but an unconditional acceptance and a realisation that “I am loved; I have a place in the world and in history, I am personally loved by God. If God accepts and loves me and I am sure of this, then I know clearly and with certainty that it is good that I am alive.” This leads Pope Benedict to speak of joy and love.

Joy is interwoven with love. These two qualities or virtues are gifts of the Holy Spirit which are inseparable. Love leads to joy and joy is the form of love. The Pope refers to Saint Theresa of Calcutta (1910–1997), who thus draws/drew on Christ's words: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Or: “Joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls; God loves a cheerful giver. Whoever gives with joy gives more.” As Saint Paul VI (1897–1978; canonised

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<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

14 October 2018) wrote: “In God himself, all is joy because all is giving.”<sup>48</sup> When he addressed young people, the Pope explained that in all aspects of life they know that when one loves it means that one is steadfast, reliable and faithful to commitments. This applies above all to friendships. Our friends expect us to be sincere, loyal and faithful because true love perseveres even in difficult times. The same can be said for work, studies and the service they carry out. Faithfulness and perseverance in doing what is good leads to joy, even if not always immediately.

Furthermore, joy leads to generosity and attention to others. Benedict says that if young people want to experience the joy of love, they also need to be generous. They cannot be satisfied with the bare minimum. The world needs men and women who are competent and generous, ready to be of service to the common good. The Pope encourages and urges them to study conscientiously, to develop their talents and place them at the service of others. He maintains that they need to find ways to make society more just and humane wherever they are. He augurs that their entire life ought to be guided by a spirit of service rather than the pursuit of power, material success or money.

One last point here is that joy is not meant to be lived in isolation. The youth are called to become witnesses to Christian joy. The Pope ceaselessly encourages young people to be “missionaries of joy.” Joy does not allow a person not to share one’s positive experience with another. Joy is such a precious treasure, it is so spontaneous that one needs/is compelled to share it with others. Confronted with this reality, the Pope inspires/emboldens young people to “narrate” to other young people that joy which they found in Jesus. In the same way, a person cannot keep the joy of faith to himself because in order to keep it, we must give it away. Saint John said: “What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; we are writing this so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:3–4).

Contrary to the impression that Christianity stifles one’s freedom or goes against one’s desires for happiness and joy, the Pope points out that Christians experience true faith because they know they are children of God. They are happy because they know that they are never alone, that God is always holding them in his hands! The role of young people now, says the Pope, is to show the world that it is faith that brings happiness and a joy that is true, full and enduring. He continues to say, “if the way Christians live at times appears dull

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<sup>48</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, 1975. See also the introduction by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi in C. Stercal (ed.), *Paolo VI. Un ritratto spirituale*, Brescia–Roma 2016.

and boring, you should be the first to show the joyful and the happy side of faith.”<sup>49</sup> Then the Pope made one of the most beautiful exhortations where he shows that the gospel is the good news, that God is love and that every one of us is important to him:

Be enthusiastic witnesses of the new evangelization! Go to those who are suffering and those who are searching, and give them the joy that Jesus wants to bestow. Bring it to your families, your schools and universities, and your workplaces and your friends, wherever you live. You will see how it is contagious. You will receive a hundredfold: the joy of salvation for yourselves, and the joy of seeing God's mercy at work in the hearts of others. And when you go to meet the Lord on that last day, you will hear him say: "Well done, my good and faithful servant . . . Come, share your master's joy" (Matt 25:21).<sup>50</sup>

### “Our hope is in the living God”

One last invitation which Pope Benedict extends to young people is to overcome fear and choose “the great hope” (1 Tim 4:10).<sup>51</sup> He does not refer to any kind of hope, but a firm and reliable hope. It is a great hope that surpasses all, and youth is a special time of hope because it looks to the future with a whole range of expectations.<sup>52</sup> He makes a distinction between various kinds/qualities/dimensions of hope. He explains that young people can satisfy their hope in a great love or in achieving a professional position since the success of love or work determines the rest of life. However, when one achieves these goals, sometimes it becomes clear that in reality they are not fulfilling/satisfying. Benedict emphasised that hope needs to go beyond these goals.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth Day...*, op. cit. See also G. Cucci, *La gioia di annunciare il vangelo*, “La Civiltà Cattolica” 168/2 (2015), pp. 30–44.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message to the Young People of the World on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, 22 February 2009, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20090222\\_youth.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090222_youth.html) [access: 26.05.2023]. Pope Benedict XVI uses the term “great hope” in Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* eleven times in the following paragraphs 3, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35 and 39. See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20071130\\_spe-salvi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html) [access: 26.05.2023].

<sup>52</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

In what follows, reference is made to some ideas through which Pope Benedict stressed various dimensions of hope. He argued that the youth should never stop believing in overcoming challenges, even if contemporary times have overly optimistically promised the hope of creating a perfect world. Life will never stop presenting challenges to youth. Pope Benedict explained that while scientific knowledge and scientifically based politics have contributed to progress, humans remain a mystery to themselves. The Pope exhorts the youth, emphasizing that the hope one should seek can only be found in the Kingdom of God, rather than in the kingdom of man. Hope should not be displaced; it ought to be sought in Scripture.<sup>53</sup> In this light, hope should not be passive but a driving force that inspires individuals to take action, make a positive impact on the world, and contribute to the betterment of society. Through facing and overcoming these challenges, young people can grow in character and wisdom. Pope Benedict's message is a call for active engagement and a reminder that true hope lies in the spiritual rather than the material. It encourages the youth to seek purpose and meaning in a higher realm, transcending the fleeting promises of a perfect worldly utopia.

The first idea that we come across in this regard is that *youth is a time of hope*. "I urge you", says the Pope, "to let yourselves be shaped by him in order to be messengers of divine love, capable of building a future of hope for all humanity. The question of hope is truly central to our lives as human beings and our mission as Christians, especially in these times." We are all conscious of the need for hope, not any hope, but that which is steadfast and reliable, as emphasised in *Spe Salvi*. Pope Benedict continues that youth is a special time of hope because one looks to the future with great expectations. Young people have many ideals, dreams and plans. Youth is a time for the accomplishment of many decisive choices about the rest of our life.

Pope Benedict encourages the youth, which is faced with/confronted with persistent questions or obstacles that seem insurmountable, to seek God. He explains that while one can experience difficulties with studies, unemployment, arguments within the family, crises in friendships or in building good loving relationships, illness or disability, or lack of adequate resources, one should never stop asking how one can keep alive the flame of hope burning in one's heart. He says:

Let yourselves be shaped by him in order to be messengers of divine love, capable of building a future of hope for all humanity. The question of hope is truly

<sup>53</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 30.

central to our lives as human beings and our mission as Christians, especially in these times. We are all aware of the need for hope, not just any kind of hope, but a firm and reliable hope.<sup>54</sup>

Benedict continues by saying that if one wishes to seek the 'great hope,' then one is to seek Christ. Like Paul, young people are to believe, the Pope insists, that hope is not simply an ideal or sentiment, but a living person: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the true hope: the Christ who lives with us and in us and who calls us to share in his eternal life. If we are not alone, if he is with us, even more, if he is our present and our future, why be afraid? The youth are to seek the way towards the great hope and through prayer become men and women of hope.<sup>55</sup> When we express our faith in prayer, we find him even in times of darkness because he offers himself to us. Pope Benedict exhorts the young generation to make space for prayer in their lives! Persevering prayer opens the heart to receive him, he says, as Saint Augustine explains: "Our Lord and God . . . wants our desire to be exercised in prayer, thus enabling us to grasp what he is preparing to give."<sup>56</sup>

Benedict explains that the human experience confirms that qualities and material goods are not enough to serve as a guarantee for the hope that a person always seeks. Referring to *Spe Salvi*, he explains that politics, science, technology, economy, and other material resources are not sufficient in themselves to provide the great hope towards which everyone aspires. This great hope "can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain." Pope Benedict explains that the pivotal outcome of distancing oneself from God is the evident loss of societal direction, leading to a state of loneliness and violence, accompanied by a deficiency in contentment and trust, ultimately culminating in despair. On the contrary, the youth are invited to frequent groups and movements to grow in the experience of faith. He says:

Take part in your parish liturgies and be abundantly nourished by the word of God and your active participation in the Sacraments. As you know, the summit and centre of the life and mission of every believer and every Christian community is the Eucharist, the sacrament of salvation in which Christ becomes present and gives his Body and Blood as spiritual food for eternal life. A truly ineffable mystery! It is around the Eucharist that the Church comes to birth and grows.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Letter 130*:8,17.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

Another idea concerns Benedict's encouragement to the youth to *live according to Christian hope*. He explains that if they find their sustenance in Christ, and if they live profoundly in him as did the Apostle Paul, they will not be able to refrain from speaking about him and making him known and loved by many of their friends and contemporaries. He identifies with Paul who through his example became a great witness to the Risen Christ. Pope Benedict exhorts young people to be Christ's faithful disciples, and in so doing help form Christian communities that are filled with love, like those described in the Acts of the Apostles. He insists that no one should get discouraged by the difficulties and trials one encounters. Conversely, all are to be patient and persevering so as to overcome the natural youthful tendency to rush ahead and to want everything immediately. He says:

If Jesus has become your hope, communicate this to others with your joy and your spiritual, apostolic and social engagement. Let Christ dwell within you, and having placed all your faith and trust in him, spread this hope around you. Make choices that demonstrate your faith. Show that you understand the risks of idolizing money, material goods, career and success, and do not allow yourselves to be attracted by these false illusions.<sup>58</sup>

In this context, Pope Benedict portrays Mary as the beacon of hope, a figure to whom everyone can turn for inspiration and guidance. The Virgin Mary, Benedict XVI affirms, accompanies the youth on their spiritual journey. Everyone looks at her since she was the one who gave life to the hope of Israel, the one who bore a saviour unto the world, and who stood at the foot of the cross with steadfast hope. Mary is a model to all and true support. Pope Benedict continues that, above all, Mary intercedes for humans and leads everyone in the hour of darkness and trials towards the radiant dawn of our encounter with the Risen Christ.<sup>59</sup> The Pontiff refers to a most beautiful prayer of Saint Bernard inspired by the title of Mary, *Stella Maris* (Star of the Sea).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the Twenty-Fourth World Youth Day 2009*, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> For brief studies on Ratzinger's devotional and theological reference to Mary, see M. Farina, *Maria riflesso della tenerezza di Dio nella prospettiva di Benedetto XVI*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 46/1 (2008), pp. 42–63; S.M. Perrella, *Maria persona in relazione nel magistero dei vescovi di Roma: da Paolo VI a Benedetto XVI*, "Theotokos" 18/1 (2010), pp. 167–255.

<sup>60</sup> "You who amid the constant upheavals of this life find yourself more often tossed about by storms than standing on firm ground, do not turn your eyes from the brightness of this Star, if you would not be overwhelmed by boisterous waves. If the winds of temptations rise, if you fall among the rocks of tribulations, look up at the Star, call on Mary . . . In

With the last invitation to place hope in the living God, Pope Benedict is empowering the youth to make Christ known, among their own age group and beyond, to those who are in search of “the great hope” that would give meaning to their lives. He encourages cultivating love of the neighbour and putting oneself and one’s talents and professional abilities at the service of the common good and truth. In this light, true Christians are never sad, even if they have to face trials of various kinds, because the presence of Jesus is the secret of their joy and peace. The youth are to spread hope around them and to always be prepared to share their faith in view of God’s love toward everyone.

## Conclusion

The five invitations of Pope Benedict XVI, highlighted in this article, represent an empowering opportunity for young people to embrace wholeheartedly, enabling them to genuinely proclaim Christ and live as his devoted followers. In this light, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch’s message gains significance, as he emphasises that it is not enough to simply bear the name of Christians; true adherence to the faith is essential. Pope Benedict urges young people not only to hear the Word of God but, more importantly, to act it out and demonstrate it in their public lives. The recognition of Christians should stem not merely from their intentions but from their unwavering dedication to their faith. These challenges are all purposefully designed to guide young people towards a positive and enduring encounter with God. To achieve this, they must become attentive listeners of the Word, consistently orienting their lives towards it, thus establishing a firm and steadfast foundation for their journey.

Pope Benedict’s legacy to the youth is nothing less than a challenge posed to young people to embody “a new generation of apostles,” deeply rooted in Scripture, equipped with it to confront the contemporary problems, and prepared to proclaim the Gospel. This aligns with God’s desire for them and is an invitation extended by and to the Church. The world, even if unaware, anticipates their presence. If Jesus calls them, there should be no fear in responding with generosity, especially when the call leads to consecrated life or

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dangers, in distress, in perplexities, think on Mary, call on Mary . . . Following her, you will never go astray; when you implore her aid, you will never yield to despair; thinking on her, you will not err; under her patronage you will never wander; beneath her protection you will not fear; she being your guide, you will not weary; with her assistance, you will arrive safely in the port.” (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mother*, Kalamazoo, MI 1993, 2,17).

priesthood. Trusting him is key, and such trust will not lead to disappointment. His challenge to the youth is to cultivate hope through their faith and to seek support and identity in Christ within the Church, all of which should enable them to become joyful witnesses in the world.

By listening, embracing silence, making decisive choices, rejoicing, and placing trust, young people can be likened to the “wise man who built his house on the rocks.” Benedict’s fundamental message is for them to anchor their lives in Christ, joyfully welcoming the Word and living its teachings. His legacy resonates through the call to be authentic disciples of Christ, acknowledging that faith and reason complement each other, valuing the sanctity of human life, finding hope and joy in their relationship with God, understanding the significance of prayer and the Eucharist, pursuing holiness and cultivating virtues, and being proactive agents of positive change, promoting justice, peace, and solidarity with the marginalised and the poor. Despite his advanced age, Benedict’s message endures as a timeless legacy that inspires and guides young people on their journey of faith, empowering them to participate in the life of the Church and society. In conclusion, this resonates perfectly with the recognition of the vital role young people play in the Church’s present and future, and urges them to engage and contribute wholeheartedly:

what we need in these times in history are persons, who through an enlightened faith, and in practice, present God in a credible manner to the world.... We need persons who keep their eyes on God, whilst learning what authentic humanity is all about. We need persons whose intellect is enlightened by divine light and whose hearts are prepared by God so that their intellect dialogues with the intellect of others, and so that their hearts open to the hearts of others. It is only through persons that have an experience of God that God approaches man.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, the youth are the present of the Church, the ones that keep her truly alive.

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<sup>61</sup> J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto nella crisi della cultura*, Siena 2005, pp. 63–64 (my translation).



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## References to the Teaching of Benedict XVI in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of Pope Francis

Odniesienia do nauczania Benedykta XVI w adhortacji apostolskiej  
*Evangelii gaudium* papieża Franciszka

**ABSTRACT:** This article analyses quotations from the teaching of Benedict XVI contained in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis (2013). The document includes 23 excerpts from Benedict XVI's teaching and one from Joseph Ratzinger's address; the most important ones were taken from the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (4 times). The aim of this article is to determine the contexts of these quotations in the Exhortation and to determine their meaning for the message of Pope Francis. It has been shown that the Exhortation contains references to Benedict XVI in all its main topics: the postulate of an authentic encounter with Christ in faith, the care for the poor people, the God made known to the man, Christ becoming poor for our enrichment, the principle of the being enlivened by the fire of the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God, the expansion of the Church "by attraction," "the service of charity," the courage to go out with the Gospel to the "peripheries," the poor people as the privileged recipients of the Gospel, the importance of the faith and the hope in Christian life, the docility to God's initiative, "the evangelizing power of popular piety," the importance of the "way of beauty" in the evangelization, the importance of the dialogue in the evangelization and the respect for religious freedom. The statements analysed in this article have shown that there is a consistency of the message between Benedict XVI and Francis concerning evangelization. The incumbent Pope not only quotes the teaching of Benedict XVI, but also creatively develops it, to match it to the needs of our times in which the Church fulfils the universal mission of the evangelization.

**KEYWORDS:** Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Deus Caritas Est*, Gospel, evangelization, joy

**ABSTRAKT:** W artykule przeanalizowano cytaty z nauczania papieża Benedykta XVI zawarte w adhortacji papieża Franciszka *Evangelii gaudium* (2013). Dokument zawiera

23 przytoczenia z nauczania Benedykta XVI oraz jedno z przemówienia Josepha Ratzingera. Najważniejsze z nich pochodzą z encykliki *Deus caritas est* (4 razy). Celem artykułu jest ustalenie kontekstów występowania w adhortacji cytatów z nauczania Benedykta XVI oraz określenie ich znaczenia dla treści zawartej w dokumencie papieża Franciszka. Ustalono, iż odniesienia do Benedykta XVI występują we wszystkich zasadniczych motywach adhortacji i dotyczą następujących tematów: postulat autentycznego spotkania z Chrystusem w wierze, troska o ubogich, Bóg dał się poznać człowiekowi, Chrystus stał się ubogim dla naszego ubogacenia, zasada ożywienia ogniem Ducha Świętego oraz Słowem Bożym, rozszerzanie się Kościoła „przez przyciąganie”, posługa miłości, odwaga wychodzenia z Ewangelią na peryferie, ubodzy uprzywilejowanymi adresatami Ewangelii, znaczenie wiary i nadziei w życiu chrześcijańskim, uległość inicjatywie Boga w dziele ewangelizacji, wartość pobożności ludowej, znaczenie „drogi piękna” w ewangelizacji, znaczenie dialogu w ewangelizacji oraz poszanowanie wolności religijnej. Badania doprowadziły do wniosku, że między Benedyktem XVI a Franciszkiem istnieje spójność przekazu w temacie ewangelizacji. Aktualny papież nie tylko cytuje nauczanie Benedykta XVI, lecz także twórczo je rozwija, zgodnie z duchem nowej epoki, w której Kościół wypełnia powszechną misję ewangelizacyjną.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: papież Benedict XVI, papież Franciszek, *Evangelii gaudium*, *Deus caritas est*, Ewangelia, ewangelizacja, radość

## Introduction

The exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* was promulgated by Pope Francis on 24 November 2013.<sup>1</sup> It is the document that crowned the work of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelisation (Rome, 7–28 October 2012), which was convened by Benedict XVI. Earlier, Francis published the

<sup>1</sup> K. Panuś, *Zasada Pondus et ordo w adhortacji „Evangelii gaudium” i jej przesłanie dla kaznodziejstwa* [The Pondus et Ordo Principle in the Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” and Its Message for Preaching], *Roczniki Teologiczne* 61/12 (2014), pp. 7–19; J. Wiemeyer, *Evangelii gaudium – das Programm eines Pontifikats*, “Die Neue Ordnung” 68/2 (2014), pp. 100–109; W. Śmigiel, *Priorytety pastoralne Kościoła w Polsce w świetle adhortacji apostolskiej „Evangelii gaudium”* [Pastoral Priorities of the Church in Poland in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”], *Roczniki Teologiczne* 62/6 (2015), pp. 33–45; J. Bagrowicz, *Radość głoszenia Ewangelii: na marginesie katechetycznych wątków adhortacji „Evangelii gaudium” papieża Franciszka* [The Joy of Preaching the Gospel: On the Margins of the Catechetical Themes of Pope Francis’ Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”], *Studia Włocławskie* 17 (2015), pp. 237–250; K. Krämer, K. Vellguth (eds.), *„Evangelii gaudium”. Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, Freiburg 2015; L. Szewczyk, *Głosiciel z Duchem. Rola Ducha Świętego w kaznodziejstwie według „Evangelii gaudium”* [Preacher with the Spirit. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Preaching according to “Evangelii Gaudium”], *Polonia Sacra* 23/3 (2019), pp. 57–70.

encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013), which was largely prepared by his predecessor.<sup>2</sup> Both documents contain various considerations of Benedict XVI, which were presented in a new form and implemented in the teaching of Pope Francis.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will focus on those statements from the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* that directly refer to the texts of Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger). Numerous other allusions and references to the thought of Pope Francis' predecessor can also be found in the document. An analysis of all these statements would be an extremely complex task, which a short article cannot cover. Therefore, given the broad context of Benedict XVI's considerations in *Evangelii Gaudium*, only direct quotations of Benedict XVI's texts will be included in this paper. Examining these statements may shed new light on a better understanding of Francis' message in this exhortation.

*Evangelii Gaudium* mostly contains references to the teaching of John Paul II; however, this exhortation includes quotations from the statements of John XXIII and Paul VI, as well as from numerous documents of the Church, statements by theologians and other authors. Pope Francis used those texts which he considered relevant to the teaching contained in the exhortation. At the same time, he has remained faithful to the demands made in the *Propositio*, which were of vital importance to the synodal fathers. The Pope also devotes much attention to the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in Aparecida (13 May 2007), of which he was an active participant (as Archbishop of Buenos Aires).

The purpose of this article is to examine all the quotations from the teaching of Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger contained in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. These analyses will take into account the context of the quotations, the presentation of their content and the role they play in Pope Francis' message.

<sup>2</sup> "These considerations [...] are meant to supplement what Benedict XVI had written in his encyclical letters on charity and hope. He himself had almost completed a first draft of an encyclical on faith" (Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, 2013, no. 7, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html) [access: 30.07.2023]).

<sup>3</sup> Bernd Hagenkord refers to the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* as Pope Francis' program for Church reform, cf. B. Hagenkord, *Die Programmschrift zur Kirchenreform*, [in:] Papst Franziskus, *Die Freude des Evangeliums. Das Apostolische Scheiben "Evangelii gaudium" über die Verkündigung des Evangeliums in der Welt von heute*, Freiburg 2013, p. 11.

The article is divided into four sections. The initial three sections refer to the general content of the exhortation, and the last one summarises the analyses and presents the conclusions drawn from them.<sup>4</sup>

## Mission of the Church

The motif of joy plays an important role in the Pope's teaching on the need to evangelise in the 21st century world.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen not only in the title of the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereafter: EG), but also in its first sentences and in the wording of the introductory paragraph: "A joy ever new, a joy which is shared" (EG 2–8). Pope Francis, after pointing out the dangers lurking in the modern world (the spirit of consumerism giving rise to sadness), encourages the Christian "to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ" (EG 3). Here he refers to Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*: "No one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord." This conciliar pope made a distinction in his document between pleasure (derived from purely natural, even technological stimuli) and the joy that the Lord gives (no. 8).<sup>6</sup> Francis also draws attention to this issue in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

The call to joy and abiding in it is an essential experience in the Christian life and an essential disposition in the work of evangelisation. These are also fundamental values throughout Francis' ministry.

After quoting two fragments from Paul VI's exhortation, Pope Francis refers, at the end of the introductory paragraph, to the teaching of Benedict XVI, which inspired the formulation of the content of the exhortation. This is evidenced by Francis' personal confession: "I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: 'Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an

<sup>4</sup> The exhortation is divided into five chapters, nevertheless the pope points to seven issues, which he sets out in more detail in the document (EG 17).

<sup>5</sup> In calling for joy, the Pope refers to the very essence of the Gospel, which is the "joyful good news," cf. F.X. D'Sa, *Das Evangelium gaudii von Papst Franziskus*, [in:] „*Evangelii gaudium*“. *Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, eds. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth, Freiburg 2015, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI also recognised the need for the Church's teaching to adapt to a world living in constant economic development and technological innovation; see J. Kreiml, "Mitarbeiter der Wahrheit." *Theologische Grundüberzeugungen des Papstes Benedikt XVI.*, [in:] *Christliche Antworten auf die Fragen der Gegenwart. Grundlinien der Theologie Papst Benedikts XVI.*, ed. J. Kreiml, Regensburg 2015, pp. 12–34.



event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (EG 7).<sup>7</sup> The Pope here introduces a quotation from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*.<sup>8</sup> The theme of the encounter with the Person of Christ is taken up again by Francis when considering the reasons for the lack of joy among Christians, and which is due to the deficiencies of the human heart – weakened both in faith and in generosity and humility. Such a situation can arise when there is no authentic and direct encounter with Jesus Christ in the life of a Christian, that is, “which gives life a new horizon.”<sup>9</sup> Referring to these words of Benedict XVI, Francis notes that such an encounter takes place in love and liberates people “from our narrowness and self-absorption” (EG 8), and at the same time enables man to reach the essence of his existence.<sup>10</sup> Only such a transformation guarantees the fruitfulness of the commitment to the work of evangelisation (EG 8).

At the end of the introduction to the exhortation, Francis refers to the deliberations of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2012) on the theme: “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith” and presents the overall plan of the document (EG 14–18). Three principal settings of evangelisation recipients are mentioned here. Their identification is indicated based on the teaching of Benedict XVI:<sup>11</sup>

1. The area of ordinary pastoral ministry, which is “animated by the fire of the Spirit, so as to inflame the hearts of the faithful who regularly take part in

<sup>7</sup> The encounter with Christ is not only an encounter as with any other person, but above all it is a mystery encounter with the Son of God, which gives rise to joy and happiness, even though it also takes place on the way of the cross, cf. Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI at the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum (21 March 2008)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080321\\_via-crucis-colosseo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080321_via-crucis-colosseo.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005, no. 1, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI instructed that the Christian, by receiving in faith the Body of the Lord, communicates in the most profound way with Jesus Christ, who grants man the fullness of life; for this see M.L. Haim, *Die Eucharistie als Lebensprinzip der Kirche*, Regensburg 2015, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Kazimierz Panuś recalls an important principle: Christian doctrine is interpreted in relation to the person of Jesus Christ, cf. K. Panuś, *Zasada Pondus et ordo w adhortacji „Evangelii gaudium”...*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at the Holy Mass for the Closing of the Synod of Bishops (28 October 2012)*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 104 (2012), p. 890, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121028\\_conclusionone-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121028_conclusionone-sinodo.html) [access: 31.07.2023].

community worship and gather on the Lord's day to be nourished by his word and by the bread of eternal life."<sup>12</sup>

2. The area of "the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism."<sup>13</sup>
3. The area of those "who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him."

No social group is outside the pastoral care of the Church. However, it is necessary to remember to respect the beliefs especially of those who are far from Christ. In line with the teaching of Benedict XVI, Pope Francis warns that proselytising should not be used, but that evangelisation should be extended "by attraction."<sup>14</sup> While evangelisation includes all people, it takes into account the circumstances of the life of a particular person or social group.<sup>15</sup>

The Pope notes that the accomplishment of missionary work is a source of joy for the Church (cf. Luke 15:7), and postulates the need for a move "from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry" (EG 15).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Eucharist also transforms people: "God, the living God, establishes a communion of peace with us, or to put it more strongly, he creates 'consanguinity' between himself and us. Through the incarnation of Jesus, through the outpouring of his blood, we have been drawn into an utterly real consanguinity with Jesus and thus with God himself," Benedict XVI, *Mass of the Lord's Supper. Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI (9 April 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) [access: 31.07.2023].

<sup>13</sup> In the relationship with the "others" (also in ecumenical dialogue), Benedict XVI encouraged "a way of enduring the thorn of being different," J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics. New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, San Francisco, CA 1987, p. 137; cf. J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, vol. 2, Katowice 2012, p. 309.

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI at the Holy Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Aparecida, Brazil (13 May 2007)*, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 99 (2007), p. 437, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070513\\_conference-brazil.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070513_conference-brazil.html) [access: 5.08.2023].

<sup>15</sup> The principle of "attraction" is based on the enthusiastic faith of Christians, those who confess that "His Resurrection has formed a bridge between the world and eternal life over which every man and every woman can cross to reach the true goal of our earthly pilgrimage" (Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli (13 April 2009)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_reg\\_20090413\\_easter-monday.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20090413_easter-monday.html) [access: 5.08.2023]).

<sup>16</sup> The Pope indicates the necessity of a "pastoral conversion" not to be stuck only in a pastoral routine, but to be open to the new challenges of the world around us (EG 49), cf. W. Śmigiel, *Priorytety pastoralne Kościoła w Polsce...*, op. cit., p. 40.

With these observations in mind, Francis, in the first chapter of the exhortation, points to a process of “the Church’s missionary transformation” (EG 19–49). Analysing the tasks of the particular Church in this area, the Pope notes that:

It is the Church incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features. Its joy in communicating Jesus Christ is expressed both by a concern to preach him to areas in greater need and in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its own territory or towards new sociocultural settings (EG 30).

Francis is referring here to Benedict XVI’s address to the participants of the international congress on the 40th anniversary of the decree *Ad Gentes*. The then Pope instructed that the Church, as a community of salvation, must follow the same path as Christ, that is, in poverty, obedience, service, sacrifice of self until death, which leads to victory.<sup>17</sup> The life of a Christian must therefore be extremely expressive, this is a necessary condition for a missionary outreach to the periphery (outside the centres of Christian life) to be fruitful.<sup>18</sup> Francis expresses his concern that there should be no lack of witnesses to “the light and life of the Risen Christ” anywhere in the world (EG 30).

In the final part of the first chapter, Francis compares the Church to a Mother with an open heart (EG 46–49). His reflection also refers to the addressees of missionary work, who are above all the poor (cf. Luke 14:14). Making the theme more specific, he cites the words of Pope Benedict XVI at a meeting with the Episcopate of Brazil: “the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel.”<sup>19</sup> Considering the plight of the poor, learning about their lives and

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the International Congress on the 40th Anniversary of the Decree “Ad Gentes”* (11 March 2006), “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 98 (2006), p. 337, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060311\\_ad-gentes.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060311_ad-gentes.html) [access: 5.08.2023].

<sup>18</sup> Instead, Benedict XVI points out that the enthusiasm of missionary commitment is drawn by Christians from the Pascha of Christ: “The sending of the disciples on mission is the beginning of the journey in the world of the people of the New Covenant, a people who believe in him and in his work of salvation, a people who witness to the truth of the Resurrection,” Benedict XVI, *Catechesis during the General Audience* (11 April 2012), [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120411.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120411.html) [access: 5.08.2023].

<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Brazilian Bishops in the Cathedral of São Paulo, Brazil* (11 May 2007), “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 99 (2007), p. 428, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070511\\_bishops-brazil.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070511_bishops-brazil.html) [access: 5.08.2023].

problems, the Church becomes a safe haven for every person and a privileged place for the encounter of man with God. Francis points to the situation of the local Churches in India and Argentina and stresses that, although battered and dirty at times, the Church is not “caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures” (EG 49). Poor people are not a problem for the Church, but a precious part of it.<sup>20</sup>

## Evangelisation in the contemporary world

In the second chapter of the exhortation (EG 50–109), Pope Francis considers the theme of the crisis of community commitment. He analyses this problem from the perspective of “evangelical discernment” and the need to be “nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit” (EG 50). After analysing some of the “challenges of today’s world” (EG 52–75), Francis points out the temptations that can threaten pastoral activity (EG 76–109). In this chapter, the Pope does not refer to the teaching of Benedict XVI, but he recalls the words of Joseph Ratzinger delivered at a conference during the meeting of the Presidents of the Latin American Bishops’ Commission on the Doctrine of the Faith.

