

THE RECEPTION OF ST. PAUL IN THE WORKS OF JOSEPH RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI

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Introduction

In his homily for the opening of the Pauline Year in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI offered a powerful summary of how the theology of St. Paul ought to be received in the Church today. Commenting on 1 Timothy 2:7, the emeritus pontiff explained:

“A teacher of the Gentiles”—these words open to the future, to all peoples and all generations. For us Paul is not a figure of the past whom we remember with veneration. He is also our teacher, an Apostle and herald of Jesus Christ for us too. Thus we are not gathered to reflect on past history, irrevocably behind us. Paul wants to speak to us—today. That is why I chose to establish this special “Pauline Year”: in order to listen to him and learn today from him, as our teacher. . . . Thus, we are gathered here to question ourselves on the great Apostle to the Gentiles. Let us not ask ourselves only: who was Paul? Let us ask ourselves above all: who *is* Paul? What does he say to me?¹

This short text captures well the broad strokes of Benedict XVI’s approach to Scripture in general and to the letters of St. Paul in particular. The present article will explore how Pope Benedict has instantiated his exegetical project specifically in reference to the Pauline corpus. Especially germane in this regard are the emeritus pontiff’s Pauline Year homilies and catecheses, but the synthesis attempted below will draw also on other works that, taken cumulatively, give a vivid sense of what Benedict considers vital in St. Paul for the life of the Church.

As this article proceeds, one thing that will stand out is how (as in his *Jesus* trilogy and his Wednesday audiences on the saints throughout Church history) Benedict employs his characteristic two-pronged approach of at-

1 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Opening of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2008). Note that for simplicity’s sake I have opted for the convention of referring to the one man Ratzinger/Benedict as “Benedict” throughout this article even in writings antedating his pontificate.

tending first to the literal and historic dimension of Scripture, but then also pausing at key moments to apply the text directly to the life of the Church in the present day. Though well-versed in the historical-critical method and keenly aware of its indispensability for exegesis within the heart of the Church, a hallmark of Benedict's exegesis is his constant desire to lead the faithful beyond the mere historical level in order to discern how God's word is active in our lives today.²

The constraints of writing only an article on this topic require that we focus on a limited number of points of contact between Benedict and St. Paul. After a thorough perusal of Benedict's corpus, the following topics have been selected because of their centrality in the thinking of St. Paul and Pope Benedict, but also because of their pivotal place within the deposit of faith itself: the dynamic of justification by faith and life in Christ; the relationship between faith and charity or "works"; the law of Christ and authentic human freedom; life in Christ as liturgy and its implications for the transformation of the world; the meaning of "adult faith," in particular its disposition of receptivity to truth that precedes us; the ecclesial dimension of faith and necessity of communion with the entire Mystical Body of Christ; and the biblical foundations of the same Pauline doctrine of the Mystical Body, in particular its Adamic, baptismal, and Eucharistic roots. Finally, I will conclude by reflecting with Benedict and St. Paul on the intimate connection between truth, suffering, and our Christian apostolate.

Justification by Faith and the Mystery of Life in Christ

Given its importance both in the debates of Christian history and in the journey of Christian living in all ages, it is not surprising that one of the dominant themes in Benedict's reception of St. Paul concerns the reality of justification by faith. Two years before inaugurating the Pauline Year, the emeritus pontiff gave a series of catecheses on the Apostle with an eye to this topic. Benedict's first major concern here regards the question of how it is that a human being initially encounters Christ and in what the relationship that ensues from this meeting consists. Unsurprisingly, the first texts Benedict turns to are Romans 3:28 and Galatians 2:16, where the Apostle states that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" and "a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." Benedict explains:

In the first place, Paul helps us to understand the absolutely basic and irreplaceable value of faith. . . . Paul states with

2 For a detailed treatment of this two-pronged synthetic approach evident throughout Benedict's corpus of writings on Scripture, see Matthew J. Ramage, *Dark Passages of the Bible: Engaging Scripture with Benedict XVI and St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 53–91.

absolute clarity that this condition of life does not depend on our possible good works but on the pure grace of God: “[We] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). With these words St. Paul expressed the fundamental content of his conversion, the new direction his life took as a result of his encounter with the Risen Christ.³

Granted the Christian’s justification by faith through the free gift of God’s grace, Benedict quickly turns his attention to the implications of this process for our identity as Christians: in being justified, we participate personally in Christ himself, identifying with him by sharing both his death and his life. As the Apostle has it in the Letter to the Romans cited here by Benedict, “[A]ll of us . . . were baptized into his death . . . we were buried therefore with him . . . we have been united with him. . . . So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:3–5, 11). For St. Paul, this twofold dynamic of death to self-gratification, on the one hand, and rising to new life in Christ, on the other, is summed up in the expression “life in Christ Jesus” (see Rom. 8:1–2, 39; 12:5; 16:3, 7, 10; 1 Cor. 1:2–3). Benedict notes that the Apostle elsewhere fittingly inverts the words and speaks of the mutual compenetration between Christ and the Christian as the mystery of Christ “in us,” “in you,” or “in me” (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20).

At the same time, Benedict is emphatic that St. Paul’s doctrine on the communion between Christ and the faithful is not to be understood in a monistic manner. In contrast with pantheistic worldviews that profess the identity of all things to one another and to the godhead, Benedict observes that St. Paul’s mystical doctrine maintains that man’s communion with God invariably entails our remaining distinct from him:

In fact, although faith unites us closely to Christ, it emphasizes the distinction between us and him; but according to Paul, Christian life also has an element that we might describe as “mystical,” since it entails an identification of ourselves with Christ and of Christ with us. In this sense, the Apostle even went so far as to describe our suffering as “the suffering of Christ” in us (2 Cor. 1:5), so that we might

3 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 8, 2006). In addition to being found on the Vatican’s website, Benedict’s 2006 catecheses on St. Paul are also contained in Benedict XVI, *Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007). Unless otherwise noted, Scripture citations within Benedict’s works have been unchanged, while independent citations are drawn from the RSV.

