Joseph Ratzinger’s Theology of Divine Revelation

A DISSERTATION

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At the beginning of the 20th Century, neo-scholastic thought discussed divine revelation almost exclusively in terms of its objective content: God has revealed specific truths expressible in concrete propositions. It also claimed that divine revelation ceased with the death of the last apostles: no new revelation is to be expected.

Some theologians saw a lack of balance in the neo-scholastic approach and desired a more comprehensive understanding of divine revelation. These ‘new theologians’ emphasized the historical and subjective aspects of revelation. This dynamic understanding of revelation allows one to speak of revelation as a continual process insofar as it is received by new subjects in each generation. Neo-scholastics claimed that this approach was too subjective, and thus modernist, leading to doubts about the certainty and stability of revelation’s objective content.

Joseph Ratzinger was involved in this dispute early in his academic career. He wrote his Habilitationsschrift on St. Bonaventure’s understanding of revelation and theology of history. His director, Gottlieb Söhngen, approved the work. However, his reader, Michael Schmaus, rejected it for proposing an overly subjective view of revelation. Despite Ratzinger’s disagreement with Schmaus’s analysis, Ratzinger omitted the first part on St. Bonaventure’s theology of divine revelation in the final, approved version of the Habilitationsschrift.

Ratzinger continued to work in the area of divine revelation as a theological advisor to Cardinal Frings, the Archbishop of Cologne, in preparation for the Second Vatican Council, and eventually as a peritus at the Council itself. In those capacities, Ratzinger criticized the original
schema on revelation, *De fontibus revelationis*. Furthermore, Ratzinger was assigned to a commission responsible for drafting what became the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*.

Hansjürgen Verweyen has suggested that the original version of Ratzinger’s *Habilitationsschrift* is a key for understanding Ratzinger’s theology as a whole. Despite the importance of Ratzinger’s understanding of revelation, his commentators have treated it sparsely. This lacuna is due to the fact that some of Ratzinger’s most important texts on revelation have been published only recently, including: 1) the original *Habilitationsschrift*, 2) his critical comments on *De fontibus revelationis*, 3) his first attempt at an alternative schema on revelation, and 4) his draft for Cardinal Frings’s speech on *De fontibus revelationis*, among other related texts.

The recent publication of these works provides an opportunity to consider Ratzinger’s theological corpus from a fresh perspective. Through the presentation and evaluation of Ratzinger’s works on divine revelation, this dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of Ratzinger’s thought and concomitantly provides a contemporary contribution to the study of divine revelation.
This Dissertation by Richard G. DeClue, Jr. fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Systematic Theology approved by Rev. John P. Galvin, Dr. Theol., as Director, and by Michael Root, Ph.D., and Christopher J. Ruddy, Ph.D. as Readers.

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INTRODUCTION

Humble and shy, Joseph Ratzinger (b. April 16, 1927) has often been pushed into the limelight contrary to his own personal dispositions. In March of 1977, Ratzinger’s career as a professor came to an end when he was named the Archbishop of Munich and Freising. A few months later, he was made a Cardinal of the Catholic Church. His tenure as Archbishop of the large Bavarian diocese was relatively short, however. In 1981, Pope John Paul II appointed Ratzinger as the Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), a post he held for nearly 24 years. Ratzinger’s fame reached its zenith when he became Pope Benedict XVI upon his election as the Bishop of Rome on April 19, 2005, only three days after his 78th birthday. For decades, then, Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI was called upon to serve in important ecclesial offices that came with public notoriety. Consistent with his personal humility and desire to live a quiet, studious, and prayerful life, however, he resigned from the papal office, becoming the first pope in many centuries to do so. On February 28, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI’s resignation took effect, his term as pope ending just shy of eight years.

Naturally, in his service as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and as Pope, Ratzinger had to deal with controversies. His familiarity with theological controversy began many years before, however. After submitting his Habilitationsschrift (a second dissertation that qualifies one to hold a chair at a German university) to theology faculty at the University of Munich, Ratzinger expected that his days as a student were completed. In fact, he was so confident that the work would be approved that he had already accepted a position at the Institute [Hochschule] for Philosophy and Theology in Freising and moved there along with his parents in November of 1955: “Since my habilitation appeared assured and the house on the Domberg still awaited new tenants, it seemed to all of us that the right thing to do was to bring
Father and Mother to Freising.” Ratzinger’s confidence in the acceptance of his work seemed to be confirmed when Gottlieb Söhngen, his director for the project, gave his enthusiastic approval.

Ratzinger was unaware of the drama that would come to pass. The reader for the project, Michael Schmaus, waited a couple of months after its submission before reading the Habilitationsschrift. In the Easter Season of 1956, Ratzinger attended a congress of dogmatic and fundamental theologians in Königstein that Schmaus had initiated. During that congress, Schmaus informed Ratzinger that “he had to reject my habilitation thesis because it did not meet the pertinent scholarly standards.” This news shocked Ratzinger, who now worried that his and his parents’ move to Freising had been an imprudent, presumptuous error.

Exactly what were the scholarly standards for which Schmaus raised objections to Ratzinger’s work? The topic of Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift was St. Bonaventure’s understanding of revelation and theology of salvation history. Schmaus was a renowned medievalist and took objection to Ratzinger’s presentation of St. Bonaventure’s theology of revelation. As Ratzinger himself recounts:

In my research I had seen that the study of the Middle Ages in Munich, primarily represented by Michael Schmaus, had come to almost a complete halt at its prewar state. The great new breakthroughs that had been made in the meantime, particularly by those writing in French, had not even been acknowledged. With a forthrightness not advisable in a beginner, I criticized the superseded positions, and this was apparently too much for Schmaus, especially since it was unthinkable to him that I could have worked on a medieval theme without entrusting myself to his direction.

Additionally, Ratzinger admits that, while Schmaus was displeased with errors present in the work’s references, “he also did not like the result of my analysis. I had ascertained that in

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2 Ratzinger, Milestones, 107.

3 Ratzinger, Milestones, 108.
Bonaventure (as well as in theologies of the thirteenth century) there was nothing corresponding to our conception of ‘revelation’, by which we are normally in the habit of referring to all the revealed contents of the faith.” Ratzinger presented revelation as primarily a divine action that included the receiving subject as an integral part of revelation. In reaction, Ratzinger writes, “Schmaus, who had perhaps also heard annoying rumors from some in Freising concerning the modernity of my theology, saw in these theses not at all a faithful rendering of Bonaventure’s thought . . . but a dangerous modernism that had to lead to the subjectivization of the concept of revelation.” In short, Schmaus thought Ratzinger’s approach to Bonaventure’s theology of revelation was inaccurate as well as overly subjective and, hence, modernist.

Ratzinger never accepted that criticism as valid. Yet, in order to complete the habilitation requirement, he revised the project, removing the contested sections on revelation and focusing on the part concerning salvation history, which Schmaus had scarcely critiqued. The revised version was approved on February 11, 1957 and published in 1959 as *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*.

The approval of the revised *Habilitationsschrift* was not the end of the controversy, however. Ratzinger still needed to fulfill an additional requirement for the degree, a public habilitation lecture, which took place on February 21, 1957. Recalling this event, he relates: “I was very tense because I knew that certain elements within the faculty would listen to me with

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suspicion, and had essentially decided negatively already.”⁷ After Ratzinger’s presentation, Gottlieb Söhngen spoke first and, as expected, was quite positive towards Ratzinger’s lecture. “The co-examiner, Schmaus,” on the other hand, “had already made it clear he would be presenting a less amicable point of view. But suddenly a dialogue sprang up between Schmaus and Söhngen, who hotly debated with each other inside the lecture hall.”⁸ According to the norms for such an academic milestone, Söhngen and Schmaus should have been engaging with Ratzinger, not each other. Nonetheless, Ratzinger notes: “They would turn to the public and hold forth their views, while I stood in the background unrequired.”⁹ Despite the heated debate at this event, Ratzinger did pass and received his post-doctoral degree, the Habilitation.

Ratzinger did not have to wait until he was appointed Cardinal Archbishop of Munich and Freising, appointed as Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, or elected as pope before receiving some vindication with respect to the controversy over his original version of the Habilitationsschrift. Prior to the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), while teaching at the University of Bonn, which is near Cologne, Cardinal Josef Frings, the Archbishop of Cologne, invited the young Ratzinger to accompany him to the Council as a peritus (theological expert). Ironically, despite the controversy of his own work on the topic of revelation, Ratzinger was assigned to a subcommission working on a document on divine revelation, a topic that became heavily debated at the Council. As he relates, “A dramatic controversy, however, did begin when the document on ‘The Sources of Revelation’ was

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⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Last Testament, 92-93.

⁹ Ratzinger, Milestones, 112.
presented for discussion.”

Some members of the council and their periti, Ratzinger among them, criticized the original schema on revelation, De fontibus revelationis. Ratzinger not only submitted objections to that original schema but also offered positive suggestions to Council Fathers on how the topic of revelation should be treated.

Even though some of Ratzinger’s insights about divine revelation received conciliar approval, and despite the fact that Ratzinger became an increasingly important and renowned theologian, his works on divine revelation have remained largely hidden. The original version of his Habilitationsschrift (1955) was not published until well after his ascendency to the papal office. It was first published in 2009 as part of his collected works, and thus far it is available only in German. Similarly, some of his other early and significant works on divine revelation were published late, including: 1) his critical commentary on De fontibus revelationis, 2) his first attempt at an alternate schema on revelation, and 3) his draft for Cardinal Frings’s conciliar speech on De fontibus revelationis.

Thus, although scores of books and articles have been written on Joseph Ratzinger’s theology, very few were written with insight from his most detailed works on the theology of divine revelation. The recent publication of these works provides an opportunity to consider Ratzinger’s theological corpus from a fresh perspective.

Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a greater understanding of Ratzinger’s thought by presenting and assessing an important yet neglected aspect of his theology. Concomitantly, this dissertation will provide a contemporary contribution to theology of divine revelation in light of the work of one of the most well-known and respected theologians of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

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10 Ratzinger, Milestones, 124.
This dissertation is divided into three main parts. Part One provides background to the historical, philosophical, and theological context of Ratzinger’s work on the topic of divine revelation. Part Two presents Ratzinger’s own theology of divine revelation. Part Three investigates Ratzinger’s contribution to theology of divine revelation and offers a critical evaluation his thought. Each of these parts consists of multiple chapters.

Part One is divided into two chapters. Chapter One summarizes the prevalent understanding of divine revelation prior to and during Ratzinger’s time as a student of theology in Germany. It starts with an overview of the modernist controversy that surrounded debates on divine revelation in the early 20th century. It proceeds with a brief presentation of magisterial documents on divine revelation starting with the First Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Dei Filius, before presenting the ideas of other magisterial documents leading up to the Second Vatican Council, namely: Providentissimus Deus (Leo XIII, 1893), The Oath against the Errors of Modernism (Pius X, 1910), Divino afflante Spiritu (Pius XII, 1943), and Humani generis (Pius XII, 1950). Subsequently, there is an overview of typical approaches to divine revelation during Ratzinger’s time as a student of theology. Then, the original—but never promulgated—schema on divine revelation, De fontibus revelationis, from the preparatory work for the Second Vatican Council, is discussed as a text stemming from neo-scholastic views of divine revelation prevalent at the time. Chapter Four of another preparatory schema of Vatican II, De deposito fidei, also concerns divine revelation, and a summary of its main contents is provided. Finally, Ratzinger’s relation to this complex historical and theological context is outlined briefly along with evidence about the main goals of his early treatment of the topic of divine revelation.
Chapter Two is subdivided into five major sections. The first section presents the main outlines of Ratzinger’s theological method, including scripture as the soul of his theology and his understanding of the role of philosophy within theology. Section Two provides a summary of Ratzinger’s account of the philosophy of St. Bonaventure in relation to Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Ratzinger has explicitly stated that he prefers Augustine’s epistemology to Aquinas’s and in the original version of his Habilitationsschrift he emphasizes and explains the import of the philosophical differences between St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas for the theology of divine revelation. Accordingly, Section Three discusses philosophical and theological anthropology—especially metaphysics and epistemology—in relation to salvation-historical views of Bonaventure’s theology of revelation. Topics considered in this section include: 1) various concepts of nature, 2) the meaning of supernatural, 3) man as the image of God, 4) divine likeness, and 5) Bonaventure’s epistemology. It is important to note here that this dissertation considers Ratzinger’s understanding of St. Bonaventure’s thought only insofar as it influences Ratzinger’s own thought on divine revelation. Hence, it is not within the purview of this work to analyze or critique the accuracy of Ratzinger’s exposition of Bonaventure’s thought. The final section provides a summary and explanation of the significance that these topics have for Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation.

In light of the historical, philosophical, and theological background and context of Ratzinger’s work on divine revelation summarized in Part One, Part Two proceeds with a presentation of Ratzinger’s own theology of divine revelation in three chapters. Chapter Three offers a terminological study of the concept of revelation and describes the nature of divine revelation itself. The first section starts with Ratzinger’s analysis of the various uses of the term revelation and then considers it in its relation to and distinction from two other terms: apparition
and manifestation. It goes on to consider the terms ‘word’ and ‘light’ as they are used in theology of revelation. The second section focuses on the essence of divine revelation. It treats the Trinitarian foundations of divine revelation, the christological core of divine revelation, and the completion of revelation in the response of faith. Chapter Four considers the relationships and distinctions between revelation, scripture, and tradition. Chapter Five discusses the concrete process of revelation in salvation history in terms of: 1) the historical character of revelation; 2) the objective and subjective aspects of revelation, where the ecclesial character of revelation becomes evident; and 3) revelation through the development of doctrine.