Pope Francis uses the quotation from Joseph Ratzinger’s in order to stigmatise the egoistic attitude of “pastoral acedia” (EG 81–83), that is, apathy and indifference in pastoral commitment. Acedia occurs especially when a person acts without being inwardly imbued with spiritual values and is filled with fears of failure, criticism and the cross. This phenomenon was just described by Joseph Ratzinger during the aforementioned conference: “the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church in which everything apparently continues normally but in reality the faith is being consumed and falling into meanness.”<sup>21</sup> The opinion expressed by the Cardinal contains extremely blunt words that touch the very essence of Christianity, namely faith. Joseph Ratzinger has in mind here the faith that was described in the experience of the first Christians (New Testament). In contrast, a faith that exhausts itself ceases to be actually a Christian faith and

<sup>20</sup> Benedict XVI states: “the Church as a whole must never forget that she has to remain recognizably the community of God’s poor” (J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, New York 2007, p. 77).

<sup>21</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The Current Situation of Faith and Theology. Meeting with the Doctrinal Commissions of Latin America (Guadalajara, Mexico, 7 May 1996)*, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_19960507\\_guadalajara-ratzinger\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc_con_cfaith_19960507_guadalajara-ratzinger_en.html) [access: 26.09.2023].

falling into “meanness,” i.e. into something worthless.<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, referring to these observations, calls such an attitude very bluntly: “A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum” (EG 83).<sup>23</sup> With the loss of faith, hope also dies, resulting in a weakening of apostolic dynamism and the joy of evangelisation.<sup>24</sup>

Pope Francis argues against an arid pessimism in the work of evangelisation (EG 84–86). He notes that in some places in the world there has been a “desertification” of spiritual life. Nevertheless, this “desert” can become a place for the radiation of faith (EG 86). In this context, the Pope recalls the teaching of Benedict XVI:

it is starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive.<sup>25</sup>

Pope Francis, aware of the challenges facing the contemporary Church, appeals: “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!” (EG 109) and takes up the theme of preaching the Gospel in the third chapter (EG 110–175). This task is the responsibility of the whole people of God (EG 111–134). At the outset, Francis justifies the grounds for such a commitment. First of all,

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, aware of the changes taking place in the modern world, encouraged young people to be its witnesses in the digital world; for this, see J. Kreiml, *Denkanstöße Johannes Paulus II. und Benedikts XVI. Zum Welttag der sozialen Kommunikationsmittel*, [in:] *Konzil und Medien. Über den Glauben reden in einer veränderten Welt*, eds. V. Neumann, J. Kreim, Regensburg 2013, pp. 71–90.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ratzinger's diagnosis is applied by Francis above all to the situation of the Church communities living north of the Alps and especially in Germany, cf. K. Vellguth, “*Unerhörte und ungehörte Worte zu den Herausforderungen an Welt und Kirche*,” [in:] *„Evangelii gaudium“*. *Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, eds. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth, Freiburg 2015, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> In such an environment, there is no possibility for growth in faith and its ongoing deepening, cf. E. Fitzgerald, *Kritische Missionare suchen und teilen die Freude von Leben in Fülle*, [in:] *„Evangelii gaudium“*. *Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, eds. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth, Freiburg 2015, p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at Mass for the Opening of the Year of Faith (11 October 2012)*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 104 (2012), p. 881, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121011\\_anno-fede.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121011_anno-fede.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

it stems from the initiative of God Himself, who has revealed Himself in the Trinity and has granted salvation, which is a work of His mercy (EG 111–112).<sup>26</sup> The commitment to evangelisation is man's response to this gift. This truth is further illuminated by another quote from the teaching of Benedict XVI:

It is important always to know that the first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into the divine initiative, only begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become – with him and in him – evangelizers.<sup>27</sup>

The theme of faith also shines through in this statement, which continually directs man towards God and His work. Faith empowers a personal and fruitful relationship with God, who is rich in grace. Pope Francis concludes these reflections by stating: “This principle of the primacy of grace must be a beacon which constantly illuminates our reflections on evangelization” (EG 112).

Pope Francis also understands the work of evangelisation as a process of inculturation (EG 122). It is therefore about respecting the cultural traditions of the different regions of the world. The people of God globally possess a great wealth of diverse expressions of Christian truths. Their value was already pointed out by Pope Paul VI in the exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In this context of Francis' teaching, there is another reference in the exhortation to Benedict XVI: “Closer to our own time, Benedict XVI, speaking about Latin America, pointed out that popular piety is ‘a precious treasure of the Catholic Church,’ in which ‘we see the soul of the Latin American peoples.’”<sup>28</sup> It is significant that both the universal aspect (the Catholic Church) and the particular aspect (the peoples of Latin America) appear in Benedict XVI's statement. Regardless of where believers live, therefore, they are all part of the universal Church, and in the universal Church there is room for all world cultures. Pope

<sup>26</sup> Mercy is a leitmotif in the Pope's message on evangelisation and the Christian life, P. Suess, *Das Evangelium von Gottes Barmherzigkeit verkünden*, [in:] „*Evangelii gaudium*“. *Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, eds. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth, Freiburg 2015, p. 166.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, *Meditation during the First General Congregation of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (8 October 2012)*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 104 (2012), p. 897, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121008\\_meditazione-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121008_meditazione-sinodo.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>28</sup> Benedict XVI, *Opening Address of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (13 May 2007)*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 99 (2007), pp. 446–447, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070513\\_conference-brazil.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070513_conference-brazil.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

Francis also emphasises here the value that popular piety brings with it, which is an important force in the work of evangelisation.

In the next section of the exhortation, Francis points out the role played by evangelisation in the work of deepening the kerygma (which is always Trinitarian in character), that is, in the work of the fundamental preaching of the Church (EG 160–175). It is the kerygma that is the constant inspiration of all Christian formation. It must permeate the catechetical process – also in its initiatory, mystagogical aspect.<sup>29</sup> This essential process of growing in the life of faith is also the “way of beauty” (*via pulchritudinis*), according to the words of St Augustine: we love only what is beautiful (EG 167).<sup>30</sup> This has important consequences in the transmission of the faith, not least in the use of the new “language of parables.” This formulation was taken by Francis from Benedict XVI’s speech after the film project “‘Art and Faith’ – *Via Pulchritudinis*.”<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis’ predecessor paid much attention to the importance of parables in the teaching of Jesus in the famous trilogy *Jesus of Nazareth*, in which he writes:

the parables are ultimately an expression of God’s hiddenness in this world and of the fact that knowledge of God always lays claim to the whole person – that such knowledge is one with life itself, and that it cannot exist without “repentance.” For in this world, marked by sin, the gravitational pull of our lives is weighted by the chains of the “I” and the “self.” These chains must be broken to free us for a new love that places us in another gravitational field where we can enter new life.<sup>32</sup>

Benedict XVI sees an opportunity in evangelisation today precisely by using the “language of parables.”<sup>33</sup> This means using a language full of comparisons, metaphors and even resorting to re-enactments or screen adaptations. However,

<sup>29</sup> The mystagogical renewal is a return to early Christian sources and an avoidance of purely moralistic forms of preaching, cf. J. Bagrowicz, *Radość głoszenia Ewangelii...*, op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>30</sup> St Augustine, *De musica*, VI, XIII, 38 (PL 32, 1183–1184); St Augustine, *Confessiones*, IV, XIII, 20 (PL 32, 701).

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address for the Screening of the Documentary “Art and Faith” – Via Pulchritudinis (25 October 2012)*, “L’Osservatore Romano” October 27 (2012), p. 7, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121025\\_arte-fede.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121025_arte-fede.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>32</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth...*, op. cit., pp. 193–194.

<sup>33</sup> In his teaching, Benedict XVI was able to combine the achievements of the work of exegetes and systematic theologians and creatively rework them, cf. W. Keller, *Dogmatische Postulate versus Exegese. Zum Umgang mit den Erkenntnissen historisch-kritischer Biblexegese in den Angelus-Ansprachen Benedikts XVI.*, [in:] *Altes und Neues hervorholen*

at the heart of these efforts must be the work of communicating gospel content. The *via pulchritudinis* is therefore an essential way of proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ. Francis is equally unequivocal on this subject: “We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word, and different forms of beauty which are valued in different cultural settings” (EG 167).

At the end of the third chapter, Francis emphasises the centrality of the Word of God in the evangelisation process (EG 174). Here he formulates the fundamental principle of the work of evangelisation: “we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized” (EG 174). In this theme, there are particularly many references to the teaching of Benedict XVI, especially the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (hereafter: VD). The first quotation deals explicitly with the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Church:

In this way I wish to point out certain fundamental approaches to a rediscovery of God’s word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal. At the same time I express my hope that the word will be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity. That our joy may be complete (VD 1).

Benedict XVI points to the intrinsic link that exists between the practice of preaching the Word of God and the joy that is its fruit (of preaching). It is this principle that underpinned the message of Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. Listening to and celebrating the Word of God makes the believer capable of being an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life (EG 174).

The study of Scripture should be practised in the life of all Christians. This has already been emphasised by the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation *Dei Verbum* (nos. 86–87). Referring again to the text of *Verbum Domini*, Francis states: “Evangelization demands familiarity with God’s word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, ongoing study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading” (EG 175). Benedict XVI emphasises the value of prayerful reading of Scripture and the use of the practice of *lectio divina*. He does, however, make a caveat in this regard:

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(Mt 13,42). *Debatten zur Bibel in Theologie und Kirche*, eds. G. Häfner, F.R. Prostmeier, T. Schumacher, Stuttgart 2022, pp. 422–423.



In this regard, however, one must avoid the risk of an individualistic approach, and remember that God's word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is a word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church. Consequently, the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church (VD 86).

Such an attitude guarantees an authentic contact of the believer with the design of God, and is therefore a life-giving feeding of personal truth.

Pope Francis concludes this chapter with a thought in the form of an exhortation: "Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word" (EG 175). This treasure is available to all believers. Thanks to it, man does not experience a lack of knowledge of the essentials, which cannot be gained through purely rational and natural efforts. In this context, Francis once again refers to the teaching of Benedict XVI: "God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us."<sup>34</sup> This phrase is also developed in the exhortation *Verbum Domini*: "life itself was made manifest in Christ. Called to communion with God and among ourselves, we must proclaim this gift" (VD 2). Benedict XVI emphasises above all the fact of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which was definitive in the history of salvation (cf. 1 John 1:2–3).

## Social impact

In the fourth chapter of the exhortation, Francis addresses the social dimension of evangelisation (EG 176–258). As the Pope rightly observes: "The kerygma has a clear social content" (EG 177). In the first point, Francis touches on the essence of the topic under consideration and points to the communal and societal repercussions of the kerygma (EG 178–185). The Pope starts from the premise that every human being is endowed with an infinite dignity because God loves all men and women with an infinite love.<sup>35</sup> This fact has both individual and

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address during the First General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops (8 October 2012)*, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 104 (2012), p. 896, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121008\\_meditazione-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121008_meditazione-sinodo.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>35</sup> The motif of the promise of salvation runs through the entire narrative of the Old and New Testaments, cf. A.S. Jasiński, *Trwałość i ostateczne zbawienie Izraela w prorocत्वach Starego Testamentu* [The Permanence and Final Salvation of Israel in the Prophecies of

social significance (healing of human relationships). In Christian practice, the desire for the good of others is “a primary and fundamental response” (EG 178).

After presenting the Scripture-based argumentation of the above principles, the Pope cites an important thought of Benedict XVI: “the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being.”<sup>36</sup> This is an excerpt from an apostolic letter with Benedict XVI’s fundamental statement taken from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable” (no. 25). There is thus a reference to the three responsibilities of the Church, which are significantly complemented by “the service of charity” to which every baptised person is called. It is thus about the mission (of charity), which is also of vital importance in the work of evangelisation.<sup>37</sup>

Francis draws practical conclusions from the Church’s teaching on social questions (EG 182–184). A man of faith cannot hide his convictions and lock them up in “the inner sanctum of personal life” (EG 183). Christians (like St Francis or St Teresa of Calcutta) wanted to change the world and committed themselves to this work. Referring in turn to the universal dimensions, Francis emphasises that the earth is a common good, so Christians must be concerned with building a better world, without, however, replacing politicians in this task. In this context, Francis recalls the teaching of Benedict XVI in the form of two quotations from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. The first concerns a fundamental principle concerning the duties of lay authority: “the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics” (EG 28). By failing to fulfil this duty, the state becomes a “gang of thieves.” In addition, it is the task of the state to guarantee religious freedom for all inhabitants. The second quotation from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* already relates directly to the message of Francis’ exhortation: the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (EG 183). Although the Church does not take the place of state authority, she does have at her disposal an important

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the Old Testament], [in:] *Izrael i Biblia hebrajska w Nowym Testamencie* [Israel and the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament], ed. K. Ziąja, Opole 2003, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio Intima Ecclesiae Natura* (11 November 2012), “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 104 (2012), p. 996, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_motu-proprio\\_20121111\\_caritas.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20121111_caritas.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>37</sup> The attitude of love and mercy reveals the truth that constitutes the foundation of Christianity is revealed, cf. J. Ratzinger, *Glaube, Wahrheit, Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg 2003, pp. 175–184.

weapon in the work of the struggle for justice, and this is, as Benedict XVI instructs, reasoned argumentation and the stimulation of spiritual forces, i.e. the creation of attitudes that will guarantee the just conduct of members of society.<sup>38</sup>

In the second point, Francis calls for the inclusion of the poor in society (EG 186–216). The Pope reminds us that all believers are called to be God's instrument in the work of liberation and promotion of the poor in order to integrate them fully into society. Christians should be guided by the principle of social solidarity (EG 187). Expanding on this theme, Francis recalls the privileged place of the poor in God's people (EG 197–201). The Pope quotes Scripture on this theme (EG 197) and recalls the "option for the poor," which belongs primarily to a theological category, as Benedict XVI, quoted in this context, instructed: "[This option] is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty."<sup>39</sup> We already read this Christological truth in the text of 2 Cor 8:9. Benedict XVI instructs on it in the context of the question of the meaning of faith in the God who has shown his love in Christ. This divine love has given humanity a family of universal dimensions (the Church), thus liberating it from egoism. In God we meet in every human being. This gives rise to solidarity and responsibility for another. The option for the poor is thus inscribed "in our Christian faith." Pope Francis concludes this theme with the statement, often repeated by himself: "This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor" (EG 198).

Addressing issues of "the economy and the distribution of income" (EG 202–208), Francis emphasises that this is also the great task of politicians who, despite the bad aura (surrounding them), are called to "a lofty vocation": concern for the common good. Such concern is a manifestation of the highest forms of charity. The Pope notes that the problem of poverty can be addressed effectively by making a structural effort to remove the causes of the situation, that is, to cure the disease, rather than taking only short-term steps. In this argument, Francis refers to Benedict XVI's address to the diplomatic corps, which included an

<sup>38</sup> The papal encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* was published at the beginning of the new millennium and reminds believers and all people of good will that God is and will be present with us (in the world) in the gift of love, cf. C. Binniger, "Deus caritas est". *Versuch einer Entfaltung und Ausdeutung der theologischen Grundaussagen der ersten Enzyklika von Benedikt XVI.*, [in:] *Christliche Antworten auf die Fragen der Gegenwart Grundlinien der Theologie Papst Benedikts XVI.*, ed. J. Kreiml, Regensburg 2010, p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> The poor and poverty are theological categories that significantly orient the Christian life towards the truth, cf. O.C. Vélez Caro, *Eine unabdingbare Weichenstellung*, [in:] „*Evangelii gaudium*“. *Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, eds. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth, Freiburg 2015, p. 273.

appeal to “eliminate the structural causes of global economic dysfunction.”<sup>40</sup> This task stems from concern for all those who suffer life-threatening deprivations: lack of water and food. It is particularly tragic that these shortages also affect children, who thus have no opportunity for proper development.

Concluding with the thought of a structural approach to solving world poverty, Francis points out: “Inequality is the root of social ills” (EG 202).

In order to further illuminate the above points, the Pope cites the teaching of Benedict XVI: “[love] is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)” (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 2). In the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI reminds us that love is the greatest gift of God given to humanity (cf. 1 John 4:8, 16).<sup>41</sup> At the same time, he warns against misunderstanding love and excluding ethical content from it, thus removing it from the order of truth. With this teaching in mind, Francis completes his thoughts in the form of a prayer: “I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor!” (EG 205). The Pope values the role of politicians on the economic level. They are indispensable in this mission, but he encourages those responsible to submit to God’s inspiration.

In the last point of the fourth section, Francis emphasises the necessity of “social dialogue as a contribution to peace” (EG 238–258). Social dialogue (alongside dialogue with the State and in the ecumenical field) is one of the Church’s essential duties. It is only realised when “the Church speaks from the light which faith offers.” This principle was recalled by Benedict XVI in his address to the Roman Curia.<sup>42</sup> He also reminds us that the Church also preserves the human memory, which contains a great variety of experiences due to the limitations (suffering) and, at the same time, the greatness of man. In dialogue, therefore, both fidelity to God and to man are preserved. Referring to these thoughts, Francis concludes:

<sup>40</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps (8 January 2007)*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 99 (2007), p. 73, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070108\\_diplomatic-corps.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070108_diplomatic-corps.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>41</sup> “Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1).

<sup>42</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia (21 December 2012)*, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 105 (2013), p. 51, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121221\\_auguri-curia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

[the Church] contribut[es] her two-thousand-year experience and keep[s] ever in mind the life and sufferings of human beings. This light transcends human reason, yet it can also prove meaningful and enriching to those who are not believers and it stimulates reason to broaden its perspectives (EG 238).

The Church proclaims first and foremost “the Gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15), and therefore any dialogue carried out at various levels must be in close connection with this task of the Church. Peace is a good in universal dimensions.

Francis considers different forms of dialogue of the Church:<sup>43</sup> 1. Dialogue between faith, reason and science. 2. Ecumenical dialogue. 3. Relations with Judaism. 4. Interreligious dialogue. 5. Social dialogue in the context of religious freedom.

Referring to interreligious dialogue, the Pope points out that it is not a matter of “a diplomatic openness” that agrees with everything for the sake of avoiding problems, hence he states: “[...] for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another” (EG 251). These important issues were already addressed by Benedict XVI in his address to the Roman Curia. An important principle of dialogue was also mentioned here, which states the necessity of gradually arriving at the expected solutions. This is a long process because the Church does not have ready-made prescriptions for specific issues. The fruit of dialogue can be important findings that must be followed by concrete actions. Pope Francis also emphasises the importance of dialogue with the followers of Islam, especially with those who now live in traditionally Christian countries. Mutual understanding and tolerance make possible the social integration of expatriates into the local population.

Francis also addressed (in the context of the dialogue) the issue of religious freedom – as recommended by the Synod Fathers (EG 255–258). This issue touches on fundamental human rights. The Pope already refers at the outset to the teaching of Benedict XVI, who emphasises that these rights include “the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest

<sup>43</sup> Benedict XVI instructs that interreligious dialogue should take place in a spirit of truth-seeking; for Christians, this is the path leading to Christ; M. Stickelbroeck, *Christus und die Religionen. Der Anspruch der christlichen Offenbarung in Hinblick auf die Religionen der Welt*, [in:] *Christliche Antworten auf die Fragen der Gegenwart. Grundlinien der Theologie Papst Benedikts XVI.*, ed. J. Kreiml, Regensburg 2015, pp. 102–103.

one's beliefs in public."<sup>44</sup> Faith plays a fundamental role in Christian life.<sup>45</sup> This is a teaching already present in the conciliar declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*. Benedict XVI repeatedly mentions it.<sup>46</sup> He also reminds us that "religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person" and is "the path to peace."<sup>47</sup> Pope Francis, on the other hand, instructs that religious pluralism "does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt [...] to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques" without the possibility of influence in the public sphere (EG 255).

In the last chapter of the exhortation, Francis points out the need for all evangelisers to be Spirit-filled<sup>48</sup> (EG 259–288).<sup>49</sup> The Pope thus goes back in thought to the beginning of the Church's history, which was the granting of the "Power from above" to the Apostles at Pentecost. Analysing the inner dispositions of evangelisers, Francis points to the necessity of the "personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus" (EG 264–267) and then instructs on

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, no. 26, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20120914\\_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20120914_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>45</sup> The Christian faith is centred on the person of Jesus Christ and gives rise to the hope of eternal life. Its manifestation is of vital importance for the future of humanity; cf. R. Vorderholzer, "Spe salvi" – eine zu Unrecht fast vergessene Enzyklika, [in:] *Christliche Antworten auf die Fragen der Gegenwart. Grundlinien der Theologie Papst Benedikts XVI.*, ed. J. Kreiml, Regensburg 2015, p. 207.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (8 December 2010)*, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 103 (2011), pp. 46–58, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20101208\\_xliv-world-day-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace.html); Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps (10 January 2011)*, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 103 (2011), pp. 100–107, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110110\\_diplomatic-corps.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110110_diplomatic-corps.html) [access: 30.07.2023].

<sup>47</sup> "Religious freedom, the path to peace," with these words, Pope Benedict XVI begins his message for the World Day of Peace (2011).

<sup>48</sup> Leszek Szewczyk notes: "In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* there is an encouragement to proclaim the truth about the Holy Spirit sent by the Father and the Son, who transforms human hearts and makes them capable of entering into the perfect communion of the Most Holy Trinity, where everything finds its unity. It is the Holy Spirit, being the harmony and bond of love between the Father and the Son, who creates the communion and harmony of the People of God. He is also the one who awakens in the Church the richness of the gifts and builds unity (EG 117)" (L. Szewczyk, *Głosiciel z Duchem...*, op. cit., p. 60).

<sup>49</sup> The fifth chapter of the exhortation summarises Francis' reflections to date and emphasises the need to revitalise the Christian life with the Holy Spirit, cf. B. Hagenkord, *Die Programmschrift zur Kirchenreform*, op. cit., p. 28.

the “spiritual savour of being a people” of God (EG 268–274). Abiding with Jesus (also with his cross) allows the believer to integrate fruitfully into society, sharing its joys and sorrows. One cannot distance oneself from “human misery” (EG 270). After quoting Scripture to support these principles (EG 271), Francis points out the essence of the Christian’s social life: “Loving others is a spiritual force drawing us to union with God; indeed, one who does not love others ‘walks in the darkness’ (1 Jn 2:11), ‘remains in death’ (1 Jn 3:14) and ‘does not know God’ (1 Jn 4:8)” (EG 272). John’s teaching on love is also the starting point of Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (cf. 1 John 4:6). This document is also referred to by Francis, who continues his own teaching on this theme: “Benedict XVI has said that ‘closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God,’ and that love is, in the end, the only light which ‘can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working’” (EG 272).<sup>50</sup> The first quotation is from paragraph 16 of *Deus Caritas Est*. Here Benedict XVI considers the theme of God’s love for man. He concludes his analysis of John’s statement: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 Jn 4:20).” Love of neighbour, then, is the way to encounter God.

The second quotation is from paragraph 39 of *Deus Caritas Est*, which is an excerpt from Benedict XVI’s reflections on the specific profile of the Church’s charitable activity. Christians should above all be animated by faith, hope and charity, which are inseparable. To conclude these reflections, Benedict XVI reminds us that charity is the light that illuminates the darkness of the world and gives courage to live and act. Every believer must have a part in this process, so the Pope concludes: “Love is possible, and we are able to practise it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world – this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical” (*Deus Caritas Est* 39).<sup>51</sup> This sentence expresses Benedict XVI’s intention in writing this encyclical. His teaching is continued

<sup>50</sup> Christianity is an affirmation of life, and therefore faith is directed towards it, which indeed affirms life at all levels, including the social level, cf. J. Ratzinger, *Eschatologia. Śmierć i życie wieczne* [Eschatology. Death and Eternal Life], transl. M. Węclawski, Poznań 1984, p. 118.

<sup>51</sup> Christian love presupposes purity and unselfishness and is the best witness to God who is love (1 John 4:8), cf. J. Tonkowicz, *Ideal życia chrześcijańskiego w encyklikach Benedykta XVI: „Deus caritas est” i „Spe salvi” oraz Franciszka „Lumen fidei” (aspekt biblijny)* [The Ideal of Christian Life in Benedict XVI’s Encyclicals: “Deus Caritas Est” and “Spe Salvi” and Francis’ “Lumen Fidei” (Biblical Aspect)], Opole [s.n.]: 2018, p. 140.

by Pope Francis, who takes a special interest in the defence of the weak, the poor, those in need, including refugees. Service to man is service to God.

After the previous two references to the teaching of Benedict XVI, Pope Francis reveals the depths of the Christian's social life:

When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God (EG 272).<sup>52</sup>

It is characteristic that this social dimension of Christian love has been strongly emphasised by both Popes in various documents. Undoubtedly, the intention is to draw the attention of the readers (addressees) to the most important aspect of Christian life, which is realised at all levels of social life. Benedict XVI instructs on Christian love in all its aspects, while Francis emphasises the role it plays in the work of proclaiming the Gospel in today's world.

## Summary

In the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis directly refers twenty-three times to the teaching of Benedict XVI and once to a statement of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. The Pope makes the most frequent use of the encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* (four times). This is followed by quotations from: the opening address of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (three times), the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (twice), the homily given at Mass at the close of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (twice), the address to the Roman Curia (twice), encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (once), the address to the participants in the International Congress on the 40th anniversary of the decree *Ad Gentes* (once), the address on the occasion of the meeting with the Brazilian Bishops in the Cathedral of São Paulo, Brazil (once), the homily at Mass for the opening of the Year of Faith (once), meditation during the First General

<sup>52</sup> The Spirit works in man not only in his immanence, but also in his encounter with others, B.J. Hilberath, *Perspektiven eines Charismatikers*, [in:] „*Evangelii gaudium*“. *Stimmen der Weltkirche*, Series: Theologie der einen Welt 7, eds. K. Krämer, K. Vellguth, Freiburg 2015, p. 299.



Congregation of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (once), reflections at the opening of the First General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops (once), the address for the screening of the documentary “Art and Faith’ – *Via Pulchritudinis*” (once), reflections at the opening of the First General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops (once) in the form of *motu proprio Intima Ecclesiae Natura* (once), the address to the diplomatic corps (once), the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* (once). There is a reference to Joseph Ratzinger in one text: *The Current Situation of Faith and Theology*, a conference delivered at the meeting of the Presidents of the Latin American Bishops’ Commissions.

The references to Benedict XVI in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* begin and end with quotations from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, and are therefore the most important texts of Francis’ predecessor used in this document. In it, the Pope appears as the successor of St Peter – an apostle of joyful evangelisation. The process of renewal in this work began with the Second Vatican Council. It is no coincidence that quotes from two popes appear at the beginning of the exhortation: Paul VI and Benedict XVI, whose time in office largely forms the period of the entire post-conciliar renewal. This is the time of the new Pentecost of the Church.<sup>53</sup> The fruit of this original event was the great joy of the disciples (Acts 2:28, 46; 8:8, 39; 13:48; 14:17; 15:3; 20:12; 21:17). Without joy there can be no authentic Christianity and thus no effective evangelisation.

The beginning of the Christian journey and evangelisation is the fruit of an authentic encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. This is the principle proclaimed by Benedict XVI. It has become a point of reference throughout the argumentation contained in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (no. 7).

Another quotation from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* is used by Francis to emphasise the need for the Church to be involved in the work of implementing a just social order. Its absence is felt above all by the poor (EG 183). Social problems cannot be solved without recourse to love, which is the spiritual force and light in the world (EG 272). These thoughts are supplemented by a reference to the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (no. 205).

The quotations from the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* address the essence of Francis’ message in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. They justify the need to engage in the work of joyful evangelisation, which can only take place on the basis of an authentic encounter with the love of Jesus Christ.

<sup>53</sup> Acts of the Apostles repeatedly describes the sending of the Holy Spirit (2:1–13; 4:31; 8:15–18; 9:17; 10:44–48).

Other references to Benedict XVI's teaching deal with many more specific issues: God made Himself known to man (EG 175), Christ became poor for our enrichment (EG 198), the principle of revival by the fire of the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God (EG 16, 174–175, 272), the expansion of the Church “by attraction” (EG 14), the ministry of charity (EG 179), the courage to go out with the Gospel to the peripheries (EG 30), the poor as privileged addressees of the Gospel (EG 48), the importance of faith and hope in the Christian life (EG 86, 238), submission to God's initiative in the work of evangelisation (EG 112), the value of popular piety (EG 123), the importance of the “way of beauty” in evangelisation (EG 167), the importance of dialogue in evangelisation (EG 251) and respect for religious freedom (EG 255).

The Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, which are closely intertwined, are an essential dimension of Benedict XVI's theology. It is reflected in the quotations used by Pope Francis in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. The thoughts of Francis' predecessor are recorded in all parts and themes of the document (except for the consideration of the homily). The references to Benedict XVI in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* are significant in the argumentation contained in this document. They have been reinforced with allusions to the teaching of Benedict XVI, which are not included in the article.

Evangelisation is the primary mission of the Church (cf. Matt 28:16–20; Acts 1:8). The content of the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* testifies that Pope Francis is faithful to this mission. His indications are deeply rooted in the New Testament message and in the teaching of the Church, especially of the post-conciliar era. As the immediate successor of Benedict XVI, Francis was inspired by his predecessor's statements, especially on the theme of evangelisation. The statements analysed in this article show that there is a consistency of message between Benedict XVI and Francis. The incumbent Pope not only quotes Benedict XVI, but also creatively develops his thoughts, in line with the spirit of the new era in which the Church carries out its global mission of evangelisation.

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## Joseph Ratzinger on the New Evangelization: The Implications for Consecrated Life

Joseph Ratzinger o nowej ewangelizacji –  
implikacje dla życia konsekrowanego

**ABSTRACT:** The article deals with the issues on consecrated life, raised by Joseph Ratzinger in his address *The New Evangelization*. The aim of the article is to consider the following questions: to what extent the reality of consecrated life corresponds to the dynamics, structure and method of the new evangelization and related recommendations; and to what extent the content of the new evangelization is present in this form of life totally devoted to God? The first part presents Joseph Ratzinger's address *The New Evangelization* in the context of contemporary Church teaching. The second part of the article shows the structure and method of the new evangelization in the life of consecrated persons. Then – in the third part – it is argued that the essential contents of the new evangelization (conversion, the kingdom of God, the person Jesus Christ and eternal life) are at the very centre of the consecrated life and are of fundamental importance for it.

