

Joseph Ratzinger and Protestant Theology: The Four Last Things

FRANCESCA ARAN MURPHY

*University of Aberdeen
Aberdeen, Scotland*

IN 1960, Joseph Ratzinger remarked that, with respect to Protestantism, one could “invert a saying of Saint Augustine’s: that an old schism becomes a heresy. The very passage of time alters the character of a division, so that an old division is something essentially different from a new one.”¹ Ratzinger had a hand in Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995) and pushed through the Lutheran–Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in the summer of 1998.² This essay will describe just his responses to Protestant thought, not his ecumenical work or the ecclesiology from which it springs.³ His engagement with Protestantism is characteristically ad hoc. Where there is disagreement, Ratzinger, as the original South Park Catholic, simply says, “You’re wrong.” He is coruscating about Luther’s reduction of justification by faith to hope *for myself*, for this entails the “exclusion of love” from justification: “[I]n Luther’s view faith is no longer, as it is for Catholics, . . . a sharing in faith with the entire Church; for him . . . the Church can neither assume the guarantee of certainty for one’s personal salvation nor decide in a . . . binding manner

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 2nd English trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1960, 1993), 88.

² John L. Allen, *Pope Benedict XVI: A Biography of Joseph Ratzinger* (London: Continuum, 2005), 232–34; and, for a scholarly account, Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 215–21.

³ We discuss both in “De Lubac, Ratzinger, von Balthasar: A Communal Adventure in Ecclesiology,” in *Ecumenism in the 21st Century: Reflections on Ut Unum Sint*, ed. Chris Asprey and Eric Puosi (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, forthcoming).

about the content of faith.”⁴ There is also an ironic side, exposed in the adverse comparison of Catholic behavior with that of Protestant. As against some 1970s Catholic catechisms, Ratzinger remarks that Luther’s catechisms were based on clear doctrinal *loci*, not on complex theological programs;⁵ having flattened another cardinal’s fleet of local churches, he capped the devastation with a citation from Rudolf Bultmann.⁶ There are a few straight lifts, such as his use of Barth’s notion of the election of *all* humanity in Christ to address the question of the relation of Christians to non-believers: “Just as Christ the chosen one,” Ratzinger says, became “the one rejected for us in order to confer on us his election,” so “this exchange relationship occurs constantly in salvation history following him.” The few are elected in service to the many.⁷ His theology also contains some give and take with recent Protestant theology.

Since Protestants have always looked to Augustine, one might imagine the interchange begins from Ratzinger’s doctoral thesis on Augustine. His habilitation on Bonaventure’s theology of history led him nearer the mark. There are two reasons why taking the measure of Bonaventure put Ratzinger foursquare with Protestant thought. In the first place, Bonaventure’s “unique individuality” consists in his being the sole scholastic writer to consider Scripture, not in a “conceptual-abstract” way, but in terms of its historical symbolism.⁸ Bonaventure built “a new theory of scriptural exegesis which emphasizes the historical character of the scriptural statements in contrast to the exegesis of the Fathers and the Scholastics which had been more clearly directed to the unchangeable and the enduring.”⁹ A Bonaventurian approach to Scripture has sufficient parallels with Protestant methods to create openings for dialogue. One way of resolving the problem of how Scripture relates to history has been to conceive Revelation as a salvation-history: For Ratzinger, Bonaventure got there

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell and Frideswide Sandeman, O.S.B. (Slough: St Paul Publications/New York: Crossroad, 1988), 111–13.

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (Ignatius: San Francisco, 1982, 1987), 130–31.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Local Church and the Universal Church,” *America* 185 (November 19, 2001): 11.

⁷ Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 79. Here, as so often in his references to Barth in the 1960s, Ratzinger refers us both to Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* and to Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *The Theology of Karl Barth*.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959, 1971, 1989), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

before Barth and Oscar Cullmann. With the Protestant writers, salvation-history replaces metaphysics as a category of theological understanding. Bonaventure's notion of salvation-history and his belief that "wisdom is unthinkable . . . without reference to the historical situation in which it has its place" enter into Ratzinger's conversation with modern Protestantism.¹⁰ He allows that history has a place in metaphysics, and complements the concession with the profession that metaphysical insight is a creative force in history.

In the second place, for better and for worse, the accentuation of the historical character of knowledge in both Bonaventure's thought and that of Protestant theologians is linked to a focus on eschatology, and even to apocalyptic leanings. Luther's appropriation of a "linear" sense of history, the "greater value" that the Reformer placed on the "individual historical event" led Lutherans to perceive their era "as moving very quickly toward the edge" of historical time.¹¹ Ratzinger had discerned the same slant in his favored medieval theologian. Luther expressed his eschatological sensibility in a doctrine of once-for-all justification. By separating justification from temporal sanctification, he divested Lutheran Christianity of the need for an historical *Church*. Ratzinger traces the "an-ecclesiality" of Lutheranism to Augustine's having

distinguish[ed] with a sharpness until then unknown between the theological greatness of the Church as a salvific reality and her empirical existence; many who seem to be in the Church are outside her; many who seem to be outside her are in her. The true Church is the number of the predestined who . . . transcend the visible Church while . . . the reprobate are present at her very center.

With Luther, the

concept of the Church was limited, on the one hand, to the local community; on the other hand, it embraced the community of the faithful throughout the ages who are known only to God. But the community of the whole Church as such is no longer the bearer of a positively meaningful theological content.¹²

It is not easy for a Catholic theologian to find a solid point of contact in writings from which a theological notion of the Church is absent. Taking

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 100, 102, and 114.

¹² Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 196–97.

a different tack from the Anabaptists and Lutherans, Calvin sublimated eschatology into dual predestination. When Barth wrote in his *Commentary on Romans* that a “Christianity which is not wholly eschatology and nothing but eschatology has nothing to do with Christ,” he was taking Protestantism back to the Reformation.¹³ In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth transformed Calvin’s idea of predestination into the eternal predestination of Christ to damnation and salvation on behalf of all. The first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* declares that “theology is a function of the church.”¹⁴ Here a point of conversational contact is established. Where Ratzinger uses Luther and modern Lutherans like Bultmann to support ideas he already holds, he assimilates the Swiss Calvinist’s Christocentricity into the positive content of his theology. At the same time—agreeing with Barth that plausibility to secular reason is not a criterion of theology—he retains the right to say, “You’re wrong.” Barth had not so much eliminated eschatology from his theology as he created an eschatological doctrine of the Church.

He fills out his notion of the Church by affirming that “the being of the Church is identical with Jesus Christ.” For Barth, the subject of theology takes three forms: Revelation (flowing from the Father), Word (corresponding to the Son), and Proclamation (deriving from the Holy Spirit). The Word is said to be the history-making *act* of God. When he states that the Word is the criterion of Christian dogma, Barth means that Christ is.¹⁵ The Church exists from the Word of God. Ratzinger acknowledges the value of this when he states his relief that, following the intervention of Paul VI, Vatican Council II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, was not absorbed into that on the Church: “The council would otherwise,” he considers,

have risked falling victim to a kind of ecclesio-monism in its texts, whereas the Constitution on Revelation now stressed the importance of listening, thus . . . tak[ing] up . . . an attitude in which the Church transcends itself, for it was not there for its own sake, but only to lead to him to whom all honor is due, God the Lord.¹⁶

¹³ Karl Barth, *Commentary on Romans*, 4th ed., 314, cited in Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: Being as Communion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8. Anyone who can get to page 314 of Barth’s *Commentary on Romans* has a higher eschatology threshold than I.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. W. Bromley, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1932, 1936, 1975), 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41, 43, 137, and 144.

¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London/New York: Burns & Oates/Herder & Herder, 1967, 1969), 162.

The first phrase in article 1, “*Dei verbum religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans*” is “one of the happiest formulations in the text: the dominance of the word of God, its sovereign supremacy above all human eloquence and activity . . . is given due prominence. The Church itself is depicted in the double role of listening and proclaiming.”¹⁷ This elucidates the link between the Constitutions on the Church and on Revelation: The “life of the Church is . . . opened upwards and its whole being gathered together in the attitude of listening, which can be the only source of what it has to say.”¹⁸

Ratzinger seems to proceed in the same deferential direction when he notes that the third article of *Dei Verbum* affirms

the historical character of Revelation, which comes to man not as a timeless idea but as the historical operation of God in our own time. So far we can see here a certain approximation to the position of Cullmann and his school without necessarily speaking, in a technical sense, of a theology of salvation history.¹⁹

But he is actually moving toward a sting in the tail. For, as Walter Brueggemann observes, the “notion of salvation history and what Enlightenment scholarship understood by history are quite distinct matters. This distinction . . . has haunted . . . the enterprise of Old Testament theology through the twentieth century.”²⁰ All the better that *Dei Verbum* was not tied to it. Two of the obstacles to the coupling of the understanding of “history” in Protestant biblical scholarship and in secular scholarship are the hermeneutical gap a modern person must cross to grasp the meaning of an ancient text, and the question of how a history in which God acts overlaps with data acceptable to a secular scholar. Brueggemann notes that, although

nineteenth-century developmentalism is very different from eighteenth-century rationalism and empiricism, it is in continuity with them in practicing *an epistemology of the human knower as an unencumbered objective interpreter who was understood to be a nonpartisan, uninvolved reader of the data.*²¹

¹⁷ Ratzinger, “Preface,” in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, 167.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 172–73.