Part Three expounds upon Ratzinger's contribution to theology of revelation and supplies an evaluation of his thought. Within this part, Chapter Six considers the extent to which Ratzinger contributed to Dei Verbum. Chapter Seven serves as a conclusion and offers a summary and critical evaluation of Ratzinger's theology of divine revelation.
PART ONE: PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF RATZINGER’S WORK ON REVELATION

CHAPTER ONE

THEOLOGIES OF DIVINE REVELATION FROM VATICAN I TO VATICAN II

In the “Introduction” above, the more immediate, personal context of Joseph Ratzinger’s work on divine revelation was explained briefly. This chapter provides both a broader historical and theological context as well as a more detailed exposition of the topics under consideration as they were typically understood and treated from the First Vatican Council to the advent of the Second Vatican Council (1869-1962). This historical and theological background will contribute to a greater understanding of Ratzinger’s own contribution to theology of divine revelation in the midst of the controversies regarding that topic as they arose in his own academic work as well as at the Second Vatican Council.

In all of the sections of this chapter, the various texts will be considered almost exclusively insofar as they touch upon or omit themes to be considered in subsequent chapters. This approach will limit the discussion to topics most pertinent to this dissertation on Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the modernist crisis that constituted a major aspect of the controversies regarding divine revelation during Ratzinger’s early work on the subject. Then, it provides a treatment of revelation in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei filius*, from the First Vatican Council and other magisterial texts, including: *Providentissimus Deus* (Leo XIII, 1893), *The Oath Against the Errors of Modernism* (Pius X, 1910), *Divino afflante Spiritu* (Pius XII, 1943), and *Humani generis* (Pius XII, 1950). Rather than treat these documents individually, they are examined insofar as they touch upon themes
relevant to the present work. Thus, that section is organized according to subtopics within theology of revelation, including: 1) the necessity of divine revelation, 2) objects of divine revelation, 3) scripture and tradition, and 4) faith as the response due to revelation.

After a consideration of divine revelation as presented in those magisterial documents, the works of theologians will be consulted to aid an understanding of how divine revelation was taught in theological schools at the time. Next, a summary of the original preparatory schema on divine revelation for the Second Vatican Council, *De fontibus revelationis*, will be provided as an example of a standard approach to theology of revelation immediately prior to Vatican II. Even though the document was never promulgated, and, hence, is not official teaching, such a summary will be helpful prior to a consideration of Ratzinger’s critiques of *De fontibus revelationis* that will be expounded in subsequent chapters. Chapter IV of *De deposito fidei*, another preparatory schema for Vatican II, is then presented. As its title suggests, the chapter concerns “Public Revelation and Catholic Faith,” and thus also provides pertinent background to the topic under consideration.

To conclude this chapter, brief remarks are made with respect to Ratzinger’s relation to the theological context in which he began his work on revelation. There, the goal of his project is discussed. In other words, the question about what he hoped to achieve through his early work on divine revelation is elucidated. Assessing the extent to which he achieved his aims will be left for the concluding chapters of this dissertation.

### 1.1 The Modernist Crisis

In the 19th century, the neo-scholastic movement developed in reaction to modern philosophy and its influence on Catholic theology. Neo-scholastics rejected the modern emphasis on subjectivity and sought to establish a cohesive philosophical framework for Catholic thought.
The prominence of neo-scholasticism in Catholic philosophy and theology was solidified by Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which supported a return to scholastic thought, especially that of St. Thomas Aquinas. This trend continued at the beginning of the 20th Century with Pius X’s condemnation of modernism as the “synthesis of all heresies”\(^1\) (1907). Other Catholic theologians sought to overcome neo-scholasticism, which led to a myriad of philosophical and theological disputes, commonly referred to as ‘the Modernist Crisis.’ Karim Schelkens summarizes the conflict thus: “Very basically, the modernist crisis would be understood as a clash between secular scientific progress and the church’s own neo-scholastic scientific model.”\(^2\)

Given the import of the modernist crisis for the topic of divine revelation in general and the controversy surrounding Ratzinger’s theology of revelation in particular, a brief sketch of this crisis is offered here to provide historical, philosophical, and theological background for the present study.

One of the difficulties surrounding any discussion of modernism is how to define it. Some argue that modernism cannot be seen as a single, coherent system of thought, and hence it is difficult to discern whether any particular individual’s thought can accurately be labeled as modernist. This complexity leads Thomas Loome to describe the Modernist Crisis as “a single intellectual crisis manifest in a wide variety of individual controversies.”\(^3\) In response to the


\(^3\) Thomas Michael Loome, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism: A Contribution to a New Method in Modernist Research* [Tübinger theologische Studien 14] (Grunewald and Mainz, 1979), 195.
question of precisely who the Modernists were, Darrell Jodock contends that “there was no easily identifiable (to say nothing of an organized) group who could be so designated.”4 “Loisy, himself the most distinguished of them,” reports Bernard Reardon, “refused to accept any description of the movement’s adherents as ‘a homogenous and united group.’”5 Furthermore, individuals accused of modernism were frequently opposed to each other on certain points: “The Modernists often were openly critical of each other.”6

Nevertheless, there was significant collaboration among many labeled as modernists. There is significant correspondence between key figures associated with modernism. While some of their correspondence is marked by criticism, many other letters offered support and encouragement for each other’s work. Meetings were also called to discuss their common objectives and ways of attaining them.7 Thus, while modernism is not a pure, monolithic school of thought, there are significant commonalities that link together those associated with it.

Despite the fact that those labeled modernists denied that they constituted a unified school of thought, Pope Pius X condemned modernism as “the synthesis of all heresies” in his encyclical Pascendi dominici gregis (1907). By putting pieces together from various sources, Pope Pius X proceeded to analyze modernism in order to “show that their system does not

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6 Jodock, Catholicism Contending, 8.

7 See Marvin R. O’Connell, Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), which cites numerous letters between modernist figures and reports of multiple meetings of players in the so-called Modernist Movement.
consist in scattered and unconnected theories but in a perfectly organised body, all the parts of
which are solidly joined so that it is not possible to admit one without admitting all.”

The most fundamental factor that unified modernists was their desire to overcome the
reigning neo-scholastic philosophy and theology of their day: “In the face of the rigidities of neo-
scholastic versions of Catholicism and its resistance to notions of historical development and
change, these Catholics were seeking an alternative way of interpreting the faith.” This common
objective challenged the desire of Pope Leo XIII, who, in 1879, called for the restoration of
Christian philosophy through a return to venerable scholastics, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas.
Hence, in response to modernism, Pope Pius X ordained that “scholastic philosophy be made the
basis of the sacred sciences.”

In the course of his condemnation of modernism, Pope Pius X noted two particularly
dangerous philosophical errors which he perceived in the movement: agnosticism and
immanentism. With respect to agnosticism, Pius X writes:

According to this teaching human reason is confined entirely within the field of *phenomena*,
that is to say, to things that are perceptible to the senses, and in the manner in
which they are perceptible; it has no right and no power to transgress these limits. Hence it
is incapable of lifting itself up to God, and of recognising His existence, even by means of
visible things. From this it is inferred that God can never be the direct object of science,
and that, as regards history, He must not be considered as an historical subject.

Such a philosophy would deny the possibility of natural theology and the long-held belief that
the human mind can know the existence of God with certainty through the light of natural
reason. “Agnosticism is thus a negative position; immanentism,” explains Jodock, “is its positive

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9 Jodock, *Catholicism Contending*, 3.
correlate. Because the Modernists cannot appeal to external revelation to explain religion, they seek its sources instead ‘in man,’ in a ‘movement of the heart’ which is called a ‘sentiment.’”\(^{12}\)

Pius X explains immanentism as it relates to faith as follows:

Should anyone ask how it is that this need of the divine which man experiences within himself grows up into a religion, the Modernists reply thus: Science and history, they say, are confined within two limits, the one external, namely, the visible world, the other internal, which is consciousness. When one or other of these boundaries has been reached, there can be no further progress, for beyond is the unknowable. In presence of this unknowable, whether it is outside man and beyond the visible world of nature, or lies hidden within in the subconsciousness, the need of the divine, according to the principles of Fideism, excites in a soul with a propensity towards religion a certain special sentiment, without any previous advertence of the mind: and this sentiment possesses, implied within itself both as its own object and as its intrinsic cause, the reality of the divine, and in a way unites man with God. It is this sentiment to which Modernists give the name of faith, and this it is which they consider the beginning of religion.\(^{13}\)

This immanentism emphasizes the interiority of the individual and his or her personal religious sentiment. It thus correlates to a form of subjectivism. This aspect of modernism is closely related to Schmaus’s later charge that Ratzinger’s interpretation of Bonaventure’s theology of revelation was modernist due to its heavy emphasis on subjectivity. Ratzinger emphasizes the role of faith in the completion of revelation. Hence, perhaps Schmaus connected Ratzinger’s view with modernism, because as Pope Pius X states: “For Modernism finds in this sentiment not faith only, but with and in faith, as they understand it, revelation, they say, abides.”\(^{14}\)

Modernism also tends to emphasize history as a dynamically developing reality, constantly evolving and changing: “Under the influence of modern philosophy, with its support for contemporary critical reflection and questioning, there was a rapidly growing interest in

\(^{12}\) Jodock, Catholicism Contending, 4. See Pope Pius X, Pascendi dominici gregis, §7 (DH 3477).

\(^{13}\) Pope Pius X, Pascendi dominici gregis, §7.

\(^{14}\) Pope Pius X, Pascendi dominici gregis, §8 (DH 3478).
historical studies. . . and the historical critical method became widely accepted among scholars."\textsuperscript{15}

In contrast, anti-modernists committed to what they deemed ‘perennial philosophy’ “assumed that the world was essentially static, not dynamic or developing. Historical changes did not affect the essential nature of persons or institutions, and consequently historical investigations, which detailed those unimportant changes, held little authority.”\textsuperscript{16} “Moreover,” continues Jodock, “the source of the supernatural was beyond history. It disclosed eternal truths that likewise were not subject to change. These truths could be found in the Bible, which the neo-scholastics interpreted as a handbook of theological axioms, and in tradition.”\textsuperscript{17}

This anti-modernist/neo-scholastic view lends itself to a static, propositional-based understanding of revelation, which places little importance on historical and cultural contexts for the understanding of God’s revealed word: “In a neo-Thomist thought world, revelation consisted of a set of divinely revealed truths, which were as such free from contextual influences and above contingency. In sum: the understanding had been that revealed propositions are supra-historical.”\textsuperscript{18} As will be seen, Ratzinger emphasizes the historical aspect of revelation, which may be another reason that Schmaus suspected that he was a modernist.

These considerations lead to the following treatment of theology of revelation as found in magisterial texts from the First Vatican Council to the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. “Vatican I can be read as the Catholic Church’s first broad and official attempt to deal with the

\textsuperscript{15} Schelkens et al., \textit{Aggiornamento?}, 72.


\textsuperscript{17} Jodock, \textit{Catholicism Contending}, 10.

\textsuperscript{18} Schelkens et al., \textit{Aggiornamento?}, 73.
Post Enlightenment situation. . . . This led to the condemnations of Modernism. . . . One notices an overall and hostile rejection of modern philosophical principles as being anti-Christian and therefore to be condemned by the church. . . . there was a longing for a restoration of pre-modern Christianity,” which “was found in scholasticism.”

1.2 Divine Revelation in Magisterial Texts from Vatican I to the Advent of Vatican II

On April 24, 1870, during its third session, the First Vatican Council promulgated the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Dei Filius. The vote in favor of the document was unanimous. Dei Filius discusses the related topics of God, revelation, and faith, primarily in opposition to what the Council Fathers considered to be errors of modern thought that could be hazardous to the Catholic faithful. After the First Vatican Council and prior to Vatican II, a number of papal documents delved into the question of divine revelation. Brendan Cahill offers a general description of revelation as it was presented by Vatican I and subsequent magisterial texts. He describes them as “emphasizing public, objective revelation as «locutio Dei attestantis», and emphasizing the doctrinal content of divine revelation.” In this view, then, revelation is not equated with God’s speech per se, but with God’s speech as it has been documented. At present, we shall consider several of those magisterial texts more specifically in relation to four major themes: 1) the necessity of divine revelation, 2) the object of divine revelation, 3) scripture and tradition, and 4) faith as the response due to divine revelation.

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19 Schelkens et al., Aggoirnamento?, 70.