**KEY WORDS:** new evangelization, consecrated life, Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI

**ABSTRAKT:** Artykuł podejmuje kwestie zawarte w przemówieniu Josepha Ratzingera *Nowa ewangelizacja*, odnosząc je do życia konsekrowanego. Celem artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytania: Na ile rzeczywistość życia konsekrowanego odpowiada dynamice, strukturze i metodzie nowej ewangelizacji oraz wskazaniom odnoszącym się do niej? Na ile treści nowej ewangelizacji są obecne w tej formie życia całkowicie poświęconego Bogu? Pierwsza część artykułu przedstawia przemówienie Josepha Ratzingera na tle współczesnego nauczania Kościoła, druga – ukazuje strukturę i metodę nowej ewangelizacji w życiu osób konsekrowanych. Trzecia część jest uzasadnieniem, że główne treści nowej ewangelizacji (nawrócenie, królestwo Boże, Osoba Jezusa Chrystusa i życie wieczne) znajdują się w samym centrum życia konsekrowanego i mają w nim podstawowe znaczenie.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** nowa ewangelizacja, struktura, metoda, treść, życie konsekrowane, Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI

## Introduction

In 2000 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger delivered an address in which he explained the structure, method and content of the new evangelisation. Although the address was primarily delivered to catechists and religion teachers, it is also relevant to a wider audience and even has universal reach. These reflections and remarks of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which have lost none of their relevance even today, are also worth exploring with regard to the consecrated life. Therefore, the following questions were put: to what extent the reality of consecrated life corresponds to the dynamics, structure and method of the new evangelisation and the indications relating to it; and to what extent the content of the new evangelisation is present in this form of life totally devoted to God? This text offers an answer to the research questions, taking into account that consecrated life at the heart of the Church denotes the imitation of Jesus Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. This issue of new evangelisation have been dealt with in numerous publications and studies on contemporary consecrated life, however, without considering the content and significance of Joseph Ratzinger's *New Evangelisation* address.<sup>1</sup>

### Joseph Ratzinger's address *The New Evangelisation* against the background of contemporary Church teaching

In order to properly and profoundly understand the thought contained in Joseph Ratzinger's address *The New Evangelisation*, it must be read in the context of the entire contemporary Church teaching on the topic of the new

<sup>1</sup> See W. Gałązka, *Konsekracja zakonna w nowej ewangelizacji* [Religious Consecration in the New Evangelization], [in:] *Duchowość w dobie nowej ewangelizacji* [Spirituality in the Era of the New Evangelization], ed. M. Tatar, Sandomierz 2016, pp. 141–164; J. Gocko, *Znaczenie profetycznego wymiaru życia konsekrowanego w nowej ewangelizacji* [Significance of the Prophetic Dimension of Consecrated Life in the New Evangelization], "Życie Konsekrowane" 7/4 (2000), pp. 5–16; A. Dziuba, *Eklezjalne znamiona życia konsekrowanego* [Ecclesial Marks of Consecrated Life], "Teologia i Człowiek" 47/3 (2019), pp. 11–32; J. Tupikowski, *Ewangelizacja kultury a życie konsekrowane* [Evangelization of Culture and Consecrated Life], "Życie Konsekrowane" 8/1 (2001), pp. 69–75; J. Kiciński, *Powołanie – konsekracja – misja. Personalistyczny aspekt teologii życia konsekrowanego we współczesnym Magisterium Kościoła* [Vocation – Consecration – Mission. The Personalist Aspect of the Theology of Consecrated Life in the Contemporary Magisterium of the Church], Wrocław 2008, pp. 228–233.

evangelisation. The issue has occupied an important place both in the teaching of Benedict XVI,<sup>2</sup> as well as that of Francis. It should be furthermore mentioned here that without first exploring Ratzinger's address it might be difficult to fully grasp the concept of the new evangelisation developed by Benedict XVI<sup>3</sup> and concluded in the Apostolic Letter in the form of *Motu Proprio Ubicumque et Semper* of 21 September 2010, in which, already as Pope, he established the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation. At the heart of this papal initiative was the intuition contained in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the relation between the Church and the modern world. The post-conciliar popes continued to reflect on the need to find suitable forms "to help people of our time to hear the living and eternal word of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> The holy popes Paul VI and John Paul II, driven by a desire to implement the Council's teaching in the life of the Church, recognised the value and profound significance of evangelisation in the modern world. Paul VI noted that

as a result of the frequent situations of dechristianization in our day, [the work of evangelisation] also proves equally necessary for innumerable people who have been baptized but who live quite outside Christian life, for simple people who have a certain faith but an imperfect knowledge of the foundations of

<sup>2</sup> See the following studies that clarify the concept and specificity of the new evangelisation according to Benedict XVI: J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [The Concept of New Evangelization in the View of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], "Studia Pelplińskie" 54 (2020), pp. 29–46; S. Tokarek, *Ewangelizacja według Benedykta XVI* [Evangelization According to Benedict XVI], "Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego" 33 (2013), pp. 247–256; W. Osiał, *Wezwanie Benedykta XVI do nowej ewangelizacji w świetle Listu apostolskiego motu proprio „Ubicumque et semper”* [Benedict XVI's Call to the New Evangelization in the Light of the Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio "Ubicumque et Semper"], "Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne" 24/1 (2011), pp. 277–290; G. Kaczorowski, *Wychowanie chrześcijańskie jako integralna część (nowej) ewangelizacji w ujęciu Benedykta XVI* [Christian Education as an Integral Part of (New) Evangelization According to Benedict XVI], "Teologia i Człowiek" 64/4 (2023), pp. 165–180.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., pp. 29–46. It is worth adding that it is possible to find studies on evangelisation according to Benedict XVI, which, sadly, do not refer to his address *The New Evangelisation* at all (see e.g. S. Tokarek, *Ewangelizacja według Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., pp. 247–256).

<sup>4</sup> See Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter in the Form of *Motu Proprio Ubicumque et Semper*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apl\\_20100921\\_ubicumque-et-semper.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html) [access: 10.05.2024].

that faith, for intellectuals who feel the need to know Jesus Christ in a light different from the instruction they received as children, and for many others.<sup>5</sup>

Pope Paul VI had in mind people who were far from the faith and therefore stated that the Church, in carrying out her evangelisation work, “must constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting, or representing, to them God’s revelation and faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Saint John Paul II considered the above tasks to be priorities, and therefore they were fundamental points of his teaching. During his first visit to Poland he used the phrase “new evangelisation.”<sup>7</sup> In his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* he stated that “the hour has come for a re-evangelization.”<sup>8</sup> This concept – which was systematically deepened in numerous speeches – summarised the challenges awaiting the Church today, especially in the regions of former Christianisation. The statement of Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on the new evangelisation can therefore be understood more fully in the context of the teaching of the then Pope John Paul II.

Benedict XVI explained what the novelty of the new evangelisation his predecessor spoke of consisted in. The new evangelisation is not “new”

in its content but in its inner thrust, open to the grace of the Holy Spirit which constitutes the force of the new law of the Gospel that always renews the Church; “new” in ways that correspond with the power of the Holy Spirit and which are suited to the times and situations; “new” because of being necessary even in countries that have already received the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, no. 52, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html) [access: 10.05.2024].

<sup>6</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 56.

<sup>7</sup> See John Paul II, *Homily during Holy Mass at the Shrine of the Holy Cross*, Mogila, 9 June 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19790609\\_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, no. 34, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

<sup>9</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Homily during the Papal Mass on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. First Vespers*, 28 June 2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100628\\_vespri-pietro-paolo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100628_vespri-pietro-paolo.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

Benedict XVI's teaching on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's realities is therefore an expression of the continuity of the Church's teaching. In the *Motu Proprio Ubicumque et Semper*, Benedict XVI finally specified the tasks of the new evangelisation. He states that "this variety of situations demands careful discernment; to speak of a 'new evangelization' does not in fact mean that a single formula should be developed that would hold the same for all circumstances."<sup>10</sup> The document emphasises the need for a new evangelisation in countries which once cherished the Christian tradition, where, due to the abandonment of religious practices, there is a need for a "a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace."<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI also pointed out the first task of the new evangelisation, namely "to make ourselves docile to the freely given action of the Spirit of the Risen One who accompanies all who are heralds of the Gospel and opens the hearts of those who listen."<sup>12</sup> The Pope stated that in order to "proclaim fruitfully the Word of the Gospel one is first asked to have a profound experience of God."<sup>13</sup> The basis of all evangelisation is not a human project of expansion. Instead, what is crucial is the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has given to man by allowing him to share in his life. Benedict XVI thus started from a realistic picture of the condition of the contemporary Church and world. He did not seem discouraged or resigned in the face of the decline of Christianity in Europe, but considered reality with courage and sought concrete ways to reverse the decades-long secularisation trends.<sup>14</sup>

The new evangelisation is also a particular concern for Pope Francis, who is faithfully continuing the path set by his predecessors. Francis dedicates his manifesto – the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* – precisely to the theme of proclaiming the Gospel in the modern world. He invites there to a new stage of evangelisation marked by the joy of the encounter with Christ.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et Semper*, op. cit.; see also: W. Osial, *Wezwanie Benedykta XVI do nowej ewangelizacji*, op. cit., pp. 283–286.

<sup>14</sup> E. Guerriero, *Świadek prawdy. Biografia Benedykta XVI* [Witness to the Truth. A biography of Benedict XVI], transl. J. Tomaszek, Kraków 2018, pp. 517–518.

<sup>15</sup> See Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2014, no. 1, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

## Structure and method of the new evangelisation in the life of consecrated persons

In his address *The New Evangelisation*, Cardinal Ratzinger noted that, although the Church had always evangelised and had never abandoned this task, the process of de-Christianisation and the disappearance of essential human values is ongoing. A huge part of modern humanity is unable to find in the Gospel a convincing answer to the fundamental question of how to live the life. That is why, in addition to permanent evangelisation, a new evangelisation for everyone and not only for some select group of people is being sought. In this context, the cardinal warned against the temptations of impatience, of striving for immediate, great success, of achieving great numbers. He pointed out that this is not God's method and reminded us that the reality of the kingdom of God is described by the image of a mustard seed (see Mark 4:31–32). This image refers at the same time to the dynamics of evangelisation, which by its nature is an instrument and vehicle of the kingdom of God. Ratzinger states:

New evangelization cannot mean: immediately attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using new and more refined methods. No – this is not what new evangelization promises. New evangelization means: never being satisfied with the fact that from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew; never thinking that the fact that different birds may find place among its branches can suffice – rather, it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow (see Mark 4:26–29).<sup>16</sup>

This view of the kingdom of God and at the same time of the new evangelisation corresponds to the specificity and nature of consecrated life. The vocation to the exclusive love of Christ and service to Him in the Church is a pure gift of God and a mystery of His unconditional, anticipatory love; it is a gratuitous call from God who invites those whom He Himself wishes to greater love and devotion to the Church for the kingdom of God. The initiative always comes from the Creator and is addressed to individual people from whom He expects a positive response. The event of vocation is in itself something akin

<sup>16</sup> J. Ratzinger, *The New Evangelisation, Building the Civilization of Love*, [https://www.piercedhearts.org/benedict\\_xvi/Cardinal%20Ratzinger/new\\_evangelization.htm](https://www.piercedhearts.org/benedict_xvi/Cardinal%20Ratzinger/new_evangelization.htm) [access: 24.04.2024] [hereinafter: NE]; see J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., pp. 36–39.

to a mustard seed; it is an invitation and a challenge: it begins a new, hitherto unknown phase of a person's life and opens up entirely new prospects for the future. In the vocation of consecrated persons, what Ratzinger observes is fulfilled: "Large things always begin from the small seed."<sup>17</sup> Those who are called are able to perceive the grace-bestowing, often very inconspicuous and delicate, action of God, who never ceases to show His care also through the human mediation of those called to cooperate with Him. In this way, in the course of the past centuries, many men and women, attracted by the love of God, have decided to give their own lives completely to Him and to devote them to the heavenly kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

A life according to the evangelical counsels means a particular deepening of baptismal consecration. Through religious profession, the intimate union with Christ already established by baptism is transformed into a gift of imitation of Him by means of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.<sup>19</sup> Considering that important and great things often have humble beginnings, those who enter religious life remind other people that "their true and complete progress consists in responding to their calling 'to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men.'"<sup>20</sup> Every human being is called to a relationship with the Creator built on freedom, the source of which is God's creative love, and to share in His action.<sup>21</sup> To become a consecrated person, moreover, it is necessary to be called by God. A vocation cannot be planned or earned – it originates and comes from outside of man. Saint John Paul II notes that "those who are called entrust themselves to the love of God who wishes them to be exclusively at his service."<sup>22</sup> Entrusting oneself is an attitude of trust in God, who is greater than all human anticipation and calculation and who is able to

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<sup>17</sup> NE.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI, *Myśli o życiu konsekrowanym* [Thoughts on Consecrated Life], transl. M. Wilk, Kraków 2010, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 1996 [hereinafter: VC], no. 30, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031996\\_vita-consecrata.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html) [access: 24.04.2024].

<sup>20</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, 1971, no. 19, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19710629\\_evangelica-testificatio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

<sup>21</sup> See Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, no. 15, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

<sup>22</sup> VC 17.

transcend man's weaknesses.<sup>23</sup> Joseph Ratzinger reminded us that this truth was already present in the Old Testament, which shows what God's design is and the specificity of God's action:

"The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you." God says [this] to the People of Israel in the Old Testament and thus expresses the fundamental paradox of the history of salvation.<sup>24</sup>

God's love for man is at the same time the foundation of the response of the one called – a response of a total and unconditional nature – given to the One who calls.

According to Benedict XVI, the vocation to the consecrated life can be better understood through the example of Mary of Bethany, who "sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak" (Luke 10:39). Consecrated persons, like her, dedicate themselves wholly and exclusively to Christ and thus are capable of imitating Him more fully.<sup>25</sup> For many people today, including those who consider themselves believers, this attitude of the consecrated is seen as insignificant, and therefore depreciated or disregarded. However, as the *Code of Canon Law* indicates, "the first and foremost duty of all religious is to be the contemplation of divine things and assiduous union with God in prayer" (can. 663 § 1).<sup>26</sup> Consecrated persons, giving absolute priority to God, want to put Christ at the centre of their lives again and again through prayer.

The nature of man's vocation to the exclusive love of Christ can be seen more fully in the light of what Ratzinger writes about the way God works.

God does not count in large numbers; exterior power is not the sign of his presence. Most of Jesus' parables indicate this structure of divine intervention and thus answer the disciples' worries, who were expecting other kinds of success

<sup>23</sup> See more: R. Słupek, *Teologia aktu wiary w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI w Roku Wiary* [Theology of the Act of Faith in Teachings of Benedict XVI in the Year of Faith], "Wrocław Theological Review" 21/2 (2013), pp. 117–125.

<sup>24</sup> NE.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, *Mysli o życiu konsekrowanym*, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, 1983, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic\\_index\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html) [access: 11.05.2024].



and signs from the Messiah – successes of the kind offered by Satan to the Lord: All these – the kingdoms of the world – I will give to you ... (Matt 4:9).<sup>27</sup>

These reflections of Ratzinger also shed light on the current situation of consecrated life. Today, congregations and religious orders – in addition to many problems – are affected by a decline in vocations and ageing of their members (especially in Europe). Pope Francis drew attention to these and other difficulties in his *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*. In spite of various problems, however, religious life is for him a reality that fills one with hope.<sup>28</sup> For the external accomplishments can never be a source of internal power or an indicator of God's presence. Hope, which is the fruit of faith in Christ, is realised in the midst of uncertainty, in the awareness of human weakness and limitation. Pope Francis noted that despite all the problems, God keeps repeating: "Be not afraid... for I am with you" (Jer 1:8). And this is why the Pope warns us not to succumb to the worldly temptation of numbers or efficiency, not to rely on our own strength. He urges us not to base our hope on statistics, but on Him for whom nothing is impossible.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that today, although there are fewer vocations than in the past, they are more cautiously and deeply discerned, both on the part of young people and of the Church.<sup>30</sup> In his reflections, Pope Francis referred explicitly to the teaching of Benedict XVI, who urged consecrated persons not to: "join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light."<sup>31</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> NE.

<sup>28</sup> See Francis, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 2014, I, 3, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacraati.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacraati.html) [access: 11.05.2024].

<sup>29</sup> See Francis, *Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, op. cit., I, 3; see M. Pagacz, *Pokusa duchowej światowości w życiu konsekrowanym w ujęciu papieża Franciszka* [The Temptation of Spiritual Worldliness in Consecrated Life According to Pope Francis], "Studia Bobolanum" 33/2 (2021), pp. 231–244.

<sup>30</sup> Francis writes that "we are increasingly aware of the need for a better process of selecting candidates to the priesthood" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 107), which can also be applied by analogy to the consecrated life. He warns that no motivation can suffice to enter the path of special service to God, and in particular it can never be the search for some form of power, honours or the desire for material prosperity.

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, *Holy Mass with Members of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on the Occasion of the 17th Day of Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2013, <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/>

future of consecrated life cannot depend on human calculations or trust in one's own strength.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar vein, Joseph Ratzinger wrote about the structure of the new evangelisation. He noted that in the early days of Christianity, believers formed small scattered communities that were, according to worldly criteria, meaningless.

In reality, they were the leaven that penetrates the meal from within and they carried within themselves the future of the world (see Matthew 13:33). An old proverb says: "Success is not one of the names of God." New evangelization must surrender to the mystery of the grain of mustard seed and not be so pretentious as to believe to immediately produce a large tree. We either live too much in the security of the already existing large tree or in the impatience of having a greater, more vital tree—instead we must accept the mystery that the Church is at the same time a large tree and a very small grain. In the history of salvation it is always Good Friday and Easter Sunday at the same time...<sup>33</sup>

According to the then cardinal, true service of the Gospel is contingent on renouncing one's own self and offering it to Christ for the salvation of men. Jesus, the Son of God, completely united to God the Father, brings the believer into the Trinitarian communion. The true evangelisers never speak in their own name, but point to the Saviour: "evangelizing is not merely a way of speaking, but a form of living: living in the listening and giving voice to the Father."<sup>34</sup> This attitude is embodied precisely in consecrated life, whose "essential contribution that the Church expects from consecrated persons is much more in the order of being than of doing."<sup>35</sup> Consecrated persons, by living totally for God and for the kingdom of God, become signs of God's primacy, of His presence, love and fidelity. Their lives are filled with prayer as a constitutive part of their life. And prayer is the foundation of all preaching and apostolic action – without

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homilies/2013/documents/hf\_ben-xvi\_hom\_20130202\_vita-consacrata.html [access: 12.05.2024].

<sup>32</sup> See M. Pagacz, *Faith as the Foundation of the Renewal of the Consecrated Persons' Life in the Light of the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, "Collectanea Theologica" 94/1 (2024), pp. 189–203.

<sup>33</sup> NE.

<sup>34</sup> NE.

<sup>35</sup> See Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 2007, no. 81, [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) [access: 12.05.2024].

it, all methods are ineffective. Being deeply rooted in God is the foundation of the new evangelisation.

The principle of self-renunciation has concrete consequences. Ratzinger illustrated it through Jesus' parable of the grain of wheat which, having fallen into the ground, dies and thus yields an abundant harvest (John 12:24). In the context of evangelisation, this parable is an extension of the parable of the mustard seed. Both principles-parables have been fulfilled throughout the history of Christianity and are still in force, being of fundamental importance for the new evangelisation. Ratzinger reminds us and makes it clear that the success of apostolic mission is "not the fruit of great rhetorical art or pastoral prudence; the fruitfulness was tied to the suffering, to the communion in the passion with Christ," as is perfectly evident from the example of St Paul and the evangelisation he carried out.<sup>36</sup> Without renouncing one's selfishness, the most beautiful and spectacular evangelisation efforts are worthless. The process of renouncing the self is a concrete form of giving up one's own life, according to the words: "whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35). In this light, it can be seen that consecrated persons are those who give themselves fully to Christ and for Christ in the service of His kingdom. They renounce not only themselves, their self, but, moreover, they resign from what is good (marriage, their own family, their freedom and unconstrained disposal of their property, the pursuit of their dreams, their plans) in order to become as free as possible for God, so that He can use them according to His will.<sup>37</sup> The evangelical counsels are the way of imitating Jesus in His total submission to the Heavenly Father, on His path towards the cross, on the way to Jerusalem.

## The contents essential for new evangelisation in consecrated life

Conversion, the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ and eternal life were marked by Joseph Ratzinger in his address *The New Evangelisation* as the contents essential and key elements of any true evangelisation.

<sup>36</sup> NE.

<sup>37</sup> M. Saj (ed.), *Benedykt XVI do osób konsekrowanych* [Benedict XVI to Consecrated Persons], Kraków 2009, pp. 77.

## Conversion

Among the contents essential for new evangelisation is, according to the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the call to conversion. It was crucial in the teaching of John the Baptist and, moreover, Jesus himself included it in the conclusion of his own preaching: “Repent, and believe in the gospel!” (Mark 1:15). “To convert” means to reconsider, to revise one’s individual and social life, to allow God to penetrate the principles applied to one’s life, not to live like everyone else, not to act like everyone else, not to justify one’s own ambiguous or wicked actions on the grounds that others behave and act in the same way. According to Ratzinger, “to convert” means to seek a new lifestyle, a new life. Conversion is not synonymous with the adoption of moral perfection, for Christianity cannot be reduced to moralism. Christian conversion is turning towards Christ, accepting from him “the gift of a new friendship, the gift of communion” with him;<sup>38</sup> it is “humility in entrusting oneself to the love of the Other, a love that becomes the measure and the criteria of my own life.”<sup>39</sup>

Consecrated life presupposes constant conversion. Looking at the history of religious life, one can see that Eastern monasticism in particular valued conversion and considered it an indispensable element of life, involving self-renunciation, compunction of heart, ceaseless prayer, fasting, vigil.<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, in his exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, noted that the need for conversion applies to all believers, but it applies especially to the consecrated life:

In fact the vocation of consecrated persons to seek first the Kingdom of God is first and foremost a call to complete conversion, in self-renunciation, in order to live fully for the Lord, so that God may be all in all. Called to contemplate and bear witness to the transfigured face of Christ, consecrated men and women are also called to a ‘transfigured’ existence.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> NE; see also: P. Kiejkowski, M. Pagacz, *Europa – humanizm – życie konsekrowane. Wokół myśli J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [Europe – Humanism – Consecrated Life. Around the Thought of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], Series: Studia i Materiały – Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Wydział Teologiczny 214, Poznań 2021, pp. 71–75; M. Pagacz, *Mathematics as a Way Towards the Creative Logos: Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s Understanding of Scientificity*, “Collectanea Theologica” 92/2 (2022), pp. 112–113.

<sup>39</sup> NE; see J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> See VC 6.

<sup>41</sup> VC 35.

In another paragraph of this exhortation, the Pope addressed those consecrated to God: “You know well that you have set out on a journey of continual conversion, of exclusive dedication to the love of God and of your brothers and sisters, in order to bear ever more splendid witness to the grace which transfigures Christian life.”<sup>42</sup> Living the evangelical counsels requires permanent conversion,<sup>43</sup> which is facilitated by the Sacrament of Reconciliation, allowing one to experience God’s mercy, gives purification and renewal of heart.<sup>44</sup>

Consecrated persons are therefore in need of continual conversion and, at the same time, their striving for conversion is of importance in the process of converting other people. Saint John Paul II noted that the presence and attitude of consecrated persons is at the same time meant to awaken in every believer “a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one’s neighbour, especially the most needy.”<sup>45</sup> Authentic witnesses to Christ, who strive for strengthening friendship with Him, support those seeking closeness to God and spiritual deepening. In this context, consecrated life is a gift offered by God so that all may recognise “one thing necessary” (see Luke 10:42).<sup>46</sup>

The basic principle of conversion is that God is, and “without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is.”<sup>47</sup> These days, when many claim to experience the absence of God, consecrated persons are a sign of God’s presence and action, and by their very existence they call for conversion. For this to happen, their profound communion with the One who calls them and gives them the gift of vocation is necessary. People totally dedicated to God are His friends and disciples, characterised by a unity of life and action, strengthened by listening to the word of God and the sacraments, immersed in prayer and contemplation, detached from the mentality of the world and constantly converted to the love of Christ so that it is He who lives and acts in them.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> VC 109.

<sup>43</sup> See VC 82.

<sup>44</sup> See VC 95.

<sup>45</sup> See VC 39.

<sup>46</sup> See VC 109.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, no. 78, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html) [access: 12.05.2024].

<sup>48</sup> See M. Saj, *Benedykt XVI do osób konsekrowanych*, op. cit., p. 182.

## The kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is the centre of Jesus' preaching; it is the key word in His message. The kingdom of God, however, is not a thing, a social or political structure, or a utopia. According to Ratzinger, the kingdom of God means that God exists, God is alive, He is present and acts in the world, in the life of every human being.<sup>49</sup> "God is the most present and decisive reality in each and every act of my life, in each and every moment of history."<sup>50</sup> And therefore "the *unum necessarium* to man is God. Everything changes, whether God exists or not. Unfortunately – we Christians also often live as if God did not exist (*si Deus non daretur*). We live according to the slogan: God does not exist, and if he exists, he does not belong."<sup>51</sup> This statement by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the same time raises the question of possibilities and ways to change the situation described. In response, Ratzinger pointed to the necessity of an evangelisation which speaks first of all of God, which proclaims the one true God: Creator, Sanctifier and Judge, since "to proclaim God is to introduce to the relation with God."<sup>52</sup>

The reality of the kingdom of God is shown in the lives of consecrated persons, who are its sign on earth. John Paul II states that through the consecrated life, "the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven."<sup>53</sup> People consecrated to God are called, as the first disciples, not only to embrace the kingdom of God personally, but also to offer their lives at the service of this cause, abandoning everything and following faithfully the way of life of Jesus. Religious life is a foreshadowing of the future kingdom; consecration "more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods [...] [and] foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom."<sup>54</sup> By their presence, consecrated people remind us that the only thing truly necessary is to seek God's "kingdom and his righteousness" (see Matt 6:33) and to

<sup>49</sup> See NE.

<sup>50</sup> NE.

<sup>51</sup> NE; cf. R. Sarah, *Catechism of the Spiritual Life*, transl. M.J. Miller, Irondale, AL 2022, pp. 291–297.

<sup>52</sup> NE; cf. J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., pp. 40–41; M. Tatar, *The Ontic Foundations of Peace in the Perspective of Pope Benedict XVI*, "Collectanea Theologica" 93/4 (2023), pp. 157–167.

<sup>53</sup> See VC 1.

<sup>54</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, no. 44, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) [access: 12.05.2024].

unceasingly pray for the coming of Christ.<sup>55</sup> By their presence and commitment, they contribute to making this kingdom present now, through the renewal of the spirit of the Beatitudes. John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* noted that

The consecrated life proclaims and in a certain way anticipates the future age, when the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, already present in its first fruits and in mystery, will be achieved, and when the children of the resurrection will take neither wife nor husband, but will be like the angels of God (see Matt 22:30).<sup>56</sup>

The evangelical counsels, especially chastity, are kept for the sake of the kingdom of God. The vocation of consecrated persons is to serve the kingdom of heaven, to extend the kingdom of Christ, according to God's design and the charisms of the individual institutes.

### Jesus Christ

Cardinal Ratzinger drew our attention to the strong temptation to diminish Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to a merely historical Jesus. Nowadays, this reduction is rather not tantamount to denying His Divinity, but presenting Him in a distorted way, adapted to human comprehension. Therefore, according to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it is necessary to discover the truth about Christ, Emmanuel, in whom God's "I am" becomes concrete; imitation of Christ is essential for this. Ratzinger makes it clear that imitating Jesus does not consist in imitating the man Jesus, for this would be an anachronism.<sup>57</sup> The imitation "has a much higher goal: to be assimilated into Christ, that is to attain union with God."<sup>58</sup> It is not a question of morality, but of entering into communion with Christ, for which the sacramental life is of utmost importance.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See VC 26.

<sup>56</sup> VC 32.

<sup>57</sup> See NE; G.L. Müller, *The Reason of Faith: The Legacy of the Great Pope*, "Collectanea Theologica" 93/4 (2023), pp. 12–13.

<sup>58</sup> NE; J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> See K. Porosło, *Sacramentality in the Perspective of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, "Collectanea Theologica" 93/4 (2023), pp. 53–83; A. Proniewski, *The Church Lives by the Eucharist, the Eucharist Lives in the Church: The Ontological Identity of the Believers*, "Collectanea Theologica" 93/4 (2023), pp. 85–107.

In the perspective of the new evangelisation that proclaims the truth about Jesus Christ the Saviour and leads to an encounter with Him, consecrated life takes the privileged place, since by its very nature it is a way of imitating Christ through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. It is difficult to imagine a way of life that would be more suitable to this end. The consecrated life is directly and inseparably linked to the person of Jesus Christ: it draws its origin from Him, relies on imitating Him, models itself on His example and teaching. Without being rooted in and related to Christ, it would have no meaning. The distinguishing feature of religious life is that it imitates Jesus more accurately and more faithfully than other forms of life. Vatican II wants a renewal of religious life above all through a radical return to the imitation of Christ.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the whole post-conciliar teaching of the Church indicates that the restoration of Christ to the central place is a necessary condition for the authenticity and quality of the life of consecrated persons. Contemplation of the person of Jesus, His words and deeds shows the value of consecrated life and reveals much of its nature.<sup>61</sup>

The imitation of Christ is rooted in the Paschal Mystery: the Cross and the Resurrection as the centre of Christology. Ratzinger stated that

The cross belongs to the divine mystery—it is the expression of his love to the end (John 13:1). The Sequela of Christ is participation in the cross, uniting oneself to his love, to the transformation of our life, which becomes the birth of the new man, created according to God (see Ephesians 4:24). Whoever omits the cross, omits the essence of Christianity (see 1 Corinthians 2:2).<sup>62</sup>

Consecrated life has an undoubtedly Paschal dimension;<sup>63</sup> it is precisely a participation in the cross of Christ in the light of His Resurrection. The religious person is called to bear witness in a special way in his or her life to the saving power flowing from Christ's cross, which is the proof of God's greatest love

<sup>60</sup> See Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965, no. 1, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html) [access: 12.05.2024].

<sup>61</sup> See M. Pagacz, *Życie konsekrowane w służbie poszukiwania sensu według Benedykta XVI* [Consecrated Life in the Service of the Search for Meaning according to Benedict XVI], "Wrocław Theological Review" 29/1 (2021), pp. 330–337.

<sup>62</sup> NE.

<sup>63</sup> See VC 24.



poured out into this world.<sup>64</sup> Consecrated life cannot be separated from the mystery of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus – without these mysteries it is not possible to realise it.

### Eternal life

A central element of any true evangelisation is also eternal life. Preaching eternal life, however, we do not encourage an escape from the present. Ratzinger asserted that it is not true that “faith in eternal life makes earthly life insignificant. To the contrary: only if the measure of our life is eternity, then also this life of ours on earth is great and its value immense. God is not the competitor in our life, but the guarantor of our greatness.”<sup>65</sup> It is precisely this eschatological perspective that is adopted on the consecrated life, a sign of the world to come. John Paul II reminds us that there is an immutable doctrine which presents consecrated life as a foreshadowing of the future kingdom. The Second Vatican Council states that consecration “foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom.”<sup>66</sup> This happens above all through the vow of chastity, always understood by tradition as a foreshadowing of the final world, which is already at work today and transforms the whole man.<sup>67</sup>

Every consecrated person is an eschatological sign, since he or she adopts already on earth that state of life which will be shared by all in heaven, in accordance with Christ’s words about those who “neither marry nor are given in marriage” in heaven (see Matt 22:30). It is therefore a clear sign of eternal life, a reminder of the value of heavenly goods; it points to the final destiny of the world beyond all temporary prospects. A life wholly devoted to God is marked with the expectation of the Lord’s second coming, an expectation that indicates the transience of all other historical realities. A religious person, by their very existence, “points to that eschatological horizon against which the choices and life decisions of every man and woman should be situated.”<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, no. 29; VC 24; M. Saj, *Benedykt XVI do osób konsekrowanych*, op. cit., p. 246.

