

“Among the vast array of commentary and interpretation concerned with the theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, this book stands out in its illuminating presentation of central aspects of Benedict’s theological vision. [*The Word Made Love*] will serve as an excellent guide to both the letter and the spirit of Benedict’s theology.”

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Boston College School of Theology and Ministry  
Author of *Retrieving Nicaea*

“Fr. Christopher Collins has written a book which is both informative for the general reader and a useful bibliographical source for the student. There is a certain ‘freshness’ in the tone and a pleasing humility in the presentation. This book is certainly a significant addition to the commentaries on Joseph Ratzinger’s work.”

—Gill Goulding, CJ  
University of Toronto

“I have been captured by the beauty of Fr. Collins’s *The Word Made Love*. By illuminating the dialogical theology of Pope Benedict XVI, this masterful work brings the reader face to face with Jesus’ living presence. Thank you, Fr. Collins!”

—Fr. John Horn, SJ  
President-Rector  
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

“Fr. Christopher Collins, with theological acumen and pastoral sensitivity, provides a robustly Christ-centered reading of the writings of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI. This is an admirable introduction to the universal scope of the Pope’s theological vision.”

—Robert Imbelli  
Boston College

“Eloquently and peaceably, with a rare combination of scholarly and spiritual discipline, Christopher Collins guides us into the very marrow of Joseph Ratzinger’s theology: God calls us to encounter Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit. In this simple insight, Ratzinger’s whole theology and life are enfolded. Indeed, like an icon, this book draws us into the encounter to which Ratzinger bears witness. A stunning achievement.”

—Matthew Levering  
University of Dayton  
Author of *The Theology of Augustine*



# The Word Made Love

*The Dialogical Theology  
of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*

Christopher S. Collins, SJ



A Michael Glazier Book

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*Contents*



Foreword vii

Introduction xi

Chapter One: The Theological Formation of Joseph Ratzinger 1

Chapter Two: “Revelation Seen Basically as Dialogue” 21

Chapter Three: Jesus the Christ: Eternal Logos-Made-Love  
in History 55

Chapter Four: Church as the Locus of Divine-Human Dialogue 93

Chapter Five: Word Spoken from Beginning to End: Creation  
and Eschatology 131

Epilogue 171

Bibliography 173

Index 179





## *Foreword*



In his *Theologische Prinzipienlehre*, first published in 1982 and translated into English in 1987 as *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, Joseph Ratzinger described the “fundamental crisis of our age” as understanding the mediation of history in the realm of ontology. He noted that the “problem of history’s role in the realm of being has become a question about being as such: Is there a continuity of ‘humanness’? And, if there is, at what point does the mediation of history begin?” In shorthand terms, one might call this the Heideggerian “being in time” problem. Whereas the theological establishment prior to the Second Vatican Council prided itself on being “ahistorical” or “above history,” the effect of Heidegger’s philosophy was to push to the front of theological speculation the issue of the significance of time and history for our understanding of the human person. Moreover, the different responses to the documents of the Second Vatican Council often revolve around different understandings of the role that history plays in theological speculation. Indeed, many of the theological conflicts of the last two centuries can be reduced to questions about the relationship between history and ontology (also described as the grace, nature, and culture relationship) and the relationship of history and revelation (which includes the territory of the relationship between faith and reason and tradition).

In this work, Christopher S. Collins, SJ, provides a most lucidly written account of Joseph Ratzinger’s theology (as it developed within the historical context of the “being in time” problematic), which Collins describes by the adjective “dialogical.” By this term, he means that Ratzinger’s theology is driven by his interest in the relationship between God and each unique human person situated in history.

Collins notes that Ratzinger learned from St. Bonaventure that “wisdom is unthinkable and unintelligible without reference to the historical situation in which it has its place.” Moreover, being a Christian is about having a personal relationship with God, and relationships are by definition a two-way giving and receiving, or literally “dialogue,” not a one-way missive.

One of the most revolutionary aspects of Christian revelation is the notion that Truth is a Person. As Collins observes, “In Ratzinger’s thought, not only is the drama of salvation history itself unfolding, but the theological *understanding* of this history is also developing in its own kind of drama within a drama. The whole of his theology is manifested according to the pattern of narrative rather than that of proposition and argumentation.” In an interview given to Peter Seewald, Ratzinger remarked that he “could not imagine a purely philosophical theology” since “the point of departure is first of all the Word.”

As a consequence, for Ratzinger, humanity is rightly understood in the light of Christ and not the other way around, and for theology this means that anthropology should be seen in the light of revelation rather than the other way around. This is essentially the path taken in paragraph 22 of *Gaudium et Spes*, which appears to have been adopted almost word for word from Henri de Lubac’s work *Catholicisme*. It was also the approach of Hans Urs von Balthasar, another of the outstanding sons of St. Ignatius in the twentieth century. In his book *Milestones—Memoirs 1927–1977*, Ratzinger remarked that meeting von Balthasar was for him the beginning of a lifelong friendship and that never again has he found anyone with such a comprehensive and humanistic education as von Balthasar and de Lubac. He concluded, “I cannot even begin to say how much I owe to my encounter with them.”

Collins summarises the meeting of theological anthropology and ecclesiology in the works of Ratzinger in the following paragraph:

As Ratzinger interprets Bonaventure, then, the understanding of God that comes in revelation is not what is apprehended in isolation by one thinker but rather is a discovery that is made in union with the community of the whole Church over the course of salvation history. Consequently, what comes to be known by the human person in the process of *revelatio* is not some kind of “clear and distinct” *idea* about God, but rather only the kind of knowledge that comes from personal encoun-

ter with God in history. This encounter does not take place in private between the individual and God but in the context of the whole complex of relations that comprise the church in the present that is always connected to its past.

This is a beautiful exposition of Joseph Ratzinger's account of the faith for which, in Ratzinger's own words, there is no more convincing proof than the "pure and unalloyed humanity" it fostered in his parents.

Because Truth is a Person, truth and love are the twin pillars of all reality and faith is dialogical. Collins, a twenty-first-century Jesuit, gets this.

