

**“Smaller But Purer”?:
Joseph Ratzinger on the “Little Flock”
and Vicarious Representation**

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ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1969, Joseph Ratzinger delivered an address on West German radio, “What Will the Church Look Like in the Year 2000?” Towards the end of that broadcast, he ventured a prediction about the future of the Church:

From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge—a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so will she lose many of her social privileges. In contrast to an earlier age, she will be seen much more as a voluntary society, entered only by free decision. As a small society [*kleine Gemeinschaft*], she will make much bigger demands on the initiative of her individual members. . . . But when the trial of this sifting [*Trennungen*] is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified [*verinnerlichten und vereinfachten*] Church. Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock [*die kleine Gemeinschaft*] of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.¹

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, “What Will the Future Church Look Like?,” in *Faith and the*

This comment, and similar ones stretching throughout Ratzinger's publications, have led some theologians and other commentators to conclude that he seeks a "smaller but purer" Church, a remnant comprised of committed believers and purged of—or at least untroubled by the loss of—those reckoned less devout or orthodox. Marked by a sharp sense of superiority and opposition to the world, such a Church would be sectarian in its introversion and defensiveness.

Ratzinger's various comments on the "little flock" or a smaller Church can be understood rightly, though, only in connection with his articulation of a key theme: *Stellvertretung* or vicarious representation (sometimes translated, less adequately, as "representation" or "substitution").² This theme, which structures his theological vision as a whole and his Christology and ecclesiology in particular, plays a marginal role in most analyses of his thought, not least in the Anglophone world.³ His vicarious-representative theology begins with the affirmation that "The healing of the whole takes place . . . in the dialectical antithesis of the few and the many, in which the few are the starting point from which God seeks to save the many."⁴ Ratzinger further develops this theme through the lens of "pro-existence," a "being-for" others that constitutes the essence of both Christ and his Church. The result, I argue, is an ecclesiological vision that, instead of generating sectarianism or a crypto-Donatism, accentuates service, humility, and openness.

I will advance this argument in three steps. First, I present and analyze key texts wherein Ratzinger speaks of the "little flock" of the future, followed by a précis of criticisms of that vision. Second, I briefly summarize the fundamental points of Ratzinger's vicarious-representative theology, with particular attention devoted to its ecclesiological dimensions. Finally, I evaluate Ratzinger's "little flock," vicarious-representative ecclesiology and its critics, with an eye to addressing contemporary ecclesial realities. I conclude that, if Ratzinger's thought does not always attend sufficiently to the gifts of the non-Christian Other or to the changed situation of a "detraditionalized" and "pluralized" post-sec-

Future (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009), 101–118, at 116, 118.

² "Vicarious representation" conveys more fully both the uniqueness of Jesus's vicarious-substitutionary saving work and his solidarity with humanity in that work of salvation.

³ See my article, "'For the Many': The Vicarious-Representative Heart of Joseph Ratzinger's Theology," *Theological Studies* 75 (2014): 564–84.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 75.

ular Europe,⁵ its vicarious-representative logic nonetheless excludes a "smaller but purer" ecclesiology and instead views the Church as a community whose identity is pro-existence for "the many."

Ratzinger on the "Little Flock"

Ratzinger's aforementioned comments on the "little flock" of the future were made in 1969, but he has expressed similar thoughts from the 1950s up through the present day. His thought, here as elsewhere, exhibits a deep, substantial continuity.⁶ I wish here to present some key texts on the "little flock" or "minority" Church, in order to give an overview of this dimension of his ecclesiology, and then will present some critiques of it. Perhaps his earliest elaboration of the "little flock" is in *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, published in 1960 but delivered first as an address to pastoral workers in April, 1958:

The relationship between the "few" and the "many" reveals the true measure of the Church's catholicity. In external numbers it will never be fully "catholic" (that is, all-embracing), but will always remain a small flock [*kleine Herde*]⁷—smaller than even the statistics suggest, statistics which lie when they call many "brothers" who are in fact merely *pseudadelphoi*, Christians by name only. In her suffering and love, however, she will always stand for the "many", for all. In her love and her suffering she surmounts all frontiers and is truly "catholic."⁸

A second mention is in his essay, "Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche" ("The New Pagans and the Church"), first published at the end of 1958.⁸

⁵ See Lieven Boeve, "Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 99–122.

⁶ See, for example, Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion, eds., *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey* (London/New York: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2010), xiv–xv, xvii, 11–12; James Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions & Legitimate Hopes* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2009), 29; Michael Fahey, "Joseph Ratzinger as Ecclesiologist and Pastor," in *Neo-Conservatism: Social and Religious Phenomenon*, *Concilium* 141 (January 1981): 76–83, at 76; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "From Theologian to Pope" *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 33 (Autumn 2005): 56–62, at 58; and Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 11–13.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 84.

⁸ This essay was first published in *Hochland* 51 (1958/59): 1–11. It was reprinted, with minor changes, in *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düssel-

Addressing the growing European phenomenon of non-practicing Catholics in traditionally Catholic regions and the consequent emergence of a “new paganism” marked by a rationalistic ethic and a “subjective choosing” of Church teachings, Ratzinger says that, whereas the Middle Ages witnessed the Church’s move from a “little flock to a world Church” [*von der kleinen Herde zur Weltkirche*] the modern age will see a reverse move back towards a “pusillus grex.”⁹ This “few,” however, will remain inherently connected to the “many” through its divine election as an instrument of service and salvation for all.

In 1963, Ratzinger wrote similarly in “Stellvertretung” (“Vicarious Representation”) of the little flock’s salvific service: “For the Church to be the means of salvation for all, it does not have to extend itself visibly to all, but has instead its essential role in following Christ, he who is uniquely ‘the one,’ and therein the church is the little flock [*die Schar der ‘Wenigen’*], through which God however intends to save ‘the many.’ The Church’s service is not carried out *by* all human beings, but is indeed carried out *for* all of them.”¹⁰

Likewise, in “Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?” (“No Salvation outside the Church?”), an article from 1965, he seconded Yves Congar’s comments in *The Wide World, My Parish* on the Bible’s “disdain” for quantitative-statistical views of communal life and mission,¹¹ and stated: “The Church is not a circle of the saved existing for itself, surrounded by the condemned. It is rather, by its nature, there for others, it is a reality open to others. . . . As a sign of divine love, of this life for the other, by which history is saved and led to God, the Church must not be an esoteric circle, but is essentially an *open space*.”¹²

Ratzinger would return to this theme of the “little flock” and its variations over the next two decades—as, for example, in 1969’s “What Will the Future Church Look Like?” and in 1973’s *Die Hoffnung des Senfkorns*

dorf: Patmos, 1969), 325–338. I will quote from this latter volume. All translations in this article are mine, unless noted otherwise.

⁹ *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 325–26, 332.

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “Vicarious Representation,” trans. Jared Wicks, *Letter & Spirit* 7 (2011): 209–220, at 218. The original is “Stellvertretung,” in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Heinrich Fries, 2 vols. (München: Kösel, 1962–63), 2:566–575.

¹¹ See Yves Congar, “A Small Church in a Large World,” in *The Wide World, My Parish: Salvation and Its Problems*, trans. Donald Attwater (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 8–16, at 9, 11.

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, “Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?” in *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 339–61, at 360.

