

The Son's Filial Relationship to the Father: Jesus as the New Moses

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I WANT to examine in this essay the Christological hermeneutical key to the first two volumes of Pope Benedict's work *Jesus of Nazareth*, that is, his understanding of the biblical proclamation of Jesus' filial relationship to the Father. I wish to do this under Benedict's rubric of Jesus being the new Moses.

The Centrality of Jesus' Relationship to the Father

At the very onset of his first volume, Benedict states that only if the historical Jesus is actually anchored in God does he become real. He continues:

This is also the point around which I will construct my own book. It sees Jesus in light of his communion with the Father, which is the true center of his personality; without it, we cannot understand him at all, and it is from this center that he makes himself present to us still today. (1, xiv)

Benedict never forgets, throughout the first two volumes, that if we are to grasp who Jesus is, we must ever more deeply understand his relationship to the Father, for it is his relationship to the Father that reveals Jesus to be his only-begotten Son. In anticipating his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, Benedict states: "Above all, what we will see in the next chapter is that Jesus always speaks as the Son, that the relation between Father and Son is always present as the background of his message" (1, 63). Subsequently, Benedict could write:

From our study of the Sermon on the Mount, but also from our interpretation of the Our Father, we have seen that the deepest theme of

Jesus' preaching was his own mystery, the mystery of the Son in whom God is among us and keeps his word; he announces the Kingdom of God as coming and as having come in his person. (1, 188)

As he begins his study of images of Jesus in John's Gospel, which will manifest even more clearly Jesus' unique relationship to the Father, Benedict concludes:

Listening to the Synoptics, we have realized that the mystery of Jesus' oneness with the Father is ever present and determines everything, even though it remains hidden beneath his humanity. (1, 218)

In volume two, this same Christological hermeneutic is present. In examining Jesus' high priestly prayer, in which he speaks of the Father consecrating him in the truth, Benedict states: "Thus one may say that this consecration of Jesus by the Father is identical with the Incarnation: it expresses both total unity with the Father and total existence for the world" (2, 87).

To examine the mystery of Jesus, as the incarnate Son, through his relationship with the Father, is not in itself a novel notion. Many other Scripture scholars and theologians have previously commented on this. What makes Benedict's treatment unique and noteworthy is the centrality he gives to the relationship and the manner in which he develops it. It is Jesus' words and deeds that reveal him to be the only Son of the Father, and for Benedict, Jesus primarily did this by fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy—that is to say, by elevating an Old Testament event to a new and never previously considered understanding. If the Christological hermeneutical key lies in Jesus' relationship to the Father, then in order to grasp fully and perceive clearly the manner of Jesus' relationship to the Father, one must turn to the Old Testament, for it is from within the Old Testament that the mystery of Jesus was hidden and is now made manifest.

Theological Exegesis

Here we must briefly examine Benedict's exegetical methodology, for it not only authorizes him to read the Bible with the eyes of faith, but it also, in faith, enables him to establish Jesus as the exegetical key for interpreting the Old Testament. While Benedict acknowledges the legitimacy of the historical critical method, he argues that left to itself it can render the Bible sterile, not permitting the full content of revelation to become manifest. In his second volume, he starkly states:

If scholarly exegesis is not to exhaust itself in constantly new hypotheses, becoming theologically irrelevant, it must take a methodological step

forward and see itself once again as a theological discipline, without abandoning its historical character." (2, xiv)

Thus, one is able to discern the fullness of who Jesus is and the comprehensive significance of his words and deeds only if one advances beyond the historical critical method. This Benedict proposes to do in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Following Vatican II's Constitution on Divine Revelation, Benedict states that "if you want to understand the Scripture in the spirit in which it is written, you have to attend to the content and to the unity of Scripture as a whole" (1, xviii). The person of Jesus Christ is the one who unifies the whole Bible—the Old and the New Testaments. "This Christological hermeneutic, which sees Jesus Christ as the key to the whole and learns from him how to understand the Bible as a unity, presupposes a prior act of faith" (1, xix). What is of immense significance here is not simply that Benedict sees Jesus as the key to understanding the whole of the Bible but that we must learn from him how to interpret the Bible. Jesus himself consciously places his own words and actions within the context of Old Testament revelation. His own words and actions, in the context of the Old Testament revelation, provide the exegetical tool for understanding who he is, and what he is salvifically doing. In so doing, Jesus reveals how he fulfills and brings to completion the whole previous history of salvation. He fulfills it and brings it to completion in a manner that no one could ever have imagined; yet, that whole history having been brought to completion, all the previous revelational content of salvation history is illuminated anew and constitutes, in Jesus, the realization of the Father's eternal plan of salvation.