This work makes a seminal contribution to a deeper understanding of Ratzinger's theology as *logo*-centric and sensitive to the historical dimensional in faith and theology.

Professor Tracey Rowland



## Introduction

**A**s a newly ordained priest, my first assignment was to be a pastor for four small parishes of the Jesuit mission on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Those years of pastoral work in a sense provide the backdrop for my own interest in the present topic. The narrative of the life and struggles on the reservation, including the massive unemployment, breakdown of family structures, violence, alcoholism, etc. is a familiar one. In my experience it seemed that none of the social, political, or even religious institutions worked very well to address the needs of the people. It also seemed that in that environment nothing I tried to do programatically as a pastor *worked*. No new initiatives of mine bore any fruit. Nobody seemed much interested in new ways of being involved in the church. However, what in my opinion *did* work, on a regular basis, was the liturgy. No matter how broken down all the other institutions and activities seemed to be, for me, especially in my sensitivity as a new priest, it was palpable how “effective” the liturgy was. Even if ten or twelve people were there for a Sunday mass, or it was a funeral mass at which only a handful of people might come for communion, somehow, by paying attention in a new way to the prayers being said, knowing a bit of the personal stories of the people in the congregation including much of the sorrow and pain in their histories as well as something of the hopes for something new in the people’s lives—all of this made for a profound encounter I had the privilege of entering into every day. I listened, in a sense, with new ears to what Christ was speaking to his people gathered around him in the Eucharist and I heard with new ears the responses and pleas of these same people. There was speaking and listening . . . and silence. There was dialogue that was very

fragile and on the surface did not achieve much. But I had a profound sense that this encounter—this dialogue—was the only thing that *worked* during my time on “the Rez.”

With that pastoral and spiritual experience as a kind of catalyst for the research and writing I have taken up in the last few years I came to discover the figure of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, as a guide and an exemplar of a contemporary theologian who does theology, it seems to me, with a profound pastoral and spiritual sensibility. I had never read his works before he was elected pope. After that I would occasionally see one of his homilies or Angelus addresses given in ordinary pastoral settings. I was struck by the simultaneous simplicity and profundity of his words. It was captivating how he could so succinctly encapsulate the mystery of the encounter with Christ in such a concrete and simple narrative manner. Again and again he would reiterate that Christianity is not a set of ideas to believe, much less moral principles or laws to follow. Rather, Christianity is about a person and, specifically, our own encounter with that person. He stresses repeatedly that God has spoken to humanity, ultimately and most perfectly, in the person of Jesus Christ.

The more I read of Ratzinger, both in his academic theology and in his preaching, the more I gradually came to detect a very basic structure in his work. Whether he was speaking of the liturgical season of Advent, the mystery of Christ’s suffering on the cross, the life of any given saint or the need for justice and solidarity in a broken political and social structure, one way or another I would always glimpse his method of describing the transformation that happens when one enters into a personal encounter, into dialogue. This is the way he articulates the whole of the Christian vision, it seems to me, and here, in the pages that follow, I have attempted to trace this pattern, to describe this dialogical principle of coherence in various and diverging aspects of his thought.

Ratzinger sees God as the one who *speaks*. Humanity is best understood as those who listen to God’s Word and then are able to respond. God and humanity are dialogue partners. But this is not a dialogue of equals; it is necessarily *asymmetrical*. It matters who speaks the first word. For Ratzinger, God is always the one taking the initiative, and humanity is always in the posture of responsiveness. So for Ratzinger all of reality is dialogical, but dialogical in an asymmetrical manner. Indeed, even in the very essence of God there is dialogical communication and communion in the eternal trinitarian relations.

But here too there is an asymmetry to the communication. The priority of speech always lies with the Father. Furthermore, not only is the *inner life* of the Trinity asymmetrically dialogical but this same God also communicates himself in creation and in human history. This communication that unfolds throughout human history culminates in *speaking himself* in the person of Jesus Christ. The basic structure of all reality, then, is dialogue. My aim here is to show how this dialogical, communicative structure that is always unfolding is the unique way Joseph Ratzinger constructs his theology. I argue that he represents a unique contribution to the renewal of theology that is more personalistic and therefore more communicable in contemporary culture.

This study begins with a brief exposition of what I think are the most significant dimensions of Ratzinger's own theological formation that produced such a communicative, dialogical approach to theology. The subsequent chapters will attempt an exposition of how the dialogical structure of his thought, based on the eternal Logos of God communicated both in eternity and in human history, provides a framework for the whole of his theology. In chapter 2, I focus on how this communication of the eternal Logos pertains to his theology of revelation, which he sees as necessarily involving the active *reception* of God's Word by God's people in history. Chapter 3 examines Ratzinger's Christology, which follows this same dialogical framework in which God's speaking of the Word is not only the source of an intelligible creation but also becomes the center of human history when that Word becomes human. Chapter 4 gives an exposition of Ratzinger's ecclesiology, which flows directly from his Christology, so that the church becomes the privileged place to encounter the fullness of the Word in Jesus Christ. Special attention will be given to the role of the liturgy in this expression of ecclesiology. Finally, chapter 5 describes the implications of this dialogical framework for a renewed eschatology and theology of creation that especially provides a basis for the theological virtue of hope that is of such concern to Benedict in the current cultural and religious context. Throughout all these aspects of his theology it will, I hope, become evident how this dynamic of the Word of God being spoken, heard, and responded to provides a basis for a contemporary kind of "personalistic" theology that is narrative in its texture and provides an alternative to the abstraction characteristic of much of modern theology. In this, an exemplar of a theologian who is able to communicate the content of

the Catholic faith in a manner accessible not only to the minds but also the hearts of a contemporary audience can be found in Joseph Ratzinger.