1.2.1 The Necessity of Divine Revelation

Some magisterial texts between the two Vatican Councils note the distinction between natural revelation and supernatural revelation, largely following the work of St. Thomas Aquinas.\(^{21}\) In doing so, they explain—however briefly—the basis of natural knowledge of God as well as the necessity for a further source of knowledge of God through divine revelation, which includes things that could be known through natural reason as well as things that go beyond natural reason. *Dei Filius* affirms that man is capable of attaining certain knowledge of God’s existence by the light of natural reason, “for ‘ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature . . . has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made’ (Rom 1:20).”\(^{22}\) This natural knowledge of God, however, is not sufficient for man to attain the supernatural end to which God has called the human race. As *Dei Filius* declares: “God in His infinite goodness has ordained man for a supernatural end, to participation, namely, in the divine goods which altogether surpass the understanding of the human mind.”\(^{23}\)

In order to attain man’s supernatural end, therefore, knowledge of divine things unknowable by natural reason alone is necessary. As *Providentissimus Deus* (Leo XIII, 1893), an encyclical on the study of sacred scripture, likewise relates: “the language of the Bible is employed to express . . . many things which are beyond the power and scope of the reason of man – that is to say, divine mysteries and all that is related to them.”\(^{24}\) In addition to divine

\(^{21}\) See Thomas Aquinas, ST I q. 1 art. 1.

\(^{22}\) Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius*, Ch. 2 *(DH 3004)*. http://inters.org/Vatican-Council-I-Dei-Filius

\(^{23}\) *Dei Filius*, Ch. 2 *(DH 3005)*.

mysteries unknowable to purely natural reason, *Humani Generis* (Pius XII, 1950) mentions a “moral necessity” of divine revelation with respect to certain things that may be known through natural reason: “It is for this reason that divine revelation must be considered morally necessary so that those religious and moral truths which are not of their nature beyond the reach of reason in the present condition of the human race, may be known by all men readily with a firm certainty and with freedom from all error.”25 Hence, divine revelation is “morally necessary” so that naturally knowable things may be known more purely by more people with greater ease and greater certainty.

1.2.2 Objects of Revelation

While discussing the necessity of divine revelation, brief mention of the objects of revelation has already been made: 1) more accessible and clear knowledge of things already knowable through natural reason and 2) divine mysteries unknowable by natural reason unaided by grace. The magisterial texts also provide more specific expositions of the objects of revelation, i.e., of ‘what’ is revealed.

*Dei Filius* mentions two primary objects of divine revelation when it asserts that it pleased God “to reveal Himself and the eternal decrees of His will.”26 *Providentissiums Deus* speaks more poetically of “the hidden mysteries of His Divinity, His wisdom and His mercy.”27 The document goes on to speak about the content of revelation in terms of doctrine and

25 Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), §3. Accessed online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html

26 *Dei Filius*, Ch. 2.

27 *Providentissiums Deus*, §1.
morality. In a similar vein, Pius X, in his *Oath Against the Errors of Modernism* (1910), speaks of “the divine deposit which has been given to the spouse of Christ” as well as of “revealed truth.” Here, the object of revelation is understood as a deposit of revealed truths, and hence, revelation is understood in terms of concrete content. Pius XII, following his predecessors, likewise speaks about the “doctrine on faith and morals” that is acquired through divine revelation in his encyclical on promoting biblical studies, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943). In a later document, *Humani Generis*, Pius XII also mentions “the whole deposit of faith” as well as (citing Pius IX) “doctrine defined by the Church . . . contained in . . . revelation.”

In summation, within those magisterial texts, there are certain expressions about the objects of divine revelation that are more abstract and less definite, such as God himself, divine mysteries, God’s wisdom, and God’s mercy, but greater emphasis is placed on more concrete notions of the object of revelation: doctrines, truths, and the deposit of faith. Hence, the most common understanding of revelation presented in these magisterial texts centers around concrete contents of things revealed. The emphasis on revelation’s objective content undergirds a propositional understanding of revelation, which is well summarized in *Dei Filius*: “Further, by

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28 See * Providentissiums Deus*, §3-5. The heading of the section is: “Holy Scripture Most Profitable to Doctrine and Morality.”


30 Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), §1; see also, §24: “the theological doctrine in faith and morals.” Accessed online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html

31 *Humani Generis*, §18.

32 *Humani Generis*, §21. See also, §35, where Pius XII speaks about “the doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition” as well as “the doctrine revealed by God.”
divine and Catholic faith, all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition, and those which are proposed by the Church, either in a solemn pronouncement or in her ordinary and universal teaching power, to be believed as divinely revealed." This quote, which speaks about truths contained in scripture and tradition, leads to the topic of the next subsection: scripture and tradition.

1.2.3 Scripture and Tradition

A major theme that will arise during the presentation of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation is the relationship between scripture and tradition, which was also a prominent topic at the Second Vatican Council. The two terms ‘scripture’ and ‘tradition’ are discussed frequently in magisterial documents from Vatican I to Vatican II. Many of the documents refer to scripture and tradition as ‘sources’ of divine revelation, which is another concept that will figure prominently in Ratzinger’s work.

*Dei Filius*, following the above mentioned content-based notion of revelation, states that “supernatural revelation . . . is contained ‘in the written books and in the unwritten traditions.’” The distinction between scripture and tradition appears here to be based on whether the information is written (scripture) or unwritten (tradition). Similarly, again following a content-based, reified notion of revelation, the document goes on to declare that “all those things must be believed which are contained in the written word of God and in tradition.” It is interesting to note that the first quote speaks of ‘traditions’ in the plural whereas the second quote speaks of ‘tradition’ in the singular.

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33 *Dei Filius*, Ch. 3.

34 *Dei Filius*, Ch. 2.

35 *Dei Filius*, Ch. 3.
Providentissimus Deus similarly presents a content-based notion of “supernatural revelation” that “is contained both in unwritten Tradition [singular], and in written books [i.e., Scripture].” The term ‘source’ or ‘sources’ is found several times in this text. First, it speaks about scripture study as a “grand source of Catholic revelation.” It likewise refers to sacred scripture in terms of “the innumerable benefits of which it is the source.” Later, it mentions past eras in which the chief opponents of the Catholic understanding of revelation purported that scripture was “the one source of revelation,” implying that this is, in fact, erroneous. While affirming sacred scripture’s “eminent position among the sources of revelation,” it nevertheless speaks of sources in the plural.

Divino Afflante Spiritu similarly considers the Bible to be “the most precious source of doctrine on faith and morals” and “an excellent source of Catholic revelation.” It does not speak explicitly of tradition as a source of revelation; nor does it explicitly deny this. It merely talks about “the unchanging tradition of the Church” approving the spiritual meaning of God’s revelation, especially in the Holy Gospel, but also through the profession of the Apostles in

36 Providentissimus Deus, §1.
37 Providentissimus Deus, §2.
38 Providentissimus Deus, §3.
39 Providentissimus Deus, §10.
40 Providentissimus Deus, §16.
41 Divino Afflante Spiritu, §1.
42 Divino Afflante Spiritu, §4.
“their spoken and written words.”⁴³ Here again, the difference between oral tradition and written scripture is highlighted.

For its part, *Humani Generis* speaks about “the whole deposit of faith – Sacred Scripture and divine Tradition.”⁴⁴ Later, it refers to “the sources of divine revelation” and “the sources of revealed truth.”⁴⁵ Notably, in the paragraph speaking about the “sources of revealed truth,” *Humani Generis* appears to distinguish these sources from “the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church,”⁴⁶ implying a distinction between scripture and tradition on the one hand and magisterial documents on the other.

None of these documents provides a detailed description of the relationship between scripture and tradition, a theme discussed at length in Ratzinger’s writings. It is clear, however, that these documents speak of scripture and tradition as ‘sources’ of revelation and as the loci of the whole ‘deposit of faith.’ As will be seen, Ratzinger takes issue with the phrase ‘sources of revelation’ and suggests an interpretation of this phrase that makes its authentic meaning more readily perceivable. He also elucidates a very complex and thorough evaluation of the relationship between scripture and tradition, something lacking in these documents.

1.2.4 Faith as the Response Due to Revelation

Chapter Three of *Dei Filius* is entitled simply, “Faith.” Faith is affirmed as the human response due to divine revelation, and *Dei Filius* affirms that “we are bound by faith to give full

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⁴³ *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, §25.

⁴⁴ *Humani Generis*, §18.

⁴⁵ *Humani Generis*, §21, 27, and 37.

⁴⁶ *Humani Generis*, §37.
obedience of intellect and will to God who reveals.” Later on, speaking of the “assent of faith,” the conciliar text notes that “no one can ‘assent to the preaching of the Gospel,’ as he must to attain salvation, ‘without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all a sweetness in consenting to and believing the truth’ (Council of Orange).” Thus, faith itself is affirmed as a divine gift that the Holy Spirit imparts to the individual believer. Without this supernatural gift, faithful assent to divine revelation is not possible. This point is one that Ratzinger will take up in earnest, as will be seen in later chapters. Interestingly enough, none of the inter-Conciliar texts considered in this present work refer to the response of faith as an aspect of divine revelation itself but rather as the appropriate response to an already existing revelation. Ratzinger offers another perspective that links faith and revelation more closely together, as will be seen.

Now that the magisterial documents that treat divine revelation have been presented, various theologians’ understandings of divine revelation can be discussed in the following section. There are, of course, different approaches to theology of revelation represented in what follows.

1.3 Theologies of Revelation in the Early 20th Century

Between the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council, the theology of revelation took on a prominent position within theological studies. As John Montag relates, “Within the organization of modern Catholic dogmatic theology (at least until the second Vatican Council), treatises De revelatione sive vera religione usually came first, both structurally and in order of importance, and were almost exclusively apologetic, serving primarily ‘to vindicate the validity

47 Dei Filius, Ch. 3.

48 Dei Filius, Ch. 3. The reference to the Council of Orange refers to canon 7 (DS 376).
of dogma and its function of providing the premises for systematic rational theology." An example of such apologetic-leaning works is Johann Nepomuk Ehrlich’s *Fundamentaltheologie*, published in two volumes right around the time of the First Vatican Council. According to David B. Glasow: “In this work Ehrlich sought to defend dogmatic theology against rationalist and historicist views. . . . Because the Enlightenment ideal was to create ‘objective’ knowledge free from any subjective influence, Ehrlich sought a definitiveness that mirrored the objective certainty believed to be held in science in order to defend the truths taught by the Church.” This approach to fundamental theology continued throughout the early twentieth century. One such work by Albert Lang became prominent in Germany in the late 1950s.

Other Catholic theologians were critical of apologetic, rationalistic approach to fundamental theology. Some developed theologies of revelation that eventually led to conflict with Church authorities. Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) and George Tyrrell (1861-1909) are two prominent examples. Loisy studied at the Instiut Catholique de Paris, where he later became a professor of sacred scripture. He was a proponent of modern historical criticism. Loisy was eventually excommunicated in 1908 by Pope Pius X on account of his published works. In

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49 John Montag, SJ, “Revelation: The False Legacy of Suárez” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, John Milbank et al, eds. (NY: Routledge, 1999), 41. Theology of revelation was actually treated as a part of fundamental theology—as distinct from dogmatic theology—during that time period, and it still is today.


52 Albert Lang, *Die Sendung Christi in Fundamentaltheologie*, 1, 2nd ed. (Munich: Max Hueber, 1957), especially 34-140.

addition to his use of modern biblical criticism, Loisy also advocated a view of faith that was quite distinct from dogma. He advocated a “principle of the complete relativity of ecclesiastical doctrine to the time and conditions of its origin.” Such views were seen by ecclesiastical authorities as lacking objectivity.

Similarly, George Tyrrell also relativized dogma and emphasized revelation as taking place within the human subject. According to Tyrrell, “Revelation is a showing on the part of God, a seeing on the part of the receiver. Prophecy is but the communication of this vision to others. Theology must take prophecy not as statement, but as experience; must try to understand it as a religious phenomenon, and use it as factual not as verbal evidence for its conceptual constructions of the supernatural order.” In a private letter which was later published, first without his consent and then by himself to set the record straight, Tyrrell wrote: “it seems to me that a man might have great faith in the Church, in the people of God, in the unformulated ideas, sentiments and tendencies at work in the great body of the faithful, and constituting the Christian and Catholic ‘Spirit’; and yet regard the Church's consciously formulated ideas and intentions about herself as more or less untrue to her deepest nature; that he might refuse to believe her own account of herself as against his instinctive conviction of her true character.” Tyrrell thus called into question the absolute truth value of dogmas and instead emphasized the priority of religious experience.

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56 George Tyrrell, Through Scylla and Charybdis or the Old Theology and the New. NY: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1907, 289.

Thus, in the early 20th century, Catholic theology of revelation had to contend with various aspects of modernism, including the subjectivizing of revelation and relativization of doctrine. “The Catholic reply to Modernism was to a great extent developed in the Latin manuals, which dominated theology of revelation in seminary teaching throughout the first half of the twentieth century.”58 In his manuals, the German Jesuit scholar Christian Pesch, presented revelation in line with the works of Suárez and de Lugo. Pesch’s understanding of supernatural revelation saw it as strictly verbal. Another Jesuit, Avery Dulles, describes Pesch’s idea thus: “Natural revelation, says Pesch, is communicated by realities (per facta), supernatural revelation by words. Whereas deeds are suited to manifest impersonal things, words are capable of manifesting the person.”59 Therefore, in Pesch’s doctrine of revelation, God’s word is revelatory, but deeds are excluded from the concept of revelation. N. Iung, also a Jesuit, who defines revelation as “the word of God teaching and attesting,”60 presents a similar verbal notion of revelation, which was shared by many Catholic theologians of the time.61 These views bear some correspondence with extrinsicism, “the method adopted by the Scholastics, for whom the historical facts recorded in the Scriptures have only an ‘extrinsic’ value. According to this view,


59 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 137. See Christian Pesch, S.J., Institutiones propaedeuticae ad sacram theologiam (Freiburg im Br., 1924), especially 112-113.