“always [carry] in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor. 4:10).⁴

The importance of unity within distinction in the Mystical Body of Christ is something we will return to as we come full circle to the topic at the end of this article. But for now, lest this mystical theology remain at the level of a stimulating intellectual exercise, Benedict characteristically takes care to apply it to the concrete circumstances of Christian living today:

We must fit all this into our daily lives by following the example of Paul. . . . [O]ur radical belonging to Christ and the fact that “we are in him” must imbue in us an attitude of total trust and immense joy. In short, we must indeed exclaim with St. Paul: “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31). And the reply is that nothing and no one “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).⁵

In short, the upshot of St. Paul’s doctrine of life in Christ is that meditation upon this reality ought to be a source of immense joy and cause us to exclaim with St. Paul, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

Faith or Charity Alone?

That grace enables the believer to do all things in Christ leads naturally to another indispensable feature of Pauline theology as received by Benedict: the mutual presence of faith and charity entailed in Christ’s gift of friendship to us. This point was emphasized in the emeritus pontiff’s homily inaugurating the Pauline Year:

In the Letter to the Galatians, St Paul gives a very personal profession of faith in which he opens his heart to readers of all times and reveals what was the most intimate drive of his life. “I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). All Paul’s actions begin from this centre. His faith is the experience of being loved by Jesus Christ in a very personal way. It is awareness of the fact that Christ did not face death for something anonymous but rather for love of him—of Paul—and that, as the Risen One, he still loves him; in other words, Christ gave himself for him. Paul’s faith is being struck by the love of

4 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 8, 2006).

5 Ibid.

Jesus Christ, a love that overwhelms him to his depths and transforms him. His faith is not a theory, an opinion about God and the world. His faith is the impact of God's love in his heart. Thus, this same faith was love for Jesus Christ.⁶

For St. Paul, the experience of being loved by Christ forms the basis of a friendship that is not merely theoretical but transformative, imbuing all areas of one's life with the virtue of charity. For this reason, in his Pauline Year catecheses, Benedict writes that it is "essential" to grasp that Christian moral living is "not born from a system of commandments but is a consequence of our friendship with Christ."⁷

Benedict's words here resonate remarkably well with Fr. Servais Pinckaers's now classical statement that "Catholic moral teaching is not a mere code of prescriptions and prohibitions. . . . Catholic morality is a response to the aspirations of the human heart for truth and goodness."⁸ Pinckaers distinguishes those who hold a "morality of obligation" from those who hold a "morality of happiness."⁹ The former view moral codes primarily as constraints upon human freedom, while the latter understand ethical norms in general, and the Church's doctrines in particular, as aids toward human happiness. A morality of happiness does not dispense one from the requirement of fulfilling obligations. Quite the contrary, as a vision of morality that stems above all from living faith in Christ, it finds the obedience of faith and responsibility of love to be a yoke that is easy, a burden that is light. For this reason, Benedict observes that St. Paul "does not use expressed commands very often (1 Thess. 4:10f), although he is aware that he has the authority to do so."¹⁰

In a catechesis specifically concerned with the doctrine of justification, Benedict addresses Reformation theology in relation to this Catholic approach to the interplay of faith and charity. Recalling that Martin Luther translated St. Paul's teaching on justification in Romans 3:28 as occurring by faith "alone" (*allein*), it may be surprising for some to discover that Benedict thinks a Catholic can affirm Luther's teaching if it is understood in a precise way:

6 Benedict XVI, Homily for the Opening of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2008).

7 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 26, 2008). In addition to being found on the Vatican's website, Benedict's Pauline Year catecheses are also contained in Benedict XVI, *St. Paul* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009).

8 Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Morality: the Catholic View* (Notre Dame, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2003), 1.

9 For a discussion of these contrasting moral approaches, see Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 17–22.

10 Joseph Ratzinger, Heinz Schürmann, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Principles of Christian Morality* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 67; see 2 Cor. 8:8.

Luther's phrase: "faith alone" is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity, in love. Faith is looking at Christ, entrusting oneself to Christ, being united to Christ, conformed to Christ, to his life. And the form, the life of Christ, is love; hence to believe is to conform to Christ and to enter into his love. So it is that in the Letter to the Galatians in which he primarily developed his teaching on justification St Paul speaks of faith that works through love (see Gal. 5:14).¹¹

For Benedict as for St. Paul, the theological virtues are inseparable from one another. Thus true belief—embarking on a friendship with Christ—is not merely an intellectual affair but necessarily already entails love of him who has called us to new life. Accordingly, the expression "faith alone" can also be flipped on its head. Concerning the gospel reading for the Solemnity of Christ the King (Matt. 25:31–46), Benedict therefore observes:

It is the Gospel of the judge whose sole criterion is love. What he asks is only this: Did you visit me when I was sick? When I was in prison? Did you give me food to eat when I was hungry, did you clothe me when I was naked? And thus justice is decided in charity. Thus, at the end of this Gospel we can almost say: love alone, charity alone. But there is no contradiction between this Gospel and St. Paul. It is the same vision, according to which communion with Christ, faith in Christ, creates charity. And charity is the fulfilment of communion with Christ. Thus, we are just by being united with him and in no other way.¹²

Benedict's provocative articulation of this dynamic relationship between faith and love in turn helps overcome the common misconception that St. Paul's doctrine is incompatible with that of St. James:

Often there is seen an unfounded opposition between St. Paul's theology and that of St. James, who writes in his Letter: "as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). In reality, while Paul is primarily concerned to show that faith in Christ is necessary and sufficient, James accentuates the consequential relations between faith and works (see James 2:24). Therefore, for both Paul and James, faith that is active

11 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 19, 2008).