## Chapter One

# *The Theological Formation of Joseph Ratzinger*

*“Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love.” (Hos 11:3-4)*

**A**s he began his opening lecture of the last course he would ever teach, a class on the theology of Pope Benedict XVI, Avery Cardinal Dulles remarked, “The real leader of the seminar, under the Holy Spirit, will be Pope Benedict himself. By virtue of his intelligence, his learning, and the positions he has held, he is in my judgment the most important Catholic theologian of the day.”<sup>1</sup> Benedict can perhaps be considered as such not only because of his role as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for nearly a quarter century and then as the elected successor of Peter, but because he has so clearly cultivated his theological project in the pattern called for in the Second Vatican Council: to return to the sources of Scripture and the patristic tradition while being consciously open to

1. Class lecture notes, January 16, 2008. Thanks to Sister Ann Marie Kirmsie, OP, the long-time secretary of Cardinal Dulles at Fordham University in the Bronx, NY, for this reference.

translating the Gospel in a mode intelligible to the modern world, according to the signs of the times.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not one might agree with Dulles's assessment, it is clear that in the landscape of Catholic theology at the beginning of the twenty-first century Pope Benedict XVI stands out as a major figure who has served as a catalyst toward encouraging an approach to theology that simultaneously involves a return *ad fontes*, to biblical and patristic sources, and at the same time one that is able to speak the new language of personalism hungered for in contemporary culture.<sup>3</sup> Before elaborating on those early intellectual influences that produced such a theological sensibility, however, we take a brief look at the context of this formation.

### ***Brief Biography***

Joseph Ratzinger was born and baptized on the same day, April 16, 1927—Holy Saturday—at Marktl am Inn in Germany. He studied philosophy and theology from 1946 to 1951 at the Higher School of Philosophy and Theology of Freising and at the University of Munich. He was ordained a priest on June 29, 1951 and taught briefly at the Higher School of Freising. In 1953 he obtained his doctorate in theology with a thesis entitled *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (*The People and House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church*).<sup>4</sup> Four years later, under the direction of Gottlieb Söhnngen, professor of fundamental theology, he wrote a second thesis, the *Habilitationsschrift* that made him eligible to teach in a German university. *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*,<sup>5</sup> published in 1959, was translated into English in 1989 under the title, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*.

2. Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), *Dei Verbum* 24.

3. John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008). A consistent theme for O'Malley is the new "style" indicative of Vatican II that speaks to the hearts and minds of more contemporary people. This style includes a responsiveness to the reality of the "turn to the subject" in modern philosophy and theology.

4. Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (Munich: Zink, 1954).

5. Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (Munich: Schnell and Steiner, 1959).

After lecturing at Freising, Ratzinger went on to teach at universities in Bonn from 1959 to 1963, Münster from 1963 to 1966, and Tübingen from 1966 to 1969. In 1969 he assumed the chair of dogmatics and history of dogma at the University of Regensburg. For the duration of the Second Vatican Council, from 1962 to 1965, he served as a *peritus*, a theological “expert,” for Cardinal Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne. In 1977 he was named Archbishop of München-Freising by Pope Paul VI and served there until 1981 when he became the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was named a cardinal that same year. Ratzinger served Pope John Paul II in this capacity for the remainder of his pontificate and ultimately succeeded him to the Chair of Peter on April 19, 2005.

### ***I. Formed by a Living Tradition***

#### **The Word Spoken at Home**

Ratzinger’s theology of the Word stems from a rigorous philosophical and theological formation. But it also carries weight precisely because it derives from both the ordinary and the extraordinary moments of his personal life. In the course of his father’s dying, he recalls, “We were grateful that we were able to stand around his bed and again, show him our love, which he accepted with gratitude even though he could no longer speak.”<sup>6</sup> And again, at the time of his mother’s death he would speak about this mystery of the truth of love being communicated in life and perhaps most poignantly in death in terms of the theological framework he had been building: “On the day after Gaudete Sunday, December 16, 1963, she closed her eyes forever, but the radiance of her goodness has remained. . . . I know of no more convincing proof for the faith than precisely the pure and unalloyed humanity that the faith allowed to mature in my parents.”<sup>7</sup> This sensibility of recognizing the resonance of the faith within very human events has continued to echo in his life where his great love for music is concerned. He famously recalls:

For me an unforgettable experience was the Bach concert that Leonard Bernstein conducted in Munich after the sudden

6. Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927–1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 119.

7. *Ibid.*, 131.

#### 4 *The Word Made Love*

death of Karl Richter. I was sitting next to the Lutheran Bishop Hanselmann. When the last note of one of the great Thomas-Kantor-Cantatas triumphantly faded away, we looked at each other spontaneously and right then we said: “Anyone who has heard this, knows that the faith is true.”<sup>8</sup>

The tangible, intimate, and expressive nature of this faith in the course of ordinary (and perhaps extraordinary) human experience sheds light on his later theological formulations of that faith. Though he would soon enter into an academic environment, his theological project would never become so abstract as to be removed from the simple and profound experience of his Catholic faith and the bonds of familial love that mediated this experience of God early in his life.

#### **Seminary Formation**

Such was the affective sensibility he brought with him into the experience of seminary studies. In his memoirs, however, then-Cardinal Ratzinger recalls plainly his dissatisfaction with the arid neoscholasticism in some aspects of this early theological training. The modern person, the young seminarian could see, longed for authentic encounter with the living God—an encounter that could lay a claim on the whole person and not merely on the mental faculties. He recalls the version of Thomism being presented in those years in the seminary: “the crystal clear logic seemed to me to be too closed in on itself, too impersonal and ready-made.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, he sought out—and discovered—a way of doing theology that would speak to the contemporary cultural needs, that would draw modern men and women out of their anxiety and isolation into communion with other believers and with the living, Triune God who is, above all, relational and personal. To enter into that vision, he came to see, the starting point must be an engagement with the biblical narrative.

#### **A New Biblical Point of Departure**

One of the most significant influences on the mind and heart of the young seminarian Ratzinger at this time was the set of exciting new developments in biblical exegesis and its import for all the other

8. Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 37.

