

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PURE IN HEART: RATZINGER'S THEOLOGICAL APPROACH AND THE INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

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SUMMARY: I. *The Vision of Faith, Wisdom and Purity of Heart*. II. *Interpretation through the form of Mary-Church*. III. *The Relationship between History and Theology in Ratzinger's thought*. 1. The influence of Bonaventure: History, Reception and subjectivity. 2. Theology and History in *Dei Verbum*: 'Word' and 'Answer'. 3. A Hermeneutics of Continuity, the Church's Memory and Living Tradition. 4. History, Revelation and Multiplicity. IV. *Conclusion*.

In an article in *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Joseph Ratzinger critiques an idea of Karl Rahner's which aims to reduce the traditional formulas of faith to "short formulas".¹ In doing so he reveals an insight into an aspect of his theological approach. For Ratzinger, the tenets of Revelation cannot be reduced to statements that are so clear cut that it would mean that the Church would "measure her language by the standards of secular comprehensibility" or "the *instrumentarium* of consumer economics".² In other words for this *Ressourcement* theologian, theology cannot accommodate itself to the modern turn to prioritise universal reason by reducing itself to a rationalistic positivism. As evident in the work of Immanuel Kant, such a turn separated theological statements from metaphysical truths as well as leading to the separation of theology from the context of faith and Church.³ For Ratzinger, faith expressed in "the symbol" of the dogmatic statement must always be interpreted in the context of "the community of believers",⁴ highlighting his understanding of the Church as a hermeneutical context for the interpretation of Revelation. The *symbolum* recognises in the Church a subject "united by the common basic experience of

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¹ J. RATZINGER, *Formal Principles of Catholicism*, in *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1987, 122 quoting from K. RAHNER, *The Need for a Short Formula of Christian Faith*, in *Theological Investigations*, 9, DLT, London 1972, 117-26.

² RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 124; 128.

³ See for example, I. KANT, *Religion within the limits of reason alone*, Harper, New York 1960.

⁴ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 128.

faith” and “possessed of a common understanding” into which believers are initiated by conversion.⁵

This paper explores how for Ratzinger the Church is the context for the interpretation of Revelation by focusing on three key and interrelated ideas in his thought. These are: 1) the vision offered by faith, wisdom and purity of heart; 2) interpretation through entry into the form of “Mary-Church”; 3) the relationship between history and theology.

I. THE VISION OF FAITH, WISDOM AND PURITY OF HEART

As Tracey Rowland points out with reference to Ratzinger’s view of Revelation, “the purpose of this dialogue between God and the human person is not so much the transmission of information but rather the transformation of the person in the life of the Trinity”.⁶ Hence only secondarily has his view of Revelation to do with the “part” or the “separate contents to which faith assents”.⁷ Ratzinger’s understanding is that “Christian faith is not related to pure ideas but to a person, an ‘I,’ and to one that is defined as ‘Word’ and ‘Son,’ that is as total openness”.⁸

This view of Revelation reveals the influence of Romano Guardini on Ratzinger during his early theological studies and expressed in his subsequent writings.⁹ Guardini’s approach contrasted with the neo-scholasticism of Leonine Thomism taught in the seminary where, as Ratzinger experienced it, ‘God’ was studied as an abstract concept in a dry theological treatise. In his *Commentary on the documents of Vatican II* he accuses neo-scholasticism of attempting to “make the certainty of faith measurable by positivist criteria so that it may compete with the positivism which dominates all contemporary thinking”.¹⁰ In his later book, *Faith and the Future*, he decries how faith which has “become a plethora of definitions ... accumulated in the course of history,” becomes a burden to men and even an obstacle to belief.¹¹ Once after a particularly dry theological lecture on God which challenged Ratzinger’s view of the importance of connecting theology to living faith, salvation and the Gospel, Ratzinger exclaimed, “a *summum*

⁵ *Ibidem*, 128.

⁶ T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, 51.

⁷ RATZINGER, *Faith and the Future*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1971, 22.

⁸ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1990, 155.

⁹ ROWLAND, *Benedict’s Intellectual Mentors and Students*, «Crisis Magazine», <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2013/benedicts-intellectual-mentors-and-students> (accessed November 29, 2017)

¹⁰ J. RATZINGER, *The Decree on Divine Revelation*, in H. VORGRIMLER (edited by) *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1967, 178.

¹¹ RATZINGER, *Faith and the Future*, 25.

bonum doesn't need a mother!"¹² Later, as Pope Benedict XVI, this personalist, Christo-centric understanding is central to his understanding of faith. In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, he writes, "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction"¹³

For Ratzinger, since faith is rooted in a personalist knowledge gained through dialogue with the person of Christ, faith knowledge differs from the knowledge gained through the empirical sciences. He notes how a grasping type of knowledge is associated with the sin of our first parents¹⁴ and is manifested today in the "world of planned economy, of research, of exact calculation and experiment".¹⁵ By contrast, faith cannot grasp its personal object since "the reality of God is greater than all our experiences, even our experience of God".¹⁶ It is a continual "entrusting ourselves to that which has not been made by ourselves and which never could be made, and precisely in this way supports and makes possible all our making".¹⁷ Nevertheless, it offers certainty in truth which is "more central to our authentically human nature than knowledge is".¹⁸ While faith is not rationalistic, it is also in harmony with reason and perfects it. Ratzinger holds that "the act of faith is an event that expands the limits of individual reason and brings the isolated and fragmented individual intellect into the realm of Him who is the *logos*, the reason and the reasonable ground of all being, all things and all mankind".¹⁹

For Ratzinger, faith's inability to 'grasp' knowledge is related to wisdom which is open to truth in a way suited to the historical and pilgrim nature of humankind in this world.²⁰ Far from being a secondary type of knowledge, wis-

¹² ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 2. Also in T. ROWLAND, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 4. Quoted from G. Valente and P. Azzardo, *Interview with Alfred Läßle, «30 Days»* 1 (2006) 60.

¹³ BENEDICT XVI, Enc. *Deus Caritas Est*, 25-XII-2005, n. 1.

¹⁴ RATZINGER, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, Crossroad, New York 1997, 53.

¹⁵ RATZINGER, *Faith and the Future*, 25.

¹⁶ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 346.

¹⁷ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 40.

¹⁸ RATZINGER, *Faith and the Future*, 28-29.

¹⁹ RATZINGER, *The Church and Scientific Theology*, «Communio» 7 (1980) 339. As Tracey Rowland points out, commenting on this quote, "in this context, Ratzinger cites his reliance on the insights of Henri De Lubac". Cfr. H. DE LUBAC, *Credo: Gestalt und Lebendigkeit unseres Glaubensbekenntnisses*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1975, 29-56 in ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 182, endnote 12.

²⁰ RATZINGER, "Die Gabe des Weisheit," in *Die Gaben Des Geistes: Acht Betrachtungen*, Echter Verlag, Würzburg 1977, 35-49, (42). Ratzinger relates faith to wisdom which is "identical to the pilgrim nature of humankind; it is almost that specific unrest which makes humankind forever

dom is a real form of “knowledge” since it is about participation in God that embraces the whole of one’s being.²¹ This wisdom, is a sharing in God’s way of interpreting reality but is dependent on union with him,

there are, obviously, certain preconditions to this knowing from God’s perspective. We cannot possess it unless we are united with God. This, in turn, means that this last and deepest mode of knowledge is not just an intellectual experience. In all that is essential, knowledge and life are inseparable.²²

Like Bonaventure and Augustine, Ratzinger takes the idea that God is present in the spirit of human beings and this is a prerequisite for participation in God’s knowledge.²³ This knowledge is not only for an elect group who have experienced a special mystical revelation as in a type of Gnosticism, but for all God’s people.²⁴ It is a gift offered universally, even to the simplest of believers in the Church.²⁵ Knowledge about Christ to be gained in modern theology or exegesis is insufficient without real experimental knowledge gained by faith and prayer which originate in love and “beholding”. Through entering into Christ’s prayer the believer enters into Christ’s mind and thus subjectively into Christ’s complete self-gift to the Father.²⁶

a pilgrim moving towards the eternal and which keeps them from being content with lesser satisfactions than this”. “Sie ist mit dem Unterwegssein des Menschen identisch; sie ist geradezu jene Unruhe, die ihn immerfort zum Pilger auf das Ewige hin macht und die ihm verwehrt, sich mit weniger als mit diesem zufriedenzugeben” (Translation mine).

