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## For the Sake of Unity Between Truth and Love

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## FOR THE SAKE OF UNITY BETWEEN TRUTH AND LOVE

The present issue of *Marian Library Studies* is centered on two major theologians and saints, Thomas of Aquin (1225–1274) and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (born Giovanni di Fidanza) (1221–1274). Contemporaries but of different religious obedience – one Dominican, the other Franciscan – and philosophical orientation, they are both doctors of the Church and pillars of Catholic theology. The major contribution to this issue, Glavin's study on the Mariology of Thomas and Bonaventure, highlights the difference and complementarity of their life and thought. Koehler's concise study on the mercy vocabulary in both authors pursues a similar objective. The article accentuates the spiritual and mystical significance of mercy in Bonaventure, and emphasizes the theological synthesis of the mercy theme in Thomas. Bonaventure's reflection leads to imitation, the imitation of Christ's mercy; Thomas, on the other hand, sees in God and his goodness the root of human existence and the very reason of human perfection.

The philosophy and theology of both these authors seeks, and is in constant search of the deeper unity between truth and love. The ultimate goal is the same for Bonaventure and Thomas; their analysis differs because of the existential and methodological interest they pursue. The time of Thomas and Bonaventure coincides with the beginning of what is called scientific theology, a theology not only steeped in the revealed word but also more and more dependent on a philosophical infrastructure and methodology, based mainly on the Aristotelian or Platonic heritage of Western culture. As a consequence of this dependence the history of theology will evolve toward a sometimes sharply defined opposition between scientific and spiritual theology, neglecting thereby the common origin of all theology in the *professio fidei* which constitutes and expresses the ultimate unity of truth and love in the Christian tradition. The separation of these two realities presents a constant challenge to the unity of thought and action in Christianity. It is a threat, ultimately to the very unity of Christ's person and mission, and to the unity of his humanity and divinity.

There exists, of course, the constant watchfulness and the noble effort of those who tirelessly remind the Christian people – bishops, theologians, and faithful – of the “undivided tunic” of Christ, a symbol of unity, and primarily a metaphor for the total message of Jesus Christ and his Church. Benedict XVI is one of these voices. Steeped in scholastic and historical theology, Joseph Ratzinger is a scholar and connoisseur of Bonaventure as well as of Thomas.

We would like to highlight in this introduction to two studies on the relationship between Thomas and Bonaventure the importance of Ratzinger's theological contribution to the unity of truth and love. In doing so, we will emphasize the importance of theological continuity in difference.<sup>1</sup>

## A Passion for Truth

Ratzinger believes in the "rationality" of faith, for him faith is reasonable: such was the tenor of his much debated Regensburg address.<sup>2</sup> But he will not turn a blind eye on the fact that there exists a truth which human reason will never discover of its own power and merit, but can only receive as a gratuitous gift.<sup>3</sup>

He uses bold language when hailing knowledge as the basis of Christian faith. "In Christianity, enlightenment has become part of religion and is no longer its opponent. Because that is how it was, because Christianity saw itself as embodying the victory of demythologization, the victory of knowledge, and with that the victory of truth, it necessarily regarded itself as universal and had to be carried to all peoples."<sup>4</sup>

If the reference to truth is constant, so is Ratzinger's *caveat* against idolatry of reason: "We must also lay to rest" — he insists — "once and for all the dream of the absolute autonomy and self-sufficiency of reason. Human reason needs the support of the great religious traditions of humanity."<sup>5</sup> Well aware that anyone who is trying to serve truth by his life, speech and action must "prepare himself to be classified as a dreamer or a fanatic,"<sup>6</sup> Ratzinger shares the ethos of truth he met and appreciated in G. Söhngen, his teacher and mentor. His profession of faith was and is marked by Söhngen's motto, *Von der Wissenschaft zur Weisheit* (From Science to Wisdom). Theology leads to wisdom, however, the way to wisdom is science. Söhngen's goal was wisdom, "the touching of truth itself, to penetrate reality to its very core, and to become one

<sup>1</sup> The following reflections are part of an article by this author, *Mary – Personal Concretization of the Church.* "Elements of Benedict XVI's Marian Thinking, in: *Marian Studies* 57 (2006), 242-321, taking into account pp. 247-251; 254-256, 261-265.

<sup>2</sup> See: Knut Wenzel (ed.), *Die Religionen und die Vernunft. Die Debatte um die Regensburger Vorlesung des Papstes* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2007), 9 ff.

