

A God Who is Present:
A Christological and Anthropological Study of the Presence of God
in Pope Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth*

Nassif Farah

Student number: 8810637

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Supervisor: **Dr. Karl Hefty**

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Introduction

In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment ushered in a radical change in Western Europe, which completely altered our perception of the world. Its insistence on the autonomy and self-sufficiency of reason ushered in the modern time.

According to many new modes of thinking, God plays only a marginal role in human life and history. The contemporary world presents many examples of systems of thought with almost no place for God – for a God who is alive and active in the world. It is no surprise that these forms of thought have led to the growth of atheism in Western culture. Here, I am not intending a polemic against any specific scholar, but rather I am describing the conditions of the contemporary context for which the absence of God is the basic premise.

In all this, believers and unbelievers alike may ask: Where is God? Is he hidden? Is there a God? How can God be credible in a merely physical, rationalistic, and subjectivistic world? What meaning can scripture have amid this seemingly organized chaos? Does God still speak to us?

Within this context and in response to it, Joseph Ratzinger, now the emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, claims that the ultimate reality of existence is the presence of a dynamic God who works through his active Word and thereby gives existence its original meaning: “Jesus himself has become the divine Word of revelation.”¹ Revelation indeed holds a significant place in Ratzinger’s theology, which we will examine in this thesis. Emery De Gaál, an expert in Ratzinger’s theology, states that from the beginning of his theological studies, when he wrote his habilitation on Bonaventure, Ratzinger concluded that: “Revelation is historical and contextual: it is Jesus

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York; Toronto: Doubleday, 2007), 316.

Christ.”² This insight which has accompanied him throughout his theological career, centers on God’s scriptural and historical presence in Christ. Ratzinger issues a radical challenge to those who believe God is absent. God is active and present in the world, with a presence that continues to accompany us today.

In today’s world, the most scientists assume that science has replaced the need for God.³ Belief in God thus loses all credibility. At most, God seems to be hidden, and leaves no physical trace of his presence in the world. The question of God hangs between two opposite extremes: acceptance or rejection. The main question then becomes: How can Jesus be credible if he is only, at most, hidden from us?

The problem before us is enormous. From the Christian perspective, Jesus is God, and consequently, the matter of his presence or absence affects the entirety of human history. God’s kingdom degenerates into a merely human kingdom whose principle moral values and laws become merely worldly. We see examples of such a world every day. Is not one of the aims of secularism to strip the world from God?⁴

Before we introduce the content of this paper, which is related to Ratzinger’s understanding of God’s presence, we will situate the problem of this presence, whether a fact or a myth, in what one might call divine hiddenness. Although we will just mention this divine hiddenness here, it

² Emery de Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 67.

³ A typical example is the last book of Stephen Hawking, “Brief Answers to the Big Questions,” published in 2018, less than a year after his death, where he clearly states: “There is no God. No one created the universe,” as a conclusion to his entire scientific career. Stephen Hawking, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (Random House Publishing Group, 2018), 38.

⁴ Ratzinger explains his understanding of secularization in his general audience in 2012. He says: “the past century experienced a strong process of secularization under the banner of the absolute autonomy of the human being, considered as the measure and architect of reality, but impoverished by being created ‘in the image and likeness of God.’ A particularly dangerous phenomenon for faith has arisen in our times: indeed, a form of atheism exists which we define, precisely, as “practical”, in which the truths of faith or religious rites are not denied but are merely deemed irrelevant to daily life, detached from life, pointless.” Pope Benedict XVI, “General Audience,” November 14, 2012, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121114.html.

will help us recognize the enormity of the problem we all face and the reason that compels Ratzinger to defend the presence of God.

Divine hiddenness, in fact, can elicit two kinds of response: the first praises God's hiddenness, while the second uses it to deny him. In order to highlight the main problem we face, we will focus on the second response. In fact, it is a response that often finds its way even into religious and theological scholarship. Let us consider just three contemporary examples, of contemporary religious skepticism: Theodore Drange, James Keller, and J. L. Schellenberg.

Theodore Drange concentrates on the argument from divine hiddenness, which denies God's existence, on the premise that unbelievers' vastly outnumber believers in the world. Drange centers his argument on a Christological-soteriological perspective. The problem arises when not all humanity believes in God. If God exists and he is really Jesus, then he has to show himself clearly to the world for his divinity to be credible, and to accomplish his message of salvation. Drange ultimately denies God's existence.⁵ Drange's argument ultimately relates hiddenness to a sort of powerlessness in God, who cannot compel people to believe in him. For Drange, if God were to exist, it would be in the frame of a universal acceptance.⁶

James Keller makes a similar argument, but in a different direction. A God who does not perform exceptional acts is at best an ambiguous God. If God exists, then he has to show himself clearly – both his nature and his will by miraculous deeds. For Keller, like many for whom divine hiddenness counts as a reason to deny God's existence, the problem of God's hiddenness is related

⁵ "If God were to exist, then he would possess all of the following four properties (among others):

- Being able to bring about situation S (the situation of all humans), all things considered.
- Wanting situation S, i.e. having it among his desires.
- Not wanting anything that conflicts with his desire for situation S as strongly as it.
- Not being irrational, which entails that he would never refrain from acting in accord with his own highest purposes."

Theodore M. Drange, "The Argument from Non-Belief," *Religious Studies* 29, no. 04 (December 1993): 418.

⁶ Drange, "The Argument from Non-Belief," 417–18.

to the problem of evil. He traces to evil all the suffering that pervades human life. For him, the love of God is incompatible with suffering. The fact of this suffering ultimately contradicts three main attributes of God: his love, his knowledge, and his omnipotence.⁷

Lastly, J. L. Schellenberg has offered a wide ranging and skeptical response to the problem of divine hiddenness. Schellenberg begins his argument from a human perspective. Any person must realize three factors, for the existence of God to be possible: not resisting God, meaningful conscious relationship with God, and participating in such relationship.⁸ Because these three features are not shared among all humanity, God does not exist. Schellenberg understands belief in God in terms of a pleasing experience, or any desirable thing, such as drugs. The fact that many still believe today is explained by their unwillingness to detach themselves from such an experience.⁹ He emphasizes a “nonresistant nonbelief” that some people acquire at a particular age, usually before the age of reason. For him, If God really exists, he would provide humanity at a specific age with an awareness of his presence.

In brief, these scholars deny God on account of his hiddenness. If he exists, he is unable, undesirable, irrational, etc. But it would better simply to conclude he is weak, dead, and finally nonexistent.

This paper will not treat the problem of divine hiddenness. Instead, we will focus on the question of God’s presence, and will treat this question from a Christological, anthropological, and ecclesial perspective. Our thesis is not to deny or ignore the question of divine hiddenness, but to show that it, too, is a modality of his presence. All the above arguments underscore the challenges

⁷ James A. Keller, “The Hiddenness of God and the Problem of Evil,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37, no. 1 (February 1995): 13-15.

⁸ J. L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 204.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204–6.

that the world faces today. The arguments of Drange, Keller, and Schellenberg represent what many scholars and ordinary people write and think concerning this issue. At root, they are grappling with the problem of God in today's world, a world that embraces both those who believe and those who deny God's presence. God is not simply refused. He is refuted by critical arguments, which lead to convincing conclusions that in turn distance the world further from God.

Ratzinger has argued from the beginning of his career, against the view that God is not present and thus man is alone in the world. In his book, *Faith and the Future*, Ratzinger says it plainly: "The question about God no longer finds any place in human thought... the context of the world is self-contained, and the hypothesis of God is no longer necessary for its comprehension."¹⁰ Ratzinger repeats this concern in *Jesus of Nazareth*, asking: "Isn't this precisely the logic of the modern age, of our age? Let us declare that God is dead, then we ourselves will be God" (I, 257).¹¹ Ratzinger's theology stresses, on the contrary, that God is present and active at the center of the world, and also at the center of each person. He wishes to lead us back to "the discovery of God in the face of the man Jesus of Nazareth."¹²

Ratzinger writes his three-volume book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, as his personal search "for the face of the Lord" (I, xxiii). He exhibits Jesus' life in three consecutive periods: the infancy narratives, the ministry of Jesus, and Holy Week. Many scholars have read and discussed important topics in the book. We will be able to examine some scholarly receptions in the first chapter. However, I believe that my work on the trilogy throughout this paper on Ratzinger's Christological approach to God's presence in Christ will demonstrate a new way to understand the essential

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith and the Future* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 5.

¹¹ In this thesis, I will reference the three separate volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth* in this way:

I: *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*;

II: *From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*;

III: *The Infancy Narratives*.

¹² Benedict XVI, *Faith and the Future*, 24.

theology he wants to deliver. In my view, no one until now has scrutinized the crucial point Ratzinger wants to convey.

Ratzinger's trilogy is thus relevant in a time when people question revelation and demand a clear answer concerning God's presence. Ratzinger's fidelity to the faith he received from the Catholic Church created in him an earnest desire to show the Word of God as an active revelation, together with its scriptural form. The dynamism of the Word responds to humanity's need for action from God and shows his authentic and continuous presence throughout history. In fact, *Jesus of Nazareth* is the answer to the question Ratzinger once asked: "Why did he [God] not make himself perceptible to all, so that every man might clearly recognize him and be able to say – 'There is God'." ¹³ The trilogy ultimately points to God as an active Word, whom we see in scripture, in the sacraments of the Church, and in men and women of faith. Ratzinger gathers all symbols, all forms, and all creation into the only Incarnate Word of God. He offers a theology grounded in a simple Christology that responds to the complexities that disturb God's world. For Ratzinger, it is obvious, God wants from us one action that reveals his simple authority: He wants an encounter with us. When we read the trilogy, we perceive that the main purpose is to "help foster the growth of a living relationship with him [Jesus]" (I, xxiv). As a matter of fact, relationship is first of all an encounter, and the encounter requires two existing subjects. The two existing subjects are present here and now. This presence is a real and true relationship between God and each man and woman. The Word that Ratzinger struggles to describe is the identity of God whom each of us encounters in the form of communion.

In his trilogy *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger does not specifically address the question of life. Nevertheless, the active presence of God in the world is his life, which includes his

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

reciprocal participation with humanity. I thus propose that Joseph Ratzinger develops an implicit theology of life, which is visible in his *Jesus of Nazareth*. It includes God's presence in the world, humanity's reception and reflection of God's presence, and their culmination in the present city of God, where humankind and God commune. His theology of life is rooted in historical and sacramental manifestation, the full revelation of Christ in the world which manifests a living God in time, revealed in the lives of the faithful who live eternity as their real life.

This thesis will first of all make a general argument about the trilogy and situate the dynamic presence of the Word as an essential topic in Ratzinger's theology, without which we cannot understand it. In the second chapter, the paper will consider the reality and sacramentality of the Word through its activity in order to show it as an enduring truth throughout history. In the third chapter, we will show the consequences of the Word's reality and sacramentality for humanity, when the person, in communion with the Word, becomes himself or herself an active word who reflects God's *sacramentum*. In the fourth and final chapter, we will consider the city of God that Ratzinger intimates, where God governs his city in his Word, and where humanity, the Church, and the world reaches communion with him. Considering this full systematic elaboration on Christ's presence, we are able then to extract from the trilogy a theology of life: the life of the Word throughout history, and the life of humanity in and through the present living Word.¹⁴

¹⁴ The theme of "a theology of life" is a late discovery within the process of my work. This theological topic may be a new project in the near future. I must make clear that the reality of the divine active presence that touches humanity in a tangible way and transforms it into a new creation removes all possibilities of God's passivity. The fact of God's activity and actions in the world, in the Church, and in humanity points to the life of God in our space. The Incarnation of the Lord was a single past event in history, but the continuation of its effects, even if it takes other forms, points always to the continually present life of God in the world. This is the life of God throughout history and the life of humanity in and through the present living God. When we, humanity, perceive the Lord as a person present among us, then automatically our will is affected by this presence. Our lives become instruments in harmony with God's life. As a result, the theology of life is always a twofold relation of God and humanity.

Chapter One

The Reception of *Jesus of Nazareth* and the Problem of Revelation

§1. Revelation: God's Action and Presence in History

Glimpsing from a distance Ratzinger's three volume *Jesus of Nazareth*, the reader sees a sequence of Biblical events, in accordance with the chronological time of each of the scriptural Christological narrations. But a closer examination shows that what seems to be a linear order in Ratzinger's methodology is in fact a spiral form of reading scripture, that brings the whole into the one, and the one into the whole, in a theological methodology that does not ignore history, but provides it with a new understanding of itself in union with the divine. It raises the Bible's events to a harmonious union with all God's work on earth, starting from creation to the Incarnation until the present. Ratzinger performs a work of art that combines two hermeneutics, history and faith, in order to present a model of what he sees as necessary for an appropriate reading of scripture.¹⁵

Ratzinger's trilogy responds to trends in contemporary exegesis that lead to a "gap between the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Christ of faith'" (I, xi), where the historical-critical method alone is proposed as the only satisfactory reading of the gospel. Three themes accompany Ratzinger throughout the book. First, the point of departure is the gospel of Jesus. Second, he typologically reads the Old Testament in order to highlight its fulfillment in Jesus. Last, he sacramentally situates the present within the mystery of Jesus. Thus, Ratzinger restores the figure of Jesus, who, as the Word of creation, the Incarnate Word, and the sacramental Word, unites the whole of creation into one, in himself, and himself into the whole of creation. This restoration is the organizing principle

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Holy Week* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), xv.

that allows us to construct and understand the whole of Ratzinger's thought in the trilogy.

In order to discover the content of the trilogy, contribute to its understanding, and situate a new fundamental reading against the current reception of Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth*, it is important to review its early scholarly reception, and clarify the ways Ratzinger's essential message has been framed and understood. For this task, I have chosen five representative scholars: Emery De Gaál, Cong Quy Joseph Lam, Joseph Mueller, Hans Boersma, and Joseph Koterski,¹⁶ who concentrate on five topics related deeply to the book *Jesus of Nazareth*: Ratzinger's definition of theology, his spiritual Christology, his theocentric Christology and tradition, the sacramental relationship he sees between history and faith, and his canonical exegesis. These five scholars, each accomplished in his own right, stand out among many who have already written significantly on the trilogy. Examining their themes will allow us to understand the general reception of *Jesus of Nazareth*. Each of these authors includes within his interpretation the other topics, but at the same time stresses a specific point they want to show. First, most of the authors concentrate on the historical-critical method which Ratzinger both acknowledges and recognizes as inadequate outside the context of faith. Second, they focus on his attachment to the Church's teaching as necessary for an understanding of God's revelation. Thirdly, they admit that Ratzinger's

¹⁶ Emery De Gaál: He studied theology in Munich and Pittsburgh. He is a Chairperson and Professor in the Departments of Dogmatic Theology and Pre-Theology in the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, Chicago.

Cong Quy Joseph Lam: He is member of the Order of Saint Augustine. He has published widely on Augustine and Joseph Ratzinger. Currently, he is senior lecturer in systematic theology at the Australian Catholic University.

Joseph G. Mueller, S.J.: (S.T.D., Centre Sèvres, Paris, 2005), specializes in ecclesiology and early Christian theology, especially Church order literature of the first five centuries and its Old Testament exegesis – Professor at Marquette University.

Hans Boersma: He is a Professor of theology at Regent College. Working in the reformed theological tradition, he specialises in patristics, sacramental theology, and nouvelle théologie.

Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.: is a Jesuit Priest of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus. In 1976, Koterski graduated with a H.A.B. degree in Classics from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1980, he earned a M.A. from Saint Louis University with a thesis titled "Aristotle's Ethics and Reflective Equilibrium," and then two years later a Ph.D. from the same school. He has been a member of the Philosophy Department of Fordham University since 1992 and is the Editor-in-Chief of the *International Philosophical Quarterly*.

Christocentric vision forms the core driving force of his theological interpretations. Nonetheless, a significant aspect of Ratzinger's trilogy is still missing. Without it, the understanding of the three volumes risks becoming an incomplete portrait of his *Jesus of Nazareth*. The trilogy reveals a theology of life: the living God who continuously approaches humanity in history in the person of Christ, and the holy life of humanity in God's presence.

I will argue that Ratzinger strives to show, from a Christological standpoint, an active revelation in the person of Christ that reveals his authentic and continuous presence in history. The credibility of this presence immediately solves many contemporary problems connected to God's seeming absence and gives credit to a different reading of scripture that respects the Word's dynamism. Moreover, from an anthropological position, Jesus of Nazareth stands as an authentic *exemplum* who, through what we will call his continuous sacrament, invites humanity to bear his image and make the world a kingdom of God.¹⁷ Thus, Ratzinger's work forges two major lines of thought: a theology of the active Word of God, and an anthropology that finds its completeness in the image of the Word. Both lead us to understand Ratzinger's implicit purpose in the trilogy. He is building a theology of life, that of God continually in history, and that of humanity continually in Christ.

§2. *Initial Scholarly Reception*

Let us begin now with the scholars' findings. First of all, in his general book on Ratzinger's

¹⁷ "Exemplum" points to Jesus Christ who is the example of a perfect humanity. He invites us to live a perfect life, which means a life with God. For that reason, the life of Christ with all its events is the image that we as adopted children strive to attain in ourselves, not only morally, but also relationally with our Father in heaven. People who, by their own will, choose Christ as their exemplum become in their lives a reflection of the life of Christ's example to humanity. Therefore, "exemplum" names two functions: First the role of Christ who is the exemplum of a perfect humanity, and second, the imitating exemplum of human believers in union with Jesus' perfect life. This explains the influence of saints on people. Their example does not point to themselves, but rather the example of their lives draws attention to their God who is their example.

theology, *The Christocentric Shift*, Emery De Gaál makes regular reference to Ratzinger's first volume *Jesus of Nazareth*. He refers primarily to Ratzinger's definition of theology. De Gaál underlines Ratzinger's problematic of how it is possible to understand the Logos within Jesus' "natural-supernatural life." In *The Christocentric Shift* he states: "The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason [*Logos*], and not the denial of its grandeur—this is the program with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time."¹⁸ At the same time, De Gaál connects this Biblical theology with Ratzinger's eschatological vision: "Theology is a constant asking for and seeking after the face of God, until he comes, and who then becomes the answer to all questions."¹⁹ De Gaál's reading helps us understand Jesus within a consideration of human limitations, which require faithfully accepting God's wisdom until we eventually find ourselves in the reality of the last encounter. Theology in this case becomes a journey of faith that demands a transcendental way of thinking that opens human wisdom to God's wisdom, waiting for a final face-to-face encounter with him. God leads humanity into his knowledge through the sacred waiting of men and women of faith who desire his unending presence in the fulfillment of Jesus' revelation.

The wisdom of one person and the knowledge that the world presents cannot by themselves lead humanity to this fulfillment. Therefore, it is generally accepted that when Ratzinger speaks of a human wisdom, he connects it not to a personal interpretation of divine knowledge, but to an ecclesial understanding of God's revelation; and in communion with the community of faith, the person can reach a credible understanding of God's wisdom. In this context, and based on *Jesus of Nazareth*, De Gaál speaks of the Church's "canonical exegesis" which Ratzinger acknowledges,

¹⁸ Emery de Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 301.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

and says: “The Church is its [the Biblical text’s] origin and therefore its indispensable *interpretament* (interpretative).”²⁰ The believer’s knowledge of God thus depends on his or her unity with the Church. Here, De Gaál speaks of the historical-critical method that Ratzinger admits only when it is completed with “the patristic teaching of the four senses of scripture.”²¹ The senses are: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. As can be seen in De Gaál’s analysis, Ratzinger always depends on tradition as a context and basis for understanding scripture. Ratzinger’s theological approach thus invites the following characteristic: “In *Jesus of Nazareth* he wants to free theology from the stranglehold of pedantically believing only what the historical-critical method supposedly deems viable.”²² But, we must ask, why is freedom from the historical-critical method? Earlier in his book, De Gaál specifies three outcomes of exegesis that are related to present concerns needed and depend on a canonical reading of scripture: “Exegetical results should assist pastoral theology, religious pedagogy, and homiletics in making the Christian faith fecund in the here and now.”²³ In this way, theology becomes a free, contextual reading of scripture that seeks to know God’s will according to the contemporary requirements. However, De Gaál’s reading misses an important feature that *Jesus of Nazareth* wants to show. Humanity asks for a fundamental relationship that recognizes revelation as a pragmatic Word of God. This Word actively works in history not only to satisfy a pastoral or a spiritual need, but rather opens the door to life with God. This life transforms ontologically current time into eternity. In his book, De Gaál underscores Jesus’ identity as the “I am,” which Ratzinger makes a central theme: “The complete response to all human questions, wishes, and hopes lies in Jesus Christ, who is life.”²⁴ But, De

²⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 270.

²³ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

Gaál understands this life as a metaphysical dimension not a real encounter in the world. This explains his understanding of theology when he relates it to the second coming that will answer humanity's questions. On the contrary, I suggest that Ratzinger demonstrates the life of God, which is the ultimate answer of everything, present in time, sanctifies humanity in time, in order to live eternity also in time.

The second scholar engaging *Jesus of Nazareth* is Cong Quy Joseph Lam. Like Emery De Gaál's account, Lam's *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Retractations* highlights Ratzinger's claims about the insufficiency of the historical-critical method, and stresses, with Ratzinger, the need for a combination of two hermeneutics, faith and history, in reading Biblical texts. This perspective aims ultimately at "an existential personal adherence."²⁵ Lam's main focus is to identify 'spiritual Christology' in Ratzinger's work, which "can lead to the true knowledge of the real Jesus."²⁶ Lam defines the work of spiritual Christology in Ratzinger's thought as follows: "The main task of a spiritual Christology is to understand and to interpret the common faith of the Church."²⁷ Lam thus adds to De Gaál's definition of theology a spiritual aspect where the knowledge of God is intrinsically related to the spirit (in which the Bible was written) – "the collective faith memory without which history remains merely a category of the past."²⁸ Lam's account identifies an integral Biblical understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). In this way, a sacramental reading that bases itself on the mystery of Christ in the Spirit throughout the history of the Church reveals the knowledge of God. By the

²⁵ Joseph C. Quy Lam, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Retractations* (Bern, Switzerland; New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 136.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

same token, spirituality frames human knowledge and enables an authentic wisdom that leads to God. The result of Lam's spiritual Christology is a relationship between God and humanity. Ultimately, we perceive God in the sacraments: "Through baptism, the believer is now bound to Christ and is identified as Christian,"²⁹ and "in the Eucharist... we participate in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection." All this is possible because "Christ's spirit lives in her [the Church]."³⁰ The believer attains this encounter spiritually in the sacraments until she or he receives God face to face. In all this, the human person is always at the center of God's plan.