(*The Hope of the Mustard Seed*)—but it has acquired a new prominence in recent years. In particular, his interviews with journalists, both before and after his papal election, have continued to address the theme. In *The Ratzinger Report*, an interview with Vittorio Messori published in 1985, he said:

After the phase of indiscriminate "openness" it is time that the Christian reacquire the consciousness of belonging to a minority and of often being in opposition to what is obvious, plausible [*logico*], and natural for that mentality which the New Testament calls—and certainly not in a positive sense—the "spirit of the world."¹³

In 1996's *Salt of the Earth*, his first extended interview with Peter Seewald, Ratzinger spoke more extensively than in *The Ratzinger Report* on the possibility of a "mustard seed" or "minority" Church:

Perhaps the time has come to say farewell to the idea of traditionally Catholic cultures [*Vielleicht müssen wir von den volksskirchlichen Ideen Abschied nehmen*]. Maybe we are facing a new and different kind of epoch in the Church's history, where Christianity will again be characterized more by the mustard seed, where it will exist in small, seemingly insignificant groups that nonetheless live an intensive struggle against evil and bring the good in to the world—that let God in.¹⁴

In 2000, Ratzinger gave a second interview to Peter Seewald, *God and the World*, in which he returned to the theme of a smaller Church:

First of all: Is the Church really going to get smaller? When I said that, I was reproached from all sides for pessimism. And nowadays nothing seems less tolerated than what people call pessimism—and which is often in fact just realism. Meanwhile, most people admit that at the present stage of things in Europe the number of

¹³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), 36–37.

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997), :16. Also, *Salt of the Earth*, 264–65, 268–69.

baptized Christians is simply dwindling. In a city like Magdeburg, only 8 percent of the people are still Christians—and, mark you, that's all kinds of Christians put together. Such statistics show the existence of trends that are indisputable. In that sense, the extent to which church and society are seen as synonymous in some cultural areas, with us in Germany, for instance, will diminish. We simply have to face up to this.¹⁵

Ratzinger then complemented his demographic argument with an historical and ecclesiological one:

The traditional Church can be very lovely, but this is not something strictly necessary. The Church of the first three centuries was a small Church and nevertheless was not a sectarian community. On the contrary, she was not partitioned off; rather, she saw herself as responsible for the poor, for the sick, for everyone. All those who sought a faith in the one God, who sought a promise, found their place in her.

The synagogue, Judaism in the Roman Empire, had surrounded itself with this circle of God-fearers, who were affiliated with it and thereby achieved a great opening up. The catechumenate of the early Church was very similar. Here people who didn't feel able to identify with Christianity completely could, as it were, attach themselves to the Church, so as to see whether they would take the step of joining her. This consciousness of not being a closed club, but of always being open to everyone and everything, is an inseparable part of the Church. And it is precisely with the shrinking of Christian congregations we are experiencing that we shall have to consider looking for openness along the lines of such types of affiliation, of being able to associate oneself.

I have nothing against it, then, if people who all year long never visit a church go there at least on Christmas Night or New Year's Eve or on special occasions, because this is another way of belonging to the blessing of the sacred, to the light. There have to be various forms of participation and association; the Church has to be inwardly open.¹⁶

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), 441.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *God and the World*, 442.

Finally, Ratzinger has continued to reflect on these themes in recent years, writing, for instance, in 2004 of "creative minorities"¹⁷ capable of transforming culture and speaking in his 2010 interview, *Light of the World*, of the connection between the decline of "popular" Catholicism and the consequent need for a "Christianity of personal decision."¹⁸ Lastly, during his September 2011 visit to Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, he said:

Secularizing trends—whether by expropriation of Church goods, or elimination of privileges or the like—have always meant a profound liberation of the Church from forms of worldliness, for in the process she as it were sets aside her worldly wealth and once again completely embraces her worldly poverty. . . .

History has shown that, when the Church becomes less worldly, her missionary witness shines more brightly. Once liberated from material and political burdens and privileges, the Church can reach out more effectively and in a truly Christian way to the whole world, she can be truly open to the world. She can live more freely her vocation to the ministry of divine worship and service of neighbor.¹⁹

Four themes, at least, recur throughout Ratzinger's comments: demography, the signs of the times, an emphasis on the qualitative over the quantitative dimensions of ecclesiality, and the intrinsic openness of the little flock. In the first place, Ratzinger sees the "little flock" partly as a function of the numerical decline of Christianity in Europe and North America; "small," in this sense, is simply descriptive and an acknowledgement of demographic changes. Second, his comments on the "little flock" arise out of his reading of a twofold contemporary context: the erosion or decline of broadly Christian cultures in which Church and society overlapped significantly, and the rise of a "new paganism" lived not against, but within, the Church; this "intraecclesial paganism" has a

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, trans. Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 120.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 162.

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Catholics Active in Church and Society," *Origins* 41 (October 13, 2011): 305–07, at 306.

“Christian façade” that conceals an absence of the conversion that marks the birth of the Church itself and of every Christian.²⁰ Third, echoing Congar and also drawing upon the history of the early Church and upon his experiences of the Catholic Church in Germany, Ratzinger holds that size or numbers by themselves are no guarantee of ecclesial vitality and openness. In his memoirs, for instance, he criticizes the German bishops’ decision in the 1930s to uphold the concordat with the Nazi government and to seek to preserve their parochial schools in the face of secularizing influences from without (the government) and within (e.g., the presence of older anti-clericalists and younger Nazis on the faculties of numerous schools): “[M]erely to guarantee institutions is useless if there are no people to support those institutions from inner conviction.”²¹ A “bigger” Church can be moribund and self-centered, while a smaller Church can be engaged and other-centered.

Fourth, although Ratzinger emphasizes that Christianity will increasingly be a community of intentional conversion and of “personal decision” (as opposed to the customs and osmosis of a “thick” Christian culture) that generate creative minorities, such intensity of conviction seeks to avoid sectarianism through an equally intentional and inherent openness to give and to receive; the Church must never be a “closed club” or a “circle of the saved existing for itself, surrounded by the condemned.” Ratzinger’s ecclesiology manifests a clear concern for the salvation of all people and sees the Church—of whatever size, in whatever era—as a salvific servant to all peoples. In sum, the Christian community, however quantitatively small it may be, must always be qualitatively open, for its mission is the “expression of divine hospitality; it is the sending forth of messengers who carry throughout the world the invitation to the divine wedding feast.”²²

Despite Ratzinger’s intentions, his comments on the “little flock” have raised considerable criticism. Demographically, they are unquestionable in regard to Western (or Northern) Christianity. Although contemporary Catholicism—and Christianity in general—have grown

²⁰ “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche,” 325, 326. Ratzinger notes, in this same section of the article, “the convert, the Christian remains a sinner, and the gravest transgressions remain possible in the Christian community. In a centuries-long struggle against the ‘heretics’ (the Cathars! [literally, the Pure]) the Church made this insight prevail” (326).

²¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 15.

²² Joseph Ratzinger, “Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?” in *Das neue Volk Gottes*, 361.

in the Southern Hemisphere, often explosively, in ways unforeseen even a few decades ago, European Catholicism continues to decline numerically, while the Church's modest growth in the United States is driven largely by the effects of immigration. In this regard, Ratzinger is right when he argues in *God and the World* that his purported "pessimism" is simply realism.