The scholarly community, therefore, "must recognize that a properly developed faith-hermeneutic is appropriate to the text and can be combined with a historical hermeneutic, aware of its limits, so as to form a methodological whole" (2, xv). This "faith-hermeneutic" authorizes one to engage in what Benedict calls "canonical exegesis" or "theological exegesis." Benedict concludes: "It is obvious that the way I look at the figure of Jesus goes beyond what much contemporary exegesis . . . has to say" (1, xxiii). In his books, Benedict has "tried to go beyond purely historical-critical exegesis so as to apply new methodological insights that allow us to offer a properly theological interpretation of the Bible" (1, xxiii). Again, Benedict, in the end, believes that in these volumes he has attempted to do properly what Vatican II encouraged.

Fundamentally this is a matter [his exegetical method] of finally putting into practice the methodological principles formulated for exegesis by

the Second Vatican Council (in *Dei Verbum*, 12), a task that unfortunately has scarcely been attempted. (2, xv)

With the above in place, I want now to examine only one example of Benedict's theological or canonical exegesis, in which he is able to perceive and articulate many facets of what it means for Jesus to be the Son of the Father. Throughout the two volumes, one theme that Benedict consistently brings to the fore concerns the various ways Jesus portrays himself as the new Moses. Given such treatment, both Jesus and Moses take on new significance. Jesus, in word and deed, aligns himself with a word said and a deed done by Moses, thus designating himself as the new Moses. Jesus' "Moses-like" words and deeds advance and elevate something that Moses said and did to a significantly new level of divine revelation, ultimately the fulfillment of divine revelation. Because of this, we are able to grasp the revelational meaning and importance of what Jesus is saying and doing. Moreover, we now perceive the deeper significance of Moses' original words and deeds. What God revealed in Moses was in anticipation of its being fulfilled in the new Moses, and thus its real significance, long hidden, can only now be seen, in the light of the new Moses. Jesus is able to reveal who he truly is only in the light of Moses, but as Jesus becomes the new Moses, Moses himself takes on his true import. I will point out some examples of this in what follows.

Jesus: The New Moses

Within the very opening sentence in his Introduction to the first volume, Benedict insightfully notes that the Book of Deuteronomy "contains a promise that is completely different from the messianic hope expressed in other books of the Old Testament, yet it is of decisive importance for understanding the figure of Jesus" (1, 1). Unlike other Old Testament books that look forward to a new David, a new king, Deuteronomy promises a new Moses. Moses is seen as a prophet and it is upon this notion that God makes a promise. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you . . . him you shall heed" (Dt 18:15). What makes Moses unique among the prophets, according to Benedict, is that he "conversed with the Lord 'face to face' as a man speaks to his friend, so he had spoken with God (cf. Ex 33:11)" (1, 4). This speaking with God "face to face" is the basis of Moses' whole ministry. Only within such an intimate relation could God have given the Law to Moses, the basis of the covenant and thus for leading a godly life. Whereas Moses can speak with God as a friend, he could not see God's actual countenance, for God placed his hand over Moses' eyes as he

passed by. He could see only the back of God (see Ex 33:18–23). Thus, for Benedict, the promise of a prophet like Moses contains a “greater expectation.” The last prophet, “the new Moses, will be granted what was refused to the first—a real, immediate vision of the face of God, and thus the ability to speak from seeing, not just looking at God’s back” (1, 6). This implies, for Benedict, that “the new Moses will be the mediator of a greater covenant than the one that Moses was able to bring down from Sinai (cf. Heb 9:11–14)” (1, 6).

It is because Jesus is the new Moses that the truth expressed in the Prologue of John’s Gospel takes on its true meaning. “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn 1:18). It is because Jesus is the Son that he is able to fulfill, as man, the promise of a new prophet like Moses. He sees and speaks with the Father, not as a friend, but as an only begotten Son.

What was true of Moses only in fragmentary form has been fully realized in the person of Jesus: He lives before the face of God, not just as a friend, but as a Son; he lives in the most intimate unity with the Father. (1, 6)

Later in the same, first volume, when again treating the Gospel of John, Benedict returns to this same understanding. Benedict argues that Bultmann is wrong in holding that the Gospel of John is rooted in Gnosticism. Rather, it is thoroughly rooted in the Old Testament. This is confirmed in Jesus fulfilling the prophecy concerning the new Moses. The Pope first quotes John.

And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart, who has made him known (Jn 1:16–18).

