

The Theology of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: In His Own Words

By: Fr. John Hollowell (all rights reserved)

“For in the midst of a world full of harsh discipline and inexorable pressures, a secret hope still looks to the Church, which, it is felt, ought to be a kind of island of the good life, a tiny oasis of freedom into which one can withdraw now and then. Consequently, this rage at the Church, or disappointment with her, has a particular quality, because in their heart of hearts people expect more of her than of all worldly institutions.”

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

Called to Communion

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Introduction

I began seminary only one year before the passing of Pope John Paul II. In that first year of seminary studies, however, I quickly grew to love the Pope and his writings. Pope John Paul II wrote with such force and insight that I couldn't help but be drawn to his teachings. After 25 years of hearing from secular society about what it meant to be human, Pope John Paul II came along and taught about what it *really* meant, and he wrote and taught in a way that spoke to my heart.

Something that made it even easier for me to become a Pope John Paul II fan was the fact that as a seminarian, I was able to read a lot of the various works of the Pope before he was elected. Cardinal Karol Wojtyla wrote several profound works that I was able to encounter in my seminary education that gave me an even deeper love for the teachings of his pontificate. I vowed to myself that I would do that same "background research" when the next Holy Father was elected so that I could gain a greater appreciation of the Pope's teachings, and I looked forward to being able to start that research from the beginning of a pontificate as opposed to constantly playing catch up as I had to do with Pope John Paul II.

So it was that on April 19th, 2005, while the bells at St. Meinrad were still tolling in celebration of the newly elected Pontiff, I went down to the bookstore to buy a few books authored by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. I purchased *Truth and Tolerance*, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, and *Called to Communion*. When I got back to my room, I cracked open the cover of *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, and I was disheartened to say the least. In the back of the book, there was a list of other works by the Cardinal, and the list contained about 80 different titles. I immediately thought to myself, "Well, so much for really getting a handle on where he's coming from!" At that moment I pretty much gave up on the idea of reading his entire corpus, but I knew that it would still be great to be in a position to study a

Pope's thought and see how that played out in his pontificate, even if reading it ALL was out of the question.

Over the next few years I read the occasional book or article by the former Cardinal Ratzinger. Some books were required for classes, but most I read on my own. The more I immersed myself in Ratzinger's writings I began to realize that my motivation was no longer one of wanting to understand the thought of the Pope; I simply started to read his stuff because what he said made sense to me, and more importantly, it was beautiful. Growing up in an era of poor catechesis, and having spent most of my time in philosophy and 'theology' classes at my liberal arts college defending my faith to a very uncomfortable and unsettling degree, it was refreshing to hear from a man who was finally proud to be Catholic. He was not in the least bit embarrassed by his faith and it actually seemed to be something that was a JOY to him. I frequently found myself reading something by Cardinal Ratzinger, and most of the time I would simply write in the margin "Yes!" As I read his stuff, over and over again it was my experience that he put into words what I had always known to be true, but could never have hoped to verbalize in the eloquent manner that he had achieved. I slowly realized that his words needed to be given to others out there who came from a similar position that I had. His words have the power to call out from hiding all the Catholics who have for the last twenty or thirty years felt the need to seek shelter and lay low; all of those who have been embarrassed to be Catholic and have lacked the ability to defend what they know to be true in their heart. I have come to experience Cardinal Ratzinger to be, like his predecessor in the papacy, a general mustering the troops of the faith once again, and I think his words need to be heard.

In the summer of 2006, I picked the *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* index back up again, and I realized I had in fact read most of his major works. Certainly there were pieces missing, I hadn't read all 80 by any means, but I felt like I had read the works that are considered to be his most important and most representative of his thought as a theologian. It was then that the

idea popped into my head that I should get his words out as best as I could. The next year at school, I translated all the key passages from his works onto computer, sorted them by category, and basically applied my own words simply as a way to transition from one quote to the next. It is my hope that this work will provide people the opportunity to get a good snapshot of where Cardinal Ratzinger is coming from theologically, even if they do not have time to read all of the individual works.

A quick note about a theme that runs throughout the work: in several key sections (Scripture, theology, liturgy, etc.) the idea surfaces and resurfaces that the Church and theologians are constantly battling one another. This needs to be explained. Theologians are mainly professors at seminaries or colleges, and they regularly write papers and books and kick around new ideas. In an article, a theologian will propose an idea that they have been pondering on. They'll propose it, but they will also be expecting feedback from other theologians. Other theologians will respond in their own articles or books, and so it is that theology, like any other science in this regard, takes shape via a slow discussion through papers and books and conferences etc.

The Church has in place a way to help monitor these discussions. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) is a group of theologians who have been called to Rome to help observe what is being said in the dialogue of theologians. The perception is that this group bullies theologians, telling them what they can and can't write, believe, teach etc. The reality is that these theologians at the CDF don't have the time to deal with all of the theological discussions going on out there. Besides, for the most part, it is fellow theologians who keep each other on the right path through their discussions and debates.

The problem is very simple. The CDF has to step in when a theologian goes from making the seemingly subtle transition from saying to the world "I think this theological idea might be true, but I'm open to discussion with other theologians," to the stance that "this theological concept that I have come up with is true, there should be no debate about it, people simply

need to think of it as true.” Cardinal Ratzinger talks about this issue noting, “Theology is interpretation and must remain such. When it no longer interprets but, so to speak, lays hands on the substance of the faith and alters it by inventing a new text for itself, it ceases to be theology.”¹ This phenomenon is not peculiar to theology. Some scientists come up with theories that they do not believe could be wrong. Some people in education believe that the methods they have developed are the best and should be used by everyone else. Doctors come up with new techniques which they believe are best, and would rather not submit them for review by a medical board. The list goes on. The problem comes down to an issue of pride. Some people believe that they are right, and refuse to hear otherwise. They believe that their creativity is not appreciated, etc. Cardinal Ratzinger notes the problem with theologians who circulate their own creative ideas as truth: “When a doctor...instead of patiently accommodating himself to the laws of anatomy and of life, risks a “creative” idea, the consequences are readily apparent...in the case of a theologian, in reality even here too much is at stake for him to trust himself simply to his momentary conviction.”² People’s souls are on the line in theology, just as their bodies are on the line in the medical field. Caution should always be the keyword, and the process for being cautious shouldn’t be despised and subverted, but embraced and appreciated for what it is.

The first check on a theologian’s attempt to turn his or her new and creative idea into dogma should be the bishop. The bishop is responsible for correcting any theologian in his diocese for teaching things that are contrary to the Church. However, the CDF can also step in to assist the bishop in his role. If people have the chance to be led astray, then the Church always comes to Her people’s defense. The Church knows that the average layperson is going to respect the teachings of a theologian, and if

¹ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 93

² *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 96

that theologian is running around teaching false doctrine as if it were truth, then the Church must act.

Some theologians, very logically then, have a strong dislike for the CDF. No one likes to have oversight, especially the smarter a person is. There is always tension between the two. The CDF is often accused of stifling “creativity” when, in actuality, theologians can be as creative as they want as long as they don’t try to lead people astray with their creativity. In order to break free from the perceived stifling oversight of the CDF, some theologians have gone as far as proposing that there be two magisteriums.³ Their idea is that theologians would run one magisterium, and the other would be the Church’s magisterium, and the two would not oversee each other. This is like drug makers proposing that there be two FDA’s, one staffed by drug company employees, and the other staffed by whoever the government wants to put in the second FDA. What is the point of an FDA if it isn’t overseeing the production of drugs and making sure that people are not being harmed? The very word oversight implies that the people doing the oversight are not the same people being monitored.

The Cardinal, who, prior to heading up the CDF for many years, was also a theologian himself who taught in a university, has the following exhortation to all those who do theology within the framework of the Catholic Church:

What conclusions may we draw from all of this?
In the first place, the importance of courage in
evaluating the latest theories of one’s age...the
obverse of this courage should be the modesty of

³ The Magisterium is the teaching aspect of the Church made up of bishops, theologians and lay people. The Magisterium has varying connotations but generally thought of, it means the bishops and hierarchy who help teach. The CDF is a significant component of the Magisterium. Other offices of the Magisterium are the Office for Divine Worship, which deals with how liturgies are to be conducted, the office of Catholic Education, and the list goes on.

not claiming to have just discovered what Christianity is really all about by dint of one's own ingenuity. Out of such modesty something even more valuable could emerge: the kind of humility that submits to reality, not inventing Christian truth as a newly discovered "find," but truly finding it in the sacramental community of the faith of all periods.⁴

⁴

Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life, 60

Important Biographical Notes

The book *Milestones* is a very complete work which paints a much more thorough picture of the life of Cardinal Ratzinger. What I hope to do here is simply to highlight some of the special moments of his life that are especially illuminating or interesting. The first interesting fact is that the Cardinal was born on the Easter Vigil.⁵ Even as a very young child, it seemed growing up that the Liturgy was something of great importance for the Cardinal. He describes the Liturgy in his youth as “a riveting adventure to move by degrees into the mysterious world of the liturgy. It was becoming more and more clear to me that here I was encountering a reality that no one had simply thought up.”⁶ This love for the Liturgy will continue to play a crucial role in his adult life as well.

When Cardinal Ratzinger was elected, a very big deal was made about the fact that he was in the Hitler Youth movement and that he was a soldier in the German army. To hear some tell the story, it almost sounded like Cardinal Ratzinger was the Fuhrer’s right hand man. Way before the controversy, the Cardinal had already spelled out, in several places, what his role in the German army was, and certainly his story is much different than the accusations following his election.

With regards to his participation in the Hitler Youth, the Cardinal tells the story that “Thank goodness, there was a very understanding mathematics teacher. He himself was a Nazi but an honest man, who said to me, “Just go once and get the document so that we have it...” When he saw that I simply didn’t want to, he said, “I understand, I’ll take care of it”, and so I was able to stay free of it.”⁷ So the Cardinal was able to avoid any of the meetings and gatherings of the Hitler Youth, but his

⁵ *Salt of the Earth*, 42

⁶ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 20

⁷ *Salt of the Earth*, 52

involvement with the events surrounding World War II were not over. In his teen years, the Cardinal joined a “voluntary” army weapons core. “With a few others I had the good fortune of being able to say that I intended to become a Catholic priest. We were sent out with mockery and verbal abuse.”⁸ Dodging active duty for a German could only last so long, and so as the war neared and the Germans became more desperate, more and more men were pulled into service. It got to the point where even the seminaries were utilized for military purposes. “From 1943 on, the seminarians in Trauenstein were all conscripted into antiaircraft work at Munich.”⁹ The result of that service was that he “ended up in an American prisoner-of-war camp in Ulm with about forty to fifty thousand prisoners. I was released on June 19, 1945.”¹⁰

After the war, Joseph Ratzinger was able to return to seminary studies. His time in seminary sounds very similar to most men studying for the priesthood. “In six years of theological study...I always had the basic direction before me, but there was no lack of crises.”¹¹ It was during his time in seminary that Joseph Ratzinger developed his love for the writings of St. Augustine. Very generally speaking, the two great figures of Catholic thought are St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. Usually, those who study theology fall into one of those two camps, although it is not so much two camps as it is simply that there are two different styles of doing theology. St. Thomas Aquinas is at least perceived of as being very logical but cold; everything is spelled out in St. Thomas’s *Summa Theologica*, an extremely meticulous work where St. Thomas goes through and answers the theological question of the day one at a time and which is thousands of pages long. St. Augustine, on the other hand, is more of an emotional and passionate defender of the faith. Cardinal Ratzinger, by his own admission, falls into the

⁸ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 33

⁹ *Salt of the Earth*, 56

¹⁰ *Salt of the Earth*, 57

¹¹ *Salt of the Earth*, 55

category of being one who prefers St. Augustine. Cardinal Ratzinger notes that in his seminary days, “I had difficulties in penetrating the thought of Thomas Aquinas, whose crystal-clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made.”¹² Elsewhere, the Cardinal spells out the very common debate that theologians have concerning the two pillars of Catholic thought: “Scholasticism has its greatness, but everything is very impersonal. You need some time to enter in and recognize the inner tension. With Augustine, however, the passionate, suffering, questioning man is always right there, and you can identify with him.”¹³ It should be noted, however, that these distinctions between Augustine and Aquinas are not agreed upon by all. It has been argued, for instance, that a deep, profound, and intense spirituality is to be found in the works of St. Thomas. That Cardinal Ratzinger, the logical and objective theologian could be an Augustinian, and that the dramatic, warm, and personal Pope John Paul II could be categorized as a Thomist illustrate that the boundaries really are limited and on some level inaccurate.

After seminary, Joseph Ratzinger was ordained a priest. The cardinal talked about an inspiring and perhaps telling event that took place at his ordination. “At the moment when the elderly archbishop laid his hands on me, a little bird—perhaps a lark—flew up from the high altar in the cathedral and trilled a little joyful song.”¹⁴ Perhaps that event was a sign of things to come.

After his ordination, Joseph Ratzinger headed off to get his doctorate. He notes that it was a particularly trying time for him. “I suffered a great deal, especially in the first year, from the loss of all the human contacts and experiences afforded me by the pastoral ministry.”¹⁵ The doctorate work was a challenge and was extremely rigorous. At his dissertation, one of the professors

¹² *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 44

¹³ *Salt of the Earth*, 61

¹⁴ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 99

¹⁵ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 102

hearing Ratzinger's presentation was Schmaus. "Schmaus called me aside for a brief private conversation, during which he told me very directly and without emotion that he had to reject my habilitation thesis because it did not meet the pertinent scholarly standards."¹⁶ That was surely quite a blow to the young theologian, but Joseph Ratzinger rebounded well. After a summer of piecing things together, "the work was not rejected but given back for revision."¹⁷ While he was picking up the pieces, he was able to stay at his parents' home once again, and he took much joy from that. "Once again I had been granted the possibility of living with my dear parents, and in their gentle company I had found the sense of shelter that was precisely what I had so needed during the turbulent events I had to undergo."¹⁸

Joseph Ratzinger would eventually be rewarded his doctorate and would go on to become a university professor. He flourished in that role. It is during this time that many have recently wondered aloud whether or not Joseph Ratzinger as a university professor was not quite liberal and experimental with his theology. To hear some tell the story, when he finally had to "grow up" and become the head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, he put all that aside, and became the hyper-conservative Cardinal that the world knows him as today. This critique was most famously leveled against Joseph Ratzinger by Metropolitan Domaskinos of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Metropolitan was writing concerning a statement issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) that was at the time headed up by Cardinal Ratzinger. The Metropolitan bluntly stated "I have realized a number of things that challenge me to put the question of whether there is any continuity between Professor Joseph Ratzinger and the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith."¹⁹ Cardinal Ratzinger, in his reply, describes the change as he sees it.

¹⁶ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 107

¹⁷ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 109

¹⁸ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 114

¹⁹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 222

The Professor and the Prefect are the same person, but the two terms refer to two offices that correspond to different tasks. In that sense, then, there is a difference but no contradiction. The Professor is concerned with knowledge, and in his books and lectures he presents what he thinks he has found and opens himself not only to other theologians disputing it but also to the judgment of the Church... The Prefect, on the other hand, is not supposed to expound his personal views. On the contrary, he has to leave them in the background so as to make room for the common message of the Church. He does not, as the Professor does, write texts based on his own research and findings; rather, he must see to it that the organs of the teaching Church carry on their work with a high degree of responsibility, so that in the end a text is purged of everything that is merely personal and truly becomes the common message of the Church.²⁰

Elsewhere, the Cardinal talks about how his time spent as a professor evolved and shaped him into the person that he became as the head of the CDF. “I must say that I felt very strongly within myself the crisis of the claim of truth during the decades of my teaching work as a professor. What I feared was that the way we use the idea of the truth of Christianity was sheer arrogance, yes, and even a lack of respect for others. The question was, how far may we still use it? I have thoroughly explored this question. In the end I could see that if we abandon the concept of truth, then we abandon our foundations.”²¹ At the same time he doesn’t think of himself as a professor who was

²⁰ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 230

²¹ *God and the World*, 262-3

unfaithful to the Church or experimental. “I have never tried to create a system of my own, an individual theology. What is specific, if you want to call it that, is that I simply want to think in communion with the faith of the Church, and that means above all to think in communion with the great thinkers of the faith.”²² Elsewhere, he seems to disagree with the criticism that he thought one way and has since abandoned that way of thinking and believing when he notes “It is not I who have changed, but others.”²³

Other contributions of the Cardinal include his work at Vatican II. It was at that council that Joseph Ratzinger really stepped onto the world stage as a theologian. At the Council, he wrote a lot of the draft documents for Cardinal Frings²⁴, who was one of the towering figures of the Council in terms of contributions to the overall body of documents produced by the Council.

In 1981, Pope John Paul II appointed Cardinal Ratzinger to the head of the CDF. His time there was considered controversial by some commentators, some nicknaming him the “Ratz-weiler”. He cracked down on theologians who stepped out of line, but that was his job. The number of interventions that the CDF made under Cardinal Ratzinger is usually dramatically inflated. Displaying his usual humility, the Cardinal does make the following concession about his time as head of the CDF however, “That in a personal controversy I occasionally react too harshly, I concede without further ado. But in what we did as a congregation, I think that we kept to the right measure.”²⁵

²² *Salt of the Earth*, 66

²³ *The Ratzinger Report*, 18

²⁴ *Salt of the Earth*, 71

²⁵ *Salt of the Earth*, 94

Appreciating the Liturgy

It could be argued that the subject that Cardinal Ratzinger has been most passionate about throughout his writing is the liturgy. It is the one subject that seems to come up in all of his writings regardless of the topic being discussed. The Cardinal sums up why he feels it is so important: “If we want to understand the Church properly, then we must look at her, I think, above all from the standpoint of her liturgy.”²⁶ Elsewhere he notes, “Eucharistic Communion is aimed at a complete reshaping of my own life.”²⁷ For Cardinal Ratzinger, the Liturgy has the opportunity to teach mankind about itself, and to open up the mysteries of the universe. Ratzinger also notes that the way the Liturgy is celebrated serves as a barometer for a community’s faithfulness to the Church. The Cardinal believes that the Mass is not something that has no connection to the everyday world; he notes, “I am convinced that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is to a large extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy.”²⁸

Cardinal Ratzinger has two main points that he seems to be making concerning liturgy in his writings. The first point is that the Mass is not something thought up by humanity, and the second point is that if humanity tries to make the Mass for itself, it becomes diseased and alienated from its true purpose. Before looking at these two points, it will first be helpful to lay out the development of the Liturgy through the ages. Jesus, in the upper room the night before he died, did not celebrate a Mass. That being the case, where did the Mass come from? It is to that task that we first turn.

²⁶ *God in the World*, 303

²⁷ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 78

²⁸ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 148

Development of the Liturgy

In *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Cardinal Ratzinger begins the history of the Liturgy not with the New Testament or Jesus but with the Exodus. He notes that “the Exodus appears to have two distinct goals...the reaching of the promised land...(and) God’s original command to Pharaoh runs as follows: “Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness” (Ex. 7:16).”²⁹ Ratzinger notes that God called the Israelites away from Egypt to a new land, but God also called them out into the desert to offer worship and sacrifice to Him. Ratzinger states that “Israel departs, not in order to be a people like all the others; it departs in order to serve God.”³⁰ So often in looking at the Old Testament, it is the land that is seen as the ultimate promise, but Cardinal Ratzinger urges his readers to look deeper. Does the power of God start and end with the fact that He provided the nation of Israel with real estate? “The land is given to the people to be a place for the worship of the true God. Mere possession of the land, mere national autonomy, would reduce Israel to the level of all the other nations.”³¹ Had God simply given the land to Israel he would have been setting up a nation like all the other nations; What made Israel unique is not the gift of the land, but the utterly new way in which God was calling Israel to worship Him, which was completely different from all the other nations around Israel. The Cardinal explains the true significance of the Mt. Sinai event: “Sinai is not a halfway house, a kind of stop for refreshment on the road to what really matters. No, Sinai gives Israel, so to speak, its interior land without which the exterior one would be a cheerless prospect.”³²

Immediately following the book of Exodus is the little-read book of Leviticus. The book is fairly legalistic in tone,

²⁹ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 15

³⁰ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 13

³¹ Ibid, 17

³² Ibid, 19

but it is important nonetheless. The Cardinal notes that what we read in the book of Leviticus is important for us today. The book sets out the laws that are to govern Israel's worship of God. "The book of Leviticus...without looking at chapter 26, with its threat of exile and its promise of new blessings – would come to the conclusion that it sets up an eternally valid form of worship."³³ It is thus the 26th chapter that provides a look towards the future, and allows for the possible reworking of the worship via the new dawn of the law in Jesus Christ. The Cardinal is noting that if the book of Leviticus did not contain a look to the future in Chapter 26, then all of its legal codes that it contains throughout the rest of the book would be closed off to being more fully fulfilled elsewhere. It would simply be a set of rules for worship that would be followed or not, but chapter 26 provides a way out of that mindset, such that the Levitical codes can be followed by the Israelites in the desert, but still possess the potential to be fulfilled by Jesus.

From the Levitical code governing worship, the Israelites, throughout the Old Testament, went on to develop their worship, especially with Solomon's construction of the temple. The Temple was the place where God truly dwelt amidst His people. After the Resurrection, however, for those who converted to Christianity, the Temple no longer served the purpose of housing God. God now had come into the world in a more dramatic way, and He was and is no longer confined to a building. In fact, the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D., a mere 35 years after Jesus' Resurrection. The worship of God was forced to evolve to respond to this most dramatic action of God in human history, His coming as man. "The liturgy of the Christian faith, cannot be viewed simply as a Christianized form of the synagogue service, however much its actual development owes to the synagogue service. The synagogue was always ordered toward the Temple and remained so, even after the Temple's destruction."³⁴ This

³³ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 37

³⁴ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 48

development of the synagogue service is symbolized by the fact that in the new Christian service, “The worshipper no longer looks toward Jerusalem,” instead it was prayer toward the east that was regarded as an apostolic tradition.³⁵ This move from worshipping toward the direction of the Temple to worshipping facing the east was done in order to face in the direction of the rising sun, and to thus “meet the coming Christ.”³⁶

After Jesus’ coming and his Eucharistic command at the Last Supper to “Do this in memory of me,”³⁷ worship of God was changed. Worship of God stepped away from the Temple and began to be celebrated everywhere. Here the question becomes, “What happened between the Last Supper and the Catholic Mass?” Often Catholics are asked to show where the Mass is located in the New Testament. Cardinal Ratzinger notes that the New Testament should be thought of as “the between-time, as image between shadow and reality” because it is the New Testament which “gives liturgical theology its specific form.”³⁸ However, it is dangerous to stop at the New Testament, and to treat it as the only source for liturgical development. “The problem with a large part of modern lituriology is that it tends to recognize only antiquity as a source, and therefore normative, and to regard everything developed later, in the Middle Ages and through the Council of Trent, as decadent. And so one ends up with dubious reconstructions of the most ancient practice, fluctuating criteria, and never-ending suggestions for reform.”³⁹

The Liturgy should be understood as cultic

In *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Cardinal Ratzinger discusses the idea that the Liturgy should be seen as a cultic sacrifice. What

³⁵ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 68

³⁶ Ibid, 69

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:24

³⁸ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 54

³⁹ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 82

does that mean? The word ‘cult’ has a negative connotation today, but when Cardinal Ratzinger speaks of cult he understands that word to refer to a group of people who come together based on a central event of sacrifice or worship. It might sound strange to refer to the Catholic faith as a cult, because of the connotation of the word, but really, society is always cultic in one way or another. “There are in reality no societies altogether lacking cult.”⁴⁰ One need only look at the TV ratings for the Super Bowl in the United States, or observe the interest generated at a midnight debut of a Hollywood blockbuster to understand that we are a cultic people. Ratzinger suggests that when people are not getting healthy cultic worship from their religion, they will create it somewhere else.

When Cardinal Ratzinger speaks of Catholicism being a cultic faith, he is referring to the fact that the Liturgy of today is tied to the sacrifices offered at the Temple in the Old Testament. If we could travel back to the Temple of the Old Testament, we might confuse it for a slaughterhouse. Sacrifices were being offered at the temple day and night, and it was a bloody affair. Goats, birds, cows, and other animals were continuously being sacrificed at the Temple for various reasons, usually to attempt to apologize to God for sins committed.

For Catholics (thankfully) the idea of animal sacrifice has been done away with by Christ’s offering of the perfect sacrifice, Himself, coupled with the fact that He showed us the new way to offer sacrifice at the Last Supper. What has not changed, however, is the idea that we are a cultic religion based on sacrifice. The Cardinal asks, “What is worship? What happens when we worship? In all religions sacrifice is at the heart of worship.”⁴¹ The idea of understanding the Liturgy as a cultic sacrificial event is what provides us with the link back to the Old Testament. “It is precisely when we read the New Testament in

⁴⁰ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 21

⁴¹ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 27

terms of cultic theology that we see how much it is bound up, in its deepest implications, with the Old.”⁴²

The Liturgy is not, in its first place, an activity designed for man

We have all seen it in parishes today, or heard the complaints from others, or perhaps leveled the criticism against the liturgy ourselves: “*It is so boring!*” In an era where some non-Catholic Christian churches offer services involving bands, singing, dancing, pyrotechnics, and a Starbucks in the narthex, the Catholic Mass can seem to be pretty slow and monotonous. Some today justify altering the Mass from the way the Church asks it to be celebrated due to the argument that an altered Mass is a more “meaningful” and a more “attractive” Mass. The Cardinal notes that if we try to make the Mass something which is entertaining on a human level, then it will fail. He says “(the Mass) will come off badly if it wants to enter the competition of show business. A pastor is not an emcee, and the liturgy is not a variety show. It will also come off badly if it wants to be a sort of engaging circle of friends.”⁴³ Indeed, some priests today seem to operate out of the notion that they should be apologetic upfront about placing such a burden as a properly celebrated Liturgy on the people, so in celebrating the Mass they do everything possible to reduce the pain of having to sit through a Mass, and they rush through it as quickly as possible so as to avoid anyone getting bored to death. Cardinal Ratzinger offers a different understanding of the Liturgy that I find completely refreshing and invigorating. One of Cardinal Ratzinger’s central theses about the Liturgy concerns the fact that we must understand whom the Mass is for before we can understand the Mass itself. It is to a discussion of this fact that we now turn.

⁴² *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 37

⁴³ *Sing A New Song for the Lord*, 94

“The liturgy is actually “done” for God and not for ourselves. The more we do it for ourselves, however, the less it attracts people.”⁴⁴ This principle sums up the Cardinal’s entire liturgical understanding. The Cardinal elsewhere describes the beauty of the Byzantine Liturgy, a Liturgy very similar to our own Mass, but which is practiced in Catholic Churches in the East.

The Byzantine liturgy was not, and is not, concerned to indoctrinate other people or to show them how pleasing and entertaining it might be. What was impressive about it was particularly its sheer lack of a practical purpose, the fact that it was being done for God and not for spectators; it was simply striving to be before God and for God: to be pleasing to God, as the sacrifice of Abel had been pleasing to God.⁴⁵

The way in which the Liturgy is celebrated and understood provides a very clear picture into how we approach and understand our relationship with God. It is for this reason that the Cardinal feels that the way we celebrate the Liturgy is equivocal with our practice of the Catholic Faith in general.

The liturgy is not the setting up of some club, an association of friends; we receive it from the whole Church, and we have to celebrate it as coming from the whole and directed toward the whole. Only then do we believe and pray aright, when we are living it in the context of this act of self-transcendence, of self-abnegation, directed

⁴⁴ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 126

⁴⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 92

toward the Church of all times and of all places:
this is what Catholicism essentially is.⁴⁶

That God created the Liturgy first of all for himself can seem to be a selfish and un-Godlike maneuver. To people operating in a modern mindset, often spending our days thinking and pondering the fact that everything is set up to serve ourselves, that it can be beneficial for us to not put ourselves first seems utterly foreign. Surely God would never be so self-righteous as to demand praise? Cardinal Ratzinger explains the issue by noting that only in making the Liturgy about God, and making the Liturgy an event where a community comes together and actually first and foremost praises God for what He has done for them, only then does that community truly receive blessings from God. It is the irony of God's law which makes it beautiful, but also makes it difficult to comprehend: only when we step away from our needs and direct our time and energy to God in the Liturgy or to the people around us through love do we truly receive anything back. God does not have us worship Him because He is selfish; He doesn't want the Liturgy to be about Him so that we all will remember that He's in charge, He asks us to worship Him because He is beauty and love and He also instructs us to worship him in large part to break the cycle of worshipping ourselves. Also, if we do not worship and praise God who is perfect, it doesn't seem we should ever expect to be able to respect our imperfect neighbors.

Cardinal Ratzinger notes that "Only respect for the liturgy's fundamental unspontaneity and pre-existing identity can give us what we hope for: the feast in which the great reality comes to us that we ourselves do not manufacture but receive a gift."⁴⁷ Only in not trying to dumb down or make exciting those parts of the Liturgy which do not, on a superficial level, seem exciting or entertaining, only when we embrace the Liturgy for

⁴⁶ *God is Near Us*, 120

⁴⁷ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 168

what it is do we really begin to worship God. When we stop trying to make the Liturgy an event where we feel like we are being entertained are we able to see the power of the Liturgy. “In the liturgy there is a power, an energy at work which not even the Church as a whole can generate: what it manifests is the Wholly Other, coming to us through the community.”⁴⁸ Coming to experience that power of the Wholly Other is what our goal for the Liturgy ought to be, and when we realize who the Liturgy is set up for, first and foremost, then we see its true power, and we’ll be less likely to be disappointed by the lack of a Starbucks in the narthex or a pyrotechnic rock concert service.

What happens when we set up the Liturgy for ourselves?

If we fail to properly orient the Liturgy towards God, the Cardinal notes the Liturgy that results is nothing short of problematic. Some would take offense to this, pointing out that we can never have a perfect Liturgy because the only true Liturgy is found in Heaven, and that God comes to us in the Liturgy no matter what we do. Both of those points are certainly true, but if we hold, as discussed earlier, that how we celebrate the Liturgy shows how we approach God, and if we believe that the Liturgy is to be directed toward God and not first to ourselves, then how we celebrate does become something more than a trivial matter.