Theologically, Ratzinger's stance has provoked greater contention. Some have taken his comments to mean that he has sought a "smaller but purer" Church, purified and even purged of lukewarm and dissenting Catholics. George Weigel has suggested that, for Ratzinger, "the Church of the immediate future would be smaller and purer, not quite a catacomb Church, but certainly not the dominant force in Western culture it once had been. Cardinal Ratzinger seemed to think that the West and its humanistic project had fallen into irreversible cultural decline. [John Paul II] believed that a revitalization of humanism was possible."²³ The journalist David Gibson is still more critical: "What all this [i.e., Benedict XVI's pontificate as an extension of his previous commitments as professor and prefect] points to is the 'smaller-but-purer' Church that Joseph Ratzinger has predicted for years, but which is not necessarily about numbers or sanctity. . . . Catholicism may grow in some places and shrink in others, but it will everywhere be afflicted by a partisanship that is an inevitable result of a campaign of purification and an inversion of the traditionally expansive view of what it means to be Catholic."²⁴

These "popular" accounts are paralleled by ones within the academy. James Corkery notes that, "[In contrast to Pope John Paul II, Benedict] is more Church-focused—consistent, maybe, with his 'mustard seed' approach to the Church of the future: leaner, but purer? Such narrowing makes me nervous, contrasting, as it does, with a remark once attributed to Cardinal Martini: if the people 'out there' do not come to us, then we must go to them."²⁵ Roberto Tura suggests that Ratzinger's own life-story incarnates this ecclesiological tendency: "[I]t is not coincidental that after three years of suffering in ecumenical Tübingen he preferred to retreat to the fortress of Bavarian Catholicism [Regensburg], with the

²³ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books/Harper Collins, 1999), 444.

²⁴ David Gibson, *The Rule of Benedict: Pope Benedict XVI and His Battle with the Modern World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 16.

²⁵ Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions & Legitimate Hopes*, 139–40.

advantages and the limits of a perhaps overly regionalist and traditionalist experience.”²⁶ Still more pointedly, Gerard Mannion has characterized Ratzinger’s ecclesiology as a form of “neo-exclusivism,” which “looks more inward (to the church community) than outward and inculcates a more separatist understanding of the relation between the church and the wider ‘world.’”²⁷ Mannion comments elsewhere that “it is an understanding of the Church that appears to accentuate the distinctive nature of the Church vis-à-vis the world. Such an ecclesiology therefore fosters an exclusivistic mentality anew in the Church. In other words, the Church and world are separate entities and the Church must work hard to resist being ‘tainted’ by the ways of the world.”²⁸

Such comments are representative of “a widespread accusation that the Pope has no affection for the big people’s Church—for the ‘masses’—but would rather plant himself among the little flock and content himself with it.”²⁹ Despite their interpretive and tonal differences, Ratzinger’s critics are united in seeing this “smaller but purer” ecclesiology as a threat to the Church’s catholicity and even to its very identity and mission.

Can this disagreement between Ratzinger and his critics be resolved? Does Ratzinger hold to a “smaller but purer” ecclesiology (and if so, what are the consequences)? If not, why not, and what instead does he believe about the Church? An answer to these questions, I argue, lays in Ratzinger’s use of vicarious representation—and its understanding of the relationship between the “few” and the “many”—as a structuring theme of his theology.

Ratzinger on Vicarious Representation

Ratzinger’s use of the concept of vicarious representation is broad and systematic, weaving together his thought on salvation history, Christology-soteriology, and ecclesiology.³⁰ Its foundation is the soteriological conviction that “the few are the starting point from which God seeks

²⁶ Roberto Tura, “La Teologia di J. Ratzinger: Saggio introduttivo,” *Studia Patavina* 21 (1974): 145–82, at 145.

²⁷ Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 2007), 15–16.

²⁸ Boeve and Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader*, 87.

²⁹ Kurt Koch, *Das Geheimnis des Senfkorns: Grundzüge des theologischen Denkens von Papst Benedikt XVI* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2010), 9.

³⁰ This section draws upon my article, “‘For the Many’: The Vicarious-Representative Heart of Joseph Ratzinger’s Theology,” *Theological Studies* 75.3 (2014): 564–84.

to save the many."³¹ Ratzinger contrasts an ancient, magical-objectified understanding of vicarious representation, in which transgressing believers sought to appease deities by offering a substitute image or representative to be destroyed by divine wrath, to a biblical understanding which reverses the process: a (divine) representative, standing in solidarity with sinners-transgressors, freely offers oneself in order to save humanity from destruction.³² Ratzinger sees this movement beginning with Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah's suffering servant; culminating in Jesus Christ, the One who alone is truly righteous and who offers his life as a ransom for many; and continuing in Christ's Church as the universal sacrament of salvation and as the light of the nations.³³ Each step of salvation history is oriented to the salvation of "the many." At the risk of oversimplification, his vicarious-representative theology may be summed up in five theses:

1. Vicarious representation stands—explicitly and implicitly—at the heart of Joseph Ratzinger's theology, integrating salvation history, Christology, and ecclesiology. That theology cannot be understood adequately apart from it.
2. Salvation history, characterized by divine election-for-others and the exchange of destinies (i.e., damnation for salvation), has as its "fundamental law"³⁴ vicarious representation.
3. Jesus Christ, as the One whose saving mission and very person is pro-existence for the Many, embodies, generates, and recapitulates vicarious representation. All of salvation history culminates in, and flows from, him.
4. The Church, participating in Christ's own vicarious-representative life and ministry, exists for the salvific, sacramental service of the "many." Its identity and mission coincide in this pro-existence.
5. The Church, precisely as a community that lives wholly from and for vicarious representation, must therefore reject sectarianism and self-referentiality in favor of openness, mission, and service.

Most pertinent for the purposes of this article is the shape of Ratzinger's vicarious-representative ecclesiology. Three dimensions are particularly relevant. First, the Church's identity and mission coincide in

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 75.

³² Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation," 210.

³³ *Ibid.*, 210–19.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 79.

vicarious-representative pro-existence. Just as Jesus's identity and mission are identical in his "pro-existence" for others,³⁵ so too the Church—the *totus Christus*, together with its Head—has no essence other than "being-for" others; the Church may never be closed-off against others, without doing violence to itself.³⁶ Second, Ratzinger highlights the paradox that the little flock is the universal sacrament of salvation. The "few" are the "archimedean point" by which the "many" are saved;³⁷ the Church's service, he writes, "is not carried out *by* all human beings, but is indeed carried out *for* all of them."³⁸ It serves the salvation of the "many" especially through its missionary activity, its agape towards all people, and, above all, its suffering by which it takes on the estrangement of the "many" and gives in return "full sonship and full brotherhood."³⁹ Third, Ratzinger sees the Church as a mustard seed. If the resurrection is the "smallest mustard seed of history,"⁴⁰ the Church participates in that mustard seed through its patient respect for the "whiteness of origins," a phrase Ratzinger borrows from Teilhard de Chardin: every beginning is imperceptible.⁴¹ God always begins by choosing a single person or a small group. The Church in its life and mission therefore must not impatiently seek to justify itself through visible success or great numbers, but trust in God's providence. Taken together, these characteristics—pro-existence, the little flock as sacrament of salvation, and the mustard seed—point to the diaconal, patient, other-centered shape of Ratzinger's vicarious-representative ecclesiology.

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), 134, 172, 174.

³⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "Kirche," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, second edition, vol. 6, eds. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (Freiburg: Herder, 1957–65), 172–83, at 180.

³⁷ Ratzinger, "Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche," 334.

³⁸ Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation," 218.

³⁹ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 84.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II*, 247.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, "The New Evangelization," available in English (and other languages) at the website of the Vatican's Congregation for Clergy: <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2001-01/30-999999/10IN.html>. A German version can be found also in Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 8/2: Kirche—Zeichen unter den Völkern: Schriften zur Ekklesiologie und Ökumene* (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 1231–42.