<sup>3</sup> "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in a Congress Held on the Occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Publication of Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*," 16 October 2008 (c2008, Libreria Editrice Vaticana)—may be found at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2008/October](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/October).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 170.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996): 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 17.

with it. His concern was truth, truth which is also the way, the way that will lead man to true humanness and teach him how to live.”<sup>7</sup> Gifted with a radical faith in the truth, Söhngen was also a “radical believer,” and it was this combined radicality that impressed itself on his student: “. . . die Furchtlosigkeit, mit der er jede Frage stellte und die Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der er dabei wusste, dass der Glaube von einem redlichen Suchen nach Erkenntnis nichts zu fürchten hat.”<sup>8</sup>

The passion for the truth is the central hermeneutical characteristic of Ratzinger’s theology; it is also the lifeline of his spiritual life because truth “is probably the best guide to selflessness and true freedom.”<sup>9</sup> Committed to truth and utterly sensitive to treason and oblivion where truth is concerned, he claims that “the lack of truth is the major disease of our age. Success and results have outstripped the truth everywhere. Renouncing the truth and escaping into group conformity are only apparently a way to peace. . . . Only in truth’s humble patience do we mature from the inside and become free from ourselves and for God.”<sup>10</sup> And so Ratzinger is seen by many as an anchor against relativism,<sup>11</sup> against relativism which—according to him—begins in the natural sciences and moves to ethics and politics, then to religion, the latter having been established in the recent present by thinkers such as John Hick and Paul Knitter.<sup>12</sup> The reassertion of objective truth in a culture often allergic to the very concept begins with the recognition that truth possesses its worth in itself. However, to think through “the essence of truth is to arrive at the notion of God. In the long run, it is impossible to maintain the unique identity of the truth, in other words, its dignity (which in turn is the basis of the dignity both of man and of the world), without learning to perceive in it the unique identity and dignity of the living God.”<sup>13</sup>

Ratzinger’s theology is centered on the *whole message*. The expression evokes method and theological principles; it also has the resonance of a personal profession of faith: “. . . what I really have at heart is keeping this precious treasure, the faith, with its power to enlighten, from being lost, and this applies

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Von der Wissenschaft zur Weisheit. Gedenkworte beim Requiem zu St. Agnes in Köln am 19.11. 1971,” *Catholica* 26 (1972): 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger, “Von der Wissenschaft zur Weisheit. Gedenkworte,” 5.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today* (New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1996), 165.

<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger, *A New Song*, 166.

<sup>11</sup> See Lothar Häberle, “Anker gegen den Relativismus,” *Communio* 36 (Nov./Dec. 2007): 586 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debate* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 40.

to the good and beautiful things that have accrued to it in our history.”<sup>14</sup> The pendant to this understanding of mission is a fundamental personal identity, the need to be true to what the person has recognized as essential, all the while remaining open to seeing what should change. Ratzinger makes this assessment of his personal history: “I don’t deny that there has been development and change in my life, but I hold firmly that it is a development and change within a fundamental identity and that I, precisely in changing, have tried to remain faithful to what I have always had at heart.”<sup>15</sup>

The full treasure has to be passed on and the fundamental identity accrued with personal experience—these appear as two indispensable linchpins for a comprehensive mission and methodological approach to theology. Add to this the comprehensive nature of the very object of method, where Jesus Christ is not seen as either Jesus or Christ but as *Christus totius*—God and man; history and faith; Christology and soteriology; Christ yesterday, today and tomorrow. The responsibility for the whole truth determines theological method and expands its effort to the totality of the message.

### **The Ethos of History**

The name Johann Joseph von Döllinger (1799-1890) is closely connected to the beginning of the Munich tradition of ecclesiastical history. Gifted with enormous historical erudition, his vision of history centered on the concepts of “organic growth” and “consistent development.” He encouraged the pursuit of scholarly study of Church history, and so became the father of an illustrious line of German Church historians. Among them we count the names of Otto Bardenhewer (Early Church literature), Martin Grabmann (Scholasticism), and Michael Schmaus (Medieval philosophy and theology). Michael Schmaus (1897-1993) was one of Ratzinger’s teachers. A professor of dogmatics, Schmaus was known for the breadth of his methodological approach, highlighting especially the historical dimension of theology. Reaching out to Scripture and the Fathers, one of his main concerns was to build bridges between Scholasticism and contemporary philosophy.