²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 11.

²¹ Ibid., 13, original emphasis.

Barth's declaration that faith is the only objective lens through which the Bible can be understood was intended to abridge this hermeneutical difficulty. His followers in the field of Old Testament studies sought to shore this up by *demonstrating* that a gulf exists between the attitudes evinced in sacred Scripture and those exhibited in the texts of other Near Eastern Religions. Albrecht Alt argued that "*very early, even from its inception, Mosaic Israel operated with distinct theological assumptions.*"²² Claiming that Israelite law codes differ from other Near Eastern codes in issuing "absolute commands and prohibitions," Alt argued that

this apodictic command . . . is based on the absolute sovereignty of YAHWEH, the God of Israel. Thus the form of the law is taken as evidence of the . . . monotheism that was already present in Israel and decisive at the Mosaic beginning of Israel. Martin Noth followed Alt's insight with the claim that it is YAHWEH's "exclusive sovereignty" that is the bedrock of Israel's self-understanding as a community under the command of YAHWEH.²³

The "Biblical Theology" school from Alt to Noth to von Rad, in Germany, and G. Ernst Wright in America intended to echo Barth's hermeneutical "fideism" by finding marks of Israel's unique character in its texts. But, after Vatican II, the second problem in the Protestant agenda for linking *sola Scriptura* to Scripture's demonstrable uniqueness came home to roost: "The principal criticism of von Rad and his 'recital of God's mighty deeds' is that neither von Rad nor anyone else has found a way to relate salvation history . . . to secular history as it could be recovered by secular scholarship."²⁴

The point at issue in both the hermeneutical question *and* that of whether both Christian and secular historians understand history in the same way is whether the Bible makes most sense within the Church. Where Brueggemann finds with the Council of Trent,²⁵ Ratzinger notes that Vatican II improved on Trent's notion of two sources of Revelation, Scripture and tradition. For this

distributes Revelation in a mechanical way between two vessels of Revelation that are independent of each other and thus again fails to recognize its true nature, which is not a collection of propositions that

²² Ibid., 21, original emphasis.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

can be . . . sheered out between two different compilations, but a living, organic unity.²⁶

But the council's effort to create a single-source, Catholic notion of *sola Scriptura* irritated Protestant observers. Ratzinger saw that the route of appeasement in dialogue with Protestantism often boomerangs; as one seems to approach convergence, more deep-seated Protestant convictions emerge to reject the apparent kinship. Moreover, the common ground may turn out to be quicksand, out of which a biblical theology like Cullmann's has no escape. The dual dilemma of mid-century biblical theology came down to *proving* in all scientific credibility that one's historical findings come up to one's *faith*. At the time, writers like Cullmann and J. Jeremias were convinced that biblical exegesis would approach ever closer to the truth of history. Others, like Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann were not: "[I]t seems to me safer to walk through a minefield blindfold[ed]," Käsemann wrote, than to rely on historical exegesis.²⁷ Although Ratzinger appreciated that, *materially*, sound scholars like Jeremias sometimes made good findings, nonetheless he recognized that Bultmann and Käsemann had seen the basic *formal* problem:

Historical research has done away with the Reformation idea that Scripture itself has one clear meaning. . . . This means that an opposition between Scripture and the Church is ultimately not possible. . . . When Cullmann tells us to put our trust in the exegetes, that is, in their being led by the Holy Spirit, then we must say that fear of the terrifying possibilities of the teaching office can equally be dispelled only through confidence in the Spirit that guides his Church.²⁸

With Barth clearly in view, Ratzinger notes that in *Dei Verbum*: "[O]nly Scripture is defined in terms of what it *is*: it is stated that Scripture is the word of God consigned to writing. Tradition . . . is described only functionally, in terms of what it *does*: it hands on the word of God, but *is not* the word of God."²⁹ As his perception of the meaning of the contingency of Revelation deepened, Ratzinger will argue that Luther's excision of "man-made traditions" from the interpretation of Scripture left him with just "the pure power of reason, the immediate access to the

²⁶ Ratzinger, "Chapter II: The Transmission of Divine Revelation," in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, 191.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

word of God.” Tradition, he will later say, “is not the adversary of reason but its handiwork . . . and the contingency on which it is founded.”³⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, two Protestant biblical scholars, Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, dismantled the nineteenth-century belief that biblical scholarship had recovered the historical Jesus. They argued that Jesus was not a pious liberal but a pious Jew who preached the imminent end of the world. A generation later, von Balthasar could accurately comment that eschatology was now the “storm-zone” of modern theology.³¹ Pre-Reformation Christians had set eschatology in stone, in the architecture of their cathedrals. But, since the seventeenth century, both magisterial Protestantism and Catholicism had put the lid on the apocalyptic fervor that preceded the Reformation;³² only sectarian Protestants like the Plymouth Brethren took eschatology or apocalyptic as central to their life and worship. The rediscovery of eschatological themes in Jesus’ own preaching reopened a question educated people imagined had been closed: If eschatology belonged to Jesus’ self-understanding, it should have some role in Christian theology—but what? Bonaventure had already raised this problem. The Franciscan general broke with the lapidary formation of medieval orthodoxy and went some way in hand with Joachim of Fiore’s use of Scripture to predict an eschaton that is both imminent and overlaps with the “Sixth Day” in which history has remained since the advent of Christ. As Ratzinger put it in his habilitation, “Bonaventure believes in a new salvation in history, within the limits of this time. This . . . must be seen as the central historico-theological problem of the *Hexaemeron*.”³³ Following Augustine, a standard medieval opinion was that nothing very new will happen before the end of time; history replays variations on the plan mapped out in the Book of Revelation. As in the liturgy, so in history—but with less calendrical regularity—the map depicted in Revelation simply circulates.³⁴ By laying the sevenfold movement of history (corresponding to the seven days of Creation) from Adam to Christ alongside a chart of historical events, Bonaventure was able, in Joachim’s footsteps, to note equivalences between

³⁰ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 91.

³¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Eschatologie,” cited in Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1977, 1988), 1.

³² Walter Klaassen, *Living at the End of the Ages: Apocalyptic Expectation in the Radical Reformation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 19–24.

³³ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 14.

³⁴ I discuss this in more detail in “The Book of Revelation: The Apocalypse of St. John the Divine,” in *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic/SPCK, 2005), 680–87.

the scriptural “septacet” and the era after Christ. Where the equivalences between the two lines have yet to be balanced out, he was able to discern which events will arrive before the “Seventh Day,” or the Second Coming of Christ: As yet missing are a second Charlemagne and, parallel to the Babylonian exile, a second tribulation for the Church. Abandoning a reading of Scripture and history that went back to Augustine, Bonaventure decided that there will be an intersection in the as-yet-uncharted territory of the Sixth Day, the last days of mankind, and the Seventh Day, the Last Judgment: The eschaton and the “new salvation” it harbors will occur within history. Bonaventure’s belief in the *imminence* of the end is tied to a conviction that Francis was the “seventh seal,” the “Angel who ascends from the rising of the sun” (Rev 7:2).³⁵ This is not, according to Ratzinger, the most ground-breaking feature of the Seraphic Doctor’s theology of history; but it is there and helped to prepare the German theologian’s response to the means by which modern Protestant theologians attempted to navigate the “storm-zone.”

In Barth’s 1919 *Romans Commentary*, eschatology had been the category that depicts God’s “vertical” difference from human, horizontal history, the way in which God miraculously erupts into history. Considering the “antiseptic task” of the *Commentary* completed, the *Church Dogmatics* modifies its category-break by asserting that the

reality of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is also what we call the lifetime of a man. It is also a section of what we call “historical time” or world history. . . . Revelation in the sense of Holy Scripture . . . is an eternal, but not therefore a timeless reality. . . . Revelation will never be discovered by anyone who undertakes to arrive at a kind of timeless core by abstracting from all times or from specific times, or who attempts to rise from the human to the divine.³⁶

Within Barth’s hermeneutics, “what we call ‘historical time’” is known theologically, and hence some Anglican critics have questioned whether “history” is for Barth a reality independent of God.³⁷ The autonomy of historical time is not the matter that Ratzinger sees as problematic in Barth’s eschatology. His concern is that the post-Romans Calvinist keeps

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 33; see also 20–32.

³⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 50.

³⁷ See Richard Roberts, “Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications,” in *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method*, ed. Stephen W. Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 88–146; and Richard Roberts, “The Ideal and the Real in the Theology of Karl Barth,” in *New Studies in Theology I*, ed. Stephen Sykes and Derek Holmes (London: Duckworth, 1980).

the “Last Things” at arm’s length, outside of time. As a theological and thus Christological category, for Ratzinger, eschatology involves indwelling as well as inbreaking. He complains that, with Barth, the “word ‘eschatological’ no longer qualifies time.”³⁸ Barth’s negotiation of the eschatological question can be seen synoptically with that performed by Bultmann, and Ratzinger does this, taking the one as the converse side to the other. Where Barth reinstated eschatology as the ever-possible *act of God*, Bultmann took eschatology as *the Christian’s* act of “*breaking through* to authenticity in an encounter-event.”³⁹ Ratzinger is no more satisfied by the Lutheran than the Calvinist: Bultmann’s “solution is,” he feels, “purchased at too dear a price. For it depends on displacing Christianity from its home in the midst of reality and resettling it on the pinhead of the present moment.”⁴⁰

Chiliasm repeatedly resurfaces in Western history because it is *religiously* attractive. Ratzinger considers that Barth’s apparent withdrawal of eschatology from “real time” leaves an all too theological Christianity defenseless against the appeal of religion. Ratzinger is familiar with Eric Voegelin’s accounts of National Socialism and Marxism as secularized versions of chiliastic and Joachimite religiosity.⁴¹ As Ratzinger sees it, the “attack on God” launched by Marxist thought

fosters a religious pathos which attracts the often deracinated religious energies of numerous contemporary men and women to itself, as a magnet draws ore. This pathos also affects theology, which detects in it the opportunity to fill the eschatological message with a tangible, realistic content. It is curious, and yet, in the light of Barth’s violent separation of faith and religion, also understandable that when theology is thus placed before the alternatives of faith in God and a religious pathos directed to futurity, it is willing to choose religion over against God.⁴²

One of Ratzinger’s objections to liberation theology is that transmuting eschatology into *futurity* creates an inner-historical “new salvation”: As a

³⁸ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 49, original emphasis.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴¹ In conversation with Voegelin’s literary executor, Paul Caringella, Ratzinger assured him that he owned shelf-loads of Voegelin’s writings. The briefest exposition is to be found in Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1968). Ratzinger may have had a sufficiently high eschatology threshold to attempt Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele: Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen* (1937–39). It has some relevance to German history between 1932–1945.

⁴² Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 3–4.

terminus for humanity, this is what Barth would call an idol. Ratzinger encountered this maneuver in the Lutheran Jurgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. Where Barth and Bultmann seemed to derealize eschatology, Moltmann made it a function of a human future to be earned by political means. Moltmann had regained the future connotation that eschatology had for Joachim, for Bonaventure in part, and for the Anabaptists, and installed at its heart a "political utopianism." Ratzinger argues that a political interpretation of the category of eschatology both rationalizes faith—by making eschatological hope intelligible in political terms—and fideizes reason—by requiring politicians to take Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom as a direct criterion of practical action.⁴³ Ratzinger's work on Bonaventure prefigures his later doubts about liberation theology: He criticizes Bonaventure's belief in the *imminence* of the end in the same way that he will censure Moltmann's "futurity," finding that, here, "a new, second end is set up next to Christ."⁴⁴

Hence, when he states that "[t]he setting asunder of eschatology and politics is one of the fundamental tasks of Christian theology,"⁴⁵ one may think that this is his last word. But when Ratzinger writes that "every interpretation of Franciscanism which abstracts from its original determination with regard to . . . eschatology . . . misses" its "essence,"⁴⁶ he does not mean that Franciscanism was a dead end. The vicissitudes of modern Protestantism make evident the omission in which Catholic and Protestant thought had colluded: We cannot maintain the polite, post-Anabaptist silence about eschatology, for forgetting that we are "ever before" the eschaton had sent theology into a tailspin when Jesus' eschatological preaching was rediscovered. Ratzinger makes good the omission in three ways, which, as it happens, are mirrored in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003). Most obviously, he seeks to reawaken the medieval art of making worship a living exegesis of Revelation: "The cosmic imagery of the New Testament cannot be used as a source for the description of a future chain of cosmic events." For "these texts form part of a description of the mystery of the Parousia in the language of liturgical tradition. . . . The Parousia is the highest intensification and fulfillment of the Liturgy. And the Liturgy is Parousia, a Parousia-like event taking place in our midst."⁴⁷ Second, just as *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* affirms that "the Christian vision . . . increases rather than lessens *our sense of*

⁴³ Ibid., 58–60.

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 114.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 60.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 40.

⁴⁷ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 202–3; cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, nos. 18 and 19.

responsibility for the world today,” so Ratzinger insists that eschatology is more effective in “moral theology” than in practical politics.⁴⁸ The significance of the sacramental and moral signposts is that, third, they disturb our this-worldly complacency:

Martin Heidegger remarked that, in the face of the situation into which mankind has blundered, only a god could save us. Our one possibility, he considered, was “to prepare the way for the readiness to receive the appearing of the god.” In this dictum of a post-Christian pagan, there is a genuine insight into the depths of our subject. The “readiness to expect” is itself transforming. The world is different, depending on whether it awakens to this readiness or refuses it.⁴⁹

Bonaventure acknowledged this “ever-beforeness.” He realized that the Franciscan order is “not yet the true order of Francis,” but, rather, poised on the edge of eschatological perfection. Bonaventure’s gesture of waiting, to “preserve whatever could be preserved” of the “radically eschatological character” of Francis’s life and testament,⁵⁰ is an *immanent* sign of the eschaton and one which Ratzinger appreciates. He finds this sense of *immanence* wanting in Barth’s theology. He intended to create a theology that does just silence the Protestant dilemmas.

Moltmann’s 1970s “futurism” was built on German biblical scholarship going back to the immediate postwar years. It was at this time that biblical scholars sought the uniqueness ascribed to Scripture by Barth in the attention that it pays to history. Thus, Cullmann found that Hebrews defined *faith* in temporal terms: The “assurance of things *hoped for*” refers to “things which are future.” This accentuation of temporality made it impossible to avoid “futurism” by entwining eschatology with the liturgy. For what is unique about the biblical conception of time, according to Cullmann, is that it does not rotate but follows a straight line:

In the primitive Christian preaching . . . salvation, in keeping with the Bible’s linear understanding of time, is conceived . . . in terms of a time process. . . . Because time is thought of as a progressing line, it is possible here for something to be “fulfilled”; a divine plan can move forward to a complete execution; the goal which beckons on the end of the line can give to the entire process which is taking place all along the line the impulse to strive thither.⁵¹

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20; Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 59.

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 201; John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20.

⁵⁰ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 51; see also 50.

⁵¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: SCM Press, 1948, 1951), 37, 53–54.

This linearity is evidence for the thesis that, unlike other near-Eastern texts, Scripture refers to a *saving* history. Cullmann seeks to show that Barth's notion of the uniqueness and hence God-giveness of *faith* is exegetically accurate: For Barth, "revealed reality" is a "temporally limited, unrepeatable, and quite unrepeatable event." Both Barth and, he thinks, the "Bible" place "extraordinary stress on the historicity of the Revelation recorded by it because by Revelation it does not mean a creation of man."⁵² For these thinkers, the liturgy cannot reflect the immanence of the eschaton because liturgy is eminently repeatable.

Cullmann's most famous exegetical claim is that Scripture makes Christ define the "mid-point" of temporal space: Once time is perceived in its full linearity, "the decisive mid-point, the Christ-deed, can be the firm hold which serves as a guide point for all the process that lies behind and for all that lies ahead."⁵³ Barth had expositied the same idea theologically:

[T]he real temporal pre-existence of Jesus Christ in prophecy and his reality post-existence in witness are identical with this once-for-all existence of his as the mid-point of time. The mid-point of time—which, after all, belongs to time—is the fulfillment of time. That is what distinguishes it from all other times. That is what it has common with the end (and . . . with the beginning) of time.⁵⁴

The topical feature of Ratzinger's habilitation was the claim that Bonaventure situates Christ at the "mid-point" of time. Bonaventure achieved this innovation partly through his "charting" of the seven days of creation against the history from Adam to Christ and post-apostolic history. For this leads him to break with the normative, Augustinian picture of Christ as inaugurating the Sixth, and historically final, Day of creation—which situates Christ at the eschatological closure of biblical time rather than in the midst of salvific time. As Ratzinger puts it,

For the Augustinian scheme, Christ is the end of the ages; for the Bonaventurian schema, Christ is the center of the ages.⁵⁵

The coming of the Son of God marks the fullness of time: not because time ends with his coming, but because the hidden prophecies of all ages have been fulfilled. . . . It belonged to Him . . . as the true Mediator, to come mid-way, some of his elect preceding and others following Him.⁵⁶

⁵² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 12, and 329.