Lam's "spiritual Christology" defines well Ratzinger's convictions. Nevertheless, his spiritual reading can easily end up a mere remembrance and acknowledgement of a stronger power, the Holy Spirit, who reconciles history and faith. His reading risks the fact that spiritual Christology requires something more practical than admitting loyalty to and faith in the Church's teachings. It is a discipleship that requires a physical along with a spiritual act that transforms humanity's life into a new creation compatible with God's active Word. We see this compatibility when we see that God is a present subject with whom we can build a real and sacramental relationship.

Our third scholar who responds to *Jesus of Nazareth* is Joseph Mueller, who shows that Ratzinger's trilogy intends to situate God again as the center of the world in Christ. To that end, he highlights and clarifies Ratzinger's theocentric portrait of Christ. Starting from the trilogy, Mueller summarizes Ratzinger's theocentric Christology in four consecutive points, which together highlight what the Son has achieved. First, he underlines Ratzinger's stress on Jesus' dialogue with the Father, his communion with him that results in life. Then, Mueller highlights Ratzinger's understanding of Jesus' mission as one that leads humanity to the Father. Mueller can

²⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

thus describe Jesus as “a person of universal import.”³¹ In other words, Ratzinger’s Jesus is the one who brings God to humanity, and the one who brings humanity to God through the act of discipleship. Third, Mueller emphasizes God’s reign in society in Jesus. Ratzinger calls for a distinction between the worldly kingdom and the divine kingdom. The former follows an earthly power and glory and thus develops a rigid regime, while the latter underscores a “fundamentally apolitical”³² Christian faith that obeys God and thus develops and is worked out on love, peace, and social justice. Finally, Mueller accentuates Jesus’ gift that is life because “he gives us God.”³³ Henceforth, Christ becomes a “life-giving center of individual and social life.”³⁴ Mueller’s interpretation of Jesus’ dialogue, mission, reign, and life-giving in Ratzinger’s trilogy thus points to the union of three unseparated fields, a salvific Christology that leads both to a Christocentric anthropology and sociology.

To support his picture of a theocentric Christology, Mueller investigates how Ratzinger equates the Jesus of the gospels with the historical Jesus. According to Mueller, an appropriate reading of scripture conditions this equation. It depends not only on “historical critical standards,” but also upon a deeper anthropological-ecclesiological thought, where the trilogy ultimately directs the reader to build a friendship with Jesus based on a relation of love that guides his or her “intellect and will.”³⁵ That is to say, for Ratzinger, many examples throughout the history of the Church know Jesus through love. They “address us in life’s various circumstances and contexts.”³⁶ Mueller thus entitles Ratzinger’s Jesus, “the Christ of Christian tradition,”³⁷ whose resurrection and divine splendor make the exegetical arguments lose some interest. Rather, they help us “enter more fully

³¹ Joseph G. Mueller, “On the Christology of Jesus of Nazareth, Volume 1,” *Nova et Vetera* 15, no. 3 (2017): 765.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 768.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 771.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 772.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 774.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 775.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

into the ecclesial tradition of mutual love” amid people and God.³⁸ For Mueller, “perhaps the formula ‘traditional gospel portrait’ best summarizes the Pope’s approach.”³⁹ Ultimately, for Mueller, Ratzinger reads Jesus’ life starting from a scripture that shows the love of God and the possibility of building a friendship with him; in addition, this love continues throughout history in the men and women of faith who encounter Jesus. “Thus, a traditional gospel portrait of Jesus achieves its plausibility on the basis of an exercise of historical reason that avoids evanescing into the ahistorical, even as it breaks through the hypothetical into certainty.”⁴⁰

In the following chapters, we will see this paper’s propinquity with Mueller’s Christology of presence. However, we will complement his approach by developing more explicitly and systematically a theology of life that does not simply depend on Christ as a life-giving center, but more specifically, on Jesus’ own life in history.

Before developing that approach more fully, however, we must first note that Mueller raises a problem that Ratzinger has not mentioned. He consequently concludes that Ratzinger’s work is incomplete: “Benedict does not mention the fragility that characterizes the knowledge of Jesus’ gospel to which Christian tradition gives us access.”⁴¹ It takes two directions: First, a certain fragility accompanies the friendship of the people with God in Biblical history and also “characterizes the knowledge of the gospel Jesus to which Christian tradition gives us access.” Second, “our tradition-grounded knowledge of the gospel Jesus is fragile” in two other ways as well: “Tradition can forget to pass on some of what it receives.” And, tradition’s fragility is also rooted in its “dependence on the sacred scriptures themselves,” which for Mueller may not be

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 776.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 777.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 777.

always determined clearly by historical inquiry.⁴² He concludes, therefore: “How the certitude of our traditional friendship with Christ can abide when it is affected by fragilities like these is an important question that we should not expect a traditional gospel portrait of Jesus to resolve exhaustively.”⁴³

Mueller’s concern about the fragility raises a valid question that deserves an adequate response. In an effort to offer one, I will argue in what follows that scholars must not ignore the pneumatological element in Ratzinger’s thought, which goes alongside his Christological reading of scripture. This dimension provides a certain firmness to what for Mueller remains fragile. Referring to his general audience in 2009, Benedict writes: “The correct way to read the scriptures is to enter into dialogue with the Holy Spirit, in order to derive a light ‘for teaching for reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness’ (2 Tm 3: 16).” Fragility is ultimately overcome by the spiritual grace of “a living faith open to all and a witness to God’s love for everyone.”⁴⁴ In the third chapter, we will explore further this living faith as derived from the *exemplum* of Christ.

Mueller’s approach to Ratzinger’s trilogy ultimately concludes that a “traditional gospel portrait of Jesus” fills the gap between faith and history. In fact, a question of theological hermeneutics is at stake. How can the event of Jesus which happened at a specific time and place prevails until the present? The answer to this question, as Mueller sees it, is the faith of the Church that never ceases to declare God present today in the sacraments. No doubt that his response serves the argument of this paper on Jesus’ real and active Word in the world. However, Mueller’s critical statement mentioned above, the “traditional gospel portrait” of Jesus, does not divulge Ratzinger’s main objective in the trilogy. Ratzinger depends on a lively revelation that speaks here and now

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 778.

⁴⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, “General Audience of Saint Paul, Theological Vision of Pastoral Letters,” January 28, 2009, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090128.html.

with humanity, according to a personal encounter with the Word. He does not only concentrate on the knowledge of a traditional context that recognizes the history of an existing friendship with God.

Hans Boersma is our fourth scholar who reflects on *Jesus of Nazareth*. He approaches Ratzinger's purpose when he explains Ratzinger's understanding of time as more than "merely chronological succession of historically distinct moments."⁴⁵ For Ratzinger in Boersma's words, the present time "is taken up into the hour of Jesus'," which indicates the "reality of faith," in the setting of sacramental presence.⁴⁶ This is basically similar to Mueller's interpretation of sacraments. Nevertheless, Boersma misconstrues Ratzinger's relationship of faith with his political vision.

Boersma insists that other important realities must be colored by Ratzinger's sacramental viewpoint. Specifically, seeing the connection of history and faith in a sacramental perspective bestows a new meaning on two concepts: truth and power. First, Boersma explains Ratzinger's understanding of truth as related also to the sacraments. "Human beings do not have a full grasp of the reality." God alone is the truth, and the truth of humanity is true "only 'to the extent that it reflects God'." Any truth in the world is thus also related to the sacraments "of which the eternal Word is the mysterious reality itself."⁴⁷ Sharing in God's truth, in turn, is the only means that leads to the good use of power, not a worldly power, but the power of God, in which the meaning of the cross prevails. For these reasons, Boersma suggests, Ratzinger advocates a "strict separation between politics and faith."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hans Boersma, "History and Faith in Pope Benedict's Jesus of Nazareth," *Nova et Vetera* 10, no. 4 (September 2012): 988.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 989.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 990.

These considerations ultimately support one of Boersma's primary criticisms of Ratzinger's account: If faith does not bear on political realities, then "politics would go its own way, apart from considerations of faith."⁴⁹ Boersma also identifies what he takes to be a contradiction in Ratzinger's thought where "such a separation does not seem to do justice to the intimate relationship between history and faith, something which Pope Benedict himself rightly advocates."⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Boersma's reproaches neglect the fundamentals of God's world that Ratzinger develops in his trilogy. Looking from a perspective of a theology of life, Ratzinger wants to transform a political regime to a Christ-like regime, which will then support the relationship of faith and history in the world.

The fifth scholar within the reception of *Jesus of Nazareth* is Joseph Koterski, who argues that Ratzinger's "canonical exegesis" of scripture relies on an ancient tradition in reading the Bible, the so-called fourfold sense. The literal sense, along with the spiritual sense that comprises three categories (the typological sense, the moral sense, and the anagogical sense) form the four senses of this approach. Koterski shows how typology holds the fulfillment of all scripture in Jesus Christ, the moral presents the totality of God's will to humanity, and the anagogic sense gives us a glimpse of what lies beyond the world in the horizon of eternity.⁵¹ Ratzinger has indeed introduced the fourfold sense in his first volume's forward, saying: "There are dimensions of the Word that the old doctrine of the fourfold sense of scripture pinpointed with remarkable accuracy. The four senses of scripture are not individual meanings arrayed side by side, but dimensions of the one Word that reaches beyond the moment" (I, xx).⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Joseph W. Koterski, "On the Fourfold Sense of Scripture in Jesus of Nazareth, Volume 1," *Nova et Vetera* 15, no. 3 (August 4, 2017): 753, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2017.0039>.

⁵² Not unexpectedly, some theologians' responses were directly issued after publishing *Jesus of Nazareth* and deal with Ratzinger's understanding of canonical exegesis, even if they do not elaborate widely this subject. The work of Thomas Weinandy, for example, "The Son's Filial Relationship to the Father: Jesus as the New Moses," applies this

Koterski wants to focus on the purpose that underlines and motivates canonical approach. He wishes to avoid “eisegesis,” that is to say, seeing in the Bible “what one wants to see,” rather than what the Word itself wants to show us.⁵³ In fact, Ratzinger, for Koterski, does maintain the importance of the literal meaning, but not as an absolute way to read the scripture. Rather, Ratzinger sees a compatibility between the limitedness of the historical critical method and the non-limitedness of the spiritual reading. To put it differently, Koterski finds a pneumatological reading alongside the Christological one, where “the Holy Spirit often teaches by image, symbol, and story, not just by logically correlated propositions.”⁵⁴ This pneumatology brings him closer to Lam’s spiritual Christology. Koterski also notices that typology dominates over the other senses in the trilogy. Jesus is thus “the new Moses, the new Adam, the new Isaac, the new Jacob, and the new David...”⁵⁵ He argues that Ratzinger’s purpose in a sense, is to bring forward this fulfillment in Christ, which then opens widely the gates to the other senses. At the same time, Ratzinger’s emphasis on typology as the ground of other senses translates “his desire to understand morality not as an autonomous natural science, but as intrinsic to a loving relationship in faith and hope with God and humanity.”⁵⁶ In addition, time, for Koterski, becomes a unity of all past and present events in one. Christ himself, who is the Word of God, who is present from the beginning of creation, is the one who performs this unity, or better, assures tradition’s continuity, so that no leap is necessary. Nevertheless, it is not simply sufficient to rely on the “canonical exegesis” in order to identify Ratzinger’s methodology of reading scripture. Beyond this method, Ratzinger reaches

method to interpret the figure of Jesus as the New Moses, concluding: “As Moses helped the Israelites to enter into the presence of God, so Jesus, as the new Moses, not only aids us in knowing the Father but it is actually in union with him, so that humankind is able to enter into the heavenly Holy of Holies, and so, in him, to see the Father face-to-face. Thomas G (Thomas Gerard) Weinandy, “The Son’s Filial Relationship to the Father: Jesus as the New Moses,” *Nova et Vetera* 11, no. 1 (2013): 263.

⁵³ Koterski, “On the Fourfold Sense of Scripture in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Volume 1,” 747.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 749.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 752.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 758.

the point where the relationship of all the senses working together is important as much as it serves humanity's encounter with the living God.

As demonstrated, although these contributions have been made by the scholars of Ratzinger regarding the three-volume book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, as of yet, there has not been a consideration regarding the pivotal interpretive key of a theology of life. This key completes Ratzinger's Christological portrait of a living God in time who sanctifies the world, including humanity, in his active presence. His example generates a Word-like humanity and thus, a city of God in time.

§3. Ratzinger's Concern: Church, Scripture, and God's Active Word

The authors discussed briefly above offer a wide-ranging set of contributions to the analysis of the trilogy, *Jesus of Nazareth*. In this thesis, a global view that I claim shows how these five perspectives together are necessary to situate the themes of *Jesus of Nazareth* within the broader ambit of Ratzinger's general theological commitments. For this task, I will make special use Tracey Rowland's work on Ratzinger's theology.⁵⁷ Rowland's interpretation helps us to decipher Ratzinger's way of reading *Jesus of Nazareth*. She suggests that he offers a correct application of Vatican II's *aggiornamento* in terms of the Christological dimension of living faith. Despite Rowland's somewhat incomplete portrait of Ratzinger's understanding of revelation, her conciliar approach to the trilogy still supports the view that Ratzinger's theological claims are closely tied to the present. We will develop in this section Ratzinger's *aggiornamento* in Rowland's *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*. After surveying her argument, we will see what is still missing.

⁵⁷ Tracey Rowland holds two doctorates in theology, one from the Divinity School of Cambridge University (the civil PhD) and one from the John Paul II Institute at the Pontifical Lateran University (the pontifical STD) in addition to degrees in law and philosophy. She began her studies at the University of Queensland where she completed her honors degree under the supervision of the Czech political theorist Vendulka Kubalkova.

Rowland concentrates on Pope Benedict's understanding of the present world and its relationship with the Church. Given that Vatican II, today, forms the heart of ecclesiology, many of her references depend on its content. For that reason, one of her contributions to Ratzinger's theology concentrates on his reading of the Vatican II documents that mostly advocate *aggiornamento* in the Church. The key to Ratzinger's theology is Christ, and thus his question is how to relate the world to Christ in the Church of our times. In other words, how we understand *aggiornamento* in the Church without dissolving Christology into a changeable world through excessive adaptation. Rowland serves the approach I am taking on this paper insofar as I wish to highlight the role of active Word in the trilogy, which works in today's world in Christ, and continues to affect the people of God. I am especially interested in the Church-world relationship and the role of faith in a present God who is always working through his Word as the key to understanding that relationship.

Rowland's book highlights Ratzinger's faith from a conciliar standpoint. Her contribution examines his contemporary views of modernity, the Church, and Christ. For Rowland, Ratzinger urges renewal in the Church according to a "twofold intention": first, a point of reference is the contemporary human being – the anthropological approach. Second, the measure of this renewal depends on Christ – Christological approach.⁵⁸

In view of this Anthropological-Christological renewal, Rowland refers to the Pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, and draws our attention to the problems that Ratzinger detects there. In particular, she sees a large distance between three relationships that eventually affect the possibility of *aggiornamento*: philosophy and theology, the human person and the Church, and

⁵⁸ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31.

individual's conscience and magisterial teaching of the Church.⁵⁹ Distancing these elements from one another negatively affects the belief in God's presence in the present world. Rowland's point is that faith and the problems she detects require humanity's considerable vigilance. Again, today's men and women are confronted with the gap between the autonomy of the world according to a reasonable context on one side, and faith in a present God in the Church, which is in turn in the world, on the other side. This gap sets up a chasm between a self-centered world and a Christ-centered Church in the world. It affects the ultimate objective of God's revelation, to build a universal encounter with humanity out of love.

For Rowland, Ratzinger's criticism of *Gaudium et spes* underscores a major problem in the present. Its anthropological analysis relates the person to the context of the Old Testament, without considering the Incarnation of the Son as the source of a "Christocentric anthropology" that achieves a humanity in the image of Christ in the world.⁶⁰ As a result, The Pastoral Constitution's approach reinforces the idea of a rational human being who depends on a general appreciation of goodness as a merely philosophical notion. This raises the question: how can faith in an active Word that continues its work in believers today be credible in a rational world? And also, can a logical mind that depends on a worldly rationalism find God? In response to this approach, Rowland points to Ratzinger's underlining of paragraph 22 of the constitution: "the human person only understands his or her identity to the extent that he or she is open to a relationship with Christ."⁶¹ Ratzinger wishes to defend humanity from a closed secularity, highlights some of the modern world's values that do not oppose the message and the person of Christ, and brings the results of reason closer to God's essential presence.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 35,39.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 32.

In simpler words, Ratzinger, according to Rowland, strives to achieve a “Trinitarian anthropology of the New Testament,” rather than just an awareness of humanity in the image of God.⁶² Rowland highlights an important topic that Ratzinger always considers, humanity and its relationship with the Church and Christ. She also stresses the significance of a society that builds itself on Christ.

Rowland ultimately relates the Christocentric anthropology, that is fundamentally Trinitarian, to tradition, which stands, for Ratzinger, as a “precondition for our humanity.”⁶³ A person can thus become aware of the presence of God, because ““a kind of memory, of recollection of God, is, as it were, etched in man, though it needs to be awakened’.”⁶⁴ The tradition of the Church, holding God’s revelation within it, awakens humanity, and enables it to know God. Rowland’s argument thus supports Mueller’s traditional gospel portrait of Jesus. *Aggiornamento* does not contradict the history of the Church but forms a fundamental step towards a real understanding of humanity.

Nevertheless, Rowland does not focus extensively on *Jesus of Nazareth* in her book *Ratzinger’s Faith*. She published her book only one year after the trilogy’s first volume was issued. But, she does stress the tradition of the Church, as mentioned above, and also scripture. Both constitute the revelation of God and make his encounter accessible. In fact, the Word without tradition is a paralyzed Word, inactive, and remains far from our present. Rowland mentions *Jesus of Nazareth* only once, to underline the way Ratzinger reads the scripture. Referring to *Dei verbum*, and emphasizing, like Koterski, a suitable reading that goes beyond the historical critical method, she highlights two main streams: First, “the unity of the whole of scripture, taking into account the

⁶² Ibid., p. 33.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith.” Second, a pneumatological reading that depends on “the teacher of the ‘spouse of the incarnate Word’.”⁶⁵ However, she does not discuss revelation the same way I see it in the trilogy. Rowland’s tradition, scripture, and pneumatology need one more explicit fundamental ground that completes Ratzinger’s Christological vision. I believe her interpretation stays incomplete if she does not consider Ratzinger’s insights on revelation as a real historic encounter with the living God. Today, it is not enough to identify the problem that Rowland well illustrates. Most importantly, we have to solve it by entering a new realm, where the knowledgeable reason of humanity joins the present God who shows his reasonable truth in time. The quite tangible experience of the Word, that we will discuss in the following chapter, provides a reasonable faith in God’s living nature.

It is ultimately my contention that, despite the excellent work of De Gaál, Lam, Mueller, Boersma, Koterski, Rowland, and many other scholars on *Jesus of Nazareth*, a gap has been left in our understanding. It is in my view the core of what Ratzinger is arguing for throughout his trilogy. On the basis of all his work, in fact, and even from the beginning of his academic career, especially in his *Habilitationsschrift* on Bonaventure’s concept of revelation and salvation history, Ratzinger shows a special interest in the theme of revelation. More specifically, he stresses a historical revelation that depends on the *actio* of God against a neo-scholasticism that relates revelation only to the intellectual realm. Additionally, in his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger comments: “the *prae* of God’s action means, ultimately, that *actio* is antecedent to *verbum*, reality to the tidings of it.”⁶⁶ He also reiterates this idea in his *Memoires* when he explains:

⁶⁵ Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 58.

⁶⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stone for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 186.

“Revelation now appeared no longer simply as a communication of truths to the intellect but as a historical action of God in which truth becomes gradually unveiled.”⁶⁷ It appears that Ratzinger’s motivation on this theme is the fruit of his conciliar thought that notices the second passage of *Dei verbum*: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity.”⁶⁸

All the insights previously mentioned miss the fundamental idea of the trilogy: a theology of life. In a world where the autonomy of the world takes the major consideration, Ratzinger tells humanity that God is alive, that he always works through his active Word that has taken on flesh among us in the fullness of time, and that he continues to reveal his active presence in history through the same living Word which encounters us in time.

In this paper, I want to study an implicit theology of life through the relation of revelation and action. Recognizing that the trilogy is considered to be the summit of his Christological work, I believe that Ratzinger’s reading of scripture, in *Jesus of Nazareth*, depends on an essential theology that takes into consideration this relation: “... the gospel is not just informative speech, but performative speech” (I, 47). The following study thus investigates how Ratzinger develops the revelation of God’s action in Christ in *Jesus of Nazareth*, because I want to show his contribution to the authenticity, sacramentality, and continuity of God’s presence in our midst, in order to help readers understand the importance of the form Jesus takes throughout history, so that through this form, humanity may become the action of God in the world.

⁶⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 104.

⁶⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum* (Vatican, 1965) sec.2.