12 Ibid.

in love testifies to the freely given gift of justification in Christ.¹³

In observing that St. Paul is “primarily concerned” (Italian: *Paolo è preoccupato anzitutto di dimostrare*; German: *vor allem zu zeigen bemüht*) with showing the necessity and sufficiency of faith in Christ, Benedict is simply making one of the characteristic exegetical moves that one can find throughout his corpus. For, read on a surface level, St. Paul and St. James would appear to be contradicting one another. However, if the interpreter follows Benedict in seeking out the true intention of these respective authors, the essence of what they wished to affirm and teach, it becomes clear that the two do not contradict but in reality complete one another.¹⁴

According to Benedict, the compatibility of St. Paul and St. James ultimately can be seen only in light of a proper understanding of what “works of the law” signified for Jews at the time of Christ.

For St. Paul, as for all his contemporaries, the word “Law” meant the Torah in its totality, that is, the five books of Moses. The Torah, in the Pharisaic interpretation, that which Paul had studied and made his own, was a complex set of conduct codes that ranged from the ethical nucleus to observances of rites and worship and that essentially determined the identity of the just person. In particular, these included circumcision, observances concerning pure food and ritual purity in general, the rules regarding the observance of the Sabbath, etc., codes of conduct that also appear frequently in the debates between Jesus and his contemporaries.¹⁵

For St. Paul it is these specific Jewish “works”—not good deeds in general—from which the Christian is liberated and which are not salvific. Though it had once been necessary for the Jewish people to erect a “wall of distinction” to protect the precious heritage of their faith from the pollution of the Gentiles, St. Paul teaches that the nonessential precepts of the Old Law have been ren-

13 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 26, 2008).

14 For a treatment of this same point in an earlier audience, see Benedict XVI, General Audience (June 28, 2006). On the inerrancy of Scripture in relation to the inspired authors’ affirmations or assertions, the classic magisterial formulation is found in the Second Vatican Council’s constitution *Dei Verbum*, 11. For recent secondary literature on the subject, see especially *Letter & Spirit*, vol. 6, *For the Sake of Our Salvation: The Truth and Humility of God’s Word* (Steubenville, OH: St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, 2010). I also have treated this subject in some length in my volume *Dark Passages of the Bible*, 55–91.

15 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 19, 2008).

dered obsolete by being fulfilled in Christ: "The wall as he says in his Letter to the Ephesians [2:14] between Israel and the Gentiles, was no longer necessary: it is Christ who protects us from polytheism and all of its deviations; it is Christ who unites us *with* and *in* the one God. . . . And this suffices. Further observances are no longer necessary."¹⁶ What Benedict argues here ought to disabuse one of the mistaken assumption that St. Paul believed "good works" in the sense of perseverance in charity to be of little consequence for one's salvation.

In addition, Benedict's words also pose a significant challenge to those who contend that St. Paul founded Christianity and that his doctrine of justification by faith departed radically from Jesus's teaching that righteousness comes through a life of good deeds. Elsewhere Benedict addresses this claim and argues at length that the solemn formulas "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you" (1 Cor. 11:23) and "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received" (1 Cor. 15:3–4) contain the central elements of faith in the Eucharist and in the resurrection of Christ learned by St. Paul in Jerusalem. With these two texts in mind, Benedict says of St. Paul, "The importance that he confers on the living Tradition of the Church, which she passes on to her communities, shows how mistaken is the view that attributes the invention of Christianity to Paul."¹⁷

As for those who claim that Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom of God was eventually lost when St. Paul shifted the emphasis to proclaiming the Kingdom's divine messenger, Benedict replies:

It is true that in St Paul the centrality of the Kingdom of God, crucial for the proclamation of Jesus, was transformed into the centrality of Christology, whose crucial point is the Paschal Mystery. . . . However, I would say, without going into detail here, that precisely in the new centrality of Christology and of the Paschal Mystery the Kingdom of God is realized and the authentic proclamation of Jesus becomes concrete, present and active. We have seen in our previous Catecheses that this Pauline innovation is truly the deepest fidelity to the proclamation of Jesus.¹⁸

Benedict's hermeneutic of reform and renewal, present throughout his corpus, is especially evident here in how he handles St. Paul's christological "innovation." In brief, the emeritus pontiff embraces the twofold presence of both discontinuity (in accidentals) and continuity (in essentials) in Church

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, General Audience (February 4, 2009).

¹⁸ Ibid.

teaching over time. Thus, while acknowledging the reality of doctrinal development and innovation even within the very first Christian century, Benedict contends that the newness we find in St. Paul's theology "is truly the deepest fidelity to the proclamation of Jesus."¹⁹ This balanced approach keeps the Catholic from having to make Jesus say things he did not explicitly say while at the same time offering a compelling *apologia* for the apparent contradiction between Jesus's and St. Paul's words. And all this is not without its practical ramifications within the life of the Church, in particular for the quest for unity among Christians.

In the progress of exegesis, especially in the past 200 years, the points of convergence between Catholic exegesis and Protestant exegesis have increased, thereby achieving a notable consensus precisely on the point that was the origin of the greatest historical dissent. There is thus great hope for the cause of ecumenism, so central to the Second Vatican Council.²⁰

The Law of Christ and Authentic Freedom

Closely associated with St. Paul's juxtaposition of faith and the responsibility of love is his understanding of the freedom that ensues from the Christian's relationship with Jesus. As seen above, the Apostle's intent was by no means to absolve believers from doing good deeds. Quite the opposite, the mistaken notion of freedom as being able to do whatever one likes was a live current that St. Paul had to combat in his day:

The opinion that was to recur systematically in history already existed in the community at Corinth. This opinion consisted in thinking that it was a question of moral law and that the Christian freedom thus consisted in the liberation from ethics. Thus in Corinth the term πάντα μοι ἐξέσταιν (I can do what I like) was widespread. It is obvious

19 For an especially clear articulation of Benedict's hermeneutic of reform in contrast with a "hermeneutic of discontinuity," see Benedict XVI, Christmas Address to the Roman Curia (December 22, 2005).