⁵³ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 54.

⁵⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 12.

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 109–10.

Bonaventure reinterprets *plenitudo temporum*, the “fullness of time,” to mean “the center of time”: Thus, “the figure of Jesus Christ, the middle person in the Trinity as well as the mediator and middle between God and man . . . becomes the synthesis of everything that is expressed for Bonaventure in the concept of center. Christ becomes the center.”⁵⁷ Joachim lies behind this new conception, for Bonaventure achieved it by assimilating something of Joachim’s “futurism,” and “baptizing” it. It was because Joachim saw the Old and New Testaments as “parallel” “halves” of history that he set Christ literally *in medias res*: “For the first thousand years of Christian theology,” or, after Augustine and before Joachim, “Christ is not the turning point of history at which a transformed and redeemed world begins. . . . Rather, Christ is the beginning of the end. He is ‘salvation’ in as far as in him the ‘end’ has already broken into history.”⁵⁸ By setting Christ at the mid-point of time, “Joachim became the path-finder within the Church for a new understanding of history which to us today appears to be so self-evident that it seems to be *the* Christian understanding.”⁵⁹ This is Joachim’s “true significance.” Joachim’s influence on the Franciscan movement is “important above all because it brought about the acceptance of this new historical consciousness. . . . The Church and redemption are rendered historical in an entirely new way which cannot be a matter of indifference for the history of dogma nor for systematic theology.”⁶⁰ Where Augustinian tradition stressed Christ’s finality, Joachim and Bonaventure stressed his centrality. Thomas Aquinas’s objection to the apocalypticist side of Joachim was that Old Testament signs and miracles do not forewarn of similar crises in New Testament and post-apostolic time but, rather, prefigure Christ himself.⁶¹ Bonaventure retains Joachim’s idea that the Old and New Testaments run parallel to each other in their entirety but keeps apocalypticism at bay by repudiating the notion of a “third age” of the Spirit that supersedes the era of Christ. Here as elsewhere, Ratzinger says, “Thomas is more an Augustinian than is Bonaventure.” Bonaventure is able to baptize Joachim’s ideas because his goal is Christocentrism. Where Joachim was

concerned with bringing out the movement of the second age to the third, Bonaventure’s purpose is to show, on the basis of the parallel between the two ages, that Christ is the true center and the turning

⁵⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 107, original emphasis.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas, IV *Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 2, ad 3. Near identical remarks occur in the *Summa theologiae* III, q. 77, a. 2, ad 3.

point of history. This is the basic concept of Bonaventure's historical schema, and it involves a decisive rejection of Joachim. In the final analysis, he is closer to Thomas than to Joachim.⁶²

This aspect of Ratzinger's comeback to biblical theology indicates that it is possible for a scholastic and Catholic thinker to place Christ at the "axis of world history," the center of time.⁶³ But this does not resolve the opposition implicit in the Protestant theologians' emphasis on biblical *linearity*. The "symbol of time for primitive Christianity as well as for biblical Judaism," Cullmann wrote, "is the line, while in Hellenism it is the circle."⁶⁴ He defined "biblical thought" as *against* "Greek thought," and thus against metaphysics. It remains common in Protestant milieux to contrast the abstract and atemporal thinking of the Greeks with the historicity of Scripture. In order to tackle this objection, Ratzinger draws on Bonaventure's deep sense of the historicity of Revelation. Once he has laid the specter of Catholic abasement before "Greek" metaphysics to rest, Ratzinger will be able to show that, in the liturgy as in "the prayer of the early Church," eschatology is "personalized. Its focus is not space and time, . . . 'Where?' and 'When?' but relationship with Christ's person and longing for him to come close."⁶⁵ The question arising from the crossover of time and eschatology in Jesus' self-understanding seemed to be, *where* do they overlap in Christian history? But a better question may be, *who* is the juncture? "The Christian," Ratzinger writes, "lives in the presence of the saints as in his own proper ambience," amongst the *persons* who indwell the frontier between time and eternity, "and so lives 'eschatologically.'" The saints "count for something not as the past but as the present of the Lord's power to save."⁶⁶

Ratzinger has claimed that because, for Luther, "ontology is the basic philosophical expression of the concept of continuity" between Christ and the Church, "*it* is opposed first as a Scholastic and later as a Hellenistic perversion of Christianity and is contrasted with the idea of history. In modern histories of theology, the concept of salvation history is treated as a Protestant antithesis to the ontological assessment in Catholic theology."⁶⁷ Before we consider Ratzinger's treatment of this "antithesis," we should note a difference between what Cullmann and Barth mean by

⁶² Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 117–18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁴ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 51.

⁶⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁷ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 158, original emphasis.

“salvation history.” When they stressed the linear *temporality* of Scripture, the salvation historians wanted to uncover in Scripture something that, in Barth’s own doctrine of Revelation, is more elusive than chronological time. For Barth, the contact of Revelation with the passage of time is a metaphor for its quality as *event*. Even the idea of the “mid-point of time” exposed in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* is too static to capture what Barth means by the Christ-event. Where the biblical theologians pointed to *historicity* as against Greek, metaphysical circularity, Barth argued that God’s acting is not a thing, but an *event*. The efforts of the biblical theologians to supply textual *evidence* for a Barthian *Weltanschauung* goes against the grain in that the purpose of Barth’s theological method is to deliver Christians from reliance on any kind of evidence, including not only the metaphysical but also the historical. Moreover, for Barth, Revelation never materializes in a text as such. The text of Scripture is not Revelation in its verbal *content*: It *becomes* Revelation if and when God chooses to make it a revelatory event. Scripture becomes concurrent with Revelation when it becomes the focus of God’s action. Barth writes that,

The concept of truths of Revelation in the sense of Latin propositions given and sealed once for all with divine authority in both wording and meaning is theologically impossible if it is a fact that Revelation is true in the free decision of God which was taken once for all in Jesus Christ, that it is thus strictly future for us, and that it must always become true in the Church in the intractable reality of faith. The freely acting God Himself and alone is the truth of Revelation.

Hence, the

direct identification between Revelation and the Bible which is in fact at issue is not one that we can presuppose or anticipate. It takes place as an event when and where the biblical word becomes God’s Word, that is, when and where the biblical word comes into play as a word of witness. . . . Thus in the event of God’s Word, Revelation and the Bible are indeed one, and literally so.⁶⁸

There is a tension between this and Cullmann’s proposition that the “Christian absolute norm is itself also history and is not, as is the philosophical norm, a transcendent datum that lies beyond all history. The primitive Christian norm . . . consists . . . in a temporally connected historical series of a special kind, namely, the biblical history.”⁶⁹ Ratzinger’s

⁶⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 15 and 113.

⁶⁹ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 21–22.

rejoinder will, in a sense, play the two positions off against each other: If Christian Revelation really *is* eschatological, then it must be historical, and this “is” is then an ontological or metaphysical datum.

Cullmann and Barth share the belief that the priority of history or event over ontology is rooted in the fact that God is “for us.” Christians must describe God in terms of “act” and “deed” because God’s primary reality in relation to us is salvific. God *does* before we know anything about him. Barth also asserts that God is a doer or actor in relation to *us* because his very being is act or deed. Ratzinger rejects one feature of these proposals but also goes some way toward greeting Barth’s insight. To say that truth is yielded only by time is to make deeds or occurrences the sole source of truth. If one takes the notion that “truth is a function of time” as a *principle*—and we have seen that the biblical theologians inadvertently reinstated a first principle to underlie revealed theology—then one will have to take it as a matter of principle that Christ’s *temporal* doing exhausts his being. For Cullmann, only the “salvation historical” creeds of the early Church, the formulae that describe what he has done for us, appropriately name him. But Christ does not remain within history: He acts creatively in relation to it and changes its course. In order to affirm the leap from historical being into Resurrection, one must affirm that there is something beyond time—eternal life. There is no need to consider the latter as a lifeless and inactive concept. As Ratzinger notes, the primitive Christian creeds were both nominal and verbal: The first, such as “Jesus is Lord,” denote what Christ is; the second, such as “God has raised him” refer to what he has done—risen from death.⁷⁰ But, precisely as a *deed*, the resurrection reveals Jesus’ ontological identity with the life of God:

The Resurrection is but the most extreme concretization of this statement: God is. It shows that God is in-deed (*wirklich*), for being is doing and God’s being is the life that overcomes death. That God is in-deed means that there is a truth of man in which the goals of his intellectual inquiry find their limits and their measure.⁷¹

The resurrection is a quintessential *event*, so that, in it, being and doing are at one. Likewise, the “is” of Chalcedon, which affirms that, in the incarnate Logos, God is man, is no abstract, a-temporal concept, but embraces the event of God’s becoming man, the Incarnation.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 16, 19–21.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 182.