<sup>65</sup> NE; J. Babiński, *Pojęcie nowej ewangelizacji w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI*, op. cit., pp. 41–42.

<sup>66</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 44.

<sup>67</sup> See VC 26.

<sup>68</sup> See Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 81; M. Saj, *Benedykt XVI do osób konsekrowanych*, op. cit., p. 144; M. Pagacz, *Życie konsekrowane znakiem nadziei dla współczesnego świata w nauczaniu Kościoła od Soboru Watykańskiego II*

“Consecrated life is a sign of good things to come in human civilisation, as it travels onwards “in exodus” along the paths of history,”<sup>69</sup> and by its very nature is called to a ministry of witness which makes it a sign in the Church. Persons consecrated to God on their own are special witnesses in the Church and in the world of the extraterrestrial meaning of human existence; with their eschatological orientation they point to the supernatural reality and to the prospect of eternal life.

## Conclusions

Joseph Ratzinger’s reflections and recommendations on the structure, method and content of the new evangelisation show that consecrated life is a reality that fundamentally and actively participates in it. The vocation of the consecrated person and their journey can only be properly read in the light of the parable of the mustard seed and the metaphor of the grain of wheat, on which Ratzinger drew in indicating the structure and method of the new evangelisation. The contents essential of the new evangelisation given by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (conversion, the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ and eternal life) are at the very heart of consecrated life. They are fundamental in religious life and in the testimony given by those consecrated to God. The vows of chastity, poverty and obedience make consecrated persons, called to ongoing conversion, legible signs of the kingdom of God already existing in this world.

The interdependence between the specificity of the new evangelisation and the reality of consecrated life leads to at least several conclusions: 1) The nature of consecrated life fully corresponds to the requirements of the new evangelisation. 2) The recommendations for the new evangelization given by Joseph Ratzinger are equally important for those consecrated to God today. They take on particular significance in view of the contemporary crisis of religious life and, in a certain sense, show the way out of this crisis; to some extent they are also an antidote to the distortions and dangers of religious life.<sup>70</sup> 3) Without

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[Consecrated Life as a Sign of Hope for the Modern World in the Teaching of the Church since the Second Vatican Council], Kraków 2019, pp. 199–201.

<sup>69</sup> See Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Keep Watch! To Consecrated Men and Women Journeying in the Footsteps of God*, 2014, no. 1, <https://cmswr.org/wp-content/uploads/Keep-Watch.pdf> [access: 12.05.2024].

<sup>70</sup> See D. de Lassus, *Zagrożenia i wypaczenia życia zakonnego* [The Dangers and Perversions of Religious Life], transl. A. Kuryś, Kraków 2022; J. Ratzinger, V. Messori, *The Ratzinger*

the theological virtue of faith, it is impossible to grasp the structure, method or content of the new evangelization; neither is it possible to renew the life of consecrated persons without a deep and living faith. 4) The decline in the number of vocations and the ageing of consecrated persons are not reasons for fear or despondency, since, viewed from the perspective of the structure and method of the new evangelisation, God does not attach importance to great numbers or external power, but His power is manifested in human weakness. However, the diminishing number of people who would intend to join institutes of consecrated life requires of the present members to deeply discern and reflect on the reasons for this negative trend, and should undoubtedly stimulate them to greater zeal and fidelity to God, to place Christ at the centre once again. 5) Living the evangelical counsels is of cardinal importance in the work of the new evangelisation in the modern world, as the whole contemporary teaching of the Church also confirms. Due to the essence and specificity of this form of life, consecrated persons – by their very existence and through the apostolic actions they undertake – communicate the contents essential to the new evangelisation: the truth about conversion, the kingdom of God, the Person of Jesus Christ and eternal life.

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## Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Faith on the Basis of Benedict XVI's Encyclicals

Filozoficzna analiza pojęcia wiary na podstawie encyklik  
Benedykta XVI

**ABSTRACT:** The article deals with the problem of faith based on three encyclicals of Benedict XVI. The author pays attention to what and how the pope says about faith from the point of view of philosophical analysis (realistic trend). It is important to show the essence, purpose and structure of the act of faith. The conducted study allows us to conclude that Benedict XVI defends the claim that supernatural faith is the substance (basis) of invisible things (Letter to the Hebrews). Thanks to it, it becomes possible to present the goal in the form of eternal (happy) life. Its updated demands the involvement of intellect and will in an act of faith. In this way, the pope emphasizes that faith is constituted by both purposeful and subjective reasons (the structure of faith). The philosophical analysis of the concept of faith presented in the article is not only about quoting the position of Benedict XVI, but also about recalling the views of those thinkers (Bacon, Luther, Kant) with whom the pope argues.

**KEYWORDS:** Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, substance, Immanuel Kant, Martin Luther, Thomas Aquinas, realist philosophy, act of faith, philosophical analysis of faith, reductive concepts of faith

**ABSTRAKT:** Artykuł podejmuje problem wiary w oparciu o trzy encykliki Benedykta XVI. Autor zwraca uwagę na to, co i w jaki sposób papież mówi o wierze z punktu widzenia analizy filozoficznej w nurcie realistycznym. W tym podejściu ważne jest ukazanie istoty, celu oraz struktury aktu wiary. Przeprowadzone studium pozwala wnioskować, że Benedykt XVI broni twierdzenia, które głosi, że wiara nadprzyrodzona to podstawa (baza, substancja) rzeczy niewidzialnych (List do Hebrajczyków). Dzięki wierze możliwe staje się uobecnienie celu w postaci życia wiecznego (szczęśliwego). Zaktualizowanie pełni życia domaga się zaangażowania intelektu i woli w akcie wiary. W ten sposób papież podkreśla, że wiarę konstytuują zarówno racje przedmiotowe (cel), jak i podmiotowe (struktura wiary). Filozoficzna analiza pojęcia wiary ukazana

w artykule nie polega tylko na przytoczeniu stanowiska Benedykta XVI, lecz dotyczy również przywołania poglądów tych myślicieli (Bacon, Luter, Kant), z którymi papież polemizuje.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, substancja, Immanuel Kant, Marcin Luter, Tomasz z Akwinu, filozofia realistyczna, akt wiary, filozoficzna analiza wiary, redukcyjne koncepcje wiary

## Introduction

Pope Benedict XVI, whose pontificate covered the years from 2005 to 2013, is the author of three encyclicals. The first is dedicated to love (*Deus Caritas Est*), the second to hope (*Spe Salvi*) and the last to integral human development (*Caritas in Veritate*). Although the issue of faith is the main theme in none of them, each of the encyclicals addresses the problem of faith to a greater or lesser extent, presenting its various aspects.<sup>1</sup> Bearing in mind that the Pope authored numerous publications and statements dedicated to the virtue of faith, it is worth noting what and how he writes about faith in his encyclicals.

This study is an attempt to reconstruct the concept of faith from three papal documents. However, faith is not explored from the point of view of theology, but realist philosophy which provides a comprehensive cognition of reality. It focuses above all on the essence, the object (purpose) and the structure of faith. This makes it possible to know what faith is (essence) and what its subjective (structure) and objective (purpose) conditions are. Quotations from the Pope (including those of J. Ratzinger), as well as those from St Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*) and St John Paul II (*Fides et Ratio*), situate the problem in the context of the teaching of the Catholic Church.

<sup>1</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Benedict XVI intended to prepare an encyclical on the faith as a culmination of the Year of Faith that began on 11 October 2012. As he stepped down on 28 February 2013, the Year of Faith ended under the pontificate of his successor, Pope Francis, on 24 November 2013. For this reason, the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013) was promulgated by Francis and not Benedict XVI. However, the latter is the author of the apostolic letter *Porta Fidei* (11 October 2011) for the indiction of the year of faith, in which the Pope addresses many issues related to faith. Cf. E. Guerreiro, *Świadek prawdy. Biografia Benedykta XVI*, transl. J. Tomaszek, Kraków 2018, pp. 524–525 (English edition: E. Guerreiro, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thought*, transl. W.J. Melcher, San Francisco 2018).



## The essence of faith (definition)

The three papal encyclicals provide the following attributes of faith: “Christian faith,” “religious faith,” “biblical faith,” “apostolic faith,” “faith in eternal life,” “faith in Jesus Christ.” Despite their diversity, Benedict XVI never explains the specific meaning of any of them. However, on reading the encyclicals, one can conclude that the Pope uses them interchangeably and identifies them with faith in the supernatural sense. Instead, he focuses on clarifying what faith is in itself (faith in general).

In addition to the above terms, the notions of “rational faith” (Kant) and “faith in progress” (Bacon) also occur in the same texts. They do not carry the supernatural meaning, but a natural one,<sup>2</sup> since they do not refer to the revelation of God. In addition, they can be recognised as true without the support of grace, but exclusively with the use of man’s natural faculties (intellective and appetitive). At this point it should be mentioned that the Pope also uses the term “crisis of faith.”<sup>3</sup>

The problem of the definition of (supernatural) faith is addressed by Benedict XVI primarily in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*. In order to show the essence of faith, the Pope quotes and discusses its definition from the Letter to the Hebrews. In none of the other encyclicals does he quote this definition or other definitions of faith. In addition to the Letter to the Hebrews, the Pope refers to statements by thinkers who also commented on and explained the meaning of faith, most notably St Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther or Immanuel Kant.<sup>4</sup>

Benedict XVI’s explanation of what faith is mainly based on two terms used in the definition. He draws attention to the meaning of the concepts of “substance” and “proof.” To this end, he juxtaposes the Greek and Latin equivalents of both terms.

The text from the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:1), named by Benedict XVI as “a kind of definition of faith,” reads in *Spe Salvi* (no. 7): “Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen.” The central concept of this definition is the Greek word *hypostasis*: “Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις,

<sup>2</sup> On the various types and aspects of faith, see e.g. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 30–32; K. Tarnowski, *Usłyszeć niewidzialne. Zarys filozofii wiary* [To Hear What Is Unseen. An Outline of the Philosophy of Faith], Kraków 2005, pp. 24–58.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17; P.N. Cain, *Technology and Freedom: Pope Benedict XVI on Faith, Reason, and Politics*, “Perspectives on Political Science” 41 (2012), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> St Thomas Aquinas devotes a separate article in which he explains the definition of faith given in the Letter to the Hebrews. See STh 2–2, q. 4, a. 1. He also quotes other definitions of faith in subsequent articles.

πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων.”<sup>5</sup> It was translated as “realisation/confidence/substance/assurance,” and *substantia* in Latin (e.g. in the Vulgate). Faith is then the substance of those goods (things) which are expected.<sup>6</sup>

The Pope mentions that for the Church Fathers and medieval theologians, the translation of the Greek word *hypostasis* was not a problem. They rendered it with the Latin term *substantia*. At that time, the Latin text of the definition of faith, as formulated in the early Church and also quoted in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*, reads: “Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium.”<sup>7</sup>

Benedict XVI observes that St Thomas Aquinas introduced terminology of the philosophical tradition which modified, as it were, the understanding of the concept of substance, and with it the question of faith. Aquinas, who in *Summa Theologica* also commented on and clarified the definition of faith given in the Letter to the Hebrews, introduced the term *habitus* in place of the term *hypostasis* (*substantia*). Then the definition of faith proposed by him is: “Fides est habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum assentire non apparentibus.”<sup>8</sup> He thus conceived faith as “a habitus, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see” (*Spe Salvi*, no. 7).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://ruchbiblijny.pl/ebook/greeknt/heb.htm> [access: 17.06.2023].

<sup>6</sup> Sometimes the term *hypostasis* is translated as “certainty.” Cf. T. Horak, *Teologia wiary w Liście do Hebrajczyków* [The Theology of Faith in the Letter to the Hebrews], “Colleganea Theologica” 61 (1991), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, no. 7. The concept of “substance” was already used by ancient philosophers (Aristotle paid particular attention to it). They used the term to denote a kind of being which is entitled to an independent existence. Moreover, “substance” is a subject for other kinds of being (e.g. accidents, relations). This means that “substance” expresses the objective state of things and specifies “being” *sensu stricte*. Cf. A. Maryniarczyk, *Koncepcja substancji w ujęciu Arystotelesa i św. Tomasza z Akwinu* [Concept of Substance in the View of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas], [in:] *Substancja. Natura. Prawo naturalne* [Substance. Nature. Natural Law], eds. A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stępień, P. Gondek, Lublin 2006, pp. 89–119.

<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas\\_Aquinas/Summa\\_Theologiae/Part\\_IIb/Q4](http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_IIb/Q4) [access: 17.06.2023]; cf. M. Płotka, *Habitus w koncepcji Arystotelesa i jego średniowiecznych komentatorów* [Habitus in Philosophy of Aristotle and His Medieval Commentators], “Hybris” 31/4 (2015), pp. 1–20.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. STh 2–2, q. 4, a. 1; J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo* [Introduction to Christianity], transl. Z. Włodkowska, Kraków 1994, pp. 39–44. On the subject of *habitus*, see, e.g., STh 1–2, q. 49–54. Elsewhere, Aquinas explains how faith is to be understood as a substance: “faith is called a substance not because it is in the genus of substance, but because it bears a certain similarity to a substance, viz., insofar as it is a first inception of and, as it were, a sort of foundation for the whole spiritual life—in just the way that

Although Thomas Aquinas uses the expression “habitus mentis,” he does not actually deny what the notion of “substance” renders. Thus, he emphasises that faith is an act of the mind (intellect). He thus draws attention to its subjective aspect, which is not emphasised in, for example, the Letter to the Hebrews. He also points out that in order to function properly, the intellect requires this “habitus.” In matters pertaining to God, the “habitus” of the intellect is faith. Ultimately, this understanding of faith does not depart from the understanding of faith as a substance. Again, it is an assurance of the presence of things yet to come. Actually, they are already present, i.e. initiated, given “in embryo” (potency) (*Spe Salvi*, no. 7), but for dynamic development, i.e. to full actualisation.<sup>10</sup>

Benedict XVI points out that there was a dispute among exegetes on the key concepts used in the definition of faith in the Letter to the Hebrews, which began at the time of the Reformation. This mainly concerned the concepts of “substance” and “proof,” and arose, among other things, from the clash between two philosophical positions: the realist and the nominalist.

In his reflections on faith as the substance of things to come, Benedict XVI referred to the thought of Luther, who interpreted and explained the issue of faith differently.<sup>11</sup> Since Luther did not use the concept of the essence of things (nominalism), in the Protestant view substance cannot denote an objective state of things, but a subjective (internal), i.e. human-dependent, attitude of the believer.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, also the notion of “proof” contained in the definition of faith acquired a different basis and was linked to the attitude of the believer.

The Bible in German in Martin Luther’s translation gives the following definition of faith: “Es ist aber der Glaube eine feste Zuversicht dessen, was

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a substance is the foundation of all beings” (<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/translat/aquinas5.htm> [access: 30.11.2023]); cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Kwestie dyskutowane o prawdzie* [Issues on Truth], vol. 1, transl. A. Aduszkiewicz, L. Kuczyński, J. Ruszczyński, Kęty 1988, p. 636 (q. 14, a. 2, ad 1).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Part 1: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do przemienienia*, transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2007, p. 71 (English edition: J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, transl. A.J. Walker, New York 2007); *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 163.

<sup>11</sup> Luther also commented on the Letter to the Hebrews and the concept of faith contained therein. Cf. D. Nowakowski, *Rozum i wiara w myśli Marcina Lutra* [Reason and Faith in the Thought of Martin Luther], “Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Philosophy” 13 (2016), p. 257.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 7; V. Possenti, *Faith and Reason: What Relationship?*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 59/1 (2016), p. 11.

man hofft, und ein Nichtzweifeln an dem, was man nicht sieht.”<sup>13</sup> The term *Zuversicht* is used in the sense of “conviction” rather than “substance.” Thus, faith is viewed from a subjective rather than an objective perspective.

A consequence of the subjective approach to faith is also that it is no longer “proof/evidence” of things to come, but a “conviction/assurance/confidence.” The latter has a subjective sense, while “proof” denotes an objective one.<sup>14</sup> In view of this, the Pope points out that Protestants tend to depart from this kind of interpretation of faith.

A contemporary ecumenical German translation of the New Testament renders the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews in this way: “Glaube aber ist: Feststehen in dem, was man erhofft, Überzeugtsein von Dingen, die man nicht sieht,”<sup>15</sup> which is translated in *Spe Salvi* as: “faith is: standing firm in what one hopes, being convinced of what one does not see.”<sup>16</sup> According to Benedict XVI, this interpretation of faith attracts few adherents today. Even Luther’s followers draw the conclusion that faith is not tantamount to a mere expectation of future things, but “it gives us something” in the present. Therefore, faith not only foreshadows but also makes present what is yet to come. For this reason, the Pope points out, a common (Catholic and Protestant) interpretation of the concept of faith is possible. It presupposes a return to the idea of “substance.”

For a deeper explanation of the meaning of faith and understanding it as a “substance,” Benedict XVI refers to another passage from the Letter to the Hebrews (10:34). It mentions those persons who experienced persecution because of their faith. They were affected by, among other things, the loss of possessions (Gr. *hyparchontom*, Lat. *bonum*). However, they obtained better and lasting things (Gr. *hyparxin*, Lat. *substantiam*). The plundered property (*hyparchonta*) is “the means of support,” “the basis” (“substance”) for earthly life. They guarantee the basic conditions for existence and sustenance, but their absence does not mean the loss of life. In addition to these, there remains a “basis” in the form of faith, which cannot be taken away. Faith as an enduring basis has acquired a greater value than the material base. It has become a new foundation (base) on which to base the deeper dimension of life.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*, <https://www.die-bibel.de/bibeln/online-bibeln/lesen/LU17/HEB.11/Hebr%C3%A4er-11> [access: 17.06.2023].

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Die Bibel. Altes und Neues Testament. Einheitsübersetzung*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 8, 13, 28; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara i egzystencja* [Faith and Existence], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Przyszłość wiary. Refleksje teologiczne* [The Future of Faith. Theological Reflections], transl. J. Marecki, Kraków 2019, p. 42; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara*

Benedict XVI explains that the attitude of both the persecuted martyrs and of those who abandon everything for Christ in the name of faith is proof of the existence of things that are not visible. What is visible is the attitude of believers. Faith and the way of living, thinking and acting that follows it actually constitute the new principle (substance) of the existence and future reality that is thus already made present.<sup>18</sup> The testimony of the lives of believers constitutes evidence of the truthfulness of things beyond the natural cognition of man, but available through the supernatural cognition, which is faith.

## The purpose of faith (objective rationales)

Does faith have a sense? What is the purpose of faith? Is faith capable of sustaining and transforming the life of contemporary man? These are the kinds of questions Benedict XVI does not leave unanswered. Referring to the dialogue that takes place during the administration of the sacrament of baptism, he stresses that faith is closely linked to eternal life.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, baptism signifies incorporation into the community of believers (the Church) and the beginning of a process of faith development (rebirth) and, on the other hand, it points to the purpose of faith, which is eternal life. Thus, faith is the key to this kind of life. Its essential role is to guide to participate in eternal life. Since

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*a teologia* [Faith and Theology], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Kościół. Pielgrzymująca wspólnota wiary* [The Church. Pilgrim Community of Faith], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2005, p. 15; Benedykt XVI, *Moja wiara* [My Faith], transl. A. Gogolin, Kraków 2023, p. 9; J. Węclawik, *Horyzonty antropologiczne encyklik papieża Benedykta XVI* [The Anthropological Horizons of Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclicals], "Nurt SVD" 152/2 (2022), p. 229. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matt 6:25).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 8–9. Furthermore, drawing on the Letter to the Hebrews (10:36–39), the Pope adds that believers are characterised by an attitude of patience and perseverance (Gr. *hypomone*). The opposite attitude implies a lack of courage and fear of the truth (Gr. *hypostole*).

<sup>19</sup> The question what faith gives us is included, for example, in *Obrzędach chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych* [Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults], Katowice 1988, p. 43. A synonym for eternal life is salvation, for example: "Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:8–9). Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 15; D. Wąsek, *Foundations of the Definition of Faith in Dialogue with Porta Fidei by Benedict XVI*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 62/9 (2015), pp. 162–166.

faith is not an end in itself, one believes in order to attain (possess) eternal life.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in baptism one affirms the conviction that faith is the substance of a life that transcends temporality.

Benedict XVI not only points to the purpose of faith, but also explains this purpose. He therefore undertakes to answer the question of what life is and what eternity is. Such an undertaking seems necessary in order to demonstrate that eternal life is appropriate for man and is his natural (often unconscious) desire.

A wrong understanding of eternity can deter possible followers. On the other hand, a correct understanding of the essence of eternity makes man strive and care for faith, which is the means leading to eternity.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise, faith turns out to be something trivial and superfluous. In this context, the Pope notes that one of the obstacles to the expectation of eternal (future) life is attachment to and desire for temporal (present) life. There is no shortage of proponents of putting temporality before eternity. For many, the focus on faith and eternal life is an obstacle to preserving and pursuing the temporal life, which they value more highly. The Pope admits that for some people “to continue living for ever—endlessly—appears more like a curse than a gift.” Prolonging life indefinitely is “ultimately unbearable.”<sup>22</sup>

Correcting this kind of thinking, Benedict XVI points to a kind of contradiction that appears in the human understanding of life and eternity. He explains that, on the one hand, man does not want to die (he postpones death indefinitely) and, on the other hand, he does not want to live indefinitely.<sup>23</sup> Overcoming the above *aporia* involves what, following St Augustine, Benedict XVI calls “happiness” or “the blessed life.” The trouble, however, is that it is difficult to explain what it is. It is easier to claim that the present life is not a happy life.

One of the intuitions that the Pope shares on this issue is that a happy life is certainly not subject to death. It is not even contradicted by the fact that man has no experience of living in such a way. The second intuition is related to the fact that the same man desires a happy life and even comes to the conclusion that it must exist, but at the same time he does not know what it is

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 10; J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Part 2: *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, transl. W. Szymona, Kielce 2011, pp. 95–98 (English edition: J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, transl. P.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011); STh 2–2, q. 2, a. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 11.

and for this reason he fears it.<sup>24</sup> In the Pope's view, this known and unknown and at the same time ultimate reality is precisely what the term "eternal life" is attributed to.<sup>25</sup> The Pope realises that it is insufficient to convey the essence of a happy life.<sup>26</sup> He explains that it can be compared to being immersed in an ocean of infinite love, accompanied by joy and fullness of life.<sup>27</sup> Man does not possess this life by himself or for himself. It is a relationship with that which is his source.<sup>28</sup> This kind of life is only possible with God.<sup>29</sup>

The understanding of faith and its purpose developed in the Church and Catholic theology encountered criticism in the modern era. This was due to the clash between the old and new ways of perceiving the world and a happy life. If hitherto faith had guaranteed happiness, with the new understanding of happiness also faith gained a different perception.

According to Benedict XVI, the abandonment of the vision of a happy life developed by Christianity and the supernatural faith leading to it is linked to ideas born in the modern age. Among those who contributed to their formulation was Francis Bacon, who proposed and applied a new method of investigating the world and practising science. "Science and praxis" (experimentation), creating mathematical natural science, made it possible to learn the laws of nature more effectively than the methods previously used (e.g. syllogism) in order to rule

<sup>24</sup> "Eternal', in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; 'life' makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12). Similar intuitions resounded in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy], vol. 3, Warszawa 2002, pp. 64–67.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1024.

<sup>26</sup> "To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality – this we can only attempt" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1045.

<sup>28</sup> "If we are in relation with him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life. Then we 'live'" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 27); cf. Benedykt XVI, *Wiara, nadzieja, miłość. Przewodnik po życiu chrześcijańskim* [Faith, Hope, Love. A Guide to the Christian Life], ed. T. Samulnik, Kraków 2022, pp. 66–67; Benedykt XVI, *Wiara to nie idea, lecz życie* [Faith Is Not an Idea but Life], transl. R. Skrzypczak, [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo? Testament duchowy* [What is Christianity? A Spiritual Testament], Kraków 2023, p. 124; Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 14.

the world.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to this, a belief spread that God's commissioned dominion over creation, lost through sin, had been restored to man. So far, the recovery of what man had forfeited (a happy life) has been possible through faith in Christ. In modernity, this is done by "dominion over creation" (nature). Thus faith has lost its original meaning and has been displaced onto the level of "private and other-worldly affairs," i.e. irrelevant for the world.<sup>31</sup> According to the Pope, this kind of modern vision of scientific knowledge and worldview shaped the crisis of faith (also present today).

Supernatural faith was replaced by "faith in progress," which Benedict XVI calls "the ideology of progress." Only this type of faith found justification in the context of modern ideas. The hope was to replace the kingdom of God with the kingdom of man. This was to be achieved, among other things, by new discoveries and inventions as a result of an interplay of science (theory) and praxis. According to Bacon, man is saved by science, not by faith. Progress does not consist in and contribute to union with God, but to a life capable of knowing and mastering nature.<sup>32</sup>

A special place in the idea of modern progress was occupied by reason and, with it, freedom. Progress meant first and foremost an increase in the dominion of reason, which was conceived as "a force of good and a force for good."<sup>33</sup> Progress manifested itself in the overcoming of the various kinds of dependency occurring between faith, Church and State. In this way, perfect (unlimited) freedom could become present.<sup>34</sup> The Pope emphasises that progress aimed at the creation of the rule of reason, in which humanity remains completely free (this kind of tendency was attempted, for example, by the French Revolution).<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 70; P. Jaroszyński, *Nauka i jej cele w kontekście historii* [Science and its Purposes in the Historical Context], [in:] *Spór o cel. Problematyka celu i celowościowego wyjaśnienia* [A Dispute over the Purpose. The Problem of the Purpose and Teleological Explanations], eds. A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stępień, P. Gondek, Lublin 2008, pp. 57–71.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara – prawda – tolerancja. Chryścijaństwo a religie świata* [Faith – Truth – Tolerance. Christianity and the World's Religions], transl. R. Zajączkowski, Kielce 2005, pp. 111–112.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wolność i prawda* [Freedom and Truth], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Prawda i wolność. Rozważania o współczesności* [Truth and Freedom. Reflections on Modernity], transl. R. Zajączkowski, Kraków 2020, pp. 143–144.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 18.



A significant role in the field of the modern understanding of a happy life and the method of achieving it was played by Immanuel Kant.<sup>36</sup> The Enlightenment philosophy he developed aimed to realise the ideals of a kingdom without God. Ultimately, reason laid claim to taking His place and, as a fully autonomous power, also aimed to establish moral law. A path conducive to the establishment of the new order was Kant's proposed new understanding of faith, which he called pure practical rational faith.<sup>37</sup> This type of faith formulated on the basis of practical cognition did not refer to revealed truths, but to the postulates of practical reason. According to the philosopher from Königsberg, the kingdom of man begins where supernatural "ecclesiastical faith" is abandoned and replaced by "a pure rational faith."<sup>38</sup> At the same time, it should be remembered that the goal of this faith is not union with God (eternal life), but *summum bonum*, i.e. the synthesis of morality (virtue) and happiness proportionate to it.<sup>39</sup>

Benedict XVI explains that similar expectations of faith in progress also occurred after the Age of Enlightenment. As a result of the development of technology and industrialisation, a new type of society was created in which the working class and proletariat dominated. The way to direct them and use them to build the New Jerusalem (the happy life) was proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It led through criticism of the existing order and revolution (the transformation of everything). It was dominated by politics, which replaced both science and faith.<sup>40</sup> However, a vision of this kind was

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. M. Sieńkowski, *O wierze i religii w systemie Immanuela Kanta* [About Faith and Religion in the System of Immanuel Kant], "Człowiek w Kulturze" 28 (2018), pp. 421–437; Sieńkowski, *Przedmiotowy aspekt wiary według Immanuela Kanta* [The Objective Aspect of Faith According to Immanuel Kant], "Studia Elckie" 20/4 (2018), pp. 429–439; A. Tomaszewska, *Kant's Reconception of Religion and Contemporary Secularism*, "Roczniki Filozoficzne" 64/4 (2016), p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. I. Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. T.K. Abbott, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5683/5683-h/5683-h.htm> [access: 30.11.2023]; cf. I. Kant, *Krytyka praktycznego rozumu*, tłum. J. Gałęcki, Warszawa 2012, pp. 230–233; Benedykt XVI, *O Wierze, rozumie i uniwersytecie* [On Faith, Reason and the University], [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Poznanie prawdy. Wykłady papieskie* [Knowing the Truth. Papal Lectures], Kraków 2017, p. 39; J. Corkery, *Reflection on the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI)*, "Acta Theologica" 32/2 (2012), p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. I. Kant, *Krytyka praktycznego rozumu*, op. cit., pp. 180–181 (I. Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, op. cit.); M. Sieńkowski, *Koncepcja dobra najwyższego w ujęciu Tomasza z Akwinu i Immanuela Kanta* [Conception of the Highest Good according to Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant], "Nurt SVD" 145/1 (2019), pp. 244–247.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 20.

not free from error. The Pope recognises that it was based on materialism and the economic conditions associated with it.<sup>41</sup>

In Benedict XVI's view, the above attempts to create a new world, i.e. to realise the desire for a happy life, focused on only certain aspects of human life, neglecting the holistic view. In the Pope's opinion, progress in the material field should not be neglected, however, it also demands development in the moral field.<sup>42</sup> Along with the acquisition of knowledge and mastery over nature, it is also necessary to perfect freedom, which leads to the improvement of the will and the ability to decide responsibly.<sup>43</sup> The learning of freedom, in turn, involves knowing and choosing the good, and therefore also the supreme good, which is God. Man is not saved by science or politics, but by the immortal love of God, which gives new meaning to life.<sup>44</sup> Whoever experiences this kind of love grasps what a happy life (living life to the full) is.<sup>45</sup>

## The structure of faith (subjective rationales)

Within the philosophical analysis of the concept of faith, attention is usually drawn to its subjective conditions. Since faith pertains to the invisible (cf. Heb 11:1), it demands the cooperation of man's personal faculties. Therefore, the act of faith is constituted by the actions of the intellect and the will, which are facilitated by divine grace. Finally, it remains to address the problem of the structure of the act of faith in relation to the papal encyclicals.

The encyclicals point to the conclusion that Benedict XVI focuses more on the relation between faith and reason, and the mutual benefits of this relation, and less on the role of reason and will in faith. In this first aspect, faith and reason are treated as two separate types of cognition.<sup>46</sup> Reason and will, on the other hand, are necessary components of the act of religious faith. Sometimes

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 22, 24; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 31.