60 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 137. Here, Dulles quotes from N. Iung, S.J., “Révélation” in Dictionnaire de théologie catholique 13/2 (Paris, 1937) cols. 2580-2618.

61 See Cahill, The Renewal of Revelation Theology, 35.
dogma expresses revealed truth by an exclusively deductive procedure, which has only an accidental or ‘extrinsic’ relation to the world of fact.”

One of the most well-known and influential theologians of the time is Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877-1964), a French Dominican theologian, who taught in Rome. Garrigou-Lagrange was a staunch defender of neo-thomism. His understanding of revelation is more dynamic than the previous two authors mentioned insofar as he includes God’s “‘free and essentially supernatural action’” as a constitutive element of revelation. At the same time, his emphasis is on mysteries and truths as the objects of revelation, which “might thenceforth be proposed infallibly by the Church.” Hence, Garrigou-Lagrange still emphasizes the propositional, instructive characteristic of revelation. In doing so, he “distinguishes sharply between revelation itself, which he regards as an objectively given word of God ‘in the form of teaching,’ and the subjective, supernatural light, which he maintains is required for the believer to make a salutary act of faith.” This distinction between revelation as instructive word and the supernatural light of faith, that is, the exclusion of the faith of the believer from the definition of revelation provides a stark contrast with Ratzinger’s thought, as will become clear in later chapters.

Hans Jürgen Verweyen describes the standard theology of revelation at that time:

In connection to the adoption of Aristotelian categories through Thomas Aquinas, the understanding of revelation was fixed on doctrines and decrees announced by God, the

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62 O’Connell, Critics on Trial, 290. N.B.: O’Connell describes extrinsicism this way in the context of Blondel’s criticism against Neo-Scholasticism in contrast to his criticism of the ‘historicism’ represented by such authors as Loisy.

63 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 138 (emphasis added).

64 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 138 (emphasis added).

65 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 138.
view of Scripture and Tradition on two sources for Christian doctrine existing next to one another. . . . A reflection upon the fact that God goes with men through a history of sin and salvation had no place in this rigid systematics. Questions of this kind were left to a spirituality detached from dogmatics and without roots in a rational, responsible faith.66

Schelkens offers a similar exposition of this line of thought, rooted in the neo-scholastic notion of scripture and tradition: “Scripture and Tradition were taken to be theological ‘sources,’ collections of revealed truth rather than revelation’s modes of transmission. This resulted in a concept of revelation that can be characterised as propositional (as a compilation of abstract concepts) and a-historical (as immune to contingency).”67 The doctrinal emphasis of Catholic theology of revelation in the early 20th century is acknowledged by Ratzinger himself, when he writes: “First of all, it is obvious that Catholic theology of revelation stresses more the moment of ‘sacra doctrina,’ thus, that revelation can be understood as God’s speech to man, even if ‘supernaturally,’ i.e., truth that is not attainable through his own searching is accessed.”68 Thus, revelation was often considered as divine instruction: God teaches man specific truths that man must then believe on the basis of God’s inability to deceive or be deceived.


One may ask where this propositional, doctrinal view of revelation originates. During this time period, Catholic theologies of revelation were strongly influenced by the thought of Francisco Suárez, S.J. (1548-1617). Jean-Luc Marion comments: “If we ask what defines revelation, Suárez suggests in response that it requires only the single sufficient proposition of the revealed object, whether or not the one to whom it comes believes in it, and without it mattering whether it comes from him directly through an inner, direct movement of God, or through an exterior intermediary.”

Developments in the theology of revelation certainly took place since the time of Suárez, but “none of these efforts to clarify the nature of revelation . . . have gotten behind the explication given by Suárez at the beginning of the modern period, for they all have shared the same presuppositions with which Suárez framed his discussion—presuppositions widely divergent from those of Thomas and many other medieval theologians.”

Thus, in order to understand prevailing notions of revelation between the two Vatican Councils, one must have some familiarity with Suárez’s theology of revelation.

Suárez “underscored the propositional character of Revelation—a statement of faith became an occasion on which some aspect of Revelation is made clear.” Tracey Rowland further describes Suárezian theology of revelation when she writes: “For Suárez, revelation does not disclose God himself, rather it concerns pieces of information which God has decided to disclose and whereas for St Thomas, things revealed led to faith, for Suárez faith confirms what

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70 Montag, “Revelation,” 58.

Ratzinger describes this view as “neo-scholastic intellectualism, for which revelation chiefly meant a store of mysterious supernatural teachings, which automatically reduces faith very much to an acceptance of these supernatural insights.”

Although Suárez’s influence is undeniable, it would also be lopsided and overly simplistic to imply that there were no other currents of thought in Catholic theology of revelation at the time. Ratzinger himself acknowledges this fact. “Today [in the mid-1950’s],” he writes, “Catholic Theology also stresses the act-character of revelation, that God speaks by acting [inden er handelt], that his teaching, goes forth not according to a kind of philosophy, but in the historical saving act of God upon man.” What is more, Ratzinger argues that this view is not an entirely new development in Catholic thought; it is, rather, commensurate with the larger Catholic theological tradition. As Ratzinger insists, “If, at that, a theologian so little suspected of innovation as Garrigou-Lagrange includes in his definition of revelation the actio divina as genus definiens, so may one view this as a proof that Catholic theology does not take a new path with such statements, but only resorts its own great tradition.”

This may well summarize the overarching intent of Ratzinger’s original Habilitationsschrift. He wants to recover and restore a more balanced and comprehensive view.

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75 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 60 (italics for Latin words added): “Wenn dabei selbst ein Neuerung so wenig verdächtiger Theologe wie Garrigou-Lagrange die actio divina als genus definiens in seine Definition von revelatio einsetzt, so darf man dies als einen Beweis dafür ansehen, dass die katholische Theologie sich mit solchen Aussagen nicht auf einen neuen Weg begibt, sondern nur zurückgreift auf ihre eigene große Überlieferung.”
of revelation from the treasury of the Catholic theological tradition in order to overcome a narrow and overly simplistic view that had become common in many intellectual circles at the time.

Before Ratzinger had begun his work on Bonaventure’s theology of revelation, Marie-Dominique Chenu had already attempted a renewal of revelation theology: “Relying chiefly on St. Thomas, but drawing inspiration at the same time from Catholic Tübingen theologians of the nineteenth century,” Chenu concluded that in faith we adhere not simply to God’s message, but to God as he makes himself present and bears witness to himself by his gracious indwelling.” This view corresponds well with what Ratzinger claims in his Habilitationsschrift of 1955, as will be seen. Chenu, like Ratzinger, took seriously the historical character of revelation and sought to surmount the regnant scholasticism of his day: “Seeking to overcome the aridity and the abstractness of the usual Scholastic analyses of revelation,” writes Dulles, “Chenu stressed, far more than Garrigou-Lagrange or Gardeil, the concrete realities of salvation history as proclaimed in the Bible.” Chenu’s book on theology at Le Saulchoir, the Dominican studium where he taught from 1928-1942, was included in the Index of Forbidden Books in 1942. The precise reasons for the condemnation of the book were not publicized. But, similar to Schmaus’s

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76 Examples of the Tübingen School are Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777-1853), and Johann Baptist Hirscher (1788-1865). See Glasow, “The Threefold Contribution,” 8.


78 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 141.
criticism of Ratzinger, Dulles speculates that “Perhaps it seemed to the authorities of [the] time that his views were dangerously close to those of the Modernists.”

Another Dominican, L. Charlier, also had one of his essays placed on the Index in 1942, likely for similar reasons. René Latourelle thinks that certain elements of Charlier’s work ought to be included “in any valid theology of revelation—the realism of God’s self-manifestation, its progressive and historical character, and its interpersonal, gratuitous nature as a divine gift of love.”

Chenu and Charlier were not the only scholars seeking to complement Thomistic approaches to revelation with ideas drawn from more recent sources. Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Maréchal, “[r]elying on St. Thomas, but exploiting also certain insights of Kant, Newman, and Blondel . . . stressed the subjectivity of the human spirit in the process of knowing.” The subjectivity of human knowledge has implications in theology of revelation, as is certainly the case in Ratzinger’s thought, as will be seen. Rousselot shows similar thoughts in this regard insofar as he thinks “that the human spirit must be inwardly transformed and attuned to the divine by the grace of faith itself,” thus viewing faith as an inherent component of divine revelation.

The above accounts of theologies of revelation between the two Vatican Councils manifest struggles within Catholic theology itself. There was a majority view that followed a

79 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 141.

80 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 142. See René Latourelle, Theology of Revelation, Including a Commentary on the Constitution “Dei Verbum” of Vatican II (Staten Island: Alba House, 1966), 221.

81 Dulles, Revelation Theology, 142.

Suárezian understanding of divine revelation that emphasized objective content and hence understood revelation primarily as a collection of propositions to be assented to in faith. However, other theologians were working to expand the notion of revelation to include the internal dynamics of knowledge. Some of these attempts were modernist, in the sense of reducing revelation to personal experience and sentiments that give little credence to objective dogmatic formulas. Some others, however, do not deny the concrete truths that God has revealed yet suggest the need for a greater appreciation for God’s revelatory action as well as the inner workings of grace as constitutive of revelation itself.

1.4 De fontibus revelationis

In this section of the chapter, the theology of revelation according to the Vatican II schema, De fontibus revelationis, is presented. An examination of this document accomplishes at least two main objectives of this dissertation. First, it offers an insight into prevalent notions of revelation leading up to Vatican II, providing an historical and theological context for Ratzinger’s own contributions to a theology of revelation. In a similar vein, insofar as Ratzinger was one of the periti who encouraged Council Fathers to reject the document, this presentation will aid the ascertainment of Ratzinger’s contribution to a theology of revelation at Vatican II and beyond. The following treatment focuses on two aspects of the theology of revelation: 1) objects of revelation and 2) the theme of scripture and tradition.

1.4.1 Objects of Revelation

With respect to ‘what’ is revealed, De fontibus revelationis used several terms. The very opening of the preparatory schema simply says that ‘revelation’ is that which is revealed, thereby indicating an objective understanding of revelation. It speaks of “The revelation, which . . . God
deigned to bestow upon man.”83 The next reference is both majestic and intellectual. It states that “under the New Covenant, through his own Son and his Apostles, God spread the treasures of his wisdom and knowledge.”84 Another reference to the object of revelation is more abstract but still noetic: “For during his lifetime Christ the Lord revealed the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven.”85 Later on in the same section, the preparatory schema speaks more concretely when it says, “the Apostles preach the doctrine of Christ.”86 Similarly, the text states in the next section that “Bishops, who succeed to the place of the Apostles in the Church, have always by their preaching handed on that doctrine and authoritatively interpreted it.”87 The content of such doctrine is indicated to be “matters of faith and morals which the Apostles received.”88 The veracity of these doctrines on faith and morals is emphasized and affirmed when De fontibus revelationis speaks of these as “truths of faith” and as “revealed truths.”89

Since the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven are conceived of in terms of true doctrines in the realm of faith and morals, stemming from the treasury of God’s infinite wisdom and infallible knowledge, it is no surprise that the reason for divine revelation is the teaching of salvific truths. As the document relates: “God sought . . . to instruct with saving counsels.”90

83 De fontibus, §1.
84 De fontibus, §2 (emphasis added).
85 De fontibus, §2 (emphasis added).
86 De fontibus, §2 (emphasis added).
87 De fontibus, §3 (emphasis added).
88 De fontibus, §4.
89 De fontibus, §5.
90 De fontibus, §15.
Note that the document does not speak of God as revealing either himself or the eternal decrees of his will as did the First Vatican Council. While ‘eternal decrees’ would fit quite easily into the category of objects of revelation as it is understood in *De fontibus revelationis*, God’s self-revelation is not presented, and *De fontibus* therefore presents revelation in a less personal way than did Vatican I.

### 1.4.2 Scripture and Tradition

*De fontibus revelationis* raises a number of points regarding scripture, tradition, and the relation between them. First of all, it is very clear in its assertion that revelation is not to be found in scripture alone but in scripture and tradition. However, the document is ambiguous about whether scripture and tradition are two sources of revelation or whether they constitute a single yet dual source. In one place, it suggests the latter, when it states: “Holy Mother Church has always believed and believes still that the complete revelation is not contained in Scripture alone but in Scripture and Tradition as in a twofold source.”

Yet, the title of §5 is “The Relation between the Two Sources,” indicating the former position, which also corresponds to the title of the whole document: *On the Sources of Revelation*. Similarly, it claims that “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments . . . constitute the other splendid source of supernatural revelation,” implying that scripture is a source of revelation distinct from tradition. This division as two distinct sources is also affirmed when it refers to them as “two sources of revelation,” but it also says that they were handed on “as a single deposit of faith,” which emphasizes their unity.