Chapter Two

Jesus of Nazareth: God's Enduring Presence

§4. A Perfect Revelation: Historical and Sacramental

Despite the fact that many scholars have exhaustively interpreted the theology of Joseph Ratzinger in his *Jesus of Nazareth*, my work consists in drawing out a fundamental composition of his trilogy from a previously undiscovered Christological perspective. Whoever reads the trilogy notices Ratzinger's contribution to the essential presence of God in the world. Until now, however, no one has exposed a full systematic elaboration of Christ's active presence. In this chapter, I intend to elaborate this exposition. It plays a significant role in gathering and connecting all of his theology of presence within a structured scheme. Ratzinger's Christological system of presence will exhibit his understanding of the perfect manifestation of Christ that comprises a historical and sacramental revelation. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger first shows an authentic presence built on a reasonable argument that supports a historical revelation. He then determines a Eucharistic and eschatological presence that bears the continuity of Jesus' presence in order to support a sacramental revelation. God's perfect revelation in Jesus extends in both directions, from the time of creation, up until the end of times. Beneath this systematic Christology of presence lies an implicit theology. If we carefully trace the movement of the Word in Ratzinger's trilogy, within the system that I will develop below, we will then recognize his objective. Ratzinger's concentration on the dynamic Word historically and sacramentally brings forth a theology of life that continually personifies the Word. Our encounter with Jesus of Nazareth is an authentic historical encounter with the living God.

Before attempting to enter the realm of God's active presence in Jesus, in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger confesses his complete trust in scripture as the ultimate truth of God's revelation. It is the source of all other truths which consequently proceed from this same Word. "I trust the gospels" (I, xxi) ... and continues: "I believe that this Jesus – the Jesus of the gospels – is an historically plausible and convincing figure (I, xxii)."⁶⁹ Obviously, in order to read the gospel, Ratzinger's point of departure is faith.⁷⁰ Aside from confessing his trust, Ratzinger also proclaims that the gospel is not merely a moral teaching in which God communicates with us. It is also an authentic and continuous presence that affects history and invites humanity to enter the depth of this presence.⁷¹ Ratzinger's theological point of departure point alludes to the hermeneutic relationship of time and presence. How can the Word of faith communicate with humanity today?

⁶⁹ In his article, "The Challenge of Jesus of Nazareth For Theologians," Roch Kereszty supports Ratzinger's belief in "the historically plausible and convincing figure" of Jesus. He defends Ratzinger's work by arguing the fact that many scholars interpret Jesus "as a unique prophet or a charismatic healer, a moral teacher or apocalyptic dreamer," thus, they situate him in an ideal world that they imagine." For that reason, Ratzinger wants to trust the gospel as the story of a real historical Jesus. Roch Kereszty, "The Challenge of Jesus of Nazareth for Theologians," 2007, 459, <https://www.scribd.com/document/314652120/Challenge-of-Jesus-for-Theologians>. Moreover, Ratzinger is convinced of two principles that accompany theological research and assert the faithful attitude of a theologian. He mentions them in a lecture delivered during the "Journées Liturgiques de Fontgombault" in 2001. He states: "For the Catholic Christian, two lines of essential hermeneutic orientation assert themselves. The first: we trust scripture and we base ourselves on scripture, not on hypothetical reconstructions which go behind it and, according to their own taste, reconstruct a history in which the presumptuous idea of our knowing what can or cannot be attributed to Jesus plays a key role." Then he states the second principle: "The second is that we read scripture in the living community of the Church, and therefore on the basis of the fundamental decisions thanks to which it has become historically efficacious, namely, those which laid the foundations of the Church." This paper will show these two principles along the flow of the argument. John F. Thornton and Suzan B. Varenne, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2008), 145.

⁷⁰ Here, Ratzinger faces many critiques of this departure that affects the modern reading of the historical critical method. Richard Hays, a professor of New Testament at the Divinity School, Duke University, argues: "He wants to 'take this conviction of faith as our starting point for reading the texts with the help of historical methodology' (p. xxiii). But many historical critics would protest that such a starting point gravely compromises historical methodology. The total portrait of Jesus that Ratzinger draws stands in serious tension with the findings of historical criticism as conventionally practiced.... How he proposes to re-conceive the practice of historical criticism to allow for the historical claims he wants to make." Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison, eds., *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth: Christ, Scripture and the Church*, Veritas Series (London: SCM Press, 2009), 114–15.

⁷¹ In her book, *Ratzinger's Faith*, Rowland recalls Ratzinger's question at the cathedral of Munster in his early academic years: "What actually is the real substance of Christianity that goes beyond mere moralism?" Rowland then quotes Ratzinger's answer where "it is not life according to the natural law or to ethics that saves and fulfils us: more radically, it involves a relationship of Communion with the Person of Jesus Christ." Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 66.

His reference to a Jewish rabbi stresses the sacred essence of the Word in both Testaments as God's continuous revelation. This reference to a rabbi's dialogue with God clearly shows how the written Word of scripture transforms present reality. Ratzinger states: "The rabbi's dialogue with Jesus shows that faith in the Word of God in the Holy scriptures creates a contemporaneous bond across the ages. Setting out from scripture, the rabbi can enter into the today of Jesus, just as Jesus, setting out from scripture, can enter into our today" (I, 104). As such, the reciprocal "setting out" is an active work that both Christ and the faithful exercise, so that humanity can live the real life that finds its truthfulness in living with God, *Hic et Nunc*.⁷² Ratzinger's faith in the Word accompanies this theological structure to its fulfilment in the encounter with God. Yet, we cannot understand the way to attain this "setting out," which will eventually reveal the reciprocal life of God with humanity, without understanding Ratzinger's full, systematic elaboration of Christ's presence in *Jesus of Nazareth*. This system shows the essence of the perfect revelation that embraces the totality and reaches the present of all times.

⁷² I believe that Ratzinger's proposition here is quite logical. For him, reading scripture demands, before any historical setting, faith in the Incarnation of the Son; Christian faith precedes history. Nevertheless, I will not be able to go forward now in this argument that many historical critical scholars already argued against. But my point is that Neusner, as a Jewish rabbi, does not have faith in the Word, Jesus, and the question that one asks based on Ratzinger's argument: How can the rabbi, who is not a Christian believer, connect his time with that of Jesus? Can an imaginative reading of the gospel, by members of other religions, link the reader to Christ? What is then the relation of Christian faith and the appropriate reading of the gospel that Ratzinger wants to underline?

Part One: The Authentic Presence of God⁷³

It is clear that Ratzinger's concern is intrinsically related to the question of God today. He is arguing for the possibility of a real encounter. We must now investigate the argument that Jesus' action in history reveals an authentic presence. In my view, this is the crucial point that Ratzinger wants to defend in order to remind the world of the true human perspective of God's revelation in Jesus, and at the same time, the true sacramental revelation that makes the presence of Christ a permanent reality.⁷⁴ Ratzinger's interpretation of the reality of God demonstrates our theology of life. The authentic historical encounter with a living God demands an authentic presence. We will thus see that, first of all, Ratzinger underscores the reality of God. It is on this basis that he then points to a Christological presence that proceeds from the Word and fulfils it: God's own Incarnation in the Word. Our consideration of this argument will thus examine several themes: the scriptural context and tangibility of God, the intelligibility of his presence, the living character of the Word, and the effects of God's presence.

⁷³ I find it important to explain my usage of the term "authentic presence." While I was writing my thesis, I used the term "real presence," but because this term can be confusing in Western theology I am explaining what I mean by it here. In Western thought it is understood exclusively as a designation of the presence of God which occurs only in the Eucharist. Instead of "real presence" I replaced it with the term "authentic presence" in order to not confuse the meaning of this term. Personally, I prefer the formal usage, "real," because I do not think any word can replace its exact meaning. This is especially true in light of my Eastern background where the term "real presence" is not used exclusively to refer to the Eucharist. "Real presence" means God's true presence in all his creatures. In the East we use the term "Divine presence" to refer to the Eucharist. The use of the term "Real presence" outside of the Sacrament does not dissolve the unique nature of God's presence in the Eucharist, but rather it indicates a real divine presence that is everywhere. In the future we can develop more on this subject within the broad realm of Ratzinger's writings. He may have had a more Eastern understanding of the "real presence." This is possible given that it is only used once, according to what I know, in the trilogy in volume II. There it is not used to reference the Eucharist: "Within his absence [referring to Jesus], is there nonetheless at the same time a real presence?" (II, 280).

⁷⁴ Ratzinger's concern is well defined in Kereszty's article where he specifies the scholars of the middle of the twentieth century who "did not set out to write a biography of Jesus, since they were convinced of its impossibility, yet they still attempted to draw a portrayal of Jesus that would include some events of his life, some of his teachings, and some features of his personality. Soon, with the green light given by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943, Catholic exegetes eagerly joined this enterprise. Most of them, however, acknowledged that their portrait of Jesus could not be identical with the real Jesus as he lived and acted in history, but could only be a mental construct based on a fragment of Jesus' reality." Kereszty, "The Challenge of Jesus of Nazareth for Theologians," 458–59. Ratzinger eagerly wants to situate the reality of God's action in history that demands a real person whose actions reveal the concrete work of God in our midst.

§5. *The Scriptural Context and Tangibility of God*

In order to understand the strategy of Ratzinger's theological structure, which first supports a historical revelation, we need to situate his thought upon a solid ground. The scriptural context and tangibility of Jesus' presence matters, since his salvific effects cannot be real and continuous without these two elements. Thus, Ratzinger builds upon them his basic argument about presence. At the same time, the manifestation of the scriptural Word gives evidence to my claim about the theology of life in the trilogy. The Word without a form remains simply a word about life. In order to narrate the life of the Word, the Word has to prove its performative abilities, coexisting with the words of life. In this context, Ratzinger considers that Jesus "acts and lives within the Word of God" (II, 5). Accordingly, Jesus does not accept a different setting other than this Word because he obeys "the mission received from the Father" (II, 5). Hence, Ratzinger's reflection alludes to Jesus' faithfulness to the Word of God, and at the same time, assures the unity of both Testaments, where the Old promises "are fulfilled in his person" and Jesus' person speaks of the Old Testament (II, 5).⁷⁵ For this reason, Ratzinger highlights two phrases: "the waiting Word and the recognition of its Owner" (III, 17). Identifying Ratzinger's "Owner" makes it possible to interpret scripture with respect to the harmony of God's Word and work. Ratzinger believes that the Old Testament's Word remains an important source because it prepares the authentic presence of the Owner. Here, we can clearly see a Christocentric vision which depends on typology and unites the two covenants. His exegesis stays "faithful to the original words of scripture" in order to recognize Jesus' true

⁷⁵ One of the many important subjects that Kereszty underlines in the trilogy whether Jesus' message holds a Paterological perspective, Christology perspective, or both. Here, he refers to Harnack's statement: "Jesus' message is about the Father, not about the Son." Then, Kereszty states: "Benedict shows that "Jesus is only able to speak about the Father in the way he does because he is the Son, because of his filial communion with the Father. The Christological dimension . . . is present in everything Jesus says and does." He continues: "In a profound way, then, the message and activity of Jesus is theocentric and, for that reason, Christocentric. God is present and active *because* Jesus is present and active." Kereszty, "The Challenge of Jesus of Nazareth for Theologians," 466. Of course, this clearly shows the communion of both perspectives, Paterology and Christology, and the fact that God the Father cannot be known or present except through the real and physical presence of Jesus.

presence (I, 18). At this point, one may think that Ratzinger limits Jesus; but generally speaking, he opens up an infinity of meaning, for the Word of God “abides forever.”⁷⁶ In short, the authentic presence of the Logos always exists in company with the Word of God itself. The Logos is the complete Word of God. Ratzinger depends on the unity of the person and Word in order to build a *substratum* of the authentic presence within his theological scheme.

The presence of the Word demands a tangible subject, a concrete Logos. This positively affects our reception of Ratzinger’s systematic Christology, which touches humanity in an existential way and generates practical effects in the human person. Ratzinger claims that this tangibility, which finds its ultimate meaning in the person of Christ, has been always a problem for those who consider God as being known only through intelligible, theoretical knowledge. Such an argument responds to those who deny that God interferes with matter, and consequently pretend the Incarnation is a myth unrelated to the reality of God. If God is God, he is Lord of everything: “If God does not also have power over matter, then he simply is not God” (III, 57). The revelation of God is his true presence, not only as a verbal revelation, but also as an active and dynamic manifestation. Actually, the unity between the words and the deeds of Christ accompanies Ratzinger throughout the trilogy. Revelation cannot be understood if it is only a scriptural Word. It must also and first be a living Word. While these dimensions are inseparable and complete each other, I will concentrate mostly on the second point, the interpretation of God’s presence as an event. It is here we find clearly illustrated the authentic and personal presence of God among his people in history. So, Ratzinger points to an atheoretical Christianity that opens widely the door for an encounter with God. When Christ is tangible, and he is one with the Word, then humanity is able to assimilate in its limited nature God’s infinite attributes which, despite their absolute state,

⁷⁶ Ratzinger refers to this verse of Saint Peter’s epistle at the very beginning of his *Verbum Domini*, the Apostolic Exhortation that shapes his understanding on the “Word of God.”

can approach us. Here we see an authentic and intimate Christology that depends on the life of God in time and reinforces the historicity of revelation as the basis of Ratzinger's theology.

§6. Intelligibility of God's Authentic Presence

Let us continue with Ratzinger's systematic elaboration on Christ's presence. It requires an intelligible justification for the credibility of an authentic presence that supports an historical revelation. How does he argue for the intelligibility of God's personal presence as the fulfilment of his Word throughout salvation history? I suspect that, for him, intelligibility takes one direction: the completion of all the events of salvation history, on one side, with the event of Christ on the other. Based on this intelligibility, and in order to strengthen it, Ratzinger indirectly reflects upon three modes of presence that give concreteness to the Word in a specific context: The scriptural presence, the ecclesial presence, and the reasonable presence. These modes contribute to the trilogy's theology of life. They situate the event of Christ in the frame of an existential realm combining faith and reason. When God is present in scripture, Church, and reason, he evidentially forms a part of humanity's life. His historical involvement includes his active movement in time, and thus his life. The fulfilled Word of God forms the subject of each of these modes of presence. Ratzinger situates the whole, including the Church and the entire world as part of God's work, in the Son.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Here, within this whole that Ratzinger argues for, an important problem arises, which we will elaborate in the next chapter. The problem in his argument is that he denies, in one way or another, the possibility of a ray of truth in other religions, because for him, the entire world enters into God's intelligible presence in the only Son of God. The thing at stake here is the way to communicate with the other. If Ratzinger's truth is the ultimate truth that the believer cannot deny, and God's presence cannot be manifested except in his Son, the question that we can ask is: is there a way to tell the truth? Or, is there a better framework within which to declare a specific belief? Also, how can we respect differences and at the same time respect the truth? Undoubtedly, Ratzinger's Christology is still problematic when confronted with different beliefs and dissimilar principles of intelligibility.

First, we will elaborate the scriptural presence. Here, the spiral form of reading that I mentioned in §1 begins to emerge. Despite Ratzinger's explanation of the Word and its "Owner" in §4, we will see him continuously "rotating" around this Word. The spiral mode of reading scripture originates from the Word of God, moving farther away as it rotates around the Word, until it reaches the encounter. In this fashion, Ratzinger takes part in the exodus that reaches the peripheries, or interpretations, of the Word. At the same time, he will prepare the reader for his return in the stability of the ever-present God in the same Word.

Ratzinger emphasizes a joint "Word of God and event [that] are deeply interwoven" (II, 202). The linkage which connects Word and event bears witness to the reality of God, the Incarnate Word. Ratzinger's main question in this setting can be formulated as follows: Is Jesus of Nazareth really the true God, the God of Israel? To answer this question, Ratzinger seeks to show that the figure of Jesus is harmonious with the old covenant. Combining the New and Old Testaments, the figure of the Son who is present among his people attains credibility.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Ratzinger strives to show that the Incarnation "unlocked the meaning" of the Word and vice versa (II, 202). Actually, throughout the trilogy he speaks of a "reciprocal relationship between the interpreting Word of God and the interpreting history" (III, 17). Scripture gives God to history, and history gives evidence to the true Word of God because it "unlock(s) the Word of God and manifest(s) the reality hidden" (III, 17). Ratzinger deals with the authentic presence of God on the basis of old signs intelligible in the events of Jesus' presence in the world. Understanding the Word thus becomes possible when we realize its completion in time.⁷⁹ History does not contradict the plan of

⁷⁸ In his *Verbum Domini*, Ratzinger states the role of typology that attains credibility: Typology "discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his Incarnate Son." Pope Benedict XVI, "Verbum Domini: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," September 30, 2010, 41, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html.

⁷⁹ Here, I think that Henry-Jerome Gagey's critique best describes two main points that face Jesus of Nazareth's reading: "there is a double risk for the Pope's essay: either to be welcomed with delight in a sort of fundamentalist

salvation because it is the territory where God attains his plan. Therefore, Ratzinger supports a historical Christology that, joined with scripture, renews creation. The historical world becomes in Jesus, a city of God.

In order to understand this better, let us notice how Ratzinger highlights two significant characteristics of the two Testaments: reality and signs. By signs, Ratzinger places Jesus in the context of all salvation history, as present from the first day of creation up until today, in the heart of the faithful. As a consequence, Jesus is the reality of all the Old Testament signs. But Ratzinger also considers him the “true beginning,” who journeys through history until the present (III, 11). This beginning “has come to us.” The objective of the journey is evidently anthropological, and always in history: the coming of Christ by signs and then in reality opens a “new manner of human existence” which we will clarify later (III, 11). Simply put, when the Word actively manifests itself in the world, in the person of Jesus, we realize the divine initiative. God invites us to be his children, the “children of God” (III, 11).⁸⁰ The second creation comes through the New Adam. As the beginning, Jesus unites all God’s salvation history in one person. The Word of the New Testament in Person firmly stands parallel to the creative Word of God in the Old Testament: “Let there be... and there was” (Gen 1). Ratzinger’s trilogy builds a new creation in Jesus of Nazareth,

fashion by some grateful readers or, conversely, to be fiercely rejected for exactly the same reason by scholars inclined to ridicule it as a sort of naïve Diatessaron.” Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison, *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth: Christ, Scripture and the Church*, 20. Of course, Gagey opens the door of the historical critical thinking, and underlines one among many combats, whether we read the Bible as singular entities or as a whole.

⁸⁰ In the year 2005, after finishing few chapters of his first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, and before his pontificate, Ratzinger publishes *God’s Word* in Germany, and in this book, he specifies this scriptural presence, showing in his second point the anthropological perspective and the initiative of God, saying: “For we find that in scripture, the presence of Christ is more precisely described in two ways. In one hand it appears identical with faith... It also lies concealed, however, under the Pauline expression “body of Christ,” which is intended to express the way that the community of believers – the Church – represents Christ’s active presence in this world, a presence into which he is gathering mankind and through which he enables them to share in his mighty presence.” Pope Benedict XVI, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 57.

when his presence, which represents the unity of both Testaments, generates a new life, thus a new history.

Let us continue with Ratzinger's second mode of presence, Jesus' presence in the Church. Here again we see the close "harmony between Word and event." (II, 203). Here too, Ratzinger is spiraling around the Word. Ratzinger now claims that the independence of the New Testament from the Old is "unintelligible" (II, 203). What seems most unintelligible here is the paschal mystery, where the powerlessness and death of the Son do not seem to be features of God's sovereignty and eternity.⁸¹ Only by relating the new events to the old do they become comprehensible. Jesus is permanently present as the living God in the Eucharist. Earlier, we saw the reality of Jesus' scriptural presence. Ratzinger now proceeds to show us an ecclesial presence. It is distinct, but it also relies on his scriptural presence, which is active in faith (II, 203). An ecclesial understanding of the Church's credibility intimately depends on the "interplay of meaning and history" (II, 204). Liturgical events in the Church bear meaning in salvation history. They form a continuity in God's relation with humanity from the beginning of creation until now.⁸² Later we will reflect more on God's continuous presence throughout history. For the moment, let us observe that the ecclesial presence in real historic events, unveils the authenticity of the scriptural Word in the life of the Church, as centered on the Eucharist. In this sense, the liturgy of the Church becomes Jesus' incarnate foundation, the sign that is the living Word in the world.

Let us now examine Ratzinger's third mode of presence, the reasonable presence. Here, Ratzinger draws attention to the importance of remembrance, the work of "memory." It is not only a remembrance of the past, but rather, "an act that comes from the Logos and leads into it" (I, 231).

⁸¹ In *Verbum Domini*, Ratzinger claims: "as we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, the word itself is present and at work in our midst." *Verbum Domini*, 86.

⁸² In fact, reading Ratzinger as a whole brings forward the liturgical event that bears God's presence in every celebration we perform.

Ratzinger emphasizes God's initiative in this remembrance. God opens the way to intelligibility which loses its meaning if it does not proceed from the Logos himself. A similar perspective is evident in Ratzinger's early work, especially in his *Introduction to Christianity*. "The God who is Logos guarantees the intelligibility of the world, the intelligibility of our existence, the aptitude of reason to know God and even the reasonableness of God.... The world comes from reason, and this reason is a Person."⁸³ Henceforth, memory looks to the events of the New Testament and relates them to the Old Testament. This intelligibility leads us to realize: "Logos is present" (I, 231). For Ratzinger, the essence of the gospel is to show this "unity of Logos and act," so that when we remember the Logos in history and the act of the last events, we can reasonably realize Jesus of Nazareth as Jesus Christ, God's presence in the world (I, 232). Ratzinger also returns to the subject of memory in his discussion of the transfiguration, on its connection to the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jewish festivals "become remembrances of God's actions in history" (I, 307). Ratzinger ultimately concludes that "Moses and the prophets all speak of Jesus" (I, 308). The whole of Israel's history is a witness to God's presence in Jesus.⁸⁴

⁸³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, Communio Books (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 26. In the same book, Ratzinger shows the reason of this intelligibility that comes from God; it is his love: "The *Logos* of the whole world, the creative original thought, is at the same time love; in fact, this thought is creative because, as thought, it is love, and as love, it is thought. It becomes apparent that truth and love are originally identical; that where they are completely realized they are not two parallel or even opposing realities but one, the one and only absolute." (p. 148).

⁸⁴ Emery De Gaal's interpretation on this subject may also be very important to this paper, especially in that he speaks of the Eucharistic anamnesis that also serves the ecclesial presence I mentioned earlier. He states that for Ratzinger an "Augustinian-Bonaventurian background, where *memoria* (memory), *intellectus* (intellect), and *voluntas* (will) are faculties of the human soul that engage revelation. In fact, for Bonaventure these faculties correlate to the processions of the Trinity. The Eucharistic *anamnesis* (recollection) is the core of memory, giving history a meaning and direction it could never generate on its own. Thus, in the deepest sense human beings acquire a full identity that perdures in history but is not lost at the end of time. In this vein, Ratzinger sees history and historicity as necessary corollaries of one reality that is revelation." Emery de Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 97.