Ratzinger’s thinking is permeated with the ethos of history. There is hardly a major article to be found in his writings where the historical context of a problem is not given mandatory attention. At the opening of the symposium on the “Primacy of the Successor of Peter” (2 December 1996), he reasserted the importance, albeit also the limitations, of the historical approach: “Given the historical nature of Christian revelation, an attentive cooperation between

<sup>14</sup> Ratzinger and Seewald, *Salt of the Earth*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Ratzinger and Seewald, *Salt of the Earth*, 116.

historical and theological methods is essential to enable theological reflection, also critically justified, to fulfill its task. Undoubtedly, it is true that history as such cannot provide an apodictic certitude of the truth of faith. It should nevertheless be borne in mind that the true meaning of historical facts—even in profane matters—is not revealed by a mere photographic recording of facts as such, but unfolds only in a light that comes from elsewhere, from a vision of reality which can never be simply reduced to the limited horizons of a fact empirically considered.”<sup>16</sup>

Some of the statements made may sound like echoes of Ratzinger’s second dissertation (*Habilitationsschrift*), *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*.<sup>17</sup> Situated within the Munchen historical tradition, Ratzinger’s study appears as an alternative to a narrowly defined Scholastic theology. Re-situating theology in a *continuum* of Revelation-Scripture-Tradition, the dissertation attempts to retrieve the historical nature of Revelation. Ratzinger sees Bonaventure as appropriating the essentially historical understanding of Scripture which characterized the work of Joachim of Fiore. Not Scripture *as such* is Revelation, but the capturing and understanding of its true and spiritual meaning. Here is the place where Ratzinger’s understanding connects with allegorical exegesis. Adopting Bonaventure’s *visio intellectualis*, he interprets it as the sharp and penetrating look that reaches the very core of meaning without perverting the objective character of Revelation.<sup>18</sup>

Ratzinger’s historical ethos of respect for history and historical sources includes the idea that Christianity is a way of life both steeped in Christ and leading to him: “A Christianity that is no longer a common way of life, but simply proclaims an undetermined ideal, would no longer be the Christianity of Jesus Christ and his immediate disciples.”<sup>19</sup> History is here qualified: it is a way with a goal and a roadmap to reach that goal. The Church by its very nature must always show the way: “She must make the moral content of faith ever newly possible.”<sup>20</sup> Not exclusively historical, this moral obligation co-fashions and co-fashioned the historical character of the Church.

<sup>16</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 1 (1 January 1997), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Translation of “Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventure,” 1959, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> See Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger—Benedikt XVI*, 23-24.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Christian Faith as ‘the Way’: An Introduction to *Veritatis Splendor*,” *Communio* 21 (Summer, 1994): 199, 200.

<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger, “Christian Faith as ‘the Way,’” 200.

## The Wisdom of Love

Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI radiates a “natural contentment,” a serene certitude, loving and knowing, of being surrounded and held by divine truths. As semi-Platonist, he believes “that a kind of memory, of recollection of God, is, as it were, etched in man.” This latent presence was awakened and grew into fascination with religion. A fascination found in liturgical feasts “with the music and all the ornamentation and images.” There was also, from early on, the fascination with knowledge, with “everything that was said in religion.” “This combination of the festive-liturgical and the intellectual seemed to me, as I sought to understand the world, an especially wonderful opportunity for enriching one’s life.”<sup>21</sup> Eventually, the “festive-liturgical” and the “knowledge” would mature into a life’s program expressed many times over as integration of truth and love. As pope, Ratzinger reminded the world’s youth who had prayed the rosary with him (Saturday evening, 11 March 2006) of the necessity to make love and truth the double and unified source and inspiration of Christian existence: “My dear friends gathered in Nairobi, Owerri and Dublin, may Mary, Seat of Wisdom, teach you always to integrate truth and love in your studies and in your lives.”<sup>22</sup> It would seem that these two, truth and love, represent what we would like to call the sapiential watermark of Ratzinger’s Christian existential “philosophy.” It entails faith seeking truth, and truth leading to adoration. In summary, this is how Ratzinger sees the passage from “philosophy” to liturgy: “. . . reverence for the truth is inseparable from that disposition of veneration which we call adoration. Truth and worship stand in an indissociable relationship to each other; one cannot really flourish without the other, however often they have gone their separate ways in the course of history.”<sup>23</sup>

The point of departure of this sapiential trajectory lies with the faith-reason approach, or in the words of Ratzinger with the “rationality of faith” inspired by the unity of philosophy and theology in early Christianity, but seeking a new unity for this time. Faith does not need protection against philosophy because it is steeped in love, and love seeks understanding; love is “at the same time eros for truth, and only so does it remain sound as agape for God and man.”<sup>24</sup> The love that inspires seeking truth is also what leads truth to adoration. For this reason, faith remains true to itself only when it “takes up the cause of philosophy.”<sup>25</sup> Faith inspired and guided by love “is not just a blind

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger and Seewald, *Salt of the Earth*, 41, 48-50.