20 Benedict XVI, General Audience (February 4, 2009). Though Benedict does not mention him here by name, in this connection one thinks of the Anglican bishop N. T. Wright, whose work on Jesus and St. Paul has proven a helpful bridge between Catholics and our separated brethren in recent years. For Wright's most recent and most comprehensive treatment, see his *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013). For a shorter, more accessible presentation of St. Paul's doctrine on justification, see Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the real founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

that this interpretation is wrong: Christian freedom is not libertinism; the liberation of which St. Paul spoke is not liberation from good works.²¹

But if Christian freedom does not consist in the ability to do as we please, then what positively can we say about it? In his homily opening the Pauline Year, the emeritus pontiff shows that there is truly a sense in which the Christian can do “as he pleases”:

Paul was free as a man loved by God, who, by virtue of God, was able to love together with him. This love then became the “law” of his life and in this very way, the freedom of his life. . . . Since Paul lives in the responsibility of love, he is free; since he is one who loves, he lives his life totally in the responsibility of this love and does not take freedom as a pretext to act arbitrarily and egoistically. In the same spirit Augustine formulated the phrase that later became famous: *Dilige et quod vis fac* (*Tract.* in 1 Jon 7, 7–8)—love and do what you please. The one who loves Christ as Paul loved him can truly do as he pleases because his love is united to Christ’s will and thus with God’s will; because his will is anchored to the truth and because his will is no longer merely his own, arbitrary to the autonomous self, but is integrated into God’s freedom from which he receives the path to take.²²

In St. Augustine’s dictum we find the fulfillment of what men are striving for when they assert their wills over and against God in the name of autonomy. That is to say, when love indeed becomes the “law” of our lives, when our will is anchored to the truth and no longer our own, then we truly can love and do what we please—because it is not primarily we who are acting, but rather the Holy Spirit in us.

In a later catechesis given during his year of audiences covering the topic of prayer, Benedict articulates more explicitly how the experience of Christian freedom is the work of the Holy Spirit:

The Apostle wants to make us understand that it is not primarily our will that frees us from these conditions, nor even the law, but the Holy Spirit. And since “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17), in prayer we

21 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 19, 2008).

22 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Opening of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2008).

experience the freedom given by the Spirit: an authentic freedom, which is freedom from evil and sin for the good and for life, for God. . . . This is true freedom: actually to be able to follow our desire for good, for true joy, for communion with God and to be free from the oppression of circumstances that pull us in other directions.²³

Here Benedict demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the distinction between what Servais Pinckaers, O.P., termed “freedom of indifference,” on the one hand, and “freedom for excellence,” on the other.²⁴ People today tend to think that freedom consists in having more options on the table and fewer rules to obey (freedom of indifference). For Benedict and Pinckaers, on the contrary, humans become free and attain happiness to the extent that we appropriate the truth and develop the ability to live in accordance with the good (freedom for excellence).

Related to the question of freedom, Benedict is well aware that modern man’s tendency to exaggerate his claims to autonomy is often couched in assertions regarding his “rights.” Against this tendency, Benedict articulates the nature of Christian freedom through St. Paul’s allegory built on the story of Sarah and Hagar (Gal. 4:21–31; see Gen. 16:1–16; 21:1–21). In this text the Apostle identifies freedom with sonship (Gal. 4:5), which for the baptized now means the possession of “unrestricted civil rights” within the People of God.²⁵ No longer under the pedagogical laws of childhood, believers are now “spiritual” (Gal. 4:4; 6:1), for they participate in the ontological status of Jesus himself. Yet despite having full rights within the new Israel of God, the Christian is warned by St. Paul not to use his newfound freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but rather to “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 5:13; 6:2). Summarizing the Pauline exhortation, Benedict writes:

To live the law of Christ means, therefore, to live according to the ontological status of the spiritual man, in the way of the Spirit. This means crucifying the flesh “with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). . . . Therefore this freedom is not

23 Benedict XVI, General Audience (May 16, 2012). In addition to being found on the Vatican’s website, Benedict’s 2011–2012 catecheses on prayer are also contained in Benedict XVI, *A School of Prayer: The Saints Show Us How to Pray* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012).

24 For an in-depth exploration of these rival visions of human freedom, see Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 327–378.

25 Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 188.

without its demands; neither is it arbitrary. It constrains to such an extent that it can be called a “crucifixion.”²⁶

The cross of Jesus Christ demonstrates in the most profound way possible that authentic freedom comes through sacrifice: through obedience to good laws, through the renunciation of the “rights” we claim for ourselves, and ultimately through the gift of our very selves on the cross.

Life in Christ as Liturgy and Its Implications for Transforming the World

In his homily on the occasion of closing the Pauline Year in 2009, the emeritus pontiff delivered a profound meditation in which he described the spiritual crucifixion discussed above in terms of liturgical sacrifice. Reflecting on St. Paul’s “most important Letter,” Benedict says that in Romans 12 “the essential nucleus of Christian existence” is summed up in the chapter’s first two verses:

What does St. Paul say to us in that passage? First of all he affirms, as a fundamental thing, that a new way of venerating God began with Christ, a new form of worship. It consists in the fact that the living person himself becomes adoration, “sacrifice,” even in his own body. It is no longer things that are offered to God. It is our very existence that must become praise of God. But how does this happen? In the second verse we are given the answer: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God” (Rom. 12:2).²⁷

According to Benedict, it must be emphasized that the personal interior renewal called for by St. Paul in this text is no mere private affair. Rather, it has immediate implications within the world around us, a world that desperately needs Christians to become living sacrifices on its behalf. “The world,” Benedict contends, “cannot be renewed without new people. This also means that it is not enough to adapt to the current situation. The Apostle exhorts us to non-conformism. In our Letter he says: we should not submit to the logic of our time.”²⁸ Appropriating the tradition handed on to the Church by the Second Vatican Council, we can say that it is paradoxically through such non-conformism to the world that the laity in particular “consecrate the world

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Closing of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2009).