In modern history, of course most Jews do not relate their own history to Jesus. This is a problem that Ratzinger does not seek to answer in his books. How can Christian faith in the reasonable presence of God extend to the other who believes in only one part of that history?

Ratzinger's three modes of presence, scriptural, ecclesial, and reasonable, help us understand that in the end, he depends on humanity's experience of the Word that it receives. Only then can it witness the intelligibility of God's presence among his people. The fulfilment of God's Word is related to the manner we perceive it in history. So, anthropology plays an important role in Ratzinger's schematic theological work when it considers Jesus' authentic presence: in scripture, Eucharist, and memory. Humanity must agree upon the experience of reality for the latter to be authentic. The person is at stake, but always in relation to the living Christ who works in history. Ultimately, Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth* shows a kind of fear what we may call an anthropocentric world. His antidote is a Christocentric world, where Jesus' presence, perceived in scripture, Church, and reason, does not abandon humanity, but rather shares with it the divine goods that satisfy.⁸⁵ When we apprehend the theology of life beneath Ratzinger's understanding of presence, then, we realize that these modes mentioned above witness to God's life in time. The life of God in Jesus is an indispensable reality of the world. It appears concretely in various ways in order to give evidence to the complete meaning of history perceived in the person of Christ.

⁸⁵ This same thought accompanies Ratzinger in his encyclical letter, *Caritas in veritate* when he states: "In reality, institutions by themselves are not enough, because integral human development is primarily a vocation, and therefore it involves a free assumption of responsibility in solidarity on the part of everyone. Moreover, such development requires a transcendent vision of the person, it needs God: without him, development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to man, who falls into the trap of thinking he can bring about his own salvation and ends up promoting a dehumanized form of development. Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him or her and to mature in a love that 'becomes concern and care for the other.'" Pope Benedict XVI, "Caritas In Veritate," June 29, 2009, 11, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

The three modes of presence, which Ratzinger identifies in order to stress an authentic presence that supports historical revelation, bring to the fore the common point, the unity of events of the Old and New Testament. Specifically, his interpretation alludes to a prophetic revelation within the historical. The intelligibility of the latter depends on realizing the fulfilment of the former. In the following section, I will continue with Ratzinger's systematic elaboration on Christ's authentic presence underlining the living character of the Word.

§7. The Living Character of the Word

As has been mentioned, the reality of God's Word and Son as one revelation, brings forward the transcendence of God in the material realm and prepares the opportunity for an encounter with God that only happens when the person accepts the fulfilled Word in all its modes of presence. Beyond merely demonstrating the intelligibility of God's presence through the event of the last covenant in Jesus Christ, and beyond understanding the three modes of this presence, Ratzinger aims to show us implicitly the living Character of the Word within its presence, by indicating special features that characterize it. These features explain analytically the modes of presence that we discussed earlier and that support his theology: The Word is not only present, but also able to act. This is clearly a fundamental statement that Ratzinger uses in different forms throughout his trilogy in order to build his elaboration on an authentic presence that ultimately demands an active body. God's Word is a "word and deed" (I, 47). He thus develops three major descriptions of God's revelation as it is related to scripture: Word as fulfillment, Word as performance, and Word as action. We will explore these in more detail in order to elucidate Ratzinger's claim about the living character of the Word in its authentic Christological presence in history, which proceeds from the Word and fulfills it. In this section, Ratzinger again spirals

around the Word of God. Whoever reads the trilogy notices this repetition of ideas analogous to the Word. The recurrence of similar thoughts in his systematic Christology must be considered as a re-examining and at the same time re-emphasizing the authentic presence of God.

Ratzinger refers to the events of the New Testament as the “fulfilled Word” (III, 21). Initially, this designation is part of the intelligibility of the Word because it reveals the full meaning of the prophecies. The events “proceed from the Word” (III, 21), and become a true and vigorous realm of salvation. By calling the events the “fulfilled Word,” Ratzinger leads us to a new dimension of completeness. It goes beyond what pertains to meaning and reveals a new manner of presence as an observable Word. When we are able to observe the act of the Word rather than only hearing it, we glimpse its fuller meaning. Before reflecting further on that manifest character of the Word, let us deepen our grasp of the fulfilled Word.

The name of Jesus is not an ordinary name given to God’s Son, but a fulfilled name that supports the nature of his sacrificial act and emphasizes the need of his presence. The New Moses bears the complete name of God, foreshadowed in the past when he revealed the name Yahweh on Mount Sinai. “Concealed within the name of Jesus is the tetragrammaton, the mysterious name from Mount Horeb” (III, 30). We find that God’s complete name is not Jesus, it is Jesus the God who saves. What is the difference? Jesus, the name of God, does not mean a name for God; God does not have a name. “He is not speaking of some new word that he has communicated to men as a particularly felicitous designation for God. Rather, the revelation of the name is a new mode of God’s presence among men” (II, 91). The new mode of God’s presence is redemptive and sacramental. The Son reveals in his sacrifice the truth of a loving and present God. The name Jesus hides the true work of God that he accomplishes in Jesus who saves. His life, including his action, is a fulfilment of his name and a manifestation of God’s will in him. Accordingly, for Ratzinger,

the act of love by which Jesus saved the world in returning it back to the Father is the true meaning of his name: “The manifestation of the name is meant to ensure that ‘the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them’ (Jn 17:26)” (II, 92). “Jesus” is no longer a name that distinguishes him from other beings; rather, the name is the act of the Son who reveals through his work the will of the Trinity in the world.⁸⁶ “Jesus – the face of the ‘God who saves’.”⁸⁷ We thus see that the fulfilled Word of God shows the Word as more than merely an ordinary word, but as a living and acting Word that brings God into our reality. “God has now truly made himself accessible in his Incarnate Son. He has become a part of our world; he has, as it were, put himself into our hands.” (I, 144).

Until now, we have said Ratzinger’s fulfilled Word depends on the act, rather than just the meaning and contains an allusion to the observable Word. In this respect, Ratzinger aims to show that scripture is not only God’s Word, but also God’s performance. He thus differentiates between “informative speech and the performative speech” in order to stress the observable Word mentioned above. The Word and deed of God “appeared” (I, 47). This is the crucial point of Ratzinger’s work. If God is just a Word, he remains in the frame of interpretation and stops short of appearing.⁸⁸ If the Word in the Incarnation is both Word and deed, the living Word of God today

⁸⁶ In his book, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger says: “All chapter 17 [in the Gospel of John] – the so-called ‘high priestly prayer’, perhaps the heart of the whole gospel – centers around the idea of “Jesus as the revealer of the name of God” and thus assumes the position of the New Testament counter-part to the story of the burning bush... it becomes clear at the same time that he himself is the name, that is, the “invocability” of God. The idea of the name here enters a decisive new phase. The name is, no longer merely a word, but a person: Jesus himself.” Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 132–33.

⁸⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, “Urbi et Orbi Message,” December 25, 2008, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/urbi/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20081225_urbi.html.

⁸⁸ If we compare this idea with *Verbum Domini*, we notice a theology similar to which Pope leads his readers. In the exhortation, Ratzinger states: “The relationship between word and sacramental gesture is the liturgical expression of God’s activity in the history of salvation through the *performative character* of the word itself. In salvation history there is no separation between what God *says* and what he *does*. His word appears as alive and active (cf. *Heb* 4:12), as the Hebrew term *dabar* itself makes clear.” *Verbum Domini*, 53.

is also Word and deed, whose presence saves and transforms. Here, we find a vital argument in Ratzinger's systematic Christology against the sufficiency of historical-critical method, because alone, it thwarts God's desire to encounter humanity.

We can see that Ratzinger's argument throws open the door for the theological debate of the present: where is the life of God in today's world? For Ratzinger, the "real Lord" is intrinsically the "living God." The life of God, who appears among people, opens the way to his encounter. The disciples' preaching on the meaning of the kingdom of God is not only "words and instruction," but also "an event," the humanity of Jesus, "God's Word in person" (I, 173). Ratzinger thus gives a new meaning to the preaching of the apostles. It leads not only to a knowledge of Christ, but also to an encounter with him. Given these facts, "Announcing" the Word and "encountering" the announcement becomes the fundamental newness in God's world.⁸⁹ The performative speech of God that saves and transforms is in reality the personal appearance of God throughout the ages.

Based on the above discussion, Ratzinger draws our attention to the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus proclaims. He relates it not to a future but to a present life with God in the world. The Hebrew root of the word kingdom, "Malkut", Ratzinger notes, means *nomen actionis*, an "action Word." The core of Jesus' message is this: "God is acting now." It is the "living God" (I, 55).

In addition to his indirect response to the historical-critical method, Ratzinger's argument of *nomen actionis* is also a response to what he sees as the "secular-utopian idea of the kingdom" which aims to free the world from the presence of God, or "pushes him off the stage" (I, 55-56). The active Word, by contrast, is God's life and presence in the world. It shows that "God exists",

⁸⁹ *Jesus of Nazareth* (I, 173).

that he is “really God” who acts (I, 55), and his kingdom is not a merely theoretical kingdom, but a real presence on the stage of history in Jesus, the kingdom of God in person.

In summary, God’s movement towards his creatures is one in which his presence is always accompanied by his fulfilled Word, his performance, and his action. He is a living God who can really address the needs of humanity and encounter them historically through the Word, Jesus.

The real incarnational and redemptive phases of Ratzinger’s theology, which history examines actively and perceptibly, pave the way to a real encounter. The dynamism of these phases basically determines his claims about historical presence and prepare for the effects of God’s authentic presence.

§8. *The Effects of God’s Authentic Presence*

We have examined Ratzinger’s approach to the intelligibility of the Word and to its living character. “The creative logic behind all things entered the world” (III, 64). In order to complete this picture of the Word’s reality, however, Ratzinger underscores the change it performs in order to reach its fulfilment in human beings: its ultimate objective is to “save and transform” (I, 47). And in order to attain this goal, the Word has specific effects on place and time. “The eternal Logos became man: the context of place and time is part of this. Faith attaches itself to this concrete reality” (III, 64). When the coming of the Logos has an effect on place and time, this means that his appearance, thus his life, touches the whole world, including humanity. For Ratzinger, this touch has two major effects: the first is Christological, and the second soteriological. These effects form the objective of the Incarnation of God. They are major themes in Ratzinger’s systematic elaboration of Christ’s presence in *Jesus of Nazareth*. They show the change that the world faces. We will determine their consequences clearly in the next chapter. For Ratzinger, the sanctification

that makes the world a temple of God and a true means of salvation depends on this touch. This section will reveal the robust interconnection of Father, Son, Word, and humanity.

To elaborate upon the Christological effect, Ratzinger gives the reader a precise meaning of Christology. It is a “discourse concerning God’s presence in his own action and being” (I, 63). The action and being of God is Jesus Christ. Ratzinger sees the unity of the Son with the Father as God’s presence in Jesus, the only one who brings God to the world: “the relation between Father and Son is always present as the background of his message” (I, 63). Because God is one, all the words and works of the Son are those of the Father. Furthermore, Ratzinger points to a world that is also Christological: the human nature that God lived with, acting and being in Jesus, witnesses his tangible touch. This touch thus opens a new path and a new existence for humanity.

On this point, Ratzinger recalls Israel’s problem, after the Incarnation, concerning the personification of the temple and the Torah. His presence extended beyond Israel’s living community, because: “God’s word is actualized” (I, 111). For Ratzinger, this actualization means the beginning of a “new Israel,” and a new living community, Jesus’ disciples. The novelty in God’s new relation with the people is the clear and authentic Christological presence that he reveals in salvation history. Jesus’ presence changes the face of the world; his presence immediately makes him the “center of history” (I, 90).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Pablo Gadenz elaborates the new temple in *Jesus of Nazareth* and shows that Ratzinger relates the two aspects of the temple to the person of Jesus. He said: “On the one hand, the temple in Jerusalem was the “house of God,” the site of God’s presence among his people and the dwelling place of his name (2:17, 91). The Jewish people would therefore go up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to appear before the Lord, to see his face. On the other hand, the temple with its sacrificial system provided the Jewish people with the means of atonement (2:32, 46). The temple sacrifices enabled the people to receive forgiveness of sins and cleansing from certain ritual impurities. Accordingly, as we will see below, the image of Jesus the new temple indicates that Jesus is now the dwelling place of God and the means of atonement; he is both presence and sacrifice.” Pablo Gadenz, “Jesus the New Temple in the thought of Pope Benedict XVI,” *Nova et Vetera* 11, no. 1 (2013). In this conclusion, the effects of God’s touch through Jesus are clear and equal to the effects of the temple on Israel. If the temple was everything to Israel in life and after it, then, Jesus also is everything.

To illustrate further Jesus' Godly being and presence, Ratzinger refers to the beatitude of Mt. 5:11: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." He specifies three titles related to Jesus that give him the power to live within and beyond history and to be continuously present in the life of the righteous. He is their "reference, goal, and center" (I, 90). If the reference refers to a former event, and the goal to a coming event, then the center is the contemporaneous event of God with the righteous. Jesus thus becomes (for Ratzinger) the same God present in the past, present, and future. His worldly touch is a human touch that saves and transforms.

The second effect of God's concrete touch is soteriological; it completes the Christological dimension because it brings salvation. Ratzinger describes the work of Jesus as a complete soteriological work, which descends to us and ascends with us. The center of Jesus' presence is the person, the lost sheep, "to bring it back home" (I, 26). The repentant sinner is in between two journeys, from God to the world in creation, and from the world to God in salvation. The only means to go back to the Father is through the Son who "bears the lost sheep on his shoulders" (I, 26). Ratzinger believes that above all else, this is Jesus' mission; the motivation of his presence and action.

Ultimately, God's objective is related to the need of the human being. He wants our salvation. The anthropological perspective in the work of God thus plays an essential role.⁹¹ But Ratzinger is very careful that the "decision from us" confronts the work of God towards us (I, 63). The free will to accept God's presence, thus God's encounter, thus our ascension with him, is a

⁹¹ As he puts it in *Deus caritas est*. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. Pope Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est," December 25, 2005, 12, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.

free choice. We thus face again the challenge of history, where the presence of God is a reality, and the choice of good or evil is also a reality that requires a decision.

Ratzinger's emphasis on the authentic presence reaches one of his ultimate goals. Jesus joins history, embracing time and communities, in one place, all in him, in order to lead humanity with him to the Father. In fact, the manifestation of God that comprises the historical revelation is perfect because it brings the whole into one. The trilogy thus explains how the historical life of God in Christ opens history, also in Christ, to an everlasting life. The One, Jesus, is in communion with God, accordingly, the whole shares in the same communion.

In brief, this thorough discussion of God's authentic presence shows a historical revelation. Our discussion examined an intimate Christology that forms a theological ground to Ratzinger's Christology of presence. He observes a tangible Christ in unity with the scriptural Word. Second, we discussed scriptural, ecclesial, and reasonable modes of presence which reveal an intelligible presence of God among his people. The linkage between these modes is a prophetic revelation that fulfills the old events. Third, we noticed Ratzinger's living character of the Word, Jesus who lives through his fulfilled, performative and active Word. This dynamism paves the way to a real encounter. Finally, we pointed to the Christological and soteriological effects in the world, the result of God's touch in Christ that leads to unity with each other in God. Even though Ratzinger does not specifically address the question of life, beneath this revelatory understanding, there is a God whose active presence in the world is his life.

Part Two: The Sacramental Action and the Continuous Presence of God

Amid the reality of God that we have interpreted above, a Christological presence proceeding from the Word and fulfilling it, and amid the continual presence that we will interpret

later in this part, Ratzinger's argument now reveals the radical action of God. It is an action that dwells within his reality and continuity, whose value and purpose it expresses. Christological Presence is fulfilled in sacramental action. It is the Eucharist of the present that performs and completes it. After we examined the systematic elaboration of the authentic presence of God that supports a historical revelation mentioned in part one, we will now examine the Eucharistic presence that bears the continuity of Jesus' presence in order to support a sacramental revelation. The person of Christ who bears the two natures is indeed present in two manners, historically and sacramentally.

It is a matter of fact that the Eucharist, for Ratzinger, is the Church because it is God present among us.⁹² This sacramental presence joined with the historical one well defines his understanding of the perfect manifestation of Christ. Ratzinger's reading of the Eucharist and God's eschatological presence in history displays our theology of life. The permanency of God's presence claims a living rather than a passive or a dead God. Our consideration of this argument will thus examine several themes: sacramental action in general, the Eucharist, and eschatology.

§9. A Sacramental Action that Incorporates the Fulfilled Word

As we discussed in part one, the kingdom of God in the world in Jesus is the fruit of a work and not merely a presence. The mere "physical presence" alone cannot attain salvation, it needs action. In this section, I will examine the sacramental action of Christ that dominates the structure of Ratzinger's trilogy. Its main task is to sanctify the world. So, the *sacramentum* of Christ, that has already begun at the Incarnation, restores the world to its original purity.⁹³ I emphasize here

⁹² In his Angelus, at the year 2011, Pope Benedict states: "Without the Eucharist the Church quite simply would not exist. Indeed, it is the Eucharist which makes a human community into a mystery of communion that can bring God to the world and the world to God." Pope Benedict XVI, "Angelus," June 26, 2011, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20110626.html.

⁹³ In this thesis in various places I will use the following terminology: "*sacramentum*," "Christ as sacrament," and "sacraments." For that reason, I find it important to clarify their specific meanings from the beginning. There is a wide theology of sacraments in the writings of Pope Benedict XVI. But what matters for us is his understanding of

that Jesus' action is "accomplished in the Holy Spirit" (I, 60). That is to say: If the Word identifies Jesus' bodily existence as the "Word made flesh," the Holy Spirit identifies the action of the Son.⁹⁴ Ratzinger emphasizes this pneumatology in the sacramental act of Jesus that attains the kingdom.⁹⁵ The Kingdom "is drawing near" through the active work of the Son in the Holy Spirit (I, 60).⁹⁶ I am mentioning the pneumatological work in my systematic elaboration of Christ's presence because Ratzinger relates the presence of God to a Trinitarian work. This makes Christology a

sacraments in *Jesus of Nazareth*, and their intimate relationship with *sacramentum*. Despite the fact that sacrament in Latin means *sacramentum*, Ratzinger distinguishes the meanings of the two words in his works. For Ratzinger, "*sacramentum*" contains the whole mystery of Christ, eternally and historically. This includes his death, resurrection, and continual presence. Jesus is the gift of the Father, who is at the same time the mystery of the Father, and also, we can say the *sacramentum* of the Father. "Christ as a sacrament" means his self-giving to humanity. Jesus' emptying himself and laying down his life to humanity out of his free will and love demonstrate that Christ is the sacrament who reveals God's love. This offering is continually present in the sacraments. "Sacraments" for Ratzinger are the visible signs that reflect the invisible truth. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, a new life, thus a new beginning is granted by grace to humanity to share in the body of Christ before its real union and sharing in the divine life. However, Ratzinger has a much broader thought of the sacraments. There are many sacraments analogous with the seven sacraments of the Church. These are also signs that reflect the divine presence. In fact, creation for Ratzinger is invited to be sacramental, to be a sign of God's presence. Also, the Word for him is sacramental because it is the active sign that reflects the truth of God. This does not dissolve the effects of the sacraments of the Church that we celebrate in the liturgy, but rather in them all creation is invited to celebrate the image of the creator it bears. The sacraments give life because they give us the *sacramentum*. Therefore, they are the instruments that form the new creation and the new humanity.

⁹⁴ In *Sacramentum caritatis*, Ratzinger states: "The Paraclete, Christ's first gift to those who believe, already at work in Creation (cf. *Gen* 1:2), is fully present throughout the life of the Incarnate Word: Jesus Christ is conceived by the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mt* 1:18; *Lk* 1:35); at the beginning of his public mission, on the banks of the Jordan, he sees the Spirit descend upon him in the form of a dove (cf. *Mt* 3:16 and parallels); he acts, speaks and rejoices in the Spirit (cf. *Lk* 10:21), and he can offer himself in the Spirit (cf. *Heb* 9:14)." Pope Benedict XVI, "Sacramentum Caritatis: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission," February 22, 2007, 13, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html.

⁹⁵ Similarly, Ratzinger states in a homily in the year 2012, in the same year of publishing the third volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*: "It was as if he [Saint Paul] had said that not only God the Father was made visible in the Incarnation of the Son, but also the Spirit of God is manifest in the life and action of Jesus, of Jesus Christ who lived, was crucified, died and rose again." Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience," May 16, 2012, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120516.html. We notice that Ratzinger repeats twice in this statement the work of the Spirit in the life and action of Christ.

⁹⁶ What Ratzinger does not mention, however, is the way the Spirit works in Christ in his human nature. Jesus, for Ratzinger, was totally aware of his identity as the Son. This question is perhaps not Ratzinger's main concern in his trilogy. Nevertheless, Jesus' action undoubtedly works differently in the second hypostases who is at the same time perfect man than in any other ordinary man. So how did Jesus understand and receive the will of God in the Spirit? Has Jesus conversed with the Spirit, much like he does in his dialogues with the Father that Ratzinger mentions throughout his trilogy? Is there a dialogue with the Spirit, or is the dialogue of the Father and Son itself the Spirit? Whatever the case may be, Ratzinger suggests indirectly that Jesus' life is sacramental on account of its pneumatological action, that ultimately means a life-giving action. All the events of Jesus' life thus enter the realm of sacramental presence.

presence in history and beyond it. Christ's presence is ultimately revealing the Trinitarian God present among us.