9. *Ibid.*, 44.

branches of theology. Friedrich Maier was the “star” biblical scholar at the Munich University faculty of theology while Ratzinger was a student there from 1947 to 1951. Maier was a significant proponent of the “two-source theory” of the Synoptic Gospels, which proposed the existence of another *Quelle* (source) from which Matthew and Luke must have drawn, in addition to Mark, to write their own gospels. This hypothesized alternative source for the gospels came to be known as “Q.” Ratzinger recalls coming to a greater appreciation of the need to pay attention to the concrete setting of the gospels and the historical settings and particularities within which they were written, the great excitement surrounding Maier’s lectures, and how he took to these new studies with great hunger for learning the newly emerging methods for doing biblical exegesis.

Ratzinger would later come to a more critical reception of a certain mode of historical exegesis because he could see how, in its attempt to be highly objective and analytical in its practice of situating the gospels in their historical contexts, “it is not in a position to see the full depth of the figure of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> He soon had a sense of the tension between appropriating the Gospel as historically embedded and yet only accessible by way of an ecclesial hermeneutic that allows the reader to understand Scripture for what it is: texts written *from* the experience of faith and *for* the experience of faith. Nonetheless, from this point on in his early seminary study he would say that biblical exegesis would always remain “the center of my theological work.”<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning how, in hindsight, he has conceived of his own theological method throughout his whole career. In the course of an extended interview, he explains:

I have never tried to create a system of my own, an individual theology. . . . I simply want to think in communion with the faith of the Church and that means above all, to think with the great thinkers of the faith. For this reason, exegesis was always very important. I couldn’t imagine a purely philosophical theology. The point of departure is first of all the Word.<sup>12</sup>

10. *Ibid.*, 53.

11. *Ibid.*, 52–53.

12. Joseph Ratzinger and Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 283.

This brief sentiment gives a clear sense of the contours of his theological vision, his desire to operate within the *communio* of the whole Christian tradition and to do so always based first and foremost on the Word of God, particularly as encountered in Sacred Scripture.

Ratzinger attributes great importance to the teaching and scholarship of Friedrich Stummer, an Old Testament scholar, for the development of another important aspect of his thought. Stummer demonstrated the importance of the perspective of the *inner unity* of the two biblical testaments. Based on this perspective, Ratzinger recounts, “more and more I came to understand that the New Testament is not a different book of a different religion that, for some reason or other, had appropriated the Holy Scriptures of the Jews as a kind of preliminary structure. The New Testament is nothing other than the interpretation of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings found and contained in the story of Jesus.”<sup>13</sup> The two testaments, he could see, are really one expression, unfolding in a coherent way, of the one Word from God spoken in salvation history, culminating in the person of Christ. He came to see that attempting to analyze and interpret each book of the Bible and each part of each book as isolated, historically conditioned artifacts of a given historical and cultural setting results in losing sight of the forest for the trees. The insight offered by Stummer regarding the inner unity of the biblical testaments would have significant impact later in Ratzinger’s understanding of the deep structure of revelation itself and how it is conveyed in the course of salvation history. He was beginning to formulate not only a *historical* sensitivity to the nature of biblical exegesis but also the need for a *literary* approach that can appropriate in a unified way the integration of many texts that offer a multifaceted but nevertheless coherent vision and basis for a whole people’s experience of God.<sup>14</sup> Throughout all of Scripture, he realized, the interpretive tension that simultaneously appreciates the particularities of any given aspect of the scriptural narrative and keeps a sense of the unity of the *one narrative* that is expressive of one ongoing dialogue between the eternal *Logos* and historical humanity must be kept alive. Ratzinger would later describe this historical and literary approach to biblical interpretation as the *analogia scripturae* that is suggested by

13. *Ibid.*, 53

14. *Ibid.*, 53–54.

the biblical texts themselves: “texts have to be referred back to their historical setting and interpreted in their historical context. Then, in a second process of interpretation, they must also be seen from the perspective of the movement of history as a whole and of Christ as the central event.”<sup>15</sup> The impact of this recognition of the inner unity of the testaments and the christocentrism of all of history on Ratzinger’s thought will be explored in further depth in the next chapter on revelation.

### **A Liturgical Horizon**

Next to the exegetes, Ratzinger recalls that his greatest influences at the time were the dogma specialist Michael Schmaus, the fundamental theologian Gottlieb Söhngen, a pastoral theologian named Josef Pascher, and a canonist, Klaus Mörsdorf.<sup>16</sup> Each in his own way pointed toward deeper sources for the various branches of the theological disciplines he taught. If he saw that the biblical narrative is the “soul” of fundamental and dogmatic theology, so too in moral theology, for example, he gained the perspective that sought to “end the dominance of casuistry and the natural law and to rethink morality on the basis of the following of Christ.”<sup>17</sup> If Scripture served as the primary basis for the various aspects of theology, liturgy too became primary as a source for theological reflection. Michael Schmaus, seeing the limitations of the neoscholasticism of the day, offered an innovative, systematic portrayal of doctrine “in the spirit of the liturgical movement and the recent return to Scripture and the Fathers, which had developed in the years after the First World War.”<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger could begin to see more and more clearly the inner relationship of all the branches of theology, reflecting in various ways one coherent vision of the dialogical encounter of God and humanity in the living tradition of the church.

Being introduced to the work of Odo Casel and Romano Guardini was also significant for Ratzinger in the focus they provided on the liturgical “shape” of the Christian faith. Casel’s contribution, highlighting

15. Joseph Ratzinger, *God’s Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, ed. Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 121.

16. Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 55.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 49.

the fact that early Christian liturgical life drew especially on the reality of *mystery*, helped contemporary theologians to reexamine sacramental theology not so much through the scientific/analytical approach characterized by reliance on the ontology of Aristotelianism and neoscholasticism, but rather through the lens of personal engagement in worship that could not be tamed and defined easily by the mode of propositional logic.<sup>19</sup> Ratzinger notes that Casel's emphasis on *mystery* had emerged from the renewed interest in the liturgy as a source for Christian theology. The very existence of this "mystery theology," he said, "posed with new acuteness the basic question concerning the relationship between rationality and mystery, the question concerning the place of the Platonic and the philosophical in Christianity, and indeed about the essence of Christianity."<sup>20</sup> This "mystery" can only be experienced when the individual, isolated person lets go of the prospect of self-security and opens up to the dynamic of conversation with the sovereign God who has "spoken" Himself and called for a response from all humanity. Casel explained that "modern man thinks he has finally driven out the darkness of the Mystery" thanks to the efforts of technical rationality, and yet the human "remains wholly circumscribed in the bounds of the material world. By imagining he is the ruler of this world, he is forced more and more to do its will."<sup>21</sup>

This notion that a human being finds authentic freedom only in entering into and surrendering to the dynamic of relationship with God in the context of worship would become the chord struck again and again in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger. He notes, for example, in his *Der Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung*<sup>22</sup> that the real purpose for God's call through Moses to the people of Israel to go out into the desert is not just so that they can pass through it on the way to the promised land. Rather, they are to go where there is no other source of security, *in order* to freely worship the living God. When God says, "Let my people go to worship me in the desert" (Exod 7:16), Ratzinger

19. Most prominently in Odo Casel and Burkhard Neunheuser, *The Mystery of Christian Worship, and Other Writings* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962).

20. Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 55–56.

21. Casel, *Mystery of Christian Worship*, 3.

22. Joseph Ratzinger, *Der Geist der Liturgie: Eine Einführung* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000); ET: *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000).

lets this command speak for itself: that the essence of God's call to his people, and therefore the fullness of the freedom God has in mind for them, is ultimately rooted in their capacity to enter into this worship, into this dialogue with the living God.<sup>23</sup>

Romano Guardini, too, did much to open up new horizons for Ratzinger through his theology that reminded people of the core of the Christian experience as liturgical worship.<sup>24</sup> For Guardini the church realizes the deepest expression of its identity only in the context of corporate worship. For "in the liturgy," he explains, "God is to be honored by the body of the faithful, and the latter is in its turn to derive sanctification from this act of worship."<sup>25</sup> Consequently, it is essential to be reminded that there is a primacy of *logos* over *ethos* in the Christian life. That is to say, contemplation of divine truth in the liturgy must always precede any authentic efforts to *work* for the kingdom of God. Guardini writes that the liturgy is "primarily occupied in forming the fundamental Christian temper. By it man is induced to determine correctly his essential relation to God. . . . As a result of this spiritual disposition, it follows that when action is required of him he will do what is right."<sup>26</sup> Entering into the dynamics of the liturgy wherein the human person discovers who he or she truly is in relation to God is essential for shedding light on the rest of the Christian life. These insights that became so central to the liturgical renewal of the early twentieth century were, of course, based on the historical retrieval of more ancient Christian sensibilities, and it is to these (and their influence on Ratzinger) that we now turn.

### **The Influence of the Fathers**

Ratzinger embraced the insights of Casel and Guardini regarding the centrality of the liturgy all the more, given his simultaneous realization of the fruitfulness of patristic biblical exegesis and theological conclusions drawn from this approach. He was shaped by the fathers in the conviction of the normativity and unity of Scripture. All theological reflection must therefore begin with a posture of faith that

23. Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 15.

24. Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 43.

25. Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 19.

26. *Ibid.*, 86.

God has taken the initiative and has indeed spoken in history. Origen, for instance, is a great model for Ratzinger in this regard. Reflecting later in life in a “Wednesday audience” on the fathers, Benedict recalls Origen’s influence on the history of theology. He reflects: “Theology to him [Origen] was essentially explaining, understanding Scripture; or we might say also that his theology was a perfect symbiosis between theology and exegesis.”<sup>27</sup> Origen himself notes in the first lines of *On First Principles* that those who find confidence in a way of life that will be “good and blessed” do so because of the “words of Christ.” But “by the words of Christ, we do not mean only those which formed his teaching when he was made man and dwelt in the flesh, since even before that Christ the Word of God was in Moses and the Prophets.”<sup>28</sup> As Sacred Scripture is a conveying of these moments of God’s speech, Ratzinger, along with his patristic teachers, recognizes it must be the starting point for further theological reflection and, as such, provides the normative framework for all that follows. The scriptural witness, though it is expressed in a variety of different genres and comes from various historical and cultural settings, nevertheless is a coherent and unified “word.” It must be taken, in this patristic vision, as a whole and not as a collection of isolated historical documents. Furthermore, from the fathers Ratzinger learned that the living tradition since the age of the scriptural witness is always essential to the present understanding of the faith. How the ecclesial community has appropriated the Word of God spoken in the past serves always as a clue as to how to remain in the dialogical exchange with God in the present. This is especially true when one considers the nature of Christian worship that has been inherited from previous generations. The *lex orandi* of the living tradition becomes essential for the current ecclesial community’s grappling with questions of the *lex credendi*.

Underlying the reliance on biblical and liturgical sources for theology is a presumption of the importance of historical experience of God’s salvation among the people of God. Ratzinger’s professor for fundamental theology, Gottlieb Söhngen, was especially influential in helping to form this vision. In his own scholarship he argued: “the

27. Benedict XVI, *The Fathers* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 36–37.

28. Origen, *On First Principles*, ed. George W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 1.

Christ mystery is no kingdom of 'pure' values like the kingdom of 'eternal truths.'"<sup>29</sup> Rather, at every turn in the Christian tradition, it is clear for Söhngen that truth is necessarily communicated by God to humanity in a manner that is *historical*, and not as ideas somehow disengaged from historical reality.<sup>30</sup> The development of Christian dogma, by way of the age of the fathers, comes to be an essential aspect of how God's word continues to be communicated to the church in every age.