²⁸ Ibid.

itself to God.”²⁹ Indeed, for Benedict, this consecration can even be described as the world’s “transubstantiation” or its “resubstantiation.”³⁰

Moreover, for Benedict as for St. Paul, Christian non-conformism involves more than a simple change in behavior or attitude:

Anyone who reads the Pauline letters carefully will see that the apostolic exhortation is not some moralizing appendix with a variable content, but a very practical setting forth of what faith means; thus, it is inseparable from faith’s core. The apostle is in fact only following the pattern of Christ, who, in this central theme of his preaching, linked admission to the Kingdom of God and exclusion from it with fundamental moral decisions, which are consequences intimately related to the way God is conceived.³¹

The sacrificial renewal of the mind (*nous*) is bound up with much more than what we do on Sunday morning, and even more than the moral code by which we live throughout the week. This renewal pertains to the very core of our being, a transformation of our “way of thinking” and indeed the very foundations of our approach to reality.

Spiritual Transformation and “Adult Faith”: Receiving the Truth that Precedes Us

A crucial aspect of the spiritual transformation called for by St. Paul stands out in his Letter to the Ephesians, another epistle that Benedict reflects upon in his homily for the closing of the Pauline Year:

In the Letter’s fourth chapter, the Apostle tells us that with Christ we must attain adulthood, a mature faith. We can no longer be “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with

29 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 34. In making its point here, the Council does not cite Rom. 12, as it does three times elsewhere, but rather here, 1 Pet. 2:5 is cited. “For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’”

30 For the expression “transubstantiation of the world” (*transustanziazione del mondo*), see Benedict’s unprecedented first public talk since leaving St. Peter’s chair in 2013. An English translation of the emeritus pontiff’s remarks can be found at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/june/documents/papa-francesco_20160628_65-ordinazione-sacerdotale-benedetto-xvi.html. The phrase “the resubstantiation of the whole of earthly reality” is found in Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 78, 118. For the New Testament roots of Benedict’s cosmological transubstantiation theology, see Rom. 8:19–23 and Rev. 21.

31 Ratzinger, *Principles of Christian Morality*, 65.

every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). Paul wants Christians to have a "responsible" and "adult faith." The words "adult faith" in recent decades have formed a widespread slogan. It is often meant in the sense of the attitude of those who no longer listen to the Church and her Pastors but autonomously choose what they want to believe and not to believe, hence a do-it-yourself faith. And it is presented as a "courageous" form of self-expression against the Magisterium of the Church. In fact, however, no courage is needed for this because one may always be certain of public applause. Rather, courage is needed to adhere to the Church's faith, even if this contradicts the "logic" of the contemporary world. This is the non-conformism of faith which Paul calls an "adult faith." It is the faith that he desires. On the other hand, he describes chasing the winds and trends of the time as infantile.³²

As Benedict says here and elsewhere, a "do-it-yourself faith" wherein one chooses what to believe and not to believe is not courageous, as is often mistakenly thought. Indeed, in reality it is not faith at all, but rather merely the confirmation of one's prior views and decisions: "[A] faith of one's own devising . . . a self-made faith would only vouch for, and be able to say, what I already am and know anyway."³³

This point is perhaps most clearly articulated in Benedict's final encyclical that was completed and published by Pope Francis. The pontiffs write:

Since faith is one, it must be professed in all its purity and integrity. Precisely because all the articles of faith are interconnected, to deny one of them, even of those that seem least important, is tantamount to distorting the whole. . . . [T]o subtract something from the faith is to subtract something from the veracity of communion.³⁴

As Francis and Benedict indicate, people today find it hard to conceive of a unity in truth. They fear that assent and obedience to the Church will lead to the destruction of our liberty. In reality, however, this is precisely how we walk the Gospel's paradoxical path of freedom. Ironically, if we choose not to follow the path of total obedience to the Magisterium, we end up locked within the

32 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Closing of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2009).

33 Ratzinger, "Why I am Still in the Church," in *Fundamental Speeches from Five Decades* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 147.

34 Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 48.

boundary of our own ego with no faith at all, ratifying at every turn what we had already thought to be true beforehand.³⁵

In his *Introduction to Christianity*, Benedict advances this same point by developing his idea that adult Christian faith comes from God, in contrast with philosophy, which comes from man. Reflecting again on the Pauline dictum that “faith comes from what is heard” (Rom. 10:17), Benedict writes:

Faith [in contrast with philosophy] comes to man from outside, and this very fact is fundamental to it. It is—let me repeat—not something thought up by myself; it is something said to me, which hits me as something that has not been thought out and could not be thought out and lays an obligation on me. . . . Faith cannot and should not be a mere product of reflection.³⁶

By no means is Benedict here pitting faith against reason or claiming that philosophy is a bankrupt discipline. To the contrary, for Benedict, faith heals reason and liberates it from the danger of remaining imprisoned within our own ego, inventing our own version of reality. The task of reason, then, is to ensure a responsible reception of the faith—to assist in the process of making what is received more and more our own by handing ourselves over to the truth.³⁷

According to Benedict, the following is the upshot of understanding faith as the reception of that which precedes us:

Because of this, because faith is not something thought up by me but something that comes to me from outside, its word cannot be treated and exchanged as I please; it is always foreordained, always ahead of my thinking. The positivity of what comes toward me from outside myself, opening up to me what I cannot give myself, typifies the process of belief or faith.³⁸

Here we have a similar point to that which Benedict made above concerning the danger of construing our own self-made faith. It is the attitude of humbly

35 For a more in-depth discussion of this reality, including an important contribution to the discussion based on John Henry Newman's theology of assent, see my article “Benedict XVI on Freedom in Obedience to the Truth: A Key for the New Evangelization” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (May 12, 2014).

36 Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 92.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

receiving truths that precede us—not that of being the arbiter of whether or not the Church is right or wrong on a given issue—that makes for “adult faith.”