In the Incarnate Christ, the deed of service to *us*, the role as savior, is identical to Christ's being; he puts his entire being at our service. Ratzinger has written that "the Trinity becomes . . . recognizable for us through the fact that in his Son as man God Himself has become witness to Himself and thus his personality has taken actual concrete shape in the radical anthropomorphism of 'the form of a servant' in 'the likeness of men' (Phil 2:7 . . .)." ⁷³ Aidan Nichols interprets such statements by reference to Ratzinger's affirmation that, in Christ, the "person is the office, the office *is* the person": There is in Christ "no private area reserved for an 'I' which remains in the background behind the deeds and actions, and thus at some time or other can be 'off duty.' Here there is no 'I' separate from the work: the 'I' is the work, and the work the 'I.'" ⁷⁴ For Barth, the person of Christ *is* his work *because* the immanent Trinity itself is act or deed *before* our need for salvation: Unlike Cullmann's equation of Christ with his temporal function, Barth's formula proceeds from a theological principle. Ratzinger's treatment recalls Barth's proposition that "'Christ's being as man is his work': the importance of the whole section had been brought home to Ratzinger by von Balthasar."⁷⁵ Ratzinger's development of a Christology of "being *and* service" is intended

to overcome, to the degree possible, the polarity between a Christology of the Incarnation, on the Johannine and patristic model, and a Christology of the Cross, of the sort found in Paul and the sixteenth-century Reformers. The being of Christ—the predominant concern of a Christology of the Incarnation—is a continuous exodus. It is not a resting in self, but the permanent act of being Son, of being servant. Conversely, this act, for which we need verbs, "doing" words, and whose supreme manifestation is the Cross, is not simply doing, but is also being. A Christology of the Incarnation and a Christology of the Cross require each other.⁷⁶

Ratzinger lays aside both a Christology that functionalizes Christ at the requirement of *human* justification, and a Christology so metaphysical that it is blind to the fact that, within the Trinity, *action* or being is

⁷³ Ratzinger, Church, *Ecumenism and Politics*, 34–35.

⁷⁴ Aidan Nichols O.P., *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (London: Continuum, 1988, 2005), 123, original emphasis, quoting Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (London: 1969), 149.

⁷⁵ Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 123, citing Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1948), III.2, 66–69; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Zwei Glaubensweisen," in *Spiritus Creator* (1967), 76–91.

⁷⁶ Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 125–26.

acting toward, or relating. The primary *historical* “action toward” is the resurrection. Hence, “all Christian theology,” as Ratzinger considers

must be first and foremost a theology of Resurrection. It must be a theology of Resurrection before it is a theology of the justification of the sinner; it must be a theology of Resurrection before it is a theology of the metaphysical sonship of God. It can be a theology of the Cross but only as and within the theology of Resurrection. . . . The core of the Gospel consists . . . in the good tidings of God’s action, which precedes all human doing. . . . For if it is true that the *prae* of God’s action is significant for theology, that faith in an *actio Dei* is antecedent to all other declarations of faith, then the primacy of history over metaphysics, over all theologies of being and existence

is “obvious.”⁷⁷ The “concept of God is” thereby

removed from the realm of a mere *οντοια*. I believe that it was here that the definitive boundary between the biblical and the Greek concept of God became obfuscated, that this obfuscation was the crux of the repeated patristic attempts to combine Greek thought with biblical faith and that from this arose for Christian theology a task that is still far from being accomplished. Decisive for the Greek concept of God was the belief in God as a pure and changeless being of whom . . . no action could be predicated; his . . . changelessness meant that he was . . . self-contained and referred wholly to Himself without any relationship to what was changeable. For the biblical God, on the other hand, it is . . . relationship and action that are the essential marks; creation and Revelation are the two basic statements about him, and when Revelation is fulfilled in the Resurrection, it is . . . confirmed . . . that He is not just one who is timeless but also one who is above time, whose existence is known to us only through his action.⁷⁸

The Reformation disjunction between metaphysics and saving history is based on the belief that God is only *known in his saving act*. If one accentuates the word “known,” God’s “saving act” is subordinated to our knowledge and reception of it: The error of Lutherans like Cullmann lies here; but those Catholic critics who reduce Protestant belief to this are also missing something. For if, with Barth, one stresses the “saving act,” then one is simply a *realist*. To say that God is his *doing* is to affirm that God *is* before we theoretically formulate his being. Ratzinger concludes that, “the *prae* of God’s action means . . . that *actio* is antecedent to *verbum*,

⁷⁷ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 184–85.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

reality to the tidings of it.”⁷⁹ Theological realism is a good way to avoid Pelagianism: “It is not works that are vivifying, but faith” because “Only by handing oneself over to truth and rightness does one find that communication which is life.”⁸⁰

Ratzinger extensively embraces Barth’s notion of God’s being as *event*. But he also sees a value in the more prosaic conception underlying the *evidentialism* of the biblical scholars: This event really does *materialize* in history. An eschatologically oriented theology must include ontology because, in the Resurrection, eschatology is history—the “is” of metaphysics is inescapable. As Ratzinger puts it,

the definitive transformation that eschatology underwent by virtue of Christian belief in the Resurrection is its transposition into history. For late Judaic expectation, eschatology lay at the end of history. To believe in the Resurrection of Jesus means, on the contrary, to believe in the *eschaton* in history, in the historicity of God’s eschatological action.⁸¹

The ancient world imagined the philosopher as one to whom “death is always present.” This pre-Christian “philosophy gave the [Christian] faith its first concrete,” imaginative “expression”: “This means that Christian art finds one of its roots in coming to grips with death.”⁸² The early Church imagined the “Christian philosopher” in an analogous yet “different” way. The difference is a new contact with reality: “[H]e carries in his hand the Gospel, out of which come facts, not words. He is the true philosopher because he understands the mystery of death.”⁸³ The art of the Catacombs often presents Christ as the philosopher, and a favorite scene is the raising of Lazarus: “Christ appears as the true philosopher because he has the answer: he changes death, and he changes life.”⁸⁴ Within the history of philosophy, as Ratzinger sees it, the upshot of Luther’s opinion that metaphysics is an intellectual “justification of works” is the “rejection of ontology” by the post-Kantian philosophers.⁸⁵ If one is to converse with Protestants about the usage of philosophy within theology, a Bonaventurian idea of the *creative Logos* is an apt opener.

Historically, Barth’s objections to the Catholic use of metaphysics in theology refer to the practice of most Thomists of his era of making

⁷⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁸⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 99.

⁸¹ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 187.

⁸² Joseph Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” *Communio* 11 (1984): 350.

⁸³ Ibid., 351.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 356–57.

philosophy the antecedent foundation of theology. Whence his assertion that there is no anthropological or metaphysical “*prius*” for theology. What Barth found fault with in the Thomist theology he knew was its methodological insistence on foregrounding philosophy. Ever “since Descartes,” he complains, this has entailed deploying “a comprehensively explicated self-understanding of human existence which may also at a specific point become the pre-understanding of an existence in the Church or in faith, and therefore the pre-understanding and criterion of theological knowledge.” As Barth sees it, God’s action is the only antecedent condition of theology: “The Word of God always tells us something fresh that we had never heard before from anyone. The rock of a Thou . . . is thrown in our path here. This otherness which is yet related to us and made known to us . . . stamps it . . . as the Word of God.” The criterion that goes before theology is not the anonymous objective truth of metaphysics but the divine subject:

The personalizing of the concept of the Word of God, which we cannot avoid when we remember that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, does not mean its deverbalizing. But it . . . means awareness of the fact that it is person rather than thing or object even if . . . it is word, word of Scripture and word of preaching. To be person means to be subject, not merely in the logical sense, but also in the ethical sense: to be free subject, a subject . . . able to control its own existence and nature . . . and also able to select new possibilities of existence and nature.⁸⁶

Ratzinger thinks that Barth’s idea of Revelation as a *personal* action influenced Vatican II’s move away from the notion of revealed truth as congealed in two separate “sources,” conceived as material objects: “One of the most important events in the struggle over the Constitution on Revelation” was, he says,

the liberation from this narrow view and the return to what actually happens in the positive sources, before it was crystallized into doctrine, when God “reveals” Himself. . . . Only by going back to the comprehensive reality of the deeds and words of God is it possible to do away with the positivistic idea of the *duplex fons*; only by going back to the common foundation of all Christian discourse, could the question of the individual elements of the passing on of Revelation be removed from the field of controversy and placed within the appropriate framework. If one compares the text of article 2 with what was said at Vatican I (*DS* 3004 f.), it becomes clear how much Catholic theology has benefited in the last fifty years from the theology of Karl Barth, which