²¹ See also Ratzinger on the truth evoked by beauty as a form of knowledge: J. RATZINGER, *Beauty and the Truth of Christ*, «Osservatore Romano English Weekly Edition», 6-XI-2002, 6-7.

²² RATZINGER, “The Gift of Wisdom,” in *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 357. At page 362, Ratzinger sees “faith as the door to wisdom” and “wisdom as a gift of faith”. See *Ibidem*, 363, where he notes that Thomas Aquinas also, in the spirit of Augustine, accepts the same: that wisdom is a purification of the heart, a sharing in God’s way of looking at things and people. See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica II-II*, q. 45, a. 6.

²³ J. RATZINGER, *Licht und Erleuchtung. Erwägungen zu Stellung und Entwicklung des Themas in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte*, in «Studium Generale» 13 (1960), 368-378. See also Dorothee Kaes’s dissertation where she highlights the influence of Augustine on Ratzinger’s understanding of wisdom in D. KAES, *Theologie im Anspruch von Geschichte und Wahrheit, Zur Hermeneutik Joseph Ratzingers*, EOS Verlag, St. Ottilien 1997, 173.

²⁴ Augustine’s view of Church as a “royal way” to God is evident here. A. NICHOLS, points this out, “Augustine and the Church,” *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, Burns and Oates, London 2005, 32.

²⁵ RATZINGER, “Die Gabe des Weisheit,” in *Theologische Prinzipienlehre*, 373-4. J. RATZINGER, *Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1971, 71.

²⁶ RATZINGER, *Behold the Pierced One*, 26. The basic precondition to understanding Jesus is to enter into his act of prayer (or his mind). This is an entry into his relationship with the Father

This faith knowledge of the pilgrim shares some similarities with a postmodern perspective which refuses to contain truth in concepts. However the latter does not aim for truth nor a conversion at the level of action. The faith response appropriate to Revelation as Ratzinger describes it, is similar to the response appropriate to beauty; it is a form of transcendence or ecstasy, which “bring(s) human beings out of themselves” and yet it incorporates an ethical dimension in that it “reawakens a longing for the ineffable, readiness for sacrifice and the abandonment of the self”.²⁷ It is an encounter with something objective, outside of myself yet mediated in a subjective way. Faith brings together both a subjective and objective aspect and both need each other. Faith “bring(s) into sharper focus the demands of objective reality”.²⁸ For Ratzinger, the subjective approach to reality is “exact thought” which is always limited. However when the subject opens itself up to objective reality and becomes freed of these limitations, only then will “the truth about humankind and the real world come into view”.²⁹

By contrast false beauty, like a false type of faith, “dazzles” and arouses a desire for possession which makes one “turn in on the self”.³⁰ This theme is also addressed by Jean Luc Marion when he distinguishes between the “Icon” and the “Idol”, and can be related to faith as the appropriate response to Revelation. Whereas the “Idol” causes the individual to remain stuck in his own knowledge and subjectivity (through attempting to ‘grasp’), the “Icon,” causes him to transcend himself since he “experiences the gaze of the Other upon himself”.³¹ Since the God who reveals himself is like the Icon, thus through beholding God in faith, the creature is drawn beyond self into God’s mystery and knowledge and in doing so finds himself. Hence the dialogical inter-personal relationship with God is not like any other relationship, since “speaking with God does not mean speaking with just anyone who happens to stand before me as another ‘thou’; on the contrary it touches the ground of own being, without which I would not be”.³²

and is “an act of love, self-giving and self-expropriation to men”. For Ratzinger, Jesus IS the very relationship with God the Father.

²⁷ Ratzinger will also deal with similar themes of love, *eros*, ecstasy and *agapé* in his first encyclical as Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*.

²⁸ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 71.

²⁹ RATZINGER, *In the Beginning; A Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall*, T & T Clark, London 1995, 86.

³⁰ RATZINGER, *Beauty and the Truth of Christ*, 6-7.

³¹ J.L. MARION, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (California) 2004, 56. The “invisible in the Icon is received but not produced (*Ibidem*, 23)”. See also J.L. MARION, *God without Being*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1991, 14-16 on the “Idol”.

³² RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 74.

Faith, which draws the believer into the divine life, is connected with “purity of heart”. Ratzinger’s interest in this theme is inspired by a Paschalian type of knowledge of the heart (which was also very Augustinian) found in John Henry Newman.³³ The reality of the ‘pure in heart’ also enables entry into Christ’s vision and the perception of reality. In a homily for the Feast of St Henry, Ratzinger explains “only God can create a pure vision for us ... the pure vision is identical with the faith that tells us what is decisive and essential in the obscurity of the things of this world”.³⁴ This works in practice through leading the creature into the vision of Christ since,

Christian faith is a sharing in the vision of Jesus, mediated by his word, which is the authentic expression of his vision. Jesus’ vision is the point of reference of our faith, the point where it is anchored in reality.³⁵

The idea of faith as wisdom and “purity of heart,” is also necessary to facilitate an openness to truth in *the other*, different to me. Purity of heart is the foundation of a theological approach which is open to those outside the boundaries of the Church including other Christians, those of other world religions and those who are of no faith, but seeking truth with a sincere heart. An example of this can be seen in Ratzinger’s views on how the dialogue based around “doubt and unbelief” can bring a purification to the Church’s understanding of Revelation. To confine God, the subject of our theologising to our conceptualisations must of necessity lead to a “God-is-dead theology”.³⁶ Ratzinger explains that faith is linked to reason which continues to search for truth since God is always greater than our experiences,

The always greater God can be known only in the transcendence of the always ‘more’ in the ongoing revision of our experiences. Thus faith and experience form the continuum of a road that must always go farther and farther. Only by keeping step with the always new transcendence of faith can we come at last to the true experience of faith.³⁷

Openness to dialogue with those who have no faith, means that those who have faith are brought to examine the “conventions which have supported their faith

³³ *Interview with Alfred Läßle by Gianni Valente and Pierluca Azzardo, «30 Days»* 1 (2006) 60 quoted in ROWLAND, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 3.

³⁴ RATZINGER, *The Yes of Jesus Christ*, 120.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 29. See also J. RATZINGER, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2006, 104. For Ratzinger the ecclesial hermeneutic is a way of entering into the “mind of Christ,” which is the “wisdom of God”.

³⁶ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 349.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 346.

through their lives in order to be brought face to face with existential questions about their own contingency and the place of God in their lives".³⁸ Both those who have faith and those who don't, ask existential questions on the basis of their common humanity. As Ratzinger puts it, there is "no escape from the dilemma of being a man".³⁹ He continues,

It is the basic pattern of man's destiny only to be allowed to find the finality of his existence in this unceasing rivalry between doubt and belief, temptation and certainty. Perhaps in this way doubt, which saves both sides from being shut up in their own world, could become the avenue of communication.⁴⁰

The idea of "purity of heart" is consistent with the Church's nature in history between temporality and eternity. It thus calls for a certain humility regarding expressions of belief and formulations of theological concepts. It could also be argued that "purity of heart," offers a way of engaging with a post-modern preference for uncertainty, fluidity and existentiality, while at the same time acknowledging the existence of truth. Such an approach keeps a theologian open to those who hold different positions which may contribute in turn to a better understanding of the core truths of Revelation. In order to prevent relativism, this open dialogue between believer and unbeliever should always be based on the premise of a genuine search by both parties in humility for the logos. This is not an impossible task since both parties in the dialogue by virtue of their humanity, participate in the one *Logos* or the creative spirit and can therefore discover by reason the truth about God at the heart of creation,

To understand reality is to believe that being exists and can be understood because being has been thought in the mind of 'absolute spirit.' Therefore all being is meaningful, it has truth and logos.⁴¹

While the pilgrim nature of human life is about openness to truth that can never be confined to concepts, at the same time faith provides a trust in the "certainty in God's promise".⁴² Faith is therefore different to a postmodern view of reality since in the midst of uncertainty, it offers a vision anchoring us and "giving direction to our lives" and a "new life". Ratzinger connects conversion to a new way

³⁸ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 18. Ratzinger gives the example of St Thérèse who at the end of her life, after a closed and protected childhood secure in the faith, is tempted by the darkness and the realisation of the void, "under the firm structure of the supporting conventions".