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91 *De fontibus*, §4.

92 *De fontibus*, §7.

93 *De fontibus*, §6.
Whether scripture and tradition constitute a single, two-fold source or are in fact two distinct sources of revelation, they are, of course, both involved in the transmission of revelation. With respect to this, oral tradition pre-dates written scripture and also persists down to the present day. “For as the Apostles handed on what they had received from Christ . . . and entrusted it for safekeeping to their successors . . ., so Bishops, who succeed to the place of the Apostles in the Church, have always by their preaching handed on that doctrine and authoritatively interpreted it.”\(^{94}\) Likewise, sacred scripture is “a divine instrument for expressing and illustrating the truths of faith.”\(^{95}\)

One of the most difficult questions facing the theology of revelation has been—and continues to be—the question of how the contents of scripture and tradition relate in regard to the transmission of divine revelation. Quite boldly, \textit{De fontibus revelationis} takes a specific position on this question. It was already seen in a previous quote that the document insists that “the complete revelation is not contained in Scripture alone but in Scripture and Tradition.”\(^{96}\) From this perspective, the document concludes that there are, in fact, divinely revealed truths contained in sacred tradition that are not found in sacred scripture: “Therefore, the things which divine Tradition contains by itself \textit{[ratione sui]} are drawn not from books, but from the Church’s living preaching, from the faith of believers, and from the Church’s practice.”\(^{97}\) The document reiterates this same point even more explicitly when it proclaims: “Indeed, Tradition and it alone

\(^{94}\) \textit{De fontibus}, §3.

\(^{95}\) \textit{De fontibus}, §5.

\(^{96}\) \textit{De fontibus}, §4.

\(^{97}\) \textit{De fontibus}, §4.
is the way in which some revealed truths . . . are clarified and become known to the Church.”

Even more radically, the document appears to purport that, doctrinally, sacred tradition is fully comprehensive: “But truly divine Tradition, preserved in the Church by a continuous succession, contains all the matters of faith and morals which the Apostles received.”

In that last quote, the document discussed scripture and tradition in terms of the expanse of their content. With respect to their dignity, De fontibus revelationis insists that scripture and tradition are to be respected equally. The existence of sacred scripture does not negate the dignity of sacred tradition. “Let no one, therefore, dare to consider Tradition to be of inferior worth or refuse it his faith.” The document declares further on the preservation of the dignity of apostolic tradition: “Some of the Apostles or apostolic men, under divine inspiration, also put the revelation into writing; but the living preaching [i.e., tradition] of the Apostles was neither annulled nor diminished by these writings; it was rather strengthened, preserved more securely, and authoritatively explained.” Rather than diminish the role and dignity of tradition, this quote suggests that scripture bolsters tradition.

Conversely, tradition assists in understanding sacred scripture. Scripture’s “meaning can be clearly and fully understood or even presented only by means of the apostolic Tradition.”

Again and equally emphatically, De fontibus revelationis teaches that “All of this can be done only if in explaining the Bible, they [Catholic exegetes] always give the appropriate reverence

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98 De fontibus, §5.
99 De fontibus, §4.
100 De fontibus, §5.
101 De fontibus, §3.
102 De fontibus, §5.
and obedience to the analogy of faith, the tradition of the Church, and the norms of the Apostolic See on this matter.”

*De fontibus revelationis* was highly criticized at the Second Vatican Council. Ratzinger himself was one of the document’s strongest critics. Thus, its treatment of the above aspects of divine revelation provides a useful contrast to Ratzinger’s own thought and thus aids a greater understanding of Ratzinger’s theological program.

1.5 Chapter Four of *De deposito fidei*

During the preparatory phase of the Second Vatican Council, the Theological Commission—led by Cardinal Ottaviani (President) and Sebastian Tromp (Secretary)—was given the task to handle questions concerning scripture, tradition, and matters of faith and morals. Under their guidance, a Dominican theologian, Luigi Ciappi, prepared an outline for a schema aimed at addressing certain errors threatening the faith: *De deposito fidei*. Ciappi presented the outline at the Theological Commission’s first plenary session on October 27, 1960. After this first session of the Theological Commission, a subcommission was established for the drafting of the schema *De deposito fidei pure custodiendo*. This subcommission itself was subdivided into eleven groups, each of which was charged with preparing chapters on different topics, including one on revelation and faith. “On March 21, 1960, 

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103 *De fontibus*, §28.

104 See *AD* I/I, 95. See also, Cahill, *Renewal*, 21.

1961, Fr. Édouard Dhanis presented to a subcommission the first redaction for the section of the schema *De deposito Fidei* concerning revelation and faith.”\(^\text{106}\)

In preparing the draft, Dhanis drew upon Latourelle’s attempts to renew revelation theology. It emphasized divine action within salvation history as well as Christ’s status as “the object of faith in which God most especially becomes known to us” and as “the fullness of divine revelation.”\(^\text{107}\)

Following the meeting, the draft was emended. The second draft, which was presented on July 8, 1961, was marked by changes that brought the text closer to manualist theology. Despite the observations of some of the members and consultors of the Theological Commission (e.g., de Lubac, Kloppenburg, and Congar), who called for substantial changes, the text remained more or less intact; only minor changes were made before it was sent to the Central Preparatory Commission in October of 1961. This version of the text “expressed a clear continuity with the teaching of the First Vatican Council and subsequent magisterial documents, emphasizing public, objective revelation as «locutio Dei attestantis», and emphasizing the doctrinal content of divine revelation.”\(^\text{108}\) Tromp’s influence is evident in the new draft.

Next, the Central Preparatory Commission reviewed the draft. During its third plenary session, the CPC discussed the schema *De deposito fidei* between January 20\(^\text{rd}\) and 23\(^\text{rd}\) of 1962. The debate on Chapter Four (and Chapter Five) took place on January 22\(^\text{nd}\). “Well-recorded in the *Acta et Documenta* of the Council, the debate within the CPC expressed clearly the reservations that some of the future Council Fathers had about the schemata prepared by the


\(^{108}\) Cahill, *Renewal*, 34.
TC.” After the CPC’s observations and requests for amendment were sent back to the TC, the TC responded, accepting some of the requests and explaining their rejection of others. Notably, in light of the CPC’s observations, the TC recommended that the title of Chapter Four be changed to reflect better the narrow scope of its contents: *De revelatione publica et de fide catholica.* On April 2, 1962, the CPC Subcommission on Amendments “accepted the amended version of chapter four of the Schema in its entirety.”

Chapter Four of *De deposito fidei* is comprised of twelve paragraphs. The first four paragraphs present: 1) the Catholic notion of revelation (§17), 2) revelation and the history of salvation (§18), 3) revelation and doctrine (§19), and 4) revelation and the manifestation of Christ (§20). Following these four paragraphs that offer a positive presentation of revelation, two paragraphs aim at condemning erroneous views of revelation. The first of these, §21, briefly discusses “Errors Quite Contrary to the Catholic Notion of Revelation”; while, §22 concerns “A Recent Form of Relativism.” Next, §23 speaks generally about the external signs involved in the process of revelation. More specifically, §24 discusses “a certain priority of miracles and prophecies.” §25 is Christological: “The Resurrection of Christ, the Messianic Prophecies, Christ Himself.” Ecclesiology marks §26, “The Pre-eminence of the Church as Sign.” The individual believer becomes the focus of §27 insofar as it refers to the interior dimensions of revelation. The final paragraph, §28, elaborates three different modes of the act of faith: “*Credere Deum, Deo, et in Deum.*”

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110 Cahill, *Renewal*, 103.

111 Cahill, *Renewal*, 102.
From the very beginning of the chapter, revelation is conceived in objective terms. “The external and public revelation by which the object of Catholic faith was divinely communicated to the Church is that act of speaking by which the most kind God . . . testified to the mysteries of salvation and to related truths.”\(^\text{112}\) However, the opening paragraph also acknowledges God’s interior witness, illumination of the human subject, and the inspiration of grace. This is augmented in §27—which complements the treatment of the objective, external signs (including prophecies, miracles, Christ, and the Church) in §23-26—when it says “To these signs and arguments are added many forms of internal witness and internal calls to believe.”\(^\text{113}\)

Nevertheless, the overall emphasis is still on the noetic aspect of revelation. The objects of revelation are the “truths” that are “to be held,” “the loftiest mysteries”\(^\text{114}\) as well as “universal truths of both the natural and supernatural orders,” which comprise “the doctrine of the faith” described as “the sum-total of revealed truths.”\(^\text{115}\) Notably, however, the historical, act-character, and Christological aspects of revelation are also affirmed. Included among the objects of revelation are “the long series of saving events that finally reaches its summit in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.”\(^\text{116}\) Again, the document affirms: “The fullness of divine revelation is rightly said to have appeared in Christ, the Son of God.”\(^\text{117}\)

\(^{112}\) *De deposito fidei* pure custodiendo, §17. The original Latin side-by-side with the English translation used here of Chapter IV of *De deposito fidei* is available in Cahill, *Renewal*, 266-291.

\(^{113}\) *De deposito fidei*, §27 (emphasis added).

\(^{114}\) *De deposito fidei*, §18

\(^{115}\) *De deposito fidei*, §19.

\(^{116}\) *De deposito fidei*, §18.

\(^{117}\) *De deposito fidei*, §20.
The fact that Chapter IV of *De deposito fidei* speaks not only of the objective content of revelation but also of internal witness, faith, God’s historical action, and the centrality of Christ led Ratzinger to single out sections of this chapter of the text as worth salvaging. Ratzinger included *De deposito fidei* among the schemata that he found to be “excessively scholastic” and commented on it specifically saying:

> [It] is still in no way suitable but is so faulty that as it stands it cannot be proposed to the Council. It follows no clear order as it takes up, from different areas of dogmatic theology, disconnected items, which in the way they are treated offer little or no benefit. . . . Because of this, it would be better to simply omit this schema and to transfer its more important topics, such as the condemnation of spiritualism, to another place.\(^{118}\)

Despite this general rejection of the draft-text, *De deposito fidei*, Ratzinger did suggest that parts of Chapter Four could be used in the creation of “an added initial chapter treating revelation itself”\(^{119}\) for the document on the sources of revelation.

### 1.6 Ratzinger in Relation to his Historico-Theological Context

In light of the above treatments of the theology of divine revelation between the two Vatican Councils, this present section serves to situate Ratzinger’s thought within that context. It is clear that Ratzinger himself saw severe limitations in the prevalent neo-scholastic theology of his day. He lamented that certain theologies “seem to be more counter-reformational than Catholic.”\(^{120}\)


\(^{120}\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 58: “mehr gegenreformatisch als katholisch zu sein scheinen.”
Some scholars considered Ratzinger a dangerous theologian with modernist tendencies.\textsuperscript{121} However, it would be simplistic and indeed false to perceive in the young Ratzinger a bold revolutionary figure that sought to overthrow the theology of the past in favor of an entirely new and modern approach to theology. In fact, Ratzinger was quite aware of dangerous aspects of modern thought as expressed in some Catholic theologians’ works, such as “Loisy and Tyrrell, men who thought they could not save the faith without throwing away the inner core along with the expendable shell. Such figures and their tragic schizophrenia show forth the mortal danger that threatened Catholicism at the first outbreak of the modern mind.”\textsuperscript{122}

Ratzinger did not wish to promote a modernist agenda, but he did want to overcome the limitations of the neo-scholasticism of his day precisely through a return to the broader Catholic theological tradition in order to retrieve insights that had been forgotten but which could prove invaluable for improving the theological understanding of his day. He sought “freedom from individual systemizations and reference to the whole of faith’s sources.”\textsuperscript{123} In line with this intention, he hoped to reawaken an appreciation for sectors of Catholic theological patrimony that had largely come to be ignored so that those sources could aid theological understanding today. As Ratzinger says with the concluding words of his “Foreword” to the original \textit{Habilitationsschrift}, “I place the work out of my hands in the hope that, despite all its weaknesses of which I am very well aware, it not only enriches our knowledge of the Middle Ages but—with the elucidation of the past—simultaneously serves the understanding of the

\textsuperscript{121} See Ratzinger, \textit{Milestones}, 109.

\textsuperscript{122} Ratzinger, \textit{Theological Highlights of Vatican II}, trans. Hendry Traub et al. (NY: Paulist Press, 2009), 41.

\textsuperscript{123} Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches During the Second Vatican Council,” \textit{Communio} 15:1 (Spring 1988): 135. Ratzinger wrote that statement in reference to Cardinal Frings’s, but it is certainly a goal that Ratzinger admired, shared, and helped to achieve.
present.”124 This intention was one he later held in common with Cardinal Frings, of whom he says approvingly: “He again opposed the whole breadth of the faith tradition to a theology whose memory seemed to reach back only to the First Vatican Council. He referred to the theory and the praxis of the Church Fathers not in order to indulge a romanticism for the distant past but in order to measure again and again the new developments against the spirit of the whole and to draw riches from the whole. Here too catholicity is the underlying motive.”125 This motive was Ratzinger’s real intention: to make Catholic theology more catholic.