The tendency, the Cardinal suggests, is to worship the community itself as opposed to worshiping God. He says that often where the liturgy is done poorly it is because “The experience of togetherness and the fostering of the village community rank higher than the gift of the sacrament...but the results of placing the experience of community above the sacramental reality in such a way are momentous. The

⁴⁸ *The Ratzinger Report*, 126

congregation is now celebrating itself.”⁴⁹ Making the Mass first and foremost an occasion for community and not first and foremost an occasion for worshiping God begins to quickly unsettle people. He notes that “at the outset people are elated because they feel confirmed by the fact that they themselves are celebrating in their church, that they can “do it alone.” But soon they notice that there is only the entity of their own making.”

In recent times, as most parishes and priests have done away with the Mass as the Church has asked it to be celebrated, “The revolt against what has been described as ‘the old rubricist rigidity’, which was accused of stifling ‘creativity’, has in fact made the liturgy into a do-it-yourself patchwork and trivialized it, adapting it to our mediocrity.”⁵⁰ Elsewhere Ratzinger bemoans the liturgical manipulation that has gone on for years now whereby most priests feel complete freedom to alter whatever they so choose in the Mass. Ratzinger notes,

Some bishops think they are not being faithful to the Council if they pray everything just the way it is found in the Roman Missal; at least one “creative” formulation must be inserted, regardless of how trite it may be. And the conventional greeting of the congregation at the beginning along with friendly wishes at the dismissal have already become obligatory elements of the sacred action, which hardly anyone would dare omit.⁵¹

Sadly, it seems often that those who seek to safeguard the Liturgy and allow it to be directed toward God and who hope to see the Liturgy celebrated as the Church has set it out to be celebrated are accused of being stiff and rigid. It is asserted that rules and regulations have nothing but a negative connotation in

⁴⁹ *Sing A New Song for the Lord*, 91

⁵⁰ *The Ratzinger Report*, 127

⁵¹ *Sing a New Song for the Lord*, 146

the Bible, so the person who even begins to talk about rules, rubrics or liturgical precision is immediately to be avoided like a conservative leper. However, does the fact that the Pharisees got into trouble following God's Law too strictly mean that all religious laws, guidelines, rubrics etc. should be abandoned? I think the answer that Cardinal Ratzinger offers is a clear and resounding no.

The only part of the Mass which is actually needed in order for the Mass to be valid are the words of Consecration: "Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body..." Some people take that rubric of the Church to provide a free pass to add and choose which other parts of the Mass they are going to use and which to obliterate or do their own way.

If there is any unchanging element, people think, then this would in no instance be anything other than the words of consecration: everything else might be done differently. The next idea is quite logical: If a central authority can do that, then why not local decision-making bodies? And if local bodies, then why not the congregation itself? It ought to be expressing itself in the liturgy and should be able to see its own style recognizably present there. After the rationalist and puritan trend of the seventies, and even the eighties, people are tired of liturgies that are just words and would like liturgies they can experience; and these soon get close to New Age styles...Finally, New Age says, "Let's just leave Christianity as a failed experiment and go back to the gods – it's better that way."⁵²

The Cardinal responds to his own statement by noting that "The liturgy becomes personal, true, and new, not through tomfoolery

⁵² *Truth and Tolerance*, 131

and banal experiments with the words, but through a courageous entry into the great reality that though the rite is always ahead of us and can never quite be overtaken.”⁵³

One of the major justifications for the liturgical experimentation by some within the Church can be traced back to Vatican II. Later on we will look in greater depth at what the Cardinal has to say about the Council, but for now, we are simply going to look at the way the Council has been used improperly to manipulate the Liturgy. Usually in places where the Liturgy is abused or done so poorly as to be almost unrecognizable to faithful, truth-seeking Catholics, what is offered as an excuse for such abuses is an appeal to the “spirit of the Council.” By making such an appeal, the abusers are readily acknowledging the facts, namely that the Council never called for anything even close to the sorts of gimmicks and tom-foolery that they push upon the people who attend Mass. Indeed, many people who rank highly within dioceses today are of a generation of Catholics who never bothered to read any of the documents from the Council but instead plowed on ahead with their own alterations and adjustments to the Liturgy which, as they note, are being implemented because said changes are in line with the “Spirit of the Council.” The Cardinal notes that “The belief that the spirit of the Council points in this direction has been able to gain acceptance in many a liturgical office and its agencies, although it is indisputable that these ideas cannot be supported by the text of the Second Vatican Council.”⁵⁴

One of the four pillar-esque documents of the Council is titled *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and it is a document solely devoted to the Liturgy. One way in which the Cardinal feels the Council has been abused concerns the idea of ‘inculturation.’ Paragraph 37 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* states that “Provisions shall also be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions,

⁵³ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 169

⁵⁴ *Sing a New Song for the Lord*, 145

and peoples, especially in mission lands, provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved.” The cardinal feels that this has been abused and people have taken the fact that the Rite can be altered for certain situations to say “Well, we have our own cultural needs as well, we should adapt the Liturgy to our needs too.” What quickly results is a dismantling of the Liturgy, which was, prior to tinkering, a great symbol of the unity of the Church across cultures. About inculturation Cardinal Ratzinger responds:

Whenever people talk about inculturation, they almost always think only of the liturgy, which then has to undergo often quite dismal distortions. The worshippers usually groan at this, though it is happening for their sake...the first and most fundamental way in which inculturation takes place is the unfolding of a Christian culture in all its different dimensions.⁵⁵

The Cardinal is suggesting that for the council members who spoke on inculturation had in mind an attempt to see inculturation directed to life in general, and not first and foremost to changing the liturgy. It is not the Liturgy which necessarily has to be reworked always and everywhere when a new culture encounters Catholicism. The cardinal also points out that often those who encounter the faith for the first time would rather that the Liturgy be left alone.

Elsewhere the Cardinal notes that ‘inculturation’ often destroys the beauty of the Liturgy. “In our form of the liturgy there is a tendency that, in my opinion, is false, namely, the complete “inculturation” of the liturgy into the contemporary world. The liturgy is thus supposed to be shortened; and

⁵⁵ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 201

everything unintelligible should be removed from it; it should, basically, be transposed down to an even “flatter” language.”⁵⁶

Another source of frustration for the Cardinal has been the abuse or misunderstanding of the idea that ‘active participation’ by the faithful must increase. In paragraph 14 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* one reads that “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (the idea of “active participation” is also found in paragraphs 19, 27, 30, 41, 50, 113, 114, 121, and 124). Some have taken this call for active participation to mean that the congregation should be doing something more, thus ways have been experimented with to get the people to more outwardly demonstrate their participation. Cardinal Ratzinger sees this call for more “active participation” to be widely misunderstood and improperly used. He says concerning participation: “Unfortunately, the word was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external, entailing a need for general activity.”⁵⁷ The Cardinal feels that participation can be found inwardly, and doesn’t necessarily mean that the Liturgy must “creatively” construct new ways for people to be engaged sensually. He notes that ““creativity” cannot be an authentic category for matters liturgical.”⁵⁸ He also states that “Man himself cannot simply “make” worship.”⁵⁹ When we experience a Liturgy which is celebrated by a priest who is embarrassed by the Liturgy and feels the need to adapt it, or when we experience a liturgy in which things have been added which are outside the Church’s vision of the Mass, something within us tells us that it is simply wrong.

Things have gone so far that Sunday liturgy
groups are cobbling together the liturgy for

⁵⁶ *Salt of the Earth*, 175

⁵⁷ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 171

⁵⁸ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 168

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 21

themselves. What is being offered here is certainly the work of a few clever and hard-working people who have made something up. But what I encounter in that is no longer the Wholly Other, the Holy One being offered to me, but rather the cleverness and hard work of a few people. And I notice that that is not what I am looking for. It's too little, and it's something else.

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These groups today could be a renegade choir who places themselves in the heart of the sanctuary and seeks to draw the attention to themselves, it could be liturgical dancing, the choices of songs for Mass by a liturgical coordinator at a parish, or it could simply be actions on the part of the Priest which demonstrate an attempt to make the liturgy something more “suitable” for the people by cutting things out, saying his own words in place of the words the Church has set forth as proper, etc. Abuse could take any number of forms at a given Mass, but the Cardinal seems to suggest that we know them to be fake as soon as we experience them. Besides, as the Cardinal notes elsewhere, attempts to make the Liturgy more “human” or more “suitable” never actually work. He notes that “Experience has shown that the retreat to ‘intelligibility for all’, taken as the sole criterion, does not really make liturgies more intelligible and more open but only poorer.”⁶¹

One example of an addition which the Cardinal sees as not simply irritating but problematic is that of liturgical dance.⁶²

⁶⁰ *God and the World*, 415

⁶¹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 128

⁶² When speaking of liturgical dancing, he is not talking about the dancing which is done in the African liturgical setting, or in other areas of the world where dancing is considered a proper expression of faith. He notes, “What people call dancing in the Ethiopian rite or the Zairean form of the Roman liturgy is in fact a rhythmically ordered procession, very much in keeping with the dignity of the occasion.” *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 199

Looking at this example will help to illustrate how he feels about the experimentation conducted on the Liturgy in general.

Theatrical entrance of different players into the liturgy, which is so common today, especially during the Preparation of the Gifts, quite simply misses the point. If the various external actions (as a matter of fact, there are not very many of them, though they are being artificially multiplied) become the essential in the liturgy, if the liturgy degenerates into general activity, then we have radically misunderstood the “theo-drama” of the liturgy and lapsed almost into parody. True liturgical education cannot consist in learning and experimenting with external activities.⁶³

As with all human “add-ons” or subtractions by additions imposed on the Church’s Liturgy, Cardinal Ratzinger feels that “It is totally absurd to try to make the liturgy “attractive” by introducing dancing pantomimes.”⁶⁴ Elsewhere, he notes that “Such attractiveness fades quickly – it cannot compete in the market of leisure pursuits...Liturgy can only attract people when it looks, not at itself, but at God.”⁶⁵ It all gets back, once again, to the idea of remembering whom the Liturgy is first of all directed toward.

Latin again?

The idea of having Mass in Latin probably sends chills down the spines of most who attended Mass prior to the Second Vatican Council. Cardinal Ratzinger does not think that the

⁶³ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 175

⁶⁴ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 198

⁶⁵ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 199

Council got it wrong allowing the Mass to be celebrated in languages other than Latin, but what concerns him is how the Council's commands have been wrongly carried out. Turning once again to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, it notes in paragraph 54, "Steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them." These parts would be the responses that people say or sing during the Mass, including the Sanctus (Holy Holy Holy), the Confiteor (I confess...), the Kyrie (lord have mercy), the creed, Gloria, Our Father, etc. The Cardinal rightly notes that the instructions of the Council with regard to this issue have not been carried out in many places, and he particularly blames priests (members of the clerical circles referred to below).

This is another of those cases which are all too frequent in recent years, where there is a contradiction between...what the Council actually says,...and, on the other hand, the concrete response of particular clerical circles.⁶⁶

This loss of the ability to know the major parts of the Mass in Latin is what disturbs the Cardinal. "If even the great liturgical celebrations in Rome, no one can sing the Kyrie or the Sanctus any more, no one knows what Gloria means, then a cultural loss has become a loss of what we share in common."⁶⁷ It is the Latin language which we share in common with the whole Catholic Church around the world, and so the Cardinal fears that the bridge may be lost if the faithful fail to maintain a knowledge of specific parts of the Liturgy in the Latin language. He feels that "use of the vernacular is in principle justified. It would be a danger only if it were to drag the Eucharist back into the realm of

⁶⁶ *The Ratzinger Report*, 122-3

⁶⁷ *God and the World*, 418

national culture.”⁶⁸ The Cardinal sees Latin as being especially beneficial at Masses celebrated amidst peoples of varying languages. He speaks of a priest who used Latin parts in his parish Masses because “there were three separate language groups coming to Mass. He suggested using a Latin Canon [Eucharistic Prayer] in common.”⁶⁹ The Cardinal also feels it is important for Catholics to retain knowledge of some Latin so that in places where people come together from other cultures, voices can be raised in common. “Let’s think of tourist centers, where it would be lovely for people to recognize each other in something they have in common.”⁷⁰ Other important spots where people come together from other cultures would include such celebrations as World Youth Day Masses, and most Masses held at St. Peter’s Basilica, including the Easter Vigil and the Christmas Masses.

The Cardinal sums up his views nicely on the subject of the Latin language and its role that he hopes it plays in the future of the Church. He is not against the Mass being celebrated in the vernacular language by any means; he just hopes that we do not forget our heritage so that we can continue to stay united via the important bridge of the common language of the Church.

Because things are as they are, we should gratefully accept both: the normal form of the Eucharist is in the vernacular, but we should not on that account forget to pray it, to love it, in the common language of the Church over the centuries, so that in this unsettled and changeable world, in which the nations are forever meeting and mingling with each other, we are still able ever and again to worship together and, in that language, to praise the living God together.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *God is Near Us*, 72

⁶⁹ *God in the World*, 417-8

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 417-8

⁷¹ ?

The Tridentine Rite (now referred to as the Extraordinary Form of the Mass)

There are important differences between the Tridentine Rite (now referred to as the Extraordinary Form) and celebrating our Mass today in Latin. Vatican II, as discussed earlier, does allow for use of the vernacular language in celebrating the Mass. The Council also called for a reform of the actual Mass and the way it was celebrated. Paragraph 21 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* puts forward an explanation of this revision.

Holy Mother Church desires to undertake with great care a general restoration of the liturgy itself. For the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These not only may but ought to be changed with the passage of time if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become unsuited to it. In this restoration, both texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify.

What resulted eventually became known as the Missal of Paul VI, the Pope who approved it in 1970. Part of the promulgation of the new Mass of Paul VI was that the Tridentine Rite, which was the Mass as it was celebrated prior to the Council, should be used only with the local bishop's permission, and even then it should be celebrated only sparingly. Therefore, at nearly the same time the Extraordinary Form of the Mass disappeared, the Latin language disappeared in the "new" Mass as well, but what is important is that they did not disappear for the same reason. Often when today we think about Latin in the liturgy, we think of

the Mass prior to Vatican II. So, although the Extraordinary Form of the Mass was “repressed” to make way for the Missal of Paul VI, using Latin in the Mass as discussed earlier is not a calling forth or a longing for a restoration of the Extraordinary Form. When someone is in favor of at times using Latin for certain parts of the Mass, the accusation that that person is hyper-conservative might not actually be true; it could be that the person simply wishes to implement the desires of the Second Vatican Council.

Along with a discussion of Latin’s place in the Mass, it is important to talk briefly about the Cardinal’s feelings on the Extraordinary Form of the Mass as well. Certainly we have noted that he is in favor of the faithful being able to say certain parts of the Mass of Paul VI in Latin. Although that is different from the Extraordinary Form of the Mass, the Cardinal also would like to see permission granted for the celebration of the Extraordinary Form more frequently, and not have it kept under lock and key. He doesn’t want to see a return to the Extraordinary Form, he simply wishes it were more available to priests wishing to, on occasion, employ it. He notes that he was “dismayed by the prohibition of the old missal, since nothing of the sort had ever happened in the entire history of the liturgy.”⁷² He also feels that the prohibition against the Extraordinary Form is problematic in that it gives the appearance that there is no liturgical continuity because of the Council. “I must say, quite openly, that I don’t understand why so many of my Episcopal brethren have to a great extent submitted to this rule of intolerance [not allowing the Extraordinary Form to be celebrated in their diocese, or sparsely so], which for no apparent reason is opposed to making the necessary inner reconciliations within the Church.”⁷³ He also notes “I am of the opinion, to be sure, that the old rite [the Extraordinary Form] should be granted much more generously to all those who desire it. It’s impossible

⁷² ?,146

⁷³ *God in the World*, 416

to see what could be dangerous or unacceptable about that.”⁷⁴ Elsewhere he says “For fostering a true consciousness in liturgical matters, it is also important that the proscription against the form of liturgy in valid use up to 1970 should be lifted. Anyone who nowadays advocates the continuing existence of this liturgy or takes part in it is treated like a leper; all tolerance ends here.”⁷⁵

The future of the Liturgy

In reading the work of Cardinal Ratzinger, although much of his effort is devoted to pointing out problematic areas with the liturgy, there is a feeling of true passion for the Liturgy which underscores all of his writing on the Liturgy. He sees beauty in the Liturgy in that throughout the entire world, the Liturgy features the same prayers, the same actions, and many other similarities, and this uniformity is one aspect that gives the Church her unity. He notes that “The decoration and arrangement of the altar and the interior of the church, the style of singing and praying – all of these give the liturgy its own special character...yet in every place we can experience it as one and the same liturgy.”⁷⁶ The liturgy being offered at a local parish is the same liturgy with the same prayers, readings and actions that one would find being offered in every Catholic Church throughout the world.

With regards to the liturgical experimentation of the last thirty to thirty-five years, Cardinal Ratzinger seems to sense that things have changed, and that a renewal and a return to a proper celebration of the Liturgy is dawning. He says, “To an increasing degree people are seeing through the banality and the childish rationalism of the pathetic home-made liturgies with their

⁷⁴ *Salt of the Earth*, 176

⁷⁵ *God in the World*, 416

⁷⁶ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 202

artificial theatrics; it is becoming obvious how trivial they are.”⁷⁷ Ratzinger says elsewhere that “Nowadays, the really widespread demand is not for a secularized liturgy but, on the contrary, for a new encounter with the sacred through a worship that manifests the presence of the eternal.”⁷⁸ The Cardinal spends time talking about how a proper celebration of the Liturgy can renew us and enliven us. “We are realizing more and more clearly that silence is part of the liturgy...not just the absence of speech and action. We should expect the liturgy to give us a positive stillness that will restore us.”⁷⁹ It is ultimately silence that flies in the face of the modern conception of the idea of worship as noise, distraction, and entertainment.

Proper celebration of the Liturgy is much deeper than being awed by surface level gags and distractions. “Worship of God is not only a sinking into him: it also gives us back to ourselves, it challenges us in the midst of our everyday lives, summoning all the powers of our mind, feeling, and will.”⁸⁰ Thus a true liturgical experience is a much deeper and more profound event. It is an “active participation” on a much more significant level than simply being physically invested in terms of an outward sensorial experience.

In the liturgy one doesn’t grasp what’s going on in a simply rational way, as I understand a lecture, for example, but in a manifold way, with all the senses, and by being drawn into a celebration that isn’t invented by some commission but that, as it were, comes to me from the depths of the millennia and, ultimately, of eternity.⁸¹

⁷⁷ *Sing A New Song for the Lord*, 39

⁷⁸ *The Ratzinger Report*, 131

⁷⁹ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 209

⁸⁰ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 100

⁸¹ *Salt of the Earth*, 175

Certainly balance is needed, which is why Cardinal Ratzinger is such a breath of fresh air. Liturgy in the past could easily become stiff and rigid, just as liturgy today is quite often a patchwork of sloppy priestly celebration and poor music. The Cardinal notes the road out of the situation:

We have to find the happy medium between a ritualism in which the liturgical action is performed in an unintelligible and nonrelational manner by the priest and a craze for understandability which in the end dissolves the whole into the work of human beings and robs it of its Catholic dimension and of the objectivity of mystery.⁸²

The Cardinal has a tremendous love for the Liturgy, and believes that we can all benefit from a deepening love for the Liturgy by lay men and women and priest alike. He notes,

The liturgy must be more. It must become clear that a dimension of existence opens up here that we are all secretly seeking: the presence of that which cannot be made...and in it God saying that all is good, his approval, which reigns over being and is alone capable of making it good so that it can be accepted.⁸³

⁸² *Sing a New Song for the Lord*, 94

⁸³ *Ibid*, 94

Correcting the Train Wreck of Scripture Study

Pope Benedict has been accused of being too strict a disciplinarian in his role as head of the CDF. He admits as much when he notes “That in a personal controversy I occasionally react too harshly, I concede without further ado. But in what we did as a congregation, I think that we kept to the right measure.”

⁸⁴ However, when one reads his writings, a much different person shines forth. He is calm and loving, rational but thoughtful in his words. The one area in which his portrayal as Cardinal “Rottweiler” could perhaps be accurate is in regard to the Historical-Critical method of interpreting Scripture.

What is the Historical-Critical method? Every Catholic has heard homilies that use the method. The general idea is that through archaeology, science, studying the cultures in which the Bible was written, studying how it was written, by whom it was written, etc., a person can learn a lot about the Scriptures themselves. Looking at the Letter to the Philippians, for example, one can ponder over many different questions. Did Paul really write the letter? Who were the Philippians? Why, halfway through the letter, does he wrap up the letter, and then proceed to dive back into more content? Is it then two letters combined into one? If so, who combined them? If they were combined, when and why were they combined? Who is Epaphroditus, a character mentioned in the letter? Are there phrases or concepts in the letter that might not make sense to a modern reader if they were simply translated word for word? Cardinal Ratzinger explains the method and its contributions:

The historical-critical method tries where possible to transfer this characteristic form which knowledge takes in the natural sciences to the realm of history and to establish a certitude in this sphere that resembles that of the natural sciences

⁸⁴ *Salt of the Earth*, 94

themselves. To a remarkable extent, this attempt has succeeded in such matters as ascertaining archaeological data, deciphering writings, dating documents, recognizing pseudepigraphy, and determining the succession of events.⁸⁵

The method itself is very useful, when it understands itself properly. As the International Biblical Commission stated in their document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, the Historical-Critical method, in “its proper understanding not only admits of its use but also requires it.” The problems begin when the method starts to get out of control, and those applying it no longer understand where it is bounded. Biology can overstep its bounds when it begins to experiment on human embryos. Physics can develop nuclear weapons. Just as with these sciences, the scientific approach to studying and uncovering the layers of the Bible can go too far. The Historical-Critical method’s employers start to get out of control when they begin to treat those speculations and hypotheses as fact. Cardinal Ratzinger does not feel that the overstepping of its bounds by the historical-critical method of scripture study is a trivial matter. He notes very clearly that “The theories of liberal exegesis⁸⁶ necessarily posed a threat to the very foundations of faith itself—a problem that is far from having been resolved today.”⁸⁷ Elsewhere, he notes that the moment the Church acknowledged the Historical-Critical method as acceptable, it paved the way for a crisis. “In Catholic theology, a crisis was prepared from the time of the reception of historical-critical

⁸⁵ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 22

⁸⁶ The term exegesis can be thought of as the study of scripture, usually using the historical critical method.

⁸⁷ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 51

interpretation of the Bible, officially recognized as legitimate with Pius XII's encyclical on Scripture study.⁸⁸

Cardinal Ratzinger notes that the proper boundaries of the Historical-Critical method are often abused.

This method soon discovers its own limitations when called upon to interpret texts with some more weighty significance where such a mode of comprehension is out of the question. The elimination of the observer, never fully possible even in natural science, now becomes a mere chimera. And yet people continue to approach the opinions of historical exegetes with a natural scientific model in mind, when the model they should be using is that proper to human history itself.⁸⁹

What the Cardinal seems to be suggesting here is that most of what people consider to be historical-critical science is really not scientific at all. He notes:

The historical method is a marvelous instrument for reading historical sources and interpreting texts. But it does include its own philosophy, which generally –if, for instance, I want to learn about the medieval emperors – hardly affects anything. For in that case I want to learn about the past, that is all...If you apply it to the Bible, then two factors you would otherwise scarcely notice are clearly manifest: the method seeks to know about the past as something past. It seeks to know what happened then, in the form it took

⁸⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 248. Here, the Cardinal references *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 30. 9. 1943: extracts appear in D.S. 3825 - 3831

⁸⁹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 22

then, at the point at which things stood right then. And it assumes that all history is in principle the same kind of history: man, in all his different manifestations, the world in its manifold variety, are yet determined by the same laws and the same limitations, so that I can eliminate what is impossible.⁹⁰

Cardinal Ratzinger notes that the Historical-Critical Method is very widespread today, and has almost become the norm. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has its own translation of the Bible, the New American Bible, and the typical print edition is rife with footnotes featuring a historical-critical approach. “The habit of regarding the miracles of the New Testament as not really being that, but as being derived from historically conditioned suppositions, has today become quite normal.”⁹¹ Naturally, science is skeptical of miracles. Therefore, things start to get murky when the miracles of the Bible begin to be deconstructed. Many have heard the homilies or sat through classes whose sole intent was to get listeners to realize that Moses in fact led the people of Israel through the Reed Sea, which was only a small puddle, that an earthquake caused the Jordan River to flow backwards, and that the feeding of the 5,000 actually took place because everybody was really inspired to share with one another, so they took their bread and fish out of their pockets, and that’s where all the food came from. About this rabid pursuit to deconstruct the miracles of the Bible, the Cardinal says, “The question of miracles poses the question of God. Anyone who does not recognize miracles has a different idea of God.”⁹² The Cardinal feels that anyone using the historical-critical method to attempt to prove that miracles have natural explanations is erring. He states above that

⁹⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 133-4

⁹¹ *God is Near Us*, 131

⁹² *God in the World*, 61

contemplating miracles inevitably points us toward prayer and reflection upon who God is. If a miracle is explained as having a natural cause, then it is de facto not really a miracle.

The countless absurdities present in biblical scholarship are approaching infinity, but one final demonstration of the insanity of over-extending the Historical-Critical Method is the Jesus Seminars. These were a series of meetings held among scripture scholars in the early nineties which essentially consisted of these scholars voting on the likelihood of Jesus actually having spoken the various parables of the Bible. Thus, the report from the Jesus seminar can still be obtained, and one can check to see what the breakdown on the voting of the authenticity of the parable of the prodigal son. One can see what percentage of scholars voted “highly likely” that Jesus actually used that parable, what percentage voted “fairly likely”, etc. Cardinal Ratzinger replies to the absurdity of just such an enterprise: “A saying of Jesus reported in the Bible is not made binding on faith because it is acknowledged as Jesus’ word by the majority of contemporary exegetes, and it does not lose its validity when the opposite is the case. It is valid because Holy Scripture is valid and because Scripture presents it to us as an utterance of Jesus.”⁹³

One of the problems of this wide-spread infection is that “Exegesis has given us very many positive things, but it has also given rise to the impression that an ordinary person can’t read the Bible because it is all so complicated.”⁹⁴ The Cardinal seems to be encouraging regular people that you don’t have to be a Scripture scholar to read the Bible. Picking up a Bible today can be very intimidating because of all the notes; some Bibles have a page of notes for every page of Bible passages, and the Cardinal wants people to know that a non-Scripture scholar can still get just as much spiritually from the Bible regardless of how many of the historical-critical notations the person understands. This problem of scaring off potential readers of Scripture through

⁹³ *Called to Communion*, 58

⁹⁴ *Salt of the Earth*, 267

intimidation is arguably Ratzinger's biggest concern with the Historical-Critical Method. He seems, in this regard, to be echoing the cry of his predecessor; he seems to be saying to all those who are not Scripture scholars themselves – “do not be afraid, Christ will speak to you (and indeed to the simplest child) in the Scriptures; do not be intimidated by the scholars!”

The proper limits of the Historical Critical method

“The exegete...wants to find out exactly “what happened,” and so he should. On the other hand, the question as to the meaning of these data from the past for the person who believes, or is searching for faith today, belongs to a quite different plane.”⁹⁵ There are, as said earlier, proper limits to the use of the Historical Critical method. There are varying planes of work that must go on, and as long as the Historical Critical method understands what it is allowed to work with, its okay, but “the historical-critical interpretation...can illumine it [Scriptures] only in its historical dimension and not explain it in its present-day claim on us. Where it forgets this limit it becomes illogical and therefore also unscientific.”⁹⁶

The Historical Critical method must point people toward the Gospel, and not away from its reality. The Cardinal notes that “interpretation, however, must justify itself before the given Word and lead back to it, not leave it behind.”⁹⁷ That is why having an authority, the Church's magisterium, is important; they ensure scholars are treating the Sacred Scriptures with the appropriate respect and care. The Catholic Church's magisterium insists that those who use the method stay faithful to the Scriptures. The Cardinal explains this fidelity:

⁹⁵ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 20

⁹⁶ *The Ratzinger Report*, 74

⁹⁷ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 86

Insistence on fidelity does not mean the renunciation of interpretation, nor does it constitute a plea for “the sterile repetition of ancient formulae.” On the contrary: it involves a decisive call to objective interpretation. If, at the end of my interpretation, I no longer occupy a reverent posture towards the interpreted word...then I have betrayed my interpreter’s role.⁹⁸

Here, the Cardinal hopes to call Scripture scholars to a new love for Scriptures, which will ensure that they treat those Scriptures with love and respect. When a Scripture scholar treats the Bible as simply a collection of archaic records which no longer have anything to say to mankind today, problems arise.

The Historical Critical method would prefer there be no magisterium over it

To all Scripture scholars who hope to work outside the teaching of the Church, the Cardinal has the following to say:

The Gospel of John states “The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth, so that you will come to know those things which would be too much for you now.” That means there is always a surplus, something anticipatory in revelation – not only with respect to what any individual may hitherto have understood, but also with respect to what the Church knows.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 242
⁹⁹ *God in the World*, 38

The Historical Critical method, like all science today, does not like to be told what is morally permissible to be explored, nor does it like to be told what is out of bounds. Many stem-cell biologists do not readily appreciate the Church telling them they can not work on embryonic stem-cells. In just the same way, many exegetes either do not like or simply are not concerned about what the Magisterium of the Church teaches as permissible realms of study using the Historical-Critical Method, and what is not. The Church has been given authority to point out boundaries in all human action, not just in Scripture scholarship, but in liturgy, in moral theology and other areas of theology. The Cardinal states,

What has at least been vouchsafed to the Church is a certitude about what can not be reconciled with the Gospel. She has formulated her most essential perceptions of this in her creed and her dogmas. They are all conceived in negative terms. She points out the borderline beyond which one would stray into error. The area within the borders, so to speak, remains both wide and open. On this account, the Church can give the general directions for human life and can say what direction I certainly should not take, if I want to avoid a fall. It remains for each person to discover the manifold possibilities on his own path and to explore them. as direction is possessed by the Church in all areas of life.¹⁰⁰

The Cardinal states that “The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation had made itself at home in Catholic theology. By its very nature, this method has no patience with any restrictions imposed by an authoritative Magisterium.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *God in the World*, 39

¹⁰¹ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 124

The Cardinal states that a discomfort in being policed and told what is in and out of bounds is the same in all fields of theology. More will be said about dissent later, but Scripture study via the Historical-Critical Method is really no different than theology in general. Theologians don't like to be told what is wrong and what is right with their creations of theological genius, and so they often rebel against the Magisterium. The Cardinal draws attention to the link.