In Ratzinger's trilogy, the sacramental presence is the fruit of a radical work Jesus has done to sanctify the world. For that reason, he perfectly manifests himself as God for others throughout history. We are still experiencing the same self-giving that happened once. The trilogy shows that Christ's self-giving is not only his death and resurrection. For Ratzinger, as we will elaborate in the next chapter, all Jesus' life is a *sacramentum*, it is a self-giving. Jesus continues the same work of sanctification in all ages. He is thus continuously giving all his life to the world. Ratzinger again and again calls attention to the *sacramentum*, which cannot be the work of a passive divinity. God is close because he truly acts to transform sinful reality into a graceful realm related to him. Ratzinger thus distinguishes Jesus who would be "spectator" from Jesus who is "suffering with others" (I, 20). Suffering demands an existential activity. In his reading of Jesus' baptism, Ratzinger says that it prefigures the Son's ultimate movement, by "knocking down, and flinging open the gates of the abyss" (I, 20). The moment of salvation requires a dynamic passage.⁹⁷ Ratzinger believes that Jesus' baptism, his first public event, along with many events that follow, illustrates the work of the Son as an active performance that prefigures the act of salvation. He leads the Word to its completion in the act of sanctification. Jesus' "existing for" in the very true sense of the word transforms the present time into God's world.

Ratzinger claims, furthermore, that this "existing for" is part of two "sanctifications" that form Jesus' person. The first is "setting apart" and the second is "existing for" (II, 86). It seems clear that for Ratzinger, the "setting apart" pertains the divine nature of Jesus that makes him the

⁹⁷ When Ratzinger speaks of the Eucharist in his encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, he mentions this dynamic work of God saying: "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the Incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving." "Deus Caritas Est," 13

wholly Other, completely different from human beings. For that reason, he can be a pleasing offering to God. On the other hand, “existing for” speaks of the realistic offering whose reality consists in the perfection of his human nature.⁹⁸ Ratzinger refers to Bultmann to describe the “inner connection between the two sanctifications” (II, 88), and highlights the difference between Bultmann’s “substantial being” of Christ that is “against the world,” and at the same time his “being for.” For Ratzinger, Jesus completes both in his person, first as the priest of the New Testament, his substantial being, and second, as “the sacrifice that is made present in the Eucharist of all times,” his existing for (II, 88). Ratzinger’s reading here opens the door to the true presence of God in the sacraments, which forms their nature as true signs of the true God present among us. The sign and its divine truth celebrated in the Eucharist becomes the continual divine existence in the world that sanctifies the world. I suspect that the value of Jesus’ real performance obviously has its full meaning in unity with the work of the Holy Spirit which sanctifies it into a sacrificial work of salvation.

It thus seems that Ratzinger wishes to highlight the act of Jesus’ self-giving as an existing for that defines his sacramental presence. It opens the world to a sacrificial universality that comprises the past and the future in its present hour, as a “new worship.” Ratzinger alludes to this universal communion, when he says, for example, “we are drawn into the ‘many’ through the sacrament” (II, 134). This outcome is obviously not the work of our personal ability and power that would relate us to the universe. Rather, “our participation in Christ’s body and blood indicates

⁹⁸ We may find Ratzinger’s superlative description of this paradox in the Son in *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio*: “Yes, God becomes altogether concrete, he becomes something we can lay hold of in history. He comes bodily to men. But this very God who has become tangible is wholly mysterious. His self-chosen humiliation, his “kenosis,” is a new form, as it were, of the cloud of mystery in which he hides and at the same time shows himself.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio, Vol. 1: The Unity of the Church*, Ressourcement (Grand Rapids, Mich.) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 154.

that his action is ‘for many’” (II, 34).⁹⁹ The body of Christ becomes the temple of our worship. Ratzinger insists on this point everywhere. In him, humanity is invited to worship God. The Word of worship becomes a body of worship where Jesus’ sacramental action performed in the Holy Spirit realizes and fulfils the Word in himself, in his continuous life.¹⁰⁰

The sacramental revelation shows the perfect manifestation of God who never ceases to give himself to the world in order to sanctify it. Presence and sanctification complete the act of the sacraments. They reveal a lively movement of God in history in order to attain his will that lasts for all ages.

§10. Eucharistic Presence in History

Ratzinger speaks of the Eucharist everywhere in his trilogy. Here, we reach with him to the major truth of God’s presence, the body of worship that we can observe. In fact, Ratzinger considers Jesus’ body both historical and spiritual. Since Jesus bears the two natures in him, the human and the divine, he always lives both, as historical and sacramental. Ratzinger often adds a qualifier to the Eucharist: “of all times.” This addition highlights the performed action of the Son in the world. He exceeds the finitude of a merely historical event and unites the present of all history.¹⁰¹ The Eucharistic character of this continuous presence completes the *sacramentum* that

⁹⁹ In his article, “The New Worship in Joseph Ratzinger’s *Jesus of Nazareth*,” Geoffrey Wainwright defines the meaning of “the new worship.” He writes: “Ratzinger’s thesis is that Jesus fulfils the worship respectively commanded and promised by the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament and thereby surpasses them, so that his own revelatory and redemptive work constitutes the basis of a new way of worship that is first enjoyed by the Christian Church while being potentially or eschatologically universal in exercise and scope, such as underlay the divine Creator’s project from the very beginning.” Geoffrey Wainwright, “The ‘New Worship’ in Joseph Ratzinger’s *Jesus of Nazareth*,” *Nova et Vetera* 10, no. 4 (September 2012): 994–95.

¹⁰⁰ This new worship, present in the sacrament, stands in contrast to other forms of Christian worship that do not have faith in the Eucharist, and at the same time to other religions that do not believe in a God present in history through Jesus.

¹⁰¹ In *Deus caritas est*, Ratzinger states: “Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.” “Deus Caritas Est,” 13.

began in Jesus' Incarnation and continues in the Eucharist through history. As Ratzinger expounds it, "Incarnation and Easter are permanently present" in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (I, 269-270). What occurred once and for all at the hour of the cross happens continually in the Eucharist, where Jesus' presence leads the faithful to realize "God's descent to us and for us" (I, 270). Ratzinger calls attention to two significant expressions that highlight the permanency of God's presence: the hour and the descent to our midst. We must examine them now, and then observe their consequence, a spiritual body of God that continues his authentic presence along with the historical body.

Ratzinger believes that Jesus' "hour," which he himself alludes to more than once in the passages of the gospel, refers to his glorification. It "brings together his cross, his resurrection, and his presence throughout the world in word and sacrament" (I, 251). In other words, the hour becomes the permanent presence in the sacrament. Ratzinger bases this reflection on the hour of the cross, which anticipates "the beginning of the new liturgy in spirit and truth" (I, 251). In this sense, Jesus' glorification becomes the subject of the present moment at each Eucharistic celebration.

Equally important, Jesus attains two things by his descent to the world: first, he gives us the "true bread of heaven," which Ratzinger relates to the necessities of human life itself. He thus combines in an indirect way natural theology and the sacraments. The "fruits of creation," the water, bread, wine, and (olive) oil, become "signs in which he bestows upon us his special closeness," the presence of God that we sense in his creation (I, 248). Second, the descent leads us to an "encounter with God" (I, 269-270). Ratzinger then reveals that the aim of participating in the Eucharist is to "become spirit" for a "new life in God and with God" (I, 269-270). Here we see that Ratzinger outlines the direction of a spiritual theology of encounter that does not remove us

from space and time, but rather enters the sphere of a permanent presence still attached to the observable signs that God provides in the world. Indeed, God can be perceived spiritually. The God of the gospels is the One who always descends and saves the world by his redemptive body – the historical body continues its role in the sacramental one.

The frame of this permanent presence is concretely verified in Jesus' prayer, which continually accompanies the people of God. How? Ratzinger indirectly concludes that the Eucharist becomes the continuous prayer of the Son in the world. For him, Jesus' prayer is "the act by which he 'sanctifies' himself, that is to say, he 'sacrifices' himself for the life of the world" (II, 101-102). History thus transmits the effects of the paschal mystery to the present through Jesus' continuous prayer.¹⁰² Jesus incessantly prays to God for humanity. His prayer reveals his communion with the Father and his communion with humanity through history in the Eucharist. We will elaborate on the theme of being with the Father more concretely in the next section. But for now, we must examine how the Eucharist "involves entering into communion with the living God, who inwardly draws people together" through the Son's prayer (II, 138). The living God, we will see, is the present God who has the ability to enter in communion with people, thanks to Jesus' descent and hour. Communion henceforth becomes the sign of God's presence.

We can thus see why Ratzinger points to two greetings for the Lord in the Eucharist. The first is related to his coming, "the one who has entered into her [Church] midst." The second is related both to his continuous coming and to the fact that he "leads us toward his coming" (II, 10-11). In this way, Ratzinger situates Jesus' coming as the essential event of salvation, because it

¹⁰² We can understand in this continual prayer what cardinal Ratzinger writes in his book *Behold the Pierced One*: "The Church is born in that prayer in which Jesus gives himself back into the Father's hands and the Father commits everything to the Son. This most profound communication of Son and Father conceals the Church's true and ever-new origin, which is also her firm foundation." Pope Benedict XVI, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 18.

clarifies two joint pilgrimages, Jesus' and ours. Jesus' coming, his presence, leads us "up with him in his ascent to the cross and resurrection" (II, 10-11). Nevertheless, it's safe to say that based on Ratzinger's argument, the main difference between the two pilgrimages is the fact that we seem to go to him, but actually, we are able to do so only because he first comes to us in order to lead us to him. The initiative is first God's own.

We can now also see better why Ratzinger speaks of three stages of transcendence which gradually present themselves to humanity. The first is that "man's real food is the Logos" (I, 155), which Ratzinger relates to the manna of the Old Testament. The second is that "the eternal Logos does not concretely become bread for man until he has taken flesh" (I, 188), which Ratzinger relates this to the New Testament, when Jesus has taken flesh. And the third transcendence Ratzinger specifies is "absolutely essential": "The Incarnate Lord gives himself to us in the Sacrament" (I, 156). Ratzinger relates this final transcendence to the Eucharist. We notice that these stages are built on a fulfilled movement that starts with a philosophical thought, continues with a corporeal reality, and is completed with a spirituality. Ratzinger thinks that the last stage of transcendence describes Jesus' intention in his Incarnation: "This extreme becoming-corporeal is actually the real becoming-spiritual: 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail' (Jn 6:63)" (I, 156). The spiritual body of Christ thus continues its presence throughout history, and has the same effects the historic body does, but now unlimited by space and time, or rather in a body "of all times."

Jesus' presence spiritually at "all times" introduces the question of eschatology, especially considering that for Ratzinger the "Lord's return" and "his presence" are two unseparated realities of God (II, 289). Jesus' permanent presence in the Eucharist is never separated from the fulfilment of this presence in the future. Jesus, the sacrifice present in the "Eucharist of all times," (II, 88)

will accompany us in the next section: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

§11. Eschatological Presence: Beyond Time and Within It

In the first part of this chapter, we have seen the authenticity of God’s Word as Christological presence proceeding from the Word and fulfilling it. In the first two sections of this second part, we have seen the Christological Presence fulfilled in the sacramental action that is performed and completed in the Eucharist of the present. Before entering this eleventh section on eschatology, it is important to remind the reader that the ninth and tenth sections introduce it, since Ratzinger believes that the Eucharist enters the realm of eschatology because of Jesus’ presence at all times in it. Because the eternal Word has entered into history through the Incarnation, Eucharist is possible; the eternal has entered into time and materiality. The separation between Eucharist and Eschatology in this chapter does not signify their independence, but classifies a sacramental presence along with an eschatological one. Therefore, the twofold life of God, historically and sacramentally, are part of the eschatology that begins in time until its fulfillment in communion with God. Now it is time to venture with Ratzinger into an eschatological presence beyond time and within it in order to clarify the continuous presence of Jesus in the history of humanity. This will give Christ’s manifestation a permanent presence, thus a perfect revelation. For this purpose, Ratzinger elaborates two subjects: first, the question of time in relation with Jesus and, second, the communion of the Father and Son as the source of Jesus’ presence.

Ratzinger emphasizes the historic event of Jesus. It happened once, during the time of the Roman Empire. Ratzinger adds, however, that “it is contemporary with all times, but not in the way that a timeless myth would be” (I, 11). In this work, he differentiates between myth and truth,

between a legend and a sacrament. Ratzinger is concerned with the reality of the event, its oneness and its contemporaneity. But then we must ask the following question: How can an event trespass time and reach the present, having changeable effects on what has passed and on what is to come?

Ultimately, Ratzinger explains the meaning of time in relation to the person of Jesus. Clearly, the question of time dominates the scene in Ratzinger's thought. In a remarkable way, he combines Christology with anthropology and eschatology. Together they form a unity that begins from the prayer of the faithful in the present, goes back to the historic time of Jesus, and finally comes back to the present of the faithful. Let me explain: Ratzinger refers to the Old Testament and relates both God's existence (characterized by his closeness at specific times of history), and his lordship (characterized by his dominion over history), to the prayer of the faithful, which changes the fact of time and brings God to the present. Through prayer, "the divine lordship, God's dominion over the world and over history, transcends the moment, indeed transcends and reaches beyond the whole of history" (I, 57). For Ratzinger, lordship contains an "inner dynamism" which becomes effective in the act of prayer and leads to God's presence in the world. Jesus, as Israelite and bearer of the "inner dynamic promises," transcends Israel and reaches the whole world. We thus notice that Jesus' historical presence in the flesh is a prayer to the Father. It reveals a true faith in God that transcends time and makes God continuously present. Referring to the synoptic gospels: – "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15), it 'has already come upon you' (Mt 12:28), it is 'in the midst of you' (Lk 17:21)," – Ratzinger states: "What these words express is a process of coming that has already begun and extends over the whole of history" (I, 58). The prayer of the Son becomes the prayer of the faithful and brings forth the lordship of God until the end of time, when the person himself becomes one with God.¹⁰³ Anthropology is thus united with Christology

¹⁰³ Ratzinger sees in this act the true liberating act when the Person participates with the Son's freedom. In *Behold the Pierced One*, Ratzinger states: "We can therefore describe that prayer which enters into the praying of Jesus and

in one person, in the two natures of Christ. The eschatological presence of God enters the realm of the believer who is united with the faithful one, Jesus Christ. Ratzinger thus gives us a picture in which the presence of God is intrinsically related to the faithful Son.

He also stresses, however, the duality of the kingdom, both “as coming and as having come in his person” (I, 188). For that reason, talking about eschatology is no longer related to the future. Rather, the Incarnation of the Son gives it a new meaning. Ratzinger here refers to Dodd’s expression: “eschatology in process of realization” to say that “Jesus, as the One who has come, is nonetheless the One who comes throughout the whole of history, and ultimately he speaks to us of this coming” (I, 188).

Such a permanency clearly accompanies the Christology of Ratzinger’s trilogy. For him, “the real ‘event’ is the person in whom, despite the passage of time, the present truly remains. In this person the future is already here” (II, 50). In Christ, we thus witness a kind of inverse eschatology, because, for Ratzinger, it is the encounter that becomes eschatological. “The future will not place us in any other situation than the one to which our encounter with Jesus has already brought us” (II, 50). In this context, “Thy kingdom come” becomes the clearest basis for Ratzinger’s thought. This coming of the Son brings a radical change to the world. The unlimited state of God touches our limitedness, and thus changes the meaning of time: “The person ‘is’ in the midst of physically measurable things; he has his own ‘time’; he ‘remains’” (II, 50). Conversely, we can also infer that the world becomes the city of God in the prayer of the faithful, and brings Jesus into our time.

So, humanity’s prayer, united with the Son’s prayer, brings Jesus to our midst. Our encounter with him becomes eschatology. What is the essence of this eschatology? The answer in

becomes the prayer of Jesus in the body of Christ as freedom’s laboratory.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 41–42.

the following passages: The communion of the Son with the Father allows God's permanent presence.

To complete the picture of the continual presence, alongside the question of time, Ratzinger also highlights the ultimate reason that permits this presence of Jesus beyond time and within it. The reason is his communion with the Father. But Ratzinger also asks about the place of God today and recalls the Nicene Creed where Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father. So, to complete this picture of presence, he also investigates his seemingly absent condition. The ascension passage provides the guiding clue: "Within his absence is there nonetheless at the same time a real presence?" (II, 280).

In an astounding way, Ratzinger considers the disciples' joy on the day of ascension and questions the reason for their joy. Confidently, he realizes that Jesus' being at the right hand of the Father is the only answer for their joyful attitude. The right hand means "a new manner of his presence" – the ascension becomes a "continuing closeness" (II, 281).

By extension, the cloud that takes Jesus up to heaven in the ascension does not signify his departure, but rather, his entering "into the mystery of God" which means for him a "different dimension of being" (II, 282). The rest of the New Testament, including the gospels, reveals clearly the reality of Jesus' sitting at the right hand of the Father. "God stands in relation to all spaces as Lord and Creator" (II, 283). In the ascension account, which entails Lordship, "his presence is not spatial, but divine." Jesus' going away becomes a "continuing presence," because he is present with the Father (II, 283).

In the end, for Ratzinger, communion is the essence of Jesus' presence. The existence of the Son depends on his relation with the Father. Indirectly, Ratzinger thus identifies the kenosis or self-emptying of the Son, since it is the Father of the Son that abundantly fills Jesus' emptiness.

Strictly speaking, communion is “the true center of Jesus’ personality” (I, xiv). It is on this basis that we are able to know his divinity: “without it, we cannot understand him at all” (I, xiv). From this communion, Jesus “makes himself present to us still today” (I, xiv). So the presence of the Son is inseparable from his divinity. We can understand the Son as Son, because he is in communion with the Father. Christology therefore cannot be separated from Paterology without losing its meaning.

Ratzinger provides a final example from Jesus’ life that illustrates clearly this communion. He interprets the passage of the disciples in the boat at the time of the storm while Jesus was praying on the mountain as an image for today’s Church.

After the multiplication of the loaves, the Lord makes the disciples get into the boat and go before him to Beth-Saida on the opposite shore, while he himself dismisses the people. He then goes up on the mountain to pray. So the disciples are alone in the boat. There is a headwind, and the lake is turbulent. They are threatened by the power of the waves and the storm. The Lord seems to be far away in prayer on his mountain. But because he is with the Father, he sees them. And because he sees them, he comes to them across the water; he gets into the boat with them and makes it possible for them to continue to their destination. This is an image for the time of the Church – intended also for us. The Lord is on the mountain of the Father. Therefore, he sees us. Therefore, he can get into the boat of our life at any moment. Therefore, we can always call on him; we can always be certain that he sees and hears us (II, 284).

When reading this passage, we can observe that the absence of Jesus is not a blind absence, nor a human absence, where the person can choose and remain only in one particular place. On the contrary, it is an observant absence, where we cannot see Jesus, but he always sees us. His absence means a permanent presence in silence. In this passage, Ratzinger defines the silence of Christ as one who is absent and present: “He sees us and hears us.” This active absence makes

Jesus a living and an available God for his people, ready to rescue them in time of danger.¹⁰⁴ We can thus understand Benedict's statement in his general audience on the presence of Jesus in Church, especially in the Eucharist: "Christ is never absent, on the contrary, he is present in a way that is untrammelled by space and time through the event of his resurrection."¹⁰⁵ Jesus' being with the Father on his mountain is an important image for the present argument. It shows that the mountain where Jesus prays is Heaven itself. Ratzinger's usage of the formulas "his mountain" and "the mountain of the Father" clearly identifies heaven as a place "on earth." Jesus' absence on his mountain thus manifests the closeness of heaven and earth in Jesus' communion with his Father.

We thus see that the divine nature of Jesus is not replaced by a human nature. Both the divine and human natures are united and lived in one person in one place. This communion of the Son with the Father thus completes the question of time. Since Jesus is the "I am": "he is always there – for human beings" (I, 347). Ratzinger thus confronts us with the radical existence of God who encompasses all creatures and all time. This is the reason for his Lordship over time, and makes eschatology a present moment with Christ.

In brief, this systematic discussion of God's Eucharistic and eschatological presence shows us the core of a sacramental revelation. First, we examined this revelation as the act of Jesus' self-giving for humanity: his act sanctifies the world. Second, our discussion examined the meaning of time in relationship with the faithful's prayer united in Christ's prayer. At last, we discussed the

¹⁰⁴ In his book, *The God of Jesus Christ*, Ratzinger speaks on the same subject saying: "When Jesus is with the Father, he is present in the Church." Pope Benedict XVI, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on God in the Trinity* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979), 72.

¹⁰⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience of Munus Docendi," April 14, 2010, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100414.html.

communion of the Son and the Father. The consequence of this communion is a permanent presence of a living God in the world.

Chapter Three

In the Image of Christ

§12. The Life of God Generates the Fullness of Life

The fact of Jesus' historical and sacramental presence in the world, which we examined in the previous chapter, effects human beings in various ways. It calls us to a new manner of life. This newness finds its source in the way Jesus lived, in his tangible presence among us. When we read the trilogy, we discover an overlap in the relationship of God and humanity in Jesus' active presence in the world. This presence generates a real anthropological *exemplum*. The life of Christ is the model for a real human life. Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth* urges the world to live according to this *exemplum*. To do so is to realize a Christ-centered society, "living and acting in and around the gift" of Jesus Christ (I, 65). In this way Ratzinger, like Augustine, envisions the city of God, which is the Church. It does not depend on morality alone, or else it would just be an improved human society. Rather, it is in the world a city of God in Christ who is present.¹⁰⁶

In this chapter, I will continue my full, systematic elaboration of Christ's presence by emphasizing the anthropological perspective. Ratzinger's trilogy underlines the substantial relationship of Christ and humanity. I will show that humanity's participation in the life of Jesus unites the different anthropological insights in the trilogy into one. Ratzinger's implicit argument is searching for the fullness of life for humanity. This fullness bears a temporal and

¹⁰⁶ At this point, I refer to Rowland's inference as she states: "There is thus no fundamental difference between the more Thomist John Paul and the more Augustinian Benedict on the question of the relationship of the Church to the world. They both agree that she is the 'light of the gentiles' or in the language of Vatican II, 'the universal sacrament of salvation' and that there is nothing in the scriptures which warrants a policy of retreat into a ghetto." Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 10.

eternal life. *Jesus of Nazareth* focuses on the principle of an anthropological, everlasting life, united within the historical and sacramental revelation of Christ. If the argument that I have elaborated in the first chapter on the life of God in time does not have concrete effect on humanity, it remains incomplete. To comprehend Ratzinger's complete understanding of Christ's perfect revelation, God's life must transform humanity's life in a new and supreme perspective.