To achieve this end, Ratzinger wrote on a scholastic doctor of the Church, St. Bonaventure, and hoped to find in his writings tools with which to overcome the all-too-constricted notion of revelation of his day, those theologies he deemed “more counter-reformational than Catholic.”126 In support of this choice, Ratzinger refers back to the approval of St. Bonaventure given in the very document that had been widely seen—and used in practice—as the basis for underpinning all philosophy and theology with the works of St. Thomas Aquinas: Aeterni Patris. On this point, Ratzinger quotes from Gilson, when he speaks of the importance of both St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure: “Therefore, Sixtus Vth promulgated without doubt in the year 1588 and Leo XIII th repeated it in the year 1879, that two [i.e., Aquinas and Bonaventure] had to create the Synthesis of scholastic thought in the Middle


126 See note 111 above.
Ages, and that even still today it is represented by [these] two.”

Ratzinger thus establishes at the beginning of his work that “Saint Bonaventure, with whom this investigation is concerned . . . is considered a summit of Catholic scholasticism.”

Ratzinger, then, uses a scholastic theologian precisely to overcome what he sees to be a wayward and narrow neo-scholasticism. He seeks to purify the theological tradition by an appeal to theological tradition. Verweyen perceives this intention in Ratzinger’s work as well:

Within an historically precise analysis of this early work in particular, it appeared possible to him at the same time to subject the chief evil of the neo-scholastic constriction of philosophical-theological thought to a radical criticism, which could be complained about by the ecclesial magisterium only with difficulty. . . . Therefore, Ratzinger probably believed—through a comparison of the fundamentally different theological approaches, which already become apparent in the commentaries on the sentences by Bonaventure and Thomas—to be able to note the, so to speak, ‘Archimedean point’ from which the one-sidedness in the neo-scholastic view of revelation, scripture, tradition, and faith as well as of the relationship between nature and grace could be unhinged. So the way would also be cleared for a new determination of the relationship between theology and philosophy, which leads out of both the modern ‘autonomy’ of reason with respect to all requirements of faith as well as avoids the separation of these two ways of thinking from one another to be found in Protestant theology.

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127 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 58, n. 2: “‘. . . Deshalb verkündet ohne Zweifel im Jahre 1588 Sixtus V. und wiederholte es im Jahre 1879 Leo XIII., dass zwei die Synthese des scholastischen Denkens im Mittelalter schaffen mussten, und dass sie auch heute noch durch zwei dargestellt wird.’ Ratzinger quotes from Gilson, Bonaventura, 674. See also Leo XIII, Aeterni Patris, 14. The work by Sixtus V from 1588 is not given by Ratzinger, but it is a papal bull entitled Triumphantis Hierusalem.

128 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 58: “der heilige Bonaventura, mit dem sich diese Untersuchung beschäftigt, . . . als Gipfelpunkt der katholischen Scholastik gilt.”

As Verweyen attests in that last quote: with his study of St. Bonaventure’s theology of divine revelation, Ratzinger hoped to make a positive contribution to many aspects of contemporary theology. He wanted to provide a truly Catholic response to the impoverished Catholic theology of his day. He also wanted to use Bonaventure as a starting point for addressing several theological disputes that persist in the modern era. He desired to offer a new understanding of the relationship between revelation, scripture, and tradition. He hoped to highlight the role of faith in revelation itself. He wanted to provide more insights into the highly debated topic of the relationship between nature and grace. He sought to encourage a renewed understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology.

Ratzinger also sought to contribute to a rapprochement between Catholic and Protestant thought on this issue. He recognized that Catholics and Protestants alike acknowledge the importance of divine revelation as a fundamental Christian reality, and yet, they tend to define revelation in quite different ways. “First of all, it is obvious that Catholic theology of revelation stresses more the moment of ‘sacra doctrina,’ thus this, that in revelation (understood as God’s speech to man) truth—even if ‘supernatural’ (i.e. not attainable through his own searching)—is disclosed. In contrast, Protestant theology puts all emphasis on this, that revelation is ‘actio divina,’ a deed of God, which may never be detached from the Person of God, thus in itself never becomes ‘on-hand’ [‘verfügbar’] for man.”

130 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 60.


132 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 59: “Zunächst fällt in die Augen, dass die katholische Theologie an der Offenbarung mehr das Moment der »sacra doctrina« betont, dies
Ratzinger already sees improvement from both sides in this regard. There is an increasing appreciation of Catholic theologians for the act-character of revelation, while contemporary Protestant theology is no longer able to deny the objective aspect of revelation, that there is some content to what God has revealed.\textsuperscript{133} Ratzinger hopes to aid the process of Catholic and Protestant thought coming closer together with respect to theology of divine revelation.

One area where the dividing line between Catholic and Protestant thought is still sharply defined is the metaphysical dimension of revelation.\textsuperscript{134} Protestant thought wants to emphasize the personal relation between God and humanity and resists the objectification of grace, while Catholic thought stresses the elevation of man’s being through grace. This difference leads to another aspect to the problem: salvation history. Revelation takes place as an historical process. Thinkers such as Oscar Cullman see the transformation of the early Church’s salvation historical view into a metaphysical view developed later as a dangerous error.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, the relationship between salvation history and metaphysics is a central issue in Ratzinger’s investigation.

Relatedly, epistemology comes into play. Catholic insistence on the possibility of ‘natural theology,’ of man’s ability to know God through natural reason through an examination of creation is often resisted by Protestants as a Hellenization of Christianity that emphasizes man’s efforts too much when the stress should be on God’s revealing action. Ratzinger asks whether a

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\textsuperscript{133} See Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 60.

\textsuperscript{134} See Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 61-62.

\textsuperscript{135} See Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 63.
Franciscan view can provide a balance between and “a genuine unity of biblical and Greek knowledge of God in the mirror of nature?”

A further issue of importance within Catholic thought as well as between Catholic and Protestant thought is the relation between scripture and tradition and both of these to revelation. The role of the Church also enters into this discussion, including with respect to the question of biblical interpretation and the development of doctrine, which are additional points of contention in contemporary theology of revelation.

All of these topics are woven into Ratzinger’s treatment of St. Bonaventure’s theology of divine revelation, and these same topics are thus included in our presentation of Ratzinger’s own theology of divine revelation. It is hoped that Ratzinger’s contribution to these themes may be expanded through the work presented in this dissertation.

136 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 65: “eine echte Einheit von biblischer und griechischer Erkenntnis Gottes im Spiegel der Natur?” See also Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI*, 53: “Protestant thought tended to divorce the theology of salvation history from the metaphysics so important to Catholic theology. They rejected this joining of faith and metaphysics as a problematic ‘Hellenization’ of the Christian tradition. To address this problem Ratzinger turned to Bonaventure.”

CHAPTER TWO

RATZINGER’S PHILOSOPHICAL PREFERENCES AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Throughout Christian history, questions concerning the relationship between theology and philosophy have been central. While Ratzinger could hardly be called a philosopher in the usual sense of the term, he nevertheless holds that philosophy—especially in the realms of metaphysics and epistemology—is crucial for the work of theology. This is particularly true in the areas of fundamental theology and dogmatic theology, the two areas in which Ratzinger was a professor. As Ratzinger posits in a footnote: “There is no doubt: metaphysics has entered the development of dogma and is not to be separated from this.”

With respect to our topic, epistemology—itself bound up with metaphysical presuppositions—is of particular importance, because the theology of revelation is inherently connected with theories of knowledge. The battle between neo-scholasticism and modernism often took place within the realm of epistemology. In the view of neo-scholastics, the modernists’ “deficiency stemmed from their theory of knowledge. Only by abandoning their epistemological assumptions and adopting those of St. Thomas could a scientific theology be constructed. . . . Pascendi applied to Modernism the same criticism that the neo-Thomists of fifty

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2 See O’Connell, *Critics on Trial*, esp. 301, where O’Connell expresses the import of a 1904 article by Edouard Le Roy, which O’Connell says “demonstrated perhaps better than any other single piece of writing how central the epistemological problem continued to be in the controversies now dramatically unfolding. What does one know, and how does one know it, undergirded the question, ‘What is a dogma?’” See also, p. 344, in reference to Pope Pius X’s *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, in which “the pope reiterated a commitment to a realist epistemology. . . . Here it seems, in clashing theories of knowledge, lay the central quarrel of the Modernist crisis.” See also, Édouard Le Roy, “Qu’est-ce qu’un dogme?,” *La quinzaine* 73 (16 April, 1905): 495-526, reprinted in *Dogme et critique* (Paris: 1907), 1-34.
years earlier had used against their opponents: the Modernists had a defective theory of knowledge.”

Hence, Ratzinger’s philosophical preferences—specifically his epistemological leanings—must be understood in order to grasp properly the starting point and overall trajectory of his understanding of divine revelation as well as to determine whether his thought has any roots in modernism. The philosophical foundations of Ratzinger’s theology of revelation are very sparsely treated in secondary sources. Specifically, up to now, Ratzinger’s commentators neither present nor explain the vast material on metaphysics and epistemology found in the original version of Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift. This chapter of the dissertation aims to correct this lacuna.

Concomitantly, it is necessary to ascertain the role of philosophy within Ratzinger’s theological framework and method, so that neither too much nor too little emphasis is granted to philosophical systems in Ratzinger’s thought in general and to his theology of divine revelation in particular.

This chapter will explore the above topics in order to provide a sufficient philosophical and theological background for the topics presented in subsequent chapters. First, we will present some basic principles that guide Ratzinger’s theological method, which will include a discussion of scripture as the soul of his theology as well as an explication of Ratzinger’s views regarding the relationship between philosophy and theology. The second section will outline the primary components of Ratzinger’s epistemology, including his reliance upon Augustine and Bonaventure’s epistemologies, for which Ratzinger has explicitly expressed preference in

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contrast to Thomistic epistemology. For this latter topic, the primary source will be the original version of the Habilitationsschrift, since it is the place where Ratzinger treats epistemology most thoroughly; other texts discuss epistemology only in general terms.

2.1 Ratzinger’s Theological Method

The primary foundation of Ratzinger’s theology is scripture. Other tools are employed as means of elucidating scripture and the revelation to which it bears witness. This section explores Ratzinger’s understanding of these tools and their interrelation. It begins with the importance of sacred scripture and his understanding of complementary exegetical tools, including patristic as well as modern and contemporary methods of exegesis. Then, Ratzinger’s understanding of the role of philosophy within theology is examined.

2.1.1 The Soul of Theology: Sacred Scripture and Its Interpretation

In his memoirs, Milestones, Ratzinger indicates that, for him, the New Testament is the soul of theology. Of course, in order for scripture to become the soul of sound theology, proper interpretation of the biblical text is necessary. In this connection, Ratzinger holds that the understanding of scripture expressed by the Church Fathers is paramount. He invokes magisterial authority to support this view: “Vatican Council I expressly followed the Council of Trent in decreeing that in ecclesiological matters and in matters of faith that meaning is to be accepted as

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4 See Joseph Ratzinger, “Commentary on Introductory Article and Chapter 1 of Gaudium et Spes,” in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II. Vol. V, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. W. J. O’Hara trans. (NY: Herder and Herder, 1969), 155, where Ratzinger speaks of “Augustine’s epistemology, which is much deeper than that of Aquinas, for it is well aware that the organ by which God can be seen cannot be a non-historical ‘ratio naturalis’ which just does not exist, but only the ratio pura, i.e. purificata or, as Augustine expresses it echoing the gospel, the cor purum (‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’).”

5 See Joseph Ratzinger, Milestones, 57.
the true meaning of Scripture ‘which Holy Mother Church has held and still holds. She has the right to judge concerning the true sense and interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. No one, therefore, is permitted to interpret Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense or contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.’”

Similarly, he cites the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, which states:

> “But since Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind, no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith, if we are to derive their true meaning from the sacred texts.” . . . [The Church] “strives to reach day by day a more profound understanding of the Sacred Scriptures in order to provide her children with food from the divine words. For this reason also she duly fosters the study of the Church Fathers, both Eastern and Western, and of the sacred liturgies.”

Among other reasons, the Church Fathers’ interpretations of scripture are invaluable for a proper reading of the Bible insofar as the Fathers are “witnesses to the text” and “members of an age that was relatively close to the origin of the Scriptures.” In fact, it was during the Patristic Era that the canon of the New Testament became definitively determined. Hence, biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers, whose authority solidified the canon of the New Testament, cannot be detached from the very existence of the New Testament as scripture.

That last statement does not mean that Catholic exegesis and Catholic theology must limit themselves solely to a consideration of patristic biblical interpretation. The whole of the Church’s tradition may and must be taken into account. For, “Certainly the richness of scriptural exegesis through the ages can help every age to a deeper understanding of the breadth of the biblical testimony, but, for that very reason, there is even less justification for limiting tradition

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8 Ratzinger, *Principles*, 137.
to a particular early period. Such a limitation—as, for instance, to the first five centuries—seems now to be ‘romantic’ or ‘classicist.’”⁹ Thus, while Ratzinger does largely fit into the ressourcement movement, he does not seek insights from the patristic or medieval eras alone.