Let us take exegesis, which even today is considered to be the classic illustration of the fact that the Church is a mere hindrance to theology...For a long time it seemed as if the Magisterium, that is, the Church's proclamation of faith, compelled a superimposition of dogma on the biblical text and thus obstructed an unbiased historical interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰²

The idea that Scripture scholarship can exist apart from the guidance of the Church and her Magisterium is being shown in our own day to be absolutely absurd. If one gathers together twenty Scripture scholars from today who do not recognize the authority of the Church, it is highly likely that they would not agree on anything. Some scholars today even deny that the Resurrection of Jesus' body took place. The Cardinal notes that this just illustrates the fundamental flaw of the Protestant idea of *Sola Scriptura*. "With the radicalization of the historical-critical method, it has become very clear today that the sola scriptura principle cannot provide a foundation for the Church and the commonality of her faith. Scripture is Scripture only when it lives within the living subject that is the Church."¹⁰³ It was the Church who wrote the Scriptures, it was the Church who collected them, and it was the Church who decided, with the

¹⁰² *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 65

¹⁰³ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 167

grace of the Holy Spirit, what should be Scripture and what should not be. “Scripture became Scripture through the tradition.”¹⁰⁴ The Cardinal also notes that “The faith of the Church does not exist as an ensemble of texts, rather, the texts – the words – exist because there is a corresponding subject which gives them their basis and their inner coherence.”¹⁰⁵ The Scriptures can not be picked apart, poked, and studied, and placed in the refining plant of the Historical-Critical method, only to have the “new” and the “analyzed” texts be something that could be used to attack the Church. Therefore the Cardinal says “one cannot just go back two thousand years and retreat into the language of the Bible.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, all of the one line proof-texting (proof-texting is using one passage from Scripture to prove a point, as opposed to the entire Bible) that is leveled against the Church can be dismissed, because when people step away from the Church and do proof texting against one another (the various protestant denominations), it quickly spirals into insanity, and the final result is nothing intelligible, and results only in a pile of rubble.

For the reasons mentioned above, the Cardinal notes, “We must have the courage to say once again that the Bible, taken as a whole, is ‘Catholic’.”¹⁰⁷ It must be read as a whole, as it has been by the Church since its beginning. Only when we read it as a whole will we keep from spiraling into a constellation of interpretations and theories about what was really happening. The Cardinal notes, “I can understand the Bible as the Word of God only if I read it in the tension engendered by seeing it as a whole, accepting everything and taking one thing with another – not merely as isolated words or phrases. It is something very real and very dramatic.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Called to Communion*, 70

¹⁰⁵ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 93

¹⁰⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 254

¹⁰⁷ *The Ratzinger Report*, 165

¹⁰⁸ *God in the World*, 152

The Historical Critical Method is flawed on its premise

The Cardinal does readily acknowledge, as has already been demonstrated, that the Historical-Critical method has its uses. However, the method, for at least the last 30 years, has run so wild that it is hard for him not to attack the method as a whole. Indeed, in his writings, when he slams the method, he is not actually slamming the whole thing, he is just slamming 99% of its use today. That is important to keep in mind when reading his comments on the method. For the sake of not explaining every time that the method is not entirely corrupt, he simply lashes out against the method as a whole.

One reason that Cardinal Ratzinger feels that the method is problematic is because nowhere in Sacred Scripture is there an instruction to read Sacred Scripture in a historical critical fashion. “Certainly the idea that Holy Scripture is an archaeological fossil, a disparate collection of ‘sources’ to be researched from the point of view of archaeology and paleontology, is nowhere to be found in Holy Scripture!”¹⁰⁹

The main flaw of the theory in the eyes of Cardinal Ratzinger is that it treats the Bible as an artifact which is only representative of something that was once alive, but is no longer alive itself. That Jesus, through the Sacred Scriptures, is still alive and continuing to reveal Himself to us in new ways is an idea that is discarded by many who use the historical-critical method. On this problem, the Cardinal has much to say. “Historiocritical exegesis does not transmit the Bible to today, into my present day life. That possibility has been excluded. On the contrary, it distances it from me and shows it as firmly set in the past.”¹¹⁰ He also ponders, “How can history be, at one point (other than God!) already at its end, when in reality it is still

¹⁰⁹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 165

¹¹⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 134

unfolding?”¹¹¹ Saving his most bitter critique of any theological subject he has explored, he notes, “Modifying an image of Kolakowski, we could say that the intercourse of the historical-critical method with its object may be compared with a kind of necrophilia.”¹¹² The Cardinal knows that the Word of God is alive and breathing, and so it can not be studied as a corpse. He notes that the Word, “if left alone as a book, is a helpless prey to manipulation through preexisting desires and opinions.”¹¹³ The Word of God deserves more credit than to be rolled out on a gurney and analyzed and made a spectacle of to advance one’s notoriety in the field of Scripture Scholarship. “The word of God is always in advance of us and our thinking. Not only is it never out of date; everything that claims to be making it outdated quickly becomes dead itself and becomes part of the past.”¹¹⁴

The damage that is possible

As Cardinal Ratzinger sees it, there is much damage that can and in fact already has come from an improper and imprudent application of the Historical-Critical method. One damaging aspect is that when human Scripture scholars are seen as the proper interpreters of Sacred Scripture, then Jesus doesn’t have to be thought of as the one who is the interpreter of the Bible, and instead the biblical scholar is the one with the answers who must be consulted to receive proper understanding of the Bible. The Cardinal notes,

¹¹¹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 253

¹¹² *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 249. Here is referenced L Kolakowski, *Die Gegenwartigkeit des Mythos* (Munich 1973), pp. 95 ff. This author used the image for man’s technical-rational intercourse with nature

¹¹³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 34

¹¹⁴ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 26

Once the Jesus of the “Sayings-Source” has been located, everything of later provenance can be explained away as a human garnish, its ingredients analyzed and combined. The true key-master of so archeologically conceived a Gospel can only be the historian. People forget that there might be in history a continuous Subject, in whom development is faithful to an Origin whose plenary authority the Subject carries within her own life.¹¹⁵

The trouble with this is that the Historical-Critical Method, when going too far, offers up for the world its own understanding of Jesus that it has discerned from its study (That thousands of different scholars have come up with thousands of different ideas about the historical Jesus is often ignored by scholars themselves). These understandings then must necessarily do battle with the Church’s teaching on Jesus (and indeed the Scriptures as a whole) because the Church’s view does not agree with the scholars’ own creations. Indeed, after the historical critical path is trod long enough, the Church itself is drawn into question. Where did it come from? There is no St. Peter’s Basilica in the New Testament. Therefore, “from its perspective, the concept of “tradition” had itself become questionable, since this method will not allow for an oral tradition running alongside Scripture and reaching back to the apostles—and hence offering another source of historical knowledge besides the Bible.”¹¹⁶ When one studies the Bible in a historical-critical fashion, the young Church which is just budding forth is analyzed and it is determined that the

Church named her developing ministries, not with a sacral, but with a profane vocabulary. It thus

¹¹⁵ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 250

¹¹⁶ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 124

becomes impossible to recognize any continuity between these offices and the priesthood of the Mosaic law...it is only toward the end of the first century that a stable pattern crystallized, though even then this pattern continued to allow variations. Above all there is no sign that these offices were empowered for cultic worship: nowhere are they explicitly connected with the celebration of the Eucharist.¹¹⁷

The problem with this reading is that “All of these data arouse the impression that these offices were seen, not sacrally but in purely functional terms, that is, that they were administered entirely according to considerations of practical utility.”¹¹⁸ When that is the case, the male priesthood, and indeed the office of priest in general, can be portrayed as unnecessary and created. From there, the question is quickly asked, “Can’t those offices then be done away with?”

It also can be said that the method “relativizes the figure of Jesus and puts a question mark against his consciousness of being the Son; it seems doubtful whether the Church really originates from Jesus, and so forth.”¹¹⁹ The Cardinal also states that

Even the reading of the Bible is neutralized: we can say when, and in what conditions, some statement originated, and we have thus placed it in its historical setting, which does not ultimately concern us. Behind this kind of “historical interpretation” stands a philosophy, a basic attitude toward reality, which tells us that it is meaningless to ask about what is; we can only ask

¹¹⁷ *Called to Communion*, 106-7

¹¹⁸ *Called to Communion*, 107

¹¹⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 163

about what we are able to do with things....The question of course arises: What is our advantage? And in what way to our advantage? What are we here for? For anyone who looks below the surface, a false humility and a false pride at once become apparent in this fundamental attitude of modernity: false humility, which denies man the capacity to know and recognize truth, and false pride, with which he sets himself above things, above truth itself, by setting the expansion of his power, the domination of all things, as the goal of all his thinking.¹²⁰

As we look at the issue of science and faith later, we see here already an idea that the Cardinal champions which we would be wise to note. The Cardinal talks in many different places about how science is never simply “objective.” In every field of science there are philosophies at work, mental conceptions of the world and of right and wrong which shape those sciences. The Cardinal notes that the Historical Critical method, just like its “scientific” brethren, is not without a philosophy either. “People sometimes give the impression that the exegetes, with their historical-critical methods, have found the ‘scientific’ and hence the nonpartisan solution. This is not the case, however; every ‘science’ unavoidably depends upon a philosophy, an ideology. There is no neutrality, here least of all.”¹²¹ The Cardinal also notes that behind the theories one senses very quickly a human agent behind their creation.

I think all these attempts are reconstructions in which we can always see the face of the architect.

¹²⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 186

¹²¹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 164 To say that all science has an underlying philosophy is not to degrade science or drag it through the mud, it is simply to remind us that objectivity in science is not as prevalent as some would have us believe.

Whether you take Adolf Harnack's Christ – who reflects the typical liberal – or whether you take Bultmann's Christ, who portrays his kind of existential philosophy. All these constructions have been undertaken with one guiding idea: There can be no such thing as God made man.¹²²

The flaw of the Historical Critical Method

For the Cardinal, what points to the true breakdown of the Historical Critical method is the fact that thousands of scholars have come up with thousands of different theories about Scripture, and those theories very often contradict each other quite directly. It is certainly the case today that in Scripture scholarship there are thousands of theories that virtually no one can agree upon, and so the Cardinal seems to suggest that perhaps this multitude of theories and hypotheses should point to the fact that the Church is actually correct in saying there is to be an interpreter of the Scriptures. The Cardinal notes, "The more I hear about these efforts of source research, the less confidence I feel in the plethora of hypotheses it has thrown up. And which are then endlessly repeated and refuted."¹²³ Indeed, exegetes often debate points ad infinitum, and that many of them can't agree seems to beg the question as to why either of the countless sides should be believed. Turning again to the letter of Philippians, if one exegete says it was two letters put together, another says it was three letters put together, and another says it was one, we have two choices. We can think that no one knows the answer, or we can think that the single answer that the Church has taught for 2,000 years is correct.

The Cardinal notes accurately that all these theories "remain, on the whole, mere attempts at analysis that are quickly

¹²² *God in the World*, 203

¹²³ *God in the World*, 203

replaced by others, and one should not overestimate the probability of their being correct.”¹²⁴ Elsewhere we read “The history of exegesis is a history of contradictions.”¹²⁵ After studying Scripture scholarship for a very short time, the ideas and theories out there are discovered to be as numerous as the stars. Again, as stated earlier, they all eventually, however, cancel one another out, and quickly become outdated. The latest hip hop chart topper is likely to last longer on the radio than the newest theory on which parables Jesus “actually” said will be considered current in the field of Scripture scholarship.

Summary

The way out of the jungle that is the study of Sacred Scripture today is to read the Bible through the lens of faith. The Cardinal notes, “The faith of the Church is the kind of sympathy without which the text remains a closed book. It must recognize this faith as a hermeneutic key, as a locus of understanding that does not do dogmatic violence to the Bible, but offers the only chance we have of allowing it to be itself.”¹²⁶ The New Testament Scriptures were all written from within the Church! The Gospel writers, St. John, St. Paul and others who contributed to the body of the New Testament were people who were already living the Catholic Christian faith. The Scriptures have to be approached from the perspective that perhaps the Church is actually correct on something instead of doubting.

The Cardinal, in the end, acknowledges the many difficulties that come today with trying to actually pray one’s way through the Gospels instead of reading through footnote after footnote. However, he also wants all to realize that we are right to have faith in both the Church and the Gospels together.

¹²⁴ *God in the World*, 227

¹²⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 34

¹²⁶ *God’s Word*, 126

He notes, “despite all source criticism, from which we still have much to learn – our trust in the Gospels is fully justified.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *God in the World*, 204

Ecclesiology – How the Church Works

Church is Both the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ

Catholics hear this terminology a lot, probably too much, and in hearing it too much, they perhaps do not actually meditate on it, or they attribute it to all the bad homilies they've heard where the priest kept saying this over and over again. The idea that the Church is the "Bride of Christ" is actually a very important one in understanding what the Church is. Saying that the Church is the Bride of Christ is NOT an analogy, and neither is saying that all the baptized are the Body of Christ! So how can the Catholic Church then actually be a bride for Jesus Christ? Why would He want a bride? How are billions of people supposed to actually shrink down into the reality of one person in order to be one bride? All this is certainly worth exploring in detail, and Cardinal Ratzinger has a lot to say about this to help Christians understand these concepts.

The real roots of the Pauline idea of the Body of Christ are entirely inner-biblical. Three sources of this idea can be identified in the biblical tradition. In the first place, the Semitic conception of the "corporate personality" stands in the background...the Pauline formula has in addition two more concrete roots. The first lies in the Eucharist, by which the Lord himself virtually invited this conception...the third root of Paul's notion of the Body of Christ: the idea of nuptiality... "For this reason the man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to the woman, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). One flesh—hence, a single new existence.¹²⁸

¹²⁸

Called to Communion, 35-8

What the Cardinal is suggesting here is that through the reading of St. Paul Christians are supposed to conceive of themselves as one body. This is not to take place merely abstractly, but in a very real and concrete way. Christ came and gave His body for all, just like a man does for his wife and vice versa when marrying. Marriage is not simply an analogy for Christ's love for his loved ones; it actually is what Christ did – and thus what those who love Him are to do for Him as well. One reads “The Church is the Body of Christ in the way in which the woman is one body, or rather one flesh, with the man.”¹²⁹

Being one body is nice imagery, but if one stops there, a problem is encountered. What does the Church have to do with it? People may be willing to agree that all persons are called to be one body, but that takes place as it were mystically, and so some would say the Church is a mere worldly creation which is nice (maybe, if we fancy it) but is not necessary. If one so chooses, he or she could very easily bypass the Church and simply skip to the “being one body” for Christ. The argument that is made to prove this point is that “There are certainly people belonging to the Catholic Church who are not part of the Body of Christ, and there are also certainly a lot of people who are outside the Church who belong to the Body of Christ, so it isn't being in the Church that matters; being in the Body of Christ is all that really is important. The Church, at Vatican I, began to take a lot of heat, and continues to do so today, for saying that “outside the Church there can be no salvation.” Essentially the formula could be read that the Body of Christ is the Church, and outside the Church a person is not a part of the Body of Christ. Some theologians have attempted to make the “no salvation outside the Church” clause sound gentler; an example would be to say that what the Church meant was that once a person is a Catholic, then outside the Church there is no salvation. Most people have been so turned off by the language of the Vatican I

statement that they choose to tone out any other explanation about the statement.

Vatican II came along and helped address the issue of whether salvation exists outside the Catholic Church by teaching that the Body of Christ “subsists” in the Catholic Church. Much has been written about the Latin word “*subsistere*” and what it means in the context of its Vatican II usage. *Subsistere* certainly does not translate directly into English as subsists, although there is probably no better word to use. To say that the Body of Christ “subsists” in the Church is ambiguous at best, but also makes the Church sound very secondary again, and could perhaps be used to make an end run around the necessity of belonging to the Church. Cardinal Ratzinger, who played a major part in helping write the documents of Vatican II,¹³⁰ has the following highly authoritative interpretation on the meaning of *subsistere*:

Subsistere is a special variant of *esse*. It is “being” in the form of an independent agent. That is exactly what is concerned here. The Council is trying to tell us that the Church of Jesus Christ may be encountered in this world as a concrete agent, in the Catholic Church.¹³¹

Esse is Latin for “to be,” the most basic verb. Therefore, the Cardinal is saying “*subsistere*” does not mean the Church is the protector of the Body of Christ, nor is it a Church which is simply a mediator for the Body of Christ. The Cardinal says that by saying that the Body of Christ “subsists” in the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council was still noting that the Body of Christ actually and indivisibly is the Catholic Church.

The Cardinal, following up on this point, notes that “The Church of Christ is not hidden behind the multitude of human

¹³⁰ *Salt of the Earth*, 71 - he helped write draft documents for Cardinal Frings, one of the main contributors to the documents of Vatican II as a whole.

¹³¹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 147

constructions, intangible and unattainable, she exists in reality as a corporeal Church that shows her identity in the Creed.”¹³² Cardinal Ratzinger also points out the impossibility that God would turn away all those who do not know of Christ or His Church. He says, “God cannot reject people just because they know nothing of Christianity and happen to have grown up in other religions. He will accept their worship and religion just as he does ours.”¹³³

With all of this being said, the question becomes “how is it possible to say that the Body of Christ and the Church are one if you do not have to be in the Church to be in the Body of Christ?” Numerous books have been written on this, but the Cardinal suggests an answer: “It is for Augustine by no means automatically the case that anyone who remains in the Church thereby has *caritas*, but there is indeed certainty about the contrary: anyone who deliberately does not remain is departing from *caritas*.”¹³⁴ *Caritas* is Latin for love, specifically God’s love or perfect love. Therefore, it seems that the Cardinal is suggesting that those who leave the Church will have something to answer for especially.

Church can be overly bureaucratic

“I have said very often that I think we have too much bureaucracy.”¹³⁵ Some might be surprised to see that Cardinal Ratzinger actually feels that the Church could be scaled back in a lot of ways. He also notes that the toll of having to have one’s hand in many different pots takes a very real toll on those who are asked to do so. He shares “I do believe the administration could be somewhat reduced...What bothers me personally is really the fact that we are supposed to do too much...A question

¹³² *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 146-7

¹³³ *Truth and Tolerance*, 203

¹³⁴ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 52

¹³⁵ *Salt of the Earth*, 110

that I ask myself is how I can do my duty in the other Congregations as well – and still remain a human being and somehow also keep my personal relationships from disintegrating.”¹³⁶

It should become apparent that his concern is not simply for the people leading the various administrations and activities, but it is more importantly for the Church herself. The Cardinal does not want to see Her over extend Herself. He says very directly:

There are also institutions of purely human law for the many purposes of management, organization, and coordination, which may grow in accordance with the demands of the time and may have to grow...Yet if they become too numerous and too strong, then they threaten the order and the life of her spiritual essence. The Church always has to scrutinize her own institutional structure so that it does not become too heavy – less it harden into an armor that stifles her actual spiritual life.¹³⁷

The Cardinal sees it as a very important task to continually monitor programs and institutions to make sure that they are not interfering with the fundamental mission of the Church. He says, “The reform that is needed at all times...consist in...ceaselessly clearing away our subsidiary constructions to let in the pure light that comes from above and that is also the dawning of pure freedom.”¹³⁸ Later he notes,

The Church will constantly have need of human constructions to help her speak and act in the era

¹³⁶ *Salt of the Earth*, 110

¹³⁷ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 181

¹³⁸ *Called to Communion*, 140

in which she finds herself. Ecclesiastical institutions and juridical organizations are not intrinsically evil; on the contrary, to a certain degree they are simply necessary and indispensable. But they become obsolete; they risk setting themselves up as the essence of the Church and thus prevent us from seeing through to what is truly essential.¹³⁹

The Cardinal sees very real benefits from keeping the Church healthy and pruned. “The Church, unlike an inner-worldly association, does not exist in order to keep us busy and to support herself but in order to break free into eternal life in all of us.”¹⁴⁰

A lot of the mistrust of the Church’s bureaucratic element comes simply from hearsay. After all, not many have actually dealt with the bureaucratic element of the Church themselves. The Cardinal acknowledges that he too used to frown on the magisterium until he was actually called to work in it. “I, too, from my native Germany often looked on the Roman apparatus with skepticism, perhaps even with mistrust and impatience. In Rome later I came to realize that this Curia was far superior to its reputation.”¹⁴¹

The Church, the Bride of Christ, is safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and is kept free of error. The human creations and institutions, run by human beings, are places where all the possibilities for failure and/or sin that exist in any other corporation are possible. But the Cardinal notes that the idea that the perfect Church is run by imperfect human beings shows that She is truly safeguarded.

Perhaps you know the story of a Jew who traveled to the papal court and who became a Catholic. On

¹³⁹ *Called to Communion*, 142

¹⁴⁰ *Called to Communion*, 147

¹⁴¹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 67

his return, someone who knew the papal court well asked him: “Did you realize what sort of things are going on there?” “Yes,” he said, “of course, quite scandalous things, I saw it all.” “And you still became a Catholic”, remarked the other man. “That’s completely perverse.” Then the Jew said, “It is because of all that that I have become a Catholic. For if the Church continues to exist in spite of it all, then truly there must be someone upholding her.”¹⁴²

Church should not be seen as a power structure

The Church is despised even from within because, so it is said, the Church possesses too much power. The word “power” is hurled at the Church seemingly at every turn by Her detractors from within and without. It is impossible for most to talk about the Church’s place in history without mentioning the issue of power. Today an argument involving “power” is made on issues like the ordination of women to the priesthood as those who seek to see women ordained argue that women should not be kept from the “power structure.” Lay people are said by some to deserve more “power”, and the argument is often made that it shouldn’t be in the priest’s hands to run things. Some argue passionately that the magisterium should not be able to tell theologians and Biblical scholars what is in and out of bounds arguing that those scholars should have the “power” to decide for themselves what should and should not be said.

When the major controversies in the Church today are examined in depth, the controversies are often portrayed as being about “power.” The Cardinal notes that when the Church is looked at through the lens of power, the viewer is missing the entire point. “Anyone who always just turns straight to the

¹⁴² *God in the World*, 64

question of the distribution of power has utterly missed the mystery of the Church.”¹⁴³ He also notes, “If I see the Church only under the aspect of power, then it follows that everyone who doesn’t hold an office is ipso facto oppressed.”¹⁴⁴ Finally, he notes that the power mindset destroys and obscures life in general. “This ideology, which suspects that everywhere and always what’s at stake is basically power, destroys the feeling of solidarity not only in the Church but also in human life as such.”

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The Cardinal certainly recognizes that what motivates people to see the Church as being about power is the fact that people have and continue to abuse positions in the Church. The Cardinal offers the following exhortation to those who are in leadership positions in the Church today:

All those in positions of responsibility in the Church, this means that they themselves must, in all seriousness, subject themselves to those conditions. They are not allowed to impose their own opinions on the Church as doctrines, but must set themselves within the great community of faith, and at its service, and must learn to listen to the Word of God.¹⁴⁶

The Cardinal notes that there are definitely things that annoy people about the Church, and there are definitely efforts on the part of the Church that can be characterized as misguided (because of human implementation, and not because the Church is not the Bride and Body of Christ) but that annoyance can not lead to schism. “Of course there are things about her, big and little, that are annoying...But you don’t leave your family

¹⁴³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 239

¹⁴⁴ *Salt of the Earth*, 165

¹⁴⁵ *Salt of the Earth*, 166

¹⁴⁶ *God in the World*, 357

because you're annoyed.'"¹⁴⁷ The Cardinal suggests a way to view the Church that allows for frustrations, but sees the Church, in the end, as She is meant to be understood:

It doesn't mean that every word that the ecclesiastical authorities say, or even every word said by a pope, is infallible. It certainly does mean that wherever the Church, in the great spiritual and cultural struggles of history, and after all possible prayer and grappling with the truth, insists that this is the correct interpretation and draws a line there, she has been promised that in this instance she will not lead people into error. That she will not be turned into an instrument of destruction for the Word of God, but remains the mother, the living agent, within whom the Word is alive and truly expresses himself and is truly interpreted.¹⁴⁸

What impresses the Cardinal about the Church is not the part of the Church that is powerful, but the suffering Church.

We have to say that it is not the Church of the successful people that we find impressive; the Church of those popes who were universal monarchs; the Church of those leaders who knew how to get on well with the world. Rather, what strengthens our faith, what remains constant, what gives us hope, is the Church of the suffering. She stands, to the present day, as a sign that God exists

¹⁴⁷ *God in the World*, 66

¹⁴⁸ *God in the World*, 356

and that man is not just a cesspit, but that he can be saved.¹⁴⁹

Dissent

An important topic in the Church for a long time has been the idea of dissent. It has been touched on already in the discussion about Biblical scholarship, but dissent does not stop there. Dissenting from a Church teaching is basically saying “I do not agree with that teaching.” This can be explicit or it can simply be implied. Certainly, if one dissents from the Church’s teaching on the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead it can not go unnoticed, especially if such a dissenter is one who is teaching in a college or seminary or is someone who publishes articles in magazines or other media. If a person dissents on the Church’s teaching concerning something much smaller than the Resurrection (for example) then that is clearly a different kind of dissent. Certainly, then, there is a gradation of the severity of dissent.

Some Church teachings can not be dissented from; for example, a Catholic can not say “The Resurrection of Jesus has never struck me as being true.” The pool of teachings which one can properly dissent from varies greatly in size depending on which theologian you ask. The part of the magisterium which is most responsible for overseeing the area of “dissent”, and which serves as a communication forum between the Church and theologians is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Cardinal points this out rhetorically when he states

Is not the office of Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, which people nowadays like

¹⁴⁹ *God is Near Us*, 40 - He also notes elsewhere that “Her greatest moments are those when she is suffering persecution and not those times when she has at her disposal great wealth and worldly power.” *God in the World*, 147

to characterize and also thereby criticize with the title “inquisitor” – is this not in contradiction to the very nature of academic study and, thereby, with the nature of theology? Are not scholarly study and external authority mutually exclusive?

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The answer for the Cardinal here is clearly no, since he manned the post for twenty years. However, there certainly is that tension between scholarship, the ability to think freely and say what ever one wants to say as a theologian, and the need on the part of the Church to protect people who are not able to grasp all of the intricacies of what is being said. It is not that the average Catholic is thought to be incapable of handling theology; it is in fact that the Church realizes that not everyone is called to be a theologian. People work and have lives and are not necessarily able to keep up with all that is going on in the world of theology. So, when a priest gives a homily or a theologian writes an article saying that this or that miracle was not really a miracle after all, or when a priest gives a homily stating that the Church is wrong on core teachings like contraception or the ordination of women to the priesthood, the faithful need to have the Church guide them to the Truth and teach them how to evaluate such claims. It isn't a propaganda issue; the Church doesn't think people need to be kept in an intellectual prison so that they'll pay their tithes and not raise a fuss or think about leaving. It is also not the case that the Church views its people as ignorant peasants incapable of theological heavy lifting. The Cardinal states the Church's role very beautifully when he says, “Those who, as it were, can't fight back intellectually have to be defended –against intellectual assault on what sustains their life.”¹⁵¹

Dissent is, for the most part, a newer phenomenon. Although history is rife with heretics from the beginning, dissent

¹⁵⁰ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 30

¹⁵¹ *Salt of the Earth*, 89

as we know it today really has only become fashionable and widespread since the Second Vatican Council, as the Cardinal sees it. At the Council, lay theologians were often consulted and provided much assistance to those who wrote the documents. That consultation, in the Cardinal's eyes, while being certainly beneficial at the time, has also led to problems today. "The role that theologians had assumed at the Council was creating ever more clearly a new confidence among scholars, who now understood themselves to be the truly knowledgeable experts in the faith and therefore no longer subordinate to the shepherds."¹⁵² Since the theologians had helped the Bishops and Cardinals at the Second Vatican Council, and in some cases far exceeded the knowledge of their clerical counterparts, some began to ask, "Why are these Cardinals and Bishops able to tell us what we should and should not ask and study if we are more knowledgeable than they are?" In this type of dissent, "here lies the origin of the decline of the authentic concept of 'obedience'. According to some it would no longer even be a Christian virtue but a heritage of an authoritarian, dogmatic past, hence one to be overcome."¹⁵³ The Cardinal also notes the prevalence of this attitude by theologians today. "It seems nowadays to have become a veritable duty, for theologians who have any self-confidence, to deliver a negative judgment upon documents issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith."¹⁵⁴

What is often blamed for dissent today is, sadly, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, it is said, since Pentecost, comes upon all the Baptized, and it is the Holy Spirit who guides all. The Holy

¹⁵² *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 133. The Cardinal elsewhere writes about the Council: "The bishops...willingly took the theologians as teachers and guides into hitherto virgin territory, even though the final decisions regarding what could be adopted as an official expression of the Council and, therefore, of the Church herself, remained in the hands of the Fathers. After the Council, the dynamic of this development continued apace. Theologians increasingly felt themselves to be the true teachers of the Church and even of the bishops." *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 102

¹⁵³ *The Ratzinger Report*, 49

¹⁵⁴ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 133-4

Spirit then is the engine for truly Christian thinking, and any institution will only hinder that free flowing grace from the Holy Spirit. The Cardinal notes, “This setting of Pneuma (Holy Spirit) and institution in opposition, which is flourishing again today, is the expression of a romanticism that is not even accurate in the worldly realm.”¹⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit can never lead people away from the institution (the Church); they will never do battle as some suggest is happening all the time. The Cardinal states his disdain for such a conception of the Holy Spirit at work in people. “That the Spirit manifests himself only in what is discontinuous, only in the chance eruptions of self-taught and self-formed groups, is utterly inconceivable.”¹⁵⁶ The reason this is inconceivable for the Cardinal is because “For the Church, which confers the sacraments and attentively interprets the Word of God, is never merely an “empirical Catholic Church”; she cannot be cut up into “Spirit” and “institution”.”¹⁵⁷

As a theologian himself, the Cardinal understands that it is easier for theologians to take the road of dissent, and to say what they want to say than it would be for them to subject themselves to the authority and the interpretations of the Church. “Certainly, it is easier to clear one’s path of the cumbersome furniture of dogma and to abandon oneself to plausibility than to remain at a standstill before a reality which obstructs the way and to make oneself vulnerable to its demands.”¹⁵⁸ As a teacher, the Cardinal also knew that “It’s obvious that students will support a teacher who says new things, who says them more clearly and boldly, who sets them free from the chains of tradition and, in doing so, crosses swords with Rome.”¹⁵⁹ When the road of dissent is chosen, however, that which is produced under such an understanding of the Church and the Magisterium cannot help but disintegrate. “When theology organizes itself according to

¹⁵⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 54

¹⁵⁶ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 54

¹⁵⁷ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 54

¹⁵⁸ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 96

¹⁵⁹ *God in the World*, 359

the principle of majority rule and constructs a countermagisterium which offers the faithful alternative modes of behavior, it misses its own essence...by stepping out of the realm of thought into the play of power, it also falsifies its scientific character. It thus loses the two foundations of its existence.”¹⁶⁰

The question then becomes how it could possibly be fair to excommunicate someone from the faith. Here it is important to remember, however, that excommunication is not thought of by the Church as a punishment, but as a way to provide healing – a desperate last attempt to try to wake someone up who is running for the edge of a cliff. Excommunication is not eternal banishment, it is meant to lead the person back to the faith. “Very often a person makes more progress in patience and humility as an excommunicate than in the situation when he is outwardly in communion.”¹⁶¹ Even when one is excommunicated, it is always hoped that the person will recant and return to the Church.