<sup>43</sup> "Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 24); cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28; J. Ratzinger, *Europa Benedykta w kryzysie kultur* [Benedict's Europe in the Crisis of Cultures], transl. W. Dzieża, Czestochowa 2005, pp. 57–61; P. Blanco Sarto, *Faith in the Year of Faith. Ratzinger's Proposal*, "Polonia Sacra" 17/2 (2013), pp. 9–10.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 25, 26–27.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 27; Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 5; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 9; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 158; M. Sieńkowski, *Wiara a inne typy poznania* [Faith and Other Types of Knowledge], "Civitas et Lex" 4 (2014), pp. 69–81.

the will is treated by the Pope interchangeably with love and even with the heart. If he refers the heart to the good, he does not go beyond the sphere of aspiration (volition), since it falls within the sphere of the act of faith.<sup>47</sup>

A characteristic feature of Benedict XVI's teaching is to show the relation between faith and reason as a relation that by no means generate conflict between them. Above all, he points to the balance that occurs between faith and reason and the mutual benefits of their interaction. Faith and reason (science) do not generate conflict because their common purpose is the pursuit of truth, which cannot contradict itself.<sup>48</sup>

The Pope repeatedly emphasises the important role of reason in both human life and religious faith. To a somewhat lesser extent, he notes some observations about the will itself. In his view, overcoming what is unreasonable is a task also for the Christian faith. On the other hand, reason is capable of opposing God, of putting itself in His place, of abusing its dominion (cognition). This makes the dialogue between reason and faith all the more necessary, which also translates into a dialogue between believers and those who reject faith.<sup>49</sup>

Benedict XVI explains that reason, which is constantly undergoing development, needs to be open to faith.<sup>50</sup> This means that reason should not remain indifferent to what faith proposes. Otherwise, it remains closed only within its own boundaries (immanence) and does not reach what is beyond the natural order of knowledge and understanding. The point is that the development of reason also includes the cognition of transcendent reality. Recognising it means expanding the concept of reason and thus also the capacity to use it.<sup>51</sup>

Reason also needs to be open to the discernment of good and evil. Benedict XVI points out that reason is called human when it guides the will.<sup>52</sup> That

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, *Pora Fidei*, no. 10; P. Blanco-Sarto, *Thomistic Themes in Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Theology*, "Wrocław Theological Review" 30/1 (2022), pp. 35–66.

<sup>48</sup> Por. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 5; Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 12; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 34; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 159; G. Bugajak, "Reason and Faith". *The Problem of the Separation of Disciplines*, "Studia Philosophiae Christianae" 56 (2020), Special Issue 2, pp. 152–154.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 57; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 41; A. Proniewski, *Problematyka wiary w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI* [The Problem of Faith in the Teaching of Pope Benedict XVI], "Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej" 10 (2011), p. 116.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 45–48.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, nos. 31, 70, 74; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 67; K. Kaucha, *Joseph Ratzinger's Argument for the Epistemological Seriousness of Faith*, "Verbum Vitae" 39/4 (2021), pp. 1282–1283; M. Sieńkowski, *Wiara a racjonalność* [Faith and Rationality], *Elk* 2020, pp. 93–96.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 13.

is to say, the will directed towards the good needs reason to recognise the real good and to guard against the choice of a merely apparent good. Thus faith and reason work together for the good.<sup>53</sup> Since there are different kinds of freedom (e.g. practical, moral) depending on the purpose, it is necessary to be able to harmonise them on the basis of a common criterion of evaluation, which is the foundation and purpose of freedom. Benedict XVI insists it is in God. In this sense, man needs God and reason needs faith.

Reason and faith rely on each other in the perspective of full human development.<sup>54</sup> Reason needs purification by faith because it is not omnipotent. And faith needs reason in order to be a human faith.<sup>55</sup> Since faith makes the encounter with God possible, it is through faith that new horizons open up for man. They go beyond the natural scope of reason. Therefore, faith is a purifying force for reason. One could say that faith frees reason from blindness.<sup>56</sup>

Benedict XVI refers on several occasions to the biblical formulation proclaiming that faith works through love (cf. Gal 5:6).<sup>57</sup> This means that the principle of faith is not knowledge, although this is an essential component of faith, but love. It is about the kind of love that responds to the love experienced from God. In this way, two dimensions meet in faith: the cognitive and the affective. In this way, faith actualises both the cognition of God who reveals Himself (makes Himself known) and the love which corresponds to the love

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, nos. 34, 75; R. Słupek, *Teologia aktu wiary w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI w Roku Wiary* [Theology of the Act of Faith in the Teaching of Benedict XVI in the Year of Faith], "Wrocław Theological Review" 21/2 (2013), p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> "Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfil their true nature and their mission" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 56. "[...] reason and faith can come to each other's assistance. Only together will they save man. *Entranced by an exclusive reliance on technology, reason without faith is doomed to flounder in an illusion of its own omnipotence. Faith without reason risks being cut off from everyday life*" (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 74; cf. no. 56).

<sup>56</sup> "From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28); cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 16.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 1, 31, 33. In the context of the relationship between faith and love (works), Benedict XVI has written: "Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path" (Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 14; cf. no. 6).

received from God.<sup>58</sup> This is why, the Pope emphasises that faith that prompts love is inseparable with love. A similar relationship exists between faith and hope. Ultimately, the Pope affirms the truth proclaiming that the three theological virtues are intimately connected.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth adding that the issue of love as a form of faith is also taken up by St Thomas Aquinas. Although Benedict XVI does not directly refer to his reflections, which are thoroughly substantiated, he draws similar conclusions. Aquinas emphasises first of all that the end (good) which is the object of the will determines the kind of action. In turn, what differentiates human acts is the form. And since faith aims at eternal life (*credere in Deum*), which is the object of the will, the act leading to it must be love (the pursuit of the divine good). Therefore, love is said to form, that is, to perfect and shape the act of faith.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

It might seem that an attempt to reconstruct the concept of faith only on the basis of Benedict XVI's encyclicals, none of which concentrates directly on the issue of faith, is a misguided endeavour. It turns out, however, that the Pope ties the theological virtues together and, when discussing even one of them, raises issues concerning the others. In this way, it has become possible to consider the problem of faith addressed in three papal documents. Their content has made it possible to highlight to some extent those aspects of faith that play an important role from a philosophical (intellectual) point of view.

According to Benedict XVI, supernatural faith is first and foremost the substance (basis) of things unseen, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews particularly emphasises. Through faith it becomes possible to make present (gradually actualise) eternal life (fullness of life), which is the purpose of faith. Referring to faith as an improvement of the intellect proposed by St Thomas Aquinas, the Pope explains that this interpretation does not contradict that of faith as a substance, but further emphasises its subjective aspect. It does not mean the same thing as the internal (subjective) attitude emphasised by Luther,

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 9–10; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 3; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 7–8.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 39; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1812–1813; P. Seewald, *Benedykt XVI. Życie* [Benedict XVI. Life], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2021, p. 818; W. Zyzak, *Faith According to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger*, "The Person and the Challenges" 3/1 (2013), p. 145.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. STh 2–2, q. 4, a. 3; Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 33.

but expresses the involvement of intellect and will in the act of faith. Since it is constituted by objective (purpose) and subjective rationales (structure of faith) relating to a transcendent God, Benedict XVI opposes the reductive and naturalistic conception of faith developed by Kant.

The Pope also entered into a discussion with the proponents of the modern concept of so-called “faith in progress.” In his opinion, by equating salvation (fullness of life) to the knowledge of the laws of nature, its mastery and the power of science, on the one hand, the holistic development of man is ignored, and on the other, God and His role in the salvific process is eliminated. The “faith in progress” presented by Bacon, according to Benedict XVI, turns out to be erroneous, because it is based on premises favouring reason (Kant) and freedom, while ignoring the moral growth of man.

Although the selected aspects of faith presented in the encyclicals cannot provide a comprehensive overview of this issue, they offer a preliminary reconstruction of the concept of faith as understood by Pope Benedict XVI, which can be supplemented and deepen with other statements of Pope Benedict XVI. Nevertheless, the issues raised in this paper correspond to the teaching of the Catholic Church, never diverging from the conclusions put forward by St Thomas Aquinas or St John Paul II.

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## Europe in the Prisoner's Dock? The Signposts of Joseph Ratzinger/ Benedict XVI's for the Old Continent

Europa na ławie oskarżonych?  
Drogowskazy Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI  
dla Starego Kontynentu

**ABSTRACT:** Harmony of the European ethos based on an appropriate system of values should be achieved as a historical necessity for the 21st century Europe. The current lack of this harmony, which can be brought down to a number of reasons, leads to an identity crisis and as such is a cause of concern for Christians. Therefore, Joseph Ratzinger asks a provocative question: “what are the essential mistakes of Europe that have brought it to the prisoner’s dock today?” This is the main research question of this article posed in the context of reflections and teaching of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. This question urges to make an examination of conscience and prompts questions to be further addressed, concerning the depreciation of Europe’s Christian roots, the negation of natural law as a source of values or the dictatorship of ethical relativism that supports a social chaos. As a result, the idea of Europe today – according to Ratzinger – “has fallen into a strange twilight” and its ethos that has been the strength of the Old Continent for centuries is being destroyed. What is necessary and urgent is a re-Europeanisation of Europe based on strong and sound axiological foundations.

**KEYWORDS:** Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, ethos of Europe, European culture, European crisis, Christian humanism, ethical relativism, natural law, social principles, ethical values, social guidelines, Europeanization of Europe.

**ABSTRAKT:** Budowanie harmonii etosu europejskiego opartego na właściwym systemie wartości jawi się jako dziejowa konieczność dla Europy XXI wieku. Obecnie tej harmonicznej spójności brakuje z wielu powodów, co jest podstawą kryzysu jej tożsamości, a jednocześnie powodem chrześcijańskiego z troskania. W takiej sytuacji Joseph Ratzinger zadaje prowokujące pytanie: Jakie są najistotniejsze błędy Europy, z powodu których siedzi ona dziś na ławie oskarżonych? Jest to główne pytanie

problemowe artykułu postawione w kontekście przemyśleń i nauczania J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI. Jego pytanie skłania do rachunku sumienia i postawienia kwestii, zawartych w kolejnych częściach artykułu, a dotyczących deprecjacji chrześcijańskich korzeni Europy, negowanie prawa naturalnego jako źródła wartości czy dyktatury relatywizmu etycznego w służbie chaosu społecznego. W efekcie ideę Europy – zdaniem J. Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI – otacza dziś zastanawiający półmrok niszczonego etosu, który przez całe stulecia był siłą Starego Kontynentu. Konieczna i pilna jest ponowna re-europeizacja Europy oparta o mocne i sprawdzone fundamenty aksjologiczne.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, etos Europy, kultura Europejska, kryzys europejski, humanizm chrześcijański, relatywizm etyczny, prawo naturalne, zasady społeczne, wartości etyczne, wskazania społeczne, europeizacja Europy

During a pilgrimage to the United Kingdom in 2010, Benedict XVI made a presentation of Christian humanism, considered part of the humanism of all mankind, creative and with a complementary structure and power of influence. It points to values rooted in the natural law: truth as the foundation, rational freedom as its climate, justice as the rule of action, and love, which can, as it were, inspire all human social action. Asking for other, alternative proposals for a system of values to solve Europe's contemporary problems, he heard no response, not even from those who loudly protested in the streets against his presence in the homeland of Anglicanism and bastion of secularism.<sup>1</sup> This gives rise to the reflection: "What point have we reached today? In the violent upheavals of our time, is there a European identity that has a future and to which we can commit ourselves with all our might?"<sup>2</sup>

Recent years demonstrate that it has become necessary to adapt old ways of life to new times, while at the same time it is necessary to search for new forms of ethos in a rapidly changing world, and thus also in Europe. Joseph Ratzinger put it bluntly in a lecture given on the occasion of the celebration of the 2000th anniversary of the town of Speyer:

The idea of Europe has fallen into a strange twilight today. [...] Up to now we have contented ourselves with a kind of phenomenology of what is European, that is, with a look at how the idea of Europe works today and how it is seen by others. Now we must go somewhat more deeply and come to an examination of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Babuchowski, *Papież podbija Wyspy* [The Pope Conquers the Islands], <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/803468.Papiez-podbija-Wyspy/2> [access: 21.05.2011].

<sup>2</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Joseph Ratzinger, Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2007, p. 30; cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *The True Europe: Its Identity and Mission*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2024 (J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa. Tożsamość i misja*, Lublin 2022, pp. 207–208).

conscience; we must ask: What are the essential mistakes of Europe that have brought it to the prisoner's dock today? How can one recognize these mistakes, and how can one distinguish them from Europe's greatness, its valid contribution to the history of mankind? The second step consists in the transition from the examination of conscience to the search for the path, that is, to the question of what Europe ought to be and to do.<sup>3</sup>

Ratzinger listed then the errors of today's Europe: ethical relativism, the depreciation of natural law, legal positivism, the exclusivity of technical reason, the destruction of traditional cultural roots or new forms of nationalism.<sup>4</sup> His postulates seem to echo the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Europe held in Rome in 1999, which is clearly noticeable in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* by John Paul II. The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also contributed to its final form:

In the process of transformation which it is now undergoing, Europe is called above all to rediscover its true identity. Even though it has developed into a highly diversified reality, it needs to build a new model of unity in diversity, as a community of reconciled nations open to the other continents and engaged in the present process of globalization. To give new impetus to its own history, Europe must "recognize and reclaim with creative fidelity those fundamental values, acquired through a decisive contribution of Christianity, which can be summarized in the affirmation of the transcendent dignity of the human person, the value of reason, freedom, democracy, the constitutional state and the distinction between political life and religion."<sup>5</sup>

Underlying this approach to the European question of the twenty-first century is Benedict XVI's hopeful, though unquestionably realistic, conviction that:

every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs; this task is never simply completed. Yet every

<sup>3</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe: The Church in the Modern World*, transl. B. McNeil, San Francisco 1994, pp. 118, 124; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie. Miejsce Kościoła i świata*, Kraków 2001, pp. 103, 108–109.

<sup>4</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe...*, op. cit., pp. 124–130; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie*, op. cit., pp. 109–117.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 2003, no. 109, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20030628\\_ecclesia-in-europa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html) [access: 10.03.2024].

generation must also make its own contribution to establishing convincing structures of freedom and of good, which can help the following generation as a guideline for the proper use of human freedom.<sup>6</sup>

The picture of contemporary Europe seems to confirm Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's diagnosis. To the discerning observer, Europe has indeed taken its place in the dock. The *status quo* of the European ethos, developed over centuries, has in recent decades gone through a series of social, economic and political perturbations, showing signs of crisis. On the one hand, there is the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, unparalleled for a long time in its history. As it seems, this crisis is complemented by a second, much deeper one, which is the crisis of its own identity and culture, which is the foundation of Western civilisation. This can be seen, for example, in its inability to cope with the influx of migrants from outside the Old Continent and its social ethos.

Whatever the crisis, however, it is not the final outcome, the final stop in the history of Europe, which appears as an unfinished journey. It is and should be the object of expert analyses so as to properly interpret the signs of the times and, ultimately, to find the starting point for a new and better reality, the starting point of a search for a just order of human things. Benedict XVI, exploring the reasons behind this crisis, identifies in the etymology of the word "crisis" an aspect of separation, and in the broad sense of evaluation and judgment.<sup>7</sup> In times of crisis, therefore, it is possible to encourage critical reflection in order to delineate a path towards the future. A crisis such as Europe has experienced many times can and should be the starting point for finding new solutions for the Old Continent as Ratzinger put it bluntly in the above-quoted excerpt from the speech in Speyer in 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 2007, no. 25, [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) [access: 10.03.2024].

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Members of the Regional Board of Lazio, the Municipal Council of Rome and the Administration of the Province of Rome for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings (January 12, 2012)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20120112\\_amministrazione-lazio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120112_amministrazione-lazio.html) [access: 11.03.2024].

## Bibliographic search towards the essence of the problem

Father Jerzy Szymik, a professor of dogmatics, once said of Benedict XVI: “[...] I am impressed with the personality of the Pope, a professional scholar. Modesty, no special effects, potent words, trust in the truth...”<sup>8</sup> However, Benedict XVI himself, as Pope Emeritus, in an interview with the agnostic Peter Seewald, when asked what he might consider to be his weakness, admitted: “Maybe clear, purposeful governance and the decisions that have to be made there. I am just in that aspect actually more a professor, someone who deliberates and reflects on intellectual matters. So practical governance is not my forte, and there, I would say, is a certain weakness.”<sup>9</sup>

In analysing the problem addressed in this article, it is necessary to look at this intellectual reflections made by Joseph Ratzinger on Europe precisely through the prism of “dealings with the Word of God [...], things which a professor does.”<sup>10</sup> More than thirty of his books have been published in Poland, several of which deal directly with European problems: *A Turning Point for Europe: The Church in the Modern World* (San Francisco 1994), *Europa Benedykta w kryzysie kultur* [Benedict's Europe in the Crisis of Cultures] (Czestochowa 2005), *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues* (San Francisco 2007). From the axiological perspective, it is also worth mentioning *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco 2004) and the only encyclical devoted to social issues, *Caritas in Veritate* (Vatican 2009). A compendium can also be found in the book *The True Europe: Its Identity and Mission* (San Francisco 2024), which includes important texts by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI on Europe. It was published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the European Union.

The question arises as to the validity of the above queries. A careful analysis of the texts, or at least a cursory examination of the table of contents, reveals some important conclusions and clues towards the clarification of the problem under study. Professor Joseph Ratzinger was not a Christian political scientist, he was a dogmatist, applying the Augustinian approach; therefore, the optics of his

<sup>8</sup> T. Jaklewicz, *Idźcie w tym świetle. Rozmowa z księdzem profesorem Jerzym Szymikiem* [Go in This Light. A Conversation with Father Professor Jerzy Szymik], “Gość Niedzielny” 2006, no. 25, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI. Last Testament in His Own Words*, transl. J. Phillips, London 2016, p. 235.

<sup>10</sup> P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI. Last Testament...*, op. cit., p. 235.

European reflection included axiological issues of truth, based on natural law and the faculties of reason. The motto on the cardinal's coat of arms is eloquent: *coop-eratores veritatis* – collaborators of truth. Starting from the dogmatic truth of the harmony of creation, Ratzinger's reflection oscillated around the philosophical understanding of the world *per causas ultimas* according to the Augustinian idea of *Civitas Dei*. He proved the Christian roots of Europe built on the philosophy of Athens, the law of Rome and the faith of Jerusalem. In another strand, he showed the axiological chaos that resulted from the separation of values from natural law and struck at the very core of Europe's "soul." Hence, deviations such as nationalisms or the dominance and dogmatism of technical reason appear. The third strand is the uncompromising fight against ethical relativism, which denies the existence of objective truth and introduces axiological degeneration into social life, destroying its foundations. The common denominator is the questions: what is the true identity of Europe and what should Europe be like? The analysis of social facts and the practical indications – in line with Ratzinger's self-reflection mentioned above – seem to occupy a secondary position, playing a role of exemplification in the indictment of Europe placed in the dock.

## Depreciation of Europe's Christian roots

A few days before Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's election as Pope, the German publishing house Herder published his *Werte in Zeiten des Umbruchs. Die Herausforderungen der Zukunft bestehen* [Values in Times of Upheaval. Challenges of the Future].<sup>11</sup> It repeatedly calls for Europe to draw anew the best from its heritage, thus serving the whole world. One of the chapters offers a general look at the civilisational roots of the Old Continent, which seems to be relevant to the analyses of the contemporary errors in the ethos of Europe.<sup>12</sup> This is in fact a schematic presentation of the emergence of a European identity rather than an accurate historical account. Starting from the first historiographer of Greece, Herodotus, Joseph Ratzinger described the milestones of the formation

<sup>11</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Werte in Zeiten des Umbruchs. Die Herausforderungen der Zukunft bestehen*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Werte in Zeiten des Umbruchs...*, op. cit., pp. 68–73. The presented text of the chapter was delivered in the form of speeches in two versions: at a conference in Berlin on 28 November 2000 and in the Senate of the Italian Republic on 13 May 2004. The differences concern the second part of the text on the Constitution for Europe. Cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *The True Europe: Its Identity and Mission*, op. cit.; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, Kielce 2005, p. 9.

of Europe up to the present day. So when he appealed to respect the Christian roots, he referred Europeans not to a fictional world, but to historical and cultural truth:

Christianity, as a kind of animating force for moral progress, has slowly inscribed itself in the European culture. As a religion, however, Christianity did not originate in Europe, a fact of which Cardinal Ratzinger is unquestionably aware. In spite of this, in-depth analyses and studies of this aspect show that it is Europe that has infused this religion with its intellectual and cultural significance. Thus, the very idea of Christianity grew in strength throughout Europe. Therefore, the interpretation of these analyses shows that the history of Christianity and Europe are linked in a special way.<sup>13</sup>

In various speeches on cultural roots, Joseph Ratzinger referred to this Christian ability of entering into convergence with other vectors of European heritage. He saw Europe as

[...] a precious fabric woven by generations of Europeans, which must be preserved so that successive generations can add their golden threads to the European heritage. The structure of this fabric is woven from principles and values derived from the Gospel, while national cultures have embroidered it with a wonderful variety of perspectives expressing the religious, intellectual, technical, scientific and artistic capacities of Homo Europaeus.<sup>14</sup>

In this context attention must be paid to the present and future of Europe and the question must be asked whether and to what extent history can be a teacher of the future for the Old Continent? Oswald Spengler's thesis on civilisations that they have "the moment of birth, the gradual growth, then the flowering of a culture, its slow decline, aging and death" sounds ominous in this context.<sup>15</sup> Is this a diagnosis for the Europe of tomorrow? Looking at

<sup>13</sup> H. Czakowska, M. Kuciński (eds.), *Chrześcijańska koncepcja Europy i Polski w perspektywie nauczania Kardynała Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [A Christian Concept of Europe and Poland in the Perspective of the Teaching of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], Bydgoszcz 2017, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Occasione Diei quo studium peragitur de dialogo inter Culturam et Religiones*, [in:] H. Czakowska, M. Kuciński (eds.), *Chrześcijańska koncepcja Europy i Polski...*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, op. cit., p. 24; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., p. 22.

contemporary Europe, one gets the impression that it is internally burnt out. The values, the bond of this civilisation that sustained its identity for centuries, have been obscured or even rejected as anachronistic, as will be discussed later. Thinking about Europe from the global perspective, it seems that

the very world of European values – the things upon which Europe bases its identity, its culture and its faith – has arrived at its end and has actually already left the scene; that now the hour has come for the value systems of other worlds, of pre-Columbian America, of Islam, of Asian mysticism. [...] This invites a comparison with the decline of the Roman Empire: it was still functioning as a great historical context, but in practice it was already living off of those who would eventually break it up, because it no longer had any vital energy of its own.<sup>16</sup>

On many occasions, Europe has been in the heat of historical turmoil, as the milestones of its history depicted by Joseph Ratzinger show. Its coherent system of values proved to be an effective salvation, which was reflected even among the anticlerical authors of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* during the French Revolution.<sup>17</sup> In this context, the words of John Paul II's appeal made in Santiago de Compostela at the beginning of his pontificate show their profundity:

I turn my gaze to Europe as the continent which has made the greatest contribution to the development of the world, both in ideas and in work, science and art. [...] I cannot pass over in silence the crisis in which Europe is on the threshold of the third millennium of the Christian era. [Old Europe,] find yourself! Be yourself! Discover your origins. Breathe life into your roots. Breathe life into those authentic values that have made your history glorious and your presence beneficent on other continents. Rebuild your spiritual unity in a climate of full respect for other religions and freedoms. Render to the emperor what is imperial, and to God what is divine! [...] Do not be discouraged by your diminishing importance in the world or by the social and cultural crises affecting you. You can still be a beacon of civilisation and a stimulus of progress for the world.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, op. cit., pp. 23–24; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej fundamenty duchowe wczoraj, dziś i jutro* [Europe. Its Spiritual Foundations Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow], “Wokół Współczesności. Biuletyn OCIPE” 2004, no. 9, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. K.F. Papciak, *Kościół a prawa człowieka* [Church and Human Rights], “Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 16/2 (2008), pp. 133–144.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Akt Europejski. Santiago de Compostela, 9 listopada 1982* [European Act at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, 9 November 1982], no. 3–4, [in:] S. Sowiński,



The times that Europeans are living through can be called a turning point, as in the title of Joseph Ratzinger's book, not so much because humanity has entered a new century and millennium, but above all other important events, such as the demographic recession in Europe, the migration crisis, the collapse of communism, the emergence of the Internet, the rise of global terrorism, the process of globalisation, the economic crisis. The transition to ever new realities implies the question of which ethos of the European home must now be particularly developed as a new model. The question of the new ethos for the Old Continent and its identity in the face of multicultural European societies thus becomes crucial. A reliable answer to this question is an urgent task for contemporary Europeans, as the shape of the continent's present and future depends on it, and ultimately its survival in a form in which it will still be possible to speak of a Europe identified by its specific and dynamic culture. As Remigiusz Sobański puts it:

Europe is more of an awareness than a geography. This awareness has an objective, historical basis, that is the common Greco-Roman-Judaic-Christian past. These four determinants of this past have caused tension, but the recognition and acknowledgement of the richness of each individual determinant has led to their interpenetration and resulted in Europe, and then Europeanness.<sup>19</sup>

The depreciation of Europe's Christian roots, briefly and somewhat colloquially, can be seen as an act of European stupidity that puts limits on human wisdom and historical experience. The diagnosis of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is unequivocal: either Europe will be a community of spirit based on universal values, shaped with a great influence of Christianity, or it will cease to be the Europe it has been for centuries.<sup>20</sup> Ominous in this context are the short-sighted actions of the Eurocrats drenched in cultural communism, which has already revealed and continues to reveal its destructive influence by trying to turn the

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R. Zenderowski, *Europa drogą Kościoła. Jan Paweł II o Europie i europejskości* [Europe the Way of the Church. John Paul II on Europe and Europeanness], Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 2003, pp. 191–192.

<sup>19</sup> R. Sobański, *Europa i Europejczycy* [Europe and Europeans], "Gość Niedzielny" 5 (2000), <https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/P/PS/GN/2000-05-4> [access: 21.05.2011].

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *To the Participants in the Congress Sponsored by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) (March 24, 2007)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070324\\_comece.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070324_comece.html) [access: 21.05.2023].

Old Continent into a religiously uninhabitable land. It is worth reconsidering the Pope's words with "a listening heart":

At this point Europe's cultural heritage ought to come to our assistance. The conviction that there is a Creator God is what gave rise to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person and the awareness of people's responsibility for their actions. Our cultural memory is shaped by these rational insights. To ignore it or dismiss it as a thing of the past would be to dismember our culture totally and to rob it of its completeness. The culture of Europe arose from the encounter between Jerusalem, Athens and Rome – from the encounter between Israel's monotheism, the philosophical reason of the Greeks and Roman law. This three-way encounter has shaped the inner identity of Europe.<sup>21</sup>

## Negation of natural law as a source of values

Christian social doctrine points to the Christian roots of Europe, but it also points to the natural law common to all people, inscribed in every human being. On its basis, a theory of fundamental, universal values has been built up, based on the concept of person. Fundamental human rights and social principles are rooted in it, i.e. all that makes up universal humanism, including Christian humanism with its specificity. However, the sphere of interpretation on the ground of social philosophy reveals great discrepancies. As a result, the concepts of person, freedom, justice, truth and social love may have a completely different interpretation, which will ultimately determine a different understanding of society and the principles that should guide it. Benedict XVI puts it as follows:

[...] precisely because of the influence of cultural and ideological factors, today's civil and secular society is found to be in a state of bewilderment and confusion: it has lost the original evidence of the roots of the human being and his ethical behaviour. Furthermore, the doctrine of natural moral law conflicts with other

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Listening Heart. Reflections on the Foundations of Law. Visit to the Federal Parliament in the Reichstag Building (Berlin, 22 September 2011)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110922\\_reichstag-berlin.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html) [access: 12.03.2024].

concepts that are a direct denial of it. All this has far-reaching, serious consequences on the civil and social order.<sup>22</sup>

The main threat to Europe's Christian legitimacy is not the clash of civilisations, but the civilisation of clashes or, more precisely, the fractures within European civilisation that make Europe sit in the dock. Perhaps this is why Benedict XVI stated with bitterness, speaking to Roman students, that "the so-called 'Western civilization' has also partially betrayed its Gospel inspiration."<sup>23</sup> Earlier, in 2007, speaking at a COMECE Congress in Rome, he stated: "Is it not surprising that today's Europe, while aspiring to be regarded as a community of values, seems ever more often to deny the very existence of universal and absolute values? Does not this unique form of "apostasy" from itself, even more than its apostasy from God, lead Europe to doubt its own identity?"<sup>24</sup>

It is true that the question of identity is at the same time a question about the system of values respected and nurtured by a given community as its ethos. The essence of the problem lies in the so-called Cartesian error that the maxim of the Enlightenment, the age of reason and philosophers, contains: *cogito ergo sum*. This can be interpreted somewhat perversely as "man thought he is a god." Since thinking constitutes being, then that man is a god and, like a god, can create the world anew. Following the example of the Enlightenment, reason becomes a god, the sole source of law and morality and the basis for their evaluation and verification; reason thus becomes, as it were, a judge in their own cause. The consequence is the separation of values, such as the dignity of the person, freedom, truth or justice, from a juridical and natural basis, and the further disruption of the system and the absolutisation of selected values. The result, on the other hand, is their arbitrary interpretation at the service of various ideologies, tailored to the particular political situation. In other words, there is a rupture between the logos rooted in natural law and the ethos as a formula for the existence of society. This also results in ethical relativism, which will be discussed in the next section. It is worth giving the floor to Joseph Ratzinger/

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to Members of the International Theological Commission (October 5, 2007)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20071005\\_cti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071005_cti.html) [access: 14.03.2024].

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Meeting With the University Students at the End of the Recitation of the Rosary (March 1, 2008)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080301\\_rosary.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080301_rosary.html) [access: 20.02.2024].

<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, *To the Participants in the Congress Sponsored by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)*, op. cit.

Benedict XVI. Speaking in the German Bundestag in 2011, Pope Benedict XVI explains the essence of the sin of Europe:

The idea of natural law is today viewed as a specifically Catholic doctrine, not worth bringing into the discussion in a non-Catholic environment, so that one feels almost ashamed even to mention the term. Let me outline briefly how this situation arose. Fundamentally it is because of the idea that an unbridgeable gulf exists between “is” and “ought”. An “ought” can never follow from an “is”, because the two are situated on completely different planes. The reason for this is that in the meantime, the positivist understanding of nature has come to be almost universally accepted. [...] A positivist conception of nature as purely functional, as the natural sciences consider it to be, is incapable of producing any bridge to ethics and law, but once again yields only functional answers. The same also applies to reason, according to the positivist understanding that is widely held to be the only genuinely scientific one. Anything that is not verifiable or falsifiable, according to this understanding, does not belong to the realm of reason strictly understood. Hence ethics and religion must be assigned to the subjective field, and they remain extraneous to the realm of reason in the strict sense of the word. Where positivist reason dominates the field to the exclusion of all else – and that is broadly the case in our public mindset – then the classical sources of knowledge for ethics and law are excluded. This is a dramatic situation which affects everyone, and on which a public debate is necessary. Indeed, an essential goal of this address is to issue an urgent invitation to launch one.<sup>25</sup>

A positivist understanding of nature, based only on the natural sciences, is unable to create any correlation between ethics and law, between person and duty. Such a doctrine does not recognise natural law because it sees it as an unverifiable, specifically Catholic doctrine. Natural law is relegated to the position of a subculture of Christian milieu. For the positivist view of social life, any reference to natural law is considered an error, as is clearly evident in the case of the public awareness of Western civilisation.