Evaluation of Ratzinger's Thought

It remains now to evaluate Ratzinger's "little flock," vicarious-representative ecclesiology and its critics. Criticism of his ecclesial vision as "smaller but purer" tends to fall into two broad categories: one, sectarianism, in which the Church as a small, disciplined community attempts to remain pure by separating itself from a corrupt and dangerous world;⁴² and two, unilateralism, which posits the Church's self-sufficiency and superiority and so consequently devalues dialogue and mutuality with the world, as well as with other churches and religions. In both instances, critics hold that Ratzinger's thought fosters—intentionally or not—an inherently oppositional Church that is largely hostile to the world and accepting of, if not encouraging, a "fragmentation"⁴³ in which less-committed believers leave.

Sectarianism

It is clear that Ratzinger's writings contain numerous passages which contrast, and even oppose, the Church and the world. Alongside the passages mentioned in the first part of this article, one may look also at his thoughts as both a young professor-*peritus* and an older pope. For example, he wrote in June 1962, on behalf of Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, a draft of an Introductory Constitution for Vatican II, which begins:

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded his Church so that it might be a "city set upon a mountain" (Mt 5:14), from which the true light of the divine word (cf. Jn 1:9) would enlighten people who walk in darkness in this world and in "the shadow of death" (Is 9:2; Lk 1:79). Mindful of this divine commission, this holy Synod, representing the holy people of God, comes together fully aware of the shadows of this age, in which the divine sunlight seems darkened and our Lord appears to be sleeping amid the storms and waves of today (cf. Mk 4:37ff.).⁴⁴

⁴² See Ernst Troeltsch's classic definitions of "church" and "sect." "Church" is an "institution . . . able to receive the masses, and to adjust itself to the world," while "sect" is a "voluntary society, composed of strict and definite Christian believers bound to each other by the fact that all have experienced the 'new birth.' These 'believers' live apart from the world, [and] are limited to small groups." Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 2:993.

⁴³ David Gibson, *The Rule of Benedict*, 365.

⁴⁴ In Jared Wicks, "Six texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *peritus* before and during

That sharp sense of contrast, expressed across decades of academic, episcopal, and curial labors, continued during his pontificate. In his installation homily, he used the imagery of the desert and of a “sea of death” to describe life in this world: “[S]o many people are living in the desert. . . . The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast,” and “We are living in alienation, in the salt waters of suffering and death; in a sea of darkness without light.”⁴⁵ And, in *Light of the World*, he noted:

[W]e need something like islands where faith in God and the interior simplicity of Christianity are alive and radiant; oases, Noah’s arks, to which man can always come back for refuge. . . . [T]he Church attempts to instill powers of resistance as well as to develop protective zones in which the beauty of the world, of the gift of being alive, also become visible in contrast to the rampant brokenness around us.⁴⁶

In its references to a “city upon a mountain,” “oases,” and “protective zones,” Ratzinger’s ecclesiology does have similarities to what Gerard Mannion has called “neo-exclusivism”⁴⁷ and what Avery Dulles called “neo-Augustinianism,” in which the Church is seen as “an island of grace in a world given over to sin.”⁴⁸ More stridently, Eamon Duffy

Vatican Council II,” *Gregorianum* 89 (2008): 233–311, at 262. See his comments at his final papal general audience on February 27, 2013: “I have felt like Saint Peter with the Apostles in the boat on the Sea of Galilee: the Lord has given us so many days of sun and of light winds, days when the catch was abundant; there were also moments when the waters were rough and the winds against us, as throughout the Church’s history, and the Lord seemed to be sleeping. But I have always known that the Lord is in that boat, and I have always known that the barque of the Church is not mine but his. Nor does the Lord let it sink.” (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20130227_en.html)

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, “Installation Homily,” 2005.

⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, 176–77.

⁴⁷ Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*, 15–16.

⁴⁸ In his evaluation of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops convoked in 1985 on the twentieth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, Dulles described Ratzinger as a leader of the “neo-Augustinians.” This group “depict[s] the Church as an island of grace in a world given over to sin. . . . Striving for openness to the world, the Church in the postconciliar period allowed itself to be contaminated.” (“The Extraordinary Synod of 1985,” in *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* [San Francisco: Harper

has charged Ratzinger with a "lurid and simplistic world of easy dualisms," in which the outside world is "the place of the demonic" and the Church stands by contrast as a "Last Redoubt . . . free from the flux and relativism of the world."⁴⁹

Ratzinger is keenly aware of potential threats to the Church, and that concern can manifest itself in drawing sharp contrasts between Church and world and in acknowledging the possibility of conflict between the two. This approach, James Corkery argues, is grounded in, first, Ratzinger's fundamental trust in the Church as "the place of truth," and, second, Christian truth's contrast to the "pseudo-wisdoms" of the world.⁵⁰ Corkery exaggerates in characterizing Ratzinger as a "detective of sin" rather than a "detective of grace," but he is correct in a significant sense in seeing Ratzinger's theology as one "more attuned to the tensions between what is godly and what is worldly rather than to the harmonies between the two."⁵¹

Ratzinger's emphasis on tension over harmony leads to a further critique, whose most prominent representatives are Joseph Komonchak and Lieven Boeve. Komonchak has argued that Ratzinger's theology is fundamentally anti-correlational and effectively anti-modern. In tandem with David Tracy,⁵² he holds that post-conciliar Catholic theology has been marked by two major strands: the correlational path of Aquinas, which seeks dialogue with modern life and thought, and the anti-correlational Augustinian-Bonaventuran path, which pursues a *ressourcement* that is at least implicitly anti-modern.⁵³ Komonchak contrasts

& Row, 1988], 184–206, at 191).

⁴⁹ Eamon Duffy, "Urbi, but not Orbi . . . the Cardinal, the Church, and the World," *New Blackfriars* 66 (June 1985): 272–78, at 273, 275.

⁵⁰ Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas*, 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵² David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 548–70, at 552–56.

⁵³ Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church in Crisis: Pope Benedict's Theological Vision," *Commonweal* 132 (June 3, 2005): 11–14, at 12–13. For greater elaboration, see his "Augustine, Aquinas, or the Gospel *sine glossa*? Divisions over *Gaudium et spes*," in *Unfinished Journey: The Church Forty Years after Vatican II, Essays for John Wilkins*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (New York: Continuum, 2003), 102–18; and its longer version, "Le valutazioni sulla *Gaudium et spes*: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger," in Joseph Doré and Alberto Melloni, eds., *Volti di fine concilio: Studi di storia e teologia sulla conclusione del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Mulino, 2001), 115–53. Two earlier book chapters make a similar argument: "Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism," in *Catholicism and*

Marie-Dominique Chenu's "*pierres d'attente*"—"tooth stones" which reach out for contact between Christianity and culture—and Ratzinger's "dichotomies" between Christian and (secular) Western perspectives.⁵⁴ Ratzinger's dichotomous stance, in Komonchak's view, both generates and flows from an overarching sense of a Church in crisis, in which the only faithful, effective response is one of opposition and evangelical proclamation; dialogue with the world and within the Church is dangerous, even impossible.⁵⁵ Komonchak sees "remarkable parallels" between the late Bonaventure's "anti-philosophical, anti-intellectual, and indiscriminate" "apocalyptic anti-Aristotelianism" and Ratzinger's "basic attitude" of suspicion towards post-conciliar Catholicism's significant changes.⁵⁶

Boeve concurs with Komonchak's judgment, but pushes further by criticizing Ratzinger's reading of contemporary Europe as secular. Rejecting what he considers to be Ratzinger's binary, reductive opposition between belief and unbelief,⁵⁷ Boeve argues that Europe is not so much secular as post-secular. It is post-secular, because modernization has not eradicated religion (as some had predicted or hoped), but transformed it through a dual process of detraditionalization and pluralization, in which the European religious situation is understood best not as a continuum between "churched Christians" and "atheist humanists," but as a "plural field of interacting religious positions."⁵⁸ Christianity, in Boeve's view, has not been replaced by a secular, godless culture, but rather a "plurality of life views and religions" has stepped in to fill the space left behind by a detraditionalized Christianity's "diminishing impact."⁵⁹ He judges that Ratzinger's theology is effectively incapable of responding to this post-secular situation. It is, instead, anti-modern and

Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy, eds. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (New York: Cambridge, 1994): 76–99; and "Das II. Vatikanum und die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Katholizismus und Liberalismus," in *Vatikanum II und Modernisierung: Historische, theologische, und soziologische Perspektiven*, eds. Franz-Xavier Kaufmann and Arnold Zingerle (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996), 147–69.