The Cardinal offers a quick glimpse of what true assent is. “Assent is produced by the will, not by the understanding’s own direct insight.”¹⁶² It is not through one’s intelligence that a person assents to follow the teachings of the Church, and thinking that intelligence is where assent comes from is what can get people in trouble. If someone is extremely intelligent, they want their decision to walk in line with the Church to be based on that intelligence, but it cannot be so. More will be said later about the role of intelligence in living out and choosing the Church, and certainly Faith and one’s intelligence are not two completely foreign and mutually exclusive concepts, they do dialogue with each other, but the *sole* criterion for choosing to live and think with the Church cannot be one’s intelligence. Assent to the teachings of the Church is something that is found

¹⁶⁰ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 107

¹⁶¹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 85

¹⁶² *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 23

firstly in that “muscle” of the human soul which is called the will. A person “wills” to believe the Church, or they “will” to not believe the Church.

Finally, it is best to conclude with a definition of belief given by St. Thomas Aquinas. “Thomas defines believing as “thinking with assent”.”¹⁶³

Infallible?

A lot of people who view dissent as a way of life will often question papal infallibility. The teaching that the pope speaks infallibly (without error) in certain very limited circumstances is widely misunderstood. One of the important aspects of infallibility is that the pope must specifically state that he is meaning to invoke his infallibility, and this has only been done so once since the Council of Trent, and that occurrence was when Pope Pius XII declared the “Assumption of Mary into Heaven” a dogmatic truth of the Catholic Church in 1950. Most habitual dissenters will say that if a teaching hasn’t been presented as an infallible teaching, then the teaching is up for debate and even rejection; the Cardinal says that is nonsense. “Both in doctrine and in liturgy, what really matters is lost when one feels obliged to distill a juridical minimum, beyond which everything is left subject to arbitrariness.”¹⁶⁴ The Cardinal also notes that it is unwise and even childish to view only those things which are issued infallibly as binding and necessary for a true living out of the Catholic faith. Noting that Catholics are called and bound by much more than those teachings considered infallible he states “binding authority cannot be the prerogative of infallibility alone.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 21

¹⁶⁴ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 112

¹⁶⁵ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 113

An example of this mentality can be found in the scholarly discussions on the Liturgy. It becomes apparent that in the Liturgy, a microcosm for theology in general, focusing on the mandatory and leaving all else up for personal fancy and whim becomes very problematic. In the following comparison, the words of consecration represent the “infallible” part of the Mass because they must be said, or the Mass is invalid. The question that the Cardinal asks rhetorically is “must only the words of consecration be obeyed, while the rest of the Mass may be used or discarded or reformed to fit the celebrant’s taste?”

Thus, in the case of the Eucharist, for example, this is expressed in an ever-stronger fixation on the words of consecration; that which is actually constitutive for validity becomes more and more strictly limited. Everything other than the words of consecration appears to be mere ceremony, which happens to have evolved into its present form but in principle might just as easily have been omitted.¹⁶⁶

Just as the Liturgy cannot be boiled down to the minute-long act of consecration (although that is all that is required for the Mass to be valid) so too would one hold a severely stunted view of what it means to embrace the teachings of the Church to only believe absolutely in the teachings of the Church which have been issued with the stamp of infallibility. The analogy might also be extended to life as a Catholic in general. That one attend Mass on Sunday should be considered a minimum for considering oneself Catholic, but if anyone asked a Catholic what it meant to live as a Catholic, not many would stop with going to Mass.

Just as Christ came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, so too there is an infinitely larger and more grand body of teachings that comprise what is properly considered “Church

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The Nature and Mission of Theology, 111

teaching” than simply the teachings that have been thought to be infallible.

The Pope

It is the papacy that is completely unique to the Catholic understanding of Church. The first question that must be answered is “Can a Petrine succession really be justified on the basis of the New Testament? Does the New Testament call for it or does it rule it out?”¹⁶⁷ In his book *Called to Communion*, the Cardinal lays the evidence out nicely.

“It is immediately striking that all the major groups of texts in the New Testament are acquainted with the subject of Peter, which is thereby proven to be a topic of universal significance whose importance cannot be restricted to a particular tradition limited to one person or place.”¹⁶⁸ The Cardinal goes on to note that Peter holds a central role in the Gospels.

Together with the sons of Zebedee, he constitutes a group of three that stands out prominently among the twelve apostles. They alone are admitted to two moments of particular consequence—the Transfiguration and the Garden of Olives (Mk. 9:2ff.; 14:33ff.); likewise only these three are permitted to witness the raising of Jairus’ young daughter (Mk. 5:37). In turn, Peter is preeminent among the three; he is the spokesman in the Transfiguration scene, it is he whom the Lord addresses in his hour of anguish in the Garden of Olives.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ *Called to Communion*, 48

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 49

¹⁶⁹ *Called to Communion*, 53-4

The Cardinal also sees it significant that in every listing of the disciples in the New Testament, Peter is listed first. “After the conferral of the power to bind and loose, he asks how often one ought to pardon. All of this is underlined by Peter’s ranking in the lists of the disciples. These lists are known in four versions (Mt. 10:2-4; Mk. 3:16-19; Lk. 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), which vary in many points of detail but which all unanimously name Peter at the head.”¹⁷⁰

An important passage for establishing the Petrine office is Matthew 16:17-19, where Jesus states, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” This certainly is not a veiled reference to the papacy, although the Cardinal notes that it has been nonetheless debated, as anyone not in communion with Rome would be forced to contend the Church’s interpretation of the passage as referring to the Papacy. “Whereas liberal Protestant theology had found reason to contest the origin of these words from Jesus, between the Wars there emerged even among Protestant theologians a sort of consensus that almost uniformly accepted their provenance from the Lord.”¹⁷¹ Some counter that Christ is the head of the Church (which is certainly true) so to have a human being as the visible head of the Church would be crazy. Why let a human being help guide the Church? The Cardinal counters: “to deny that man, with God’s help, could actually lead the Church is to deny God his power.”¹⁷² Some say that God is diminished if a human being, as Pope, were to help Christ in actually guiding His Church, but the Cardinal says that is simply a false piety to God. Concerning Christ’s words to Peter in Matthew 16:17-19, the Cardinal states, “Whoever deprives the words of their force for fear of triumphalism or of human usurpation of authority does not proclaim that God is greater but diminishes him, since God demonstrates the power of

¹⁷⁰ *Called to Communion*, 54

¹⁷¹ *Called to Communion*, 57

¹⁷² *Called to Communion*, 73

his love, and thus remains faithful to the law of the history of salvation, precisely in the paradox of human impotence.”¹⁷³

A tactic often used to undermine the authority of the papacy has been to call attention to the scandals of some popes. Sadly, most know little of the details surrounding historical scandals, and it seems enough today to simply know that in the past there have been “some bad popes.” Concerning the sins of popes, Cardinal Ratzinger (as should any Catholic) readily admits that popes have not lived up to the standards that the office demands. “On the one hand, the papacy remains the foundation of the Church in virtue of a power that does not derive from herself. At the same time, individual popes have again and again become a scandal because of what they themselves are as men, because they want to precede, not follow, Christ.”¹⁷⁴

Others not in favor of the papacy will raise the argument that perhaps Christ founded the Church on Peter, but Christ said nothing about Peter having successors. On the successors of Peter the Cardinal notes, “In the Acts of the Apostles and in the Pastoral Letters – the principle of succession does in fact take on concrete shape. The Protestant notion that the “succession” consists solely in the word as such, but not in any “structures”, is proved to be anachronistic in light of what in actual fact is the form of tradition in the New Testament.”¹⁷⁵ The idea of an “unbroken line of succession” needs to start with the ritual of the laying on of hands. It is this ritual that is described in the Acts of the Apostles as the way that the Apostles chose and appointed their successors. The second generation of apostles also chose their successors and appointed them via a laying on of hands. That tradition is continued today in the ritual for the appointment of bishops. Bishops also in turn appoint their “deputies”, their priests, using this laying on of hands. So when a new bishop is

¹⁷³ *Called to Communion*, 73

¹⁷⁴ *Called to Communion*, 61

¹⁷⁵ *Called to Communion*, 67

chosen and consecrated, another bishop lays his hands on the newly appointed bishop, and the unbroken line of succession continues. The idea that the Church can trace an unbroken line of succession all the way back to Saint Peter and the apostles is an important one. It is not simply that 400 years after the Apostles passed away, the Catholic Church power structure looked back on the Acts of the Apostles and thought they had better come up with a ritual for the passing on of the power of the Apostles that coincides with what the people of God would find in the Acts of the Apostles. Since it was the Catholic Church who put the Bible together, it makes no sense that the Church would have included the Acts of the Apostles if it revealed that the Church had invalidly ordained its bishops and priests for the first three-hundred years of the Church.

That there have been concessions by non-Christians to the idea of the Petrine office, whether they be scholarly or simply sentimental (i.e. to have a central figure looks like it might be nice), is something that for Cardinal Ratzinger suggests a possible point of connection with people of other faiths. “There is also a positive tendency for today. Many non-Catholics affirm the necessity of a common center of Christianity...only by having such a center can the faith of Christians secure a clear voice in the confusion of ideologies.”¹⁷⁶

The question still remains as to why the Pope is in Rome. There is nothing special that happens in the New Testament in Rome other than the fact that Paul wrote to the Christians there. As the Church came into form, there developed five Patriarchates or Apostolic Sees: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. Each was ruled by a different person, and the Cardinal notes that

The apostolic sees became the reference point of true communio. But among these sees there was in turn—quite clearly in Irenaeus of Lyons—a

¹⁷⁶

Called to Communion, 47

decisive criterion that recapitulated all others: the Church of Rome, where Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom. It was with this Church that every community had to agree; Rome was the standard of the authentic apostolic tradition as a whole.¹⁷⁷

The Cardinal also points out that this turn to acknowledging Rome as head of the patriarchates is an idea that developed even before the canon of Scripture was set in place. “The Roman Primacy, or, rather, the acknowledgement of Rome as the criterion of the right apostolic faith, is older than the canon of the New Testament, than “Scripture.””¹⁷⁸ Even a non-Catholic Scripture scholar Robert Harnack acknowledges as much. The Cardinal states, “Harnack, a witness who cannot be suspected of pro-Roman bias, has remarked in this regard that it was only at the end of the second century, in Rome, that a canon of the “books of the New Testament” won recognition by the criterion of apostolicity-catholicity.”¹⁷⁹ Robert Harnack was a protestant Scripture scholar, so the Cardinal is noting that if he attributes credit for the assembly of the Bible by the Roman Church, then that is really saying something. Rome took its place of prominence and authority for a fairly simple reason. “The essential point, in my opinion, has already become plain: the martyrdom of Peter in Rome fixes the place where his function continues.”¹⁸⁰

Finally, with regard to the Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger lays out what he feels is the proper job of the pope. “The pope...incarnates this constraint laid upon the Church. Whenever temptations arise in the Church to do things differently now, more comfortably, he has to ask, Can we do that at all? The Pope is thus not the instrument through which one could, so to speak, call a different Church into existence, but is a protective

¹⁷⁷ *Called to Communion*, 69

¹⁷⁸ *Called to Communion*, 70

¹⁷⁹ *Called to Communion*, 70

¹⁸⁰ *Called to Communion*, 72

barrier against arbitrary action.”¹⁸¹ Cardinal Ratzinger also feels that the Pope’s job needs to evolve to fit the demands of the times. Having to run an entire city-state is one of the first things that is problematic in the eyes of Cardinal Ratzinger. Concerning Vatican City, the Cardinal notes, “Its only purpose is to ensure that the pope has sufficient freedom to carry out his ministry. Whether this could be simplified still further is a question we may ask.”¹⁸² Also, “Not all motherhouses of orders, for example, would have to be at Rome. And how many encyclicals the pope chooses to write, how often he wishes to address people.”¹⁸³ The Cardinal here is suggesting that the Pope could possibly not write as much and that he could also perhaps cut back on administrative duties such as some of the tasks that are involved in running a city-state. With regard to motherhouses, the Cardinal is saying that it need not be the case that each of the religious orders, of which there are thousands, might not need a delegation in Rome. In general, the Cardinal, who got to see the daily tasks that were placed on the Pope in his 20 plus years of service in the holy city, is just offering some suggestions, on how the job of the Pope could be restructured a little bit so that there was more time for the Pope to be Pope of the universal Church.

Are we losing the universal consciousness of Church?

In the Cardinal’s view, we too often look at the Church merely at the parish level. When a person thinks of themselves as a Catholic Christian today, it is usually their local parish experience that comes to mind. When that happens, problems very quickly set in, as will be noted. One source of the problem are the words of Christ “Where two or three are gathered in my

¹⁸¹ *God in the World*, 377

¹⁸² *God in the World*, 382

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 382

name, there I am also” (Matthew 18:20). Concerning this passage, the Cardinal notes the problem with this faulty view:

The Church as institution has in this view no properly theological status; only the community has theological significance, because what matters is the Word alone... “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst” (18:20). One could almost say that for many this saying has replaced the logion about the rock, about the power of the keys.¹⁸⁴

The logion about the rock and the power of the keys mentioned in the previous quote refers to Jesus’ declaration that Peter is the rock, and upon that rock He would build His Church (Matt. 16:18). So the Cardinal is saying that it seems today that Jesus’ words about where any two are gathered in His name He is there also (which are used by people who want to talk about the significance of a local community) seems to trump His words to Peter which established the universal Catholic Church. Many who would put the local community at odds with the universal Church will say “the assembly that has become an ecclesial community in this way holds all the powers of the Church...she constitutes herself.”¹⁸⁵ The Cardinal is suggesting that when the local Church community begins to take precedence over the universal Church, the local church community often dangerously becomes the sole source of authority for itself. In order to refocus people back towards a holistic vision of what it means to be Catholic (that a Catholic is a member of a local community AND the universal Church) the Cardinal encourages a proper understanding of the passage “where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name.” He says, “The Lord’s word concerning the two or three who gather in his name must not be isolated; it is not a

¹⁸⁴ *Called to Communion*, 80-1

¹⁸⁵ *Called to Communion*, 81

definitive and exhaustive statement of the whole of the Church's reality."¹⁸⁶

There are several perceived benefits to doing away with the universal Church. Some suggest that "We must move—it is maintained—from the paternalistic Church to the community Church; no one must any longer remain a passive receiver of the gift of Christian existence. Rather, all should be active agents of it...It thus finally becomes "our" Church."¹⁸⁷ In that setting, however, "The meaning of the words "I believe" never signifies anything beyond "we opine"."¹⁸⁸ Cardinal Ratzinger notes, "The more men themselves decide and do in the Church, the more cramped it becomes for us all. What is great and liberating about the Church is not something self-made."¹⁸⁹ A Church which originates out of human conceptions becomes a farce. "The Church...must not...become an end in herself. Nowadays the opinion surfaces occasionally even in ecclesiastical circles that a man is more Christian the more he is involved in Church activities. We have a kind of ecclesiastical occupational therapy; a committee, or at any rate some sort of activity in the Church, is sought for everyone."¹⁹⁰ As soon as the universal and binding nature of the Catholic Church disintegrates into nothing more than local parishes, even the parishes themselves can no longer stay together. When that universal unity is lost, nothing remains but sects.

In Protestant Churches in Germany, there was and is the custom of announcing on the bulletin board who is celebrating the service and preaching the homily. Such names often stand for religious parties: everyone wants to attend the service of his own camp. Unfortunately a similar use is now

¹⁸⁶ *Called to Communion*, 82
¹⁸⁷ *Called to Communion*, 137
¹⁸⁸ *Called to Communion*, 140
¹⁸⁹ *Called to Communion*, 140
¹⁹⁰ *Called to Communion*, 145

beginning in Catholic parishes; but this means that the Church is disappearing behind parties, that ultimately we are listening to human opinions and no longer heeding the common Word of God that transcends us all and whose guarantor is the Church.¹⁹¹

The Cardinal also notes that “The Church is not a club of friends or a leisure association that brings together men with the same likes and related interests.”¹⁹²

A democratic approach to Church?

“There are attempts...to “democratize” the Church in a decided fashion...A faith we can decide for ourselves is not faith at all. And no minority has any reason to allow a majority to prescribe what it should believe.”¹⁹³ The attempt to democratize the Church leads to a power struggle between the laity (those thought to have been given no power) and the clergy (those thought to have been given all the power of the Church). “The notion has formed that we have to determine together what it is possible to believe today, what kind of Church we should construct. And in doing this we would, so to speak, have to deprive the clergy of their power and to ensure that the laity have their due say.”¹⁹⁴ This conception of Church is so far from the truth that Cardinal Ratzinger feels that it can’t even be considered Protestant. “A conception of Church is spreading in Catholic thought, and even in Catholic theology, that cannot even be called Protestant in a ‘classic’ sense.”¹⁹⁵ The problem with a church based on democracy and “power sharing” is that

¹⁹¹ *Called to Communion*, 163

¹⁹² *Called to Communion*, 77

¹⁹³ *Truth and Tolerance*, 129

¹⁹⁴ *God in the World*, 386

¹⁹⁵ *The Ratzinger Report*, 45

“Everything that men make can also be undone by others. Everything that has its origin in human likes can be disliked by others. Everything that one majority decides upon can be revoked by another majority.”¹⁹⁶

The Church reminds her members that it cannot constitute nor determine itself of its own volition through the consecration of the bishops. That the local dioceses draw their strength from the universal Church “is expressed in his (the bishop’s) very consecration: no community can simply give itself its own bishop. Such a radical embedding in the local is incompatible with the principle of apostolicity and...universality.”¹⁹⁷ The Cardinal also points out that not every diocese is guaranteed to go on forever. “The promise of Christ – “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world” – does not mean, in addition, that each and every diocese has the assurance that it will endure forever.”¹⁹⁸ He also notes that “It will be scarcely possible to keep up the entire parish system as it now exists, a system that, by the way, is of rather recent date.”¹⁹⁹ The Cardinal points out the idea that parishes are not set in stone not as a threat but to point people toward the Church universal, and he seeks to encourage people not to become short-sighted or overly local in their conception of the Catholic Church.

Solution to Misconceptions

The Cardinal suggests that the fact that the Church is a universal Church, the Bride of Christ, and something created and established by God must penetrate the Church at every level. “The Church cannot become a static juxtaposition of essentially self-sufficient local Churches. The Church must remain “apostolic”, that is to say, the dynamism of unity must also mold

¹⁹⁶ *Called to Communion*, 139

¹⁹⁷ *Called to Communion*, 88-9

¹⁹⁸ *God in the World*, 361

¹⁹⁹ *Salt of the Earth*, 265

her structure.”²⁰⁰ The final answer is a simple one, and again highlights one of Cardinal Ratzinger’s main points that penetrates all of his works. He notes, “We need, not a more human, but a more divine Church; then she will also become truly human.”²⁰¹ He notes elsewhere that “The origin of the Church is not the decision of men; she is not the product of human willing but a creature of the Spirit of God.”²⁰²

One practical way out of a self-centered conception of church by a community or an individual is to realize that “There must always be in the Church ministries and missions that do not belong purely to the local Church but serve the task given the whole Church, the task of spreading the gospel.”²⁰³ The Cardinal is suggesting that local churches can remember their place in the universal Catholic Church by including the mission of the universal Catholic Church within their own ministries and assignments so that some of the energy of the parish is given over to the universal church.

²⁰⁰ *Called to Communion*, 85

²⁰¹ *Called to Communion*, 146

²⁰² *Called to Communion*, 43

²⁰³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 202

Relativism – The New Dictatorship

My reason for writing this book, as stated earlier, concerns making people aware of where the pope is coming from intellectually, spiritually, etc. Also, there is the hope that when the pope now speaks, a greater understanding of what he means when he puts forth ideas can be achieved. This window into the Pope's understanding of things may be no more important than with the idea of relativism. Cardinal Ratzinger as dean of the College of Cardinals had the responsibility of presiding and preaching at the Mass which the Cardinals celebrated just prior to entering into their conclave to elect the next pope. Cardinal Ratzinger caused quite a stir when he preached on something that he had written on extensively as a Cardinal. Cardinal Ratzinger preached on the "dictatorship of relativism."

Cardinal Ratzinger, many years prior to his homily to his brother Cardinals, he noted, "Relativism has become the central problem for faith in our time."²⁰⁴ Relativism is the idea that all faiths are simply relative. It is said by relativists that because there are multiple faith traditions in the world, they all must be essentially equal. It sounds just, but in actuality, to admit that all faiths are equal is to also dismiss any faith tradition's claim to truth. If all religions are equal, and many contradict with each other on key points, relativism solves that dilemma by saying things like "if faith a works for this person and faith b works for this person, that's fine. Neither are actually true, but at least we'll all get along by acknowledging that all faiths are wrong."

Relativism has become the only acceptable approach to the problem of how to live in a culture where many faiths encounter one another. Most people today would not consider themselves relativists, but most of people on some level have been infected with the relativism of the culture. It may be called political correctness, or a host of other names, but relativism is everywhere today. It seems to stem, yet again, from the fact that

²⁰⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 117

mankind has begun to worship itself. The Cardinal laments that “it doesn’t really matter whether you take God as being a person or as impersonal, whether you call him Jupiter, Shiva, or whatever other name. And it becomes more and more clear that people no longer take God seriously. That they have wandered away from God and now only turn to refracted images in which they see reflected only themselves.”²⁰⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger also speaks about the prevalence of relativism in our culture today when he notes,

The fact that...in the context of the encounter between cultures, relativism seems appropriate as the true philosophy of humanity gives it...such an appreciable impact, both in East and West that it hardly seems possible to offer further resistance. Anyone who opposes it is not only setting himself against democracy and tolerance, that is, the fundamental rules of human intercourse; he is obstinately insisting on the preeminence of his own Western culture and thus refusing to share in that coexistence of cultures which is obviously the order of the day.²⁰⁶

In addition to that, he notes relativism’s pervasiveness especially in this era of democracy. According to the Cardinal, relativism “defines itself positively on the basis of the concepts of tolerance, dialectic epistemology, and freedom...Relativism thus also appears as being the philosophical basis of democracy.”²⁰⁷

All faiths are equal

²⁰⁵ *God in the World*, 169

²⁰⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 122

²⁰⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 117

“The other religions are always treated as being ultimately of more or less equal value, always looked at from the point of view of their value for salvation.”²⁰⁸ Once people accept relativism, people must necessarily agree that all faiths are essentially the same. “Out of the impression of complete plurality, which represents, so to speak, the first stage of perception, there develops an impression of all being ultimately the same.”²⁰⁹ This neutering of religion begs the question for the Cardinal as to whether or not man should indeed actually search and weigh the various religions and test them. “Can or must a man simply make the best of the religion that happens to fall to his share, in the form in which it is actually practiced around him? Or must he not, whatever happens, be one who seeks?”²¹⁰ Catholics support the idea that we should be seekers of the Truth, and relativism would agree with that, but relativism, seeing all faiths as equal, says that the only real criterion for whether or not a person has found the faith is if a certain religion “feels good,” “enlightened,” or “at home.” The Cardinal suggests, however, that man needs and wants actual criteria which exists above and beyond his own feelings and opinions. Man wants to seek for truth, and not simply for that which makes him or her feel good.

The idea that all religions are in fact equal does not conform to people’s experience of the various religions of the world. “We find that there is no more an identity of religions in general than there is an unrelated plurality among them.”²¹¹ “We should...not just be discussing an undefined entity of “religion” en masse”²¹² because there is no such thing. Later, the idea that eastern spirituality is held up as the solution to this quest for the distilled or purified religion will be noted, and the truth of that claim will also be examined. For now, suffice it to say that when the issue is actually examined, it becomes quite clear that there

²⁰⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 17

²⁰⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 26

²¹⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 54

²¹¹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 26

²¹² *Truth and Tolerance*, 18

are in fact very different types of religions out there, and those religions make an impact on the people who practice them. Religions are not interchangeable like pairs of jeans. The Cardinal points this out in a “negative” way; “religions...are seen as being all of the same kind. But that is by no means the case. There are in fact sick and degenerate forms of religion, which do not edify people but alienate them.”²¹³

Tracing the development of relativism

Relativism is a plant that grows very quickly once the seed is allowed to grow in a person. Relativism is not an idea that takes very long to develop because all of the steps of development very quickly follow once the presuppositions of relativism are granted. A quick look at the stages of the development of relativism within a person:

Stage 1: polytheism is ideal

The growth of relativism in a person first of all begins with the recognition that there are very different religions in the world. The next question which people ask themselves is whether or not they should return to polytheism; whether or not humanity should, as the Israelites cried, “return to Egypt” (or ancient Rome or ancient Greece for that matter) where every person can pick and choose their gods to create an individualized line up of deities that suit their own devotional fancy. It seems like returning to that kind of system would solve the problem posed by relativism. The Cardinal notes that people cry out “The Exodus must be reversed; we must go back to “Egypt” – that is to say, the distinction between true and untrue in the realm of

²¹³ *Truth and Tolerance*, 204

religion must be done away with.”²¹⁴ The Cardinal responds, “The return to Egypt is the return to the gods, inasmuch as it rejects a God who stands over against the world but regards the gods merely as symbolical forms of expression for nature, which is divine.”²¹⁵

This quickly becomes problematic, because anyone who looks at history will see that “The notion that the gods are peacefully interchangeable will not stand up to reality.”²¹⁶ This is an extremely important point: there have always been wars and battles fought over the gods and over religions, just as there are sadly still today.

The more significant reason that the Cardinal feels that people realize that polytheism doesn’t work is that people ask “the good-natured and tolerant gods who do not inquire about truth, “what about being set free from the distinction between sin and what is good? How is that lived?””²¹⁷ The Cardinal is noting that people want to hear answers from the various gods about serious questions, about sin, goodness, life and death, but many gods in the world don’t offer satisfactory answers to those questions, or they don’t answer those questions at all. The gods, “For the person who is asking himself how he can live and die, and for what, they are not enough.”²¹⁸

A return to polytheism is also problematic in that it fails to take into account the fact that there has been religious development. The cardinal points out that “Polytheism of the “nature religions” is not a static entity to which one could return at any time.”²¹⁹

²¹⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 212

²¹⁵ *Truth and Tolerance*, 214

²¹⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 223

²¹⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 217

²¹⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 216

²¹⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 224

Stage 2: let us adopt an eastern approach

Religion appears as a world of symbols, which despite the ultimate unity of the language of human symbols (as is increasingly demonstrated today by psychology and religious anthropology), vary in details but nonetheless mean just the same thing and really ought to begin to discover their deep, underlying unity. Once this comes about, then the unity of religions will be achieved without doing away with any of their variety – that is the most attractive illusion that particularly those people with religious awareness see before them today as a genuine hope for the future.²²⁰

The hope for the future is now laid out, but it seems that the path is flawed from the start, in Cardinal Ratzinger's understanding. The way out of the dilemma of relativism is now sought, not in a new encounter of the "I" with the "Thou" or "We", but in overcoming subjective consciousness...religion means bringing my self into tune with the cosmic whole, the transcending of all divisions."²²¹

So the question becomes, "what, if anything, underlies all the religions of the world?" In answer, Cardinal Ratzinger asks, "Does not Asia show us a way out? Religion that works without having to raise any claim to be true?"²²² Here, Cardinal Ratzinger is noting the spiritual traditions of Asia that are more mystic in nature, that stress the need to transcend the physical world. Religious traditions in Asia typically don't worry about earthly things like dogmas, teachings, and institutions because they are just part of the world, and the world is typically thought of by the religions of the East as something more like a

²²⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 23-4

²²¹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 127

²²² *Truth and Tolerance*, 227

distraction and more like an illusion. The Cardinal also notes that because the religions of the east do not make a claim to possess the truth, it means that in the religions of the East the world can find a solution to the problem of relativism. He notes, “the spiritual monism of India... regards itself as the overarching way: it can offer all other religions a place.”²²³ The religious tradition of India is monotheistic, but “Monotheism in India is different from that of Israel in two ways: firstly, it is directed toward mysticism...Secondly, it arose, not through a revolution, as in Israel, but through an evolution; in consequence, the gods were never overthrown; rather a peaceful balance between varying forms came about.”²²⁴

Eastern spirituality appeals to us today because it places a premium on personal experience, transcendence, and religious experience.

All religion is said to be based in the final analysis on the experience of the mystic, who alone is able to make contact directly with the divine and who passes something of this on to the many...religion would exist among mankind in two (and only two) forms: in the direct form of mysticism as “firsthand” religion and, then, in the indirect form of knowledge only “passed on” from the mystic.