We will thus investigate, according to Ratzinger, the anthropological *exemplum* that Christ has given in his *sacramentum*, or better, in his life. My aim is to develop a full, systematic anthropology intrinsically related to Christ's presence in the trilogy. To that end, we will elaborate upon four issues that Ratzinger raises so that he defends it. He first concentrates on the most fearful tragedy that faces humanity: the unnecessary presence of God in the world that marks a materialistic existence. For him, to deny God's presence is ultimately to deny the *exemplum* or any other reference. Second, he emphatically points out that Jesus is present, and the presence of God in Jesus forms the *exemplum* of a real humanity that depends on its relation with the *sacramentum* of Christ. Third, our life, which has become itself an *exemplum* in Jesus opens the world to universality, unity, and eternity making it a real city of God. Finally, Ratzinger also points to the martyrs as the radical *exemplum* for the credibility of this city. Ratzinger ultimately aims to realize between the image of the new person in Christ and Christ's real image, revealed in his active presence. Beneath this anthropological elaboration, Ratzinger's argument arouses the fullness of life that fulfills God's ultimate will in his revelation. It is an everlasting life because it is in Christ.

§13. *The Problem: God's Unnecessary Presence*

Before explaining the *exemplum* of Christ, Ratzinger insists repeatedly that the real problem facing humanity is that the presence of God would be unnecessary in the world. He thus underlines the condition of the world with no reference, or in other words, the tragedy of the meaningless state of humanity without God. It is this meaninglessness that Ratzinger's position directly opposes with the knowledge of a present God who works in humanity. Ratzinger has to build his anthropology on a solid ground. For this task, he first highlights humanity's problem, and on this basis, he then offers a theological response.

In the first place, Ratzinger draws our attention to the theological upheaval brought about by the modern Biblical interpretations with no reference to the living God. He calls them the temptations of the present. For those scholars who defend these contemporary readings, "God cannot act in history" (I, 35). The idea of God's passivity or non-existence amounts to a declaration of his death. Ratzinger is quite clear that such an assumption, and the readings of scripture based on it amounts to an "antichrist" and "devil." God is forbidden from speaking (I, 36).¹⁰⁷ More than

¹⁰⁷ Ratzinger's cry is not at all new. From the clearest writings on this subject is the Erasmus Lecture that he delivered on 27 January 1988 at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City, where he referred to Vladimir Solowjew's "History of the Antichrist," in order to speak of the historical critical method that I believe forms the origin of his problematic in *Jesus of Nazareth*. In this article, he states a serious problem: "The various theories increased and multiplied and separated one from the other and became a veritable fence which blocked access to the Bible for all the uninitiated." He ended his lecture with hopes that reveal his work through *Jesus of Nazareth*: "1- Scientific exegesis must recognize the philosophic element present in a great number of its ground rules/ 2- Exegesis can no longer be studied in a unilinear, synchronic fashion, as is the case with scientific findings which do not depend upon their history but only upon the precision of their data/ 3- Philological and scientific literary methods are and will remain critically important for a proper exegesis. But for their actual application to the work of criticism—just as for an examination of their claims—an understanding of the philosophic implications of the interpretative process is required/ 4- What we do need is a critical look at the exegetical landscape we now have, so that we may return to the text and distinguish between those hypotheses which are helpful and those which are not/ 5- Finally, the exegete must realize that he does not stand in some neutral area, above or outside history and the church. Such a presumed immediacy regarding the purely historical can only lead to dead ends. The first presupposition of all exegesis is that it accepts the Bible as a book... It must recognize that the faith of the church is that form of "sympathia" without which the Bible remains a closed book." Pope Benedict XVI et al., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, Encounter Series; 9 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 2, 21-22.

that: “only his [the antichrist scholar’s] kind of exegesis, the supposedly purely scientific kind, in which God says nothing and has nothing to say, is able to keep abreast of the times” (I, 36).

In addition to this silence and passivity of God, Ratzinger highlights another problem which he also labels a temptation of the present: The thought that God is “secondary” or even “superfluous and annoying” (I, 28). The effect of succumbing to such a temptation is equally disastrous. Ratzinger considers both of these positions as a rejection of metaphysics and a total reliance on the light of the subjective mind as the absolute truth of being. More broadly, Ratzinger objects to the refusal of “anything beyond the political and material” (I, 28). The most dangerous temptation, ultimately, is the one that considers God an illusion.

As we can see, here is the full problematic image that Ratzinger wants to draw: Because God is an illusion, God cannot act in history. This prompts Ratzinger, as a believer, to ask: “Why God did not make a world in which his presence is more evident?” (I, 34). In fact, he straightforwardly objects to the premise of this question by pointing to the faith of holy men and women in history. He thus answers this question by appealing to a non-material evidence. He centers his claim on the Word of God and argues that numerous people have in fact experienced satisfaction through obedience to the Word. Such a satisfaction bears witness to a credible presence of God, which gratifies a hunger for more than food: “We do not live by bread alone, but first and foremost by obedience to God’s Word” (I, 34). Here, Ratzinger alludes to a different kind of life, one that depends on scripture, on the Word of God, and leads to what I have called the fullness of life. This fullness thwarts the doubts of a seemingly absent God. It stands firmly against the meaninglessness that Ratzinger confronts, against a culture of an inevitable death.

Ratzinger on this point challenges the influence of German Idealism and nihilism which had a profound influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not least in the work of

Nietzsche. He also influenced the logical positivism that was spread wide in Germany in the 1920s until the 1950s coinciding with Ratzinger's early academic years. On this point, Ratzinger's argument is arguably one-sided. He concentrates on a spiritual satisfaction that senses God's presence, but what about Christians who are asking for God because of their extreme poverty, or worse, where God seems to be really absent? How can the Word of God satisfy the poor if they cannot satisfy themselves with food? One might thus object here that Ratzinger does not really enter the depth of reality, where a more practical way to feel God's presence might be more important and decisive.

In any case, for Ratzinger the things we believe are more important than God are in fact a door to total destruction. For him, God cannot take a secondary role in human life. God cannot be simply used and then "set aside temporarily or permanently" (I, 33). The problem of materialism, or of the objectification of God, is associated with meaning. Who is God? We can here sense an Augustinian influence in Ratzinger's reading, and specifically his understanding of enjoyment and usage. In fact, Ratzinger's non-material evidence of God's presence, summarized as the experience of satisfaction, echoes Augustine's statement: "For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one's disposal to obtain what one desires, if it is a proper object of desire."¹⁰⁸ Ratzinger's refusal of God's objectification thus depends on a primordial knowledge of God in terms of enjoyment rather than usage. He even goes farther and cautions against the pride that leads man to live as a god by objectifying God, where God's importance is a function of our needs. If the needs are met, then maybe God exists; and if not, then he does not exist. God thus becomes a tool in order to fulfil our needs. "The arrogance that would make God an object and impose our laboratory conditions upon

¹⁰⁸ Saint Augustine and Green R. P. H., *On Christian Teaching*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford [England]; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008), I, 4.

him is incapable of finding him” (I, 37). In this way, Ratzinger alludes to the first sin of Adam and Eve. Greed repeats itself throughout the years in the history of man’s relationship to God. A person tries “to make oneself God” (I, 37); to attain this end, the person tries to free himself from God. As a result, he loses the fullness of life because he loses life with God.

In all this, Ratzinger argues it is the devil who convinces humanity to think that the presence of God is unnecessary. The devil uses people’s desire for self-sufficiency in order to deceive them. For Ratzinger, the devil’s concern is not to abolish God’s presence directly but rather gradually, by reducing the presence of God to a “private concern,” and persuading us that God “must not interfere in our essential purposes” (I, 41). In this context, Ratzinger’s case connects back to his earlier point about the death of God and reminds his readers of the first sin: “we are simply the owners of ourselves and of the world” (I, 257). But Ratzinger generalizes this scenario. The present situation in general is a case of this desire: “We are already beginning to see it [the effects of killing God]” (I, 257).

In the case of the unnecessary presence of God, ignorance is quite close to knowledge. “Is it not on account of our knowledge that we are incapable of recognizing truth itself?” (II, 208). I point here to two types of knowledge in Plato which complete Ratzinger’s thought. The first is one that sees the shadows in Plato’s cave as the reality, while the second sees the reality from outside the cave, in an act of a seeing freedom, rather than a blind one attached to the chains of a fake knowledge.¹⁰⁹ Our present day offers the same alternative, and it is always a challenge to profess

¹⁰⁹ In *Communio*, Ratzinger elaborates broadly on this subject saying: “Ignorance is dependence, slavery: he who does not know, remains a slave. It is only when understanding arises, when we begin to grasp what is essential, that we begin to be free... Of course, when we talk today of knowledge as liberating us from the slavery of ignorance, we usually do not think of God, but of mastery, the knowledge of dealing with art, with things, with people. God remains out of the picture; for questions of getting along he seems unimportant. First one must know how to assert oneself; once that is secured, one wants room for speculation. In this shrinking of the question of knowledge lies not only the problem of our modern idea of truth and freedom, but *the* problem of our time altogether, for it presumes that for the shaping of things human and the fashioning of our lives it is indifferent whether or not there is a God. God seems to lie outside the functioning relationships of our lives and our society, the well-known *Deus otiosus* (superfluous God)

belief in God and proclaim the credibility of this belief.¹¹⁰ A similar challenge confronted Israel: “If you exist, God, then you’ll just have to show yourself” (I, 32).

How does Ratzinger aim to show God to the world? Ultimately, he relates the reason of the world to the “eternal reason” who is God. This is to say, he begins by introducing the tragic problem rooted in the denial of “creative reason.” A purely rational world opens to the realm of chance as the source of everything. In turn, chance by its nature “sets limits to the world’s rationality,” because the essence of the world cannot be a pure knowledge (I, 174). Chance in this case forms an empty reference to any possible basic foundation.¹¹¹ Against this irrational outcome, Ratzinger returns back to the first cause, and relates the world to a loving creator rather than a creation out of chance. Creation becomes an intelligible task of God through his Word, a Word that is more reasonable than an unknowable reality of chance. God’s living Word in his Son, Jesus of Nazareth, whose reality continues in the present time of history, fulfils completely the love of God that generates his presence. The power of the Word does not limit itself to Jesus’ time, but is a living Word that applies also to the present: “The Lord always speaks in the present with an eye to the future” in order to maintain God’s continuous love to his creation (I, 257).

of the history of religions. A God who is insignificant for human life is no God at all, since he is powerless and unreal. But if the world does not come from God and is not influenced by him even in the smallest things, then it does not come out of freedom, and freedom is thus not a power in it; it is merely a conglomerate of necessary mechanisms, and any freedom is only appearance.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio, Vol. 2: Anthropology and Culture*, Ressourcement (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 95.

¹¹⁰ Ratzinger defines true knowledge, in his book *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, at the time of writing his first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, with the following words: “...being touched by reality, ‘by the personal presence of Christ himself,’ as he (Nicholas Cabasilas) puts it. Being overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction.” Pope Benedict XVI, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 36.

¹¹¹ Here, I believe Ratzinger is criticizing Darwin and his followers. In his book, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger already spoke of a similar argument when he stated two stages that accompanied the modern thinking and living: the birth of the historical approach, and the turn toward technical thinking. In the first stage, Ratzinger states: “At the very moment when radical anthropocentrism set in and man could know only his own work, he had to learn to accept himself as merely a chance occurrence, just another fact. Here, too, the heaven from which he seemed to come was torn down, so to speak, and he was left with just the earth and its facts in his hands – the earth in which he now sought with the spade to decipher the laborious history of his development.” Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 63.

This Incarnate love, which forms a Christ-centered society, reflects the same image of God and shows his authentic presence in the world. Obviously, such a society differs totally from the present world. Ratzinger finds that even the Church can succumb to this temptation and forget God. Many theologians, for instance, prefer to speak of regnocentrism rather than of Christ. God's kingdom is thus reduced to a moral world "governed by peace, justice, and the conservation of creation" (I, 53). Religion in this case is reduced to a mere "sets of customs" (I, 54). A crisis faces today's world as it shifts towards a political order where anything that serves its worldview is considered to be good.¹¹² Religion thus repeats the third temptation; it is the state of not needing God and of denying him: "'All this I will give you,' he [Satan] said, 'if you will bow down and worship me' (Matthew 4:9)."

Ratzinger thus challenges a supposedly-perfect humanism, where Christian faith is only a means to serve a person's moral attitude. For Ratzinger, Jesus' new commandment to love the same way he loved trespasses such morality and opens the way to a deeper living. The commandment is Christological. It invites humanity to unite itself with Christ. It thus becomes appropriate to speak about "the newness that can come only from the gift of being-*with* and being-*in* Christ" (II, 64). Put succinctly, Ratzinger encourages a Christ-centered society rather than a moral society, wherein Christ's message is not limited to a moral teaching but leads to a giving of self as a living *exemplum*. Here, the trilogy conveys the fullness of life that does not have an end in Christ. The self-giving of Jesus led to his resurrection, to his permanent presence among us. When humanity recognizes its oneness in Incarnate love, in Christ, its action becomes also one in

¹¹² Rowland highlights this issue in her book *Ratzinger's Faith*: "In 1964 Ratzinger posed the question: 'What actually is the real substance of Christianity that goes beyond mere moralism?' The term moralism generally refers to the Kantian rationalist tendency to reduce Christianity to the dimensions of an ethical framework, or to equate faith with obeying a law... Ratzinger proposed that the antidote to moralism is the theology of the First Letter of St John: God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. A theology focused on divine love was his solution." Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 66.

him. Humanity thus experiences this life that never ends in time and beyond it because it is immersed in Jesus' death and resurrection. This idea will become more vigorous later, in §17: "Martyrs: Witnesses of God's Presence."

§14. *Between Religions and Christ*

Following the problem of God's gratuitous presence, Ratzinger in this section highlights another problem that indirectly expresses the death of God and forms the problem of religious societies. When religion becomes a set of customs rather than an encounter with a living God, then, God becomes a kind of legend that entails certain practices which respect traditional duties. On the contrary, Ratzinger wants to build a full, systematic anthropology that finds the truth of humanity in Christ. At that time, the practicing of faith becomes a real human action. For that reason, he addresses both, religions that unintentionally may reject the fact of an active living God on one side, and the truth and love of a living God who generates life on the other side. I think he aims to free humanity from the former and opens human knowledge to the latter. *Jesus of Nazareth* thus rejects certain kinds of pluralism. The book also rejects a merely social manner of practicing a religious life. We are thus able to say that the trilogy focuses on the fullness of life with God. It is the kenosis of the person who only searches for a life in Christ. This fullness needs to empty him or her from all worldly strains, even from oneself, in order to receive Christ. It is a personal encounter, leading to a Christ-like exemplum.

Ratzinger somewhat unexpectedly describes religion in terms of "political goals," as so many ways to organize the world (I, 54). He radically claims that they amount to a rejection of God, and that they amount merely to an organization of habitual acts. Looking to *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger singles out Christianity from other religions. "God can be a cause of division

between religions and between people” (I, 53). It seems he wants to free Christianity from being a religion and call it simply the “Christian faith” (I, xv). In this context, he also warns of the danger of seeing Christianity as a religion, as a ritual performance where habitual practice opposes the truth of God’s encounter. The aim of Christian faith is the transcendence of practices. Christianity entails a profound search for God, whom we find in the depth of our being, in the act of his “quiet exhortation” (I, 92). Ratzinger invites the person to search for God first and foremost within. The meaning of Christianity is not to be a “sets of customs” but an encounter with God (I, 54). Nevertheless, for these to be an encounter, a person cannot remain passive. The work of God, who is present inwardly, and of the human being, who journeys towards God, together become the ground of the encounter, humanity’s participation in the divine life; raising up of our human nature to make us sharers in the divine nature.¹¹³ In this sense, Ratzinger wants to free God from religion. The practical dimension of Christianity becomes a natural act of love that expresses the encounter with God and demands his presence in our lives.¹¹⁴

For Ratzinger, this profound search is important quite simply because humanity “needs God,” the truth that gives life (I, 354). God’s presence in Jesus is the fulfilment of humanity’s desire to encounter the truth, not just the organizing principle of an ingrained habit. Ratzinger also

¹¹³ In fact, Rowland mentions Ratzinger’s thought about the origin of Christianity and its relation with religions. Her interpretation that situates Christianity as a reasonable faith is far from just being one among many religions: “Ratzinger frequently reminds academic audiences that the Church fathers found the ‘seeds of the Word, not in the religions of the world, but rather in philosophy, that is, in the process of critical reason directed against the [pagan] religions’. He notes that the habit of thinking about Christianity as a ‘religion’ among many religions, all of roughly the same intellectual merit, is a modern development. At its very origins Christianity sides with reason and considers this ally to be its principal forerunner.” Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 62.

¹¹⁴ In, *Deus caritas est*, Ratzinger situates God’s presence in all aspects of life: “Indeed, God is visible in a number of ways. In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of his heart on the Cross, to his appearances after the resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, he guided the nascent Church along its path. Nor has the Lord been absent from subsequent Church history: he encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. In the Church’s Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives.” *Deus Caritas Est*, 17.

relates this truth of God to love, which needs truth in order to be authentic. In Jesus Christ we encounter the truth and love of God who is himself God: “Jesus’ word is more than a word; it is his very self. His word is truth, and it is love” (II, 60). The truth of God is no mere idea that we proclaim; rather, it is a person who loves, and this person makes the truth credible and clear. In this context, humanity needs no more than the fullness of life that the trilogy implicitly delivers in order to satisfy its full nature. If the human mind finds truth and love, what else would he or she ask for? Ratzinger in fact points to a very delicate topic, religions and their relationship with Christianity. He also points to an untrue Christianity that is satisfied with a mere practice of faith without the knowledge of Christ. Therefore, the fullness of life is the act of losing everything in order to share the fullness of Christ, which is an unending life.¹¹⁵

To illustrate this idea further, let us examine the paradox which Ratzinger repeats throughout the trilogy, that Jesus gives new life from the cross. We perceive the new worship, our thanksgiving to God for his gift of life which is himself, from the cross that is Jesus’ “true exaltation” (I, 354) and “the fire of crucified love” for others (I, 67). Ratzinger here stresses God’s active presence in Jesus as a real and tangible sacrifice for the world. In other words, God’s truth is itself the *sacramentum* of the Son’s work in his historical presence for the new life of the world. His *sacramentum* is obviously a kenosis. As we will see, this *sacramentum* is the life of Jesus which in turn is the *exemplum* for our new life in him. If his *exemplum* is a kenosis because he is a *sacramentum*, then, God also invites us to this kenosis in order to be fully in the life of Christ. Religion by itself does not lead to a transcendent life with God; rather, it remains a worldly aspect of life that ends up focusing on the person himself. On the other hand, Christian faith answers the ultimate question of existence that demands an ultimate truth found visibly in the person of Christ.

¹¹⁵ See Philippians 3: 8.

In order to live this faith, and thus to live this truth, the encounter with the subject of faith and the person of truth is necessary. Jesus' presence, as the truth of the crucified love, provides the possibility of such an encounter, which takes place when the person believes in Jesus' life. This belief demands a loss in order to gain the truth that he or she encounters. The life of truth then becomes the *exemplum* of the faithful, who in turn, accept Jesus as the answer to the ultimate question of existence. The equation of losing and gaining leads us to the fullness of life, when we lose even our lives in order to gain his. My life is then a sharing in the *sacramentum* of God that never ends.

§15. *From Sacramentum to Exemplum*

Earlier, I explained Ratzinger's two main concerns: (a) the necessary presence of God in Christ, and (b) mankind's choice of Christ, which both serve the fullness of life in unity with the chosen one. Ratzinger is obviously drawing a picture of a Christocentric world, the city of God, which we will interpret further in chapter four. He is pointing to the realization of John's book of Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life" (Rev 21:6). John explains the uniqueness of the fountain: "... from the throne of God and of the lamb through the middle of the street of the city" (Rev 22:1-2).

We must now fully examine how Ratzinger elaborates on the equivalency of the *sacramentum* and *exemplum* in the person of Jesus. This likeness enables humanity to be in the image of Christ. It forms the core of Ratzinger's systematic anthropology. Ratzinger refers to the Fathers of the Church, though not by name, in order to explain that the *sacramentum* is related to Jesus' life and death as a whole; and, more specifically, it means the gift of God to the world.

Ratzinger understands this *sacramentum* as God's active presence in Christ for the world. In conjunction with this meaning, the *exemplum* then forms the new life that Jesus offers through the gift of himself. This *exemplum* is no mere moral teaching, but the anthropological resemblance to the way Jesus lived, as a gift: "The gift – the *sacramentum* – becomes an *exemplum*, an example, while always remaining a gift" (II, 65). Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection as a whole enter the realm of this *sacramentum*, which in turn is the *exemplum* that offers the possibility of a perfect human life in harmony with God who became Man – our gift from God – contingent on "our 'I' being absorbed into his" (III, 64). As we can see, Ratzinger envisions this as a unified action: "he now acts in us and our action becomes one with his" (II, 62). The cause of this unification, so to speak, is the very nature of the *sacramentum* that "cleanses us." We become ready to act as the gift, because we ourselves are a gift in him, and at the same time, become examples that proceed from the gift we bear in ourselves.¹¹⁶

Ratzinger calls our attention to the overlap of the *sacramentum* and *exemplum* in the Son which forms the new creation of God in Jesus, thus a new humanity. In both, Jesus carries out his Father's will. Ratzinger here makes reference to Saint Irenaeus' reading of the passage in Luke which refers to the seventy-two generations, and claims they symbolize all humanity. Irenaeus relates Jesus' whole existence to Adam. Jesus' present is joined with the very beginning of creation in order to "recapitulate in himself all the nations" (III, 10).¹¹⁷ The objective of this recapitulation is to give humanity "a decisive re-orientation toward a new manner of human existence" (III, 11). Here we see the presence of a second Adam that changes the direction of human history. A new

¹¹⁶ When Ratzinger discussed the process of *lectio divina*, he said that it "is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity. *Verbum Domini*, 87, Consequently, our life becomes a prayer in the Son.