Benedict thus sees the promise made to Moses “fulfilled superabundantly” in Jesus. “The one who has come is more than Moses, more than a prophet. He is the Son. And that is why grace and truth now come to light, not in order to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it” (1, 263).

I want now to examine some of the ways Benedict sees Jesus, being the incarnate Son of the Father, as the new Moses.

The New Moses: Sermon on the Mount

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, as has often been noted, portrays Jesus as the new Moses. The Pope notes this as well, but he provides a

deeper and fresh understanding to this image. In the Sermon on the Mount, “Matthew puts together a picture of Jesus as the new Moses in precisely the profound sense that we saw earlier in connection with the promise of a new prophet given in the Book of Deuteronomy” (1, 65). It is not simply that Jesus ascends a mountain, just as Moses ascended Mount Sinai; rather, Jesus ascends a mountain, sits down, and teaches. Benedict comments: “Jesus sits down—the expression of the plenary authority of the teacher. He takes his seat on the *cathedra* of the mountain” (1, 65). Whereas the rabbis sit on the chair of Moses and have authority, Jesus sits on the mountain “as the greater Moses, who broadens the Covenant to include all nations” (1, 66). The Sermon on the Mount is a dramatic lesson, in word and deed, wherein Jesus assumes the role of the new Moses and thereby reveals that he is the author of the law of the new covenant. In so doing, Jesus also reveals the real significance of the first Moses. Moses’ significance goes beyond his role in establishing the first covenant; rather, in the establishment of the first covenant he became the prefigurement of the new Moses, Jesus. We see the true importance of Moses only in the light of Jesus, for he provides the means by which Jesus is able to reveal who he is—the new and greater Moses, who will establish a new and everlasting covenant for all nations.

Moreover, Jesus, the new Moses, is on a new Sinai enacting a new covenantal law, and the atmosphere is far different from that of the first Sinai. Unlike the first Sinai, where the people were terrified by storm, fire, and earthquake, and only Moses ascended the mountain in safety, on this new Sinai “God’s power is now revealed in his mildness, his greatness in his simplicity and closeness” (1, 67). While the scene is pastoral and serene, yet, according to Benedict, Jesus’ message is that of a deeper love, a love that embraces the cross. “Now God speaks intimately, as one man to another. Now he descends into the depth of their human sufferings” (1, 67). Benedict beautifully summarizes what is taking place, in word and deed, on the new Mount Sinai.

It should be clear by now that the Sermon on the Mount is the new Torah brought by Jesus. Moses could deliver his Torah only by entering into the divine darkness on the mountain. Jesus’ Torah likewise presupposes his entering into communion with the Father, the inward ascents of his life, which are then prolonged in his descents into communion of life and suffering with men. (1, 68)

Benedict’s understanding of what is happening in the Sermon on the Mount is indeed theologically profound. He perceives Jesus teaching us how to understand who he is in the light of the Old Testament. Benedict

not only sees Jesus as the new Moses promulgating the new Torah, but he perceives that Jesus is able to do this only because, in a singular fashion—one that differs in kind from that of Moses—he possesses a filial relationship with the Father. Because of this divine filial relationship, Jesus not only proclaims the Sermon on the Mount but also literally embodies the sermon that he preaches. Unlike Moses, Jesus is the new Torah incarnate—the law of love. Because Jesus embodies the new law of love—love for the Father and love for the whole of humankind—he, as Son, will embrace, in filial love, the will of the Father and so ascend the mountain of Golgotha and take possession of the new chair of Moses—the cross. On the cross, Jesus, as the new Moses, will establish the new and everlasting covenant with his Father, a covenant for all nations.

The New Moses and the Prayer of Jesus

Benedict emphasizes that, because of Jesus' unique filial relationship with his Father, Jesus' teaching is not then the product of human learning. Again, fulfilling the experience of Moses: "It originates from immediate contact with the Father, from 'face-to-face' dialogue—from the vision of the one who rests close to the Father's heart" (1, 7). This unity between Jesus and the Father is the source of Jesus' life of prayer. His prayer—within his human consciousness, intellect, and will—"becomes a participation in this filial communion with the Father" (1, 7). For Benedict, "We must also keep in mind that the Our Father originates from his own praying, from the Son's dialogue with the Father. This means that it reaches down into depths far beyond the words" (1, 133).