Another major influence, Alfred Läßle, also directed Ratzinger toward Hans Urs von Balthasar's translation of Henri de Lubac's *Catholicism*.<sup>31</sup> De Lubac became for Ratzinger a guide to the fathers, especially Augustine. He describes how de Lubac helped him to discover the "essentially social" nature of the Christian faith.<sup>32</sup> He found there an alternative to the presentation of the faith sometimes narrowly conceived as an individualistic following of moralistic codes or private assent to particular propositional truths. This opening up of the horizon of the essentially communal and ecclesial nature of the Christian faith made it clear to him how the celebration of the sacraments by the whole church really expresses the fullness of the Christian life. In particular he realized in a deeper way the essential link between the Eucharist and the church, namely, how each one "makes" the other.<sup>33</sup> By placing the Eucharist at the center of ecclesiology he simultaneously insists, with Augustine, that the substance of ecclesiology is essentially Christology. This is so since the unfolding of the life of the church whose members are in communion with one another and with the tradition that has preceded them is always

29. Gottlieb Söhngen, "Das Mysterium des lebendigen Christus und der lebendige Glaube . . ." in *Die Einheit in der Theologie: Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Munich: Zink, 1952), 344–48. Cf. Patrick W. Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ: A Model Theologian, 1918–2008* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 168.

30. Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 55.

31. Henri de Lubac, *Glauben aus der Liebe: Catholicisme*, trans. Hans Urs von Balthasar (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970). See also Ratzinger's own introduction to a later edition of the same work by de Lubac in *Henri de Lubac, Catholicism. Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

32. Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 98.

33. *Ibid.* More will be said on this in the later chapter on church and liturgy.

centered on, in imitation of, and participating in the mystical body of Christ himself.<sup>34</sup>

The encounter with Augustine would ultimately lead to the focus of Ratzinger's later doctoral work on the great Latin father's theology of the church as communicated in the images of "people" and "house" of God. Here a familiar theme in Ratzinger's theology would be developed: his sense of the "collective I" of the church. Ratzinger notes that Augustine's use of the term "people of God" often recalled Old Testament foundations wherein God gathered his people together for them to listen to the word spoken through Abraham, Moses and the prophets. This notion of the people of God is recapitulated and fulfilled in the New Testament when the apostles gather together as an *ekklēsia* around the person of Christ.<sup>35</sup> In the process of hearing the Word of God the church becomes a true subject, able to speak back, to enter into dialogue with God who has spoken first. In the course of this exchange of listening and speaking, the church becomes its "true self." Though Ratzinger drew on an ancient source in Augustine for such a vision, the theme would resonate in at least some strands of contemporary hermeneutics as well. The proposal in "reader response theory" that meaning in a text is not fully realized until the reader appropriates that meaning, and further, that this appropriation is a matter not simply for the individual reader but for the whole "interpretive community," would find a certain resonance in Ratzinger's recognition that "by definition, [divine] revelation requires someone who apprehends it."<sup>36</sup> More on this aspect of Ratzinger's thought will be taken up in chapter 4, on the relationship of the Word to the church. But suffice it to say for now that Ratzinger found in the insight of the "essentially social" nature of the church gathered from Augustine yet another place of contact with contemporary thought that was rediscovering some of these ancient anthropological and epistemological insights. We turn now to an elaboration of Ratzinger's contact with some other strands of contemporary philosophi-

34. Emery de Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 65.

35. Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology. Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 159.

36. Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 108.

cal movements that would find resonance in the Christian theological tradition.

### Philosophical Personalism

Ratzinger says that in first being introduced to the “philosophy of dialogue” of Martin Buber he was given “a spiritual experience that left an essential mark” not unlike his first encounter with Augustine’s *Confessions*.<sup>37</sup> Though he does not go on to elaborate much about what this experience was like, it is evident in his later writings how much Buber has been an influence.<sup>38</sup> This new horizon of a “metaphysics of dialogue”<sup>39</sup> suggested by Buber would give a contemporary philosophical grounding that would allow Ratzinger to appropriate the Christian vision from the ancient biblical and patristic sources while enabling him to simultaneously engage contemporary culture in the sphere of its own concerns.

Buber first published his landmark essay, “Ich und Du” (*I and Thou*) in 1923. His “dialogical philosophy” offered a basis not only for a renewal of ethics, politics, and hermeneutics, but also for an understanding of authentic religious experience. Conscious of the needs and concerns of modern culture, Buber’s “Ich und Du” spoke to the “sickness of the age” and offered an antidote to it. In this age between the wars Buber sensed, like many of his contemporaries, an alarming isolation, anxiety, and alienation in his contemporaries. The way to healing this sickness of alienation, for Buber, lay in humanity’s return to the dialogue with “the Eternal Thou.”<sup>40</sup>

In this foundational work Buber points to the possibility of a real encounter of the human person with God, a proposal called into question in the modern philosophical and theological landscape. Only in this encounter, however, would the human person find a way out of the oppressiveness of the modern mentality that had come to objectify all around him. This way of objectification Buber deemed the

37. *Ibid.*, 44.

38. Markus Rutsche, *Die Relationalität Gottes bei Martin Buber und Joseph Ratzinger* (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2007).

39. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice S. Friedman, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 49–68.

40. Tamra Wright, “Self, Other, Text, God,” in Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102–21.

“I and It” relationality. He admits that relating to objects—“Its”—is the way in which we must live much of our practical lives, but when it comes to interacting with the world around us, with other people, and even in attempting to relate to God it is impossible for us to remain constantly standing in this objectivist posture, relating only to “It.” For Buber, this objective relationality is precisely what creates a sense of isolation and “sickness” in the human subject. Offering a critique similar to that of Odo Casel, Buber explains that to have our way of interacting beyond ourselves limited only to this “objectifying” mode is to have the essence of our true human nature stifled. Rather, what is necessary is an entering into the “mystery” of the encounter that is established in an opening up to “the Thou.”<sup>41</sup> The most authentic human experience, for Buber, is an “I-Thou” encounter. This is indeed what makes us human. Too often, however, we become content to remain in the realm of talking about these encounters from the safe distance that “various conceptual, aesthetic, instrumental or mathematical” mediations afford us.<sup>42</sup> Insofar as we do not allow ourselves to be drawn into and changed by these encounters we become closed off from authentic human existence. Rejecting the objectification of God, then, Buber reintroduces his reader to God as divine *subject* with whom the human person is able to enter into real relationship and thereby actualize authentic human identity.