²²⁵

Elsewhere, the value of mysticism and the mystic experience for eastern religions is noted once again. “In mysticism, inwardness holds the first place...the view that God is purely passive in relation to man and that the content of religion can only consist of man plunging into God. God does not act.”²²⁶ People who are nowadays bored by the religious worship of Catholicism can find

²²³ *Truth and Tolerance*, 84

²²⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 35

²²⁵ *Truth and Tolerance*, 26

²²⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 36

in the east a religious system that once again places their own experience in the proper place – at the top of the list. The Cardinal notes, “If the “rational intoxication” of the Christian mystery cannot make us intoxicated with God, then we just have to conjure up the real, concrete intoxication of effective ecstasies, the passionate power of which catches us up and turns us, at least for a moment, into gods, helps us for a moment to sense the pleasure of infinity and to forget the misery of finite existence.”

²²⁷

Cardinal Ratzinger also notes a more human reason for admiring the religions of Asia, and being a bit embarrassed about Christianity when examined next to eastern religions.

If we set the principle actors in the covenant-event of Israel against the religious personalities of Asia, then first of all we feel remarkably uncomfortable. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, with all their wiles and tricks, with their ill-temper and their inclination to violence, seem at least quite mediocre and pathetic next to someone like Buddha, Confucius, or Lao-tzu.²²⁸

The more significant appeal of eastern religions to those fed up with Christian worship and the Christian way of viewing the world is that eastern mysticism seems to do away with worship altogether. The Cardinal notes “The relativist elimination of...ecclesiology, now becomes a central commandment of religion.”²²⁹ There is no need for a magisterium, worship, ministers, sacraments, tithing, scriptures, etc. if what is now truly cherished is transcendence to a spiritual plane which is ipso facto

²²⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 128-9

²²⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 41. Here Cardinal Ratzinger acknowledges another source which gave rise to his reflection. The footnote states “Cf. the way these figures are portrayed in K. Jaspers, *Die groben Philosophen*, vol. I (Munich, 1957), pp. 128-85; 898-933.”

²²⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 121

removed from the realm of this world. If this world is to be transcended, then it goes without saying that religious structures found in this world must be transcended as well. This gives rise to the idea that we see over and over again that religion can be separated from religious experience. It is the same view of things that those who would try and divorce the Body of Christ (that which can be transcended to) from the Catholic Church (that which is only a broken façade, and must be transcended from). That Cardinal Ratzinger sees this distinction between religion (liturgy, bishops, sacraments, etc.) and “true religion” as false should not surprise us at this point. He states, “To me, the concept of Christianity without religion is contradictory and illusory.”²³⁰ The Cardinal notes that those who idealize the eastern mystical religions fail to realize is that eastern mystical religions are not free from religious structures and hierarchy, nor are they free of “burdensome and boring” prescribed worship formats. They have their own sets of regulations and guidelines just like Catholicism, although that is never mentioned when popular culture is portraying eastern mystical religions. The Cardinal notes, “These religions do have a system of ritual actions that are regarded as being necessary for salvation and that distinguish the “believer” from the unbeliever.”²³¹ To view the eastern religions as simply striving for individual transcendence via mysticism would be to base one’s view of those religions solely on popular images of those religions, and not on actual knowledge of the faith traditions of eastern religions themselves. Essentially, the view of eastern religions that people put all of their hope in; a view that the way religion is practiced in the East will provide a true path which will allow humanity to do away with distinctions is actually based on a false understanding of those religions.

²³⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 50

²³¹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 124

Implications of relativism

Relativism, in its dissemination of the idea that all faith traditions are equal has implications on Christianity specifically. First of all, Christ is seen as one among many great religious figures of the world under the relativist viewpoint. “The historical Jesus, so people now think, is actually no more uniquely the Logos than any other savior figures from history are.”²³²

Another problem concerns Christian mission. “Many a one began to wonder, ‘Why should we disturb non-Christians, urging them to accept baptism and faith in Christ, if their religion is their way to salvation in their culture, in their part of the world?’”²³³ Elsewhere he states

Christian universalism, which is carried out concretely in mission, is no longer the obligatory handing on of a good meant for everyone, that is, of truth and love; with this presupposition, mission becomes the mere presumptuous attitude of a culture that imagines itself to be superior, that tramples upon a whole multitude of religious cultures in the most shameful fashion, thus, it is held, depriving those peoples of what is best: their own heritage. Thence comes the imperative: Give us back our religions.²³⁴

The Cardinal notes elsewhere, “insisting that there is a universal, binding, and valid truth in history, which became flesh in Jesus Christ and is handed on through the faith of the Church, is regarded as a kind of fundamentalism, as an attack upon the modern spirit, and as a threat to tolerance and freedom.”²³⁵ The

²³² *Truth and Tolerance*, 122

²³³ *The Ratzinger Report*, 197

²³⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 73

²³⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 211

Cardinal also says, “If all religions are in principle equal, then mission can only be a kind of religious imperialism.”²³⁶ He also notes that “If there is no truth shared by everyone, a truth that is valid simply because it is true, then Christianity is merely a foreign import, a form of spiritual imperialism, which needs to be shaken off just as much as political imperialism.”²³⁷

As we see above, the central problem of relativism is its destruction of the idea that there can be truth.

Truth is replaced by the decision of the majority...precisely because there can be no truth, in the sense of a binding and generally accessible entity for man. Thus the multiplicity of cultures serves to demonstrate the relativism of all cultures...This relativism, which is nowadays to be found, as a basic attitude of enlightened people, penetrating far into the realm of theology, is the most profound difficulty of our age.²³⁸

This slaughtering of truth is done, it is thought, out of a respect for other religions. To understand truth to be always and everywhere relative has unfortunately positioned itself at the top of the enlightenment hierarchy, which makes it all the more difficult to change. “To lay claim to truth for one religion’s particular expressions of faith appears today, not merely presumptuous, but an indication of insufficient enlightenment.”²³⁹ Although relativism is seen as the most hospitable and ecumenical and most enlightened road, it is actually the path whereby all religions are in fact trampled on.

If the question of truth is no longer being considered, then what religion essentially is, is no

²³⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 105

²³⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 128

²³⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 72

²³⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 72

longer distinguishable from what it is not; faith is no longer differentiated from superstition, experience from illusion. Unless claims to truth are considered, respect for other religions ultimately becomes contradictory and meaningless, because there is no criterion by which to distinguish what is of positive value in any religion and what is negative or is the product of superstition and deception.²⁴⁰

Solutions to relativism

Relativism is a difficult philosophical stance to refute, which is why Cardinal Ratzinger, in his last homily as a Cardinal, called it the central problem of our time. The Cardinal feels the solution lies in understanding that Truth (with a capital T) resides in the Catholic Church. The implications of saying that Truth is to be found in the Church need to be examined, so as to avoid the charge of arrogance. The Cardinal notes it is possible to hold up Catholicism while still respecting people of other faith traditions. “Respect and regard for the religions and cultures of the world, which have brought an objective enriching in terms of promoting human dignity and the development of civilization, neither diminish the originality and unique status of the revelation of Jesus Christ nor restrict the missionary task of the Church.”²⁴¹ The Cardinal notes that other religions are not therefore debunked when it is said that Truth resides within the Church. “Did not the Magi find their way to Christ...by means of their “superstition”, by their religious beliefs and practices (Mt 2:1-23)?”²⁴²

²⁴⁰ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 219

²⁴¹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 215

²⁴² *Truth and Tolerance*, 21

The question of Truth is attacked from two sides. First of all, some say it doesn't exist. That truth does not exist is easily disproved. The Cardinal notes, "Even in the realm of politics, of course, one cannot always manage with absolute relativism: there are things that are wrong and can never become right."²⁴³ The Cardinal also notes that if one were to look at the Communist regime, it would be possible to see that if one believes there is no truth, madness is not far behind. "Whence do I derive right action if I have no idea what is right? The collapse of the Communist regimes resulted directly from the fact that they had changed the world without knowing what was good for the world and what was not."²⁴⁴ Indeed, even the start of Communism shows us something about the nature and necessity of truth. "Relativism is dangerous in quite particular ways: for the shape of human existence at an individual level and in society. The renunciation of truth does not heal man. How much evil has been done in history in the name of good opinions and good intentions is something no one can overlook."²⁴⁵ The Cardinal suggests here that when it becomes impossible for truth to be universal, then the only thing left to guide people is to intend to do well (which is flawed itself because to decide whether or not someone intends to do well requires a standard of objective truth by which to judge one's intentions, and whether or not someone intends well). The Cardinal, however, holds up the sum of human history and notes how often people have erred tragically and catastrophically with their justification being good intentions.

What to Make of the Second Vatican Council

²⁴³ *Truth and Tolerance*, 117

²⁴⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 124

²⁴⁵ *Truth and Tolerance*, 204

It has already been noted that Cardinal Ratzinger played a significant role in the Second Vatican Council as a theologian. For this reason, it is important that the Cardinal's understanding of what the Council was be examined, because he was actually there, and he was one of the many contributors to the Council itself. Cardinal Ratzinger's understanding of what the Council was meant to be is also important given his role as the head of the CDF and the fact that that role has forced him to play a major part in seeing that the Council has been truly implemented and understood for what it was. We turn now to what the Cardinal believes about the Council.

The Council Created Nothing New

The conception is out there that the Second Vatican Council was a new event, something that had never happened in the Church before. This is not true; there have been many ecumenical councils. The Cardinal notes that people within the Church have sometimes lead to the misunderstanding. "It is...our fault if we have at times provided a pretext to view Vatican II as a 'break'."²⁴⁶ One of the ways in which this conception of a break has been perpetuated is through the language used by the Church via its bishops, priests and theologians. Often the words "pre-conciliar" and "post-conciliar" are used to talk about the time either before or after the council (it can at times seem like the Second Vatican Council takes on as much significance for breaking history into two halves as did the birth of Christ!). The Cardinal notes that we, as a Church, must steer clear of that type of language. "I want to emphasize that I don't like the terms pre- or post-conciliar. To accept them would be tantamount to accepting a rupture in the history of the Church."²⁴⁷ Again, this is clearly

²⁴⁶ *The Ratzinger Report*, 31

²⁴⁷ *The Ratzinger Report*, 113

problematic because “In no wise did the Council intend to introduce a temporal dichotomy in the Church.”²⁴⁸ The view that the Church’s history somehow broke apart onto a new timeline after the Council has become problematic first of all in giving people the impression that the Council and its teachings somehow lie outside the continuum of Church history. If the Church’s history is not linear, but is jagged and prone to dramatic shifts, then there begins to creep in the idea that maybe some Councils were right while others were wrong. This has created the interesting state in the Church whereby some who are extremely conservative feel that the Council should be rejected because it was too liberal, while extreme liberals feel the council should be rejected because it didn’t take the Church far enough toward their view of things. The Cardinal notes this problem by stating that “Vatican II today stands in a twilight. For a long time it has been regarded by the so-called progressive wing as completely surpassed and, consequently, as a thing of the past, no longer relevant to the present. By the opposite side, the ‘conservative’ wing, it is, conversely, viewed as the cause of the present decadence of the Catholic Church.”²⁴⁹ Each side wants to find fault with the Council; “Some are unhappy because the Church has conformed too much to the standards of the world; others are angry that she is still very far from doing so.”²⁵⁰

The trouble with viewing any Council as a break should be obvious. The Cardinal notes that it is really unintelligible that one Council or another be thought of to be “new” or “a discarding of the past.” “First, it is impossible (‘for a Catholic’) to take a position for Vatican II but against Trent or Vatican I...It is likewise impossible to decide in favor of Trent and Vatican I, but against Vatican II.”²⁵¹ Essentially, the Cardinal here is using the examples of Trent and Vatican I (the favorite councils of conservatives today) and Vatican II (a favorite council for

²⁴⁸ *The Ratzinger Report*, 35

²⁴⁹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 28

²⁵⁰ *Called to Communion*, 134

²⁵¹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 28

liberals today). It is not possible for a Catholic to hold on to and cherish the more traditional councils of Trent and Vatican I, but reject Vatican II because it is too liberal, just as it would be wrong to hold up Vatican II as evidence as to why one would reject Trent or Vatican I. Any view of the history of the Church that does not view Her history as continuous, harmonious, and guided in all things by the hand of God will necessarily lead to disastrous conceptions of the Church and Her councils.

Revolution or revelation?

With all that was said above about the attempt by some to divide history into two halves, the time “before the Council,” and the “time after the Council”, it seems that a lot of people were confused about the implications of the Council. If the Council did truly herald a new era, a break from the old, then that meant that there was a lot that needed a makeover in the Church. Cardinal Ratzinger talks about this change: “After the Second Vatican Council: under the impact of the claims of the wholly new, the earlier continuum of tradition was relegated to the abandoned space of the “preconciliar.” The impression arose that Christianity in all its aspects was to be sketched out anew.”²⁵² The idea that it was (and still is) time to recreate the Church is clearly problematic. After the Council, “One found oneself facing a progressive process of decadence that to a large measure has been unfolding under the sign of a summons to a presumed ‘spirit of the Council’ and by so doing has actually and increasingly discredited it.”²⁵³ By appealing to the ‘Spirit of the Council’, we see once again that the actual pronouncements by the hierarchy, the statements and documents of the Council, as representative of the authority in general of the magisterium or hierarchy of the Church, as being labeled as ‘able to be

²⁵² *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 248

²⁵³ *The Ratzinger Report*, 30

transcended' if one appeals to the 'spirit of the council.' The Cardinal, in this context, again addresses the problem of divorcing the institutional church from truly Christian life.

Because the Church as she appears empirically is so remote from such dreams, because she, too, smacks of institution and of everything human, an especially fierce anger wells up against her—an anger that nonetheless cannot part with the idea of the Church, because the dream that had turned men's eyes toward her in expectation cannot be extinguished. Because the Church is not as our dreams picture her to be, a desperate attempt is undertaken to bring her into conformity with our wishes: to make her a place for every freedom, a space where we can move freed of our limits, an experiment in utopia, which, after all, must exist somewhere.²⁵⁴

The Cardinal does not believe, however, that a third Vatican Council is needed to sort out the issues. The Cardinal believes that it simply takes a long time to implement the teachings of the Council. "A council, as we are seeing, is an event that stirs up the whole Church, an event that requires long periods of time to assimilate. We have not yet assimilated Vatican II by a long shot. A Third Vatican wouldn't be the medicine to help digest it."²⁵⁵

How is Vatican II to be understood?

For Cardinal Ratzinger, it is very simple. There is no spirit of the Council that must be ascertained to judge whether or not an idea should be implemented. There is no need for a third

²⁵⁴ *Called to Communion*, 136

²⁵⁵ *Salt of the Earth*, 252

Council to sort out the Second Council. All that needs to happen is that people need to read the documents from the Council for themselves. The Cardinal dissects the situation: “The true time of Vatican II has not yet come, that its authentic reception has not yet begun: its documents were quickly buried under a pile of superficial or frankly inexact publications.”²⁵⁶ Elsewhere the Cardinal notes, “The true inheritance of the Council lies in its texts.”²⁵⁷ He even exhorts Catholics to “return to the authentic texts of the original Vatican II.”²⁵⁸

He sees all the problems stemming from the fact that not many Catholics even know the names of the major documents of Vatican II, let alone know what they actually say. This has allowed people to fill that disconnect with their own ideas, imaginations, and agendas to dramatically alter the teachings of the Council.

The Second Vatican Council certainly did intend to subordinate what it said about the Church to what it said about God...The way in which the Council’s teaching has been received, however, has hitherto overlooked this determinative prefix...people have pounced upon individual phrases and slogans and thus fallen short of the great overall perspectives of the Council Fathers.

²⁵⁹

If the Council is not actually studied first hand by Catholics, if all of the information that Catholics use to shape their opinion of the Council comes from other sources and other people, if Catholics are thought to be incapable of understanding the documents themselves, then problems result. The Cardinal states that if “theology can no longer transmit a common model of the faith,

²⁵⁶ *The Ratzinger Report*, 40

²⁵⁷ *Salt of the Earth*, 76

²⁵⁸ *The Ratzinger Report*, 31

²⁵⁹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 125-6

catechesis is also exposed to dismemberment and to constantly changing experiments.”²⁶⁰

All about the liturgy?

Most Catholics, when they think of the heritage from the Second Vatican Council, they probably think the Liturgy, specifically, that it is now celebrated in the local language, and now the priest faces the people. In thousands and thousands of pages of very interesting, fruitful, and worthwhile documents, most Catholics would be surprised to find those two ideas mentioned in a total of two or three sentences. Nowhere does it say the priest should face the people, and the language while more profound, is still not a very big deal in the eyes of the fathers of the Council. The Cardinal describes the mindset of the fathers of the Council, with whom he spent a lot of time helping to write some of the documents. “The reform of the liturgy in the spirit of the liturgical movement was not a priority for the majority of the Fathers, and for many not even a consideration.”²⁶¹

The Cardinal also notes the perceived importance of the Council on the subject of the Liturgy:

This alone confirmed the primordial model of the Last Supper. These arrangements seemed in the end so persuasive that after the Council (which says nothing about “turning toward the people”) new altars were set up everywhere, and today celebration versus populum [towards the people] really does look like the characteristic fruit of Vatican II’s liturgical renewal. In fact it is the most conspicuous consequence of a reordering

²⁶⁰ *The Ratzinger Report*, 72

²⁶¹ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 122

that not only signifies a new external arrangement of the places dedicated to the liturgy, but also brings with it a new idea of the essence of the liturgy – the liturgy as a communion meal.²⁶²

The Cardinal notes that “The Eucharist that Christians celebrate really cannot adequately be described by the term “meal”.”²⁶³ The problem that this turning towards the people, and conceiving of the Sacrament as a meal is that “The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle.”²⁶⁴ Conceiving of the Eucharist as a community meal is problematic because it essentially cuts God out of the celebration. The Cardinal notes

When priest and faithful look at one another, they are looking at the image of God in man, and so facing one another is the right direction for prayer. I find it hard to believe that the famous critic thought this was a serious argument. For we do not see the image of God in man in such a simplistic way. The “image of God” in man is not, of course, something that we can photograph or see with a merely photographic kind of perception.²⁶⁵

The irony is that those who most readily embraced this form of worship were those who felt like under the ‘old’ rite, and indeed in the ‘old church’, the priest had too much authority and power. Now, it was believed, the power was being shared more; priest and people faced one another. The irony here is that this form of worship actually puts even more ‘power’ into the priest’s hands, and no longer lets the Liturgy stand on its own authority. What

²⁶² *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 77

²⁶³ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 78

²⁶⁴ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 80

²⁶⁵ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 83

seems to be needed in this new system, when not properly executed, is not men willing to offer sacrifice to God, but those who are entertaining and who are pleasant. The Cardinal notes, “What happened was an unprecedented clericalization came on the scene. Now the priest – the “presider”, as they now prefer to call him – becomes the real point of reference for the whole liturgy.”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 80

The Relationship Between Faith and Reason

The discussion in the Church on the relationship between faith and reason stretches back nearly to its temporal beginnings. When the Greeks, who prized reason, mixed with Christians such as St. Paul, who clearly prizes faith, the issue of how faith and intelligence interact became of central importance. The questions answered and examined in this area might sound like the following: “Is faith something I can reason (or think) myself into, or is it a blind leap?” “Can reason carry me to the edge of the cliff, and from there, I make a blind leap?” “Do faith and reason fly in the face of one another, such that a person is either intelligent or a believer in God?” “Can faith aid reason, and can reason offer anything to faith?” These are all central questions, and have remained so in theological discussions today. This is also a question which has been largely reopened because of the Reformation. It is safe to say that the Scholastics had pretty much capped off the Church’s teaching on the relationship of reason to faith, but now that other Christians have begun asking the questions, and, more importantly, answering them differently in the Church, it has become an issue again. This intensity is all the more real because, although the discussion might seem highly philosophical, the way the above questions are answered has a big impact on the way society thinks about itself. For example, if faith and reason are opposites, that means “religion” and “science” are opposites as well, and the two are on completely different and competing trajectories. This is just one example of many important ramifications for this question.

It seems best to first look at what Cardinal Ratzinger means when he speaks of faith. “Faith, to begin with, is...to take God at his word.”²⁶⁷ Elsewhere, he notes, “The tradition of the faith is not given to us for the satisfying of idle curiosity...its aim is to direct us, not to divert, that is to entertain us.”²⁶⁸ Again, he

²⁶⁷ *Salt of the Earth*, 117

²⁶⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 119

notes that faith is not an individual experience: “Faith is no private path to God; it leads into the people of God and to its history.”²⁶⁹ Because it isn’t just about each individual, it also cannot be sown up. “Faith has to be lived again and again in life and in suffering, as well as in the great joys that God sends us. It is never something that I can put in my pocket like a coin.”²⁷⁰ Faith also cannot be understood as a decision that is made once in a person’s life. Faith is “not just a ready-made guarantee, something one can regard as accumulated capital that can only grow. Faith is always given only in the context of a fragile freedom.”²⁷¹

Another type of question which can flow from meditating on the relationship of faith and reason is whether or not faith is corrupted by reason. The Cardinal phrases the question as “In what sense does faith need philosophy?”²⁷² The question essentially is whether faith, which involves a transformative relationship with God, might be polluted if it were said that reason could enhance or even be in discussion with faith. The Cardinal notes, “Opposition to philosophy as the alleged corrupter of theology is very ancient. It can already be found in Tertullian.”²⁷³ People who make that argument are perfectly happy with the divorce between science and religion or, on a less practical level, philosophy and religion. There are, then, two extreme camps. There are the religious people who don’t want any intermingling between faith and understanding or between religion and science, and there are the philosophers and scientists who admit to no impact on the part of religion in the realm of science/philosophy/reason. These two sides actually are in agreement, as fanatical opposites usually are, that neither side has anything to discuss with the other; they are perfectly content with there being no dialogue. This mindset is difficult in the

²⁶⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 71

²⁷⁰ *God in the World*, 23

²⁷¹ *God in the World*, 55

²⁷² *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 22

²⁷³ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 18

realm of faith and reason, just as it is when trying to get warring factions to sit down and talk.

These questions will be addressed shortly, but first, it must be discussed as to whether or not reason leads up to faith.

Does Reason Progress Up To Faith, and then they split ways?

The idea is present that we think, think, think, philosophize, etc. along the way, and that at some point, because of our thought, we start to believe. The Cardinal is quite sure that understanding the relationship between faith and reason in that way is in error. “I should say, never begin with thinking alone. For if you try to pull God toward you in the laboratory of rational thought, and to attach him to you in what is to some extent a purely theoretical fashion, you find you can’t do it.”²⁷⁴ If left with disinterested thinking, thinking with a supposedly neutral approach to faith (which isn’t possible anyway) doesn’t lead to faith. The Cardinal notes “If the forms of verification of modern natural science were the only way in which man could arrive at any certainty, then faith would indeed have to be classified in the realm of mere “perhaps.””²⁷⁵ It is impossible, in the Cardinal’s view, for a person to “think” their way to God in a scientific way, that is, using the scientific method (which does not belittle the scientific method, he is simply saying it is ineffective for establishing proof of God).

Understanding the reason does not lead up to faith, it becomes possible to talk about how the two work together. The Cardinal notes, “People talk of believing when the status of knowing has not been reached. Many people probably think that this meaning of believing is also applicable in the realm of religion.”²⁷⁶ At first this seems to contradict what was said in the

²⁷⁴ *God in the World*, 321

²⁷⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 19

²⁷⁶ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 18

previous paragraph. Is the Cardinal suggesting in one place that reason can't carry us to the train station where we get on board with faith, but then turning around and saying that we get on board with faith with the help of reason? An appropriate question is "how can reason not carry us to the train station of faith, but also be said to help aid in the path toward faith?" The answer is that the train station analogy is false, although it's how many want to believe it. The train station implies two things: 1) that at a point, faith takes off and departs from reason, and 2) that reason can get one to that departure point.

The true departure point is the human will. The Cardinal notes that faith is "made possible by the will through the heart being touched by God."²⁷⁷ He also notes, "The degree of evidence does not turn the thought into assent; rather, the will commands assent, even though the thought process is still under way."²⁷⁸ The Cardinal also notes, "we are able to give the assent of faith because the will – the heart – has been touched by God."²⁷⁹ It is a decision of the human person, it is an act; faith does not "happen" to a person. A true assent to faith, to truly say "I believe in the one God, maker of heaven and earth..." is an active choosing to believe by the person if it is truly faith. God mysteriously touches us, he nudges us in different ways, but some how, miraculously, it is still a decision that we make. Cardinal Ratzinger discusses the mystery of the interaction between God's will and a persons will. "How that can be –that God knows everything but that other plans are still possible—the greatest theologians and philosophers have racked their brains over it. At some point it is beyond us, simply because we are not God and because our horizons are in the end extremely limited."²⁸⁰

A famous phrase in the history of the Church was St. Anselm's "*Credo ut Intelligetium.*" This means "I believe in

²⁷⁷ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 25

²⁷⁸ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 23

²⁷⁹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 23

²⁸⁰ *God in the World*, 59

order that I might understand.” Cardinal Ratzinger holds this up as the proper way to view faith and reason. A person cannot come to the faith by thinking about it; it is not that faith occurs after all the rational pieces have been sought out. The Cardinal notes, “I accept what is given in advance, in order to find, starting from this and in this, the path to the right way of living.”

²⁸¹ Only when one possesses faith does one truly begin to think rightly. A person is not left totally bereft of hope, reason is not completely paralyzed prior to believing, and in fact reason without faith can come across things which hint or suggest that there is a good that it is right to put one’s faith in, but man’s ability to think and reason is totally elevated to a higher level when one believes.

Are Faith and Reason Incompatible?

Another reason that the train station analogy is wrong is because a person of faith will continue to use reason; faith and reason do not split ways when a person begins to believe. The Cardinal notes that some famous protestants do not hold that opinion, and that they think faith, once attained, nullifies the need for reason/science/philosophy. “Here arises the contrary objection which Heidegger and Jaspers have intently formulated. They say: Faith excludes philosophy, real research into and seeking for ultimate realities. For faith supposes it knows all that already. Its certainty leaves no place for questions.”²⁸² The Cardinal offers a different understanding. He feels that “Whenever faith and reason part company, both become diseased.”²⁸³ He elsewhere notes the same point: “Without faith, philosophy cannot be whole, but faith without reason cannot be human.”²⁸⁴ To those who accuse the Church of arrogantly

²⁸¹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 31

²⁸² *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 20

²⁸³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 291

²⁸⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 136

positioning itself above science or other forms of rational enquiry, the Cardinal notes that these people have it wrong. “In Christianity, enlightenment has become part of religion and is no longer its opponent.”²⁸⁵

Faith is also rightly conceived of when it is seen as the defender of reason. Reason, if removed from faith in one’s life knowingly and willingly, becomes ill. The Cardinal thinks “reason needs to listen to the great religious traditions if it does not wish to become deaf, blind, and mute concerning the most essential elements of human existence.”²⁸⁶ The Cardinal thinks that reason naturally tends toward meditation on the issues that faith is concerned with as well; “If man cannot use his reason to ask about the essential things in his life, where he comes from and where he is going, about what he should do and may do, about living and dying, but has to leave these decisive questions to feeling, divorced from reason, then he is not elevating reason but dishonoring it.”²⁸⁷

In the Cardinal’s view, what attracted people to the Church and to Christianity early on was that the Church elevated reason, and found a way to merge the two with love. He notes, “Christianity was convincing because of the connection of faith with reason and by directing behavior by *caritas*, by loving care for the suffering, the poor, and the weak, across any boundaries of class or status...Why is this synthesis no longer convincing today?”²⁸⁸ The Cardinal feels that people will have to once again achieve this understanding of how faith and reason are related; “Reason and religion will have to come together again, without merging into each other.”²⁸⁹ It seems that the Cardinal is suggesting not that the Church needs to adjust, but that Her people need to recapture the attitude that the Church Herself has always held. Reason has always been a part of the

²⁸⁵ *Truth and Tolerance*, 170

²⁸⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 252

²⁸⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 158

²⁸⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 174-5

²⁸⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 144

Church, even more so than other faith traditions, as the Cardinal notes, “Rationality belongs to the essence of Christianity in a way which the other religions do not claim for themselves.”²⁹⁰

The Cardinal sees faith as that which offers assistance to reason. He notes that “the atomic bomb is a product of reason, just as the breeding and selection of human beings in the laboratory have also been thought out by reason. Must we not therefore say that it is reason that needs a guardian?”²⁹¹ He also notes this need for faith to be its brother’s (reason’s) keeper when he says, “by no means the least important practical function of faith is to offer healing for the reason as reason, not to overpower it or to remain outside it, but in fact to bring it to itself again.”²⁹² The Cardinal is not diminishing reason, but again illustrating that faith and reason cannot exist without each other and remain authentically what they are. The cardinal has a great love for reason and in many places speaks of the dignity of healthy and authentic reason. He says, “Faith defends both the grandeur and mystery of philosophy.”²⁹³ Faith brings to reason the grounding of Truth. The Cardinal asks rhetorically, “Is there any truth for men, truth that is accessible as such for all men and belongs to all men, or are we only ever, in differing symbols, just touching on the mystery that never unveils itself to us? Is it a presumption to talk about the truth of faith, or is it a duty?”²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 56

²⁹¹ *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 37

²⁹² *Truth and Tolerance*, 136

²⁹³ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 28

²⁹⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 57

Authentic Freedom

How it is misunderstood today

Freedom today is, in the mind of Cardinal Ratzinger, an extremely misunderstood word. The Cardinal feels that the marring of the understanding and meaning of the word freedom is a central problem for the world today. Freedom today is misunderstood in the following way:

The average attitude, without thinking about it, understands by “freedom” the right, and the practical possibility, of doing everything we wish and not having to do anything we do not wish to do. Putting it another way, freedom would mean that our own will was the only criterion for our action and that this will would be able to want to do anything and also be able to put into practice anything it wanted. At this point the question arises, of course: How free in fact is our will? And how rational is it? – And, is an irrational will truly a free will? Is irrational freedom truly freedom? Is it really a good thing?²⁹⁵

The Cardinal goes on to use an example from Karl Marx to illustrate the understanding of freedom that most have today:

I believe that the content generally associated with the demand for freedom is most accurately described in the words Karl Marx once used to express his dream of freedom. The state of affairs in the future Communist society will make it possible “to do one thing today, another tomorrow, to go shooting in the morning and fishing in the

²⁹⁵

Truth and Tolerance, 232

afternoon and in the evening look after the cattle,
to indulge in criticism after dinner, just as the
fancy takes me”²⁹⁶

Concerning Karl Marx’s definition of freedom, the Cardinal notes, “There was no real spiritual defeat corresponding to the political and economic collapse, and to that extent the questions raised by Marxism have by no means been solved.”²⁹⁷ This failure to defeat a Marxist mindset toward freedom has allowed Marx’s conception of freedom to live on today, although his political system has floundered. Freedom today is often placed at the top of society’s value structure; it is the most desirable thing for mankind today. The Cardinal notes, “In the consciousness of mankind today, freedom is largely regarded as the greatest good there is, after which all other good things have to take their place.”²⁹⁸ This freedom is misunderstood as being able to have all options open, and also conversely, to never be told what one should do. Cardinal Ratzinger notes that man’s

claim to be the ultimate and sole authority over oneself, and the claim to have the right to appropriate as much of life as possible, while no one has the right to stand in the way, is part and parcel of the sense of life on offer to man today. In this sense, the “Thou shalt not” – there are normative criteria to which we must submit – is an encroachment, indeed an outright attack against which people defend themselves.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 232 – The Marx quote comes from the following source: K. Marx and F. Engel, *Werke* (Berlin, 1961-1971), 3:33; quoted by K Low, *Warum fasziniert der Kommunismus?* (Cologne: Deutscher Instituts Verlag, 1980), p. 65.