⁵⁴ Komonchak, "The Church in Crisis," 12–13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁷ Lieven Boeve, "Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief? Perspectives from the Vatican," *Modern Theology* 23 (April 2007): 205–27, at 217–18, 222.

⁵⁸ Boeve, "Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe," 107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

apocalyptic.⁶⁰ Its neo-platonic, neo-Augustinian, dualistic, hierarchical, asymmetrical framework leads ineluctably to an inherently oppositional stance towards the world,⁶¹ because "anything that is different is considered by definition lesser, sinful and unredeemed."⁶² In a cruel irony, Ratzinger's theological-ecclesiological vision perpetuates the very oppositions it laments and seeks to overcome.

Kevin Hughes has challenged the adequacy of the oppositional, anti-correlational Augustinian-Bonaventuran interpretation on which Komonchak's and Boeve's reading of Ratzinger rests. He argues that the now-commonplace contrastive reading of Bonaventure as a "conservative" and Aquinas as a "progressive"—"when faced with new ideas, Aquinas appears to open, engage, and synthesize, whereas Bonaventure appears to close, confront, and divide."⁶³—is untenable. Such a "dyadic oppositional"⁶⁴ view misreads both thinkers and, more broadly, distorts our understanding of conciliar and post-conciliar Catholicism, especially its theology. Aquinas was not as "liberal" or correlational as is commonly thought (e.g., he used Aristotelian science as the "*formal key* rather than the *cultural correlate*"⁶⁵ to his theology), nor was Bonaventure as "conservative" and closed (e.g., his confidence in the power of human reason to discern vestiges of the Trinity in creation,⁶⁶ the non-conservative radicalism of his defense of mendicant life⁶⁷). Hughes argues, therefore, for a more genuinely Catholic understanding of tradition, which rejects the binary "logic of contradictories" in favor of a more capacious and

⁶⁰ Boeve, "Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief? Perspectives from the Vatican," 220; also, Boeve, "Retrieving Augustine Today: Between Neo-Augustinian Essentialism and Radical Hermeneutics?," in *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance Against Modernity?*, eds. L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, M. Wisse (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 1–17, at 5–6.

⁶¹ Boeve, "Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief? Perspectives from the Vatican," 219; idem., "Retrieving Augustine Today: Between Neo-Augustinian Essentialism and Radical Hermeneutics?," 6.

⁶² Lieven Boeve, "Retrieving Augustine Today: Between Neo-Augustinian Essentialism and Radical Hermeneutics?," 6. For a more comprehensive overview and evaluation of Ratzinger's theology, see Boeve, "Kerk, theologie en heilswaarheid: De klare visie van Joseph Ratzinger," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 33 (1993): 139–65, especially 160–63.

⁶³ Kevin L. Hughes, "Bonaventure *Contra Mundum*? The Catholic Theological Tradition Revisited," *Theological Studies* 74 (June 2013): 372–98, at 378.

⁶⁴ Hughes, "Bonaventure *Contra Mundum*?," 379.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 381.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 392–93.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 390.

complementary “logic of communion.”⁶⁸

Hughes’s position can be seen as turning on its head Komonchak’s and Boeve’s criticism of Ratzinger: they may be engaging in precisely the kind of oppositional thinking for which they criticize Ratzinger. They read Ratzinger through lenses that are distorted by one-sided readings of, first, Bonaventure (and Aquinas), and second, conciliar and post-conciliar Catholic theology. If Bonaventure is not as oppositional and Aquinas not as correlational as they are often depicted—and if, as Hughes argues, the use of such categories is itself a sign of a flawed theology of tradition beholden to a “fractured”⁶⁹ method and a “damaged”⁷⁰ practice—then Ratzinger’s Augustinian-Bonaventuran orientation cannot be used as *prima facie* proof of his oppositional, sectarian thought. If that orientation is not the sectarian culprit that Komonchak and Boeve, among others, hold it to be, then one may seek an alternative, non-sectarian explanation for Ratzinger’s comments about the “little flock.” His vicarious-representative theology offers one such explanation: the Church and the “non-Church”⁷¹ are dialectically related, of course, but are oriented towards each other and depend upon each other:

[The Church] must always remember that she is only one of two sons, one brother beside another, and that her mission is not to condemn the wayward brother, but to save him. The Church, it is true, must unify herself to form a strong inner brotherhood in order to be truly *one* brother. But she does not seek to be *one* brother in order finally to shut herself off from the other; rather she seeks to be one brother because only in this way can she fulfill her task toward the other, living for whom is the deepest meaning of her existence, which itself is grounded wholly in the vicarious existence of Jesus Christ.⁷²

As this passage indicates, Ratzinger argues that the most fundamental contrast in vicarious-representative theology—and in salvation history itself—is not between Jew and Gentile, or Church and world, but between Christ and humanity itself.⁷³ This common submission to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 398.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 395.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 397.

⁷¹ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 79.

⁷² Ibid., 80.

⁷³ Ratzinger, “Vicarious Representation,” 215.

Christ subverts a simple oppositional reading of Ratzinger's thought on the Church-world relationship. In this sense, Ratzinger's ecclesiological vision may not be Chenu's, but it is not sectarian. It is a different kind of engagement, one attuned to tensions and even conflict, but also one whose deepest commitment is to openness, relation, pro-existence, and reconciliation.

One may also challenge, in some of the critiques that Ratzinger's little-flock ecclesiology promotes a "smaller but purer" vision,⁷⁴ the implicit assumption that "little=closed" and "big=open." The early Church, as Ratzinger noted in *God and the World*, was small but open to all in its works of charity, its catechumenate, and its welcome of the "God-fearers," whereas one could argue that the post-Tridentine Church was big but closed in several important aspects. Paradoxically, one can have an open little flock and a big sect. Sectarianism is characterized not so much by its smallness as by its closedness, its lack of openness.⁷⁵ If it is undeniable that Ratzinger has offered a sustained opposition to what he judges to be modernity's flaws—an opposition which leads him at times to value insufficiently its achievements—it remains that the trajectory of his vicarious-representative theology leads away from sectarianism.

Unilateralism

The second main criticism of Ratzinger's little-flock ecclesiology, which I term unilateralism, is a corollary of the first, sectarianism. If sectarianism raises the specter of a closed, oppositional ecclesial stance towards the world, unilateralism raises the specter of a monological, self-sufficient, superior Catholicism vis-à-vis other Christians, other religions, and the world as a whole. Where sectarianism tends towards separation from the world, unilateralism focuses largely on what the Church gives to the world and not what it receives from it. Dialogue and mutuality are casualties of this approach.