But Benedict is not content to remain at the level of generalizations concerning what constitutes true “adult faith.” He gives examples of truths that belong to the *fides quae* of the Church, truths we are not free to disregard in the name of an alleged freedom or the so-called courage required to dissent:

Thus, being committed to the inviolability of human life from its first instant, thereby radically opposing the principle of violence also precisely in the defense of the most defenseless human creatures is part of an adult faith. It is part of an adult faith to recognize marriage between a man and a woman for the whole of life as the Creator’s ordering, newly re-established by Christ. Adult faith does not let itself be carried about here and there by any trend. It opposes the winds of fashion. It knows that these winds are not the breath of the Holy Spirit.³⁹

Speaking the truth in love sometimes requires making what will be unpopular decisions, like standing up for life from its first instant or defending the truth of marriage as a bond between a man and a woman for the whole of life. At the same time, Benedict teaches us that our “speaking the truth in love” (see Eph. 4:15) ought to emphasize that the uncomfortable truths we profess are not primarily negative prohibitions, but part of a greater “yes” to love that fulfills the deepest aspirations of the human person.

Faith as Call to Communion within the Mystical Body of Christ

One of the most underappreciated facets of the Christian faith is directly related to and indeed depends upon the disposition of receptivity described above. We are faced here with a paradox: by giving up our own preconceived opinions and receiving the Church’s faith in an attitude of humble submission, we actually end up finding ourselves again within a new and greater ego.

The redeemed ego finds itself again in a greater new ego. Paul describes this process of the dissolution of the first ego and its reawakening in a greater ego as being born again. In this ego into which I am liberated by faith I find myself united not only with Jesus but with everybody who has followed the same path. To put it another way, faith is necessarily what may be called churchly faith. It lives and moves in the ‘we’ of the Church, one with the common ‘I’ of

39 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Closing of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2009).

Jesus Christ. . . . In this new subject, I am contemporaneous with Jesus, and all the experiences of the Church are mine too, and have become my own.⁴⁰

Thus, while Christianity certainly involves a revolutionizing personal experience, it is above all an encounter with objective reality that is more profoundly lived within the context of community:

This primacy of the word means that faith is focused on community of mind in a quite different way from philosophical thinking. In philosophy, what comes first is the private search for truth, which then, secondarily, seeks and finds traveling companions. Faith, on the other hand, is first of all a call to community, to unity of mind through the unity of the word. Indeed, its significance is, a priori, an essentially social one: it aims at establishing unity of mind through the unity of the word. Only secondarily will it then open the way for each individual's private venture in search of truth.⁴¹

All this may be beautiful, but Benedict enjoins us not to forget that the exodus from our own ego and incorporation into a greater one is a challenging affair. Indeed, entry into the Mystical Body requires something much more radical than the revision of a few opinions and attitudes. It is nothing less than a "death event . . . an exchange of the old subject for another" in which our ego "is fitted into a new subject," receiving itself anew in and together with a greater 'I'.⁴²

This "death event" is best described by St. Paul himself while reflecting on his own journey: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). But where precisely does this "death event" take place?

The "I no longer live" does not describe a private mystical experience but rather defines the essence of baptism. . . .

40 Joseph Ratzinger, *The Yes of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 36–37. Ratzinger adds, "[W]hat is essential is that I cannot build my personal faith in a private dialogue with Jesus. Faith lives in this 'we,' or else it is not alive" (ibid., 37).

41 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 93–94. For more on the communal dimension of faith or faith as an "ecclesial act," see Benedict XVI, General Audience (October 31, 2012). This was one of Benedict's final papal audiences, later collected and published in the volume *The Transforming Power of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013).

42 Joseph Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 51.

The passive side of becoming a Christian calls for the acting Church in the unity of believers as a single subject manifests itself in its bodily and historical dimensions.⁴³

Here as in so many places throughout his corpus, Benedict weaves seamlessly between liturgical and biblical theology, demonstrating that one cannot be rightly understood apart from the other. For the emeritus pontiff, our Christian journey of sanctification is rooted not merely in a change in moral behavior, but above all in the ontological reality of our baptism into Christ; baptism, meanwhile, is best understood not merely as a ritual cleansing or purification, but above all as an intimately personal death event.

The Biblical Roots of the Pauline Doctrine of the Mystical Body

The above discussion has focused largely on the practical implications of faith being an essentially ecclesial act, in particular the ineluctable necessity of receptivity and assent to truths that precede us. But seeing as the study of the sacred page is the soul of theology, it ought not to come as a surprise that Benedict also spends considerable time throughout his corpus examining the biblical foundations of the Mystical Body.

The emeritus pontiff is not afraid to admit that the doctrine of the Mystical Body has roots, even if only marginally, in Roman sociology and in particular the Stoic philosophy of the Apostle's day.⁴⁴ Yet the call to what the emeritus pontiff calls "churchly faith" is not just a philosophical concept or a moral imperative. The ecclesial dimension of Christian existence is an ontological necessity grounded in the New Testament itself. Addressing those who attempt to reduce the doctrine of the Mystical Body to a secular construct, Benedict has this to say:

The oft-repeated assertion that Paul merely applied to the Church an allegory widely current in the Stoic philosophy of his time is totally false. The Stoic allegory compares the state to an organism whose members must all work together. . . . This imaginative picture was used in order to calm agitated masses and to recall them to their specific tasks. . . . It is indisputable that Paul had recourse to such notions [he here cites 1 Cor. 12:17ff as an example]. . . . However, St. Paul's conception of the Body of Christ does not exhaust itself in considerations of sociology or moral philosophy such as these.⁴⁵

43 Ibid., 52.

44 Benedict XVI, General Audience (October 15, 2008).

45 Ratzinger, *Called to Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 34.

Addressing this same parallel with Stoic philosophy elsewhere, Benedict adds that the Mystical Body of Christ is not merely a group dedicated to a “cause.” Much more than a social organization, she is a living body that is mystically one with Christ, her Head.⁴⁶

But if the Church is not merely a social organization, and if the unity of “Head” and “body” in Christ cannot be explained on the basis of Stoic metaphor, then where are we to find the true roots of the Mystical Body? This is one of those places where Benedict’s brilliance at wedding the Bible with the history of dogma particularly shines.