²⁹⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 223

²⁹⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 231

²⁹⁹ *Salt of the Earth*, 167

He also says, “It is unfortunately often the way in the modern situation that only change, only flexibility for its own sake, counts for anything.”³⁰⁰ Elsewhere, the Cardinal states that today people say, “Life is basically complicated and short; I want to get as much out of it as possible, and no one has the right to stand in my way. Before all else I have to be able to seize my piece of life, to fulfill myself, and no one has the right to interfere with me. Anyone who would stand in my way is an enemy of my very self.”³⁰¹

What happens when society’s freedom is carried out?

The Cardinal spends a lot of time looking at what happens when one carries out the implications of society’s understanding of freedom. He notes, “an understanding of freedom is wrong if it would see as liberating simply an ever-wider loosening of norms and the constant extension of individual freedoms in the direction of a total liberation from all order.”³⁰² The Cardinal here suggests that relaxing moral norms so that one is able to have more and more options is what one necessarily gets when one carries society’s understanding of freedom out to its conclusions. The Cardinal also suggests that this is a recipe for disaster, and cannot actually hold up.

To help examine the absurdity of thinking of freedom as the ability to do what ever a person wants, the Cardinal uses an example concerning abortion.

People have narrowed down the concept of freedom to individual rights and freedoms and have thus robbed it of its human verity. I should like to make clear the problem of this

³⁰⁰ *God in the World*, 257

³⁰¹ *Salt of the Earth*, 167

³⁰² *Truth and Tolerance*, 256-8

understanding of freedom with one concrete example, which can at the same time open up for us the way toward a more appropriate conception of freedom. I mean the question of abortion...a woman must be able to have total control over herself. She must have the freedom to bring a child into the world or to rid herself of it...in an abortion, is the woman actually making a decision that concerns herself? Is she not in fact making a decision about someone else—deciding that this other person should be allowed no freedom, that the sphere of freedom—his life—should be taken away from him because it is in competition with her own freedom? And thus we should ask: What kind of freedom is this that numbers among its rights that of abolishing someone else's freedom right from the start?³⁰³

What the Cardinal is suggesting is that if freedom is the ability of a person to do whatever he or she wants, then peoples' spheres of the range of possibilities for their actions will bump into each other and overlap. The Cardinal states, "The growth of freedom can no longer consist simply in the demolishing of barriers to individual rights ever more widely – something that leads to absurdity and to the destruction of those very individual rights."

³⁰⁴ If someone wants to steal a purse, the owner of the purse will not be too happy in granting that purse-snatcher the freedom to do so. The perfect example, however, is abortion. As the Cardinal says, the feasibility of defining freedom as the ability to do whatever I want breaks down very quickly. Citing the abortion example, the Cardinal says, "Freedom to destroy oneself or to destroy others is not freedom but a diabolical parody. The freedom of man is a shared freedom, freedom in a coexistence of

³⁰³ *Truth and Tolerance*, 245-6

³⁰⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 250

other freedoms, which are mutually limiting and thus mutually supportive: freedom must be measured according to what I am, what we are – otherwise it abolishes itself.”³⁰⁵

The Cardinal also very nicely points out that every human being depends on other human beings in society. Doctors and nurses in the E.R, firemen, policemen, people who work on the traffic lights etc. are just a few examples of how humanity is interdependent on one another at all times. Yet the Cardinal points out that individuals today are more likely to seek to deny such an interdependence because they want to think of themselves as free. The Cardinal notes,

Man presumes completely of his own accord that others will be there for him, as has been arranged today in the network of services provided, yet for his own part he would prefer not to be included in the constraint of such a “from” and “for” others; rather, he would prefer to become entirely independent, to be able to do and allow only just what he wants.³⁰⁶

Some here would appeal to a very broad and religiously generic definition of decency or natural law as possessing the ability to properly limit freedoms. Others might say that keeping freedom within certain bounds is why civil law was created. However, secular “solutions” to the problem of “freedom” gone wild lacks the substance to speak to the issue itself. The civil law and “decency” do not require the citizens of a society to ask themselves if they are fundamentally off base at the initial stage of grasping what freedom really is. Decency and civil law are created to contain a diseased understanding of freedom, they are not able to treat or examine the disease; they are not able to understand freedom as it ought to be thought of. Besides, it is

³⁰⁵ *Truth and Tolerance*, 248-8

³⁰⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 247

becoming all too clear today that even civil law and decency are breaking down as proper barriers to help contain diseased freedom, as both seem to be marching towards an approval of abortion, euthanasia, and other areas where the “freedoms” of individuals collide.

Some would also argue that man has the ability to keep in check his freedom because he is rational and he is able to think through the consequences of an action. It is thought that a person can simply punch in the action into the simulator (one’s mind) and a rational decision can then be made based on what the numbers produced. A person can ask oneself, “ought I to steal the purse?” The mind then runs through the ramifications, and determines that the answer is no. Certainly a person must take into account the ramifications of an action before performing it, but the idea that a human being can *decide* on the moral strength of an action based on prognostication is nothing other than the most dangerous kind of arrogance. The human mind can make a good, rational judgment on issues like purse stealing, but the fact that people steal purses proves that even that method doesn’t always work. Plus, the method breaks down completely when one asks oneself whether it would be best to marry a certain person or not, or any other sort of gigantic life decisions along those lines. One can work out the ramifications for stealing a purse; one cannot work out all the ramifications of marrying a certain person. The mind lacks the ability to work out consequences very far in advance. The Cardinal says, “Man is quite simply taking on too much if he believes he can work out the all-around consequences of his actions and take these as the norm for his freedom.”³⁰⁷

True Freedom

³⁰⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 253

Earlier, society's diseased conception of freedom was discussed. Freedom, under that definition, involves the ability of a person to do what he or she wants to do. Not only is that conception diseased, it is wrong to actually speak of it as freedom at all. The secular world's understanding of freedom today gives the impression that law/religion/morality bounds freedom, or restricts it, or hinders it. That language is part of the problem however. As long as freedom is thought of as existing outside of the law, and specifically God's law, freedom will never be understood rightly. The Cardinal says,

If the freedom of man can only continue to exist within an ordered coexistence of freedoms, then this means that order – law—is, not the concept contrary to that of freedom, but its condition, indeed, a constitutive element of freedom itself. Law is not the obstacle to freedom; rather, it constitutes freedom. The absence of law is the absence of freedom.³⁰⁸

He notes later that “Freedom, properly understood, must always be thought of together with responsibility.”³⁰⁹ Concerning responsibility and a new view of God's law for mankind, the Cardinal states, “The growth of freedom must consist in the growth of responsibility. That includes the acceptance of ever greater ties, as demanded by the claims of human coexistence, by what is appropriate for the essence of being human.”³¹⁰ Freedom, outside the bounds of the laws of God (and also thus all the laws that are in conformity with God's law within a civilization or society) is actually a figment of our human imagination.

Cardinal Ratzinger sees it as essential for humanity that it come to understand God not as the destroyer of freedom, but as

³⁰⁸ *Truth and Tolerance*, 249

³⁰⁹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 250-1

³¹⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 251

its bestower. In all other relationships where a person is put over us, and that person tells us what to do, it is a restriction of our freedom. A boss at work tells a coworker that they cannot do this and that they must do that, and the coworker experiences a loss of freedom. God and His law cannot be conceived in that way. Cardinal Ratzinger says, “Our idea that unless I say no to evil, my freedom has already been taken from me is itself a perversion of freedom. Freedom really finds its creative space in the realm of what is good. Love is creative; truth is creative.”³¹¹ The Cardinal notes that God’s “Grace does not remove freedom; rather, it brings it into being.”³¹² Humanity does not take well to submission to a will that is perceived to be outside itself. There is a natural tendency to want to be the author of one’s life, and thus of all the moments that comprise one’s life, but that is precisely the desire that must be left behind when it comes to being a Catholic Christian. To think of things in terms of the freedom of an individual being the execution of that individual’s will is to think as Satan would have humanity view the situation. The Cardinal notes, “For the fall of man depends on the contradiction of wills, on the opposition of the human will to the divine, which the tempter leads man to think is the condition of his freedom.”³¹³ Because humanity thinks egotistically, the Cardinal notes that mankind, often to its detriment and confusion, wrongly ascribes that egotism to God. “The primeval error of such a radically developed desire for freedom lies in the idea of a divinity that is conceived as being purely egotistical.”³¹⁴ In order to be truly free, persons must recognize that God is the opposite of egotistical, and that it must be our egotism that is the problem. God is the only one who can ask us to do something with our best interest in mind, with absolutely no mixed or selfish motivations.

³¹¹ *God in the World*, 95

³¹² *God Is Near Us*, 20

³¹³ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 187

³¹⁴ *Truth and Tolerance*, 248

Freedom rightly understood

The solution, as the Cardinal explains, consists in understanding Freedom properly. He notes, “Freedom consists of oneself becoming a part of the house, to be taken and used in the building.”³¹⁵ He says elsewhere, “Living out the Ten Commandments means living out the divinity of man, and exactly that is freedom: the fusing of our being with the Divine Being and the resulting harmony of all with all.”³¹⁶ It is a radically different way of viewing God and His laws that is required to actually know what freedom is. Anything outside of that realm is not even diseased freedom, it is actually no freedom at all. In fact, outside of God’s laws, the only types of actions are those that tear away at freedom and seek to destroy it. It is often thought that when a life is conformed to God’s law, and that person submits to the yoke of God’s law “the burden that is easy, a load that is light (Matt. 11:30),” that one will live a quite boring and unoriginal life. The Cardinal reassures people that “Lives that follow such a course are not a sign of a lack of imagination or of rigidity.”³¹⁷ To our sensibilities today, being excited about following God’s law may seem foreign. On this, the Cardinal notes that the disintegration of God’s law into something burdensome took place “the moment it was no longer being lived out from within but was broken down into a series of obligations external in their origin and their nature.”³¹⁸ Because of that, in today’s setting, “Joy in the law astounds us. We have become used to regarding it as a burden that oppresses man...Israel saw in the law in fact something that set them free for the truth, free from the uncertainty, the gracious gift of the way.”³¹⁹

³¹⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 57

³¹⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 254

³¹⁷ *God in the World*, 257

³¹⁸ *God Is Near Us*, 135

³¹⁹ *God Is Near Us*, 137

The answer to how a life lived under the “burden” of the laws of God can be unique and original is found by looking at the lives of the saints. If following God’s will turns humanity into automatons, then the lives of the saints (those who have most fully surrendered to God) should look nearly the same. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. Concerning the saints, the Cardinal states, “All these people have become truly like Jesus – and they are nonetheless different and original.”³²⁰ By looking at the vast array of the lives of the saints, it becomes clear that truly in embracing the yoke of God’s law, in allowing that law to be the norm for freedom, mankind is truly set free. “There are just as many ways of living a successful life as there are people,”³²¹ states Cardinal Ratzinger. Elsewhere, the Cardinal holds up the saints for an examination, “When the figures of the saints come before us, we can see how many shapes and fashions of sanctity there are. From a doctor who does his work unselfishly, to a scholar, to simple folk, founders of religious orders, and lay people who live their lives in this world.”³²²

The irony here is that those who live lives of sin and strive to manufacture their lives according to their own will and be “unique”; it is precisely those people who are predictable and identical and unoriginal. A person who is addicted to something will live a life confined to a very predictable pattern of behavior that is remarkably consistent from one addict to the next. The same goes for others who are enslaved to sinful behaviors. The Cardinal says, “If we look at the lives of the great men, the saints, we can see how, in the course of history, they bring to light in creative fashion quite new human potentialities, which inwardly blind or stunted people have hitherto been quite unable to perceive.”³²³ Thus those who run from the Will and the Laws of God, attempting to be original and nonconformist are in fact

³²⁰ *God in the World*, 220

³²¹ *God in the World*, 229

³²² *God in the World*, 457

³²³ *God in the World*, 95

conforming themselves and pigeonholing themselves in the narrowest of categories and behaviors.

Summary

The Cardinal notes concerning freedom that

Unless it is to lead to lying and self-destruction, freedom must relate to the truth, that is to say, to what we actually are, and must correspond to this nature of ours... Within this human history of ours the absolutely ideal situation will never exist, and a perfected ordering of freedom will never be able to be achieved... We must also bid farewell to the dream of the absolute autonomy of reason and of its self-sufficiency³²⁴

The Cardinal is saying that perfection will never happen on this earth, but it is still in a person's best interest to strive to implement God's will in their life, and to conform their freedom to the Laws of God. Lastly, he once again reminds humanity that using human intellect to decide what is right and wrong and to try to predict all the implications of an action leads to failure and madness. The answer to what human freedom is lies precisely in seeing that it is the Jesus Christ, His Laws, and His Truth that first of all give humanity its freedom, and those are also the instruments by which human freedom is properly conformed and shaped. Only when those are the measuring sticks that a person uses to understand one's freedom will that freedom be set free.

³²⁴

Truth and Tolerance, 256-8

Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell

Introduction

“All of us today think that we are so good that we deserve nothing less than heaven!”³²⁵ The Cardinal feels that the questions about what happens after this life are often repressed today because people do not want to think about them. On these sorts of questions, however, the Cardinal hopes to confront those who have repressed those questions, because one of the fundamental questions that all people should be asking themselves is “what happens when I die?” This question is not a dreary or depressing one, but has been, for much of history, the question which has lead people precisely to religion. The Cardinal notes that these questions, along with suffering, seem to be avoided at all costs. “If one were to formulate today a Litany of the Unbelievers the petition would, no doubt, be just the opposite: a sudden and unprovided death grant to us, O Lord. Death really ought to happen at a stroke, and leave no time for reflection or suffering.”³²⁶ The Cardinal hopes to help us once again ask the questions that need to be asked, because until we ask the questions, we won’t look for the answers. As the Cardinal notes, “The question of the meaning of one’s own dying cannot be suppressed.”³²⁷

Death Rightly Understood

“Attitudes to dying determine attitudes to living.”³²⁸ The first issue for the Cardinal to clear up with issues of Eschatology is death. The Cardinal believes that the world today looks at

³²⁵ *The Ratzinger Report*, 145

³²⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 71

³²⁷ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 12

³²⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 72

death in a way that is not in line with what the Church teaches, and he puts forth a lot of effort in attempting to help people understand what really is involved in the death of a human person.

One myth that the Cardinal hopes to clarify concerns what happens when a person dies. “The idea of a sleep of death, in the sense of an unconscious state spanning the period between death and the end of the world is an unfounded piece of archaizing which no New Testament text warrants.”³²⁹ This misunderstanding leads to the following attitude: “the way of the wise man...is to treat the body as the tomb of the soul and to prepare himself for immortality through such enmity to the prison house. Death, then, is the great moment when the gates of that prison house are flung wide open and the soul steps forth into that freedom and immortality which are its by right.”³³⁰

The Cardinal believes that misunderstanding death in this way leads to a faulty understanding of what happens after death. Many people seem to believe that when death occurs, heaven is instantly realized. “The view of the resurrection takes place at the moment of death has gained such widespread acceptance that it is even incorporated, with some qualifications, into the Dutch Catechism...The indivisibility of man and his boundness to the body, even when dead, suddenly seems to play no further role.”

³³¹ Later, he notes ““Resurrection” suddenly shifted. Resurrection was stripped of time, and was relocated at the moment of death. Such elimination of time necessarily implied the elimination of matter, since it is obvious that in the moment of death a human being does not rise bodily.”³³² The Cardinal, in the last two quotations, makes reference to the implied separation of the soul from the body. That is the heart of the problem with the view that people instantly enter into heaven and reap the full rewards of the Resurrection when they die. Because the body of

³²⁹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 131

³³⁰ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 73

³³¹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 108

³³² *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 165

a person is still quite plainly left behind in death, death involves a divorce between the soul and the body, two entities which are much more intimately linked than modern man wants to give them credit for. We often today think of the body as simply the earthen vessel for the soul which simply provides us with all the problems of this life such as the stain of original sin and temptation in all its forms. The Church teaches a different conception of the relationship between the body and soul. The two are linked and form a whole which is not divisible into the parts of “body” and “soul.” The soul is not the engine; the body is not the exterior, etc. The Church teaches that neither the body nor the soul is able to function as it ought without the presence of the other element. “The soul can never leave behind its relationship with matter.”³³³ So the idea that the soul skips merrily off to heaven, leaving the body behind on earth is not the proper way to understand what happens after death. The Cardinal notes, “It is evident that early Christian proclamation never identified the destiny of those who die before the Parousia with the quite special event of the resurrection of Jesus.”³³⁴

The question then quite necessarily becomes “What does happen to a person when death occurs?” The Cardinal states, “the biblical authors do not submit death to an idealistic transfiguration in their descriptions of it, but present it, rather, in its full, unvarnished reality as the destroying enemy of life.”³³⁵ About New Testament visions of death, the Cardinal also says, “Life is identical with blessing, death with a curse. Life means communion, whereas the heart of death is the absence of relationship.”³³⁶ The Cardinal wants people to understand that death is not simply a breaking free of the earth, he wants to make sure people know that death is not merely a biproduct of being alive, it is a biproduct of original sin, and it is not ideal. That being said, before the Cardinal can be accused of being an eternal

³³³ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 179

³³⁴ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 111

³³⁵ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 74

³³⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 82

pessimist, it must be realized that he has much more to say beyond this appraisal of death.

While it should be understood that death is not a jaunt straight to heaven, it doesn't mean that people are in hell either. He states, "Human beings live on "with the Lord" even before the resurrection."³³⁷ The picture that the Cardinal hopes to paint does not imply that what really happens is awful, he just wants people to realize that the Resurrection, the final event, the entrance into heaven is not given to people the moment that they die. People of faith do live on "in Christ", but "This living is not yet identical with the Resurrection which comes only "at the end of days" and will be the full breaking in of God's Lordship over the world."³³⁸

A person continues to echo throughout history

The idea that when a person dies they go to heaven to receive their verdict is a poor way to understand what happens at death for the Cardinal. One major reason a person fails to get their sentence before the final Resurrection of all the dead is that their deeds while they were alive continue to echo in time. The story of one's life continues to be written after they die as the seeds planted in life can mature and grow long after one has gone from the earth. First, it is important to note that the Cardinal is not talking about our living on through achievements and actions which we often view today as "immortalizing." "The achievements I bequeath, these will immortalize a part of me. But in this attempt to manufacture eternity, the vessel of man must at the last, founder."³³⁹ If Michael Jordan hopes that his basketball championships alone will echo through all eternity, he is to be disappointed. The way that we echo throughout history

³³⁷ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 246

³³⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 246

³³⁹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 156

is not through human achievement, but through the love that we put forth. The Cardinal notes, “It is not only the guilt we leave behind on earth that prevents our definitive reclining at table for the eschatological banquet, in joy unalloyed. The love that overcomes guilt has the same effect.”³⁴⁰ Through love, “everyone exists simultaneously in other people.”³⁴¹ The Cardinal wants us to see that a person is not instantly divorced from time upon death. Just as was said earlier, such an action would render time and other elements of the created world irrelevant, so it would also do so by thinking that the Resurrection is fast-forwarded to upon one’s death. The Cardinal notes, “In a preliminary fashion, history is concluded – for me. But this does not mean that we lose our relation to history.”³⁴² Time, human history, is something that God holds the highest respect for. God does not consider the drama being played out on earth to be trivial. The Cardinal says that if God were to act like what was still happening on earth did not matter, then he would be trampling on that which He created. The Cardinal says, “Such a triumphal march of God would surely have something cruel about it, for it would be in despite of humanity. The God whom we come to know in Christ’s cross is different. For him, history is so real that it leads him down to Sheol [Hell].”³⁴³ The Cardinal also notes, “An everlasting, unrelated and therefore static juxtaposition of the material and spiritual worlds contradicts the essential meaning of history, the creation of God and the word of Scripture.”³⁴⁴

Cardinal Ratzinger here wants to clear up the idea, however, that people who die simply wait around for the world to end. Do people who die sleep until the end of the world? The Cardinal notes, “To posit an interruption of life between death and the end of the world would not be in accord with Scripture.”

³⁴⁰ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 188

³⁴¹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 190

³⁴² *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 184

³⁴³ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 189

³⁴⁴ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 192

³⁴⁵ God does not have to wait on the completion of history in order to pass out our judgment because he knows how things will go. The Cardinal notes that “The decisive outcome of each person’s life is settled in death, at the close of their earthly activity. Thus everyone is judged and reaches his definitive destiny after death. But this final place in the whole can be determined only when the total organism is complete, when the *passio* and *actio* of history have come to their end.”³⁴⁶ An appropriate question here would be “What about the saints?” The Cardinal states that for the saints, it seems that they get to pass on from the intermediate state, noting that in *Benedictus Deus* promulgated by Pope Benedict XII on January 29th, 1336 “The Pope taught that, in the time after Christ’s passion, death and ascension into heaven, the souls of those departed persons who stand in no further need of purification do not have to linger in an intermediate state.”

The Cardinal explains the difference between knowing one’s sentence and receiving the final judgment at the end of time as follows, “Even though the definitive truth of an individual is fixed in the moment of death, something new is contributed when the world’s guilt has been suffered through to the bitter end.”³⁴⁷

So how do we understand all this?

Cardinal Ratzinger feels that there are things that can be said about what happens when we die, and he also feels that there are things that we can rule out about what happens when we die. However, that does not mean we should expect to be able to nail down the process for ourselves simply through words. On this point, the Cardinal notes that the prophets pointed towards Jesus

³⁴⁵ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 120

³⁴⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 190

³⁴⁷ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 207

and were able to say things about him, but had NO IDEA about the whole reality of Jesus Christ that was behind their words. The Cardinal says,

No matter to what degree the biblical word interpreted him ahead of time, only the real figure of him-who-came makes visible what remained hidden within the linguistic word alone and resisted extraction by purely historical means.” – so the same is with eschaton, we no more understand it when we talk about than did those who knew the prophets understand Jesus.³⁴⁸

The Cardinal notes that a certain level of anxiety about the inability of humanity to express fully and completely the reality of what happens when we die is acceptable, as long as we always think with the heart of the Church and do not follow whimsical theories about the end times. “The tension is bearable so long as the Church retains its integrity as the factor uniting word and reality despite the changing readings on the Geiger counter of eschatological radioactivity that the turmoil of the centuries may bring in its train.”³⁴⁹

The Afterlife is Not to be viewed as a break in time

The Cardinal notes, “The dividing line between eternal and temporal life is by no means simply of a chronological order: so that the years before death would be temporal life; the endless time afterward would be eternal life.”³⁵⁰ This is a very important point that the Cardinal hopes to get across about death and the afterlife. The Cardinal paints a picture of a more interlocked and

³⁴⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 44

³⁴⁹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 46

³⁵⁰ *God Is Near Us*, 137

interrelated picture of this world with the next than modernity often conceives of things. Cardinal Ratzinger says, “Present and eternity are not, like present and future, located side by side and separated; rather, they are interwoven. That is the real difference between utopia and eschatology.”³⁵¹ The Cardinal notes that our way of viewing heaven, hell, and salvation is related to the Greek way of seeing things, and he notes that both ours and the Greeks’ understanding of the afterlife need a revision. “The Greek way of seeing time...salvation can consist only in escaping the circle of time...By contrast to the Greek cyclic view of time, Scripture’s understanding of time is linear...salvation occurs within time.”³⁵² How to conceive of the workings of the afterlife and the end times then becomes the question, but Cardinal Ratzinger again notes that we cannot find images that are completely satisfactory descriptions; all descriptions are only analogies which break down at some point.

Traditional images...become false if they either remove heaven altogether from relation with this world, or if they attempt to integrate it totally into the world, as some kind of upper story. Scripture, accordingly, never tolerates the monarchical supremacy of a single image. By utilizing many images, it keeps open a perspective on the Indescribable.³⁵³

The one definitive description of the meeting point between heaven and earth, the one description of how this life transitions into the afterlife is the following, which is always important to keep in the forefront of our thought, “Where God’s will is done, there is heaven, there earth becomes heaven.”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ *God Is Near Us*, 141

³⁵² *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 51-52

³⁵³ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 237

³⁵⁴ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 176

A very interesting analogy is made to help understand how the time in which we live ought to be understood. The Cardinal notes, “Cullman’s book...uses for illustration’s sake a comparison with the events of the War itself, wherein a considerable time had elapsed between “D-day,” the decisive military engagement, and “V-day,” the moment of victory...it is just the same with Christ’s coming.”³⁵⁵

Being In Christ Means Being In Heaven

One idea that the Cardinal throws around is that when we are in Christ, we are in Heaven. Cardinal Ratzinger says,

Heaven is not an extra-historical place into which one goes. Heaven’s existence depends upon the fact that Jesus Christ, as God, is man, and makes space for human existence in the existence of God himself. One is in heaven when, and to the degree, that one is in Christ. It is by being with Christ that we find the true location of our existence as human beings in God.³⁵⁶

There seems to be for the Cardinal that in Christ there is the kind of life beyond life, life raised to the exponent of infinity, which is to be found in a life which is in Christ. That life is what Heaven is for the Cardinal, and it is then that Christ can be seen as the portal between our world and heaven. “The integration of the “I” into the body of Christ... is not the self’s dissolution but a purification which is, at one and the same time, the actualization

³⁵⁵ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 53

³⁵⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 234. In this quotation, the Cardinal refers to the following source: K Rahner, “Auferstehung des Fleisches,” in *Schriften zur Theologie II* (Einsiedeln 1955), p. 221.

of its highest potential.”³⁵⁷ This life in Christ which is spoken of much more often than it is sought after, is possible to enter into now, although it can only be perfectly realized in heaven. The Cardinal talks about how this life in Christ, this life in God, is the highest form of reality. “Communication with God is reality. It is true reality, the really real, more real, even, than death itself.”

³⁵⁸

A life in Christ, for those who have never had a glimpse of unbounded love and joy, might seem to be fairly boring or monotonous. Certainly most are bored by the idea found in Revelation that Heaven consists in worshipping the lamb at the Altar of God, and most are even more horrified to discover that this is also what happens at a Catholic Mass. Most probably think “if Heaven is a Catholic Mass carried on for eternity, I’m not so sure I want in.” Cardinal Ratzinger assures such people by noting that “Eternal life is not an endless sequence of moments, in which we would have to try to overcome boredom and anxiety in the face of what cannot be ended. Eternal life is a new quality of existence, in which everything flows together into the “now” of love.”³⁵⁹

Cardinal Ratzinger thinks that a key focal point in understanding the afterlife concerns the conversation between Jesus and the good thief during Jesus Crucifixion.

That destiny reserved by the Jewish tradition to the martyrs and the privileged “righteous ones” is now promised by the condemned Man on the Cross to a fellow condemnee...”with me” takes on a transformative significance. It means that paradise is no longer seen as a place standing in permanent readiness for occupation and which

³⁵⁷ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 235

³⁵⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 89

³⁵⁹ *God Is Near Us*, 137

happens to contain the Messiah along with a lot of other people. Instead, paradise opens in Jesus.³⁶⁰

³⁶⁰

Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life, 124

Being a Better Human Being

Faith requires us to respond in action and prayer

The life of a person who manages to coast through life enduring the least amount of pain is often held up by society as the ideal. Movies and TV often portray such people as the wisest and cleverest and most enviable people, they are those who are able to manipulate and navigate their way through and around the various icebergs of growth and suffering and pain, always deftly avoiding having to interact with the real world and be engaged. The Cardinal says such an existence is hellish. “Day-to-day living is for the most part merely a shadow existence, a form of Hades, in which we have only the most occasional inkling of what life should truly be.”³⁶¹ He states elsewhere that a life which follows no particular pattern but only coasts along cannot lead to happiness in the true sense of the word. “Letting oneself be pushed, going with the tide, letting oneself be submerged in the crowd leads only again to the crowd and then into nothing. The courage to climb higher, to face up to difficulty, that is what brings me onto the right road.”³⁶² The Cardinal states that we are meant to be a people of engagement, struggle, and growth. “He gives us our capacities so that we can make efforts, discover things, and struggle with things.”³⁶³ He also notes that time that is wasted on itself is also wasted on us. That time vanishes for all eternity bearing no fruit and making us at best no better, if not dragging us down even further. Cardinal Ratzinger says, “The time we make best use of is the time transformed into what endures; the time we receive from God and give back to God. Any time that passes him by just expires and becomes mere past.”³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 94

³⁶² *God In The World*, 288

³⁶³ *God Is Near Us*, 112

³⁶⁴ *God In The World*, 292

In calling us to a more purposeful existence, the Cardinal is not in the last instance negative but is very much hopeful. He wants people to realize the potential within them, put there by God, to achieve what they are meant to achieve, which is happiness. It is in the personal struggle to become who God made us to be that the world is transformed. The Cardinal says, “In becoming true, man contributes to the world’s becoming true.”³⁶⁵ Although God is not about success in worldly terms, the Cardinal exhorts each human person onward to evangelize and do good work in the world as opposed to sitting back with the mentality that “it is all in God’s hands anyway.” The Cardinal says, “We can’t calmly sit down and say, “Well, there’s no promise of large numbers; success isn’t one of the names of God; we’ve done our part, and we’ll see who comes and who doesn’t.” This inner restlessness that comes from knowing we have a gift that is meant for humanity must always be present in the Church.”³⁶⁶

For the Cardinal, an important part of engaging the world and becoming a person who lives out God’s call involves disciplining oneself. He states, “Nowadays we train with enthusiasm, perseverance, and great renunciation for many different purposes – why do we not train ourselves for God and his Kingdom?”³⁶⁷ This training and regimenting of oneself is important for many reasons. One is that it focuses us in on using our time better. Cardinal Ratzinger notes, “It is important for the process of spiritual growth that you don’t just pray and study your faith at times when it happens to cross your mind, when it suits you, but that you observe some discipline.”³⁶⁸ The Cardinal also says that in order to calm himself in the midst of business, “I try to do something challenging, really to give myself entirely to

³⁶⁵ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 39

³⁶⁶ *Salt of the Earth*, 180

³⁶⁷ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 176

³⁶⁸ *God in the World*, 320

some task that is demanding and at the same time gives me satisfaction.”³⁶⁹

The Rule of St. Benedict

The Father of monasticism in the West is St. Benedict. He wrote a rule (rule in the sense of a constitution of sorts, not simply one rule) for the order that he founded, which was to be observed by all the members of the order. Since St. Benedict, there have been thousands of other religious orders that have been founded, each with their own particular rules, but it is the Rule of St. Benedict which is still the model and the reference point for all other monastic enterprises. Cardinal Ratzinger sees in the Rule of St. Benedict a great guide on how to be the human person God intends us to be. The Cardinal notes, “Time and again, our world could so easily find its corrective in the Benedictine rule, since it offers the fundamental human attitudes and virtues needed for a life of inner balance, those that are requisite for social life – and for the maturity of the individual.”