Christianity has been a companion in Europe for centuries. It has been a historical co-creator on whom one can rely in times of the greatest turmoil. Europe has everything to arm itself with the courage of new, constructive thinking. In the words of Benedict XVI: “If something is wrong in our relationship with reality, then we must all reflect seriously on the whole situation and we

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Listening Heart. Reflections on the Foundations of Law...*, op. cit.

are all prompted to question the very foundations of our culture.”<sup>26</sup> Zbigniew Stawrowski aptly puts it:

[...] from the very beginning, there were people who contested the ethical foundation of the West, but as long as these were only individual outsiders, they were of little significance. For some time, however, there had been a growing sense of dissonance inside Western civilisation, which spread with great force with the outbreak of the French revolution, the mother of all future revolutions. They were the ones that turned the existing order upside down and in its place they applied a cultural pattern based on a new foundation of values. In recent years, the dynamics of revolutionary change have accelerated. The ethical capital on which Europe has grown, and which Europe has been able to present to the rest of the world for centuries as a universal civilisational model, is being devastated.<sup>27</sup>

The aforementioned new foundation of values appears rather as a system of pseudo-values or even anti-values based on rationalism or, in other words, on the so-called Cartesian anthropological error and the acknowledgement of reason as the ultimate rationale for the creation of a world of values, including indisputable truth. The separation of values from natural law results in what John Paul II particularly emphasised: the denial of the inseparability of truth and freedom, “justice without freedom” in totalitarianism or “freedom without truth” in democracy.<sup>28</sup>

Benedict XVI, speaking to the diplomatic corps during his pilgrimage to Austria in 2007, points to the coherence of the European value system and tradition: “The “European home”, as we readily refer to the community of this continent, will be a good place to live for everyone only if it is built on a solid cultural and moral foundation of common values drawn from our history and our traditions. Europe cannot and must not deny her Christian roots.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Listening Heart. Reflections on the Foundations of Law...*, op. cit. Cf. also: J. Węgrzecki, *W obronie rozumu politycznego. Myśl Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [In Defence of Political Reason. The Thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], Warszawa 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Stawrowski, *Niemoralna demokracja* [Immoral Democracy], Kraków 2008, pp. 165–166.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 98.

<sup>29</sup> Benedict XVI, *Meeting with the Public Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps at Hofburg Palace in Vienna (September 7, 2007)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070907\\_hofburg-wien.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070907_hofburg-wien.html) [access: 12.03.2024].

The Church's social teaching, which, according to Benedict XVI, "argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being,"<sup>30</sup> is capable of creating a platform for constructive dialogue for those Europeans of good will who, motivated by a new courage of thought, want to take part in creating a better future for Europe and build the European house on rock, not on sand.

## Ethical relativism in the service of chaos

The above two major errors of the European, contemporary ethos are closely related to a third one: ethical relativism, which denies the existence of objective truth and the impossibility of arriving at objective knowledge. Reading Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's diagnosis of modernity, one gets the impression that this is the central point of his intellectual inquiries and reflections. Małgorzata Pagacz lists a whole catalogue of issues in the context of ethical relativism:

The Pope describes many currents in the world today that are either at odds with Christianity or are directly in opposition to it. He repeatedly draws attention to secularism, relativism, atheism, practical atheism, agnosticism, materialism, unbelief, nihilism, indifferentism, subjectivism, individualism, reductionism, conformity, hedonism and consumerism. The way in which the Pope addresses the issues of religion, faith, culture, truth and conscience, freedom and tolerance, reason and society, indicates that Benedict XVI's attention is focused on the importance of the phenomenon of relativism.<sup>31</sup>

For the topic of this study, those threads that refer to the European ethos are of interest, especially those that concern relativism in the spheres of culture, politics and religion, that is, the ethos of European society in general. The Pope warned against this dictatorship of relativism:

There is also something sinister which stems from the fact that freedom and tolerance are so often separated from truth. This is fuelled by the notion, widely

<sup>30</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005, no. 28, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html) [access: 12.03.2024].

<sup>31</sup> M. Pagacz, *Życie konsekrowane wobec relatywizmu w świetle nauczania Benedykta XVI* [Consecrated Life in the Face of Relativism in the Light of the Teaching of Pope Benedict XVI], "Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny" 28/2 (2020), p. 136.

held today, that there are no absolute truths to guide our lives. Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made "experience" all-important. Yet, experiences, detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, relativism, which seems to be constantly on the rise, is becoming the cause of axiological degeneration and, as a result, chaos in the social sphere. If there is no objective truth, then neither can we be sure who man is, what is good or bad for people, what is just or not. Since in a culture of relativism, a culture of an infinite number of subjective truths, everything seems to be allowed, anyone who wants to live according to the truth and proclaim the truth is quickly labelled a fundamentalist, often with the attribute "Christian." Consequently, relativism becomes a dictatorship, marginalising those brave enough to proclaim the truth as a valid ethical imperative for all. Ultimately, a chaos of ideas, an axiological chaos, a social chaos is created, and people feel lost in it. In the public space, relativism degenerates into manipulation and democracy becomes an imitation, an unlimited and soulless territory of ruthless political and economic interests. For Benedict XVI, relativism, which takes various forms in individual and social life, is one of the main threats, also to the ethos of Europe.<sup>33</sup>

How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking. The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves – flung from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth. Every day new sects spring up, and what St Paul says about human deception and the trickery that strives to entice people into error (cf. Eph 4:14) comes true.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, *Welcoming Celebration by the Young People at Barangaroo, East Darling Harbour of Sydney (July 17, 2008)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080717\\_barangaroo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080717_barangaroo.html) [access: 12.03.2024].

<sup>33</sup> Cf. M. Tykfer, *Relatywizm, który dotknął serca* [Relativism that Touched the Heart], <https://www.przewodnik-katolicki.pl/Archiwum/2018/Przewodnik-Katolicki-42-2018/Wiara-i-Kosciol/Relatywizm-ktory-dotknal-serca> [access: 14.01.2021].

<sup>34</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Mass "Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice"*. *Homily of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals*, Vatican Basilica, April 18, 2005, <https://www>.

## Conclusions

As it seems, minor tentative adjustments and retouches to the current European ethos may turn out to be a road to nowhere, like those fictitious bridges on the Euro currency notes. The European Commission notes: “New social realities require new responses. Change is rapid – and policies need to keep pace, responding innovatively and flexibly to the challenges of globalisation, technological advances and demographic developments.”<sup>35</sup>

Europe is facing a new situation, marked by the inadequacy of both political and economic solutions. It has been confronted with new factors that give rise to anxiety and a sense of instability, provoke anti-system protests, opposition to the current shape of democracy, opposition to uncontrolled migration. The current directions of the construction of the common European home, drifting towards ideological confrontation and the dictates of cultural communism, call for a thorough revision of the values and principles on which Europe and its social, political and economic system are to be based.<sup>36</sup> In such a situation, it is worth giving the floor once again to Benedict XVI. In his first encyclical, he offered a succinct solution, containing words of encouragement. Expressing his desire to disseminate the social teaching of the Church, the Pope stated:

Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church’s immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her

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vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-cligendo-pontifice\_20050418\_en.html [access: 14.03.2024].

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Renewed Social Agenda: Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in 21st Century Europe*, Brussels, July 2, 2008, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0412:FIN:EN:PDF> [access: 14.03.2024].

<sup>36</sup> Cf. I. Bokwa, *Zmagania o tożsamość i chrześcijańskiego ducha Europy. Refleksje na kanwie myśli Kardynała Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI o historii i przyszłości naszego kontynentu* [The Struggle for Identity and the Christian Spirit of Europe. Reflections on the Thoughts of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI on the History and Future of Our Continent], “Studia Nauk Teologicznych” 12 (2017), pp. 211–231.



own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.<sup>37</sup>

For centuries, certain groups of people have been fighting against God, religion, Christians and their social paradigms. Experience teaches that those who proclaim catchy slogans of building a bright Europe without God promise to build heaven on earth. In effect, they always build hell. In his novel *Chrystus ukrzyżowany po raz wtóry* [Christ Crucified for the Second Time], Nikos Kazantzakis wrote that an angel can only enter heaven, Satan can only enter hell, while man can choose (?!).

In conclusion, one can say that Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI believes that Europe deserves to be accused because of bad choices. To describe these choices as incorrect would be an infantile statement, since it concerns fundamental issues.

Here we notice a self-hatred in the Western world that is strange and that can be considered pathological; yes, the West is making a praiseworthy attempt to be completely open to understanding foreign values, but it no longer loves itself; from now on it sees in its own history only what is blameworthy and destructive, whereas it is no longer capable of perceiving what is great and pure. In order to survive, Europe needs a new—and certainly a critical and humble—acceptance of itself, that is, if it wants to survive. Multiculturalism, which is continually and passionately encouraged and promoted, is sometimes little more than the abandonment and denial of what is one's own, flight from one's own heritage. But multiculturalism cannot exist without shared constants, without points of reference based on one's own values. It surely cannot exist without respect for what is sacred.<sup>38</sup>

This is demonstrated in the article as a series of interdependent errors in the construction of Europe's ethos. The first error consists in the separation of values from their objective legal and natural basis. Consequently, the denial of the existence of natural law itself. Another error is the construction of an ethical

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28; Cf. also: Benedict XVI, *To the Participants in the Conference of the Executive Committee of Centrist Democratic International (CDI) (September 21, 2007)*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070921\\_idc.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070921_idc.html) [access: 10.03.2024].

<sup>38</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow...*, op. cit., p. 33.

relativism that denies the existence of objective truth. In turn, the multiplicity of subjective truths leads to social chaos. This process is accompanied by the growing role of a sinister cultural communism in which ideology replaces truth. This separation of Europe from its axiological and cultural roots leads to an increasing internal weakness and a declining role of the Old Continent in the global ethos.

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## Benedict XVI and the Foundations of Politics

### Benedykt XVI i fundamenty polityki

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to present the political theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. The first paragraph focuses on Ratzinger's interpretation of selected New Testament source texts and the basic assumptions of what he called the "service to politics rendered by the Christian faith." The second paragraph deals with Ratzinger's interpretation of the key relevant logion: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). It cut the knot of the legal, moral and cultic order, on which states based their status, regarding the binding character of its laws as an expression of the divine will. The Enlightenment, according to Ratzinger, was faced with the necessity of cutting the equation "in two," this time in the Christian world, by exposing the Gospel-rooted model of separation of Church and State. The fundamental task of Christians then is to maintain the balance of the dual system as the basis of freedom. The third paragraph traces the development of Ratzinger's reflection on the greatness and weaknesses of the contemporary vision of democracy. The *clou* of this reflection was the reference to the "Böckenförde paradox," particularly topical in the era of the "dictatorship of relativism" that destroys democracy. The author refutes the criticism of the "Böckenförde paradox" made by Chantal Delsol in her book predicting the end of the Christendom, and concludes with a presentation of the *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (2002), which is, in his view, the culmination of Ratzinger's thought on the foundations of politics in the light of fundamental theology and Catholic social teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, foundations of politics, faith and politics, critique of the Christian state, separation of church and state, Böckenförde paradox, dictatorship of relativism, end of the Christendom, Chantal Delsol

**ABSTRAKT:** Przedmiotem artykułu jest teologia polityczna Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI. W paragrafie pierwszym przedstawiono dokonaną przez niemieckiego myśliciela interpretację wybranych źródłowych tekstów nowotestamentowych i podstawowych założeń teo, co Ratzinger nazywał „służbą wiary chrześcijańskiej

wobec polityki”. W paragrafie drugim zajęto się Ratzingerową interpretacją kluczowego w tym zakresie logionu: „oddajcie Bogu, co boskie, a cesarzowi, co cesarskie” (por. Mk 12,17). Rozciął on splot porządku prawnego, moralnego i kultowego, w którego ramach państwa czerpały swój wiążący charakter z tego, że stanowiły wyraz woli boskiej. Oświecenie, zdaniem Ratzingera, stanęło przed koniecznością nowego „rozcięcia splotu” – tym razem w świecie chrześcijańskim. Dokonało tego, odsłaniając zakorzeniony w Ewangelii model rozdziału Kościoła od państwa. Podstawowym zadaniem chrześcijan w tej sferze jest utrzymywanie równowagi dwoistego systemu jako podstawy wolności. W trzecim paragrafie prześlędzono rozwój refleksji J. Ratzingera nad wielkością i słabościami współczesnej wizji demokracji. *Clou* tej refleksji stanowiło odwołanie do „paradoksu Böckenfördego”, szczególnie aktualnego w dobie niszczącej demokrację „dyktatury relatywizmu”. Autor artykułu zbija krytykę „paradoksu Böckenfördego” dokonaną przez Chantal Delsol w książce *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego* i kończy prezentacją *Noty doktrynalnej o niektórych aspektach działalności i postępowania katolików w życiu politycznym* (2002), będącej w jego przekonaniu ukoronowaniem refleksji Ratzingera nad fundamentami polityki w świetle teologii fundamentalnej i katolickiej nauki społecznej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, fundamenty polityki, wiara a polityka, krytyka państwa chrześcijańskiego, rozdział Kościoła od państwa, paradoks Böckenfördego, dyktatura relatywizmu, koniec świata chrześcijańskiego, Chantal Delsol

The subject of this article is the political theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. Ratzinger never related this term with his reflections. He believed that “New Testament is acquainted with political ethics, but not with political theology.” This means, he argued, that the Gospel as a rule rejects attempts to elevate the Kingdom of God to the status of a political project and that politics is the province of ethics.<sup>1</sup> With this opinion, Ratzinger reacted to the views of his prominent university colleague from Münster, Johann Baptist Metz. He was convinced that his new political theology<sup>2</sup> takes a direction “which brings faith into politics in the wrong way,”<sup>3</sup> which had become a reality in the radical currents of South American liberation theology that inspired it. He did,

<sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy? On the Indispensability of Christianity in the Modern World*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics. New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, transl. M. Miller, San Francisco 2008, p. 204 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *O niezbywalności chrześcijaństwa we współczesnym świecie*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Kościół – ekumenizm – polityka*, Poznań–Warszawa 1990, pp. 253–254).

<sup>2</sup> See J.B. Metz, *Teologia wobec cierpienia*, transl. J. Zychowicz, Kraków 2008; see H. Seweryniak, *Teologia fundamentalna*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2010, pp. 37–43.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, transl. J. Phillips, London 2016, p. 150 (Polish edition: Benedykt XVI, P. Seewald, *Ostatnie rozmowy*, transl. J. Jurczyński, Kraków 2016, p. 179).



however, agree with Metz on some significant points,<sup>4</sup> and recognised that it was possible to practise political theology in a broad sense.<sup>5</sup> At the end of his life, replying to Peter Seewald's question about his interest in politics, he stated:

I have never attempted to exert myself politically, but I always had a great personal interest in politics, and the philosophy that stands behind it. Because politics lives off a philosophy. Politics cannot simply be pragmatic, in the sense of 'we'll do something.' It must have a vision of the whole. That has always concerned me.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I take up the most important issues of this "vision of the whole" that concerned Benedict XVI: analyses of the source texts of Christianity in an attempt to extract from them, despite their reserve towards power, politics and the state, the fundamental principles of what he called "the social and political responsibility of faith"<sup>7</sup> or the "service to politics rendered by the Christian faith";<sup>8</sup> reinterpretation of the question of separation of religion and state; reflection on the "dictatorship of relativism" that threatens modern democracy.

## Source texts – a telling reserve

Initiating in the 1970s an in-depth reflection on the sources of Christian political commitment, Joseph Ratzinger made it clear that the search in the New Testament for references to political problems and Christian responsibility for

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger admitted it when he took part in a session organised in Westphalian Ahaus on the occasion of Metz's 70th birthday. Cf. J. Ratzinger, J.B. Metz, *Gott, die Schuld und das Leiden. Gespräch*, [in:] *Ende der Zeit? Die Provokation der Rede von Gott*, eds. T.R. Peters, C. Urban, Mainz 1999, pp. 50–55.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?...*, op. cit., p. 204 (cf. J. Ratzinger, "O niezbywalności chrześcijaństwa we współczesnym świecie," op. cit., p. 254). For more on this issue from the perspective of fundamental theology: T.R. Rourke, *Fundamental Politics: What We Must Learn from the Social Thought of Benedict XVI*, "Communio" 35/3 (2008), pp. 432–450.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Last Testament...*, op. cit., p. 116 (Benedykt XVI, P. Seewald, *Ostatnie rozmowy*, op. cit., pp. 141–142).

<sup>7</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*, transl. B. McNeil, San Francisco 1994, p. 76 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie. Miejsce Kościoła i świata*, transl. M. Mijalska, Kraków 2005, p. 63).

<sup>8</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics...*, op. cit., p. 144 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, [in:] *Kościół – ekumenizm – polityka*, op. cit., p. 198).

the state is difficult and may end in disappointment. An example of this is the description of the temptation scene in the desert, placed by all the synoptics at the beginning of the public activity of the Master from Nazareth. At this critical moment in His life, He was confronted with Satan's offer of universal power: "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me" (Matt 4:9). Despite the conviction The Old Testament, as well as part of the Judaic texts from the intertestamental era, was characterised by the conviction that the future Messiah would bring about Israel's victory over the other nations. In the Gospels, therefore, a significant inversion takes place in this regard – this conviction is seen as a temptation of the Evil One.

The inversion – according to Joseph Ratzinger – can also be seen in Jesus' reaction to Peter's behaviour, who, at the decisive moment of the Master's public activity, after the multiplication of bread and its surprising climax – the call to carry the cross – seems to say: "that's not consistent with your mission; you must be successful; you cannot go to the Cross [cf. Mark 8]. Thereby Peter repeats the temptation from the days in the wilderness, which is presented to us as Jesus' one temptation, to be a Messiah of success, to climb on the political bandwagon."<sup>9</sup> This temptation also recurs in the reproach of the disciples at Emmaus: "And we expected that He would deliver Israel..." (Luke 24:21).

'O, foolish men,' summarises Ratzinger the reply of the Risen One, 'and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' [...]. Jesus, however, repeats to us what he said in reply to Satan, what he said to Peter, and what he explained further to the disciples of Emmaus: No kingdom of this world is the Kingdom of God, the total condition of mankind's salvation. Earthly kingdoms remain earthly human kingdoms, and anyone who claims to be able to establish the perfect world is the willing dupe of Satan and plays the world right into his hands.<sup>10</sup>

This is precisely why Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI will often warn radical factions of liberation theology against a temptation analogous to Christ's "third

<sup>9</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, transl. H. Tylor, San Francisco 2002, p. 238 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat. Wiara i życie w dzisiejszych czasach. Z kardynałem Josephem Ratzingerem rozmawia Peter Seewald*, transl. G. Sowinski, Kraków 2001, p. 219).

<sup>10</sup> J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, San Francisco 2007, p. 43 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, vol. 1: *Od Chrztu w Jordanie do przemienienia*, transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2007, p. 49).

temptation.” It is not true that “Mankind would be saved if everyone had enough money and possessions”;<sup>11</sup> that Christianity will only be authentic and effective when it becomes a distinctive instrument for the political transformation of the world;<sup>12</sup> that it will fulfil its purpose when the attempt to construct “a Marxist version of Christianity, which would finally create the ideal society.”<sup>13</sup> “In the case of the radicalized political theologians, [...]” Ratzinger concluded, “the New Testament is taken back into the Old; redemption becomes the Exodus, interpreted in a political way, as the secular act of liberation, and thus the Kingdom of God becomes the product of the human act of liberation.”<sup>14</sup> It is important for the Church to be concerned with the problem of injustice, hunger and oppression. But it should not evolve into a social association nor begin to heal man from without, but from within.<sup>15</sup> For the message from the narrative of the third temptation is that power, politics, governance, if pursued without God, spoil man. This was proved by political experiments which treated the Creator as an illusion and attempted to satisfy human desires through the structures of power itself: Marxism, National Socialism, Fascism, Maoism or Pol Pot.<sup>16</sup> It is true, Ratzinger concludes, that the power of God is quiet in this world, but it is a real and lasting power. The kingdoms that Satan showed Christ have disintegrated and are still disintegrating. Their splendour, their glory has turned out to be a sham – Christ’s glory, which is humble, loving, and ready to suffer, endures.<sup>17</sup>

The author of *Introduction to Christianity* recalls another difficulty in defining the foundations of Christian reflection on politics. In his view, it lies in the fact that the fundamental texts of the New Testament were written in

<sup>11</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 238 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 219).

<sup>12</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 238 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 219).

<sup>13</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *God and the World...*, op. cit., p. 238 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Bóg i świat...*, op. cit., p. 233).

<sup>14</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?...*, op. cit., p. 77 (J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie...*, op. cit., p. 64). Cf. J.L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith*, New York 2000 (German edition: *Joseph Ratzinger. Biographie*, Düsseldorf 2005, pp. 115–127).

<sup>15</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?...*, op. cit., p. 77 (J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie...*, op. cit., p. 64).

<sup>16</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?...*, op. cit., p. 77 (J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie...*, op. cit., p. 64).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Matt 4:8 “the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor [literally: *doxa* – ‘glory’]” (RSV).

a world in which Christians were not allowed to shape their state nor to share the responsibility for it, but rather suffered persecution from its authorities. In other words, they could only endure what the state did, living a life of Christians in spite of it. The persecutions during the reign of Nero and Domitian (54–96) made them think that they were strangers in a state that in their eyes resembled Babylon, in which Israel, six centuries earlier, had painfully experienced its plight as “objects of that state.”<sup>18</sup>

In spite of these reservations, in the 1970s Joseph Ratzinger discovered in the epistles of Paul and Peter the impulses relevant for Christian political reflection. In his view, the state does not set the boundaries of human hope because it is, in the sense of Christian theism, much greater (here J. Ratzinger used for the first time the phrase “great hope” and “greater hope,” which would become central to his encyclical *Spe Salvi*<sup>19</sup>). This is precisely what provoked Rome’s repression – the early Christians with their “great hope” demythologised the state as a divine reality, the ultimate.<sup>20</sup> For wherever the prospect of a “greater hope” is lost, the myth of the divine state, various forms of cult of the leader or cult of the individual appear, even if they take the form of the myth of the abolition of the state in the final phase of the development of societies (Marxism) or the myth of the kingdom of God on earth (Ernst Bloch’s neo-Marxism).<sup>21</sup> “Such politics, which declares that the kingdom of God is the outcome of politics [...], is by its very nature the politics of enslavement; it is mythological politics.”<sup>22</sup> The service of Christian faith to politics consists in that “it liberates man from the irrationality of political myths,” and political morality resists “the seductive force of the big words for which humanity and its chances are being gambled away. The moral thing is not adventurous moralism, [...] but rather honesty, which accepts man’s limits and does man’s work within

<sup>18</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 143–144 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., pp. 198–199).

<sup>19</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 143–144 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., pp. 197–198).

<sup>20</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 144 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., p. 198).

<sup>21</sup> On Ratzinger’s relationship with Ernst Bloch, author of the three-volume work: *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [The Principle of Hope] (1954–1959), see P. Seewald, *Benedykt XVI. Życie* [Benedict XVI. Life], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2021, pp. 471–472, 490–491.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 144 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., p. 198).

them. Not the uncompromising stance, but compromise is the true morality in political matters.”<sup>23</sup>

Although, as mentioned, the Christian sources sometimes compared the Roman state to Babylon (1 Pet 5:13; Rev 18:2), they also recognised, as Ratzinger emphasises, the positive significance of the state as such. For the metaphor of “Babylon” also invoked the letter addressed to the exiles by the prophet Jeremiah (VI century BC) and the encouragement contained therein: “build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce. [...] Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer 29:5, 7). For the sake of these prophetic words, the authors of 1 Peter and 1 Timothy were also concerned about the prosperity of their country. They encouraged the first generations of Christians living as if in exile: pray “for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim 2:2); “maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12); “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Pet 2:17). In these words, Ratzinger observes, it is not a matter of encouraging cowardice or easy compromise, for the martyrs from the times of Nero became paragons for all generations of believers. Recognising the limits of the rulers’ demands, they did not bow to them when the rulers opposed God’s will. They followed their own way of living in the state; the teachings of the Roman schools of Peter and Paul and, for example, of the *Epistle to Diognetus* from the second century reveals how they fought what was amoral with what was moral, evil with good. They prayed for the rulers so that the rulers could rule justly and honestly, and in this sense they also were obedient to them. The obedience, however, was not absolute and it ended when the ruler attempted to take the place of God.

Morality – doing good – is the true resistance, and only the good can be a preparation for a turn for the better. There are not two kinds of political morality: a morality of resistance and a morality of ruling. There is only one morality: morality as such, the morality of God’s commandments, which cannot be temporarily suspended in order to bring about a change in the status quo

<sup>23</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 144 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., p. 198); cf. T. Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith. The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Oxford 2008, p. 157 (Polish edition: T. Rowland, *Wiara Ratzingera. Teologia Benedykta XVI*, transl. A. Gomola, Kraków 2008, p. 190).

more quickly. One can build by only building up, not by destroying – that is the political ethics of the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth remembering that this way of thinking was absent from the political thought of modern Christianity for centuries, and even today many still have problems with it. When, in the nineteenth century, representatives of liberal, anti-Church political circles began to rule in France and Catholics found themselves once again in the political “foreign land,” many considered this state of affairs to be completely incompatible with the ideal of the Christian state, conceived as the only proper form of the “state-Church” relationship. It was then that Pope Leo XIII addressed the Catholics of the Hexagon with his encyclical *Au Milieu Des Sollicitudes* (Amidst the Cares), in which he called for a redefinition of the relation between Church and government, encouraging them to follow the path of *ralliement*, by which he meant the acceptance of the republican form of government and the renunciation of treating such a state as an instrument of hostile force. The social good, the Pope proclaimed, demands “respect due to constituted power.” On the other hand, “upright men should unite as one to combat, by all lawful and honest means, these progressive abuses of legislation” (no. 24). Leo XIII illustrated the new situation by recalling the story of the Emperor Julian Apostate, reigning from 361 to 363, who, quoting St Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmis* 124,7,

was an emperor unfaithful to God, an apostate, a pervert, an idolator. Christian soldiers served this faithless emperor, but as soon as there was question of the cause of Jesus Christ they recognized only Him who was in heaven. Julian commanded them to honor idols and offer them incense, but they put God above the prince. However, when he made them form into ranks and march against a hostile nation, they obeyed instantly. They distinguished the eternal from the temporal master and still in view of the eternal Master they submitted to such a temporal master.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, according to Joseph Ratzinger, the responsible political action of Christians consists of the convictions that the persecuted early Church prescribed as the core of the political ethos: that morality is not a private matter, but has

<sup>24</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 145–146 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., p. 199).

<sup>25</sup> Leo XIII, Encyclical *Au Milieu Des Sollicitudes*, 1892, [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_16021892\\_au-milieu-des-sollicitudes.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_16021892_au-milieu-des-sollicitudes.html) [access: 12.11.2023].

public significance; that the centre of responsible political action must be the dimension of God's commandments also in the public sphere; that only where good is done and recognised as good can coexistence between people flourish.<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusions and implications

[1] From the beginning of his path of theological reflection, Ratzinger argued that authentic Christianity does not equal the Kingdom of God with the realisation of political visions. Consequently, he denied the validity of the postulate to govern the state according to the "principles of revealed truth,"<sup>27</sup> leaving politics to reason and morality. Vaticanum II gave this norm the name of autonomy of earthly realities.<sup>28</sup> It is not, however, an absolute autonomy. Christianity is seen within it as a source of knowledge that illuminates the meaning of political activity. It is not this source as a revealed religion, but as leaven and a form of life that has stood the historical test. Among other things, it has proved itself by demonstrating the need for faith in ultimate truth, the indisputable nature of conscience, the value of following witnesses to truth, conscience and love, defying the state's pursuit of absoluteness, which always ends in totalitarianism.

[2] In the field of politics, too, the correlation of reason and religion, called to refine each other, must be sought. Religion must give up its aspirations to earthly power, for it then loses its inherent nature; reason should learn in this encounter to recognise its limits. Without this, so-called pure rationality ends up threatening the self-destruction of humanity (nuclear weapons) and treating human beings as products (experiments on embryos, euthanasia). The same question was put forward by an American thinker and convert, Richard Neuhaus (d. 2009), who criticised what he termed the *naked public square*

<sup>26</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., pp. 146–147 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, op. cit., p. 200).

<sup>27</sup> In 1968, J. Ratzinger strongly supported the *Bensberger Kreis Memorandum*, which was a profound response of German Catholics to the famous *The Pastoral Letter of the Polish Bishops to their German Brothers* of 18 November 1965. However, he demanded the removal of the aforementioned postulate from the *Memorandum*, which he described as a "false political theology." For: P. Stachowiak, *Poczucie winy, poczucie zobowiązania* [A Sense of Guilt, a Sense of Obligation], "Przewodnik Katolicki" (June 25, 2023) No. 25, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 36; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, no. 45, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html) [access: 14.11.2023].

(“meaning public life stripped of religion and religiously grounded argument”). Its “alternative,” he argued, “is not the sacred public square, but the civil public square.”<sup>29</sup> In this public square, on the one hand, citizens respect the religious neutrality of the state and, on the other hand, the state respects the religious views of citizens.

[3] According to Ratzinger, any “interpretation of Jesus that makes him a failed rebel paints a totally false picture of him. Jesus was not Barabbas or Spartacus, but precisely Jesus.” This is a significant consequence – “faith in him goes beyond the social and political realm, but [...] precisely in the mode of responsibility,” which “requires mediation through reason and will.”<sup>30</sup> Reason and will must attempt to concretise it with an awareness of the imperfection of human action in history. This action will not build the Kingdom of God on earth, but the very idea of it, the vision of it, calls for reaching out through law and love. The fact that such a hope has been given to humanity gives Christians the courage to take up again and again “the struggle for a just order that is the form of freedom and builds up a dam against the tyranny of injustice.”<sup>31</sup>

[4] From what has been said, there is another important function of religion, which Ratzinger emphasises in the “Church-State” relationship: the limiting function.<sup>32</sup> “The State is not the whole of human existence and does not encompass all human hope. Man and what he hopes for extend beyond the framework of the state and beyond the sphere of political action. This is true not only for a state like Babylon, but for every state. The state is not the totality; [looking at political reality *sub ratione Dei*] this unburdens the politician and at the same time opens up for him the path of reasonable politics.”<sup>33</sup> In this way, the Church/Churches help to defend politics from itself – from its transformation into a secular religion, which would seek to create a paradise on earth. “The unlimited state, whether based on Marxist atheism or on the engineered designs of Enlightenment rationalism strives for totalitarian power.”<sup>34</sup> By contrast, the “limited state is kept within this limitation by the democratic

<sup>29</sup> R.J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon. Notes of a Christian Exile*, New York 2009, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?...*, op. cit., pp. 82–83 (J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie...*, op. cit., p. 69).