For the real roots of the Pauline idea of the Body of Christ are entirely inner-biblical. . . . In the first place, the Semitic conception of the ‘corporate personality’ stands in the background; this conception is expressed, for example, in the idea that we are all Adam, a single man writ large.⁴⁷

Although St. Paul certainly would have known the Stoic allegory of his day, the deepest roots of his thinking were Jewish. Moreover, we have explicit evidence from the Apostle’s writings (in particular, Rom. 5:12) that he had reflected deeply upon the mystery of our belonging to Adam by virtue of creation and of our incorporation into the New Adam by grace. But perhaps more than the Stoic or Semitic influences that would have predisposed St. Paul to his theology of the Mystical Body, it was his experience on the road to Damascus that directly revealed the foundations of this conception. Observing that no other New Testament author articulates the doctrine in such developed fashion as does St. Paul, Benedict writes:

First the Lord asked him: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” To the question: “Who are you, Lord?” Saul is given the answer: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4ff). In persecuting the Church, Paul was persecuting Jesus himself. “You persecute *me*.” Jesus identifies with the Church in a single subject. This exclamation of the Risen One, which transformed Saul’s life, in summary already contains the entire doctrine on the Church as the Body of Christ.⁴⁸

46 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Opening of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2008). For additional considerations on the Church more as Christ’s own body than as a social organization, see Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 54.

47 Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 35.

48 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Opening of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2008).

“Because There Is One Bread, We Who Are Many are One Body” (1 Cor. 10:17).

If St. Paul’s Semitic worldview and his experience on the road to Damascus furnished him with the rudiments of his doctrine of the Mystical Body, it must be added that, for the Apostle, the Christian’s incorporation into the Mystical Body is consummated in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Benedict speaks of this Pauline mystery many times throughout his corpus, and indeed already in one of his early catecheses as pope:

Paul holds that the Church is not only an organism but really becomes the Body of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where we all receive his Body and really become his Body. Thus is brought about the spousal mystery that all become one body and one spirit in Christ. So it is that the reality goes far beyond any sociological image, expressing its real, profound essence, that is, the oneness of all the baptized in Christ, considered by the Apostle “one” in Christ, conformed to the Sacrament of his Body.⁴⁹

As we saw above, Benedict rejects the suggestion that the ultimate roots of the Mystical Body trace back to Stoic philosophy. Additionally, there we saw that Benedict rather finds its basis in the Semitic notion of a corporate personality—every man’s belonging to Adam by virtue of creation, and every Christian’s belonging to the New Adam through baptism. Here, however, Benedict locates the heart of this mystery in one of those favorite biblical verses upon which he frequently pauses to comment:

We find the deepest root of this surprising designation of the Church in the Sacrament of the Body of Christ. St Paul said: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body” (1 Cor. 10:17). In the same Eucharist, Christ gives us his Body and makes us his Body. Concerning this, St Paul said to the Galatians: “You are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). By saying all this, Paul makes us understand that not only does the belonging of the Church to Christ exist, but also a certain form of equality and identification of the Church with Christ himself.⁵⁰

49 Benedict XVI, General Audience (October 15, 2008).

50 Benedict XVI, General Audience (November 22, 2006). The pontiff here also recalls several other texts in which we find the Pauline doctrine of the Mystical Body: 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12; 5:30; Col. 1:24.

Before his election as Roman pontiff, then-Cardinal Ratzinger had already seen in the sacraments of initiation the actualization of the believer's belonging to the Mystical Body. "[I]t is entirely impossible," he writes, "to conceive of the New Testament's notion of the People of God apart from Christology, which in turn is no abstract theory but a concrete event taking place in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist."⁵¹ Stating that "the true basis of this doctrine" is found in the Eucharist and that "the Lord himself virtually invited this conception," Benedict comments:

The outward action of eating becomes the expression of that intimate penetration of two subjects. . . . Communion means the fusion of existences; just as in the taking of nourishment the body assimilates foreign matter to itself, and is thereby enabled to live, in the same way my 'I' is 'assimilated' to that of Jesus, it is made similar to him in an exchange that increasingly breaks through the lines of division. . . . The formula 'the Church is the Body of Christ' thus states that the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives us his body, forever remains the place where the Church is generated.⁵²

Two More Images for Our Incorporation into the Mystical Body: Sonship and Nuptiality

Before concluding, I would like briefly to mention two more ways of describing what is meant by the "fusion of existences" discussed above. The first can be found in the Patristic dictum that Christian initiation makes us "sons in the Son." In a catechesis on Galatians 4:6–7 and Romans 8:14–17, Benedict writes of this dynamic:

Becoming a human being like us, with his Incarnation, death and Resurrection, Jesus in his turn accepts us in his humanity and even in his being Son, so that we too may enter into his specific belonging to God. Of course, our being children of God does not have the fullness of Jesus. We must increasingly become so throughout the journey of our Christian existence, developing in the following of Christ and in communion with him so as to enter ever more intimately into the relationship of love with God the Father which sustains our life.⁵³

51 Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 33.