³⁷⁰ The mantra of St. Benedict was *Ora et Labora* (work and prayer), and Cardinal Ratzinger loves the fact that St. Benedict showed people that work was a holy endeavor. St. Benedict’s mantra “Involves overcoming the ancient prejudice against manual labor, hitherto regarded as fit only for slaves. Manual labor now becomes something noble; on the basis of the Gospel of John, it is seen as being, so to say, an imitation of the Creator’s work.”³⁷¹ Cardinal Ratzinger also likes the balanced approach that St. Benedict takes. St. Benedict’s Rule was not too stringent; St. Benedict constantly taught the idea of moderation. As the Cardinal says, “The great characteristic of the rule is keeping good measure. Many monastic rules have erred in being too

³⁶⁹ *God in the World*, 21

³⁷⁰ *God in the World*, 392

³⁷¹ *God in the World*, 309

strict. In the enthusiasm of conversion people often attempted a monstrously radical program, which one person, who is truly seized with enthusiasm, can keep, but which cannot in the long term sustain a common life.”³⁷²

Suffering

For the Cardinal, suffering is such an important aspect of life, and it has become especially pertinent in our time now. There are many ways that humanity has at its disposal by which people are able to try and avoid suffering. However, the Cardinal warns, “Suffering is the process through which we mature,”³⁷³ and also “Those who have nothing to say about suffering except that we must fight against it are deceiving us.”³⁷⁴ In attempting to avoid suffering, a person also becomes less human. The Cardinal says, “Anyone who has consistently avoided suffering does not understand other people; he becomes hard and selfish.”³⁷⁵

The question here is how are pain and suffering possibly helpful? The Cardinal answers by noting “Pain and disease can paralyze one as a human being. They can shatter one to pieces, not only physically, but also psychologically and spiritually. However, they can also smash down complacency and spiritual lethargy and lead one to find oneself for the first time.”³⁷⁶ At this point many people would say that to desire suffering is a sign of psychological disturbance. The Cardinal instructs that “While faith does not deliberately seek out suffering, it knows that without the Passion life does not discover its own wholeness, but closes the door on its own potential plenitude. If life at its highest demands the Passion, then faith must reject *apatheia*, the

³⁷² *God in the World*, 391

³⁷³ *God in the World*, 322

³⁷⁴ *Called to Communion*, 155

³⁷⁵ *God in the World*, 322

³⁷⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 95

attempt to avoid suffering, as contrary to human nature.”³⁷⁷ Christians are not pain seekers who are to constantly self-flagellate and create new ways of suffering, but Christians ought to be a people who embrace their crosses when they are given to us. The Cardinal also notes that purifying suffering is not something that comes only when one is martyred for the faith or is put into a prison camp or inflicted with a disease. A call to allow suffering to transform humanity is one that the Cardinal hopes will be embraced on a daily basis even by those who by Biblical standards are not currently caught up in persecution for their faith; the Cardinal points out that which we all know to be true, that everyone has opportunities throughout each day of their life to suffer and embrace their cross. The Cardinal says, “Sharing in the *martyria* of Jesus is not something that starts when a person lets his name go forward for imminent execution...It consists in the daily readiness to give greater weight to faith, to truth and to what is right than to the benefits of not getting involved.”³⁷⁸

Love

This could easily be a chapter all to its self, but it also fits in with the idea of suffering and how to perfect oneself as a human being. The Cardinal points out one of the many paradoxes of the Christian world-view: “We must think of love as suffering.”³⁷⁹ Elsewhere, the Cardinal again points to the link between love and suffering when he says “Anyone who really wanted to get rid of suffering would have to get rid of love before anything else, because there can be no love without suffering.”³⁸⁰ It seems that for the Cardinal, the suffering aspect of love, and

³⁷⁷ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 101

³⁷⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 98

³⁷⁹ *God in the World*, 84

³⁸⁰ *God in the World*, 322

the potential for suffering to become love lies in the fact that love is an abandonment and a trusting. The Cardinal says,

Before seeing my self-determination limited, before coming to depend on something I can't control so that I can suddenly plunge into nothingness, I would rather not have love. Whereas the decision that comes from Christ is another: Yes to love, for it alone, precisely with the risk of suffering and the risk of losing oneself, brings man to himself and makes him what he should be. I think that that is really the true drama of history.³⁸¹

Failure to be a person of love ruins a person in the eyes of the Cardinal. For such people, "Love is seen as dependence and is rejected. In its place come autonomy and autarchy: existing from oneself and in oneself."³⁸² Being an independent agent, trying to not enter into love creates a problem. As the Cardinal points out, "Love...if one tries to make it something one can grasp in one's hand, by then it has already been destroyed."³⁸³ Elsewhere, the Cardinal says, "If you only want to have love, that is just exactly when you never receive it, for it becomes selfish, twisted, and naturally the other person feels this."³⁸⁴ Love is thus always directly opposed to the sin of pride, whereby one feels that love is not needed for themselves. "God sets against human pride a universal measure, namely, love. Pride is at the heart, and is the content, of every form of sin, in the sense of wanting to be God oneself."³⁸⁵

Love is something which is very much a participation in the life of God. As the Gospel of John reminds us, God is love.

³⁸¹ *Salt of the Earth*, 283

³⁸² *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 33

³⁸³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 20

³⁸⁴ *God in the World*, 193

³⁸⁵ *God in the World*, 213

Love thus shares a very beautiful ability to be creative. The Cardinal says “Everything you would like people to do to you, he now says, do that to others. That calls forth, so to speak, the creative imagination of love.”³⁸⁶ One who loves is one who can put himself or herself in the place of another person and actively and creatively think, “What can I do to help this person.”

Success

Often in the Christian life there is the tension between success and surrender, pride and humility. Cardinal Ratzinger notes, “When you stand on the side of God, you do not necessarily stand on the side of success.”³⁸⁷ Elsewhere, the Cardinal says, “Being chosen by God does mean he will make you great in worldly terms.”³⁸⁸ Not only is success not necessarily a benefit promised by God, but those who experience success face greater temptations in proportion to their success. Cardinal Ratzinger says, “The greater a creature is, the greater the danger it runs. And the greater its potential, its power, and its capacities are, so much the greater are the dangers that arise from them.”³⁸⁹ He develops this idea further, saying, “The threat always develops in this way: the greater a being is, the more it wants to determine its own life. It wants to be less and less dependent and, thus, more and more itself a kind of god, needing no one else at all. This is how the desire arises to become free of all need, what we call pride.”³⁹⁰

Some might be tempted to run from all earthly success based on what has been discussed thus far, but the Cardinal does not mean to discourage people from advancing in the Christian life. Success provides temptation, but it does not necessarily ruin

³⁸⁶ *God in the World*, 283

³⁸⁷ *Milestones; Memoirs 1927-1977*, 155

³⁸⁸ *God in the World*, 147

³⁸⁹ *God in the World*, 119

³⁹⁰ *God in the World*, 125

a person. The Cardinal notes that at the Nativity, “The simple folk come first, but the wise are not excluded.”³⁹¹ The Cardinal believes that the power to be successful must be transformed. He notes, “Only when power is changed from the inside, when our relationship to possessions is changed from within and we accept Jesus and his way of life, whose whole self is there in the action of foot-washing, only then can the world be healed and people be able to live at peace with one another.”³⁹² To overcome the temptations that are faced by being successful in the eyes of the world, the Cardinal believes that it comes down to giving up the dream of autonomy, which is the key to all Christian living. He states, “Living in dependence on God means not being one’s own master, not wanting to take charge of the world oneself; it means saying good-bye to the dream of autonomy and of being one’s own boss.”³⁹³

Community

Living in and as a community of people is also an important piece to living the Christian life. Cardinal Ratzinger, on several occasions, describes the impossibility of trying to live a life rooted in Christ while also trying to isolate oneself from other people. He notes, “One cannot develop one’s Christian “being” in a sect, in isolating oneself from others.”³⁹⁴ The Cardinal warns elsewhere, “If we become steel-hard, impenetrable, that would mean a loss of humanity and sensibility in dealing with other people...being sympathetic, being vulnerable, is part of being a Christian.”³⁹⁵ The Cardinal hopes people see the importance and the beauty of being in relationship with other people. He says, “A being is the more itself the more

³⁹¹ *God in the World*, 215

³⁹² *God in the World*, 260

³⁹³ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 84

³⁹⁴ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 52

³⁹⁵ *God in the World*, 22

it is open, the more it is in relationship.”³⁹⁶ Elsewhere, the Cardinal notes, “What gives rise to man’s longing for survival? Not the isolated I, but the experience of love.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 155
³⁹⁷ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 259

Issues of Life – Abortion, Euthanasia, and Contraception

One of the most hotly debated topics of the modern era has been issues concerning life. When Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* in 1969, it was not warmly embraced. The predictions that the document made about the future were thought, at the time, to be pessimistic and way off base. However, it is now safe to say that the document has been vindicated, and is now thought to be one of the more prophetic papal documents of all time. Cardinal Ratzinger notes that *Humanae Vitae* has still not been properly understood.³⁹⁸ Cardinal Ratzinger analyzes some of the issues of *Humanae Vitae*, and he attempts to defend the Church's teaching on those issues.

Contraception

The Cardinal sees contraception as that which will bring about the downfall of humanity if it is allowed to. He notes that with contraception, "The child is going to be something that tends to be planned and made, that he lies completely under the control of reason, as it were. And that signals the self-destruction of man."³⁹⁹ In using one's reason to plan and decide when intercourse ought to lead to the production of life, and when it ought not to, the Cardinal says that this has at its root the same promise that Satan made to Adam and Eve in the garden. He notes, "What clearly stands behind the modern era's radical demand for freedom is the promise: You will be like God."⁴⁰⁰ Cardinal Ratzinger also has the following to say with regard to contraception:

³⁹⁸ *The Ratzinger Report*, 88

³⁹⁹ *Salt of the Earth*, 202

⁴⁰⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 247

The misery is not produced by people who bring up children to learn faithfulness and love, respect for life and self-restraint, but by those who try to talk us out of morality and who see man only in a mechanistic way: the condom seems to them more effective than morality, but when they think you can replace the moral dignity of man with condoms, so as to make his freedom no longer a danger to him, then they have stripped man of all dignity, down to his most basic self, and have produced exactly what they claim to be preventing: a selfish society in which everyone lives his own life and is responsible for nothing and no one. Misery comes from demoralizing society, not from moralizing it, and the condom propaganda is an essential part of this demoralizing, the expression of an attitude that despises people and that in any case thinks people capable of nothing good whatsoever.⁴⁰¹

With regard to contraception, the Cardinal has also received a lot of criticism for somehow being perceived as the front man on the issue of the Catholic Church's refusal to condone or support the use of condoms in Africa. Although the teaching is a teaching of the Church, and is an issue that doesn't seem to really be up for discussion like some believe, being the spokesperson for the Church's stance is something that the Cardinal willingly took on. Concerning the issue, he notes that to simply see the Church's work in Africa as going around telling people to not use condoms is to be totally uninformed. Also, he notes that to think that Africans require condoms because they lack the ability to control themselves shows an ignorance of the African people. The Cardinal says,

⁴⁰¹ *God in the World*, 430

The misery is the result of a breakdown of the moral sense that once gave order to life in tribal societies, or in the community of believing Christians, and that thus prevented the great misery we can see nowadays. Reducing the voice of the Church to no more than a prohibition against contraception is utter rubbish, based on a completely distorted picture of the world.⁴⁰²

Abortion

“It is true that the unborn child is regarded by not a few people as an unjust aggressor who narrows the scope of my life, who forces his way into my life, and whom I must kill as an unjust attacker.”⁴⁰³ When I operate out of the understanding of freedom as the ability to do whatever I want, then Children do become burdensome and intrusive invaders. Because of this, the Cardinal notes, “This is in fact a great temptation for Western societies, to see children as competitors who take away from us something of our living space, something of our future.”⁴⁰⁴ Elsewhere he says, “Today children are conceived of almost as a threat. People think that they rob us of a place for the future, they threaten our own space, and so forth.”⁴⁰⁵

About abortion itself, the Cardinal thinks it strange that although after a child is born, it is still as dependent on someone to take care of it as it was in the womb, yet it is okay for someone to decide to kill the child while it is still living in the mother. He notes,

Now we have to add that the child, even when he is born and the outward form of being-from and of

⁴⁰² *God in the World*, 429

⁴⁰³ *Salt of the Earth*, 203-4

⁴⁰⁴ *God in the World*, 428

⁴⁰⁵ *Salt of the Earth*, 201

coexistence changes, remains even so just as dependent, just as much in need of someone being there for it. Of course, you can push it away into a home and assign someone else to be there for it, but the anthropological figure stays the same; it remains the derived being, demanding someone to be there for it.⁴⁰⁶

Some argue that the death penalty is the wrongful taking of life, and so ought to be just as vigorously opposed as abortion. While the Cardinal certainly is opposed to the death penalty, he argues that abortion is more fundamentally evil. Cardinal Ratzinger states that with the death penalty, “A guilty person is punished. In the case of abortion, on the other hand, the death penalty is inflicted on someone who is completely innocent.”⁴⁰⁷
Euthanasia

Concerning the treatment of the elderly, the Cardinal has the following to say,

There is however a silent admonition, within the fourth commandment, concerning our treatment of the elderly, those who are no longer usefully active, who are now helpless. Great value is placed on honoring elderly parents. Our attitude should not be determined by ideas of usefulness, but in old people we should render honor to those who gave life to us. In his person I can honor the personal value of a human being just at the point where he can no longer fend for himself.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 246

⁴⁰⁷ *Salt of the Earth*, 203

⁴⁰⁸ *God in the World*, 173

The Beauty of Life

Cardinal Ratzinger doesn't spend all of his time fighting against all of the atrocities that are committed against life. He also, of course, is a very eloquent and passionate defender of life in all of its positive implications. He notes,

An Italian bishop once said to me that poor people invest in life; they look on children as their future; rich people invest in things. I don't want to exaggerate what he meant by that, but it is obvious with us the investment in things, insuring oneself by the value of things, which are a multiplication of our own self, is stronger than our readiness to stand at the service of another life.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁹

God in the World, 428-9

The Eucharist

The first issue for the Cardinal with regards to the Eucharist is that of the Real Presence. In the West, no other Christian denomination believes in the Real Presence as Catholics do. An important passage in the Bible concerning the Eucharist is the sixth chapter of John. In John 6: 51-57, which it will do well to cite here.

I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me."

Many Christians read this and think, "Christ certainly didn't mean that literally, it is a nice analogy perhaps, but we can't eat Christ's body." Indeed some Christians believe that the entire Gospel is true in a literal sense, word for word, except the above quoted passage from John 6. Needless to say, discussion on John 6 is voluminous.

What is important, as with all passages from Scripture, is to see the passage in its larger context. Just a few verses later,

disciples to whom Jesus was speaking noted that “This teaching is hard, who can accept it?” Instead of saying, “look, I didn’t mean you literally have to eat my body,” Jesus instead asks, “Is this difficult for you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before.” Jesus seems to be saying, “If you think this eat my body stuff is tough, what would you think about seeing me ascend into heaven.” The point is, Jesus in no way softens his original statement about the necessity to eat his body; in fact, not only does he not explain it as a metaphor, he refortifies the literal sense in which he is speaking by almost provoking them with his question, “Is this difficult for you?”

All this is important, because in verse 66, because of Jesus’ statements, many disciples left him and no longer followed him. It is here that the Cardinal wonders whether Jesus would have let the disciples leave him if they simply failed to understand that he was speaking metaphorically? Cardinal Ratzinger notes, “When the murmuring of the Jews arose, the controversy could easily have been quieted by the assurance: Friends, do not be disturbed; this was only metaphorical language; the flesh only signifies food, it isn’t actually that! – But there is nothing of that in the Gospel.”⁴¹⁰

The Lutheran view of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is that during a Lutheran service, Jesus comes down to the bread, but when the service is over, Jesus leaves the bread again, and it returns to being simply bread. This is usually called Transubstantiation. About Transubstantiation, the Cardinal notes, “Wherever Christ has been present, afterward it cannot be just as if nothing had happened.”⁴¹¹

Why does receiving the Eucharist matter?

⁴¹⁰ *God Is Near Us*, 77

⁴¹¹ *God Is Near Us*, 86

People usually want to know not simply what something is, but what effect it has. To say that the Eucharist is the Body of Christ doesn't help people today because the title of Body of Christ doesn't let people in on what taking in the Body of Christ actually accomplishes within them. The first thing that the Cardinal wants to note about the Eucharist is that "The Eucharist is meant to transform us."⁴¹² The question still remains, however, as to what the Eucharist transforms us into. About this, the Cardinal notes that we are transformed into the Body of Christ. "Christ gives us his body and thus, makes us into his body."⁴¹³ So those who take in the Body of Christ are transformed into the Body of Christ. This is perhaps informative, but the Body of Christ imagery is so overplayed and abused today, that it likely needs to be clarified. St. Paul says in numerous occasions, "We are the Body of Christ."⁴¹⁴ When St. Paul says we, he means those who are partaking of the Body of Christ. If he had a wider audience in mind, then St. Paul had never read John 6. The Cardinal also feels that only the actual Body and Blood of Christ will work for building up the Body of Christ on earth. Substitutions and thinking of the bread as simply a sign of Christ are ineffective, and not what Jesus asked for. The Cardinal notes, "Only the true Body in the Sacrament can build up the true Body of the new City of God."⁴¹⁵ The Catholic Church has a special gift which it should not try to hide, in the mind of the Cardinal.

⁴¹² *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 86

⁴¹³ *The Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 142

⁴¹⁴ 1) Romans 12:5 – "We, who are many, are one body in Christ."
 2) 1 Corinthians 10:16 – "Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?"
 3) 1 Corinthians 12:12 – "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."
 4) Ephesians 4:11-12 – "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

⁴¹⁵ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 88

He notes that Catholicism is special because in Catholic churches around the world “The eternal light is burning before the tabernacle,” which means that it “is always alive, always something more than a building made of stones. In this place the Lord is always waiting for me, calling me, wanting to make me “Eucharistic”.”⁴¹⁶

If Jesus had a simple meal, why the Liturgy?

Many today are of the opinion that the Church has added an awful lot of unnecessary pageantry and pomp to the Liturgy. The Cardinal notes that people say:

with the traditional form of celebrating the Mass the Church has strayed far from the original intentions of the Lord. The Lord, they say, held a simple meal of fellowship with his disciples, and he said: “Do this in remembrance of me!”...she has reworked the whole thing into the Mass, has surrounded it with richly decorated cathedrals and with an imposing and sublime Liturgy, and has thus altered beyond recognition the simple nature of what Jesus commanded us to do.⁴¹⁷

The problem with this line of thinking is the idea that Jesus just wanted those who would commemorate his actions to celebrate simply a meal. The Cardinal notes, “Jesus did not command his disciples to repeat the Last Supper as such and as a whole; this would in any case not have been possible, as it was a Passover meal.”⁴¹⁸ If Christians are simply asked to recreate the meal that Christ shared, it would only be able to be celebrated on the

⁴¹⁶ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 90

⁴¹⁷ *God is Near Us*, 56

⁴¹⁸ *God is Near Us*, 58

Passover, because that was the context of the Last Supper which anyone wanting to recreate the meal could not simply remove from the meal.

Other people talk about the fact that the meal should be a remembering of the meals that Jesus shared with sinners, such as at the house of Zacharias. This claim is usually based on the belief that “the Eucharist cannot be conditional on anything, not dependent on denomination or even on Baptism.”⁴¹⁹

The Cardinal hopes that Catholics realize that claims that we should return to a simple meal and that the Church has corrupted what Jesus intended for a Eucharistic celebration are simply wrong. He notes,

The historical development of the Church’s Eucharist is not a decline from its origins but the true fruit of those origins. Those attempts to tell us that we should “get back” to a simple profane meal, to multipurpose areas and so on, are only in appearance a return to the origins. In reality, they are a step back behind the turning point of the Cross and the Resurrection, that is, behind the essentials that are the basis for Christianity in all its novelty.⁴²⁰

Adoration

A practice that is coming back into style for Catholics is that of Eucharistic adoration. It is a practice whereby a host is placed in a gold monstrance and placed on the altar. Time is then spent in prayer, whether silently or communally. The monstrance is meant to hold the host up at a height roughly equivalent to where a priest would hold the host just after it has been

⁴¹⁹ *God Is Near Us*, 59

⁴²⁰ *God Is Near Us*, 65

consecrated in a Mass. Because after the consecration, things can happen so fast, and it may seem like there is not enough time to process the arrival of Jesus on the altar, adoration exists to allow for a freezing in time, so to speak, such that people can look upon Jesus, and pray to him in a special and intimate way. Concerning Eucharistic Adoration the Cardinal notes, “To receive Christ means: to move toward him, to adore him. For that reason, the reception can stretch out beyond the time of the Eucharistic celebration; indeed it has to do so. The more the Church grew into the Eucharistic mystery, the more she understood that she could not consummate the celebration of Communion within the limited time available in the Mass.”⁴²¹

Some people accuse adoration of being lots of things. Some say it is individualistic in nature because it takes the Eucharist out of the context of the Mass and brings it into a space of private devotion. To people who make such a claim, the Cardinal responds, “Adoration is an intensification of communion. It is not a case of ‘individualistic’ piety: it is a prolonging of, or a preparation for, the community element.”⁴²²

Eucharistic Fasting

Another trend lately in some Catholic circles is the idea of Eucharistic fasting. Certainly, before the council, a 12 hour fast was in place before Sunday Mass, and now there is a one hour fast that must be observed before receiving the Eucharist. However, this new concept involves actually abstaining from receiving communion at a Mass. This type of fasting or abstinence is required today for anyone who is in a state of mortal sin. But a deliberate fast which is not required is an idea that is unheard of today among most Catholics. First of all, it has its roots in recognizing that some are not able to receive the

⁴²¹ *God is Near Us*, 89

⁴²² *The Ratzinger Report*, 133

Eucharist every Sunday. The Cardinal notes, “There is first of all the quite simple practical impossibility of receiving the Sacrament in times of persecution or when there are not enough priests.”⁴²³ Cardinal Ratzinger explains some of the practical benefits of partaking in such a fast:

I think that a Eucharistic fast of this kind, if it were deliberate and experienced as deprivation, could even today be properly significant, on certain occasions that would have to be carefully considered – such as days of penitence (and why not, for instance, on Good Friday once more?), or also perhaps especially at great public Masses when there are so many people that a dignified distribution of the Sacrament is often just not possible, so that by not receiving the Sacrament people could truly show more reverence and love than by doing so in a way that contradicts the sublime nature of this event...it could be an act of solidarity with all those who have a yearning for the Sacrament but cannot receive it.⁴²⁴

Some would argue that such a fasting would be striking away the very reason for attending Mass. Cardinal Ratzinger wants to get people out of the mindset that the number one priority at Mass is that a person receive the Eucharist. He notes, “We need to rediscover the awareness that the Eucharist is not worthless if one does not receive communion.”⁴²⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger also suggests that fasting from the Eucharist on occasion might help us appreciate more deeply the times when we do receive the Eucharist. He ponders, “Do we not often take things too lightly today when we receive the most Holy Sacrament? Could such a

⁴²³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 83

⁴²⁴ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 87

⁴²⁵ *The Ratzinger Report*, 132

spiritual fasting not sometimes be useful, or even necessary, to renew and establish more deeply our relation to the Body of Christ.”⁴²⁶

Does it matter if we receive on the tongue or in the hand?

The short answer: no. The Cardinal states that receiving on the hand is perfectly fine because it was the norm for the first nine hundred years of Catholicism. He notes, “The new development that began after the ninth century is quite justified, as an expression of reverence, and is well-founded. But, on the other hand, we have to say that the Church could not possibly have been celebrating the Eucharist unworthily for nine hundred years.”⁴²⁷ Elsewhere, he says, “A reverent manner of receiving Communion in the hand is in itself a perfectly reasonable way to receive Communion.”⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 86

⁴²⁷ *God is Near Us*, 70

⁴²⁸ *God in the World*, 410

Theology – The Study of God

Theology is not separable from the Faith

Theology is technically defined as the study of God. However, that definition needs a bit of unfolding. Cardinal Ratzinger asks, “What in fact is theology? Has it been adequately described when we say that it is a methodically ordered reflection on the questions of religion, of men’s relationship with God? I would answer: No.”⁴²⁹ What theology does seem to be for the Cardinal is “rational reflection upon God’s revelation.”⁴³⁰ It is not a cold and calculating enterprise; theology is something that occurs with and through prayer and reading of the Scriptures etc. He notes, “Theology always presupposes faith.”⁴³¹ In the Cardinal’s mind, one cannot be a theologian but not practice the other elements of the Catholic faith. The Cardinal notes what it takes to be a true theologian:

It is thus evident that two things are essential for the theologian. First, the methodological rigor which is part and parcel of the business of scholarship...He also has need of inner participation in the organic structure of the Church; he needs that faith which is prayer, contemplation and life. Only in this symphony does theology come into being.⁴³²

Cardinal Ratzinger wants people to realize that there is more to theology than studying in the classic sense. The Cardinal sees theology as being intimately wrapped up with the Christian faith and its mission, as he notes, “Theology is a

⁴²⁹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 30

⁴³⁰ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 16

⁴³¹ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 55

⁴³² *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 105

specifically Christian phenomenon which follows from the structure of this faith.”⁴³³ Theology is essentially a Christian undertaking, and is not found nearly as much in the other religions of the world. That is not to denigrate other religions; it is to simply note that something about Christianity has caused those who believe in God through the centuries to incorporate studying God and His ways in with the other aspects of the faith such as worship and prayer.

Theology is also a departure point where simple human reflection takes off, aided by the grace of God, to enter into a new kind of thinking which comes from outside a person. Cardinal Ratzinger notes, “Theology is born when the arbitrary judgment of reason encounters a limit, in that we discover something which we have not excogitated ourselves but which has been revealed to us.”⁴³⁴ He also notes, “That is what is peculiar to theology, that it turns to something we ourselves have not devised.”⁴³⁵

Can anything be said about God?