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 21.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 31.

⁴² RATZINGER, *Faith and the Future*, 25-50.

of “seeing,” in order to embody a new way of living.⁴³ Christianity also reveals more about the *logos* than reason can discover. In Christianity the *logos* in creation has been revealed as absolute love. As Tracey Rowland notes, “Ratzinger holds that the ethos of Christianity must consist in *love* and *reason* converging with one another as the essential foundation pillars of reality”.⁴⁴ In an address to the Sorbonne in 1999, Ratzinger explains,

In the conception of early Christianity the primacy of the Logos and the primacy of love were revealed as one and the same. The Logos was revealed to be not only the mathematical reasoning at the basis of things, but as creative love to the point of becoming com-passion, co-suffering with creation.⁴⁵

II. INTERPRETATION THROUGH THE FORM OF *MARY-CHURCH*

For Ratzinger (as for von Balthasar), the deepest entry into Christ’s being occurs where there is the form of “Mary-Church”.⁴⁶ Mary is also representative of a particular way of “seeing” given from the wisdom of the pure in heart, “who shall see God” (Mt. 5:8) and it is Marian spirituality that can help to overcome the modern tendency for human persons to “fall apart into mere bios and mere ra-

⁴³ J. RATZINGER, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1997, 30. It involves a “handing over into the Word, that reveals new paths to our reason and gives form to our life”. See also his discussion of conversion in the context of evangelisation. “To convert means ... to see one’s life through the eyes of God; thereby looking for the good, even if uncomfortable; not to depend on the judgment of the majority, but on the justice of God - in other words, to look for a new style of life, a new life”. See also, J. RATZINGER, *The Way to True Happiness*, «Inside The Vatican» (August - September 2001) 20-23, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=4025&repos=1&subrepos=0&searchid=1795900> (accessed Jan 8, 2018).

⁴⁴ ROWLAND, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 63-64.

⁴⁵ J. RATZINGER, Sorbonne Address: ‘The Truth of Christianity,’ 25-7 Nov. 1999. See text in original French, *Vérité du Christianisme*, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1348914?en=y> (accessed Jan 8, 2018). See also J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1999, 182.

⁴⁶ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Glory of the Lord*, 1, 256. When speaking of this entry into the mind of Christ which the Church makes possible, he distinguishes between “the average views of the mass of sinners that populates the Church,” and the “*forma Christi* which best comes to prevail and best becomes impressed on the form of the Church-in Mary, and in the saints, in all those who have consciously made their own form wane so as to yield the primacy in themselves to the form of the Church ... the being in God of our substance occurs in the form of Christ, and the realisation of this reciprocal indwelling is the holiness of a Church that has become a reality and a transformation of the individual soul into an *anima ecclesiastica*”.

tionality,” helping them to “rediscover unity in the centre,” by attending to the heart.⁴⁷

Faith also gives entry through Christ into the subject of the Church. Through the act of faith, the believer surrenders not only to Christ where there is “a breaking down of my subjectivity” so that “Christ lives in me,” but also a surrender into the subject of the Church, where,

The redeemed ego finds itself again in a greater new ego ... It lives and moves in the ‘we’ of the Church, one with the common ‘I’ of Jesus Christ. In this new subject the wall between myself and others falls down; the wall that divides my subjectivity from objectivity and makes it unattainable for me, the wall between me and the depth of being. In this new subject I am contemporaneous with Jesus, and all the experiences of the Church are mine too, and have become my own.⁴⁸

Ratzinger points out that Jesus makes the People of Israel into a new people by “adopting those who believe in him into the community of his own self (his body)” by “transforming his death into an act of prayer, an act of love, and thus by making himself communicable”.⁴⁹ This grafting onto the Cross is begun at Baptism⁵⁰ and also takes expression in the other sacraments in the life of the Church. As Ratzinger puts it, “Baptism and Eucharist are the two ways in which human beings are brought into the life-world of Jesus Christ”.⁵¹ In an essay on spiritual Christology, Ratzinger writes that through prayer believers enter not only into participation with Christ’s prayer and through that into his being, but also into the “true subject of our knowledge of Jesus,” which is the Church.⁵² This dependence on the memory of Christ in the community of the Church does not exclude “personal responsibility to exercise one’s reason” but “provides the hermeneutical context for a rational understanding; i.e. It leads to the point where my ‘I’ fuses with the ‘other’ and hence to the realm of understanding”.

⁴⁷ J. RATZINGER, *Mariology and Marian Spirituality*, in H. MOLL (edited by), *The Church and Women: A Compendium*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, 79.

⁴⁸ RATZINGER, *The Yes of Jesus Christ*, 36-37.

⁴⁹ RATZINGER, *Behold the Pierced One*, 30.

⁵⁰ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 34.

⁵¹ J. RATZINGER, *Das Geheimnis von Tod und Auferstehung: Betrachtungen zur Fasten- und Osterzeit*, Benno Verlag, Leipzig 2006, 14. Taufe und Eucharistie sind die beiden Weisen, wie die Menschen einbezogen werden in den Lebensraum Jesu Christi. Denn Taufe bedeutet, dass ein Mensch wird, sich unter den Namen Jesu Christi stellt ... aus der Vorgang der Ehe unter der Namensgemeinschaft, die sie zwischen zwei Menschen stiftet als Ausdruck der Verknotung ihres beiderseitigen Seins, die ihnen darin geschickt. (English translation mine).

⁵² RATZINGER, *Behold the Pierced One*, 27.

This remembrance of Christ in the Church is enriched and deepened by love in worship and yet is “continually refined by critical reason”.⁵³

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND THEOLOGY IN RATZINGER’S THOUGHT

Ratzinger’s theology is so often accused of being non-historical or “platonian”⁵⁴ and “top-down”.⁵⁵ R.A. Krieg for example expresses the view that although Ratzinger’s method is a synthesis of systematic and historical methods, he believes that Ratzinger prioritises the systematic over the historical.⁵⁶ However Ratzinger’s theological perspective on history shows the underlying influence of the newly emerging theological currents from before the Second Vatican Council. Tracey Rowland sums up the characteristics of this new form of theology which acknowledges history,

the common thread running from Newman and the Tübingen scholars through to the names of Guardini, Blondel, de Lubac, Przywara, von Balthasar, Péguy, Bernanos, Mauriac, Claudel and ultimately Ratzinger, is an interest in how the human being situated in time and in a specific cultural milieu connects to the divine.⁵⁷

After Guardini, another teacher who influenced Ratzinger’s understanding of the place of history in Theology was Gottlieb Söhngen. As the Professor of Fundamental Theology at the University of Munich he supervised both Ratzinger’s doctoral dissertation on Augustine’s ecclesiology and the *Habilitation* on the theology of history in St Bonaventure. It was Söhngen who introduced Ratzinger to Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* and who defended Ratzinger’s *Habilitation* from the accusation that his work was anti-Suárezian, and bordering on mod-

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ J. CORKERY, *Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions and Legitimate Hopes*, Dominican Press, Dublin 2009.

⁵⁵ G. MANNION, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church of our time*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville (MN) 2007, 58-59. Mannion writes: “Essentially this model as it is interpreted by those in the Church such as Joseph Ratzinger and likeminded Church people could literally be described as a conservative model of the Church, i.e. concerned with preserving and consolidating certain forms of ecclesial life believed to be under threat in our time” (59). He also equates Ratzinger’s interpretation of communion ecclesiology like that of Von Balthasar to a ‘kneeling’ ecclesiology which he says is related to how “ecclesial communication, relationships, and structures of organisation, authority and governance are understood: very much in a top-down sense”.

⁵⁶ R.A. KRIEG, *Kardinal Ratzinger, Max Scheler und eine Grundfrage der Christologie*, «Theologische Quartalschrift» 160 (1980) 106-122 (108).