Thus, Jesus is able, as the new Moses, to make known the full name of God. Jesus does this, for Benedict, when he teaches us to pray the Our Father (see 1, 142–45). Also, in the Johannine high priestly prayer Jesus prays to the Father: "I have manifested your name to the men that you gave me out of the world" (Jn 17:6). Jesus also states: "I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17:26). Benedict comments: "With these words Jesus clearly presents himself as the new Moses, who brings to completion what began with Moses at the burning bush" (2, 90–91, see also 1, 144). Knowing the name of God allows the Jewish people to invoke him and so make him present. The Jewish people also knew that God was made known in the Temple, for that was his dwelling (cf. Dt 12:11). When Jesus says that he has made known the name of God, he is stating a truth that again is singularly different from the manner in which Moses made God's name known. In Jesus "the revelation of the name is in a new mode of God's presence among men, a

radically new way in which God makes his home with them. In Jesus, God gives himself entirely into the world of mankind: whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9)" (2, 91–92). Jesus, as the new Moses, is able to make the Father fully known because, in accordance with Benedict's Christological hermeneutical key, he and the Father are ontologically one and the same God. The immanence of God, through the revelation of his name in the Old Testament, "has now become ontological: in Jesus, God has truly become man. God has entered our very being. In him God is truly 'God-with-us'" (2, 92). We also see once again that his prayer illustrates how Jesus, in his words and actions, brings new depth to Moses' speaking with God at the burning bush by expanding who can call upon his name. God the Son, in knowing the Father perfectly, makes his name known, not simply to the Jews, but to all nations.

Johannine Images of Jesus as the New Moses

Benedict examines two images of Jesus as the new Moses within the Gospel of John—Jesus as the bread of life and the living water. "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn 6:35). Jesus is the new Moses because he will truly give bread from heaven. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). For Benedict, "Moses gave manna, bread from heaven. But it was still just earthly 'bread.' The manna is a promise: The new Moses is also expected to give bread. Once again, however, something greater than manna has to be given" (1, 241). The reason that Jesus' flesh gives eternal life is twofold. First, it is once again because of his intimate unity with the Father. "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:57). It is because Jesus possesses the very divine life of the Father that all who feast upon Jesus obtain communion with the Father, the author of all life. Secondly, the body and blood that the faithful receive in the Eucharist is not the earthly body and blood of Jesus but the real heavenly manna—the resurrected body and blood of the new Moses—Jesus the risen Lord.

At the Feast of Tabernacles, the Gospel of John informs us that "[o]n the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed: 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water"' " (Jn 7:37–38). Benedict notes that on the last day of the feast there was a water ritual that commemorated "a piece of salvation history, of the water from the rock that, in spite of all their doubts and fears, God gave the Jews as

they wandered in the desert (cf. Num 20:1–13)” (1, 244). For Benedict, not only would the new Moses provide living bread from heaven that would exceed the manna, but he would also provide living water that would quench one’s spiritual thirst. Jesus “is the new Moses. He himself is the life-giving rock” (1, 245). Commenting on John 7:38, “As the Scripture has said ‘Out of his body shall flow rivers of living water,’” Benedict follows those Fathers of the Church who interpreted “his heart” as referring, not to the heart of the believer, but to the heart of Jesus. “‘His body’ is now applied to Christ: He is the source, the living rock, from which the new water comes” (1, 246). Jesus, as the new Moses, is the source of the life-giving waters, just as he is the bread of eternal life, because he is in divine communion with his Father—the eternal spring of all life.

The Transfiguration: The New Moses

The typology of Jesus being the new Moses reaches, in the Transfiguration, its climax prior to his death and resurrection. Scripturally the Transfiguration is also closely conjoined to the Feast of Tabernacles, which culminates on the last day with the festival of light. Likewise, it is connected to Moses’ ascent up Mount Sinai. There the glory of God covered the mountain for six days (cf. Ex 24:16). Benedict points out that Mark simply states that Jesus was transfigured before them, noting that “his cloths became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” (Mk 9:2–3). Matthew, more elegantly, states: “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Mt 17:2). Only Luke, Benedict notes, indicates the purpose of the ascent. He “went up on the mountain to pray” (Lk 9:28). It was while he was at prayer that “the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white” (Lk 9:29). Here, in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus’ closeness to his Father and his being the New Moses become one.

Benedict begins:

The Transfiguration is a prayer event; it displays visibly what happens when Jesus talks with his Father: the profound interpenetration of his being with God, which then becomes pure light. In his oneness with the Father, Jesus is himself “light from light.” (1, 310)

The Transfiguration manifests the prayerful unity of the Father and the Son—a unity that far exceeds the unity of friendship between God and Moses. Jesus’ prayerful unity is ontological in that the Transfiguration illuminates the fact that Jesus and the Father share one and the same glorious divine being.