“Positive” theology is not “positive” in the normal sense of the word, but is a type of theology where something is being said about God. “Negative” theology is a type of theology where one is only saying what God is not. Some people are of the opinion that humanity can know nothing about God, only what He is not. This gets to the question of whether mankind really has the capacity to know God or not. Today, the Cardinal notes that “Our current form of sensibility, which can no longer apprehend the transparency of the spirit in the senses, almost inevitably brings with it a flight into a purely “negative”

⁴³³ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 103

⁴³⁴ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 8

⁴³⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 31

(apophatic) theology.”⁴³⁶ Most today think it arrogance on our part to try to speak about what God is, and that we should only stick to talking about what God isn’t. The Cardinal assures us that while negative theology has its place, and that a discussion of what God is not certainly is important, to simply be negative theologians, and to never strive to think about what can be said about God is problematic. He notes, “What seems like the highest humility toward God turns into pride, allowing God no word and permitting him no real entry into history.”⁴³⁷

Problems with theology in the past century

Cardinal Ratzinger is concerned with the state of theology. In the 1900’s the Cardinal notes that an increase in the number of Catholic universities rapidly increased the number of theological faculty members that those schools needed. He notes that there “was a considerable extension of professional theological teaching which had been underway since the beginning of the 1960s. A whole multitude of new theological faculties was born...Correspondingly, the number of professorships grew by leaps and bounds.”⁴³⁸ This lead to a relaxing of the standards that one hoping for their theological doctorate had to meet. Cardinal Ratzinger says, “The pressure to meet more expeditiously the demand for teachers also altered the standard of qualification.”⁴³⁹ Elsewhere, we read, “Whereas thirty years ago one was still required to master an oral examination cutting across the whole spectrum of theological specializations...in most exam regulations today three specializations suffice.”⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 124

⁴³⁷ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 124

⁴³⁸ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 122

⁴³⁹ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 123

⁴⁴⁰ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 123

The problem with this is that those who are at the top of the theological world are not as well trained as they used to be. Not only is that a problem, there is also the fact that people hoping for a doctorate have become more and more specialized. A moral theologian today doesn't necessarily have to know very much about scripture theology or Patristic theology, etc. The Cardinal talks about this problem:

One can become a doctor in theology without being familiar with the Greek Bible (to say nothing at all of Hebrew), without being capable of reading medieval texts – just to illustrate aspects of the situation with a few “samples”. This specialization is the motor which keeps the single branches of theology steadily drifting apart and thereby leads to a progressive obscuring of the unity of theology.⁴⁴¹

Butting heads with the Magisterium

This erosion of the difficulty of attaining a doctorate in theology was a slow problem that took time to develop. By the time the document *Humanae Vitae* was issued in 1969, the problem of theologians not necessarily obtaining a thorough and broad education came to the fore. Most theologians readily dismissed the document, and they had reasons for their dismissal, and so most of the general Church going public, lacking a theological degree, was ready to trust the experts. Cardinal Ratzinger laments the trend of theology being used to confuse people and lead them astray, “The intrinsically necessary and positive value of the Magisterium has also lost its self-evident character in the general consciousness of today’s Catholic

⁴⁴¹ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 123-4

theology.”⁴⁴² The standoff has been going on ever since. The great majority of the theologians in the world today, not properly and thoroughly educated, often rail against the magisterium of the Church. The Cardinal has a corrective measure for those who would perhaps rather the Church not bother with theologians, “It has become necessary to reflect anew on the position of theology and of the theologian as well as on their relationship to the Magisterium.”⁴⁴³

There is a link between the Church and theology which cannot be severed. The Cardinal notes, “Theology either exists in the church and from the church, or it does not exist at all.”⁴⁴⁴ Elsewhere, he notes that you can’t have theology or the Church without the other: “A church without theology impoverishes and blinds, while a churchless theology melts away into caprice.”⁴⁴⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger points out the impossibility of conducting theology without having a magisterium, a teaching office of the Church, overseeing the discussion. He notes “There can be no office of teaching theology if there is no ecclesiastical magisterium, for in its absence theology would enjoy no greater certainty than any of the liberal arts, that is, the certainty of hypothesis...which no one can stake his life on.”⁴⁴⁶

As was said in the intro section to this chapter, theology is born out of the Church, Her worship, the Scriptures, and a life of prayer. The Cardinal restates this: “The Church does not merely provide theology with an organizational framework but is its inner foundation and its immediate wellspring.”⁴⁴⁷ Theology is today conceived of as academic, cold, and something that a person can sit around in a study and think about, totally removed from all other things of life just as a math problem can be pondered upon with no other reason than trying to find a

⁴⁴² *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 47
⁴⁴³ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 102
⁴⁴⁴ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 45
⁴⁴⁵ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 48
⁴⁴⁶ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 46
⁴⁴⁷ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 61

solution. As the Cardinal surmises, “On the one hand, theology must research, discuss, experiment; on the other hand, theology cannot thus create for itself its own object.”⁴⁴⁸ Theology cannot be taken out of the context of the Church, just as an organ cannot be taken out of a living body and examined. The Cardinal states, “A theology wholly bent on being academic and “scientific” according to the standards of the modern university, cuts itself off from its great historical matrices and renders itself sterile for the Church.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ *Theology volume 9: Eschatology – Death and Eternal Life*, 244
⁴⁴⁹ *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 116

The World

How to understand the world we live in

When talking about the world, Cardinal Ratzinger thinks that the over all leaning of the world is such that at the bottom of the hill, taking the downhill path, leads one towards evil by leading people away from God. The Cardinal states, “There is a collective consciousness that sharpens the contradiction – that agrees with the selfish tendencies, the turning away from God, and always prefers the momentarily easier choice in life.”⁴⁵⁰ The Cardinal believes that people have the ability within themselves to see beyond the tugs of the purely secular, and he notes “those who have lost the capacity to see that even in an evil world the Creator still shines through are at bottom no longer capable of existing. They become cynical, or they have to say farewell to life altogether.”⁴⁵¹

The Church in the world

A major problem for the world is that it views the Church as being too pessimistic. The Cardinal notes that when the Church preaches the Gospel message, it isn’t pessimism, but in fact realism. He notes, “Nowadays nothing seems less tolerated than what people call pessimism – and which is often in fact just realism.”⁴⁵² The Cardinal traces the trend of being angry with the Church because of Her message back to the French Revolution. Cardinal Ratzinger states,

The French Revolution saw the birth of the ideology according to which Christianity, because

⁴⁵⁰ *God in the World*, 52

⁴⁵¹ *Salt of the Earth*, 69

⁴⁵² *God in the World*, 441

it believes in the end of the world, judgment, and the like, is by nature pessimistic, whereas modernity, which has discovered progress as the law of history, is by nature optimistic. We now see that these comparisons are slowly dissolving. We see the self-confidence of modernity increasingly crumble...Christianity in fact does not have such a notion that history necessarily always progresses.⁴⁵³

Cardinal Ratzinger notes the difficulty that the Church finds Herself in when trying to preach Her message. He notes, “It becomes difficult, if not altogether impossible, to present Catholic morality as reasonable. It is too distant from what is considered to be obvious, as normal by the majority of persons, conditioned by the dominant culture with which not a few ‘Catholic’ theologians have aligned themselves as influential supporters.”⁴⁵⁴ The Cardinal hopes that the story of Pentecost found in the Acts of the Apostles is used as a model for those who seek to bring the message of the Church to the world. He notes,

The image of Pentecost presented in the Acts of the Apostles shows the interplay of plurality and unity and in this sense teaches us to perceive the distinctive character of the Holy Spirit as opposed to the spirit of the world. The spirit of the world subjugates, the Holy Spirit opens. The Church embraces the many languages, that is, the many cultures, that in faith understand and fecundate one another.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ *Salt of the Earth*, 25

⁴⁵⁴ *The Ratzinger Report*, 83

⁴⁵⁵ *Called to Communion*, 43-4

Technology

Cardinal Ratzinger is usually found to be concerned about how technology is used by people in the world today. He certainly doesn't think that the world should throw all of its technology out, but he wants to make sure that the caution flags are raised. He notes, "Even if the efforts at technical improvement make many things much easier in the world, nonetheless they make life darker and more difficult in many respects."⁴⁵⁶ The Cardinal also says "The immense growth in man's mastery of the material world has left him blind to the questions of life's meaning that transcend the material world."⁴⁵⁷ With regards to technology, the Cardinal hopes that mankind will still seek out solitude and silence. He exhorts, "We must learn that it is only in the silent, barely noticeable things that what is great takes place, that man becomes God's image and the world once more becomes the radiance of God's glory...let us ask him to help us not to be so deafened and desensitized by this world's loud outcry that our receptivity fails to register him."⁴⁵⁸ The noise of the technological world often seems to drown out that silence, but the Cardinal reminds the world that, "that there are primordial human problems that are not susceptible of technological solutions but that demand a certain life-style and certain life decisions."⁴⁵⁹

The Cardinal feels that humanity stands in a dangerous place with where technology is poised to go. He notes, "When we see now how people, with genetic codes available to them, are really starting to pick from the tree of life and make themselves lords of life and death, to reassemble life, then precisely what man was supposed to be protected from is now

⁴⁵⁶ *God in the World*, 286

⁴⁵⁷ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 130

⁴⁵⁸ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 83

⁴⁵⁹ *Salt of the Earth*, 202

actually happening: he is crossing the final boundary.”⁴⁶⁰ The power of technology is also threatening in the mind of Cardinal Ratzinger because of its universal scope and the fact that it unites people, in some ways more intimately and successfully than attempts by Christianity to unite the world. The Cardinal notes,

Perhaps the consciousness of the inadequacy of previous attempts at Christian universality has become so urgent today because there is meanwhile another kind of universality that has truly reached to the farthest corners of the earth: the unity of technical culture, which imposes itself by the power of its capacities and its successes and yet, at the same time, through its method of centralizing power and through its exploitation of the earth, has brought about that division of the world into north and south, into rich and poor.⁴⁶¹

The Cardinal is not someone who hates technology. A modern critique of religion is that it always fears science, technology, and thus change. The Cardinal is actually very knowledgeable about science, and feels that science and technology contribute very much to humanity, and that both can play a part in the advancing of Christianity to the ends of the earth. The Cardinal only thinks that “Science becomes pathological and a threat to life when it takes leave of the moral order of human life, becomes autonomous, and no longer recognizes any standard but its own capabilities.”⁴⁶² As long as science and technology do not see themselves as ends in and of themselves, and as long as scientific work is conducted under the moral guidance of faith and the natural law, then science is very much part of the world which God created, and which He said was “Very good.” Science and

⁴⁶⁰ *God in the World*, 134

⁴⁶¹ *Truth and Tolerance*, 58

⁴⁶² *Truth and Tolerance*, 158

technology used in that way is, “ so to speak, the adventure he has left to us for ourselves.”⁴⁶³

Evil

The major point that Cardinal Ratzinger makes concerning evil is that good and evil are not two sides to a coin. Many problems concerning people’s conception of evil today stem from the idea that at the end of time there will be a big fight between good and evil. In fact, a cursory glance over the book of Revelation may even give that impression because of the fact the book features a lot of battle and war imagery. However, the battle described in the book of Revelation is no real battle at all. The outcome is never in doubt; the defeat of evil is instantaneous. The use of war imagery has likely led some to think that if it were possible for evil to mount an offensive, then perhaps the forces of evil possess at least a punchers chance of actually overthrowing God. It is this misconception that the Cardinal wishes to clear up by noting that there will be no fight. The Cardinal states, “Evil is indeed a constant threat and temptation but is in the end not a comparable alternative to God. We must always be aware that only God is God and that whoever builds on him, therefore, need never fear satanic powers.”⁴⁶⁴ Elsewhere, he notes, “On his own, man has not the power to oppose Satan, but the devil is not a second God, and united with Jesus we can be certain of vanquishing him.”⁴⁶⁵ The belief that God and the Devil depend on each other, or that they each control a roughly even stake in the world stems largely from the influence of the philosophies and religions of the East. The Cardinal notes, “Good and evil, according to Buddhism, stand from the beginning in mutual interdependence. Neither has

⁴⁶³ *God in the World*, 121

⁴⁶⁴ *God and the World*, 126

⁴⁶⁵ *The Ratzinger Report*, 138

priority over the other.”⁴⁶⁶ But as the Cardinal points out, if evil is simply part of the overall plan of God, then “Good would then have need of evil, and evil would not really be evil at all but would just be a necessary part of the world’s dialectical process.”

⁴⁶⁷ If evil is thought of as part of what God made, then how could God see all that he had made, and say that it was good. Furthermore, humanity could never be asked to do good and avoid evil if evil was really, deep down, something which God really uses or commands or created.

If evil is not the other side of the coin, how is it to be understood? The Cardinal says, “Evil is not something with its own nature, its own being but is simply negation.”⁴⁶⁸ Evil can never do anything on its own or create anything, it can only destroy. This destruction is brought about through temptation towards divisiveness. Cardinal Ratzinger describes the work of Satan and his legions: “Satan is the absolute destroyer, undermining every relationship: man’s relationship to himself and men’s relation to one another. Thus he is the exact opposite of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶⁹

Sin

Sin for Cardinal Ratzinger is always essentially a fixation on one’s self. He notes, “It is not by analysis of our own existence, not by looking at ourselves, at our hopes and our needs, that we discover eternal life. Eternal life steadily withdraws from a person whose attention is fixed on himself.”⁴⁷⁰ This self-absorption leads people away from God and into the things of the world. The Cardinal states,

⁴⁶⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 49

⁴⁶⁷ *Truth and Tolerance*, 48

⁴⁶⁸ *God and the World*, 128

⁴⁶⁹ *The Ratzinger Report*, 151

⁴⁷⁰ *God Is Near Us*, 132

Of course it is easier for the moment to take pleasure in material things, in what is tangible, in things that bring us happiness and can be directly bought and accessed. I can go into a pleasure shop; for the price of entry I can experience a sort of ecstasy and thereby buy release from all cares, from the difficult path of self-development and of self-transcendence. This is a dreadfully strong temptation. In this way happiness becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold. That's easier; it's quicker; we seem to have bypassed the inner contradiction –because the question concerning God now seems quite unnecessary.⁴⁷¹

Sin thus results in “the situation in which man finds himself if he has alienated himself from his own essential being.”⁴⁷² The temptation to alienate oneself from love is particularly strong in the cultures of the West. The Cardinal notes, “Western culture is hellish when it persuades men that the sole aim of life is pleasure and self-interest.”⁴⁷³ The Cardinal believes, however, that all people, regardless of how deeply bogged down in sin they are, still feel guilt over the experience of their sins, and he feels that that guilt ought to tell us something. He notes, “After the ecstasy, I can no longer stand myself or the world. And at this point at least I know I have been cheated.”⁴⁷⁴ Elsewhere he says, “Even if man wants to know nothing more about sin and has

⁴⁷¹ *God and the World*, 53. The Cardinal elsewhere describes people living a sinful life: “The people who want to have everything, who cannot have enough money, the people who finally manage to get everything, do everything, who want to live life for themselves, who want just to be themselves – they all think they are living like God: everything is there for my benefit; I am not there for anyone else’s benefit. But in reality, while they think they have really become gods, their life is a caricature of God; it is pitiful, empty, and hopeless” (*Many Religions – One Covenant*, 86).

⁴⁷² *God and the World*, 94

⁴⁷³ *The Ratzinger Report*, 188

⁴⁷⁴ *God and the World*, 54

apparently got rid of whatever torments his consciousness, he soon notices that he feels guilty.”⁴⁷⁵

The accusation that one’s conscience makes when a person is sinning is always present, as the Cardinal notes. However, that conscience can get dulled from constantly being trampled by man, and thus it can become easier to sin as the voice of one’s conscience gets drowned out to a faint whisper. The Cardinal says, “When the conscience becomes dulled, this lets in the violence that lays wasted the world.”⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ *God and the World*, 93

⁴⁷⁶ *God Is Near Us*, 98

Ecumenism – Dialoguing With Other Faiths

Dialogue with other faiths

Ecumenism is simply an examination of how the Catholic faith dialogues with other faiths in the hope of realizing Jesus' prayer in the 17th chapter of John's Gospel, "That they may be one." The Cardinal's first caution in regards to ecumenism concerns the fact that Catholics "must beware of a too-easy ecumenism which can lead Catholic charismatic groups to lose their identity and, in the name of the 'Spirit' (seen as the antithesis of the institution), uncritically associate with forms of Pentecostalism of non-Catholic origin."⁴⁷⁷

Another caution that the Cardinal offers to Catholics concerns the fact that, "A certain attitude in Catholic ecumenism after the Council was perhaps marked by a kind of masochism and a somewhat perverse need to declare itself guilty for all the catastrophes of past history."⁴⁷⁸ When dialoguing with people of other faiths, the Cardinal hopes that Catholics will certainly claim sins that people have committed in the Church, but at the same time, "Confessing...demands, above all, the discipline and the humility belonging to truth, not to deny all the evil that has been carried out in the Church, yet also to avoid marking up against ourselves, in false modesty, sins that were never committed or concerning which there is no historical certainty."

⁴⁷⁹ Here, the Cardinal is suggesting, for example, a tendency for Catholics today to be ashamed of the Crusades or the actions of Pope Pius X during World War II. When these issues are brought up today, it is expected that Catholics kneel on the floor and receive their beating. However, how many people (whether it be those leveling the criticisms or the Catholics being accused) actually have studied the history of the crusades, or the history of

⁴⁷⁷ *The Ratzinger Report*, 152

⁴⁷⁸ *The Ratzinger Report*, 159

⁴⁷⁹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 282

indulgences leading up to the reformation? The Cardinal laments, “Any attempt to see history as being a little less black and white, to distinguish a little more clearly the various ways in which different people were responsible, to see the complexity of these phenomena and to see what the various people responsible were trying to do, is condemned beforehand as a concession to inhumanity.”⁴⁸⁰

Division

In this postmodern era, Concerning division, some would like to see all differences done away with (because differences really don’t matter anyway), and so the quicker distinctions between faiths are bulldozed, the sooner the world will have peace. The Cardinal believes, however, that not all differences are to be shunned. He says, “Division is necessary for purifying us. We have to do everything to become once more capable and worthy of unity, so as not to need any more. So to speak, the scourge of division. But we cannot simply manipulate things so that it is now at an end.”⁴⁸¹ Elsewhere he notes, “It is not for us to act as if there were unity where this is not the case.”⁴⁸²

The Cardinal also makes a quite sobering statement to those people who believe that differences among religions are about to come crashing down. He says, “Let me speak plainly: Anyone who expects the dialogue between religions to result in their unification is bound for disappointment. This is hardly possible within our historical time, and perhaps it is not even desirable.”⁴⁸³ The Cardinal feels that the key to dialoguing with other faiths is to realize that it isn’t paramount to simply get everyone to be unanimous, as if the various doctrines could be bartered and traded like the process of coming up with a peace

⁴⁸⁰ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 281

⁴⁸¹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 258

⁴⁸² *God Is Near Us*, 55

⁴⁸³ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 109

treaty. He notes, “In faith you cannot simply order someone to do something, as certain ecumenical projects have assumed, so that now the leadership of the Church says to everyone, Friends, we’re going to leave a bit out here and add something on there – that won’t work.”⁴⁸⁴ Unanimity among humans does not determine what is true, therefore to strive for unanimity among humans is not necessarily to strive for the truth. The Cardinal notes this important idea when he says that, “Unanimity is not the basis of binding authority but is a sign of the manifestation of truth, and it is from this latter that the authority derives.”⁴⁸⁵ Elsewhere, the Cardinal notes a related difficulty in ecumenism; “It is the dynamic of the conscience and of the silent presence of God in it that is leading religions toward one another and guiding people onto the path to God, not the canonizing of what already exists, so that people are excused from any deeper searching.”⁴⁸⁶

Catholics and Protestants

A very important passage from Cardinal Ratzinger is important for portraying his feelings on the split after the reformation. He contrasts the Protestant understanding of the early Church with the protestant view. He says,

At the beginning there was certainly no “catholic” Church, but merely various distinct local Churches with varying theologies, with offices that differed, and so on. No institutional Church therefore, it is said, can maintain that she is the one Church of Jesus Christ in accordance with God’s will; for then all institutional structures have arisen through various sociological

⁴⁸⁴ *God in the World*, 453

⁴⁸⁵ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 257

⁴⁸⁶ *Truth and Tolerance*, 54

requirements and, hence, are all, as such, human constructions that in new situations may also be radically altered, perhaps indeed must be. They differ from one another in theological quality at a secondary level at most, it is said, and that is why one can say that the “one Church of Christ” subsists in them all, or at any rate in many of them – but the question here, of course, is what right anyone has, taking such a view of things, to talk about the Church of Christ at all. The Catholic tradition, in contrast to that, has chosen a different starting point: it trusts the evangelists; it believes what they say.⁴⁸⁷

The lengthy quotation ends with a very important phrase for the Cardinal; it is the idea that the Catholic Church trusts the evangelists.

Martin Luther had a very hard time with the hierarchy and bureaucracy of the Catholic Church. The Cardinal notes, “Catholicism appeared to Luther as the sacrilegious reinstatement of the cult, of sacrifice, priesthood and law. He therefore saw it as the negation of grace, as apostasy from the gospel, as a return behind Christ to Moses.”⁴⁸⁸ Luther felt that Christ’s death outside the gates of Jerusalem was a sign of how to regard the Old Law. The Cardinal says, “The emphatic affirmation of the Letter to the Hebrews that Jesus suffered his Passion outside the gates of the city and in consequence summons us to come out to him (Heb. 13:12f.) now became a symbol: the Cross has rent the veil of the temple, the new altar stands in the midst of the world, the new sacrifice is not a cultic event but an entirely profane death.”⁴⁸⁹ The Catholic Church was blamed by Luther and the reformers of wedding itself too closely

⁴⁸⁷ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 145-6

⁴⁸⁸ *Called to Communion*, 108

⁴⁸⁹ *Called to Communion*, 107

to Greek culture, and thus falling into problems. Cardinal Ratzinger notes how the reformers viewed the Bible as opposed to the Catholic Church: “The Bible is said to be the expression of religious experiences and to have worked out a practical teaching for right living; the early Church, dominated by Greek culture, it is said, overlaid this practical teaching with a philosophical theory and developed it into a literalist orthodoxy that is no longer reasonable for anyone today.”⁴⁹⁰

The Cardinal states, “The reproach of the reformers was that the Church had betrayed the novelty of Christianity and had retreated from the new Christian path by making the presbyter into a sacerdotal priest again.”⁴⁹¹ However, if we are to take the Gospel at its word, then when Jesus says that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it,⁴⁹² the Catholic Church takes Him at his word. Here, one could argue that the Catholic Church left the Old Covenant behind as well. They might point out that the Catholic Priesthood is not the same as the Priesthood found in the Old Testament, and likewise, the Catholic Mass is not the same as the Temple worship of the Old Covenant. However, the Catholic Priesthood is certainly a growth from the Old Testament priesthood, and not an entirely new creation, just as the Catholic Mass is very intimately tied to the Temple worship of the Old Testament, and has not cast it off to the side either. The Cardinal faults Luther and the reformers for pushing for a complete break from the Old Testament. The Cardinal says, “any conception that presupposes a complete break, in matters of worship and priesthood, with the pre-Christian history of salvation and that denies any connection between Old Testament priesthood and that of the New Testament must be rejected.”⁴⁹³

A major tenant of Martin Luther’s was *Sola Fide* - by faith alone. Luther felt that any form of adding rubrics or canon laws or hierarchies into Christianity was a corruption, just as St.

⁴⁹⁰ *Truth and Tolerance*, 91

⁴⁹¹ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 172

⁴⁹² Matthew 5:17

⁴⁹³ *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 174

Paul says over and over again about the Old Law. But Jesus says himself he didn't come to abolish the law. The unique thing about the laws that God passes on to humanity, either via the Old Testament or through the New Testament or through the Church is that, unlike other forms of law, God's Laws are life giving. The Cardinal has a simple response to Luther, who feels that laws are not God's way of operating; "The law itself is the concrete form of grace. For to know God's will is grace."⁴⁹⁴ Elsewhere, he says, "Jesus broadened the Law, wanted to open it up, not as a liberal reformer, not out of a lesser loyalty to the Law, but in the strictest obedience to its fulfillment."⁴⁹⁵ This discussion of Jesus and God's laws leads nicely into a discussion with the Catholic Church's relationship with the Jewish people.

Relationship With the Jewish People

Israel is a nation that was chosen by God starting with his promise to Abraham. A lot of the Old Testament talks about how God protected, punished, and lead the people of Israel. On a large scale, Israel was led to Egypt, out of Egypt, into the promised land, into exile, and back into the promised land. Also, on a smaller scale, there are the many instances of the people abandoning God, being reprimanded by a prophet, and then eventually turning their hearts back to God. Cardinal Ratzinger notes, "Admonished by the Prophets, and as a result of the suspension of the Temple cult during the Exile and the recurring trials that followed it, Israel well knew that it had broken the covenant more than once."⁴⁹⁶ Some here think that it is strange that God chose some people and not others. The Old Testament talks about God crushing other nations, etc. Some wonder what Israel did that was so special to be chosen. To these questions,

⁴⁹⁴ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 69

⁴⁹⁵ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 39

⁴⁹⁶ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 64

the Cardinal responds, “he does not make a choice so as to exclude the others, but in order to come to the others by means of the one chosen, and to enter in a concrete fashion into the interplay of history.”⁴⁹⁷ The Cardinal also notes that Israel was chosen because of their feebleness and because only by dealing with a humble and weak people would God be made known to others. Had God chosen to ally himself with the most powerful people in the ancient world, not many would have wondered where the people drew their strength. But a ragged and wandering people who had no other explanation for their blessings other than a benevolent God watching out for them, that would demonstrate to people the true power of God. The Cardinal notes, “The choice of “little things” and “little people” is characteristic of God’s dealing with man.”⁴⁹⁸

Another aspect to being chosen was also not so desirable as one might suppose. Cardinal Ratzinger notes, “The word chosen or elect has acquired a nasty taste for us, because we interpret it as a form of distinction, as a presumption of superiority. In its original biblical sense it meant that a people was chosen so that something might be required of them, that they might endure something and might accomplish something for others.”⁴⁹⁹ At the same time, he notes, ““covenant” is not a two-sided contract but a gift, a creative act of God’s love,”⁵⁰⁰ and “God, the King, receives nothing from man; but in giving him his law, he gives him the path of life.”⁵⁰¹ An important idea for understanding the covenant between God and Israel is that “The basic structure of all the covenants we find in the Old and New Testaments is...a sovereign action, not a contract between two equal partners.”⁵⁰² In all this, then, it becomes clear that God is not the big brother who agrees to beat up anyone who bothers his

⁴⁹⁷ *God and the World*, 146

⁴⁹⁸ *God and the World*, 213

⁴⁹⁹ *God and the World*, 211

⁵⁰⁰ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 50

⁵⁰¹ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 50

⁵⁰² *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 71

little brother at school, freeing the little brother to act in anyway he chooses, without fear of repercussion from others or the big brother.

The ultimate message of Cardinal Ratzinger is one of unity with the Jewish people. As to whether or not the Jewish people should shoulder a burden for the Crucifixion, the Cardinal notes, "In the New Testament there are not two effects of the Cross: a damning one and a saving one, but only a single effect, which is saving and reconciling."⁵⁰³ Elsewhere he says, "Jesus' blood raises no calls for retaliation but calls all to reconciliation."

⁵⁰⁴ The Cardinal also notes that Catholics and Jews have a responsibility to present the one true God to the world. Cardinal Ratzinger states that this "responsibility consists precisely in representing the truth of the one will of God before the world and thus placing man before his inner truth, which is at the same time his way. Jews and Christians must bear witness to the one God, to the creator of heaven and earth, and do this in that entirety."⁵⁰⁵ Finally, the Cardinal notes that both Jews and Catholics look to heaven anticipating the Messiah: "The Church, too, waits for the Messiah she already knows, the Messiah who has yet to manifest his glory."⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 40

⁵⁰⁴ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 45

⁵⁰⁵ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 34

⁵⁰⁶ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 106

God

God is not something we think up

For the Cardinal, God is not something we know because it is natural for us to know it. He states, “The picture of God the Father that we find in the Bible is not a projection upward of our own experiences; rather, the contrary: we are told from on high, in quite a new way, what a father really is and what he could be and should be among us human beings.”⁵⁰⁷ Elsewhere, the Cardinal says, “What does it mean when we call this God a living God? It means that this God is not a conclusion we have reached by thinking, which we now offer to others in the certainty of our own perception.”⁵⁰⁸ The Cardinal suggests that the more we try to impute things onto God which are not Him, when we try to make Him like us, problems arise. The Cardinal exhorts people to think less about God, to try and know less about Him in order to truly come to know more about him. The Cardinal says, “The more we trust in the uncomprehended God, the more we will become aware that that very God who seems to be tormenting us is the one who truly loves us, the one we can trust without reserve.”⁵⁰⁹ The Cardinal points to the foot-washing as the true way to understand the power of God: “At that moment when the Lord of the world comes and undertakes the slave’s task of foot-washing...we have a totally different picture. God, who is absolute power itself, doesn’t want to trample on us, but kneels down before us so as to exalt us.”⁵¹⁰

It is thus not in thinking that one knows God, but in an approach of simplicity that allows one to know God. The Cardinal again calls on people to be simple in their attempts to grasp God.

⁵⁰⁷ *God and the World*, 275

⁵⁰⁸ *God Is Near Us*, 11

⁵⁰⁹ *God Is Near Us*, 47

⁵¹⁰ *God and the World*, 259

Here again is the mysterious pattern of the way God acts: the whole magnitude of it is more easily grasped by simple people than by those who, with a thousand distinctions and diverse intellectual baggage, ferret out each little bit on its own and are no longer capable of being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the whole. No rejection of intellectuals, or of detailed knowledge of Scripture, is intended here, but a warning not to lose our inward simplicity, to keep the meaning of the whole in view, and to allow oneself to be impressed, to be ready to accept the unexpected.⁵¹¹

God is not of this world

God is not of the world, he is not moving about acting within the world, he is utterly beyond the world. The Cardinal says, “God is God by his very nature, but it is not nature as such that is God.”⁵¹² God is not to be thought of as another actor on the stage, but as the one who holds the stage and the actors and the audience up, he holds them all in the palm of his hand. The Cardinal also says that, “this God is not loud; he cannot compete with the powers of this world. He is the “poor” God, the God whose only weapons are the humble weapons of love and truth.”⁵¹³ For this reason, the Cardinal notes where to best find God: “Monotheism was not able to develop in the great cities and fertile countryside of Mesopotamia. No, it was in the wilderness, where heaven and earth face each other in stark solitude, that monotheism was able to grow – in the homelessness of the

⁵¹¹ *God and the World*, 243-4

⁵¹² *Truth and Tolerance*, 172

⁵¹³ *Many Religions – One Covenant*, 82

wanderer, who does not deify places but has constantly to put his trust in the God who wanders with him.”⁵¹⁴

God is the utterly beyond that we can only do harm to ourselves trying to get our arms around. Trying to comprehend the uncomprehendable can only get humanity into trouble. However, most human beings, in order to try to comprehend something, will conduct experiments on it to poke it and prod it and see if it can be brought under one’s control. The Cardinal points out that this experimentation on God is not wise. He notes, “He does not allow himself to be found by those who wish to conduct experiments on him...and undertake certain things to which we think he must either react or not react, if we make him the object, so to speak, of our experiment, then we have set off in a direction that will not lead us to find him.”⁵¹⁵

One’s relationship with God impacts all other relationships

That God is above, beyond, and uncomprehendable does not mean that we are unable to enter into a relationship with Him. He doesn’t remain uncomprehendable to the human mind because he wants His privacy. He simply warns us that it is not healthy for us to be trying to grasp the whole of God in our minds.

Relationship with God is still to be longed for and pursued. Not only is a relationship with God possible, it is necessary before one can have truly right relationships with other people. The Cardinal notes, “It is only, therefore, when man’s relationship with God is right that all of his other relationships – his relationships with his fellowmen, his dealings with the rest of creation – can be in good order.”⁵¹⁶ Elsewhere we read, “Man lives in relationships...father, mother, brother and sister, and so

⁵¹⁴ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 99

⁵¹⁵ *God and the World*, 105

⁵¹⁶ *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 21

forth...none of these relationships can be right if the first relationship, the relationship with God, is not right.”⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁷ *Salt of the Earth*, 22

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