⁵⁷ T. ROWLAND, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed*, T&T Clark, London 2010, 20.

ernism.⁵⁸ Gianluigi Pasquale points out that it was Söhngen's work in dialogue with Karl Barth and Emil Brunner that saw the emergence of a turn to salvation history in Catholic Theology for the first time in the German speaking world.⁵⁹

The theme of history was also represented in English speaking theology through the work of John Henry Newman. It was an older student in seminary, Alfred Läßle, who introduced Ratzinger to the thought of Newman⁶⁰ and Heinrich Fries who introduced him to Newman's teaching on the development of doctrine. Ratzinger writes that Fries had therefore, "placed the key in our hand to build historical thought into theology, or much more, he taught us to think historically in theology and so to recognize the identity of faith in all developments".⁶¹

Under the influence of Protestant theology, many Catholic theologians of the early twentieth century had separated history and metaphysics. As Pasquale notes, "the theology of salvation history presented itself as antithetical to metaphysics and theology considered in metaphysical terms, since up to then the term 'sacred history' had been preferred".⁶² However by contrast, Ratzinger's recognition of history in theology includes a metaphysical emphasis. He demonstrates a critique of an existentialist approach to history by commenting on the work of Rudolf Bultmann and Albert Schweizer.⁶³ Unlike these theologians who exclude metaphysics, for Ratzinger, history is never theologically neutral. History is always *the vehicle* for the relationship of God and man and therefore has something to say theologically.⁶⁴ Also for Ratzinger, salvation history, as the working

⁵⁸ ROWLAND, *Benedict's Intellectual Mentors and Students*. See also where Ratzinger confirms this fact in an address as Cardinal, *On the occasion of the first Centenary of the death of Cardinal Newman*, April 28, 1990, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19900428_ratzinger-newman_en.html (accessed December 1, 2017).

⁵⁹ See G. PASQUALE, *The Influence of Protestant Theology on the Catholic 'Historia Salutis' Concept in Theological Debate in Europe*, «Služba Božja: liturgijsko-pastoralna revija» 57/1 (Travanj 2017) 66.

⁶⁰ RATZINGER, *Interview with Alfred Läßle by Gianni Valente and Pierluca Azzardo*, «30 Days» 1 (2006) 60 quoted in ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 3. Ratzinger confirms also this fact in the aforementioned address *On the occasion of the first Centenary of the death of Cardinal Newman*.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 66.

⁶³ J. RATZINGER, *Heilsgeschichte und Eschatologie: Zur Frage nach dem Ansatz des theologischen Denkens*, in J. NEUMANN, J. RATZINGER (edited by), *Theologie im Wandel: Festschrift zum 150-jährigen Bestehen Der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät an Der Universität Tübingen, 1817-1967*, 68-89, Erichewel Verlag, Munich und Freiburg 1967.

⁶⁴ Cfr. RATZINGER, *Heilsgeschichte und Eschatologie*, 73.

out of God's history of relationship with his People, is inseparable from a metaphysical understanding of God.⁶⁵

1. *The influence of Bonaventure: History, Reception and subjectivity*

For Ratzinger, the importance of history in theology is most evident in his understanding of the interpretation of Revelation. While this is demonstrated in his contribution to discussions on *Dei Verbum* at the Second Vatican Council, the roots of these insights date back to his Habilitation thesis on Bonaventure. In studying the Seraphic Doctor, he wanted to “try to discover whether in Bonaventure there was anything corresponding to the concept of salvation history, and whether this motif—if it should exist—had any relationship to the idea of revelation”.⁶⁶

Ratzinger finds in Bonaventure a new view of history differing significantly from that found up to then in Christian tradition. Unlike Augustine who divides up history in his seven-stage schema, or Gregory of Nyssa who divides it into five stages, or Joachim of Fiore who divides it into three, Bonaventure holds a different view. He rejects the view that there are different self-contained stages of history before Christ and which with Christ, history has reached “its highest degree of inner-historical fulfilment. ... so that there is nothing left but an eschatological hope for that which lies beyond all history”. Rather he puts forth a “new salvation in history, within the limits of this time”.⁶⁷ Christ is no longer the end of history, but the centre point of history which allows for a state of salvation that is “pre-eschatological” and yet differs from the “Joachimite expectation of imminent glory within history”.⁶⁸ It is actually through accepting aspects of Joachim of Fiore's understanding of the figure of Francis of Assisi and his place in history that Bonaventure comes to this new approach to history. As he later pointed out in an address on Bonaventure given as Pope, while the Church Fathers are essential in the understanding of theology, the emergence of Francis signified to Bonaventure that Christ's oneness through history could allow for the emergence of new insights and aspects to Christian Revelation and theology.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 70.

⁶⁶ J. RATZINGER, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1998, 104.

⁶⁷ W. PATENAUE, *Loving in the Present: The Theological and Pastoral Influences of St Bonaventure's Critical Retrieval of Joachim of Fiore on Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/theology_graduate_theses/1/?utm_source=digitalcommons.providence.edu%2Ftheology_graduate_theses%2F1&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages (accessed November 11, 2017).

⁶⁸ PATENAUE, *Loving in the Present*, 24.

⁶⁹ See BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience: Bonaventure* (2), 10-III-2010.

Bonaventure comes to his view of history through reflection on scriptural exegesis⁷⁰ which for him includes a historical element, unlike the scholastic tradition which found only static, unchanging elements.⁷¹ He draws out his exegetical idea through the metaphor of seeds found in nature, which like the meaning of the Word, develop and grow slowly through time bringing forth new fruit in the future.⁷² This points to the view that the total meaning of Scripture or revelation is not yet clear but still to come.⁷³ His approach to Scriptural exegesis, understood through the lens of creation history, gives him a way of acknowledging that apart from the allegorical and the sacramental meaning that there is another interpretation which he calls the *multiformes theoriae*. This facilitates scriptural exegesis in its openness towards fuller interpretation and the acknowledgement of the relationship between knowledge and the historical situation.⁷⁴ This fuller interpretation of revelation calls for each reader of Scripture to go beyond the objective written word and to a “mystical” knowledge, through faith and in this way, “gain entrance into the living understanding of Scripture in the Church”.⁷⁵ For Bonaventure as Ratzinger points out, only in this way does one “truly receive ‘revelation’”.⁷⁶

Bonaventure’s emphasis on human subjectivity in relation to Revelation also forms part of his acknowledgement of history. As Ratzinger points out, for Bonaventure, God’s word or ‘Logos,’ which concerns his internal conversation with himself, also relates to his “speech outwards”.⁷⁷ This speech outwards already points to the fact that Revelation has a purpose, a ‘for,’ and that for Ratzinger when we speak of God’s Revelation, what we mean is God’s working this Word *in us* for our enlightenment.⁷⁸ Thus Ratzinger concludes that in the word of Revelation outwards, the divine is not yet made manifest unless it allows for receptivity from the human side.

⁷⁰ RATZINGER, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 9.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 7.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 7-9.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 83-4.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 7.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 68.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 68.

⁷⁷ RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften: Offenbarungs-Verständnis und Geschichts-Theologie Bonaventuras*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2009, 99. Ratzinger writes, “auch bei Gott gibt es nun nicht nur das ewige inner Reden zu sich selbst,-den Logos- auch bei ihm gibt es “Rede nach außen” (Translation mine).

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 100. “wenn die göttliche (Selbst-) Erkenntnis kausal wirksam wird nach außen hin,” ... “und zur Ursache wird für eine Erleuchtung im Menschen;” “When the divine (self-) knowledge is causally efficacious to the outside world,” ... “and causes an illumination in the people” (Translation mine).

For Bonaventure, God's Word outwards is connected to his understanding of Jesus Christ, who is not simply described as Logos, but can also be described as 'Ikon' or 'image' of God.⁷⁹ For Bonaventure however, revelation or its interpretation does not stop there. Creatures continue the Revelation of God in history as "Words" and "Images". Ratzinger explains this idea, "the creature is in this respect God's Word, like the others, light is reflected in the creature as traces of God".⁸⁰ Also for Bonaventure and for Ratzinger, Revelation is received differently in each and every individual (experienced as salvation),

So it is clear, that the Revelation in each and every Christian is not the same, but is distinguished according to its spiritual character: this concept of Revelation carries mystical character.⁸¹

At this stage of his theological career however, acknowledgement of the subject, appeared similar to the modernist claim of the early twentieth century. Yet it differed substantially from it in its understanding of access to objectivity. It also differed from a traditional scholastic view and it was this that put Ratzinger in a precarious position at the defence of his post-doctoral work. On recommendation, these sections were edited out by Ratzinger in order to gain his qualification. Yet it was this exploration of Bonaventure that gave Ratzinger the ability to contribute to the contemporary debate on the relationship between history and theology in Catholic theology and the Church of the time.⁸²

2. *Theology and History in Dei Verbum: Word and Answer*

As the main editor of chapter one of *Dei Verbum* on behalf of the German speaking contributors at the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger's contributions reflect his continued interest in the relationship between Christian Revelation and history.⁸³ In the *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, he points out how Tradition must not be understood as something given once and for all, but must

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 147.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, "dass die Kreatur hinsichtlich Gottes "Wort" ist, wie auch die andere, dass Gottes Spuren, 'widerleuchten' in der Kreatur" (Translation mine).