<sup>31</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?...*, op. cit., p. 83 (J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie...*, op. cit., p. 70).

<sup>32</sup> The excerpt refers to H. Seweryniak, *Apologia i dziennikarstwo* [Apologia and Journalism], Warszawa 2018, pp. 310–311.

<sup>33</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Biblical Aspects of the Theme of Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 144 (J. Ratzinger, *Biblijne aspekty tematu: wiara a polityka*, p. 197).

<sup>34</sup> R.J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, op. cit., p. 187.



demand for recognition of the transcendent aspirations of human hearts.”<sup>35</sup> The presence of the Church “in public discourse relativises the arrogant ambitions of politicians.”<sup>36</sup>

## Church and state – “a new era”

Joseph Ratzinger assigns a decisive role in the formation of Christian political responsibility to the New Testament injunction: “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17; Matt 22:21; Luke 20:25). This logion, he stresses, “inaugurated a new era in the history of the relationship between politics and religion.”<sup>37</sup> Ratzinger’s most elaborate interpretation of the logion was made in 2004 in his book *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues*. There he states that in formulating the injunction, Jesus teaches that to the extent that the state ensures peace and law, it represents the order resulting from creation, is therefore based on nature and is necessary; to the extent that authority is the guarantor of law, to that extent it can enforce obedience. At the same time, the teacher from Nazareth limits the extent of the obligation to obey which must be shown to it – there is also that which belongs to God. This approach implies that “whenever Caesar exalts himself as God, he has exceeded his limits, and obedience then would be the denial of God”; the refusal to give glory to the Caesar is therefore equal to a negation of all manner of totalitarianism.<sup>38</sup>

According to Ratzinger, with the injunction: “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s,” “the new dualism” emerged in history, involving the separation of state and sacred authority. In the ideology of authority of ancient Israel, the legal order and moral and cultic

<sup>35</sup> R.J. Neuhaus, *Liberalizm Jana Pawła II* [Liberalism of John Paul II], “First Things. Polish Edition” 5 (2007), p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> [Interview by M. Zięba] R.J. Neuhaus, *Ocalić publiczną rozmowę* [Saving the Public Conversation], [in:] R.J. Neuhaus, *Prorok z Nowego Jorku* [Prophet of New York], eds. G. Górny, R. Jankowski, Warszawa 2009, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Theology and Church Politics*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics...*, op. cit., p. 155 (Polish edition: *Teologia a polityka Kościoła*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Kościół – ekumenizm – polityka*, op. cit., p. 208).

<sup>38</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Political Visions and the Praxis of Politics*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2007, p. 56 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Wizje polityczne i praktyka*, [in:] *Europa. Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, transl. S. Czerwik, Kielce 2005, pp. 52–58).

order made a fundamental constitution, and Jesus cut them in two.<sup>39</sup> Ratzinger analyses this “cutting” not only in the logion, but in the whole teaching of Jesus. It was previously assumed that the political sphere is also a sacred sphere; the state and its laws derived their binding character from the fact that the laws were the expression of the divine will and not merely the will of the ruler.<sup>40</sup> In other words, Christ, with his Gospel, cut in two “the equation of the state’s claim on men with the sacred claim of the divine will for the world.”<sup>41</sup> No wonder, then, that the Empire saw in the attitudes resulting from this an attack on its foundations. Jesus, by denying the sacral foundations of the pre-Christian world system, nullified the claims of the Roman god-Caesar, who thus became a mere man-Caesar.<sup>42</sup>

The Age of Martyrs in the Church was followed by the Constantinian Age: Christians assumed responsibility for the state and began to shape the foundations of a Christian political ethic. Something of the legacy of “render to Caesar...” remained. In the West, the doctrine of the duality of power gradually took shape: the emperor and the pope hold power separately, neither of them possessing it in its entirety. Ratzinger recalls that Pope Gelasius I (492–496) formulated it in a letter to Emperor Anastasius, where he stated that Christ because of human

weakness (pride!) separated the two ministries for the following ages, so that no one might become proud. For matters concerning eternal life the Christian emperors needed the priests (pontifices), and the latter, in turn, abided by the imperial ordinances in the course of temporal affairs. In worldly matters, the priests had to follow the laws of the emperor who had been placed in office by a divine decree, whereas he had to submit to the priest in sacred matters. [...] [Thus the principle of] a separation and distinction of powers was introduced, [...] which laid the foundations [...] for what is distinctively typical of the West.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Theology and Church Politics*, op. cit., p. 156 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Teologia a polityka Kościoła*, op. cit., p. 208).

<sup>40</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Theology and Church Politics*, op. cit., p. 156 (J. Ratzinger, *Teologia a polityka Kościoła*, op. cit., p. 208).

<sup>41</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Theology and Church Politics*, op. cit., p. 156 (J. Ratzinger, *Teologia a polityka Kościoła*, op. cit., p. 209); cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wizje polityczne i praktyka*, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> J. Ratzinger, *A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?...*, op. cit., p. 204 (J. Ratzinger, *O niezbywalności chrześcijaństwa we współczesnym świecie*, op. cit., pp. 253–254).

<sup>43</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2007, p. 16 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, transl. S. Czerwik, Kielce 2005, p. 14).

It is undeniable, however, that this conclusion is too optimistic, and that the balance inherent in dualism was often violated, mainly by the fact that both parties manifested “the totalitarian impulse” and “a desire to place one’s own power above the other.”<sup>44</sup> The process of usurpation took a variety of forms. We find significant elements of it, for example, in the medieval *Romano-German Pontifical*, which was widespread throughout Western Christendom, a variant of which, as could be seen during the coronation of Charles III, is the coronation ritual still used in Great Britain today.<sup>45</sup> In the political doctrine that can be extracted from there, the legal, moral and cultic orders formed a tight knot;<sup>46</sup> the merging of state and church often took place; the idea of a Christian state and a state church came to the fore.

It has therefore become indispensable to cut the knot anew – this time in the Christian world. The epoch in which this began to take place was the Enlightenment. Analysing the libertarian ideals of the Enlightenment, Ratzinger will show that this epoch managed to separate and control the power, establish human rights equal for all, establish that religion should not be imposed by the state, but be a matter of free human choice. All of this contributed to restoring the functioning of the principle of “render to the Caesar,” then precisely defined as the principle of separation of Church and State. Ratzinger, however, is by no means as forbearing to the spirit of the Enlightenment as John Paul II<sup>47</sup> or Cardinal Walter Kasper were.<sup>48</sup> Replying to Peter Seewald’s question in the *Salt of the Earth* interview whether it is not beneficial that the separation of Church and State took place and that the faith is henceforth not imposed by the State, but “rest[s] upon freely acquired conviction,” Cardinal Ratzinger once again returns to the origins of the idea of separation. He diagnoses that

<sup>44</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 16 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., p. 15).

<sup>45</sup> See H. Seweryniak, *Błogosławieństwo nowego króla i królowej w Pontyfikale Płocense I* [Blessing of the New King and Queen in *Pontificale Plocense I*], “Wrocław Theological Review” 29/1 (2021), pp. 269–299.

<sup>46</sup> It is noticeable in the medieval coronation rites which drew on the figures of Old Testament kings and the model events of their reign (more often than to New Testament figures and events). See H. Seweryniak, *Skarbiec średniowiecznej modlitwy. Błogosławieństwa, modlitwy, egzorcyzmy i dramat liturgiczny w Pontyfikale Płockim I* [Treasury of Medieval Prayer. Blessings, Prayers, Exorcisms and Liturgical Drama in *Pontificale Plocense I*], Płock 2021, pp. 35, 71–80.

<sup>47</sup> See John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 2005, p. 82 [Kindle] (Polish edition: Jan Paweł II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków 2005, pp. 101–102).

<sup>48</sup> See W. Kasper, *Rzeczywistość wiary* [The Reality of Faith], transl. J. Piesiewicz, Warszawa 1979, pp. 13–14.

any modern student of history will answer that it was the result of the struggle between the republican, liberal and democratic movements in the 18th and 19th century. As a great apologist, he reversed this way of thinking, insisting that “the idea of the separation of Church and state came into the world first through Christianity.”<sup>49</sup> He pointed out that in antiquity, both in pagan countries and in Israel, the political system and religion were united, and that it was at this decisive point that Christianity confronted the Empire – Rome tolerated the religions of conquered peoples, but only on two conditions: firstly, that they recognised the state cult and “the aegis of Rome”; secondly, that the state religion prevailed over all private religions as their supreme structure.<sup>50</sup> Christianity, by challenging this construction in the name of the evangelical principle “render to Caesar..., render to God...,” denied the sacral character of the state. “[T]his separation is ultimately a primordial Christian legacy and also a decisive factor for freedom.”<sup>51</sup> The state is no longer “the sacred power but simply an order that finds its limit in a faith that worships, not the state, but a God who stands over it and judges it.”<sup>52</sup> What, then, have the Enlightenment liberal, republican and Masonic movements accomplished? They only brought out the “model of the separation of Church and state” that was rooted in the Gospel! And it is only in this sense that the ongoing evolution since the Enlightenment, in which this model was revealed and began to function, can be said to have a positive side.

### Conclusions and implications

[1] The author of *Introduction to Christianity* proclaims almost demonstratively: neither state monism, based on so many attempts to eradicate Christianity in Europe, nor religious monism, characteristic of Islam, for example!<sup>53</sup> It is clear

<sup>49</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church at the End of the Millennium*, transl. A.J. Walker, San Francisco 1997, p. 239 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Sól ziemi. Chryścijaństwo i Kościół katolicki na przelomie tysiącleci*, transl. G. Sowinski, Kraków 2005, p. 205).

<sup>50</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Salt of the Earth...*, op. cit., p. 239 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Sól ziemi...*, op. cit., p. 205).

<sup>51</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Salt of the Earth...*, op. cit., p. 239 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Sól ziemi...*, op. cit., p. 206).

<sup>52</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Salt of the Earth...*, op. cit., p. 239 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Sól ziemi...*, op. cit., p. 206).

<sup>53</sup> Also, for example, Richard J. Neuhaus (*Prorok z Nowego Jorku*, op. cit., pp. 293–294) has argued that Islam has no arguments to justify or support democracy and religious pluralism; it is radically monistic in its understanding of spiritual and temporal authority.

that freedom is inhibited where the Church subordinates the state or becomes the state. But it is inhibited above all where the state eliminates the Church from the public sphere, deciding that no equally significant (albeit significant differently) authority can exist apart from it. This is a situation where it arbitrarily claims to decide what is moral and, moreover, exercises this claim (Vendée, USSR, Hitler's Germany, China from Mao onwards with varying degrees of intensity up to the present day). Such a state inevitably becomes totalitarian, for it cannot be opposed by an independent, publicly recognised authority of conscience. "Where such duality is lacking, totality, that is, the totalitarian system is inevitable."<sup>54</sup>

[2] According to Ratzinger, the fundamental task of Christians in this sphere is "to maintain this balance of a dual system as the foundation for freedom." Therefore – in his opinion – "the Church must lay claim to public rights and cannot simply withdraw into the realm of private rights. For this reason, however, she must also make sure that Church and state remain separate and that membership in the Church clearly retains its voluntary character."<sup>55</sup>

[3] How the principle of dualism or separation should be correctly implemented and what shape should be given to it, remains – according to Cardinal Ratzinger – a fundamental problem for the present and future fate of the Euro-Atlantic world.<sup>56</sup>

## The democratic model – the Böckenförde paradox

In a number of prominent essays, Joseph Ratzinger traces the path towards a democratic model of statehood in Europe and the modern desacralisation of the state. He reminds us that already in the late Middle Ages the slow decline of the sacred empire as a political reality was perceived; "the sacred foundation for history and for the existence of the State was rejected; history was no longer gauged on the basis of an idea of a preexistent God who shaped it; the State was henceforth considered in purely secular terms, founded on reason and on the

<sup>54</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Theology and Church Politics*, op. cit., p. 157 (J. Ratzinger, *Teologia a polityka Kościoła*, op. cit., p. 210).

<sup>55</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Theology and Church Politics*, op. cit., p. 157 (J. Ratzinger, *Teologia a polityka Kościoła*, op. cit., p. 210).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 16 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., p. 15).

will of the citizens.”<sup>57</sup> By now, modern philosophers would be firmly convinced that reason and the people’s will should take the place of inherited social rules in the new, post-revolutionary world. It is in the hands of the enlightened monarch that the task and the right to implement this will should be placed (Thomas Hobbes). And if citizens did not understand freedom in this way, they should be compelled to do so (Jean-Jacques Rousseau); the Enlightenment (as can be seen from the adventures of the European Union to the present day) acts “in destroying these well-developed freedoms, it considered itself the executor of the higher freedom that higher insight bestows.”<sup>58</sup>

Modernity greatly facilitated the process of transformation in the state theory by reducing religion to the realm of subjectivity, of a private affair (Rousseau)<sup>59</sup> and thus excluding it from the public sphere. Ratzinger does not hesitate to use the word “schism” to refer to this turn in state theory. He recognises this schism in the fact that

for the very first time in history, a purely secular State arose, which abandoned and set aside the divine guarantee and the divine ordering of the political sector, considering them a mythological world view, and it declared God himself to be a private affair, that did not play a role in public life or the formation of the popular will. The latter was seen now solely as a matter of reason, by which God did not appear to be clearly knowable; religion and faith in God belonged to the realm of feelings and not to that of reason. God and his will ceased to be relevant in public life.<sup>60</sup>

There is, however, one problem – the democratic system formed at that time only functions if it is based on accepted and defined fundamental values. It cannot, therefore, do without values; it cannot be neutral towards them and their source cannot be tantamount to the essential mechanism for the functioning of democracy: the decision, the will of the majority. The source is elsewhere. In order to answer the question “where,” Ratzinger refers to a theorem, called

<sup>57</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 20 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., p. 14).

<sup>58</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Freedom and Constraint in the Church*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics...*, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>59</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Salt of the Earth...*, op. cit., p. 239 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Sól ziemi...*, op. cit., pp. 205–206).

<sup>60</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 21 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., pp. 18–19).

the Böckenförde theorem, dictum, dilemma or paradox.<sup>61</sup> It reads: “the liberal, secularized state lives by prerequisites which it cannot guarantee itself.”<sup>62</sup> This means that it needs the ultimate criteria for its existence: freedom, truth, goodness and, above all, justice. Their source is not democracy, for its fundamental principle is, after all, the rule of majority. Since Immanuel Kant, numerous philosophers have proposed that this source is the “pure insight of reason.” In our own times, the source is located either in the nation, or in the “working people of the cities and countryside,” or in the race, or in the leader. However, as history shows, even such a thing as “pure reason” does not exist; the state has its foundation from outside through reason, which has matured on the basis of historical religious traditions.<sup>63</sup>

The most universal and rational religious tradition, according to Ratzinger, has proved to be the Christian faith. Even in our own times, it offers to reason the basic moral insight, indispensable for the rational moral measure in the life of society.<sup>64</sup> Christianity can fulfil this role especially today, when it has overcome the temptation to become tightly related with the state and the temptation to create a Christian state.<sup>65</sup> That is why, Ratzinger in his conversation with Seewald echoed Böckenförde’s paradox: “democratic society lives thanks

<sup>61</sup> He seems to make his earliest reference in an essay with the distinctive title: *A Christian Orientation in a Pluralistic Democracy?...*, op. cit., p. 206 (J. Ratzinger, *O niezbywalności chrześcijaństwa we współczesnym świecie*, op. cit., p. 244).

<sup>62</sup> The *Böckenförde-Paradox* was first reported in the lecture *Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation* (The Emergence of the State as a Consequence of the Secularisation Process) of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (d. 2019), German philosopher of constitutional and administrative law, judge of the *Bundesverfassungsgericht*, at the *Ebracher Ferienseminar* held in 1964 (first published in the collection E. Forsthoff, *Säkularisation und Utopie. Ebracher Studien. Ernst Forsthoff zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 1967, pp. 75–94). The lecture was addressed to a Catholic audience, to whom Böckenförde had explained the process of the formation of a secular, and therefore no longer Christian, state; the lecture was delivered before 1965, i.e. before the promulgation of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. See E.-W. Böckenförde, *Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation*, [in:] E.-W. Böckenförde, *Recht, Staat, Freiheit. Studien zur Rechtsphilosophie, Staatstheorie und Verfassungsgeschichte*, Frankfurt 1991, pp. 92–114.

<sup>63</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, transl. M. Miller, San Francisco 2018, p. 147 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Prawda, wartości, władza. Kiedy społeczeństwo można uznać za pluralistyczne*, transl. G. Sowinski, Kraków 1999, p. 83); cf. T. Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith...*, op. cit., p. 158 (T. Rowland, *Wiara Ratzingera...*, op. cit., p. 191).

<sup>64</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 147 (J. Ratzinger, *Prawda, wartości, władza*, op. cit., pp. 83–84).

<sup>65</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 147 (J. Ratzinger, *Prawda, wartości, władza*, op. cit., p. 84).

to forces that it cannot generate on its own” and will add that Christianity possesses these forces.

The Church is not an organisation among others or a sort of state within a state that would thus have to be formed in exactly the same way as the state according to the same democratic rules of the game. She is something different, a spiritual power, as it were. She has her social and organisational form, but in essence she is a source of energy that provides what the state can't have of itself.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, Ratzinger emphasised in his essay *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow* that the Old Continent cannot do without showing the face of God as revealed to us – a God full of mercy for the poor and the weak; a God who became man and who, suffering with us, gives dignity to suffering and illuminates it with hope. If we fail to do this, we betray Europe's identity and become incapable of dialogue with others. “For the world's cultures, and especially for Islam, the absolute secularism that has spread in the West is something profoundly alien. [...]. This is why cultural pluralism is a call for us to delve anew within ourselves.”<sup>67</sup>

Assimilating the Böckenförde paradox, Ratzinger will contrast in several different texts the words: “interior” and “exterior.” The interior is to be Christianity, which, while respecting the essence of the state and its freedom, is to recognise itself as a community of convictions, in other words: “a community based on convictions.” At the same time, the Church is to be “exterior” to the State. Only then are both the State and the Church truly what they should be. The Church, like the State, must remain in its place and within its boundaries. It must respect the essence of the State and its own freedom – it is in this way that it can do the State the service it really needs.<sup>68</sup>

Peter Seewald, in his monumental book *Benedict XVI. A Life* recalls that the question of the conditions for a democratic state became the subject of Ratzinger's debate “with the formerly neo-Marxist sociologist” Jürgen Habermas. This debate about “pre-political moral foundations of a liberal state” (*Vorpolitische moralische Grundlagen eines freiheitlichen Staates*) took place on 19 January 2004

<sup>66</sup> J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Salt of the Earth...*, op. cit., p. 272 (J. Ratzinger, P. Seewald, *Sól ziemi...*, op. cit., p. 233); cf. the abbreviated version in: J. Ratzinger, *A Turning Point for Europe?*..., op. cit., p. 141 (J. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie...*, op. cit., p. 126).

<sup>67</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 33 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., pp. 31–32).

<sup>68</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, op. cit., p. 105 (J. Ratzinger, *Prawda, wartości, władza*, op. cit., p. 84).



in the building of the Catholic Academy in Munich.<sup>69</sup> “The starting point for the disputation with Habermas was a statement by the former constitutional court judge Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, a brother of Ratzinger’s former assistant Werner Böckenförde. [...] “The liberal secularized state depends on assumptions it cannot itself guarantee.” In essence, then, the two thinkers agreed to talk about “whether the democratic state succeeded in basing its standards on secular reason alone” or “whether religion was really needed as a pre-political authority.” It was not particularly difficult to predict which position Ratzinger would take. “But the debate really became exciting when Habermas, a last representative of the left-wing Frankfurt School, proved to be in complete agreement with Ratzinger in rejecting an anti-religious society.” As the “pugnacious spokesman for the Enlightenment [Habermas]” argued, where the measure of everything is money, religion can “set values for fulfilling the human task of preserving the creation.” Habermas considered Christianity “particularly fitted for this role”; he had even earlier stressed that the “egalitarian universalism from which the ideas of freedom and living together in solidarity sprang, is a direct legacy of Jewish justice and the Christian ethic of love,” which has “no alternative.” “Unfortunately, this awareness was getting lost and giving way to a ‘narrow-minded Enlightenment’, which rejected faith and religion as ‘irrational’. For and open, rational discussion the contributions ‘of religious as well as non-religious citizens’ were needed, Habermas told [...]. That also went for morally complex questions as abortion, euthanasia or pre-natal genetic modification.”<sup>70</sup>

Ratzinger’s significant achievement is the application of Böckenförde’s theorem to the analysis of the condition of contemporary liberal democracies. In *Truth, Values, Power: Touchstones of Pluralistic Society* (1993), Ratzinger noted that democracy seems inseparable from relativism. There is no ultimate truth, no one can claim to be the proclaimer of truth, only opinions are admissible; one human nature and the rights derived from it are undermined. “It is relativism

<sup>69</sup> The text of the conference delivered by Cardinal Ratzinger entitled: *That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2007, pp. 47–66 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Co podtrzymuje świat. Moralne i wyprzedzające politykę podstawy państwa*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, transl. S. Czerwik, Kielce 2005, pp. 65–79).

<sup>70</sup> P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life*, vol. 2: *Professor and Prefect to Pope and Pope Emeritus 1966–The Present*, London 2021, pp. 300–301 [Kindle]; cf. P. Seewald, *Benedykt XVI. Życie*, op. cit., pp. 700–701; see Z. Teinert, *Habermas i Ratzinger: wiara i wiedza w dobie sekularyzacji* [Habermas and Ratzinger: Faith and Knowledge in the Age of Secularisation], “Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne” 20 (2006), pp. 151–168; J.M. Carr, *Catholicism and Liberal Democracy: Forgotten Roots and Future Prospects*, Washington, DC 2023, pp. 191–206.

that appears to be the real guarantee of freedom.”<sup>71</sup> In his homily during the Mass *Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice*, given on 18 April 2005 at the beginning of the conclave, Cardinal Ratzinger puts it more bluntly: Europe is building “a dictatorship of relativism”:<sup>72</sup> the postmodern relativity of everything has become the principle of the Old Continent’s politics, tolerance is the highest virtue, while the Christian legacy that has defined it for at least 1,500 years, a battlefield. If Europe wants to survive, the Cardinal stressed in a conference presented on 13 May 2004 in the Italian Senate, it needs “a new – and certainly a critical and humble – acceptance of itself.”<sup>73</sup> The pluralism that is being spread with such fervour consists, in the first place, in rejecting with a self-hatred what is one’s own, in fleeing from one’s own values and Christian legacy. “But multiculturalism cannot exist without shared constants, without points of reference based on one’s own values. It surely cannot exist without respect for what is sacred.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> See the chapter *Relativism as a Precondition of Democracy* in the book: J. Ratzinger, *Faith and Politics*, transl. M. Miller, San Francisco 2018, pp. 131–133 (Polish edition: J. Ratzinger, *Relatywizm jako przesłanka demokracji?*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Prawda, wartości, władza*, op. cit., pp. 61–87 [especially 64–66]).

<sup>72</sup> This seems to have been the first use of this famous phrase (see J. Ratzinger, *Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice*, [https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice\\_20050418\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html) [access: 14.11.2023]). In the extended interview Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, transl. M.J. Miller, A.J. Walker, San Francisco 2010, a whole section was entitled *The Dictatorship of Relativism* (pp. 61–70). This theme apparently recurred in: Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings*, January 8, 2007, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070108\\_diplomatic-corps.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070108_diplomatic-corps.html) [access: 14.11.2023]; Benedict XVI, *General Audience. John of Salisbury*, December 16, 2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20091216.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20091216.html) [access: 14.11.2023]; Benedict XVI, *Homily, Bellahouston Park, Glasgow*, September 16, 2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100916\\_glasgow.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100916_glasgow.html) [access: 14.11.2023]. See: S. Jaśkiewicz, *Relatywizm – od idei do dyktatury. Wybrane zagadnienia z nauczania kard. Josepha Ratzingera – papieża Benedykta XVI* [Relativism – From Idea to Dictatorship. Selected Issues from the Teaching of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI], “Częstochowskie Studia Teologiczne” 34 (2006), pp. 15–25; B. Gienza, *Kościół wobec dyktatury relatywizmu* [The Church against the Dictatorship of Relativism], “Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 16/1 (2008), pp. 89–103; J. Warzeszak, “Dyktatura” relatywizmu w ujęciu Benedykta XVI [Benedict XVI’s Approach to the “Dictatorship” of Relativism], “Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne” 24/1 (2011), pp. 291–322.

<sup>73</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 33 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., pp. 31–32).

<sup>74</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 33 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., pp. 31–32).

The paradox of Böckenförde has been repeatedly attacked by liberal political philosophers (Gerhard Czermak, Michael Haus, Gerhard Himmelman).<sup>75</sup> In 2021, they were joined by Chantal Delsol from France, a well-known Catholic philosopher. In her book *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego. Inwersja normatywna i nowa era* [The End of the Christian World. Normative Inversion and a New Era],<sup>76</sup> she wrote: “The secular liberal state is based on assumptions that it cannot guarantee by itself”<sup>77</sup> and referred to the legacy of Christian principles. In French Catholic thought, she recalled, long before the German constitutionalist, the liberal state was accused of “parasitising” on these principles, appropriating them and destroying them at the same time. Charles Péguy even compared ungrateful and unfaithful post-Enlightenment modernity to a clergyman who has abandoned the priesthood and taken his furniture with him, and to a cuckoo who shamelessly lays its eggs in the nests of other birds.<sup>78</sup> “I have a different perspective on these issues,”<sup>79</sup> argued Delsol. “Modern people realise that their world is full of rules that they somehow unconsciously use, and in doing so they no longer know them, have no control over them and are not convinced by them.”<sup>80</sup> Although the modern state came into being by liberating itself from the influence of religion, it relied on its religious legacy, according to the paradox. “Must the only conclusion be to recognise that the state is a parasite, a thief and a hypocrite, and by this fact is dramatically immoral? Does this thought mean that its days are numbered?”<sup>81</sup>

Analysing these vicissitudes of French political thought and posing her question, however, Delsol does not predict the end of the liberal state, but of “the end of Christian civilisation” (see the book’s title). The arguments presented

<sup>75</sup> E.-W. Böckenförde, *Freiheit ist ansteckend* [Interview with Joachim Frank], “Frankfurter Rundschau” November 2, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20101104053317/http://www.fr-online.de/kultur/debatte/-freiheit-ist-ansteckend-/-/1473340/4795176/-/index.html> [access: 14.11.2023]: “From the point of view of the state,” said Böckenförde, “the liberal order needs a unifying ethos [...] of those who live in the state. The question then arises: what feeds this ethos, which can neither be enforced nor enforced by the state? One might say: first and foremost from a living culture. But what are the factors and elements of this culture? This brings us to sources such as Christianity, the Enlightenment and humanism.” Which source is primary, Böckenförde was not asked.

<sup>76</sup> Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego. Inwersja normatywna i nowa era* [The End of the Christian World. Normative Inversion and a New Era], transl. P. Napiwodzki, Kraków 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>78</sup> Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, op. cit., pp. 139 and 142.

<sup>79</sup> Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>80</sup> Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, op. cit., p. 142.

are intended to support her thesis of this very end. She believes that the fact of appropriating other, earlier principles is the usual way in which successive societies behave. Each new epoch makes use of the legacy of its predecessors, building on what it has taken over and at the same time turning against it. Often these hypothetical epochs do not acknowledge this legacy, distorting the meaning of what they have taken over, even degenerate what they have inherited. Professor Delsol believes that a good illustration of this phenomenon is the palimpsest – a new manuscript on a parchment from which the previous text has been removed.<sup>82</sup>

One can assume that the mechanism of the reception of tradition looks resembles Chantal Delsol's description. In the Böckenförde paradox and its interpretation by Joseph Ratzinger (Delsol never refers to Ratzinger's analyses in her book), however, it is not the mechanism that is important, but two other specific issues. Firstly, the liberal state does not derive its so-called fundamental values from the majority rule (by negotiation; these values cannot be established by voting). Therefore, the state derives them from elsewhere. Secondly, in the Euro-Atlantic world, the state finds the whole range of these values in Christianity (e.g. justice, equality, mercy, forgiveness, the sense of suffering) and by referring to them it was able to create an original concept of human rights that is unknown elsewhere. This was already signalled by John Paul II in *Memory and Identity*, when he noted that the

"European Enlightenment not only led to the carnage of the French Revolution, but also bore positive fruits, such as the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, values which are rooted in the Gospel. Even when proclaimed independently, these ideas point naturally to their proper origin. Hence, the French Enlightenment prepared the way for a better understanding of human rights. Of course, the Revolution violated these rights in many ways. Yet this was also the time when human rights began to be properly acknowledged."<sup>83</sup>

In this sense, too, it would be defeatist to predict the end of Christian civilisation.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Ch. Delsol, *Koniec świata chrześcijańskiego...*, op. cit., pp. 145–148.

<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, op. cit., p. 90 (Jan Paweł II, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, op. cit., pp. 111–112).

## Conclusions and implications

[1] In 2002, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as prefect signed the *Doctrinal Note on Certain Aspects of the Activities and Conduct of Catholics in Political Life*. Although officially a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it contains numerous elements and practical conclusions from the cardinal's reflections on the foundations of politics in the light of Catholic social teaching. Democracy is praised as "the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices."<sup>84</sup> The need for the greatest possible participation of lay Catholics in political life is emphasised. When acting in this space, however, they are particularly called upon to reject the "a conception of pluralism that reflects moral relativism."<sup>85</sup> The *Note* also provides an excellent summary of Ratzinger's critique of this concept:

A kind of cultural relativism exists today, evident in the conceptualization and defence of an ethical pluralism, which sanctions the decadence and disintegration of reason and the principles of the natural moral law. Furthermore, it is not unusual to hear the opinion expressed in the public sphere that such ethical pluralism is the very condition for democracy. As a result, citizens claim complete autonomy with regard to their moral choices, and lawmakers maintain that they are respecting this freedom of choice by enacting laws which ignore the principles of natural ethics and yield to ephemeral cultural and moral trends, as if every possible outlook on life were of equal value. [...] The history of the twentieth century demonstrates that those citizens were right who recognized the falsehood of relativism, and with it, the notion that there is no moral law rooted in the nature of the human person, which must govern our understanding of man, the common good and the state.<sup>86</sup>

[2] The document also addresses an issue particularly close to Ratzinger: the question of the values that should guide the formation of political life. It is thus recalled that these are values and "ethical precepts are rooted in human nature itself and belong to the natural moral law."<sup>87</sup> It is not, therefore, "a question

<sup>84</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Vatican City 2002, no. 3, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20021124\\_politica\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html) [access: 14.11.2023].