Several theologians have criticized Ratzinger for such unilateralism. James Corkery holds that Ratzinger's theological approach emphasizes that "grace flows from the Church to the world, but not really from

⁷⁴ See, for example, Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions & Legitimate Hopes*, 139–40. Also, Boeve and Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader*. "Ratzinger has frequently spoken of the possible need for the Church to become smaller, but purer" (85); and "[Ratzinger's] oft-stated belief that the Church needs to become smaller but purer" (154); no bibliographic citations are provided for these claims.

⁷⁵ Recall Augustine's claim that the Donatists possessed everything but love, which opens one to the other.

the world to the Church.”⁷⁶ Gerard Mannion notes that some see Ratzinger’s early writings on the Church’s essential openness to others as “sitting uneasily with his later neo-exclusivist writings and also his oft-stated belief that the Church needs to become smaller but purer.”⁷⁷ Joseph Komonchak has stated that Ratzinger believes that genuine dialogue with the world is impossible and that such dialogue undercuts the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel.⁷⁸ And Lieven Boeve has categorized Ratzinger as fundamentally “anti-modern” in his taking “leave from dialogue with modernity, because of the threatening influence that it had on the integrity of the Christian faith.”⁷⁹ Boeve further claims that Ratzinger sees revelation, faith, and the Church as entities that are essentially and in principle “distinct from the world.”⁸⁰

Ratzinger undeniably attributes to the Church a certain preeminence or priority vis-à-vis the world. He tends to emphasize much more the Church’s contributions to the world than vice versa, and is more skeptical than some others about the actual fruits of the Church’s contemporary dialogue with the world. Komonchak has observed that, in his 2005 Christmas Address to the Roman Curia, wherein he set forth his preferred Vatican II “hermeneutic of reform” as opposed to a “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture,” Pope Benedict mentioned Christianity’s productive patristic and medieval encounters with Hellenism and other philosophical streams, but said nothing about any such post-medieval, modern encounters.⁸¹ In that same address, though, Benedict gave a summary of his view of the relationship of the Church and the modern world, in which he emphasized that that relationship—in which both parties had often failed in the modern era⁸²—demands both openness and discernment:

⁷⁶ Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Ideas*, 26.

⁷⁷ Boeve and Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader*, 154.

⁷⁸ Komonchak, “A Church in Crisis,” 14.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Boeve, “Retrieving Augustine Today,” 5. For more on Boeve’s criticism of Ratzinger’s “anti-modernity,” see his “Kerk, theologie en heilswaarheid: De klare visie van Joseph Ratzinger,” 152–57 and 160–63; and his “Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief,” 222–24.

⁸⁰ Boeve, “Retrieving Augustine Today”: 6.

⁸¹ Joseph A. Komonchak, “Novelty in Continuity: Pope Benedict’s Interpretation of Vatican II,” *America* 200 (February 2, 2009): 10–16, at 13.

⁸² See Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 381–82, wherein he speaks of *Gaudium et spes* as a “counter-syllabus” to the “one-sided” oppositional stance adopted by Pope Pius IX in his *Syllabus of Errors* and by Pope Pius X.

Those who expected that with [Vatican II's] fundamental "yes" to the modern era all tensions would be dispelled and that the "openness towards the world" accordingly achieved would transform everything into pure harmony, had underestimated the inner tensions as well as the contradictions inherent in the modern epoch. . . . This dialogue must now be developed with great openmindedness but also with that clear discernment that the world rightly expects of us in this very moment.⁸³

His address mentions, for example, how the American Revolution initiated a movement towards a constructive conception of governmental secularity that differed from the absolutist *laïcité* born of the French Revolution, and that Vatican II—after great difficulty—received and approved.⁸⁴ Ratzinger's position on the interplay of openness and discernment in dialogue—of "reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel"—commits the Church to engage in genuine dialogue with the world, even as it requires at times the Church to accept or to criticize various developments vis-à-vis the "light of the Gospel." One may disagree with his judgment on particular concerns of that dialogical relationship, but one cannot dismiss his stance as unilateralist, unless one regards criticism of another's position as a rejection of dialogue.

One may ask, yet, about the possibility of a more subtle form of unilateralism in Ratzinger's thought: a self-sufficient Church that is genuinely willing to serve and heal the world, and yet is unaware of—or unwilling to acknowledge—the ways that the world might serve and heal the Church. Paul Lakeland has explored this possibility in his reflection upon Congar's image of the Church-world relationship as one of the Good Samaritan tending to the wounded person.⁸⁵ In *The Wide World, My Parish* (which influenced Ratzinger's own thought on vicarious representation and on a 'minority' Church in service of the majority), Congar envisioned the Church-world relationship not as parallel ("two crowned sovereigns looking sideways at one another as they sit enthroned on

⁸³ Pope Benedict XVI, "Interpreting Vatican II," *Origins* 35 (January 26, 2006): 534–39, at 538–39.

⁸⁴ See also his similar comments in *Without Roots*, 108–13.

⁸⁵ Paul Lakeland, "Who Is My Neighbor?", in *A Council That Will Never End: Lumen Gentium and the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier-Liturgical Press, 2013), 118–33.

the same dais”⁸⁶) but as entwined (the Good Samaritan holding the wounded man). Lakeland appreciates Congar’s vision, but suggests that it is incomplete in its unilateralism. The Church can become self-referential and centripetal, he argues, seeking repentance before God but not before the world and mistakenly believing that it possesses within itself all the resources needed for such repentance; such a Church would be self-absorbed and self-congratulatory in its service of the wounded one while being oblivious to the ways in which it resembles the priest and the Levite who simply pass by. Lakeland proposes that the Church must acknowledge that it is also always the wounded one in need of the Good Samaritan that is the rest of the world. “In our embrace of the world,” he writes, “we are not healing the sinner so much as encountering the grace of God in unexpected places.”⁸⁷

It is clear that Ratzinger pays more attention to the Church-as-Good-Samaritan than to the World-as-Good-Samaritan. The largest part of that option is his conviction that the Church, by virtue of its divine election and vicarious-representative, pro-existent mission, uniquely bears and makes present the Gospel in ways that no other community does.⁸⁸ One cannot deny that unique, even “superior” role without undercutting foundational Christian beliefs about divine revelation, Christ, the Church, the sacraments, and mission. Lakeland’s argument tends at times to a flawed perspective in which humility and uniqueness compete in a zero-sum fashion, rather than complementing each other.⁸⁹ Must the Church choose, for instance, between “healing the sinner” and “encountering the grace of God in unexpected places”? Moreover, Ratzinger’s sympathetic engagement with Marcello Pera,⁹⁰ for instance, evinces a genuine openness to the secular world—as did his efforts as Pope to foster, through the Pontifical Council for Culture, the “Courtyard of the Gentiles” initiative, which brings together religious believers and secularists for open dialogue on cultural, philosophical, and religious

⁸⁶ Congar, *The Wide World, My Parish*, 24.

⁸⁷ Lakeland, *A Council That Will Never End*, 131.

⁸⁸ See, for example, *Unitatis redintegratio*, §3: “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”

⁸⁹ For a complementary perspective on a penitential ecclesiology, see William T. Cavanaugh, “The Sinfulness and Visibility of the Church: A Christological Exposition,” in *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 141–69.

⁹⁰ See Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots*.

issues.⁹¹ It is a fair criticism that Ratzinger does not always sufficiently attend to the contributions that the "'other' brother" makes to the exchange relationships that recur throughout salvation history, but his own words on interreligious dialogue offer a glimpse of that mutual relationship:

What we need . . . is respect for the beliefs of others and the readiness to look for the truth in what strikes us as strange or foreign; for such truth concerns us and can correct us and lead us farther along the path. What we need is the willingness to look behind the alien appearances and look for the deeper truth hidden there.