¹¹⁷ Saint Irenaeus, *The Third Book of St. Irenaeus, Bp. of Lyons, Against Heresies* (Charleston, South Carolina: Nabu Press, 2012), 22, 3.

humanity comes into harmony with Jesus and thus the Father because he simply bears humanity in himself.¹¹⁸ Ratzinger also alludes to this *sacramentum* and *exemplum* when he writes about the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Son that brings a new manner of life. “Just as he was transformed through the cross into a new manner of bodiliness and of being-human pervaded by God’s own being, so too for us this food must become an opening out of our existence, a passing through the cross, and an anticipation of the new life in God and with God” (I, 270). As we can see, Christ invites humanity to share in his *sacramentum* of the cross and to live the *exemplum* of a new life in God. This *exemplum* is an existential dimension that is intrinsically related to the *sacramentum* and completes it. Humanity, in the Eucharist of all times, thus shares in God’s life. In §11 of chapter two, we examined Jesus’ communion with the Father that generates a permanent presence. The same thing happens in humanity’s communion with Christ. Our sharing in his *sacramentum* grants us the fullness of life that never ends.

Finally, we see here the existential aspect of faith, and thus what it means to be “just before God” and to “understand God aright” (II, 236). The theological interpretation of the cross, of the sacraments, and of worship does not give us full knowledge, because, in addition, “the existential dimension is involved.” This dimension is a result of Jesus’ life, lived in an “incarnate obedience” (II, 236). Jesus’ human nature mirrors the way humanity must act in order to be just and to understand God. Christianity thus invites the person to become “word-like, god-like” (II, 236) –

¹¹⁸ James Corckery, interpreting Ratzinger’s Christocentric idea after *Jesus of Nazareth* was: “With Jesus Christ, the second (or ‘last’) Adam, the head of a new humanity, a new incarnation begins (Ratzinger 1969:211, 1966:60). He is not some special case of the human being but rather the exemplary human being in whom God’s intention for humanity fully comes to light (Ratzinger 1969:175-176). He is the restored image of God (Ratzinger 1979:47), ‘the revelation and the beginning of the definitive mode of human existence’ (Ratzinger 1987[b]:187), the complete answer to the question ‘what is the human being?’ (Ratzinger 1995:48). In him, the second, the definitive Adam (1 Cor. 15: 44-48; Col. 1: 15), we are shown what it really is to be human; and we see that, with creation – the first Adam – a preliminary sketch, a rough draft, was given, which means that we are beings en route, not yet ourselves, but transitioning to what we are to become, as this is revealed in the second Adam (Ratzinger 1995:48-49).” James Corkery, “Reflection on the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI),” *Acta Theologica* 32, no. 2 (December 2012): 23–24.

an *exemplum*. The search for God in Christ is the only way to this encounter, and becomes the center of human life. Our encounter with the truth becomes an act of sharing the same truth, and consequently, becomes an incarnate truth. That is what it means to be the image of Christ in the world, and to attain in ourselves a “living and holy sacrifice,” by “sharing in the incarnate love of Jesus Christ” (II, 236). In this way, Ratzinger the person is the “true worship,” when he or she lives God’s will and becomes “a total answer to God” (II, 238). By this token, the person becomes in himself or herself a “Word-like” of God, a reflection of the Incarnate word, and of course, the place where the Christian faith is fulfilled.

Here we see what Ratzinger calls the “true humanity” of Jesus, God in person (I, 334). The two figures he has in this humanity, “mission and being,” illustrate the salvation he brings with him. Because the Son of Man is God, he “transcends the bounds of the individual and embraces many” (I, 334). In this embrace, he forms disciples, who in turn form a “new humanity and communion with God” (I, 335). Nothing separates being and mission. “Jesus’ whole being is mission” (I, 172). He is always present in all who carry this mission. All such missionaries find their strength in Jesus, who accompanies them in this “missionary dynamic” (I, 172). The apostles’ message leads to an encounter because it is more than a word, it is the person of Jesus Christ.

§16. *Universality, Unity, and Eternity*

Chapter Fifteen inspires us precisely to concentrate now on the fullness of life in time and beyond it. The believers’ *exemplum* is not closed in the circle of finitude. In order to understand the full dimension of Ratzinger’s perspective, we must see that it also opens the way to universality, unity, and eternity. It makes the world a city of God.

Ratzinger describes the believers as the “just” who “walk their path in righteousness” and who “open up space for new action by the Lord.” They are called his missionaries, or in other words, disciples of God (III, 19). For Ratzinger, these two dimensions, righteousness and new action, fulfil the law of God through the “revealed will of God” (III, 19). This revelation finds its clarity in Jesus’ presence, which shows God’s will to the world in his human nature, specifically in his agony and death, in his *sacramentum*. It is there that we realize that God’s will differs from humanity’s. It is there we see, paradoxically, that the new action is usually surprising and illogical. Ratzinger thus makes reference to Saint Joseph, for example, who was called to an unexpected act that fulfils God’s will. In this same way, we could add that righteousness shows readiness and action paves the way to God’s world, to his presence in us and through us, just like his presence within the holy family.

In effect, for Ratzinger, discipleship is first and foremost harmony with the new covenant of Jesus. It depends on hearing the Word and obeying it within the unexpectedness and the apparent irrationality of God’s wisdom. It is a discipleship covenant that does not depend on an ancestry related to one’s nation. Rather, it is the “domain of universality” that the Son has brought in his coming (I, 66). The essence of God’s words and actions communicates “the we of the new family” (I, 169); and he calls this family to universality. God’s people are not Israel’s people only, in other words, but are those who form a “communion with Jesus,” according to the new nature of God’s Torah, a “living Torah” and thus a present Torah (I, 169). The meaning of discipleship itself thus becomes a call to a universal mission. This universality embraces Israel and the world. In addition, Ratzinger claims that this new covenant transcends time. From the past, to the time of Jesus, up until our present and future, Jesus stands as the permanently present Word. His universality and transcendence enable us to “follow him and accompany him on his journey” (I, 69).

What makes this universality real? Ratzinger alludes to a kind of chain of universality. It depends on the apostles who perceived the presence of Christ tangibly, and with them, we observe and listen “to the Jesus of the gospels.” The objective of observing and listening, in turn, is to “lead to personal encounter.” What makes this encounter possible is the “collective listening” of humanity, together with the disciples of Jesus who truly witnessed Jesus’ historicity (II, xvii). It is plain to see that Ratzinger here stresses faith in an Apostolic Church. This Apostolicity ensures the continuation of God’s work in us in Jesus Christ.

Ratzinger thinks the way to this encounter in history, in communion with the apostles, demands an internal ascent. In his trilogy, he frames the encounter in a mystic dimension when he speaks about our ascent with Christ to the right hand of the Father. This dimension is not at the end of a long journey; rather, it begins from the day of baptism, which unites us with the Son. Consequently, our life becomes a personal invitation to a harmonious living with Christ, and follows the path of a kind of “space travel of the heart” to “the new dimension of world-embracing divine love” (II, 286). The Christian life becomes a continuous ascent with Jesus to the right hand of the Father, and there, a universal dimension of love overshadows the faithful. The world becomes for the faithful a Christ-centered world, where he is present, invites us to be present with him in God, and thus to embrace all the world of God in Christ.

But universality is also intimately connected to unity. Specifically, Ratzinger relates universality to the “communion of Christ’s Church” (I, 84). Communion with Jesus and in him, quite literally establishes a unity in which God reveals himself as the powerfully present God. The image of a united Church is the image of the one kingdom of God, the city of God, and the authority of this kingdom relies on “Jesus Christ’s peace” (I, 84).

In addition, Ratzinger believes that this unity is “something that is inexplicable on the basis of mankind’s own efforts and that therefore makes visible the workings of a higher power” (II, 96). The visibility of such a unity, specifically, witnesses to the presence of God who works concretely in the world through the community of faith. Thus, the Church itself becomes the witness of God’s presence. It is on this basis that we can now understand all of Ratzinger’s efforts to make visible the Church’s unity. Through it, the person can recognize the power of God and his continuous presence.¹¹⁹

Our unity in communion with the Church relies on, a more basic, transcendental unity that unites us with God in the form of a communion. Ratzinger unifies the person as mentioned earlier in the sacrifice of Christ that generates communion. It is a fullness of life that upholds our ability to live in God in time. The fruit of this unity is recognition and faith in God through the Son. These are “not something merely intellectual” (II, 99). In other words, Because God is love in the Son (§13), he gives human beings the opportunity to know him, and by knowing him, they can change their way of life. As a result, true life becomes a gift from God to humanity lived in the Church, in Christ (§15). It is a universal call that begins with Jesus, as the one universal God (§14), continues with the disciples, and reaches everyone through their mission. God invites the whole world, through his Son, “to be torn free from its alienation” (II, 100). Jesus becomes for Ratzinger the image of the New Moses who frees the world from slavery in order to make it a world of God.

The outcome of this world in Christ, as we can now see, is anthropological. God invites the person to “become fully himself again by becoming one with God” (II, 101). In other words, humanity is incomplete apart from God. “Jesus’ ‘I’ is by no means a self-willed ego revolving

¹¹⁹ On the other hand, “any unity that is created without God, or even in opposition to him, ends like the experiment of Babylon: in total confusion and destruction, in the hatred and violence of universal conflict.” Pope Benedict XVI, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 124.

around itself alone... communion with him is a filial communion with the Father” (I, 117). As Word and event in history, the object of this communion, scripture itself affects time, in that it becomes the space that enables us to encounter God. Time is thus reciprocal. Reading the scripture leads us to “the today of Jesus,” and at the same time, “Jesus can enter into our today” (I, 104). The Word of God is the site of this encounter in the world. It thus realizes the fullness of life in God through the fullness of time that joins God and humanity.

Ratzinger can now speak about a heaven that is already present. His point of view is eschatological. By this token, the interpretation of the Beatitudes, which he places under the category of “eschatological promises,” is not about future promises, but rather an invitation to a new way of living where “the reality to come, is already present” (I, 72). This interpretation makes sense when we realize that our encounter is not with a mere human being in body and blood, but with Jesus, the God-man who is always present.

Ratzinger is thus also able to speak of eternity in the present. This eternity is the “real life” that Jesus invites us to live (II, 83). We can thus extract from the trilogy a theology of life. For Ratzinger, life is different from existence. The interplay between “recognition” of God and “communion” in him forms this real life. When we know God, we enter into communion of life with him. Ratzinger opens the gates to true life just as for John’s gospel: “to ‘know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (Jn 17:3)” (II, 83). So, eternal life is not the mystery of an anonymous everlasting dwelling; it is the state of living a real life here and now with the one who is sent. Ratzinger thus also opens the gates of recognition with the key, Jesus Christ: “it is in the encounter with him that we experience the recognition of God that leads to communion and thus to ‘life’” (II, 84). Recognition, communion, and life become the journey of the faithful. In this context, Ratzinger’s trilogy opens the gates of the world to God’s perspective. The historical

life of God that we examined in the first chapter speaks of God's enduring presence that allows us to enter this recognition and communion, thus, allows us to live the fullness of life.

Ultimately, it is the saints who represent the eschatological world that is already present: "The Kingdom of God is drawing near" (I, 79). They are the true missionaries who live their Word, and thus reveal their *exemplum* in their sacrifice that imitates the Word. They manifest in themselves the message of the Church which provides the tools for a heavenly living because it is the dwelling place of the risen Lord. St. Francis of Assisi exemplifies this dwelling place: "Francis stood totally within the Church" (I, 79). He stands totally within the city of God that all people are invited to join, in order to live one kingdom for one Christ in a heavenly earth.¹²⁰

§17. *Martyrs: Witnesses of God's Presence*

As we approach the end of this chapter, we must finally elaborate on the theme of martyrdom in Ratzinger's trilogy. It is the fullness of Ratzinger's anthropology. He seems to take into consideration, throughout his argument, the theology of this radical choice, simply because he believes that martyrs are a vibrant example of the radical *exemplum* for the credibility of the city of God. Unsurprisingly, for its part, martyrdom attaches itself radically to God's presence and is inseparable from it.

The problem that Ratzinger confronts is clearly related to the present time. The development of science and the capacity to dominate the earth shapes a purely human world. As we have seen, God becomes a myth, an enjoyable or useable object. The "ideology of success" that sees God as "fiction" amounts to losing oneself, because the person just becomes "a random

¹²⁰ In his book, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*, Ratzinger states: "The Christian lives in the presence of the saints as his own proper ambience, and so lives eschatologically." Pope Benedict XVI, *Eschatology, Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed, Dogmatic Theology / Johann Auer, Joseph Ratzinger (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 9.

product of evolution” (I, 166). Here, we must note that Ratzinger’s critique of success does not encourage an ignorant society. Rather, it is the success that is independent from God that leads the person to lose her true identity, while the success that is dependent on God grants true freedom. But what is the connection between this problem and martyrdom? In order to provide credibility for his argument that God exists, and is still working and affecting the lives of many people, Ratzinger chooses to highlight another radical movement that declares God’s triumph courageously, the success of the martyrs who are “joyful and confident in a world full of affliction” (I, 166). They become the witnesses of a true life built on happiness. It seems that finally it is joy for Ratzinger that is the criterion of success, and this joy is intrinsically related to an encounter with God.

The power of the martyrs derives from the reality they truly live. For its sake, they offer their lives. We are not talking here about illusions, but rather about an act that costs *life*. Hence, we are speaking of a *sacramentum*, an *exemplum*, and an eschatological act, which proclaim God’s victory *Hic et Nunc* in them. They are consequently signs of the fullness of life.

Ratzinger thus situates martyrdom in the context of a radical choice for God when the person is confronted to choose either God or man. At this point, two apparent contradictions arise: on the one hand, faith in God, and on the other hand, a constant shift in man to a personal freedom, even away from God. For Ratzinger, these two aspects are not contradictory but dependent on each other. Because the man of faith does not seek a personal freedom, the world persecutes the righteous. The only hope that the faithful carries throughout persecution is her solidarity with the persecuted Church, which “stands in the place where God’s Kingdom is coming” (I, 89). It is necessary to note that Ratzinger is in no way against the world. In this context, he limits the meaning of the word “world” to “the ruling powers.” We must not forget that the Church is in the

world. So, it would be better to say we make a worldly choice directed to evil, or a worldly choice directed to God.

In this context, Ratzinger refers to Acts: “the Christian has to ‘obey God more than men’ (Acts 5:29)” (I, 12). This can be interpreted to mean that obedience, by its nature, demands listening, and listening demands a person, and the person in this setting is God. The believer listens to the person who is God and obeys him. The Word of scripture thus becomes in a permanent way an Incarnate Word that speaks and waits for a response.¹²¹ Apart from this divine fact that communicates humanity, Ratzinger describes with embarrassment those who, by their suppression, declare themselves the ultimate truth. These are usually connected to political systems, starting from “Augustus’ claim to be the bringer of world peace and the savior of humanity,” up until the present dictatorial systems (I, 12). In all this, we perceive the poignancy of Ratzinger’s radical call to God’s choice when we notice his focus on praising the martyrs. The martyrs are Jesus’ image and embody “the faithful witness” (I, 12). They become themselves Christ present in the world and for the world.

Henceforth, Ratzinger recognizes that suffering for the sake of the Lord shows the true image of God who suffered for humanity (*sacramentum* and *exemplum*). Exactly like Jesus, the witnesses of the truth carry the “inhumanity of worldly power” as their cross in order to attain (with Jesus) a true life in the world (II, 199): “This transformation comes at the price of the cross; it comes at the price of readiness for martyrdom on the part of Christ’s witnesses” (II, 101). Jesus’ witnesses then share in the salvific plan of God that changes the world through their unity with the crucified. From here, we can infer that communion with Jesus’ action brings the same effects to

¹²¹ In *Spe Salvi*, Ratzinger says: “The Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative”. That means: The gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. Pope Benedict XVI, “Spe Salvi,” November 30, 2007, 2, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html.

the world. Jesus is thus present today in his witnesses. The interrelation between Jesus the sufferer and the present martyrs who are “victims of violence” bears the image of the loving God who still works for the world and shows the power of his seeming powerlessness in them (II, 200). But of course, this is not the end. Ratzinger highlights that the martyrs’ passion and death is connected to their resurrection with Christ. Again, his key word is joy. For him, it is the clearest effect of the resurrection that accompanies the one who suffers in the name of Christ: “the splendor of the resurrection shines through, and it brings a joy.” He thus points out that the unity of the messenger with the message gives birth to personal “satisfaction and happiness” (I, 73).

All in all, Ratzinger summarizes the theology of martyrdom in two Christological fundamentals: the “obedience of Christ” and “the liturgy of the cross.” Both lead to “true worship.” We thus understand that the content of Christianity is not only based on a faceless morality which leads a person towards a good social life. Rather, the martyrs proclaim the tidings of one who is “god-like,” and “word-like,” who unites the believer with Jesus in his life and death. Ratzinger’s conclusion is here based on Saint Paul’s reading of his own martyrdom as “liturgy and as sacrificial event” (II, 239). The Incarnate God manifests himself plainly, as a living liturgy and as a living sacrifice in those who still live their choice for God until death – until the fullness of life. Therefore, because he is present in them, he is also present in the world, and the world is the city of God.

In brief, this systematic discussion of Ratzinger’s anthropological vision takes into consideration the perfect manifestation of a present God who sanctifies the world for himself. Jesus’ historical *exemplum* that shows his *sacramentum*, is a loud universal sign of the true life. Choosing Christ, which means living Christ, is thus living the fullness of life that does not end, a fullness that bears a temporal and eternal life.

Chapter Four

The Sacramental Giver: Building the City of God

On the basis of Jesus of Nazareth's historical and sacramental revelation, and his *exemplum* that affects believers through his *sacramentum* that is his life, Ratzinger reveals a world where God is actively present in his city. In it, humankind and God commune. For Ratzinger, the city of God is a reality which situates God's presence in a special frame embracing all the implications of this presence. We will now examine a final argument that completes Ratzinger's theology of God's presence in his trilogy. After we have briefly mentioned the city of God that opens the world to universality, unity, and eschatology, we must trace closely the theme of the city within the books. We will also revisit the previous chapters to examine their significance for the city Ratzinger envisions. In this way, we will clarify Ratzinger's unique contribution to contemporary theology and the newness he brings to the world in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

§18. *Humanity, the Church, and the World: The City of God*¹²²

Ratzinger often implies that the city of God is an exceptional city in the world, one that is able to understand and live God's authentic and continuous presence among his people. It is thus

¹²² Ratzinger's city of God is in total harmony with the description of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ratzinger indirectly elaborates the following passage: "Often, too, the Church is called the building of God. the Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the corner-stone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives solidity and unity. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which his family dwells; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling-place of God among men; and, especially, the holy temple. This temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it. It is this holy city that is seen by John as it comes down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband." U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition*, 2nd Edition edition (New York: Image, 2003), 756.

able to live according to the requirements of Jesus' perfect manifestation. Based on Augustine's apparent influence, Ratzinger develops a reflection on the city of God. We see in *Jesus of Nazareth* a "trinity" of person, Church, and world, as it relates to Ratzinger's concept of the City. The person is the city of God, the Church is the city of God, and the world is the city of God.¹²³

To begin with, Ratzinger emphasizes the non-theoretical character of the kingdom of God that is like Jesus; it is a factual reality Christians experience in history.¹²⁴ The uniqueness of God's revelation in Jesus is his historicity (chapter one), and for that reason Ratzinger states that "the *factum historicum* (historical fact) is not an interchangeable symbolic cipher for Biblical faith" (I, xv). Because the Word of God is dynamic and more than just a 'word,' it is an event: "We can go to the very places where he himself went. We can hear his words through his witnesses" (I, 272). In describing the kingdom of God that is ultimately the city, Ratzinger sees a visual connection between the kingdom, which is the dominion of God, and history, including humankind, Church, and the entire world, which is also in Christ a dominion of God. Through the city, he shows the vigorous, tangible effects of Jesus' lively Word. In this city, God and human person work together. God the builder in his Son, and humanity the adherent through a life-changing decision. How then does Ratzinger picture the city of God in history?

Let us first notice how the ascension of Christ helps build the city. As demonstrated earlier, the communion of the Father and Son makes Jesus permanently present in the world because he is present with the Father. Ratzinger thus interprets the ascension event as the foundation of the

¹²³ In this chapter, the world as a city of God respects Ratzinger's vision of the Christological world that will eventually triumph. "In Jesus' world, righteousness is man's answer to the Torah, acceptance of the whole of God's will, the bearing of the 'yoke of God's kingdom,' as one formulation had it" (I, 17).

¹²⁴ Since his early years, Ratzinger has expressed this idea. During the Jubilee of Catechists, he stated: "the kingdom of God is not a thing, a social or political structure, a utopia. The Kingdom of God is God. Kingdom of God means: God exists. God is alive. God is present and acts in the world, in our – in my life." Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Conférence Sur Le Thème de La Nouvelle Évangélisation," 2000, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20001210_jubilcatechists-ratzinger_fr.html.

city.¹²⁵ “The blessing hands of Christ are like a roof that protects us. But at the same time, they are a gesture of opening up, tearing the world open so that heaven may enter in” (II, 293). Here, Ratzinger implicitly points to the world that witnesses this blessing, to the Church embraced in Jesus’ hands, and to the person who receives God’s blessing. If Jesus’ blessing becomes the “roof” of the city, this signifies that he is the protector of the world, and his blessing also becomes the tent of the meeting, the Church, which signifies he is the mediator, since he brings heaven to earth. The city of God, then, is the body of Christ that embraces the Church, and protects the world including humanity, which signifies for Ratzinger the world. Ratzinger’s Christocentric vision is obvious in this scheme. The two main pillars of the city are God and the world: “God and man, God and the world, touch one another in him” (II, 40). The Christ reconciles the world with God. As a consequence, the world does not form a separate entity far from its creator, but rather it is intrinsically related to him in the redemptive work of the Son. Ratzinger thus professes a new creation in Christ. Again, humanity and God are not only united in one place, but radically in one person: “the world... attained its rightful form, the unity of God and the world” (I, 353).