⁸⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 36, 138, 141.

itself was influenced by the personalistic thinking of Ebner, Buber, and others. . . . Whereas Vatican I starts from the natural knowledge of God and considers “supernatural” Revelation only in close connection with this idea, in order to proceed . . . to the question of its transmission in Scripture and tradition, here the question of the natural knowledge of God is put at the end and God’s revealing activity described within a comprehensive survey of salvation history.⁸⁷

If starting from God’s “revealing activity” could help to defrost the notion of Revelation as a solidified “deposit,” so the notion of philosophy as an antecedent foundation of theology can attain more flexibility if one considers philosophical questions historically. Barth rejected philosophy as a static, Cartesian basis for theology because this foundation lacks the ultimacy of a person-to-person “dialogue”:

[T]he Word of God . . . aims at us and smites us in our existence. No human word has the competence to aim at us in our existence. . . . The only word that may aim at us in our existence and can smite us in our existence is one which questions and answers us in . . . the same way as death might question and answer us at the end of our existence. But death is dumb. It neither questions nor answers. It is only the end.⁸⁸

For Ratzinger, metaphysical conceptions of immortality, like that of Plato, are not the antecedent foundation of Christian faith in resurrection:

The philosopher, we might say, is Peter on the lake, wishing to step beyond mortality and glimpse life but not succeeding, indeed sinking beneath the waves. For all his capacity to speculate about immortality, in the end he cannot stand. . . . Only the Lord’s outstretched hand can save sinking Peter, that is, humankind. That hand reaches out for us in the saying, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” [Mt 5:8]. Philosophical understanding remains a walking on the waters: it yields no solid ground. Only God incarnate can draw us out of the waters by his power and hold us firm.⁸⁹

Once given a “Christological transformation, the Platonist notion of the life which flows from truth is . . . made the vehicle of a ‘dialogical’ concept of humanity: Man is defined by his intercourse with God.”⁹⁰ Although it accords with the Platonic conception, the

⁸⁷ Ratzinger, “Chapter I: Revelation Itself,” in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, 170.

⁸⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 141.

⁸⁹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 152.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

starting point of the Christian understanding of immortality is the concept of God, and from this it draws its dialogical character. Since God is the God of the living, and calls his creature, man, by name, this creature cannot be annihilated. In Jesus Christ, God's action in accepting humanity into his own eternal life has . . . taken flesh: Christ is the tree of life whence we receive the food of immortality. Immortality cannot be accounted for in terms of the isolated individual existent and its native capacities, but only by reference to that relatedness which is constitutive of human nature.⁹¹

The "constitutive" "relatedness" of human beings is brought about by their creatureliness: Their Creator sets them in relation to himself as creatures. Whereas, for the creature, relatedness is conferred by another, to be God is to be relationship, for God is love. So it is wrong to think of God as an inactive metaphysical condition of theology: "knowing and believing in God," Ratzinger states,

is an active-passive process, not a philosophical structure . . . ; it is an act in which one is first touched by God and then responds. . . . It is only from this perspective that we can understand what it means to call God a "Person" or to speak of "Revelation": in our knowledge of God there occurs also—and, indeed, first—something from God's side.⁹²

Presented in terms of a doctrine of creation, a theocentric personalism can interpret immortality as a property of human nature. Using Teilhard de Chardin's idea that evolution produces "ever better eyesight" as a metaphor for spiritual vision, Ratzinger remarks that the human person is the

creature . . . for whom the vision of God is part and parcel of his very being. Because this is so, it also belongs intrinsically to his being to participate in life. . . . it is not a relationless being oneself that makes a human being immortal, but precisely his . . . capacity for relatedness, to God. . . . such an opening in one's existence is not a trimming, an addition to a being which really might subsist in an independent fashion. . . . It constitutes what is deepest in man's being. It is . . . what we call "soul." . . . A being is the more itself the more it is open, the more it is in relationship.⁹³

Hence,

it is the man who makes himself open to all being, in its wholeness and in its Ground, and becomes thereby a "self," who is truly a person. Such

⁹¹ Ibid., 157–58.

⁹² Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 69.

⁹³ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 154–55.

openness is not a product of human achievement. It is given to man; man depends for it on Another. But it is given to man to be his very own possession. That is what is meant by creation, and what Thomas means when he says immortality belongs to man by nature.⁹⁴

As in “Thomas’s theology of creation: nature is only possible by virtue of a communication of the Creator’s, yet such communication both establishes the creature in its own right and makes it a genuine participator in the being of the One communicated.”⁹⁵

But if relatedness is simply a spelling out of createdness, how was it that this insight gave over to a notion of metaphysical “natures” as rationally self-founding entities? Why did Catholic theology need Karl Barth to remind it of the implications of the doctrine of creation? And was it because of any overlaid feature of Catholic theology that Protestant salvation historians complained that the “‘Hellenization’ of Christianity” had “created a static style of thought that cannot do justice to the dynamism of the biblical style?”⁹⁶ Such “questions had a strong influence” on Ratzinger, and he wrote his habilitation on Bonaventure in order to “make a contribution toward answering them.”⁹⁷ As he notes, the idea of history that the Scholastics took from Augustine denies that, as a series of accidental occurrences, history can be a “science”: “for science treats precisely of the universal.” Hence, despite the importance of biblical typology to the medieval, “the predominant impression remained that history lay outside the limits of that which is properly intelligible and thus below the proper area of concern for theology.”⁹⁸ Since any sequence of moments is “mere[ly] accidental,” the idea that an infinite series of moments could lie behind us is not illogical. Once it is assumed that “history is the realm of chance,” one can entertain the hypothesis of the eternity of world.⁹⁹ “With keen perception,” Ratzinger says, “Bonaventure sees that this concept of history is incompatible with the Christian view.”¹⁰⁰ Bonaventure rejected the thesis of the eternity of the world not because it was Aristotelian but because it ran counter to his own “theology of history”¹⁰¹ within which history is not a chronicle of

⁹⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, xi

⁹⁷ Ibid., xii.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 76, 119.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 119.

chance occurrences, but “illumined by the same divine order which is the unifying law of all reality.”¹⁰²

Ratzinger seems to consider that a Bonaventurian sense of history as the arena of God’s action is a natural complement to the Thomist appetite for metaphysics. For, without the sense of dynamism and concrete contingency that history lends to metaphysics, philosophy neglects its other-bound reference, becoming a self-referential science of pure rationality, not the rationality of things, and thus loses the sense of relationality in creation, which theology perfects. Something similar can happen to *faith*. Just as a theoretical commitment to philosophical rationality can end up “reasoning about rationality,” so a programmatic determination to make faith propel theological discourse can turn into believing in one’s belief. Commenting on the odd fact that it was “Thomas the metaphysicist” who both “brought about the rejection of the salvation-historical concept” and “took the first critical step toward the age of history,” Ratzinger remarks that “[f]ortunately, theology has always been richer in its achievements than in its programs.” The theological “revolution” attendant on a literal rather than allegorical “hermeneutic method” can be assessed “positively and negatively (yes, negatively!).”¹⁰³ Ratzinger is an unprogrammatic thinker, a Church man who is more interested in responding to the lay of the land than in driving a theory to its logical conclusion. For the man of the Church, neither Plato, Aristotle, nor Thomas “is philosophy or the philosopher. It is in the multivalent message of the entire history . . . that truth is disclosed and with it the possibility of fresh knowledge.”¹⁰⁴ The question of philosophy and theology is not a matter of either giving priority to faith or making reason the foundation but of “put[ting]” both “into dialogue with one another.”¹⁰⁵

Barth said that theology is “rational wrestling with the mystery” of God’s action. “But all rational wrestling with this mystery . . . can lead only to its fresh . . . interpretation and manifestation as a mystery. For this reason it is worth our while to engage in this rational wrestling with it.”¹⁰⁶ Ratzinger was disconcerted that a recognition of God’s mysterious “invisibility” is absent from *Lumen Gentium*’s two articles on atheism: “[P]ass[ing] over the essentials of the *via negativa*,” the council ignored the attention that Catholic theologians had paid to this “since Karl Barth’s

¹⁰² Ibid., 19.

¹⁰³ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 181.

¹⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” 358.