The context for these comments is Ratzinger’s discussion of modern and contemporary conflicts over scriptural exegesis. With the development of the historical-critical method, for the sake of purity in the ‘scientific’ investigation of the bible, many exegetes began to shy away from reliance upon the thought of the Church Fathers and along with this avoided explicit submission to ecclesial authority and tradition. Supposedly for the sake of intellectual integrity, the historical-critical method needed to produce results on its own terms, unrestrained by external presuppositions and hierarchical oversight. Others became indignant towards that attitude and were thus suspicious of modern and contemporary forms of exegesis that severed the interpretation of scripture from the Church Fathers, magisterial authority, and ecclesial tradition. Two vastly different approaches to biblical exegesis were thus put at odds with one another.

Is it a foregone conclusion, however, that there is a necessary dichotomy between patristic exegesis and historical-critical hermeneutics? Are they intrinsically mutually exclusive? Ratzinger thinks not. For his part, Ratzinger strives to avoid either extreme. Instead, he proposes the need for complementary methods of biblical exegesis. Neither of these methods by itself is sufficient for current Catholic theological reflection. Catholic theology cannot limit itself solely to the thought of any given time-period in Church history, patristic or modern. Somewhat ironically, that error is a common characteristic of both the antiquarian approach, which seeks knowledge of scripture only through the lens of the Church Fathers, and the pure historical-critical approach of certain modern and contemporary biblical scholars, which seeks answers to

questions about scripture solely through its narrowly defined and so-called ‘scientific’ method. At root, both schools of thought choose a given time period—either ancient or modern—and claim that era as the sole valid one for gaining authentic insight into the meaning of the biblical text.

Ratzinger argues that the common error of these attitudes must be rejected. As he urgently insists: “Today also the proclamation of the faith must be catholic—that is, it must live from the whole, draw again and again directly from the Bible, drink again and again from the great, pure sources of all times.”10 In Ratzinger’s writings on biblical hermeneutics as well as in the application of his own theological method in his vast theological corpus, one can discern a balanced approach to biblical interpretation. Ratzinger draws upon the thought of the Church Fathers quite extensively. However, he also frequently engages with and utilizes the fruits of modern and contemporary historical-critical exegesis. Ratzinger affirms the positive contributions to theology that historical-critical investigations of the Bible have made and can still make. He even goes so far as to say: “that there is no longer a way to pass by the historical-critical method and that as such it corresponds to a demand of the subject of theology itself.”11 The reason for this view is founded upon the nature of revelation itself. “The legitimacy, indeed the necessity of the historical research of scripture,” writes Rudolf Voderholzer, “is thus based on the character of scripture as historical witness of revelation.”12

10 Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 135.


At the same time that Ratzinger affirms the validity and necessity of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, he also calls upon the need for an explicit admission of the inherent limits of what the historical critical method can attain by itself. Speaking of a narrow-minded utilization of the historical-critical method, he offers an important insight: “But this idea which identifies God’s revelation with literature and employs the dissecting knife of the literary critic to lay bare to us the inmost secrets of God, misreads both the nature of God and that of literary science” and would lead to a reading of scripture that is wholly unscriptural, since “[t]he Bible itself never implies anything like that. In the Bible the act of faith by which a person receives revelation is by no means a comparison between the book and the individual’s analytic reasoning.”

Moreover, Ratzinger points to examples where supposedly pure historical-critical approaches to scripture have resulted in erroneous results. Perhaps most convincing of the need for a criticism of historical criticism is the fact that, as he argues, the method has not de facto attained the goal for which it was initially developed and employed. The prediction that the historical-critical method—after the likeness of other modern sciences—would lead to a growing consensus amongst professional exegetes and through this unity of scientific knowledge arrive at greater certitude about what scriptural passages truly mean has not, in fact, been fulfilled. On the contrary, Ratzinger (at the time, Pope Benedict XVI) writes:

As historical-critical scholarship advanced, it led to finer and finer distinctions between layers of tradition in the Gospels, beneath which the real object of faith—the figure [Gestalt] of Jesus—became increasingly obscured and blurred. At the same time, though,

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*Werk Joseph Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI.* in *Ratzinger-Studien*, vol. 6 (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2013), 52: “Die Legitimität, ja die Notwendigkeit der historischen Erforschung der Schriften liegt also im Charakter der Schriften als geschichtliches Offenbarungszeugnis begründet.”

the reconstructions of this Jesus . . . became more and more incompatible with one another.
. . . If you read a number of these reconstructions one after the other, you see at once that far from uncovering an icon that has become obscured over time, they are much more like photographs of their authors and the ideals that they hold. . . . All these attempts have produced a common result: the impression that we have very little certain knowledge of Jesus.14

That ominous result often stems from the application of the historical-critical method detached from complementary methods of interpretation, such as the analogy of faith and the Christological reading of the Old Testament advanced by the Church Fathers. While some theologians have opined that Vatican II’s Dei Verbum was two-faced in its advocating both traditional exegesis and the historical-critical method, Ratzinger saw it as much more than a mere compromise between divided camps. Rather, he argues that “it is a synthesis of great significance: the text combines fidelity to the ecclesial tradition with the yes to critical science and thereby opens anew for the faith the way into the present day.”15 In fact, Ratzinger believes that the traditional four-fold reading of scripture is already inherently open to the historical-critical method as one component of exegesis. “We need to renew this old study of the four

14 Pope Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth, vol. 1: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, trans. Adrian Walker (NY: Doubleday, 2007), xii. See also Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 138, where Ratzinger remarks: “After the shipwreck of this position one is now all the less concerned with the literal meaning of the Bible and reads it according to a political or psychological hermeneutics—that is, one reads and confirms only one’s own self.”

senses of Scripture; it explains the indispensable place of historical exegesis, but it just as clearly shows its limits and its necessary context.”

At the heart of Ratzinger’s theology lies a dedication to a sound and well-balanced reading of sacred scripture. As Lutheran exegete, Eckart Schmidt testifies, “Joseph Ratzinger . . . throughout all his work has devoted himself so intensively to exegesis and biblical hermeneutics like few other systematic theologians (of both great Christian confessions).” His approach is neither antiquarian nor modernist. In his reading of scripture, Ratzinger seeks a catholic approach that draws from the positive insights gained through exegetical methods employed in all ages of Church history.

2.1.2 The Role of Philosophy in Theology

In the section above on Ratzinger’s theological method, nothing was said with respect to the role of philosophy within theology, apart from the generally considered ‘philosophies’ of biblical hermeneutics. Here, that particular question is addressed.


Christianity (1968/1969), Ratzinger entitled the third chapter, “The God of Faith and the God of the Philosopher,” a title shared with an even earlier work, Ratzinger’s inaugural lecture at the University of Bonn, which he gave on June 24, 1959. It is evident therefore that Ratzinger has considered the question of the relationship between philosophy and theology to be an important one across the span of his theological career. It is helpful, then, to consider his thoughts on this topic at least briefly. Despite the fact that Ratzinger rarely engages in specifically philosophical disputes, it is quite evident that he finds philosophy indispensable for the task of theology.

In The Nature and Mission of Theology, Ratzinger offers a diachronic exposition of the history of prevailing approaches to the relationship between philosophy and theology as a precursor to offering his own propositions on the right relationship between them. He begins with a discussion of “The Unity of Philosophy and Theology in Early Christianity,” when Christianity was intimately linked to a search for true philosophy.19 “For them [the Church Fathers],” Ratzinger wrote in the original version of his Habilitationsschrift, “Christianity was the philosophy, the true philosophy in contrast with the false philosophy of the heathens.”20 Philosophy was a welcome tool that the Fathers of the Church utilized to overcome the irrationality of the pagan world. The early Church took it upon herself—as a matter of vocation—to bring the reasonableness of Christianity to the world. “Thus, Christian mission contributed forcefully to demythologizing the thinking of the world and strengthened the course

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of *logos* against *mythos*. . . . Christianity accepted rational philosophy as a partner in its labor for souls.”

After the consideration of the relation between philosophy and theology in the Patristic era, Ratzinger offers a general outline of the way in which the original unity between philosophy and theology changed: first into a clear distinction between them (chiefly based upon Aquinas’s approach) through a stronger separation in the late Middle Ages to an even more radical opposition between the two in the modern period.

In the modern era, well-known and influential philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers argued that philosophy and theology could not have any meaningful mutual relationship. At the same time, a corresponding opinion originated from the side of theologians, especially in the emergence of the Protestant reformation:

Martin Luther inaugurated a new era of antagonism to philosophy for the sake of the unadulterated Word of God. His battle cry, ‘*sola scriptura*’, was a declaration of war not merely against the classical interpretation of Scripture advanced by tradition and the Magisterium of the Church but also against Scholasticism, that is, the use of Aristotle and Plato in theology. For Luther, the incorporation of philosophy into theology automatically destroys the message of grace, hence, the gospel itself in its very heart. . . . On this reading, philosophy is the sheer corruption of theology.

Other theologians, such as Karl Barth (with his strong rejection of the *analogia entis*), have continued to advance this line of thought in recent times. Hence, an impasse seemingly appears from both sides of the divide: “On the one hand, philosophy defends itself against the prior given which faith implies for thinking; it feels that such a given inhibits the purity and freedom of its reflection. Theology, on the other hand, defends itself against the prior given of philosophical relationships.

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knowledge as a threat to the purity and novelty of faith.”

Similarly, Emil Brunner “considered the patristic synthesis of the God of faith and the God of reason a fundamental evil” and “deems . . . any philosophical doctrine of God fundamentally incompatible with the Christian belief in God.”

Is there any solution?

Ratzinger holds that there is. In fact, he thinks the common attitude that philosophy and theology are mutually exclusive is erroneous and does not correspond to the history of either academic field. In response to such an erroneous view, Ratzinger writes:

In reality, however, the pathos of such denials cannot be maintained to the end. How could philosophical thinking make a beginning at all without prior givens? Since Plato, philosophy has always thrived on critical dialogue with some great religious tradition. Its own standing has always been bound to the status of the traditions which lie at the starting point of its struggle for truth. Whenever it discontinues such dialogue, it quickly dies out even as pure philosophy. Conversely, in reflecting upon the revealed Word, theology simply cannot avoid proceeding in a philosophical manner. As soon as it no longer repeats, no longer merely gathers historical marginalia, but endeavors to understand in the proper sense of the word, it enters into the realm of philosophical thinking. As a matter of fact, neither Luther nor Barth managed to divest himself of philosophical thinking and of a certain philosophical patrimony, and the very least that can be said is that the history of Evangelical theology is no less profoundly shaped by exchange with philosophy than that of its Catholic counterpart.

Ratzinger thus seeks to show that philosophy and theology have always had a mutual relationship and, in many ways, have depended upon one another. More directly pertinent to the


topic of this dissertation, it is abundantly clear that theology cannot proceed without some philosophical thinking, if it is to be ‘faith seeking understanding.’ Christian faith “wishes to make a reasonable statement” and thus “Theology . . . is a rationality that is inherent in the faith and that makes explicit the inner coherence of the faith. This explains the peculiar phenomenon that, at the time of its beginning, Christian faith found its ally not among the other religions but in the great philosophy of the Greeks.”

With these observations in mind, one can understand Ratzinger’s lament over the ever increasing separation between philosophy and theology. “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 is, and must be, a human reason in faith.”

After making general comments about philosophy in relation to theology, Ratzinger specifies more narrowly the precise area of philosophy to which the likes of Luther and Barth objected: metaphysics, particularly the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle. Lutheran opposition to the Hellenization of Christian doctrine through the assumption of Greek philosophy could only go so far, however, insofar as Protestant orthodoxy assents to the creeds of the early ecumenical councils, which stand as “the epitome of the Hellenization and ontologization of faith. It is a fact that both the doctrine of the triune God and the profession of faith in Christ as true God and true man had moved the ontological content of the Bible’s utterances to the center of Christian thought and belief.” Speaking of Nicea, Ratzinger remarks that “the Council

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27 Ratzinger, “The Church and Scientific Theology,” 337.

28 Ratzinger, “Commentary on Gaudium et Spes,” 120.

Fathers used philosophy in order to clarify, beyond the possibility of misunderstanding, the belief that is the essence of Christianity.”

Despite the attempt of some to pursue a more historically-minded approach to philosophy in contrast to metaphysics, Ratzinger believes that such an approach is ultimately untenable; for, “no one can exclude the question of metaphysics from philosophical inquiry . . . To cease asking about the origin and goal of the whole of reality is to leave out the characteristic element of philosophical questioning itself.”

The disavowal of metaphysics does not destroy philosophy alone. Contrary to the desire of some theologians to oppose the use of metaphysics in theology, Ratzinger holds that “the theologian stands to lose most by divorcing the two.” As Emery de Gaál relates: “Ratzinger asserts that if Christianity were to surrender the metaphysical dimensions of the Judeo-Christian understanding of God, then invariably it would simultaneously give up its claim to universality.”