Joseph Ratzinger found in this “I-Thou” paradigm a way of talking about relating to God that opened up new horizons that could speak to the longing for relationship and overcoming the isolation so characteristic of the modern person. Ratzinger would concur with Buber in his belief that the crucial turning point in this authentic coming to be of one’s true self is the conviction that God must be “addressed” and not simply “asserted” or “expressed.”<sup>43</sup> Tamra Wright describes Buber’s strong critique at the end of *I and Thou* both of modern theology and of many traditional religions that are often drawn into an objectification of all that pertains to the encounter with God.<sup>44</sup> While God can be spoken of in certain circumstances as an “It,” it is not true that God *is* an “It.” Making a kind of liturgical argument that reso-

41. Martin Buber and Ronald Gregor Smith, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 229.

42. Wright, “Self, Other,” *Cambridge Companion*, 108.

43. *Ibid.*, 110.

44. *Ibid.* See the whole section on “The Eternal Thou,” 109–11.

nates with the biblical admonition against idolatry, Buber reminds his reader: "God, the eternal Presence, does not permit himself to be held. Woe to the man so possessed that he thinks he possesses God!"<sup>45</sup> Worship, then, that activity in which the human person *addresses* the personal God and allows the God who is not object but subject to *speak*, is essential for healing the modern sickness of humanity.

For Ratzinger's part, it seems that he has drawn especially upon the Jewish philosopher Buber to suggest the very shape of the Christian faith itself. Emery de Gaál Gyulai argues that for Ratzinger, by following the "grammar" of Buber's description of the God-human relationship, both Christian theology and anthropology may be redefined precisely because "through a human being God has entered history as a speaking subject."<sup>46</sup> Buber's dialogical philosophy was certainly an impetus in Ratzinger's development of this "grammar" of the Christian mystery. Later, in reflecting back on the development of the church's teaching on divine revelation in *Dei Verbum* at Vatican II, Ratzinger would note that there emerged "an understanding of revelation that is seen basically as dialogue."<sup>47</sup> The dialogical understanding of revelation taken up in *Dei Verbum* was influenced in no small part, according to Ratzinger, by the "personalistic thinking" of Buber that had helped to shape so much of philosophy and theology on the eve of the council.<sup>48</sup> It is to this dialogical conception of Christianity embraced by Ratzinger that we now turn.

## ***II. A Post-Conciliar Theological Alternative***

The ecclesial divide that has emerged in the wake of the Second Vatican Council has been frequently described, typically framed in the sociological and political terms of "conservatism" and "progressivism." This paradigm, however, does not easily offer a way of understanding the likes of Joseph Ratzinger. In the years around the council he is easily placed in the "progressive" category, and yet in more recent decades his identity has been more often associated with

45. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 106.

46. De Gaál Gyulai, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 61.

47. Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 3: 171.

48. *Ibid.*

conservatism. People search for political and sociological reasons for such a “change” in him: he was unsettled by the social upheavals of 1968; he became motivated by ecclesial ambitions, etc.<sup>49</sup> These must be the reasons, so the conventional wisdom goes, for his “reversal” of thinking. However, if the social and political hermeneutic can be suspended for a moment and the theological perspective allowed to come to the fore, the development of Ratzinger’s thought becomes more intelligible.

Ratzinger, following Hans Urs von Balthasar, places the mystery of the drama of salvation at the center of the theological project. In fact, he describes von Balthasar’s use of the drama of the Christian narrative as the proper hermeneutic lens for understanding the Second Vatican Council’s understanding of the task of theology.<sup>50</sup> The Christian is the one called into the tension of *living within* this dramatic narrative of the salvific dialogue of God and humanity. To use Buber’s category, it is a way of “in-betweenness” that indicates the tension between God, who speaks to the world, and the world that is able to listen, but perhaps afraid to do so.<sup>51</sup> The “deep structure” of reality is based not primarily on the individual’s knowing and understanding reality according to this mode of knowing. Rather entering into relationship with both God and others sets the conditions for the emergence of the possibility of *knowing* at the deepest level. Indeed, this knowing that is consistent with faith takes place most perfectly in the life of the church and occurs only by letting perception of the whole of reality be shaped by the vision from within these sets of relationships. Tracey Rowland cites in Charles Taylor a similar understanding of the encounter of the church and modernity: “It is not that we have sloughed off a whole lot of unjustified beliefs leaving an implicit self-understanding that had always been there, to operate at last untrammelled. Rather, one constellation of implicit understandings of our relation to God, the cosmos, other humans, and time, was

49. Clifford W. Mills, *Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007); John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 98; Michael Collins, *Pope Benedict XVI: Successor to Peter* (Blackrock: Columba Press, 2005), 98.

50. Joseph Ratzinger, “Communio: A Program,” in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 19, no. 3 (1992): 436–49.

51. Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 3–10.

replaced by another in a multifaceted mutation” in the course of the emergence of secularized modern culture.<sup>52</sup> For Ratzinger, in order to address this challenge of the culture of modernity what is required above all is “receiving” the truth of the reality of the revelation from God, thereby giving impetus for a Christian culture to be revived according to what has been received in the community of the church.

As Ratzinger would put it in a 1992 essay, “Christianity is not speculation; it is not a construction of the intellect. Christianity is not ‘our’ work, it is a Revelation, a message that has been given us, and we have no right to reconstruct it as we wish.”<sup>53</sup> This revelation that is given constructs the whole of reality for the Christian. Reliance on revelation and its historical-symbolic nature, as opposed to the abstract character of other modes of contemporary theology, has been an essential characteristic of Ratzinger’s manner of doing theology. This approach, I suggest, might be considered uniquely “dialogical.” It also allows for the possibility of coming to new judgments about current social, political, or ecclesiastical issues, depending upon how historical circumstances are evolving. So rather than trying to lock Ratzinger in as either conservative or progressive, it is more accurate to see him as one attempting to discern responses to current matters of the day in light primarily of the revelation of God in Scripture and tradition and how this revelation has recently been appropriated in various historical contexts. He has proceeded in this “historical-symbolic” manner of doing theology that is most given to a *narrative* theology whose central motif is the dialogue between God and humanity. I would argue that he chooses this mode of doing theology not only because he sees it as being true to the core of the faith that has been given, but also because he believes that this is pastorally the most effective way of communicating the saving power of the Word in history.