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 368.

criticism of the *analogia entis*.”¹⁰⁷ Rather than regarding the necessity of acknowledging God’s “invisibility” as an admission of the ultimate blindness of conceptual reason, Ratzinger treats it as the space that creates the possibility for dialogue between philosophical questions and theological answers: “Must not the answers . . . by their very nature leave room for the unexpressed and inexpressible? Might it not be that such answers give the ultimate questions of life and death their real depth and dramatic character?”¹⁰⁸ Theology creates the possibility for concrete, realistic, and dramatic philosophical speech because “if faith speaks about the resurrection from the dead, then we are not dealing with some abstruse utterance about some unknown place in some unknown future.”¹⁰⁹

Earlier twentieth-century students of Bonaventure had been divided between those who followed Etienne Gilson in viewing him as an anti-Aristotelian Augustinian, and those like van Steenberghen who saw Bonaventure as an eclectic, Augustinian Aristotelian. Gilson and van Steenberghen differed for half a century, not only about whether Bonaventure was a pure Augustinian or an Aristotelianizing one, but about the possibility of “Christian philosophy.” Whilst finding that van Steenberghen’s view of Bonaventure as an eclectic Aristotelian is more on the mark, Ratzinger observes a certain irony in the fact that this requires van Steenberghen to regard the Seraphic Doctor as a “Christian philosopher.”¹¹⁰ Ratzinger does not point out a second irony: *Both* medievalists exchanged places in the two controversies, for Gilson’s

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “Introductory Article and Chapter I: The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. W. J. O’Hara (London/New York: Burns & Oates/Herder & Herder, 1969), 154–55.

¹⁰⁸ Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” 354.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 358.

¹¹⁰ Ratzinger declares that “Van Steenberghen is . . . inconsistent with the results of his own studies when he defines Gilson’s concept of ‘Christian philosophy’ and when he expressly affirms the fundamental possibility of separating philosophy and theology in Bonaventure; for his own presentation of the history of philosophy indicates that the so-called Augustinianism arises from the problem of the relation of philosophy and theology and that it is the result of a process of development in which this philosophy is actually being formed. . . . His own presentation of the history of this period . . . indicates that the real question in the great disputes of the thirteenth century was not simply a philosophical fight within an already existing philosophy. Rather it was a question of Christian philosophy and Christian wisdom as such. . . . The problem of Augustinianism and Aristotelianism is not a purely philosophical problem. It cannot be treated at all if we abstract from theology, and every presentation that attempts to do so overlooks the decisive point at issue.” Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 131.

notion of Christian philosophy is at least as Bonaventurian as it is Thomist. Ratzinger mentions, in his book on Bonaventure, Gilson's famously annoying lecture on the future of Scholasticism, in which he argued that Scholastic *philosophy* can only survive if, like the philosophy of the medieval doctors and saints, it needs theology like some fish need "warm water."¹¹¹ Two decades on, when Ratzinger tackled the Thomist-Franciscan debate over whether theology is primarily a speculative or practical science, he finds with the Thomists, simply because *God* is and does before human theologians can act and do. But, he says, this does not mean Bonaventure's insight can be disposed of. This is because the assumption that God, and thus the scriptural word of God, is the subject of theology that lies behind it:

The writers of Holy Scripture speak . . . as men, and yet . . . in doing so, they are "theologoi," those through whom God as subject, as the word that speaks itself, enters into history. What distinguishes Holy Scripture from all later theology is thus . . . safeguarded, but, at the same time, the Bible becomes the model of all theology. . . . In this way, Bonaventure achieved in his later works the synthesis he had sought in his earlier ones, where he had affirmed the ontological character of theology and thus the proper rank of the theoretical and yet had spoken . . . of the necessary self-transcendence of contemplation into the practice of the faith.¹¹²

A good theologian is not a career intellectualist, for "just as we cannot learn to swim without water, so we cannot learn theology without the spiritual praxis in which it lives."¹¹³ Ratzinger's response to the protest against the presence of metaphysics in theology is to take up a Bonaventurian, that is, Gilsonian, notion of philosophy as Christian wisdom.

A Christian wisdom will relate philosophy to history. For instance, it will not think of Platonism as an ahistorical "essence," but as a precise response to a historical and political crisis in the development of human thought about human nature.¹¹⁴ For Ratzinger "the whole question of the relation of faith and reason" is related to the issue of history. For it

can hardly be disputed that as a consequence of the division between philosophy and theology established by the Thomists, a juxtaposition has gradually been established which no longer appears adequate. There

¹¹¹ Etienne Gilson, "Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism," *Modern Schoolman* 29 (1951): 10.

¹¹² Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 321.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹¹⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 77–78.

is, and must be, a human reason in faith; yet conversely, every human reason is conditioned by the historical standpoint so that reason pure and simple does not exist.¹¹⁵

As Ratzinger notes, “the terminology established by St. Thomas” entailed that “philosophy and theology were distinguished as the study of the natural and the supernatural. . . . These distinctions received a particular sharpness in the modern era.” Even if the “distinction” was later presented “in a more radical manner than the texts themselves would justify,” one cannot go back to the thirteenth century or make the tradition just end there: “Once this distinction is drawn, the question inevitably arises: can philosophy and theology be brought into a methodological relationship?”¹¹⁶ The means of reconnection between nature and the supernatural that Ratzinger takes links up with a historical fact: Historically, philosophy has always responded to *religion*. This link can be surprising, not only because one may think of philosophy as timeless reasoning, but because Ratzinger himself can be as critical of religiosity as any Lutheran or Barthian. He constantly deems the innovations of Socrates and Plato as an “enlightenment” with respect to earlier religious and mythical thinking.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, unless it wants to be ontologically empty, philosophy needs “a priori concepts”: “philosophy has always thrived on critical dialogue with . . . religious traditions.” “[R]eligious traditions” form “the starting points in its struggle to find the truth.”¹¹⁸ What calls for enlightened criticism in religion is the localism of myth, its inability to proclaim one universal God. This is where the philosophical impulse joins forces with the Revelation of the unique God of Israel:

The assertion of a God who creates and redeems the entire world goes far beyond any individual religious community. . . . It is an assertion about reality. . . . The impact of this “God-thought” . . . is quite clear in the critique of other religions made by the prophets of Israel and the Wisdom literature. When the self-made gods are ridiculed and the one true God is placed in opposition to them, we see the same movement at work as we do in the pre-Socratic thinkers of the early Greek enlightenment. . . . The faith of Israel gives rise to a . . . claim whose universality is linked to its reasonability.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Ratzinger, “Introductory Article and Chapter I,” 120.

¹¹⁶ Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” 353.

¹¹⁷ See, for instance, Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 327 and 339; and idem, *Eschatology*, 77–79. The deepest discussion is in *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003, 2004), 82–83 and passim.

¹¹⁸ Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” 355.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 355.

When John calls Christ the *Logos* “he stands in the clear Wisdom tradition.”¹²⁰

Although biblical theologians like Gerhard von Rad grasped the significance of biblical typology, it took him a while to admit that Scripture does not only proclaim history, but also creation. Von Rad arrived at this conclusion late in life, through the study of Old Testament parables and proverbs.¹²¹ Ratzinger uses the example of the parable to explain what Christian wisdom is. Jesus taught in parables not just because “faith reveals itself only in parables” but also because “the parable makes clear the core of reality itself. This is possible because reality itself is a parable. Hence, it is only by way of parable that the nature of the world and of man himself is made known to us.”¹²² Parables are not extrinsic to our natural or historical “experience of the world” for

the parable . . . gives this experience its proper depth and reveals what is hidden in things themselves. Reality is self-transcendence, and when man is led to transcend it, he not only comprehends God but, for the first time, also understands reality and enables himself and creation to be what they were meant to be. Only because creation *is* parable can it *become* the *word* of parable. That is why the material of daily living can always lead beyond itself; that is why a history can take place in it that both transcends it and is profoundly conformable to it.¹²³

Christian wisdom is historically instantiated because to be human is to be historical:

Man is temporal as a traveler along the way of knowing and loving. . . . His specific temporality also derives from his relationality—from the fact that he becomes himself only in being with others and being toward others. Entering upon love, or . . . refusing love, binds one to another person and so to the temporality of that person, his “before” and “after.” The fabric of shared humanity is a fabric of shared temporality.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ibid., 359.

¹²¹ Gerhard von Rad began his defense of the reading of Christological typology in the Old Testament by remarking that typological thinking is present in all human thought, especially in proverbs and in poetry: “Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament,” in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westerman, trans. James Luther Mays (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964). Von Rad elaborated on this at length in *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM, 1970, 1972).

¹²² Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 344.

¹²³ Ibid., 345, original emphasis.

¹²⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 183–84.