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 115, so wird aber deutlich, dass Offenbarung in diesem und in jenem Christen nicht dasselbe heisst, sondern unterschieden ist nach dem Maß der geistlichen Hinsicht: dieser Offenbarungsbegriff trägt mystisches Gepräge" (Translation mine).

⁸² RATZINGER, *Milestones, Memoirs 1927-1977*, 109.

⁸³ As Dorothee Kaes points out, based on the memoirs of De Lubac, Ratzinger was for the German speaking contributors the main editor of the first chapter of *Dei Verbum*. H. DE LUBAC, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, Série "Présence", Namur 1992, 123. See KAES, *Theologie im Anspruch von Geschichte und Wahrheit*, 3.

be understood in terms of “the categories of growth, progress and knowledge of the faith that Romanticism developed”.⁸⁴ As Ratzinger interprets it, and which the Council comes to accept, “Tradition has its place not only in the explicitly traditional statements of Church doctrine, but in the unstated -- and often unstated -- elements of the whole service of the Christian worship of God and the life of the Church”.⁸⁵ He comments that this section of the text is influenced by Yves Congar and the Catholic school of theology in Tübingen in the nineteenth century, in turn influenced by a Romanticist turn which emphasized the “organic-dynamic” understanding of Tradition. It is also influenced by John Henry Newman and Henri De Lubac who, like Ratzinger, had also commented on Bonaventure’s scriptural exegesis.⁸⁶ The role of the Holy Spirit is central to progress in knowledge of Revelation. In his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, he explains that this approach to Revelation doesn’t abandon Trent and Vatican I but “realises that fidelity in the sphere of the spirit can be realised only through a constantly renewed appropriation”.⁸⁷

As is evident in his exploration of Bonaventure, Ratzinger recognises here again an interdependence between objective content, “what is assimilated” (Revelation) and the subjective elements “process of understanding,” and that they cannot easily be separated. Since the process of assimilation and what is being assimilated cannot be completely isolated from each other, the interpretation of Revelation therefore “develops” as the understanding of it grows in the minds and hearts of believers who have assimilated it as is expressed in *Dei Verbum*, 8.⁸⁸ At the same time the Council highlights that these two dimensions are *separate* by putting these two ideas in two separate clauses in *Dei Verbum* 8.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ RATZINGER, *The Decree on Divine Revelation*, 156.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 184.

⁸⁶ See H. DE LUBAC, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2000, 114, 208.

⁸⁷ RATZINGER, *The Decree on Divine Revelation*, 164-165.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 187; Ratzinger highlights that the Council’s specific decision to go beyond Trent and Vatican I by not quoting from Vincent of Lerin’s understanding of the unchangeability of Tradition was to emphasis a new “conception of the nature of historical identity and continuity” (187). This kind of new orientation expresses “a deeper knowledge of the problem of historical understanding, which is no longer adequately expressed by the simple ideas of a given fact and its explanation, because the explanation as the process of understanding, cannot be clearly separated from that which is being understood. This interdependence of the two, which does not remove the ultimate basic difference between assimilation and what is assimilated, even if they can no longer be strictly isolated, is well expressed by the dialectic juxtaposition of the two clauses *Traditio proficit* and *crecit perceptio*.”

In the same commentary, Ratzinger also states that this “progress of the word in the time of the Church,” is the task not just of the hierarchy but of the whole of the People of God and “anchored in the whole life of the Church” and,

through it, we hear in what is said and that which is unsaid. The whole spiritual experience of the Church, its believing, praying and loving intercourse with the Lord and his word, causes our understanding of the original truth to grow and in the today of faith, extracts anew from the yesterday of its historical origin what was meant for all time and yet can be understood only in the changing ages and in the particular way of each.⁹⁰

The importance of history and subjectivity for understanding the truth of Revelation, is also seen in Ratzinger’s understanding of the idea of ‘Word’ and ‘Answer’ which connects to ‘what is assimilated’ and the ‘process of assimilation’ in relation to Revelation.⁹¹ In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger explains how Scripture and the Church Fathers belong together as do “word and answer”. Here he is touching on the idea of Tradition as he writes,

The two (Word and Answer) are not identical, and not of equal importance ... the word is always first; the response, second. ... Only because the word has found its answering word (Ant-wort) does it continue to be a word and become objective. From the ontological perspective, the word is a referential reality; it assumes the presence of one who speaks as well as of one who receives the word by hearing it; it ceases to exist not only if no one speaks, but also if no one hears ... Hence the word exists only in connection with—by means—of the response.⁹²

This text on ‘Word’ and ‘Answer,’ can also be related to Ratzinger’s understanding of the function of Mariology in Theology. In *Daughter Zion*, when examining the role of the feminine in the Bible, he looks at the place of wisdom. Wisdom appears as “God’s first creature in whom both the pure, primordial form of his creative will and the pure answer, which he discovers, find their expression ... Creation answers, and the answer is as close to God as a playmate, as a lover”.⁹³ In the New Testament, Wisdom refers on the one hand to Christ and on the other to Mary as “the womanly answer which receives wisdom and brings it to fruition”.⁹⁴ Hence we could draw the connection here in saying that Mary represents Tradition in the Church since she represents the ‘creaturely answer’ to the reception of God’s word in history.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 186.

⁹¹ See previous point.

⁹² RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 147.

⁹³ J. RATZINGER, *Daughter Zion*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1983, 25.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 27.

In *The Place of Marian Doctrine in Faith and Piety*, Ratzinger writes that Mary represents the creature who is called to respond to God/ God's revelation in freedom. "Mary is the believing other whom God calls. As such, she represents the creation, which is called to respond to God, and the freedom of the creature, which does not lose its integrity in love, but attains completion therein".⁹⁵ He expands this further to include the feminine dimensions of reality by connecting the place of women to the representation of creation and election, which points to salvation history. Hence for Ratzinger, to deny the place of women (and hence Church) in theology is to deny the full understanding of revelation and the work of God in history.⁹⁶ Since Mary also represents the Church, therefore the creaturely answer is perfected in the Church and *is* Tradition. Tradition is the Church's reception of the Word of God in history which reveals aspects of meaning to be included in its interpretation.

3. *A Hermeneutics of Continuity, the Church's Memory and Living Tradition*

Ratzinger's view of Tradition reveals the influence of Bonaventure's view of history.

Drawing on Bonaventure's approach to history and knowledge, he writes that in order to understand the future we need to understand the past.⁹⁷ This is only possible since Christ is the centre of time, holding past, present and future together as one.⁹⁸ Augustine and other scholastics saw Christ's appearing in history as the "end of the ages",⁹⁹ and its apex *in time*, suppressing what went before rather than its axis which would point to "a future state of full redemption yet to be achieved in history".¹⁰⁰ This influences Ratzinger's view of Tradition and

⁹⁵ J. RATZINGER, *Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology*, «Communio» 30 (Spring 2003) 147-160.

⁹⁶ RATZINGER, *Daughter Sion*, 25. See also M.F. MCKENNA, *Innovation within Tradition. Joseph Ratzinger and Reading the Women of the Bible*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2015.

⁹⁷ RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften: Offenbarungs-Verständnis und Geschichts-Theologie Bonaventuras*, 457; *Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 20. He writes that knowledge of the past is necessary for the grasp of the future: "Der eigentliche Sinn der neuen Geschichtsbetrachtung Bonaventuras ist nicht Verständnis des Vergangenen, sondern prophetie über das Komende".