But Ratzinger’s theology of the Word does not limit itself to an *ad intra* discussion among Christians alone. By appealing, not unlike the early church father Justin Martyr,<sup>54</sup> to the ancient category of *logos*,

52. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theory of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 145–46. Cf. Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” *Hastings Center Report* (March–April 1995): 24–27.

53. Joseph Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth: Meditations for Every Day of the Year*, ed. Irene Grassl (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 265.

54. Justin Martyr, *The First and Second Apologies*, ACW, trans. Leslie W. Barnard (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997).

Ratzinger makes a case to the world beyond the church for the intelligibility of all of creation—human existence in particular—in light of the Word being spoken by God that is the basis for all reality. In so doing he provides a challenge to a postmodern tendency toward relativism that has called into question the human capacity to discover and know truth.<sup>55</sup> The case he makes is based not on abstraction and rationalistic argumentation but rather on the narrative of salvation history. As this historical narrative unfolds, the *Logos* comes to be known as a person, as love itself. The *Logos*, then, becomes the basis for a more personal sense of the Christian mystery for believers themselves and also provides a criterion for dialogue with secular culture.

### ***III. Conclusion: A Dialogical Vision Formed***

The process of the formation of the “dialogical structure” of the young Joseph Ratzinger’s thought was multifaceted. That formation was in itself, of course, the fruit of ongoing dialogue with sources both ancient and new. As he matured, he cultivated what might be termed a “personalist theology,” or perhaps better a “dialogical theology” shaped ultimately by biblical and patristic sources but also reaffirmed by contemporary philosophical lines of inquiry. The basis of this personalist theology is the eternal *Logos* who is speaking, is being spoken and being heard. In Ratzinger’s theology, whether it pertains to the inner life of the Trinity, Christology, or theological anthropology, there is always present what might be called a dialogical principle in which the Eternal Word is continually being spoken in history, in human words. This reliance on the Word, which is by definition both intelligible and communicable, lays the groundwork for a theology that is inherently relational. Ratzinger’s dialogical mode of doing theology, then, serves his preference for the “communio” shape of theology.<sup>56</sup> For example, when he reflects on the intrinsic link between Christology and the eucharistic liturgy and its significance for ecclesiology, he notes:

The Eucharist is never an event involving just two, a dialogue between Christ and me. Eucharistic Communion is aimed at

55. James V. Schall and Benedict XVI, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007).

56. Ratzinger, “Communio: A Program,” 436–49.

a complete reshaping of my own life. It breaks up man's entire self and creates a new "we." Communication with Christ is necessarily also a communication with all who belong to him: therein, I myself become part of the new bread that he is creating by the resubstantiation of the whole of earthly reality.<sup>57</sup>

Thus at the heart of how he understands all these aspects of theology—Christology, liturgy, ecclesiology, creation and eschatology—lies the communicative structure of dialogue.

Ratzinger's dialogical structure of theological reflection follows a consistent pattern: Scripture, the "soul of theology," must be its methodological starting point. Scripture as a whole is the narrative of the unfolding relationship between God and humanity. A narrative is always set in history; it is never merely abstract reflection. It is in history, then, that God speaks to humanity and reveals himself ultimately as Word-made-flesh in the protagonist of the entire narrative: Jesus of Nazareth. This is the culmination of the narrative in which God and humanity are rediscovered in a new way. Indeed, in the person of Jesus himself appears the perfect dialogue between God and humanity.

### **A More Historical, Spiritual, and Pastoral Systematic Theology: *Logos* Manifested as Love**

Characteristic of Ratzinger's thought is a re-conception of the basis of Catholic theology by way of renewed attention to the historicity of the Christian mystery. His formation was influenced very much by the emergence of historical consciousness in biblical exegesis. Ratzinger's response to the need for a more "historically conscious" theology, however, has not simply been capitulation to an academic trend. Rather, it has expressed a mode of doing theology that is more spiritually and pastorally rich, given its dialogical and narrative style. The dialogical mode of doing theology is also arguably more capable of plumbing the depths of the essential truth of the Christian vision, which has at its center the mystery of the "tearing of the veil" previously separating heaven and earth and now makes possible intimate communion between God and humanity. Dialogue and encounter

57. Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 78.

with the *Logos-made-love* in history is at the heart of Ratzinger's theological and pastoral vision.

A consistent concern since Ratzinger's seminary and doctoral studies has been the articulation of how it is that God speaks across the chasm that separates heaven and earth. A theology based on the *Logos*, communicated in dialogue of word and response, is central to his way of dealing with this question. With the *Logos* as the key to his approach, Ratzinger's theology is reasonable, but not abstract. Rather, it is reasonable in a manner that becomes personally attractive when communicated in the context of the biblical narrative as the *Logos* shows itself as visible, incarnate *love* in Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Ratzinger has from the beginning seen love as the "key to Christianity." When he was asked in an interview about the significance of the common theme from his first publication as an academic to his first encyclical as pope, both of which centered on *love*, he replied:

Two themes have always accompanied me in my life, then: on the one hand, the theme of Christ, as the living, present God, the one who loves us and heals us through suffering, and, on the other hand, the theme of love . . . because I knew that love is the key to Christianity, that love is the angle from which it has to be approached.<sup>58</sup>

He has made this "angle" his own throughout his theological and pastoral career.

In this chapter I have attempted to establish the centrality of the *Logos* in Joseph Ratzinger's thought. Based on the consistent use of *Logos* in his theology, I have suggested a dialogical principle at work that serves as a kind of unifying principle for all of theology as he undertakes it. I have proposed a few early influences in his philosophical and theological formation that helped to provide a basis for such a dialogical structure in the whole of his thought. I hope that in the next chapters it will become evident how this dialogical principle is at work in particular areas of his theology, beginning with the theology of revelation and then moving on from that basis to his Christology, ecclesiology, and finally his theology of creation and eschatology.

58. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 102.