<sup>85</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 5.

of ‘values’ per se”<sup>88</sup> although the Church transmits them in her legacy, by her teaching she

confirms and defends them always and everywhere as part of her service to the truth about man and about the common good of civil society. Moreover, it cannot be denied that politics must refer to principles of absolute value precisely because these are at the service of the dignity of the human person and of true human progress.<sup>89</sup>

The principle of “secularism” or “laicity” of the State, often invoked today, implies the autonomy of the political sphere from the religious and ecclesiastical sphere. It is also a principle accepted by the Church as a legacy developed by our civilisation on the foundation of the Gospel (“render...”), differentiating it, for example, from Islamic civilisation. Consequently, “the recognition of civil and political rights, as well as the allocation of public services may not be made dependent upon citizens’ religious convictions or activities.”<sup>90</sup> However, it does not imply autonomy with regard to moral principles. “The fact that some of these truths may also be taught by the Church does not lessen the political legitimacy or the rightful ‘autonomy’ of the contribution of those citizens who are committed to them.”<sup>91</sup> For secularism understood as autonomy implies an attitude of respect for the principles and truths flowing from the natural knowledge of human beings living in the community, regardless of the fact that these truths are also part of the teaching of a particular religion. The duty of the Church’s Magisterium in this regard is to form consciences, especially of those involved in political activity. It is a contribution to the work so that, through politics, a social order more just and corresponding to human dignity is established.<sup>92</sup>

[3] In a word, relativism is detrimental to democratic life, which needs a true and solid foundation in the form of ethical principles which are “non-negotiable.”<sup>93</sup> All “those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a ‘grave and clear obligation to oppose’ any law that attacks human life.”<sup>94</sup> Catholics working in

<sup>88</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 6.

<sup>91</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 6.

<sup>93</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 4 (after John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 73).

the public sphere, on the other hand, should know that a special responsibility rests with them in those areas where the integral good of the human person is at stake, i.e. fundamental and indisputable ethical requirements.<sup>95</sup> Today, this mainly concerns:

- civil legislation on abortion and euthanasia (the latter should not be confused with the morally permissible treatment abandonment), which should protect the fundamental right to life from the moment of conception until one's natural death;

- respect for and protection of the human rights of the embryo;

- protection and development of the family based on monogamous marriage between persons of different sexes. Its unity and permanence, threatened by modern laws permitting divorce, must be safeguarded. In no way can other forms of cohabitation be legally equated with the family, nor can they receive legal recognition as such;

- freedom for parents to raise their own children;

- social protection of minors and the liberation of victims of contemporary forms of slavery;

- “the right to religious freedom and the development of an economy that is at the service of the human person and of the common good, with respect for social justice.”<sup>96</sup> In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, published in 2009, Benedict XVI formulated a rationale to help people face current social and economic problems more effectively: the widening gap between rich and poor, dependence on new global economic powers and threats from hard-to-control financial markets. He called for a rediscovery of fundamental ethical values. Ethics does not lie outside the economy, it is its inner principle. An exclusive focus on profit, when it is achieved by reprehensible means and not with the common good as its ultimate goal, creates incalculable risks – “social systems had been established which made the needy become dependents.”<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said without a doubt that Joseph Ratzinger was a prominent Catholic systematic theologian, apologist and visionary with regard to

<sup>95</sup> Cf. H. Seweryniak, *Apologia i dziennikarstwo*, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>96</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note...*, op. cit., no. 4.

<sup>97</sup> P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life*, p. 511 [Kindle]; cf. P. Seewald, *Benedykt XVI. Życie*, op. cit., p. 874.

the foundations of politics. By examining the source Christian writings, the Bavarian thinker pointed to their characteristic rejection of political messianism. He saw the danger of the return of this messianism in the radical currents of contemporary liberation theology. Ratzinger extracted further aspects of the Christian approach to politics from the Epistles to the Romans, 1 Peter and 1 Timothy. Their authors, encouraging the first generations of Christians to pray for kings and for all those in authority, so that a quiet and peaceful life could be lived, applied the faith-based model of existence in an unjust state, fighting what is amoral with what is moral. Following in the footsteps of the political ethics of the prophet Jeremiah, they showed, on the one hand, that “one can build up only by building up”; on the other hand, they compared the Roman Empire to Babylon, conveying the unequivocal message that Christian obedience ends where the ruler takes the place of God. In this context, Ratzinger emphasises the inalienable character of martyrdom and the evangelical “great hope” in curbing the temptation of the state to turn into a secular religion.

Ratzinger devoted much of his political theology to interpreting the key logion: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). He argued that Jesus “cut in two” the knot of the legal, moral and cultic order, which ensured the binding character of state laws as an expression of the divine will. The Enlightenment faced the necessity of cutting the knot anew, this time in the Christian world. Ratzinger did not believe that by promoting the separation of Church and State, the Enlightenment had accomplished something new and revolutionary. He argued that it rather had merely unveiled a model of this separation rooted in the Gospel. The primary task of Christians should henceforth be “to maintain this balance of a dual system as the foundation for freedom.”

Ratzinger strongly advocated the conciliar vision of the autonomy of earthly realities in the sphere of politics as well, rejected the vision of a Christian state and refused to give validity to the postulate of secular government according to the “principles of revealed truth.” He believed, however, that it was an important task for both the state and the churches to implement correctly the principle of separation and reciprocity, and above all to give a profound ethical dimension to politics. Deeply convinced that the greatest threat to this task is the contemporary “dictatorship of relativism,” he contrasted it with the “Böckenförde paradox,” which is the observation that a democratic system only functions if it is based on accepted and defined fundamental values, whose source is outside the system, because their adoption cannot be determined by the will of the majority. Thus, although the modern state came into being by liberating itself from the influence of religion, it had to rely on a religious heritage, according



to the “Böckenförde paradox.” The most universal and rational heritage is the Christian faith, which offers a moral insight to the reason. Christianity can fulfil its mission especially today, when it has overcome the temptation of a “marriage” with the state.

However, Benedict XVI had no illusions about the effectiveness of this mission. He reminded us that we became a minority, a small flock. The Church, as a minority, must be able to effectively actualise its great values, and Christians should “contribute to Europe’s recovery of the best of its heritage and thus to the service of all mankind.”<sup>98</sup> This was an important point of the new evangelisation promoted by the Pope. Perhaps the most important.

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<sup>98</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, op. cit., p. 34 (J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Jej duchowe podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro*, op. cit., pp. 31–32).

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## Ratzinger, il Mozart della teologia\*

Ratzinger, the Mozart of Theology

Ratzinger, Mozart teologii

**E**minentissimo e Reverendissimo Cardinale Pietro Parolin, Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede; Eminenze, Eccellenze; caro Padre Federico Lombardi, Presidente della Fondazione Ratzinger, così come tutti i membri di questa illustre istituzione e anche precedenti vincitori di questo premio; *querida familia*; fratelli nel sacerdozio, signore e signori:

Innanzitutto, vorrei ringraziare il Santo Padre Papa Francesco e tutti coloro che sono intervenuti per l'assegnazione di questo premio, che non vedo come qualcosa di personale ma come qualcosa simbolica e collettiva. Mi sembra che sia, innanzitutto, un premio per la teologia in lingua spagnola o castigliana, che ha già dato qualche frutto nel corso dei secoli, sia nel mio Paese che in America Latina. Lo considero anche un premio per i miei insegnanti della facoltà teologica dell'Università di Navarra, dove il nostro amato Joseph Ratzinger è stato nominato dottore *honoris causa* nel 1998, ormai venticinque anni fa. Per inciso: il traduttore che lo accompagnò per tutta la settimana – il professor Enrique Banús, oggi nell'Università di Piura, in Lima – disse che, in tutto quel tempo a Pamplona – una settimana –, il cardinale bavarese non parlò mai di sé...

Quindi, ho imparato tutto da quella generazione di professori di teologia navarri, e l'elenco potrebbe continuare fino alla noia, nel tentativo di non dimenticare nessuno. E comunque, chi ha detto che siamo nani sulle spalle di giganti?

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\* Discorso pronunciato alla consegna del Premio Ratzinger, nella Sala Reggia del Palazzo Apostolico, in Città del Vaticano, il 30 di novembre de 2023.

Mi viene chiesto di fare una serie di considerazioni sull'importanza della teologia di Joseph Ratzinger Benedetto XVI, e sinceramente penso che il compito sia al di là delle mie possibilità. Penso che sarebbe più fattibile per me ripercorrere il mio apprendistato con colui che considero il mio grande maestro in teologia, e cercherò di trarre alcune conclusioni da questo percorso. Spero in ogni caso che questo non sia visto come un atto di narcisismo ma di gratitudine.

Tutto è cominciato qui, in queste amate terre italiane, la Bella Italia, quando sono venuto a terminare gli studi di teologia, fare la licenza in filosofia, e a scrivere una tesi di dottorato con il professor Francesco Russo alla Pontificia Università della Santa Croce su un filosofo esistenzialista di nome Luigi Pareyson, non molto conosciuto fuori dell'Italia, ma che ha avuto discepoli famosi come Umberto Eco e Gianni Vattimo, anche se questi non ne hanno seguito purtroppo del tutto l'ispirazione cristiana. Speriamo comunque bene anche per loro...

L'argomento che mi occupava allora era l'estetica e l'ermeneutica dell'arte in Pareyson, ma questa ricerca è stata anche un invito ad imparare qualcosa sull'idealismo e sull'esistenzialismo tedeschi<sup>1</sup>. Così, quando anni dopo lessi l'*Introduzione al cristianesimo* di Ratzinger all'inizio dei miei studi universitari di teologia dogmatica, ritrovai un linguaggio affine a quella *Weltanschauung* esistenzialista con cui avevo familiarità. Lì ho trovato in parte le risposte alle domande poste da Fëdor Dostoevskij, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger o Nikolai Berdiaev, tra altri.

Così, nel teologo bavarese mi è sembrato di scoprire anche un esistenzialista e un ermeneuta (come ha dimostrato Dorothea Kaes nella sua dissertazione)<sup>2</sup>, sia nella sua squisita cortesia nel dialogo con i colleghi, sia nella sua concezione della teologia come interpretazione della fede, in cui è contenuta la verità. "Ricco di conoscenze ed esperienze – ricorda Bruno Forte –, Ratzinger non si impone mai, mette anzi il suo interlocutore a proprio agio, ne sollecita la parola e l'espressione sincera del pensiero per quanto possa essere diverso e distante del suo"<sup>3</sup>. Così, mentre il teologo Ratzinger è visto come un autore che tratta con attenzione il fondamento biblico e storico dei suoi sviluppi teologici (e in

<sup>1</sup> P. Blanco-Sarto, *Formazione e interpretazione dell'opera d'arte. Estetica ed ermeneutica in Luigi Pareyson (1918-1991)*, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Rome 1997; P. Blanco-Sarto, *Hacer arte, interpretar el arte. Estética y hermenéutica en Luigi Pareyson (1918-1991)*, Pamplona 1998.

<sup>2</sup> See D. Kaes, *Theologie im Anspruch von Geschichte und Wahrheit*, Dissertationen Theologische Reihe 75, St. Ottilien 1997.

<sup>3</sup> B. Forte, *Joseph Ratzinger: la profondità, lo stile, l'umanità*, [in:] *Joseph Ratzinger. Il mite custode della fede. Tra verità e carità*, a cura di R. Cutaia, M. Albergante, Torino 2022, p. 260.

effetti è così), non tutti sono consapevoli della dimensione vitale, esistenziale ed ermeneutica del suo pensiero.

È vero che il professore a Bonn, Münster, Tubinga oppure Ratisbona non è riuscito a coronare la sua opera con una grande dogmatica, come ogni teologo tedesco si vanta di fare. Ma l'essersi dedicato ad alcuni compiti pastorali nella Chiesa ha dato al suo pensiero una dimensione pratica, un realismo e una visione che potremmo definire panoramica. Questo è ciò che ho potuto apprezzare quando ho iniziato a scrivere la mia tesi di dottorato, questa volta in teologia. Ho trovato un realismo che mi ha affascinato, oltre a un linguaggio pienamente accessibile, persino poetico e musicale. Si dice che Joseph Ratzinger Benedetto XVI sia il Mozart della teologia, e credo di aver sentito quella melodia, piena non solo di grazia e leggerezza ma anche di drammatica profondità...

Allora ho studiato un tema che sarebbe stato cruciale nel suo pontificato, cioè il rapporto tra fede e ragione nel cristianesimo. Credo sia stata un'intuizione profetica del mio relatore di tesi, don José Morales, anch'egli esperto di John Henry Newman e circa l'Islam, che mi disse in modo indimenticabile, con la sua caratteristica concisione, quando dovevo scegliere tra uno degli autori in lingua tedesca: "Ratzinger, ecco un teologo!" Il rapporto tra fede e ragione è un tema centrale del suo pensiero, che dai primi scritti del 1959 attraversa tutta la sua opera, compresi i discorsi di Ratisbona e quello mai pronunciato *alla Sapienza*.

Non credo che quei momenti tristi – causati dal radicalismo di matrice islamica o secolarista – facessero sperare in un lieto fine della sua diagnosi profetica. Tuttavia, dopo le parole pronunciate a Ratisbona, il dialogo tra cattolici e musulmani è cresciuto esponenzialmente, fino agli incontri anche di Papa Francesco con i leader del mondo musulmano (come la Dichiarazione di Abu Dhabi del 2019), mentre – d'altra parte – penso che non sia stata ancora resa giustizia alla rivoluzionaria e romana affermazione che filosofia e teologia sono "sorelle gemelle", e non semplicemente che la prima dovrebbe essere l'*ancilla* della seconda. Un'affermazione che, a mio avviso, deve ancora essere meditata in tutta la sua profondità<sup>4</sup>.

Poi, su suggerimento della professoressa Jutta Burggraf, illustre teologa tedesca ed esperta in ecumenismo alla nostra università, ho iniziato a studiare tutto il suo pensiero per settori: la verità e l'amore, la persona e la Chiesa, Cristo e Maria, e tanti altri grandi temi che emergono da questi nuclei intimi<sup>5</sup>. Qui devo fare

<sup>4</sup> P. Blanco-Sarto, *Joseph Ratzinger. Razón y cristianismo. La victoria de la inteligencia en el mundo de las religiones*, Madrid 2005. Prólogo de José Morales; si veda anche la mia edizione di Benedicto XVI, *Razón, islam y cristianismo. Los discursos de Ratisbona y La Sapienza*, ed. P. Blanco-Sarto, Madrid 2023.

<sup>5</sup> P. Blanco-Sarto, *La teología de Joseph Ratzinger. Una introducción*, Madrid 2011; P. Blanco-Sarto, *Teología, Vaticano II y Evangelización según Joseph Ratzinger / Benedicto XVI*.

una nuova confessione personale, che mi riporta al mio soggiorno a Monaco, la città di Joseph Ratzinger. Mi ero recato lì per studiare l'Eucaristia, il ministero e l'ecclesiologia nel dialogo cattolico-luterano, come mi aveva suggerito il professor José Ramón Villar, ecclesiologo ed ecumenista di illustre memoria che oggi anche ci manca<sup>6</sup>. Lì sono stato ospite onorato dai professori luterani Gunther Wenz e Wolfhart Pannenberg (questo vorrebbe anche essere un omaggio alla sua persona *in memoriam*), e ringrazio anche questa generosità ecumenica. Quest'ultimo – Pannenberg – mi ha espresso il suo dispiacere per il fatto che il suo interlocutore in campo cattolico (cioè, Ratzinger) fosse stato portato a Roma come prefetto dell'allora Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede...

Mentre proseguivo questi studi, non potevo tuttavia fare a meno di approfondire la vita e il pensiero dell'autore bavarese che avevo studiato nella mia tesi di teologia. Così ho dedicato il tempo libero tra un testo di Lutero e l'altro (o di altri teologi luterani) a leggere di più su Ratzinger, sia dal punto di vista storico-biografico che teologico. Mi è servito come pausa. Inoltre, poiché mi sono reso conto che durante il suo pontificato Benedetto XVI non era molto conosciuto dai media, ho anche deciso di pubblicare un testo biografico che contribuisse a farlo conoscere meglio<sup>7</sup>. Perché, d'accordo con Tertulliano, ho pensato che “si finisce di odiare quando si finisce di ignorare”; o, per dirla in modo positivo con le parole di Leonardo Da Vinci: “un grande amore è figlio di una grande conoscenza”...

Così ho trovato una sintesi armoniosa, al ritmo di Mozart. “Ratzinger”, ha detto Olegario González de Cardedal (l'unico spagnolo prima di noi due a ricevere il Premio Ratzinger, con cui ci sentiamo in buona compagnia), “è sempre stato un maestro per il quale la ragione e il rigore, la dimostrazione e il dialogo erano in primo piano”, che “si è sempre preoccupato del legame tra dogma e predicazione, verità e vita, esercitandoli lui stesso nelle sue omelie e nei cicli di messaggi radiofonici”<sup>8</sup>. (Come si direbbe adesso, Ratzinger è stato anche un *influencer*...) La sua teologia copre tutti i campi del sapere teologico; ogni

*Nuevos estudios*, Pamplona 2013. Prefazione di Pedro Rodríguez.

<sup>6</sup> P. Blanco-Sarto, *La Cena del Señor. La Eucaristia en el diálogo católico-luterano después del Concilio Vaticano II*, Colección Teológica 119, Pamplona 2009; P. Blanco-Sarto, *Ministri Ecclesiae. Eucaristia, ministerio y ecclesiología en el diálogo católico-luterano*, Bibliotheca Oecumenica Salmanticensis 38, Salamanca 2017. Prefazione di monsignor Adolfo González Montes.

<sup>7</sup> P. Blanco-Sarto, *Benedicto XVI, el papa alemán*, Barcellona 2010, 2a edizione, Città del Messico 2011. Prefazione di Josep-Ignasi Saranyana; trad. port.: P. Blanco-Sarto, *Bento XVI – O Papa Alemão*, 2 voll., trad. R. Albino de Assunção, C. Colera Berna, São Paulo 2019; P. Blanco-Sarto, *Benedicto XVI. La biografía*, Madrid 2019, 2a edizione 2020, 3a edizione 2023.

<sup>8</sup> O. González de Cardedal, *Ratzinger y Juan Pablo II*, Salamanca 2005, p. 114.



sezione di una biblioteca teologica ha un suo libro. Ma c'è anche sempre l'unità organica in tutto il suo pensiero. Come afferma Scott W. Hahn, Ratzinger è un pensatore “piuttosto sinfonico”, mentre Joseph Murphy ha fatto appello alla *inner consistency* dei suoi scritti<sup>9</sup>.

Anche, a mio avviso, nei suoi libri sono sempre presenti equilibrio e serenità, qualità che permettono di scoprire con intelligenza i punti di forza e di debolezza del suo interlocutore. In questo senso, Ratzinger mi ha guidato anche nei miei studi ecumenici, perché sa riconoscere tutto ciò che di positivo e utile c'è in Lutero, ad esempio, e allo stesso tempo individua con chiarezza gli aspetti differenziatori. Il suo è un pensiero con radici e ampiezza, come se fossi un albero frondoso. Si basa, insomma – secondo un arcivescovo delle Asturie – su fede, ragione e bellezza, come suoi tre pilastri principali: “una fede che ha ragioni e una ragione che diventa credente; una profondità che si esprime con semplicità perché attinge alla migliore tradizione della Chiesa, e una bellezza che suscita stupore per la verità e adesione al bene”<sup>10</sup>.

Il resto lo ha fatto il nostro stesso teologo, di cui ogni giorno aumentano gli studiosi, soprattutto tra gli studenti di teologia ma anche in altre discipline accademiche. Ricevo quasi tutti i giorni qualche domanda – da laici e religiosi, sacerdoti e seminaristi – sul suo pensiero e sulla sua teologia, il che mi fa sospettare che ciò migliore di Ratzinger debba ancora venire... Non è solo un grande teologo del passato, ma anche una promessa per il futuro. Una teologia a cavallo tra due millenni, che raccoglie il meglio di tutta la tradizione della Chiesa, del concilio Vaticano II e del pensiero del XX secolo, e lo proietta verso l'inizio del nostro secolo.

Credo che Papa Francesco lo abbia spiegato molto meglio alla cerimonia di consegna dei Premi Ratzinger dello scorso anno: “Inoltre tutti sentiamo la sua presenza spirituale e il suo accompagnamento nella preghiera per la Chiesa intera: quegli occhi contemplativi che sempre mostra. Ma questa occasione è importante per riaffermare che anche il contributo della sua opera teologica e più in generale del suo pensiero continua ad essere fecondo e operante”. È vero che ci ha lasciato e oggi senz'altro ci manca. Ma ora penso che la sua compagnia, il suo sguardo contemplativo da un po' più dall'alto, continuerà a illuminarci in questo entusiasmante e un po' rischioso inizio del terzo millennio.

<sup>9</sup> S.W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion. The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Grand Rapids, MI 2009, p. 16; cfr. J. Murphy, *Christ Our Joy. The Theological Vision of Pope Benedict XVI*, San Francisco, CA 2008, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> J. Sanz Montes, *Prólogo. La estela de las sandalias de Pedro*, [in:] J.L. Restán, *Diario de un pontificado*, Madrid 2008, pp. 11–12.

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## Homily on the Day of Benedict XVI's Funeral, Cathedral of Christ the King, Katowice, 5 January 2023

Homilia w dniu pogrzebu Benedykta XVI – Katowice,  
katedra, 5 stycznia 2023 r.

1 John 3:11–21

John 1:43–51

**B**eloved in Christ the Lord, our Priests, Sisters, Brothers!  
“Children, let us love [...] in truth,” we heard St John’s words just now. It is through love – says the saint – “in deed and truth,” that “we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him.” To love in truth – that’s our task.

*Cooperatores Veritatis*, “Cooperators of the truth” – this was Benedict XVI’s episcopal and papal motto. He took it from the Third Letter of St John. There, in verse 8, the apostle speaks of working together for the truth, becoming “co-workers in the truth,” which was rendered in the Vulgate translation as *cooperatores veritatis*.

The reality of truth was something absolutely fundamental for the late Pope: to put it in John’s terms: he loved us with the truth. That is why I propose that we dedicate these moments, this reflection on the Word of God, to Benedict XVI’s understanding of truth; or rather, to a few theses of his that deal with the contemporary question of truth. I trust this form of our prayer today would have suited the pontiff best.

Christian hope – Benedict XVI said – flows from the fact that faith speaks the truth. This is the essence of the matter. What exactly, he asked, is the ‘Christian longing for truth’? Is it a kind of usurpation stemming from a feeling

of superiority? From a lack of respect and humility towards others? Arrogance stemming from ignorance (dilettantism, a lack of elementary knowledge of the irremediable complications and difficulties of arriving at the truth, granting that truth exists; difficulties that make “arriving at the truth” virtually impossible, and certainly unprovable)? Is it an obscurantists’ assault on tolerance and pluralism? Is truth accessible to man? Is it worth pursuing? Does it promise salvation? Perhaps the contrary is to be believed that t abandonment of the quest for truth is the genuine liberation of man who, freed from this burden, can shake off the never-never world and take matters into his own hands instead?

What is at the core of things? How does reality operate? What is the truth?

The dominant, most vociferous mainstream of modern philosophy holds sceptic (and this is putting it mildly) views on the existence and what follows the human cognition of truth. This scepticism has been expounded since the times of nominalism, through Cartesianism, Kantianism, Enlightenment, 19th and 20th century philosophies up to postmodernism. Also today, science and ethics (public morality) along with the dominant philosophical and political cultures of the West still cling to the conception of truth (and hence of freedom) formulated in the 18th century Enlightenment. And the question of truth, which was once the foundation of universities, is marginalised or even regarded as “unscientific.” The claim to know and express truth that is binding on all in its greatness is denounced as an anachronism – a “bizarre medieval arrogance” – and as such equated with a tendency conducive to all types of fundamentalism.

The vehemence and fervour with which this position is proclaimed and defended along with the accompanying fierce combat against the dissenting opinion (observable especially in the academic and media circles), this missionary, even neophyte zeal with which this position is promoted and considered unchallengeable – make one wonder. Benedict XVI argues that all this is fuelled by the “deeper spiritual levels” which arouse “the suspicion that truth exists” and that it is discoverable/knowable, and as such makes a demand, a dangerous attack on my way of life. “It is against this [intuition of truth] that one must defend oneself with a passion that arises where one is affected in the deepest part of one’s existence.”<sup>1</sup> Spot on. Simply put: the fight against truth translates into fear of conversion.

As it is, we need the presence of Truth at the centre of the world we are building. A world without truth turns into the unpredictable power of relativism

<sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Prawda w teologii* [Truth in Theology], transl. M. Mijalska, Kraków 2001, p. 89.

(which, based on falsehood, sooner or later will occupy the empty space left by truth) coupled with cruel self-interested panegotism (the more camouflaged the more dangerous), where the boundaries between good and evil are set by the stronger or by the opinion of a random (parliamentary) majority. Even Christian love/charity without truth becomes merely a storehouse of good intentions and feelings, useful but marginal, not exceeding the merely sentimental and emotional.

This is why we need a return to what the Pope provocatively called “Christian naivety,” for which the question of truth is still valid, for which knowledge is grounded in truth. We need the old Christian conviction that truth can be known rather than produced, appropriated, seized, used against others, manipulated; it can be known with all humility and a sense of the frailty of that knowledge, as of everything that is human. Truth can be known with the aid of the faith in the Creator and with pride in humanity. There is truth, and this truth is knowable.

The greatest fallacy of relativism is that it *a priori* regards man's blindness to the truth as an insurmountable thing. The Pope wrote thus:

Today it has become an irresistibly forceful prejudice to dismiss as simplistic and at the same time arrogant those who are reputed to believe that they “have” the truth. Such people are supposedly incapable of dialogue and ultimately cannot be taken seriously. For nobody “has” the truth. All of us, the argument goes, can only be searching for it. But – we must reply with another question – what kind of search is this that can never reach a conclusion? [...] It seems to me that we should turn the question about presumption the other way round: Is it not presumption to say that God cannot give us the truth as a gift? That he cannot open our eyes? Does it not show contempt for God to say that, once we have been born blind, truth is not our concern? Is it not a degradation of man and his longing for God to claim that we human beings are merely groping in the dark forever? Hand in hand with this, furthermore, goes the real presumption, namely, that we and we alone would like to take God's place and determine who we are and what we do and what we want to make out of ourselves and of the world. Besides, knowing and searching are not mutually exclusive.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> J. Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2004, Kindle 735–750.

What does it mean then? What then is truth? Who is truth? Let us repeat the most famous question anyone has ever asked: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). The answer: “I am the truth” (John 14:6).

This answer does not exhaust what Christianity has to say about truth; it is also the cornerstone of Christian faith: it is not a beautiful but vague abstract hidden behind the veil of myth, nor a storehouse of positive sentiments, a self-doubtful correction of an imperfect world, a positive idea like any other. No, the Christian faith has a real basis, its hopeful strength comes from the truth. For it is He, the incarnate Divine Logos (each of these three words is relevant here) – the basis of the logic of Christian faith – who is the truth. This is the foundation of everything Christian, and of everything in general. It is one and the same foundation. The Pope wrote: the Christian faith “was not part of a particular cultural tradition, differing from one people to another, but belonged instead to the realm of truth, which concerns everyone equally,”<sup>3</sup> not only to Christians. The Christian faith has access to the deepest, ultimate reality – the truth about how things are. It answers the question of how things really are with me, with us, with the world. For it is not silence – as the Gnostics of all eras want – but the Word (Logos) that is the “ultimate thing” given to us by God.

“For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (John 18:37). To the point that this truth, too, will be the cause of His death: “you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God” (John 8:40). Jesus dies because an attack on the truth has been launched; His obedience is to stand by the truth against the conspiracy of lies. For no lie can ever withstand the truth: it must either repent or gag the prophet’s lips.

And that was exactly the problem of the Great Pope. He was supposed to say what they wanted him to say, what confirmed their views and their way of life; he was supposed to keep silent about what was inconvenient, choosing only some of the puzzle pieces from the Gospel distorted for the needs of (post) modernity... For a fair price, in their opinion: a better PR, postponement of media criticism, turning a blind eye to blunders. Benedict XVI had the courage (and the audacity) to throw in the faces of the powers of modernity a thesis that absolutely must not be proclaimed under the supreme penalty of exclusion, civil death and imprisonment in the dungeon for lunatics. His thesis was: neither modernisation, nor globalisation nor innovation are God; God alone is God. Modernisation is good if it serves a divine cause. Only then will it bring good to man. This is the truth.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 2010, no. 92.

Only this truth liberates... Only the freedom given by truth is true freedom. This is a very important lesson for our world, which longs for freedom, but treats truth as the opposite of freedom. Meanwhile, truth and freedom cannot and must not be divorced from each other because if they are, both are both lost.

Well, Jesus-Truth heard "Take him away, take him away!" (John 19:15). But "Take him away" shouted at the truth ends up badly for those shouting. It is irreplaceable by anything. The Pope quotes Richard von Weizsäcker, President of Germany: "I believe society can only really develop if it is rooted in truth rather than in happiness."

Freedom without truth always turns out, sooner or later, to be the pseudo-freedom of slaves. And it ends up at troughs, feeding on fodder intended for swine, envying them because swine are not subject to the curse of freedom. In the most progressivist places of modernity, troughs with fodder already supersede truth and freedom.

Benedict asks why does becoming true mean becoming good? Why is truth good – a good in itself? Why is it valid in its own right, without the need of a purpose? Why does the very question of truth, devoid of scepticism, arouse such resistance, such fury, and, on the other hand, such devotion on the part of its defenders? Why have the most godless and inhuman empires in the history of the world invariably been based on a gigantic lie? What is there in truth that so attracts the human mind and heart? Who is there (in it)? And he answers that having delved into the essence of truth, we arrive at the concept of God. He is in it.

Finally, let us return to today's Gospel. Philip: "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets" (John 1:45). Nathanael: "*Rabbi*, you are the Son of God" (John 1:49).

This is the truth. This is the truth of our lives: we have found in our lives the Son of God, God Himself! Like Philip and Nathanael. What a Grace has been granted to us.... It has reached us through the corridors of history and genesis, through the streams of blood of the martyrs, through the prayers of our ancestors, through the holiness not ours, but ultimately through the decision of our weak hearts that have been made powerful by Grace.... Why, we could worship the moon, rip open the bellies of sacrificial beasts, or worship the spiritual emptiness in a western city before becoming sacrificed to the deity of euthanasia. On the contrary, we were granted the Grace to find the Son of God... But this Grace was not given to satisfy our pride, but to convert ourselves and others. To be co-workers in the truth.

Amen.

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