<sup>22</sup> *L’Osservatore Romano* (Eng.) no. 12 (22 March 2006), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 29.

gesture, an empty confidence, an adherence to a secret doctrine or the like. On the contrary, it wants to open men's eyes, to open their eyes to truth."<sup>26</sup> Against Martin Buber's claim of faith as fundamental trust, Ratzinger holds the importance of the faith-content, a content that compels belief and wins one's Yes. A "structural constituent of Christian faith," this content refers to Jesus Christ, the *Logos*, in "whom is contained the meaning of the world—its truth."<sup>27</sup>

Early Christianity was convincing in the eyes of the world because of the connection of faith with reason and by directing behavior with charity. This was possible only because "Christianity went beyond the limits of wisdom the philosophical schools, in that the notional God was met as a living God . . . [with] a moral practice that was embodied and lived out in community."<sup>28</sup> The practical basis and constant reference of this mission was and is the twofold commandment of loving God and one's neighbor.

Ratzinger's version of the complementarity of "sitting" and "kneeling" theology is that true theology is always "ordered to the experience of the saints," because "the single invisible light of God is broken up in the prism of our human history, so that we may encounter the everlasting glory and radiance of God in our own human world, in our brothers and sisters."<sup>29</sup> The mention of the saints as brothers and sisters is reminiscent of one of Ratzinger's earliest essays on Christian brotherhood. For its actualization two qualities are required: the "vital knowledge of God's fatherhood," and a "vital joining with Jesus Christ in a union of grace."<sup>30</sup> "Vital knowledge" and "vital joining," or truth and love: here the two pillars of the Christian edifice open the door to a deeper understanding of the importance of the liturgy. Truth and love are intimately related to prayer, itself an "instance of praying, . . . the most transparent moment in the dialogue between God and man."<sup>31</sup> Truth and love are essential to prayer because the Christian God is "speech" or "word." Only where God is *Logos* can there be "speech" to and with God, meaning expression of relation (love) and reflection (truth). In both of these aspects, the divine *Logos* is the "ontological foundation for prayer," for he has first shared in human speech and, even more important, has brought God and humanity in communication with each other.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Anthropological Element in Theology," in his *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 337.

<sup>27</sup> Ratzinger, "The Anthropological Element in Theology," 337.

<sup>28</sup> Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 174.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Verkündigung* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1973), 421.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Christian Brotherhood* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 44.

<sup>31</sup> Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 208.



But since Church is so identified with him that she can be called his body, the insertion of the human person into God's own speech happens in the Church.

Thus the importance of liturgy and worship. The importance of worship is correlated with human dignity: "Only if man, every man, stands before the face of God and is answerable to him, can man be secure in his dignity as a human person. Concern for the proper form of worship, therefore, is not peripheral but central to our concern for man himself."<sup>32</sup> Liturgy is the place where true human identity is decided, because "in the liturgy we learn, by identification with the Church, how to find our true identity in the Christ who as the 'firstborn of all creation' holds all things together." Goal and expression of this identification hold in the expression *anima ecclesiastica*, the "personal embodiment of the Church." In the liturgy "we are given an anticipatory share in the Church's perennial dialogue of love with him who desired to be one flesh with her and this gift is transformed into the gift of speech. And it is in the gift of speech, and not until then, that I am really restored to my true self; only thus am I given back to God, handed over by him to all my fellowmen," "only thus am I free."<sup>33</sup>

The connection made between "gift of speech" and "restoration to true self" takes us back to the linchpin of love and truth. The "gift of speech" is both admission of the dissimilarity between God and the human person (truth) and realization of similarity thanks to God's graciousness (love) making possible and actualizing the relation. The veritable integration of love and truth at the level of the God-human relationship can only be conceived as what Verweyen considers the central notion in the whole of Ratzinger's work. According to him, what defines Ratzinger's whole work is the notion of "being for" which, in turn, is centered on the Pauline "Body of Christ." This ecclesiological notion evolves within the broad context of the liturgy. Liturgy, in turn, serves as the common denominator of Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology.<sup>34</sup> Aidan Nichols' assessment may thus be accurate, that the mature Ratzinger will speak of theology as "subordinate, in the last analysis, to contemplation, charity, holiness and—not least—the attaining of poverty of spirit."<sup>35</sup>

Johann G. Roten, S.M.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, 30; Nichols, *The Thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI*, 212.

<sup>34</sup> Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 64.