⁹⁸ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 27. It is Christ who bridges the gap between the temporal and the eternal. Recognising the role of history in the faith means recognising that reality is shaped by the truth of the Incarnation, which holds together both temporal and eternal spheres of reality. God is not only that inaccessible being, invisible and beyond, but that Being who has entered history. See also RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 23, where he points out that the "Church is the mediator between being and time".

⁹⁹ RATZINGER, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 96.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 106.

its relationship with the Church and with time. In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger explains that living Tradition is related to the Church as a subject in which Revelation can adhere in a linguistic community.¹⁰¹ Tradition is only possible only because “many subjects become, as it were, *one* subject in the context of a common heritage”.¹⁰² In relation to time, since Tradition takes as its premise Christ as the axis of history, it thus involves the work of the Spirit bringing to light knowledge of Christ entrusted to the Church’s memory as the holder of the revelatory event of Christ in history. In and through the Church as living subject, “the past is present” and at the same time, the future is gradually unveiled.¹⁰³ Tradition thus involves re-reading the gift of Revelation through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church to bring to light meanings which may have been hidden¹⁰⁴ and discovering the unstated dynamic elements in Christian life and worship. Thus Tradition is “not the advent of something entirely new but “the process whereby the memory becomes aware of itself” so that “what is already present in the memory is seen more clearly and better understood”.¹⁰⁵ For Ratzinger, the Church is the “living voice of the Word and bears the memory of God’s saving acts in history”.¹⁰⁶

After examining Ratzinger’s view of Revelation, History and Tradition, his principle of the ‘Hermeneutics of Continuity,’ a well-known aspect of his theological approach, can be better appreciated. Criticised by theologians such as Lieven Boeve,¹⁰⁷ the idea came to prominence through Pope Benedict XVI’s December 2005 address, but it was already expressed in *Principles of Catholic Theology* where Ratzinger highlights that the Church as subject connects theology through time in an organic unity which cannot allow for radical discontinuity but yet allows for development and for diverse meanings united in the Spirit.

Ratzinger explains the roots of Tradition in the recognition by the Church of the excess of Revelation over Scripture as it is written down.¹⁰⁸ There are three

¹⁰¹ J. RATZINGER, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2008, 52.

¹⁰² RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 88.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ RATZINGER, *Milestones-Memoirs*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ RATZINGER, *Behold the Pierced One*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ S. HAHN, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, DLT, London 2010, 50.

¹⁰⁷ L. BOEVE, F. DEPOORTARE, S. VAN ERP (EDITED BY), *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*, T&T Clark, London 2010, 245-246.

¹⁰⁸ Cfr. RATZINGER, *Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriff*, in K. RAHNER, J. RATZINGER, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung, Quaestiones Disputatae*, Herder, Freiburg 1965, 45; *Revelation and Tradition: Quaestiones Disputatae*, Burns and Oates, London 1966, 46 (reprinted as “The Question of the Concept of Tradition,” in RATZINGER, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 63). For Ratzinger this corresponds to the three roots of and more fundamentally to the concept

roots of this “excess” as the basis for Tradition. Firstly, Tradition is connected to New Testament revelation rooted in the Spirit rather than the written word and secondly the later practice of the Church which placed the Creed and the rule of faith over details of the written word. The third root of Tradition is found in the authority to interpret Christ given to Christ’s body and seen particularly in the preaching of the apostles.¹⁰⁹ As Bryce Evans explains, Ratzinger’s view of Tradition, is “an interpretation of the Christ-event itself on the basis of the *pneuma*, which means on the basis of the Church’s present. The latter is possible because Christ is not dead but living, not only Christ yesterday but Christ today and tomorrow”.¹¹⁰ The Church emerges as the living hermeneutical context for the ongoing interpretation of the Christ event in the Spirit.¹¹¹

4. *History, Revelation and Multiplicity*

The influence of Bonaventure’s understanding of multiplicity in the expression of Revelation is evident in Ratzinger’s later work. Bonaventure acknowledges differences in receptivity to Revelation which enables members of the Church to penetrate beyond the written word of Scripture to its mystical meaning. The different stages of faith are different stages of mysticism as well as different stages of Revelation.¹¹² The highest stage of revelation is given to those (like St Francis) with the highest degrees of humility in accord with Scripture (Mt 11:25).¹¹³ For Ratzinger, acknowledging multiplicity in unity relates to faith’s “catholicity”¹¹⁴

of Tradition in Trinitarian life. “the *paradosis* of the fact that the Father gives away the Son to the world and the Son for his part allows himself to be handed over to the nations as a sign”. This *paradosis* is continued in the presence of Christ in his body the Church in its character as judgment and bestowing salvation.

¹⁰⁹ RATZINGER, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 62-63.

¹¹⁰ B. EVANS, *Subjective and Objective Dimensions of Faith in John Henry Newman and Joseph Ratzinger*, [https://www.academia.edu/33004026/Objective and Subjective Elements of Faith in John Henry Newman and Joseph Ratzinger](https://www.academia.edu/33004026/Objective_and_Subjective_Elements_of_Faith_in_John_Henry_Newman_and_Joseph_Ratzinger) (accessed December 1, 2017).

¹¹¹ Cfr. M. McCAUGHEY, *The Church as Hermeneutical Community and Embodied Faith in Joseph Ratzinger and Lewis S. Mudge*, Peter Lang, Bern 2015.

¹¹² Cfr. RATZINGER, *Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 68.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Cfr. RATZINGER, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 136. The word Catholicity comes from the Greek word “kat’holon” meaning “according to the whole”. The Church according to Ratzinger is kat’holon from the very first instance—comprehending the whole universe”. This is something which Ratzinger has in common with his theological contemporary Hans Urs von Balthasar. For the latter, the revelation of Christianity is given in “the form,” (*die Gestalt*) which can be read and understood as the whole or not at all”. Cfr. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1985, 46 quoted in D. KAES, *Theologie im Anspruch von Geschichte und Wahrheit*, 165.

and again legitimate plurality is enabled through the subject of the Church which is the “locus that gives unity to the content of faith”.¹¹⁵ Ratzinger recognises that multiplicity can actually enhance the understanding of Revelation by presenting it from new perspectives. However this is to be understood as the work of the Holy Spirit bringing new meanings to light (through the memory of the Church), rather than a sociological adaptation to the trends and fashions of the age which Ratzinger radically opposes. He compares the role of multiplicity in Theology by drawing on an insight from natural physics which recognises that any objectivity can only be achieved from considering a plurality of angles.¹¹⁶ He writes:

Only by circling round, by looking and describing from different, apparently contradictory angles can we succeed in alluding to the truth, which is never visible to us in its totality ... Physicists today know that one can only talk about the structure of matter in approximations from various different angles. They know that the position of the beholder at any one time affects the result of his questioning of nature.¹¹⁷

Ratzinger recognises that since Revelation can be assimilated differently by different members of the Church that theology can thus be open to incorporating multiplicity in the Church without sacrificing truth and unity. This understanding of the importance of a plurality of faith expressions in the Church is similar to that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who expresses it in the idea of the truth being “symphonic”.¹¹⁸ Using this musical analogy, he distinguishes between a monophony and a symphony which demonstrating a certain type of non-contradictory and yet multifaceted unity,

the truth of the faith resonates not as a mono-phony but as a sym-phony, not as a homophonic, but as a polyphonic melody composed of the many apparently quite discordant strains in the contrapuntal interplay of law, prophets, Gospels and apostles.¹¹⁹

The Church also provides a way of distinguishing between more socio-cultural expressions of faith and legitimate ones in harmony with Tradition.¹²⁰ For Ratzinger, the interpretation of Revelation by social movements such as the feminist, new age or ecological movements is often done apart from the living context of

¹¹⁵ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 24.

¹¹⁶ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 124.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁸ RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 83. Cfr. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Pluralism*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1987, 7-15 and 37-64.

¹¹⁹ RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 83-84.