By “rightful form,” Ratzinger indicates that a change has happened. Before the active work of Christ, the world was incomplete, its form not yet right. Ratzinger thus returns to Jesus’ key of salvation, to the cross. Ratzinger writes that the second sleeping of the second Adam generates life. Jesus, as man and God, sleeping on the cross, is an image that declares the birth of the city in the history of salvation. His sleeping is the light of a new creation illumined from the crucified

¹²⁵ *Dominus Iesus*, the declaration of the congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at the time when Ratzinger was its head, contributes to our interpretation of God’s city in Ratzinger’s trilogy. The declaration also begins with the ascending of Christ saying: “The Church’s universal mission is born from the command of Jesus Christ [The *Lord Iesus*, before ascending into heaven, commanded his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and to baptize all nations] and is fulfilled in the course of the centuries in the proclamation of the mystery of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the incarnation of the Son, as saving event for all humanity.” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Dominus Iesus*,” August 6, 2000, 1, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

God. Why does Ratzinger call it sleeping? This choice goes back to Eden. A new creation is brought forth from the sleeping of the New Adam: The Church. “The opened side of the Lord *asleep* on the cross prompted the Fathers to point to the creation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam, and so in this outpouring of the sacraments they also recognized the birth of the Church” (II, 226, emphasis mine). This new city in Christ reveals the second creation in the Church as the “*definitive Jerusalem* that is already growing in the midst of this *world*” (II, 11, emphasis mine). So, the ascension of Christ is a continuation of his work of salvation on the cross. Jesus’ sacrificial act gives a new blessing to the world, it builds the city of God in the Son, in history.

In the city, God is permanently present. The Lord “continues to come” (II, 11) as a perfectly present God for his people in the Eucharist.¹²⁶ Herein lies an important point. Ratzinger refers to Saint Bernard who speaks of the “*adventus medius*, the middle coming” (II, 291). The Incarnate God reveals himself personally at three different times: The Incarnation, the present, and the final coming. After the ascension, that ends Jesus’ coming in his Incarnation at the fullness of time, the world witnesses the middle coming, which precedes the eschaton, or the final coming, and at the same time lives it in time. The definitive Jerusalem thus begins on earth until the direct encounter in heaven.¹²⁷ Significantly, Ratzinger’s “*adventus medius*” situates the Church as the only means to encounter God in time. By this token, Ratzinger thus criticizes generally pluralist theologies in favor of the Church as the locus of God’s active presence for the universal salvation.

As mentioned earlier in § 15, the disciples, like Christ, are faithful to the Word of God that

¹²⁶ Noticeably, in *Sacramentum caritatis*, on the theme of sacramental presence, Benedict clearly states: “By his command to ‘do this in remembrance of me’ (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:25), he asks us to respond to his gift [the loving gift of the incarnate Son of God] and to make it sacramentally present. In these words the Lord expresses, as it were, his expectation that the Church, born of his sacrifice, will receive this gift, developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the liturgical form of the sacrament.” Pope Benedict XVI, “*Sacramentum Caritatis*,” 11.

¹²⁷ *Dominus Iesus* professes: “The kingdom of God, in fact, has an eschatological dimension: it is a reality present in time, but its full realization will arrive only with the completion or fulfilment of history.” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 18.

they proclaim and live. Jesus comes in the Eucharist, and he also comes in the Word of his disciples. It is the whole Church handing on the faith of the apostles that bears God's presence and transmits his Word among the people. Again, Ratzinger here remains close to Augustine, and "sees the clouds on which the judge of the world is to arrive as the word of proclamation" (II, 291). Thus, both the Word and the Eucharist bear the continuous presence of God in his city. The Word in this case is dynamic. The disciples' witness to God's presence in the Eucharist. "The Word is the true, dependable reality: the solid ground in which we can stand, which holds firm even when the sun goes dark and the firmament disintegrates" (II, 51).

We can thus conclude that the world, the Church, and humanity – the city of God that Ratzinger visualizes – are intrinsically bound to the person of Christ, to his historicity in the world, to his Eucharist in the Church, and to his Word in the faithful. His blessing constitutes its covering, and his Word establishes its ground. It is thus a sacramental city that the sacramental giver builds, and in which he remains actively present in time through the sacraments and through the proclaimed Word that holds the *sacramentum*, Jesus' life (§15). His presence remains continuous, because the divine Word, that requires humanity's participation, lasts forever.¹²⁸

Our sharing with God in his coming prompts Ratzinger to write: "The present 'world' has to disappear; it must be changed into God's world" (II, 101). His reading, "God's world," points to the world as a temple where all the universe worships the one God. "They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Jer 32:38), and also: "there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16).

¹²⁸ The city that is related to the sacraments and to humans is also mentioned in *Dominus Iesus* in these two fundamentals: "On the one hand, the Church is a sacrament... On the other hand, the Church is the people gathered by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, 18.

The temple and the liturgy are intrinsically related to each other. Ratzinger thus points out that what unites the people and the city to each other is the temple's liturgy that "open(s) up a space for common worship" (II, 18). In this context, again, Ratzinger rejects a pluralistic conception of worship. He sees unity in the city of God a sign of its strength and triumph; it "makes visible the workings of a higher power" (II, 96). Even space in Ratzinger's city does not exist anymore. God is already present in the temple; the temple is anywhere and anytime: it is humanity, it is the Church, and it is the world. For that reason, the worship of God is "no longer on this or that mountain, but 'in spirit and truth' (Jn 4:23) (I, 20): This is the new space and time of the city. Here, Ratzinger cites Zechariah's vision, in which he "proclaims a kingdom that extends 'from sea to sea' (Zech 9: 10). Yet precisely in this way he distances himself from any national frame of reference and points toward a new universality" (II, 16).

In the city of God, this universality is apparently an invitation, through the Word proclaimed, to share in the sacrament of Christ (§16). This is possible because of God's initiative. He invites us to be his children (§6), thus to be his city, his dwelling. Because God touches the world in Christ (§8), "the filth of the world is truly absorbed, wiped out, and transformed in the pain of infinite love" (II, 231). Ratzinger points to this paradox where the clean purifies the unclean. Faith in the active work of God purifies. Faith "restores the pure breath of life" (I, 175). Ratzinger again alludes to the new creation, to "the Spirit of God (who) was hovering over the waters" (Gen 1:2) that "can give health to the world" (I, 175). Indeed, health equals life. The universe was void and the breath of God gave life to the world. And now, through faith, humanity's answer to God's universal invitation, the same breath again gives life to the city of God and creates the new person in Christ. The sacraments by this token, as the work of the Holy Spirit, are the nourishment that give life to the people of God.

Ratzinger describes the awakening stage of those who accept God's invitation in their life-changing decision. "Man wakes up to the truth in a way that gives him a new satisfaction here and now" (I, 214). It is interesting to note that in the Eastern Christian tradition, which Ratzinger already recognizes, awakening distinguishes men from the angels. The angels are called *Íro*; which also means awakening. Ratzinger thus unites earth as a whole, and by the same token, unites heaven and earth as one city of God. The unity of heaven and earth, of men and angels, brings total freedom in God. Ratzinger sees that at this level, the person frees himself from his "I" to touch "a new love that places us in another gravitational field where we can enter new life" (I, 194). This entrance becomes concrete when we live the *exemplum* we have already elaborated on earlier (§15) and enter "into communion of service and obedience with Jesus Christ" (I, 95). We will become then the city of God.

Ratzinger's city of God describes a world with no sin, where God prevails over any other power, and where the person lives a total union with the Holy. For him, "Once sin has been overcome and man's harmony with God restored, creation is reconciled, too" (I, 27), and by this token, humanity, the Church, and the world as the bearers of the body of Christ become the city of God.

We can describe the city of God that Ratzinger envisions as person, Church, and world, in terms of the hypostases of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Trinity.¹²⁹ Just as the hypostases of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are unique in that they retain their individual attributes, they are also united in one divine essence. Also, the person, the Church, and the world retain their individual and unique attributes while remaining united in the city of God.

¹²⁹ Here, I am not making an equation between the trinity of person, Church, and world, and the Trinity Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am trying to describe a find language of what Ratzinger is trying to say in his *Jesus of Nazareth* on the city of God.

Nevertheless, certain questions remain, which we must now address. Is the city of God a mystical reality to ponder upon, or a lively reality to be tangibly achieved? How is it related to the theology of life that we discussed in the previous two chapters? How can a theology of life throughout *Jesus of Nazareth* respond to the trilogy's critics?

§19. *Recapitulation: A God Who Is Present in the City*

The foregoing discussion refers the city to an active scheme. It unites the dynamism of the person in his proclaimed Word, with the dynamism of the Church in the Eucharist, and the dynamism of the world as the ground of a sacred history. The city of God thus relates to a more vital structure, the authentic and sacramental presence of God in Christ. If the Son is the kingdom of God, *Autobasilica* – “The Kingdom is not a thing, it is not a geographical dominion like worldly kingdoms. It is a person; it is he” (I, 49) – and the kingdom is the city of God where he reigns, then the city is a vessel where the Incarnate God exercises his dominion over history: in the world, in the Church, and in the believer. Ratzinger thus relates the whole to the dominion of the One. Nothing can be out of God's reach. Ratzinger answers the question of God. He is defending God's ability to dwell everywhere in Christ. Yes, the city of God is a lively reality. It also depends on the response of faith, which accepts the living God in his tangible city, in history.

I will now relate this city of God to the theology of life in *Jesus of Nazareth*. Based on chapter two, part one, we are able to encounter historically the living God. Nevertheless, this encounter demands a vital place that bears his holy presence. So, as long as there is a living believer, living Church, and living world, there is also a living God who is actively working in his city.¹³⁰ We thus encounter him in ourselves, in the sacraments, and in his sacred world. The

¹³⁰ This does not mean that the dominion of God is conditioned by our existence or inexistence. However, I am relating his presence here to humanity's perception of God.

tangibility of the living Word – its intelligible, scriptural, ecclesial and reasonable presence, including the fact of its fulfilled, performed, and active living character – is perceived in a living history, in the city of God.

Based on chapter two, part two, the sanctification of the world that Christ achieved – in which time links the sacrament of Christ with our prayer, and in which Jesus' communion with the Father signals his permanent presence – involves an ontological communion with him. Because Jesus dwells in his city, believers share the life of Christ personally in their depth, communally with the ecclesial community they belong to, and universally with the invited peoples.

Based on chapter three, this historical encounter with the living God generates the fullness of life. The city of God thus is open to an eternal life despite its temporality. Jesus' presence that structures the city by his *sacramentum* introduces a new heaven. The believer, the Church, and the world, are the heaven of God because they are colored by the *exemplum* of Christ, they are a Christ-like city. Yes, indeed, even the world that accepts Christ becomes a heaven that never dies, it is God's creation, and part of his universal salvation.

The theology of life that we have thoroughly discussed fills the gaps of the initial scholarly reception of *Jesus of Nazareth* we have seen in chapter one. First, it completes De Gaál's reading when it relates theology to a contemporary living with the Word. If Jesus is the answer of God to humanity because he is God, then he responds in his *sacramentum* to humanity's questions. For De Gaál, the second coming guarantees acceptable responses to faith. I think Ratzinger in the trilogy wants to accentuate the ability to know God and retain satisfactory answers to our concerns here, on earth, by encountering the living Word. Second, the theology of life fulfills Lam's "spiritual Christology" with a more practical way of living a historical, universal, communion with oneself, with the church, and with the world. The spirituality that Lam speaks of in his *Joseph*

Ratzinger's Theological Retractations needs to be more experiential. For Ratzinger, Christ is tangible; he lives in history. Beside remembrance and acknowledgement of God's power, *Jesus of Nazareth* underscores a spirituality that requires entering existentially into the depth of Jesus' dwelling. It helps the faithful to participate in the life of God with his creation. Third, the theology of life weds Mueller's "traditional gospel portrait" with a living Word portrait, in order to give birth to an actual relation of God and man in the present moment. Jesus is not only the narrated man; he is also the living man in the historic city of God. The city bears the past, the present and the future as one time in the life of Christ. Fourth, a theology of life in the trilogy solves Boersma's criticism on Ratzinger's understanding of faith and politics. It is very true that Ratzinger separates them, but at the same time, he indirectly reconciles the work of politics to serve faith. When Ratzinger speaks of a life with God in history, drawing to the fullness of life in the city of God, he is then calling to a universal reconciliation that ensures a transparent work of politics in respect to the living faith.

Finally, the theology of life in the trilogy responds to the supporters of the historical critical method who believe that this method alone is sufficient in order to read scripture. When Ratzinger proclaims the life of the Word historically, he is thus pointing to a lively reading that respects the life of God in his Word. *Jesus of Nazareth* is saying that the historicity of God's revelation in Jesus necessitates a new understanding of the concept of God. He is a person; he is related to history, including its three dimensions, the past, present, and future. Speaking of God becomes a more comprehensible discourse when we tangibly receive him in the Incarnate Son, in the Word of scripture present among us. However, Ratzinger sees a continuous problem related to the time-experience hermeneutic, which recognizes the distance between us and the historic event. In the reasonable world, the narrated event becomes a regular, disputable substance when it is taken as

only a historic Word. Ratzinger's systematic Christology of Christ's presence incorporates the question of time. It is a major theme in his understanding of historical and sacramental revelation. How does Ratzinger solve this question and thus give a satisfactory answer to the insufficiency of the historical critical method?

Time is intrinsically related to history. Ratzinger's examination of the intelligible fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament reveals the authenticity of the Word that has already journeyed a long distance of time, from creation to the fullness of time. The same Word is thus able to continue its path freely in history. The scriptural Word which is fulfilled in the Incarnate Word thus has a dynamic substance. This dynamism gives it the power to continue moving without interruption through time. Ratzinger understands the credibility of the Word's dynamism in its performative character. Therefore, we consistently conclude that the journeying Word is not a theoretical observation; it fills time with the lively act it performs. By this token, Ratzinger does not measure time only with the chronological sequence of history. He measures time according to its valid subject. If the event of the Word still has its salvific consequences in the experience of the faithful, of the Church, and thus of the world, then, the distance between two moments of history, the past and the present, do not affect time which is already filled with its active event. Therefore, reading scripture demands an acknowledgement of a living Word that lives in time and beyond it. It can surely be examined on the basis of a historical reading, but also on the basis of an extensive reading that relates all the history of mankind, even until now, to the life of the permanently present Word.

§20. A Simple Word

In this discussion of a God who is present, we notice Ratzinger's obvious Christocentric vision that simply relates the whole life of mankind, even the whole creation, to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In him, God is present; in him there is life. Can we call Ratzinger's Christology a simple theology that preserves the simplicity of God rather than complexity? Surely Ratzinger builds his insights on the Word: creative, salvific, and sacramental. For him, God has only one Word, and thus he speaks to humanity through this Word. It is not logical to understand God's simplicity in terms of complexity. From this simplicity, humanity understands the humble relation that God reveals in his Son, who is present in humble forms in the world. This simple theology paves the way to a close relation between humanity and God that anyone can reach, the old and young, the academic and the ordinary, the rich and the poor, the politician and the citizen, and the believer and unbeliever. This simplicity also touches the unbeliever through its openness to an encounter with no limitations. This openness is related to its dynamism, which can reach the whole through the simplicity of God in Christ. We can now understand Jesus' titles, whose meaning Ratzinger interprets. The title "Son" is a "simple designation of himself" (I, 338); "'I am he' seems to be a simple identifying formula by means of which Jesus enables his followers to recognize him" (I, 351); and "Son of Man" is a "simple word [that] blends together with a mysterious allusion to a new consciousness of mission" (I, 324). Ratzinger ultimately believes that if God were not simple, he would not have lived among us, and we could not have known him in the world.

With the crisis that faces today's world, – and when we say crisis, we do not mean the effects, but rather the causes that are related to the interiority of the human person – the question of God's presence becomes urgent. If he is present, let him change the human condition to that of a peaceful, thankful, and obedient creature. In fact, Ratzinger leads us to know that God is already

present, and what is happening to us depends on our response to God's presence. Ratzinger stresses where to find God: in the sacraments, in men and women of God, and in the sacred world that witnessed his Incarnation. The Word of God is scripture, it is Jesus. But it is also the Church, his body, it is humanity, his image, and it is the world, his creation. The unity of scripture, ecclesiology, and anthropology dwells in the Word because they all reflect its presence in the world, always to remind the world of its simple origin, which is in God.

Conclusion

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger shows that God in Christ discloses a new world which is not imaginative, but is rather a real world that a person builds in his life, faithful to the Word he has received. But yet, at the end of our investigation, there still remain elements for further inquiry in Ratzinger's theology: one beyond it and one beneath it.

Beyond his theology, within the horizons of the active Word, Ratzinger has faith in the Church's contemporary message. His appeal to trust the Word of scripture as the dynamic Word that we truthfully encounter in the sacraments and in the life of those who live the *exemplum* of Christ, based on its intelligibility as a Word and at the same time as an event, opens the door to a new evangelization that begins in the life of the faithful. Ratzinger invites Christians to live in Christ based on what the apostles and witnesses have taught in their word and example, in order to transmit this evangelical faith to other people who will also bear witness to the beauty of their encounter. This thought is in fact the purpose that Ratzinger professes at the beginning of his first volume: This book is an expression of his "personal search 'for the face of the Lord'" (I, xxiii). Ratzinger builds his trilogy on a faith which is an encounter with God, in which we can observe and witness the activity of the Word within our realm. As such, the society of Christ that Ratzinger envisions depends first of all on the example of the faith that Christians live, which helps to build the city of God, and shows the unfaithful the dynamic Word that works through its *sacramentum* in that same city.

In his apostolic letter, *Ubicumque et semper*, Benedict refers to *Deus caritas est*: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a

person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction' (n. 1).” He then adds: “Likewise, at the root of all evangelization lies not a human plan of expansion, but rather the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has wished to give us, making us sharers in his own life.”¹³¹ In this sense, evangelization is not an action that requires a disengagement, but rather, it requires personal involvement and living faith, built on an encounter with God. Furthermore, the light of this encounter is sufficient to change the world and make it a city of God. This horizon gives humanity a practical way to spread the faith, simply by evangelizing as people in the image of Christ.

Ratzinger shows that those who think that God is absent – whether hidden in a different world, a different space, or in one’s imagination – should contemplate the fact that other people have experienced a very authentic presence that changed their lives and opened for them another perspective of reality. Their change of life was a result of hearing the same Word that the apostles proclaimed. How has this same Word affected people through the centuries and led them sometimes to disregard death, and even to praise it in order to encounter the Word without fear, and with an unbelievable joy? If reality is not just what we see, but also what we do not see – such as love, peace, and hope – why can’t the Word be a reality? This positive experience of the Word is an affirmative response to the question of God’s hiddenness. One can even assume that hiddenness cannot be affirmed positively unless God’s presence has first been affirmed negatively.

In his trilogy, Ratzinger shows the reality of the Word that touches humanity through the *sacramentum* of Jesus of Nazareth in order to manifest itself truly in the world. He shows the dynamic journey of the Word as creative, salvific, and sacramental, all in Christ. He also shows

¹³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, “Apostolic Letter Issued ‘Motu Proprio’ Ubiicumque et Semper of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization,” September 21, 2010, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html.

its effects on human lives. All this is to say that it never ceases to show itself as an Incarnate Word that aims to build a relationship with humanity in Jesus Christ.

Ratzinger's concern to highlight this relationship through the active revelation in the Word that changes the world by its activity, and consequently transforms it into a Word-like kingdom, poses the reality of a God who is keenly present and speaks with his creation. This changes our understanding of God's purpose, for he aims not only to introduce himself as an absolute Creator who takes care of his creatures, but as one who raises them up so that they can approach his mystery when he invites them to a communion with the Word. The one who experiences the Word is then the one who also transcends the world and its experiences.

We know that Ratzinger argues for the reality and continuity of the living Word and of its effects on the believer. But we must also note in closing how he understands the ground of this dynamism. What is the fundamental essence of the one, simple, and single Word of God, which comprises all the words of scripture, holds all creation together, and sacramentally saves and transforms the world through its work? What is beneath the theology of Ratzinger's trilogy?

In the trilogy, there are some subtle hints which may help us formulate answers to the above questions. Beneath this theology of the Word, Ratzinger conceals a silent and hidden Christology that respects the mystery of Christ's divine nature. For that reason, the encounter that the faithful establishes demands a kind of mystical life that discerns the voice and image of God.

In the trilogy, Ratzinger also mentions Jesus' silence or alludes to it many times. For example, in the mysterious deeds he has done: "Whenever Messianic or other related titles are applied to him, he enjoins silence" (I, 321), or when he speaks of Jesus' dialogue that "reaches down into depths far beyond the words" (I, 133). Also, when he speaks about the Word of Jesus that is "more than a word; it is his very self. His Word is truth, and it is love" (II, 60). In all this,

Ratzinger notices a different form of the word that, in one way or another, is related to Jesus' silence.

Besides silence, Ratzinger alludes to a Christology of hiddenness that also demands a mystical reflection. Ratzinger clearly uses important terminology such as "implicit Christology" (I, 207) and "veiled Christology" (I, 49). He also calls Jesus a "mysterious defendant" (II, 199) and a "mysterious other" (I, 14). Ratzinger finally characterizes most of Jesus' answers as "puzzling" (II, 19), "enigmatic" (II, 72), or "cryptic" (II, 71).

What can we say of this? The Word of God is present actively in the world. But this does not mean that it discloses itself in a way that we can totally absorb it. The paradoxes of the Word will always accompany our knowledge in order to reflect the truth of the Word in faith. In fact, if the Word is exhaustively uncovered, then faith is needless, and the free choice of humanity is demolished. Consequently, God becomes a power that imposes itself. By this token, the encounter will lose its loving value, which demands the free response of the person towards God.

Ratzinger builds the city of God on the active Word. But he knows that this world is only a foreshadowing of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the encounter becomes an eternal communion in God.

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