This insight, spurred in part by Barth's perception that we gain our humanity by how we are addressed and respond, leads into the question of whether "tradition takes place . . . as the growing insight, mediated by the Holy Spirit, into Revelation that has been given once and for all": The question of the historicity of inspiration is "the crux of the difference between Catholic and Protestant theology in the question of tradition."¹²⁵ During the Second Vatican Council, both literal-minded Thomists and Protestants like Cullmann found it difficult to articulate the value of tradition because they ignored

our deeper knowledge of the problem of historical understanding, which is no longer adequately expressed by the simple ideas of a given fact and its explanation, because the explanation, as the process of understanding, cannot be clearly separated from what is being understood.¹²⁶

Bonaventure had made no such clean-cut distinction between Revelation and inspiration, text and interpreting mind: For him, Revelation is the ongoing deepening of our understanding of Scripture.¹²⁷ Ratzinger carries this line of thought through by declaring that "subsequent history belongs intrinsically to the inner momentum of the text itself. . . . It does not . . . provide retrospective commentary on the text. Rather, through the appearing of the reality which was still to come, the full dimensions of the word carried by the text come to light."¹²⁸ Because Scripture becomes spiritually intelligible in history,

the Gospel does not confront the Church as a self-enclosed *Ding-an-Sich*. Herein lies the . . . methodological error of trying to reconstruct the *ipsisima vox Jesu* as a yardstick for Church and New Testament alike. . . . Jesus' message becomes intelligible for us through the echo effect it has created in history. In this echo, the intrinsic potential of that message, with its various strata and configurations, still resounds. Through its resonance, we learn more about the real than we shall ever do from free-floating critical reconstructions.¹²⁹

The sense of "either/or"-ness upon which Protestant spirituality turns can be appropriated by Catholics as the real historicity of the human creature. But where, in Protestantism, the "either/or" is conceived as a decision and thus related to the *future*, for the Catholic, human history

¹²⁵ Ratzinger, "Revelation Itself," 179.

¹²⁶ Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," 187–88.

¹²⁷ Ratzinger, *Bonaventure*, 64–69.

¹²⁸ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 42.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

includes not only the present and future, but also the past. Barth both uses the philosophers and thinks philosophically for himself: He does not so much denigrate philosophy or reason as he underplays the consideration that reality “remembers” what God has done in it. Ratzinger claims that human time is “*memoria*-time,” time as recapitulated and made meaningful in memory.¹³⁰ Barth believed that

To be in the Church . . . is to be called with others by Jesus Christ. To act in the Church is to act in obedience to this call. This obedience to the call of Christ is faith. . . . Faith grasps the promise that we shall be led into all truth (Jn 16:13). Faith knows God. Faith is the determination of human action by the being of the Church and therefore by Jesus Christ, by the gracious address of God to man.¹³¹

For Ratzinger, the ecclesiality of Christian faith entails that, as a “trans-historical subject,” a subject that is *in* but not *of* time, the “*communio Ecclesiae* . . . is the mediator between being and time.”¹³² This memory generates tradition, the creative ability to take history forward. Within the communal litany of the saints, the “eschatological question becomes the question of my own dying,” rather than “temporal expectation of the world’s end.” But “this is possible . . . because the individual has found shelter in a history filled with salvific energy.”¹³³

The prerequisites for Ratzinger’s reply to Barth’s understanding of the Incarnation as the revelatory *act* of the Trinity were, first, his discovery of a similar pattern in Bonaventure, for whom “Christ is the *medium distantiae*, the defining center, in his *Crucifixion*,”¹³⁴ and second, that he “in due course” became “sympathetic to the principal prophet of a renewed Christocentricity in Catholic theology: Hans Urs von Balthasar.”¹³⁵ Von Balthasar’s work on Barth’s theology was one means through which Ratzinger learned that “for pursuing the dialogue with Protestant theology, Catholic theology requires that there be, despite all divisions and antitheses, a common theological motive”¹³⁶ and that “Catholic theology must not . . . be afraid to learn from its partner.”¹³⁷ The pre-Barthian Catholic understanding of the work of Christ was not really centered on

¹³⁰ Ibid., 184.

¹³¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 17.

¹³² Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 23.

¹³³ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 11–12.

¹³⁴ Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI*, 63.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 63–64.

¹³⁶ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 180.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 180–81.

death. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had summed up human historicity as a being toward death. Barth appropriated this historicizing of human “nature” into his Christocentric anthropology. For him, the human being is a being toward the eschatological act of God—Christ. Barth created an opening for others to enable philosophy to recapture its bonds with the deep religious desires of humanity, and thus with faith.

Ratzinger affirms that for “human life, death is the only real question” and yet that, “we have also to reckon with the openness” of divine “Love for history.”¹³⁸ Barth concurs. The critical difference between the two is the place of human philosophy in this “reckoning.” For the Thomists of Barth’s time the only dialogue possible with Barth was a “dialogue of the deaf” (we need not pretend that the recent maneuver of pretending that Thomas was a Barthian is a better solution). Ratzinger draws on Bonaventure instead, because unlike Thomas the “saint . . . admits that there is a certain violence in reason which will not be harmonized with faith.” This is the violence of irreligious, technological rationality. But Bonaventure

says that there is a question that emerges from another source: perhaps faith should be understood in terms of the love to which it gives its assent. . . . To love means wishing to know, and so the search for insight can be an inner drive towards love. . . . There is a link between love and truth, which is significant for both philosophy and theology.¹³⁹

For the Swiss Calvinist,

Revelation . . . does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ nor from the reconciliation accomplished in him. . . . When in the word Revelation we say “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” then we are saying something which can have only an inter-Trinitarian basis in the will of the Father and the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the eternal decree of the triune God, so that it can be established only as knowledge of God from God.¹⁴⁰

Ratzinger modulates Barth’s programmatic *forte*: The “means of salvation history—the death and Resurrection of the Lord” is “truly present” in the ecclesial act of faith.

This means, which is inseparably bound to the act of “faith in” . . . introduces us into the dynamic circle of Trinitarian love. . . . Because this creative love is . . . love as meaning and meaning as love, because it is

¹³⁸ Ibid., 39; and idem, *Eschatology*, 190.

¹³⁹ Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” 361.

¹⁴⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.1, 119.

the creative reason of all reality, it cannot be reciprocated without logic, without thought and word. But because true reason makes itself known, not in the abstraction of thought but in the purification of the heart, it is linked to a way, the way followed by him of whom it may be said: He is the Logos. This way is death and resurrection; to the Trinitarian *communio* there corresponds the sacramentally real *communio* of a life lived in faith for which we are purified in the death and resurrection of conversion.¹⁴¹

Ratzinger complements Barth's theological Christocentricity with a firm recognition that "in the man Jesus God has bound himself permanently to human history."¹⁴² As he reads it, the "act of faith . . . is essentially an act of union"¹⁴³ because "the real interdependence of all men and of all creation" entails that

the end of history is not for any man . . . something which has ceased to concern him. . . . "The Body of Christ" means that all human beings are one organism, the destiny of the whole the proper destiny of each. . . . The decisive outcome of each person's life is settled in death. . . . But his final place in the whole can be determined only when the total organism is complete, when the *passio* and *actio* of history have come to their end. And so the gathering together of the whole will be an act that leaves no person unaffected. Only at that juncture can the definitive general judgment take place, judging each man in terms of the whole and giving him that just place which he can receive only in conjunction with all the rest.¹⁴⁴

Human history is the gestalt form of the Lord. "History is still real" after Christ, "it really continues and its reality is suffering."¹⁴⁵

The way in which Ratzinger applies a "renewed Christocentricity" to eschatology fills certain lacunae in Protestant and earlier Catholic thought. He understands the Last Things historically, by reference to the person of Christ. "Justification by works means that man wants to construct a little immortality of his own,"¹⁴⁶ and hence, "Purgatory is understood in a properly Christian way when it is grasped Christologically, in terms of the Lord himself as the judging fire which transforms us to his own glorified body."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 26–27.

¹⁴² Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 187.

¹⁴³ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 328–29.

¹⁴⁴ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 190.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

It does not replace grace by works, but allows the former to achieve its full victory . . . as grace. What . . . saves is the full assent of faith. But in most of us, that basic option is buried under a good deal of wood, hay, and straw. . . . Man is the recipient of the divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed. Encounter with the Lord is this transformation.¹⁴⁸

Just as purgatory is not a “supra-worldly concentration camp,” so heaven is not a place, but Christ:

One is in heaven when, and to the degree, that one is in Christ. . . . Heaven is thus primarily a personal reality. . . . Heaven, as our becoming one with Christ, takes on the nature of adoration. All cult prefigures it, and in it comes to completion. Christ is the temple of the final age; he is heaven, the new Jerusalem; he is the cultic space for God. . . . This is what the theological tradition calls the vision of God.¹⁴⁹ N-V

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 231, original emphasis.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 234.