¹²⁰ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 357.

the Church and observes harshly that often these movements are actually “only a summation of egoisms”.¹²¹ He speaks in a similar negative tone about specifically Marxist understandings of faith related to a local context alone (but not the universal Church) in terms of both of local level ecumenism and liberation theology.¹²² These expressions contrast with a plurality in interpreting and expressing Revelation which arise from a pre-given unity rooted in Christ. For Ratzinger, since the Church facilitates a participation of all its members in the one Christ, it enables a unity among different expressions of the faith above the fragmentation of egos, cultural and minority interests. He writes,

The belief that we have all become a single new man in Jesus Christ will always call us to let the separating particularity of our own egos, the self-assertion of human selfhood, melt into the community of the new man Jesus Christ.¹²³

For Ratzinger, the very possibility of holding together multiplicity in the faith in a non-contradictory unity is connected to the Trinitarian dimensions of Church revealed in the economy of salvation and in particular the work of the Spirit. The German pastoral theologian, Michaela Hastetter, notes that in Ratzinger’s work on plurality, “the incarnational-christological element, connected to the work of God in history and in the Church, is elaborated through the Christological-pneumatological perspective, where the newness and continuity of the living Church are guaranteed”.¹²⁴

¹²¹ J. RATZINGER, *Die Situation der Kirche heute, Hoffnungen und Gefahren*, in *Festvortrag beim Priestertreffen und Ansprache beim Pontifikalamt anlässlich des 60 jährigen Priesterjubiläums von Kardinal Josef Frings*, Druckerei Wienend, Köln 1970, 15. See also J. RATZINGER, *Identifikation mit der Kirche*, in J. RATZINGER, K. LEHMANN (edited by), *Mit der Kirche Leben*, Herder, Freiburg 1977, 35.

¹²² RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 299.

¹²³ J. RATZINGER, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1993, 55.

¹²⁴ M. HASTETTER, *Die Bedeutung des Symphonischen Denkens des ‚Mozarts der Theologie‘ für die Pastoral*, in M. HASTETTER, C. OHLY, G. VLACHONIS (edited by), *Symphonie des Glaubens*, EOS Verlag, St. Ottilien, 2007, 36. She writes, “das inkarnatorisch-christologische Element, jene Bindung an das geschichtliche Handeln Gottes, wird in der Kirche also ergänzt durch die christologische-pneumatologische Perspektive, die, wo die Neuheit und Kontinuität der lebendigen Kirche zugleich gewährleistet” (English translation mine). In order to highlight this she notes that Ratzinger points to the notion of “Geist-Sacraments,” in J. RATZINGER, *Kirchliche Bewegungen und ihr theologischer Ort*, in «Internationalische Katholische Zeitschrift» 27 (1998) 435.

a) History, Contextuality and Charisms

A certain multiplicity in the faith within a unity of truth is possible due to the work of the Spirit. Ratzinger comments on Bonaventure's understanding that the charismatic and theological interpretations offered by the Church Fathers and the saints,¹²⁵ presented new dimensions to understanding the interpretative criterion of the whole Church as People of God rather than just the interpretative criterion of the canon of Scripture alone.¹²⁶ In the *Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, he writes:

The 'Holy People of God' which is the Church of the present is here placed side by side with the classical saints of theology, that is, with the Fathers of the Church; and the Church of the present is understood to be a new criterion of interpretation with equal rights.¹²⁷

Furthermore, for Bonaventure, Francis and Dominic become witnesses to this progressive principle of interpretation since the Church has confirmed their sanctity.¹²⁸

In his own later theology, Ratzinger highlights this progressive principle of interpretation through the spirit given to the People of God. He compares the role of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the thirteenth century to the New Ecclesial Movements today. Both point to the importance of reception as part of the pneumatic, interpretative criterion of the faith and allow for new developments in the expression of Revelation. The New Ecclesial movements aim like the monastic movements of the past, to "live out the Gospel radically," and to evangelise through living the "evangelical life".¹²⁹ They represent a radical charismatic interpretation of the faith for new contexts in ways that are suited to the meaning sought for by contemporary generations. For Ratzinger the New Ecclesial movements thus open up the "surplus" or universal dimension within the notion of apostolic succession representing the universal commission of all in the Church to hand on the faith.¹³⁰

As Ratzinger highlights, Bonaventure clarified that the mystical interpretations of the Word of God evident in Francis and revealed at the highest level

¹²⁵ RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften: Offenbarungs-Verständnis und Geschichts-Theologie Bonaventuras*, 539; RATZINGER, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 77-80.

¹²⁶ RATZINGER, *Gesammelte Schriften: Offenbarungs-Verständnis und Geschichts-Theologie Bonaventuras*, 542; RATZINGER, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 82.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, 82.

¹²⁹ Cfr. J. RATZINGER, *New Outpourings of the Spirit*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2007, 45-46.

¹³⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 38.

of love were consistent with the knowledge of Christ given to the apostles and therefore with the hierarchical form of the Church.¹³¹ Later in his own theology Ratzinger comes back to that connection. While the multiple and charismatic forms in which the faith is lived out may appear too radical for those in positions of hierarchical authority in the Church, he sees that Church authorities have to learn a certain “selflessness” (*Selbstlosigkeit*) to assent to them. On the other hand, those expressing different charisms need to learn to submit to the universal Church in order to recognise the importance of unity. They are not to see themselves in opposition to the whole Church and hence her theology, but are to learn from her, just as the whole Church is to be open to learning from them in order to be true to itself and its pilgrim and pneumatic identity. He writes,

Each side has to learn from the other, has to let itself be purified, must bear with the other and find its way to those attitudes of which Paul in speaking in his great hymn to love (1 Cor 13:41ff). Thus movements ... must be warned that they are a gift made to the Church as a whole and that they need to submit to the demands of the whole in order to remain true to their own nature.¹³²

b) Multiplicity and unity: the context of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Dialogue

Ratzinger’s understanding of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue also demonstrates that his openness to different interpretations of Christian Revelation is central to coming to a fuller understanding of the truth of Revelation.¹³³ He recognises the “inner wholeness of faith;” that all expressions of Christianity belong within the Catholic whole, the Church of Christ.¹³⁴ For the interpretation of Revelation, this involves examining different expressions of Christianity in their particularity and asking whether these can be changed without changing the essence of the faith.¹³⁵ Within an ecumenical context, Ratzinger outlines the importance of hermeneutics for this task of constantly re-interpreting Revela-

¹³¹ Cfr. RATZINGER, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, 93.

¹³² *Ibidem*, 45-46.

¹³³ Cfr. J. RATZINGER, “Anglican-Catholic Dialogue: Its problems and hopes,” in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, St Pauls, Slough 1988, 83.

¹³⁴ Cfr. J. RATZINGER, *Die Erste Sitzungsperiode des zwieten Vatikan Konzils: Ein Ruckblick*, Bachem, Cologne 1963, 47. “Ecumenical should mean ... to support the inner wholeness of faith, and thus make the separated brother aware that everything truly Christian finds shelter in the Catholic”, cited in A. NICHOLS, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 81.

¹³⁵ RATZINGER, “Anglican-Catholic Dialogue: Its problems and hopes,” in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 82.

tion and highlighting new angles. He writes “hermeneutics is about apprehending the word with an understanding which at the same time discovers in it new possibilities”.¹³⁶

The importance of combining the metaphysical and historical dimensions in an ecumenical context is vital. For Ratzinger, a socio-linguistic or cultural-linguistic approach to ecumenism, confines it to the level of empirical experience, and doesn’t yield any new insights on Revelation because it is unconnected to metaphysical truth and therefore is unconnected to redemption which impacts life. Ratzinger writes in the context of Anglican-Catholic dialogue that “the question arises whether it (ecumenism) is a matter of truth at all, or just of comparing different customs and finding a way of reconciling them”.¹³⁷

For Ratzinger, the Church’s interpretation of Revelation can also be purified by dialoguing with other world religions. Like his approach to ecumenism, his approach to inter-religious dialogue has to go beyond a metaphorical approach to religion or the idea that all religions are simply different cultural expressions of the same reality. Ratzinger criticises the view of Paul Knitter or John Hick that Christian “symbols” for God¹³⁸ are merely metaphorical and interchangeable with those of other world religions since none of them can access reality.¹³⁹ The document *Dominus Jesus* highlighted the uniqueness of Christ and reflected Ratzinger’s views on Christ as “valid and binding truth” expressed in his book, *Truth and Tolerance*.¹⁴⁰ Here Ratzinger noted a view prevalent in some inter-religious theology that Jesus Christ is now seen as one moral figure among many, each partially representing the truth, but none capable of revealing it entirely.