52 Ibid., 36–37.

53 Benedict XVI, General Audience (May 23, 2012).

Benedict elsewhere recalls a further important consequence of our participation in Christ's sonship: if God is our common Father, then Christ is the first-born among many brothers (Rom. 8:14–17, 28). Accordingly, "[W]ith Christ there begins not only a new humanity, but also a new human brotherhood which surpasses and replaces the old."⁵⁴ Cognizant of our common status as co-heirs with Jesus, Christians therefore ought to love one another with a different kind of love from that which they have for those who are not Christians. To be sure, the attitude of *agape* (love, charity) is appropriate toward all, but *philadelphia* (brotherly love) refers specifically to the relationship with our brothers in Christ, a bond that simply cannot be had with those who do not share our faith. Thus the Apostle teaches that a sort of ecclesial subsidiarity ought to be exercised in our charitable deeds: "Let us do good to all men, and especially those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).⁵⁵

Last but not least, a final biblical root for St. Paul's doctrine of the Mystical Body lies in the dynamism of nuptiality, the biblical philosophy of love that Benedict believes is inseparable from eucharistic theology:

[I]n the sacrament, which is an act of love, two subjects are fused in such a way as to overcome their separation and to be made one. . . . But a new, more important subject, which might be ignored in a narrowly conceived sacramental theology, now emerges: the Church is the Body of Christ in the way in which the woman is one body, or rather one flesh, with the man. Put in other terms, the Church is the body, not by virtue of an identity without distinction, but rather by means of the pneumatic-real act of spousal love. Expressed in yet another way, this means that Christ and the Church are one body in the sense in which man and woman are one flesh. . . . The Church does not simply become Christ; she is ever the handmaid whom he lovingly raises to be his Bride and who seeks his face throughout these latter days.⁵⁶

Benedict's recourse to nuptiality is critical because this image above all others most clearly evinces what is meant by the Mystical Body and what precisely constitutes its relationship to Christ himself. As the emeritus pontiff explains, the Church is not simply identical with Christ's body. Rather, Christ and his body are one in the sense that spouses are one. In contrast with monistic re-

54 Joseph Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 33.

55 See *ibid.*, 34–35.

56 Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 39.

ligious and philosophical systems, Christian mysticism reveals that the most intimate union of God and man is one where the two parties, though united and not separate, nevertheless remain distinct from one another. And the best created image we have for this reality is none other than conjugal love within the context of the marriage covenant. In short, for St. Paul and for the Book of Genesis that lies behind his theology of nuptiality, Christ and his followers become one spirit as man and woman become one flesh.⁵⁷

Conclusion: St. Paul on Truth, Suffering, and the Apostolate

This article has endeavored to survey a variety of themes central to the thinking of St. Paul and Pope Benedict XVI, from the nature of faith and life in Christ to the importance of receptivity to truth that precedes us, the ineluctable ecclesial dimension of faith, and other topics pivotal to the Christian belief and practice. By way of conclusion, I would like to follow Benedict's lead in directing our reflection outward with an eye to its import for the apostolate of souls in the world today.

In his book *Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts*, we find a magnificent homily on the conversion of the Apostle Paul. Here Benedict begins by reflecting on a classic Pauline text:

As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Tim. 4:5–8).

This brief exhortation contains the heart of St. Paul's theology of the apostolate. If the sword rightfully stands as the attribute of the Apostle's life in Christian art, we must immediately remedy a potential misunderstanding of this tool's significance. It is not primarily a weapon wielded by the warrior for Christ. According to Benedict, viewing St. Paul only in this way "misses the core of his personality." The sword is first and foremost a tool not of war but of the passion endured by the Apostle: "Paul was a man who was ready to let himself be wounded, and that was his real strength."⁵⁸

In addition to the sword, the Apostle's other martial and athletic metaphors for Christian existence (the good fight, the race, crown, etc.) are directly

57 Benedict XVI, First Vespers Homily for the Opening of the Pauline Year (June 28, 2008).

58 Joseph Ratzinger, *Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 24–25.

applicable to men of every age and nation. Like the athlete or soldier, we are all called to bear our share of hardship entailed by the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:8). Like the new convert Saul, we too will suffer for the sake of Christ's name (Acts 9:15–16). Yet at the same time, this same suffering is paradoxically our very source of joy: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor. 12:15). Benedict tells us that this passage "lays bare the innermost essence of this man."⁵⁹ Indeed, we might say that it reflects the essence of every Christian apostolate.

Turning his attention more directly to our missionary lives today, Benedict reminds us of both the content and the consequences of the Pauline gospel proclamation: "Paul was not of the opinion that the chief pastoral task was to avoid controversy. Nor did he think that an apostle should have above all a good press. No, he wanted to arouse, to awaken consciences, even if it cost him his life."⁶⁰ As we saw above, for both Benedict and St. Paul, at times our proclamation of the Christian mystery will prove disturbing and threatening to those who receive it. It is for this reason that our preaching of the gospel will inevitably be linked to our suffering for its sake:

Because life often appears more comfortable lived in the lie or simply without regard to truth than according to the demands of truth, men often get angry about the truth. They want to suppress it, repress it, evade it. . . . Whoever commits himself entirely to the truth . . . will always approach the vicinity of martyrdom. He will become a sufferer. To proclaim truth without becoming a fanatic or dogmatist—that would be the great task.⁶¹

For those who wish to be effective as evangelists, Benedict thus reminds us that it is not brilliant rhetoric or sophisticated strategies that win souls. Rather, we will succeed in our mission as ambassadors for Christ to the extent that we imitate St. Paul in letting ourselves be wounded in service of the gospel.⁶² And part of that vulnerability means proclaiming the whole truth no matter what its cost. In short, "Suffering and truth belong together. Paul was resisted because he was a man of truth. His words and life still have meaning today because he served truth and suffered on its behalf. Suffering is the necessary authentication of truth, but only truth gives meaning to suffering."⁶³

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶² *Ibid.* (see 2 Cor. 10:10).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Finally, if our apostolate demands fidelity to the truth and inevitably involves suffering, it should not be forgotten that the sufferings we endure in the good fight are themselves graces of encounter with Jesus Christ. Indeed our vocation, our dignity, and our fulfillment as Christians emerge most fully in our response to Christ's invitation to suffer with him. It is precisely in this suffering with joy on behalf of God's people that we become co-redeemers and fellow-workers of God (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 6:1). For our emeritus pontiff, the truth of St. Paul's missionary vision can thus be summarized in one line: "This remains the mission of all Christ's apostles in all times: to be his fellow workers in true joy."⁶⁴

64 Benedict XVI, General Audience (September 10, 2008).