Benedict also perceives other similarities and differences between Jesus and Moses. When Moses finished speaking with God “the skin of his face shone” (Ex 34:29–35). Benedict comments:

Because Moses has been talking with God, God’s light streams upon him and makes him radiant. But the light that causes him to shine comes upon him from the outside, so to speak. Jesus, however, shines from within; he does not simply receive light, but he himself is light from light. (1, 310)

The Transfiguration anticipates the cross and resurrection, for it is through his salvific death that Jesus obtains the fullness of glory. His glorious humanity now completely manifests the ontological depth of his divine filial relationship to the Father. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus absolutely becomes the new Moses, for now his full human intimacy with the Father is established and manifested. This too points to his Second Coming, for when he comes again in all of his glory, Jesus will bring his kingdom to completion and all men and women as well as the whole of creation will radiate from within the divine light of glory. The first Moses will no longer reflect the glory of God as from the outside, but he will share within his very humanity the inner divine life of the new Moses.

The New Moses: Obedience and Intercession

In examining the Last Supper, Benedict states that the first covenant was founded on two elements: “first, on the ‘blood of the covenant’. The blood of sacrificed animals with which the altar—as the symbol of God—and the people were sprinkled, and second, on God’s word and Israel’s promise of obedience” (2, 132). After the reading of the book of the covenant, the people promised obedience to all that God had told them and, thereupon, Moses sprinkled them with the blood of the covenant. However, immediately after this, while Moses was on the mountain, the Israelites broke the covenant by worshiping the golden calf. As the new Moses, Jesus would need, Benedict states, to forge a new covenant, one that was “founded on an obedience that is irrevocable and inviolable. This obedience, now located at the very root of human nature, is the obedience of the Son, who made himself a servant and took all of human disobedience upon himself in his obedience even unto death, suffered it right to the end, and conquered it” (2, 132). As the incarnate Son of the Father and thus within that intimate relationship, a relationship that exceeded Moses’ with God, Jesus, as man, was fully obedient to the Father’s will even unto death, a sacrificial death that established the new and everlasting covenant.

In his sacrificial death, Jesus, as the intercessor for the whole of humankind, is also the new Moses. He does this through his vicarious atonement. Man having broken the covenant, God was angry and threatened to destroy the Israelites. Moses stepped into the breach. He cried out to God: "But now, if you would forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I beg you, out of your book which you have written" (Ex 32:32). Benedict comments: Moses is "the substitute, the one who bears the fate of the people and through pleading on their behalf is able to change it again and again" (2, 173). As the new Moses, Jesus will stand in the place of humankind and offer himself to the Father on its behalf so that all nations may be reconciled to God. Jesus does what Moses could not do. Because he is the obedient incarnate Son, through the offering of himself in sacrifice, he is able truly to cleanse humankind of sin and transform it into a genuinely righteous and holy people.

Conclusion: A Personal Relationship with Jesus, the New Moses

Benedict observes that the apostles struggled to articulate who Jesus is, though they did grasp that, because of his relationship to the Father, he is the new Moses, the one who truly speaks to God face-to-face. They perceived him to be "God himself." Benedict sees this ever-growing clarity culminate in Thomas's confession. "It [the clarity] could arrive at its complete form only when Thomas, touching the wounds of the Risen Lord, cried out, in amazement: 'My Lord and my God' (Jn 20:28)" (1, 304–5). Only in his death and resurrection did Jesus manifest the full divine oneness that he shared with the Father. In the Paschal Mystery, Jesus accomplished his work as the New Moses—liberating humankind from sin and death and bringing it into the promised land of the heavenly kingdom.

Moreover, Benedict emphasizes that, as the Apostles and followers of Jesus had a personal encounter with him while on earth so, even more so, after his resurrection should men and women of faith encounter him now. As Moses helped the Israelites to enter into the presence of God, so Jesus, as the new Moses, not only aids us in knowing the Father but it is actually in union with him, so that humankind is able to enter into the heavenly Holy of Holies, and so, in him, to see the Father face-to-face. At the beginning of volume one, Benedict states that he hopes to "foster the growth of a living relationship with him (Jesus)" (1, xxiv). Likewise, at the beginning of volume two, he writes:

I have attempted to develop a way of observing and listening to the Jesus of the Gospels that can indeed lead to personal encounter and that,

through collective listening with Jesus' disciples across the ages, can indeed attain sure knowledge of the real historical figure of Jesus. (2, xvii)

I believe that Benedict has accomplished what he set out to do. In encountering Jesus, the Son, we encounter the new Moses who gives us, in the Holy Spirit, access to the Father. **N-V**