For Ratzinger the centrality of Christ for salvation means that truth is manifested in Christ “in a form that cannot be exchanged with some other symbol”.¹⁴¹ Christianity is not an ‘absolute religion’ among ‘relative’ religions but combines

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, 82. Hermeneutics means reading the statements of both parties in the “context of the whole tradition and with a deeper understanding of Scripture,” in order to “show(s) up much that is new”.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, 83.

¹³⁸ RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 52; 119.

¹³⁹ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, «Communio» 31/3 (2004) 489.

¹⁴⁰ Cfr. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 120 and cfr. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Dominus Jesus*, CTS, London, 2000, reflecting Ratzinger’s stance reaffirming his commitment to the centrality of Christ for the salvation of all human beings as distinct from being merely one way among many others.

¹⁴¹ RATZINGER, *The Church and Scientific Theology*, 336. Unlike the Hindu myths which recount impressive stories about the descents of the god Krishna, the Christian faith affirms that Jesus came into the world not merely symbolically but in historically verifiable reality;” *Truth and Tolerance*, 254. See also RATZINGER, “Das Problem der Absolutheit des christlichen Heilsweges,” in RATZINGER, *Grundsatz-Reden*, Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg 2005, 36. Ratzinger

‘enlightenment’ with religion, to meet requirements for universality¹⁴² and to meet reason in its search for truth. Christian faith is not just based on a mythical knowledge. In *Truth and Tolerance*, he explains that Christian theology as it emerged in the second century was seen to correspond more to a philosophical wisdom (due to its connection to universal truths accessible to reason) rather than ‘religions’ which were based on myths. In the early Church, Christ was also depicted as a philosopher with a philosopher’s staff as he gave a meaning to life and the problem of death.¹⁴³ Christianity and its connection to reason was seen in such sharp contrast to mythical religions from surrounding religions, that it was often termed a–theistic.¹⁴⁴ As a philosophy, its core message was that what unites all human beings of all cultures and religion are not interchangeable religious rituals or cultures, but “the question of truth”.¹⁴⁵ Hence religion should have the effect of transforming one’s life.¹⁴⁶ Ratzinger goes on to assert that, “no one dies for interchangeable myths; [...] nor is it possible to live on a hypothesis; after all, life itself is no hypothesis but rather unrepeatable reality upon which rides an eternal destiny”.¹⁴⁷

Without this recognition that religion is based on searching for truth referents, the real “difference” between different religions is ignored in dialogue.¹⁴⁸ Ratzinger recognises that due to the influence of the Enlightenment, more mythological understandings of different World Religions are common today. After Kant, and influenced by Voluntarism, religious concepts are seen as interchangeable at the level of phenomenological reality, while the reality itself to which they point is seen as noumenal and completely inaccessible.

points out that the absoluteness of a Monotheistic God means that this god is of *universal* appeal, transcending all national boundaries.

¹⁴² RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 82.

¹⁴³ Ratzinger speaks of Christian theology as the true philosophy drawing from Justin Martyr’s understanding. He also notes Hans Von Balthasar’s comments on this in J. RATZINGER, “Philosophie, Christentum, Mönchtum,” in *Sponsa Verbi*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1960, 340–387. Cfr. J. RATZINGER, *Faith, Philosophy and Theology*, «Communio» 11/4 (1984) 351.

¹⁴⁴ Cfr. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 170.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 82–83.

¹⁴⁶ Cfr. RATZINGER, *Salt of the Earth*, 21.

¹⁴⁷ RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, 21. See also M. MCCAUGHEY, *Reason, Reality and the Re-personalisation of Being*, in «REA: A Journal of Religion, Education and the Arts», no. 7 (2011), “Ratzinger characterises the effects of the third wave of de-hellenisation in a similar way: the rejection of reason results in a cultural and religious pluralism which favours relativism in favour of the truth of being. He also notes that deism and voluntarism have resulted in a popular secular view of faith that is no longer something that has the ability to explain and penetrate everyday human life and its meaning, but is ‘pure paradox.’”

The full weight of Ratzinger's concerns about the separation of faith and reason and its effect on religion are expressed in his Regensburg address as Pope which detail the effects of what he calls "the third wave of de-hellenisation". Since the link of faith with reason has been severed, there is a resultant cultural and religious pluralism which favours relativism. Since no religion is seen as connecting to truth and ultimately to matters of salvation, my life or death, then it doesn't seem to matter what religion one chooses. These ideas are echoed by Charles Taylor who also recognises that associated with modernity is a new 'tamed' form of religion and a new form of religious believer: the modern invulnerable "buffered-self" to whom a multiplicity of faiths has little effect once "being like them is not an option for me".¹⁴⁹

Ratzinger also critiques a form of inter-religious dialogue which emphasizes mystical union and completely ignores any religious concepts or doctrines. This confines religion to the spiritual and private sphere, effectively undermining religion and theology,

When God is confined to the private realm, then the various expressions of faith which do exist in the public realm are seen as interchangeable. Each religion is seen to merely reveal aspects of the truth and are just symbols of God, but that God in Himself cannot be known. The most important aspect of any religion becomes the mystical element or the contact with the ineffable which it offers and that this can lead to a great peace among world religions if "each recognises the other as a different way of reflecting the One Eternal Being".¹⁵⁰

For Christianity, based on the Incarnation and God's action in the world, God enters inter-religious dialogue and theology only when dialoguers speak about real life and God's transformative power in their lives. Here the emphasis is metaphysical rather than mythological. Ratzinger speaks of those in dialogue "bringing themselves into the dialogue," which involves God. As Ratzinger puts it,

Only when man brings himself into the conversation, then God too is involved in some way or other [...] only when man brings himself into the conversation does the *logos* of all being enter, along with the *logos* of human being, into the words of human speech.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 67. See C. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London 2007, 304. Also, RATZINGER, *The changeable and unchangeable in theology*, «Theology Digest» 10 (1962) 71-76.

¹⁵⁰ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, 488.

¹⁵¹ RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, 61.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have engaged with the foundations of Ratzinger's theological approach through examining the influence of his study of the theology of history in St Bonaventure as well as influences from other Catholic theologians such as Augustine, Guardini and Newman. Acknowledging the pilgrim and pneumatological context of the Church in history is central to understanding how Ratzinger does theology and approaches the interpretation of Revelation. Theologians are called to participate in Christ's prayer relationship with the Father within the faith community of the Church giving them real experiential knowledge of God in Christ which also gives a way of interpreting reality. This faith knowledge goes beyond rationalistic, exact knowledge yet offers certainty through entry into divine love and relationship and entry into God's providential care for the world. Theology, for Ratzinger, is therefore to be done "through the lens of the pure in heart," or in the form of Mary-Church, bringing members through faith into the subject of the Church and the living memory of the Christ event, which constantly brings to light new perspectives on Revelation. This lens of the pure in heart also allows for new insights into Revelation through dialogue with agnostic seekers,

other Christians and those of other world religions once all are genuinely seeking the *logos* and therefore related to the Christ event and the Church. At all times humility and openness to the other is central to this interpretative approach in history, and yet rooted in the view that truth (which is a person) is indeed accessible.

It is my hope that this exploration of aspects of Ratzinger's theological approach will help underpin a theological attitude which participates in Christ through the Holy Spirit, is rooted in contemplative holiness and which, through humility, distinguishes truth from graspable certainty. Such an approach is never content to reduce Revelation to historicist fundamentalism nor return to a narrow, propositional interpretation. Nevertheless it holds the centrality of Christ as the truth and continues through the gift of the Holy Spirit to seek and search for a fuller insight into this person, the memory of which the Church holds in history. It opens to creative fidelity, the discovery of new insights into Revelation through the Spirit's expression in ever new contexts, times and places without an accommodation to relativism, the ideological grasping of modernity or the fashionable fluidity of a postmodern culture.

ABSTRACT

For Ratzinger, the truth of Revelation (as person) cannot be confined to empirical, positivistic statements. His interpretation of Revelation centres on a deeply mystical view of faith, which, through the Church, gives access to a real experiential knowledge of God in Christ. His view of history, tradition and categories of wisdom and purity of heart give eyes to see the work of the Spirit in symphonic-multiplicity and facilitate new insights through dialogue with the *logos* in new contexts. New insights into Revelation are given without an accommodation to relativism, the ideological grasping of modernity or the fashionable fluidity of a postmodern culture.