Furthermore, I need to be willing to allow my narrow understanding of truth to be broken down. I shall learn my own truth better if I understand the other person and allow myself to be moved along the road to the God who is ever greater, certain that I never hold the whole truth about God in my own hands but am always a learner, on pilgrimage toward it, on a path that has no end.⁹²

The criticism that Ratzinger's little-flock vision is unilateralist and contributes to a "smaller but purer" ecclesiology may be rooted most deeply, however, in the difficulty that many have with the concept of election, which strikes some as elitist, intolerant, discriminatory, triumphalist, even violent.⁹³ In our context, shaped by the Enlightenment's distinctive moral and epistemic universalism, election can be seen only as irremediably opposed to tolerance and inclusion; election and universality seem to be inimical.

⁹¹ For background and an overview, see: <http://www.cultura.va/content/cultura/en/dipartimenti/ateismo-e-non-credenza.html>

⁹² Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 110.

⁹³ Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?: Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1999), 38. See also Benedict XVI's *lectio divina* on 1 Peter 1:1–5, delivered to Roman seminarians on February 8, 2013, three days before he announced his intention to resign the papacy: "Perhaps today we are tempted to say: we do not want to rejoice at having been chosen, for this would be triumphalism. It would be triumphalism to think that God had chosen me because I was so important. This would really be erroneous triumphalism. However, being glad because God wanted me is not triumphalism. Rather, it is gratitude and I think we should re-learn this joy." (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130208_seminario-romano-mag_en.html)

A recent retrieval of the biblical theology of election has argued, though, that this legacy poses a false opposition between universalism and particularism. A proper understanding of election, Joel Kaminsky argues, discloses that a truly biblical universalism arises precisely out the particularity of election. Israel became more aware of its mission to the Gentiles, the more it became aware of its unique election.⁹⁴ Kaminsky sees the story of Joseph as the exemplar of such election: the younger, rejected (and flawed) brother is elected by God to be the means of salvation for his older non-elected brothers; all are reconciled through the election and suffering service of one.⁹⁵ Ratzinger himself has argued, from the nature of love itself, for precisely such an understanding of universality-through-particularity:

In the first place it becomes clear that every love bears within itself a universal tendency. The world to which this beloved belongs seems different once I start to love. The lover would as it were like to embrace the whole world in and with his beloved. The encounter with the one person restores the whole to me afresh. Of course, love is a choice: it is directed not at millions but at precisely this person. But precisely in this choice, in this one person, reality as a whole appears in a new light to me. Pure universalism, general philanthropy . . . remains empty, while the quite definite and decisive choice that falls on this one person gives the world and other people back to me afresh and me to them.

This observation is important because from this starting point we can also start to comprehend why God's universalism (God wants everyone to be saved) makes use of the particularism of the history of salvation (from Abraham to the Church). Concern for the salvation of others should not lead to this particularism being as good as completely deleted: the history of salvation and the history of the world should not be declared to be simply identical because God's concern must be directed at everyone. This kind

⁹⁴ Joel S. Kaminsky, "Election Theology and the Problem of Universalism," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33 (2011), 34–44, at 42.

⁹⁵ See Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 77–78: "The ability to sense one's chosenness and also to see one's character flaws is perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Israelite religious mind. It creates a sense of ultimate meaning for one's nation, but it does so in ways that mitigate movement toward an unfettered imperialism and triumphalism. . . . [E]lection reaches its fruition in a humble, yet exalted, divine service that benefits the elect and the non-elect alike."

of direct universalism would however destroy the true totality of God's activity that reaches the whole precisely through selection and election.⁹⁶

One therefore cannot do away with a biblical theology of election and the unique role of the "one" or the "few" without doing away with God's own pattern of salvific action. A theology of election can be abused for unilateralist or triumphalist purposes, but, rightly understood, it serves to overcome the seeming opposition between the elect "few" and the non-elect "many."⁹⁷ Vicarious representation—what Congar called "*pars pro toto*" and a "minority in service of a majority"⁹⁸—cannot be dismissed or even minimized without renouncing the scriptural narrative, salvation history, and the identity and the mission of both Christ and his Church. Salvation history, as Ratzinger has argued, is structured by a "whole system of vicarious relationships,"⁹⁹ to which both scripture and tradition bear witness.¹⁰⁰ Bernard Sesbouïé has seconded Ratzinger's

⁹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Yes of Jesus Christ: Spiritual Exercises in Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Robert Nowell (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 91–92. See also Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant*: 27–28; and *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012), 5, 64–65.

⁹⁷ For example, see Gerard Mannion's conflation of "distinctive" and "exclusivistic": "[Ratzinger's] is an understanding of the Church that appears to accentuate the distinctive nature of the Church vis-à-vis the world. Such an ecclesiology therefore fosters an exclusivistic mentality anew in the Church" (Boeve and Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader*, 87). Kaminsky draws a helpful distinction between the "elect;" the "non-elect," who are "considered full participants in the divine economy"; and the "anti-elect," "those few groups who are deemed to be enemies of God" (Kaminsky, "Election Theology and the Problem of Universalism," 38–39). Contemporary thinkers—not least Christian ones, Kaminsky suggests—tend to collapse the latter two categories, with the consequence of diminishing or even dismissing the concept of election as a whole. In short, one can be "distinctive" and "inclusive" simultaneously.

⁹⁸ Yves Congar, "A Small Church in a Large World," 12. Ratzinger cites this text in various articles. Congar borrows the phrase, "a minority in the service of a majority," from J. Weill, *Le Judaïsme* (Paris, 1931), 16; the English translation omits this reference, which is present in the French original.

⁹⁹ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ Contemporary exegetes such as N.T. Wright and Gerhard Lohfink have emphasized the centrality of vicarious representation. See N.T. Wright's multi-volume series, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, as well as two recent distillations of that material: *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), and *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2012). For Lohfink, in

emphasis on the centrality of vicarious representation for ecclesiology, soteriology, and missiology. Instead of generating a “smaller but purer” ecclesiology, Ratzinger’s vicarious-representative thought, Sesboüé argues, leads to its exact opposite: the Church as a salvific sacrament of the unity of all humanity.¹⁰¹

The Church’s divine election is thus always ordered towards service of neighbor, especially of the “other brother.” Gift and task inhere in each other, as do gift and repentance. It is undeniable that to be Christian is precisely to be aware of having been given—through no merit of one’s own—a gift (of faith, life, wisdom, salvation) that others are intended to receive as well. An acknowledgment of the creaturely and sinful limits of Christians and their communities, as well as of the truth and holiness present in other religions and cultures, ought not to be used to undercut the unmerited gift and unique responsibility involved in being joined to Christ and his Church. It would be a false, dangerous understanding of dialogue and mutuality that required the surrender of the doctrine of election. An ample understanding of vicarious representation, however, allows one to hold together both mutuality and uniqueness.¹⁰² If one

addition to *Does God Need the Church?*, see *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 2012), 254–68; and, *No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 2014), 86–104. One witness from tradition is the likely-second-century “Epistle to Diognetus,” which says of Jesus, “O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous person, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!” (Epistle to Diognetus, 9.5, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd edition, ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007]: 711.)

¹⁰¹ Bernard Sesboüé, *Jésus-Christ L’Unique Médiateur: Essai sur la rédemption et le salut* (Paris: Desclée, 1988), 357–77, esp. 376, where he cites approvingly Ratzinger’s conception of the Church as a little flock in the saving service of the many. See also his *La théologie au XX^e siècle et l’avenir de la foi: Entretiens avec Marc Lebouchier* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer: 2007), 175, 332–33. Sesboüé sees Ratzinger’s thought on vicarious representation as dovetailing with *Lumen gentium* §1’s affirmation that “the Church, in Christ, is a sacrament—a sign and an instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.” This sacramentality, Sesboüé states, means that “the Church is not in the first place for itself: it is for all and at the service of all. It belongs to its very being to be missionary” (333).

¹⁰² One of Ratzinger’s contributions to *Gaudium et spes* illustrates this point. The Pastoral Constitution weaves together dialogue-mutuality and uniqueness-priority, in the prominence it gives to dialogue (especially in its introduction and

may excuse a pun, vicarious representation is not the whole of Christian theology in general and ecclesiology in particular, but it is an essential part of any authentic Christian theology and ecclesiology. It is equally indispensable for a fuller understanding of Ratzinger's little-flock ecclesiology.

Conclusion

The vicarious-representative form of Ratzinger's thought, expressed over nearly sixty years, leads towards a vision of the Church that is mindful of its election by, and dependence upon, its Lord; that is other-oriented in its essential pro-existence; and that is catholic in its openness in love and suffering for and with the "other brother" with whom it is inextricably joined. Ratzinger's ecclesial vision is thus not of a "smaller but purer" Church, but of a missionary little flock or mustard seed whose mission is to participate in the reconciliation of all in Christ, the One whose entire existence is "being-for" the Many.

It remains, however, that Ratzinger's ecclesial vision is at times insufficiently attentive to the gifts of the non-Christian Other and to the changed cultural situation of Christianity in the contemporary West, particularly in Europe. He has over several decades articulated a theology of relational personhood,¹⁰³ but, by way of a conclusion, I

conclusion) and in its Christocentricity, whereby each section of the document's first part culminates in a Christological affirmation. Thomas Gertler calls *Gaudium et spes* §10, which roots the Church's dialogue with all of humanity in its faith in Christ, the document's "Christological credo" (*Jesus Christus—Die Antwort der Kirche auf die Frage nach dem Menschsein* [Leipzig: St. Benno, 1986], 107–14). Ratzinger was closely involved in the drafting of that passage. In a draft text recently discovered by Jared Wicks, Ratzinger explicitly yokes Christian uniqueness and dialogical mutuality: "Thus the Church believes that the definitive answer to the pressing questions of the human race is found in Christ, true God and true man. Therefore she intends to respond to the questions of today in the light that God makes resplendent in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). Still she can and must enter into sincere dialogue with all people, first, by bringing to the common questions that light which she believes she is given by faith in Christ, and, second, by seeking to understand her own faith deeply in the light of human truths. Thus the Church invites all people to hear the message that she brings forth from her faith and she wants to hear the questions and answers of all those with whom she forms one human race and one history" (Wicks, "Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger," 293).

¹⁰³ For example, Ratzinger, "On the Understanding of 'Person' in Theology," in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, First Unabridged Edition, trans. Michael J. Miller and Matthew J. O'Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), 181–96.

would like to mention briefly two theologians who may help to further a generous understanding of mutuality in which identity and openness are reciprocally constitutive. The first is John Dadosky, who in several articles has proposed an ecclesiology of friendship.¹⁰⁴ He holds that Vatican II inspired two principal ecclesiologies: communion and friendship. Friendship, in his view, offers the possibility of mutuality, of gift-giving and gift-receiving: good friends challenge each other, complement each other, and also give rise to something new and greater than themselves.¹⁰⁵ Drawing upon Bernard Lonergan's and Robert Doran's work on mediation, Dadosky argues that communion ecclesiology reflects the Church's self-mediating identity, while an ecclesiology of friendship expresses the Church's mutually self-mediating identity in its relation to the Other. The former ecclesiology emphasizes the Church's mediation of grace, revelation, and salvation *to* the Other, while the latter stresses that the Church is also "enriched *by* the Other."¹⁰⁶ The former tends to see difference as dialectical, while the latter tends towards difference as complementary. Both ecclesiologies are essential for an adequate account of ecclesial identity and mission. Dadosky concludes therefore that one must not choose one ecclesiology over the other, but rather see them as complementary expressions of the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is precisely this Trinitarian dimension of mutuality that Piero Coda has developed in numerous works, most comprehensively in *Il Logos e il nulla: Trinità, religioni, mistica*.¹⁰⁷ Coda's theology grows out of the spirituality of the Focolare movement, whose late founder, Chiara Lubich, he served for many years as personal theologian. Focolare's charism is unity—Catholic, ecumenical, interreligious, and human—fostered by the self-emptying love of Jesus forsaken on the Cross. As Jesus in his abandonment lost God for the sake of God, experiencing the full weight of human sinfulness and division so as to restore unity, so too is the Christian called to empty oneself so as to make oneself one with the other. At the core of the Focolare's spirituality is a conviction that "The person next to me was created as a gift for me and

¹⁰⁴ See "The Church and the Other: Mediation and Friendship in Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," *Pacifica* 18 (October 2005): 302–22; and "Towards a Fundamental Theological Re-Interpretation of Vatican II," *Heythrop Journal* 49 (2008): 742–63.

¹⁰⁵ Dadosky, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Re-Interpretation of Vatican II," 748.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 745.

¹⁰⁷ Piero Coda, *Il Logos e il nulla: Trinità, religioni, mistica*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Città Nuova, 2004).

I was created as a gift for the person next to me."¹⁰⁸ Out of this spirituality, Coda has developed a sophisticated Trinitarian theology of mutuality, not least in relation to other religions. Seeing an inclusivist Christian theology of religions as insufficiently attentive to true religious otherness, he draws upon the "theological icon" of Ephesians 2:11–22 in order to propose a "recapitulative-relational" model, which affirms Christ's unique, universal salvific mediation precisely in—and not merely alongside—the encounter with the religious other.¹⁰⁹ Christ—supremely in his forsakenness on the Cross—is at once Logos and nothingness, a nothingness which is not a nihilistic void but a self-emptying love that alone makes possible the deepest relationship and communion. Coda thus posits that identity and openness-receptivity are mutually constitutive, both for the Church and for its relationship with other religions. "The form of Christological kenosis (cf. Phil. 2:7)," he writes, "must be able to be expressed in the structures and actions of the Church."¹¹⁰

This Christic way of self-emptying and of littleness for the sake of mission stands at the heart of Ratzinger's vicarious-representative thought, and it helps one to understand why he concludes the climactic chapter ("Jesus' Resurrection from the Dead") of his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy (and his theological corpus as a whole) with the following words:

It is part of the mystery of God that he acts so gently, that he only gradually builds up *his* history within the great history of mankind; that he becomes man and so can be overlooked by his contemporaries and by the decisive forces within history; that he suffers and dies and that, having risen again, he chooses to come to mankind only through the faith of the disciples to whom he reveals himself; that he continues to knock gently at the doors of our hearts and slowly opens our eyes if we open our doors to him.

And yet—is this not the truly divine way? Not to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love. And if we really think about it, is it not what seems so small that is truly great?¹¹¹

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¹⁰⁸ Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2007), 87. Echoes of this spirituality of communion may be discerned in Pope John Paul II's 2001 apostolic letter, *Novo millennio ineunte*, especially §43.

¹⁰⁹ Coda, *Il Logos e il nulla*, 57–92.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II*, 276.