In light of this strong conviction that metaphysics plays a crucial role in the task of theology, Ratzinger gives his own proposal for a new—or perhaps re-newed—relationship between philosophy and theology. In this regard, he argues that metaphysics is a point of intersection for philosophy and theology. As Ratzinger insists: “the question of metaphysics and the question of God are fundamentally the same. The problem of God is not a supplementary section of metaphysics, but is posited simultaneously with the question of being itself, while

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conversely, the question of being implies the question of God.”34 Elsewhere, he writes about philosophy and theology: “we held that both disciplines need this dimension of thought [i.e., metaphysics] and that it is here that they find themselves indissolubly associated.”35 Speaking of biblical faith and metaphysics in Ratzinger’s thought, de Gaál states: “In relatedness to the other, both disciplines gain their respective contours, acquire greater depth and achieve their ‘requisite critical purification and transformation.’”36

Christianity is intrinsically bound to metaphysics. For, “faith advances a philosophical, more precisely, an ontological claim when it professes the existence of God, indeed, of a God who has power over reality as a whole. . . . The scope of the assertion that there is a God who is the creator and savior of the whole universe reaches beyond the religious community which makes it. It is . . . a statement about reality as it is in itself.”37 As Matthew Levering explains, “the theologian needs philosophy—especially metaphysics—to be able to formulate the testimony of faith. Metaphysics is required to defend theology’s claim that God exists and acts with power over the whole of reality.”38

This aspect of faith is seen already in the Old Testament. “Here the faith of Israel unquestionably steps beyond the limits of a single people’s peculiar worship: it puts forth a

34 Ratzinger, “Commentary on Gaudium et Spes,” 132-133.


universal claim, whose universality has to do with its being rational”\textsuperscript{39} as opposed to the irrationality of pagan idolatry. The claim of the rationality of ancient Jewish faith laid the ground-work for the further synthesis between divine revelation and philosophy, which itself is evident in the New Testament. “For this reason,” continues Ratzinger:

it is incorrect to reduce the concepts of \textit{logos} and \textit{aletheia}, upon which John’s Gospel centers the Christian message, to a strictly Hebraic interpretation, as if \textit{logos} meant ‘word’ merely in the sense of God’s speech in history, and \textit{aletheia} signified nothing more than ‘trustworthiness’ or ‘fidelity.’ For the very same reason, there is no basis for the opposite accusation that John distorted biblical thought in the direction of Hellenism. On the contrary, he stands in the classical sapiential tradition. It is precisely in John’s writings that one can study, both in its origins and in its outcome, the inner movement of biblical faith in God and biblical Christology toward philosophical inquiry.\textsuperscript{40}

The Christian faith’s claim to universal validity, which lies at the heart of its missionary mandate, demands that it be “oriented beyond the symbolism of the religious toward an answer meant for all, an answer which also appeals to the common reason of mankind. . . . The question of God, therefore, obliges theology to take a position in the philosophical debate. . . . By the same token, a philosophy which wishes to remain true to its object must open itself to faith’s claim on reason.”\textsuperscript{41} True and honest philosophy must be open to insights from faith. It cannot simply avoid the claims faith makes about reality. “Christian faith is characterized by its desire to unlock real knowledge and as such has direct relevance to intellectual reasoning.”\textsuperscript{42}

As an example of the complementarity between the God of faith and Greek philosophy’s notion of God, which supports Christian missionary activity, one can point to the absolute perfections predicated of God, such as eternity, truth, and omnipotence, “which are common to


\textsuperscript{40} Ratzinger, \textit{Nature and Mission}, 24-25.


\textsuperscript{42} Ratzinger, “The Church and Scientific Theology,” 338.
the God of Israel and to the concept of God of natural reason. In this way, the possibility of a universally communicability of biblical faith is opened, whereby the absolute perfection of the God of Israel can be explained. This missionary-apologetic tendency is strengthened with the transition from Judaism to the essentially more expansive Christianity. De Gaál expresses this complementarity of philosophy and faith in Ratzinger’s thought as follows: “The historical horizon of the philosophical quest for God is ultimately open to the same God as the one proclaimed by Judeo-Christian revelation. The truth of humankind’s existential and intellectual search is welcomed and transformed by the true God in his self-communication. . . . Philosophical truth becomes personal, divine-human truth in Jesus Christ as the Logos.” As Ratzinger himself insisted in his inaugural lecture at the University of Bonn: “The God of Aristotle and the God of Jesus Christ is one and the same; Aristotle has recognized the true God, whom we may grasp more deeply and more purely in the faith, just as we will grasp God’s essence once again more intimately and more closely in the otherworldly vision of God.”

“With this,” writes Felix Resch, “Ratzinger makes use of a proportional analogy between


44 de Gaál, “Pope Benedict,” 275.

Christian faith and philosophical knowledge of God on the one hand, *visio beatifica* and faith on the other hand.”

In addition to the necessity of engaging with philosophy for the sake of missionary activity, faith seeks understanding, because the believer’s love for God includes a desire to know and understand God more. “Faith is life because it is relation, that is to say, it is knowledge which becomes love, love which comes from knowledge and which leads to knowledge.”

“Love is the desire for intimate knowledge, so that the quest for intelligence can even be an inner requirement of love. Put another way, there is a coherence of love and truth which has important consequences for theology and philosophy.” As de Gaál expresses this idea: “Truth and charity become synonymous in Christ.”

The danger of a radical separation between philosophy and theology is that humanity will stop posing fundamental questions about reality. Put another way, Ratzinger “proposes that the testimony of faith enables the philosopher to continue raising the deepest questions rather than giving up in despair.” Faith encourages these lines of questioning. “Faith thus both supports and requires philosophy’s dynamic of fruitful questioning about ultimate questions.”

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50 de Gaál, “Pope Benedict” 275.

51 Levering, “Jesus and Metaphysics,” 309.

52 Levering, “Jesus and Metaphysics,” 310.
Ratzinger asserts: “faith needs philosophy because it needs man who questions and seeks. It is not questioning, in fact, which places obstacles to faith but that closure which no longer wants to question and holds truth to be unreachable or not worth striving for. Faith does not destroy philosophy, it champions it. Only when it takes up the cause of philosophy does it remain true to itself.”

Ratzinger believes that the rejection of this perspective has drastic consequences. According to de Gaál, Ratzinger “states that negating the possibility of a correlation between philosophy and revelation amounts to abolishing humankind.” The danger is expressed sharply in Ratzinger’s own words: “Where the metaphysical question is definitely rejected, the ‘death of God’ is the inescapable consequence. But equally inescapable is the mutilation of man and the dimension of wisdom, and any theology which survives is inconsequential chatter.”

The fundamental basis for a close relationship between philosophy and theology is found in the doctrine of the incarnation: the Word became flesh. “Christ—so Justin argues—according to the word of the Gospel is ‘the Logos,’ that is, reason, meaning: thus everything that is reasonable, meaningful is also Christian, because indeed reason, meaning and Christ are one and the same. . . . Thus, one who connects Christianity and Greek reason does not chain heterogenous elements to one another but brings together what belonged together long ago.”

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54 de Gaál, “Pope Benedict, 275.

55 Ratzinger, “Commentary on Gaudium et Spes,” 133.

56 Ratzinger, “Theologia Perennis?: Über Zeitgemäßheit und Zeitlosigkeit in der Theologie,” Wort und Wahrheit 15 (1960): 180: “Christus—so argumentiert Justin—ist nach dem Wort des Evangeliums ,der Logos’, d.h. die Vernunft, der Sinn: also ist alles, was vernunft-haft, was sinn-haft ist, auch christlich, weil ja Vernunft, Sinn und Christus ein und dasselbe sind. . . . Wer also Christentum und griechische Vernunft verbindet, kettet nicht heterogene Elemente aneinander, sondern bringt zusammen, was vom Wesen her längst zusammengehörte.”
In conclusion, then, Ratzinger clearly argues for a necessary symbiosis between philosophy and theology. Ratzinger views philosophy as indispensable in the task of theology. Most relevant for the present work, “[Ratzinger] sees philosophy preparing humankind for becoming the properly prepared addressee of divine revelation.” Thus, a consideration of Ratzinger’s philosophical preferences for the purpose of understanding his theology of divine revelation is justified. In fact, it is required. In what follows, Ratzinger’s discussion of philosophy in relation to theology of revelation is presented as a precursor to the more specifically theological topics to be addressed thereafter.

2.2 Ratzinger on the Relation between Bonaventure and Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas

The above treatment of the relationship between philosophy and theology has an important antecedent in Ratzinger’s early work, notably, in both versions of his Habilitationsschrift. In the unapproved, original version, Ratzinger makes considerable reference to Bonaventure’s use of philosophy in his theology of revelation, often comparing and contrasting Bonaventure’s views to those of Aquinas and others. In that work, Ratzinger’s treatment of Bonaventure’s philosophy is narrowly focused on its use in theology. However, in the final, approved version of his Habilitationsschrift, Theology of History in St. Bonaventure, Ratzinger offers an insightful and unique contribution to the already extensively debated question of Bonaventure’s philosophy in general. In the present work, this second, more general question of Bonaventure’s philosophy is considered first, before delving into the specifics of his philosophy as it relates to theology of divine revelation.

\[57\] de Gaál, “Pope Benedict,” 274.

The question of Bonaventure vis-à-vis Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas constitutes the concluding section of Ratzinger’s approved Habilitationsschrift. This fact highlights the importance of that question in Ratzinger’s thought and work. The concluding chapter, Chapter IV, is entitled: “Aristotelianism and the Theology of History.” It is divided into two main sections: “The modern controversy concerning Bonaventure’s anti-Aristotelianism” (#15) and “The historico-theological significance of Bonaventure’s anti-Aristotelianism” (#16).

In the first main section, Ratzinger starts by outlining the thesis of Étienne Gilson and those who agree with him. Their main conclusion is that Bonaventure is an Augustinian and as such is concomitantly anti-aristotelian. Then, Ratzinger outlines a contrary view exemplified by Fernand Van Steenberghen, who argues that Bonaventure is an augustinizing aristotelian. Finally, Ratzinger offers his own position which lies somewhere between those two main camps. Ultimately, Ratzinger finds both schools of thought insufficient and erroneous, despite their respective positive contributions and their accuracy on certain, specific points.

Jules d’Albi is credited with being the first to identify Bonaventure’s anti-aristotelianism. Gilson, however, has for a long time been the most significant figure in interpreting Bonaventure’s work as radically anti-aristotelian. Gilson argues that the foundation of Bonaventure’s rejection of aristotelianism is Bonaventure’s commitment to augustinianism. Gilson differs from Franz Ehrle’s interpretation, which holds that Bonaventure developed his thought based on a traditional augustinianism.59 For Gilson, Bonaventure’s thought is to be understood as “Augustinian in the sense that he created an integral anti-Aristotelian Augustinianism as a new synthesis against the threat to Christian thought represented by

59 See Ratzinger, Theology of History, 120-121.
Aristotle.”

In some way, Gilson views Bonaventure as an anti-Thomas insofar as they differ in their approach to Aristotle. Aquinas is pro-Aristotle; Bonaventure is contra-Aristotle and “makes use of certain Platonic structural elements which had already been refashioned in a Christian way by Augustine.” Gilson’s interpretation garnered much attention and the approval of several scholars.

Van Steenberghen, however, disagreed sharply with Gilson’s interpretation. Van Steenberghen points out that, in the early thirteenth century, there was no such thing as either augustinianism or aristotelianism, per se. It is true, however, that over the course of the thirteenth century Aristotle’s influence gradually increased at an impressive rate. Nevertheless, at that time, there was no explicit, conscious notion of a conflict between augustinian philosophy and the work of Aristotle. Instead, Van Steenberghen posits, “It was a question of a neo-Platonizing Aristotelianism which lacked homogeneity. The theologians joined this with the traditional doctrines of Latin theology for which Augustine was the main source.”

“According to Van Steenberghen,” Ratzinger writes, “Bonaventure remains basically within the neo-Platonizing Aristotelianism adopted by his Franciscan Masters and develops it further.” Thus, Van Steenberghen essentially views Bonaventure’s work as an eclectic form of aristotelianism with neo-platonic and augustinian influences. In comparison to Thomas Aquinas, then, “The philosophy of Bonaventure and that of Thomas do not stand opposed to one another as an

60 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 121.


62 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 126. It is interesting to note that, during the time Ratzinger was writing his Habilitationsschrift, Van Steenberghen’s work had received little attention in Germany.

63 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 126.
Augustinian system against an Aristotelian system, but rather as two forms of neo-Platonizing Aristotelianism which have not been equally developed.”

Followers of Bonaventure saw Aquinas’s more developed aristotelianism as dangerous, and hence it was they who turned to Augustine as a corrective force along with other thinkers such as Avicebron and Avicenna, and even, curiously, Aristotle himself. This amalgamation of various philosophical influences constituted a late thirteenth century neo-augustinianism.

Along with Gilson, Van Steenberghen admits that, in his later works, Bonaventure does take up “a position against the Aristotelianism of Thomas.” However, in Van Steenberghen’s estimation, Bonaventure primarily encouraged the work of others, especially John Peckham, who developed the Augustinian school, which—at any rate—did not last long due to the rise of Scotism shortly thereafter. Essentially, the difference between Gilson and Van Steenberghen lies in the fact that the former views Bonaventure as an augustinian from the beginning who had fundamental disagreements with Aristotle from the start, while the latter sees Bonaventure’s anti-thomist/anti-aristotelian proclivity as a rather late development in Bonaventure’s thought.

In relation to these two contrasting views, Ratzinger offers his own insightful analysis that comes to conclusions quite different than both Gilson and Van Steenberghen. First, Ratzinger admits, “It must be conceded to Van Steenberghen that there is much Aristotelian material in Bonaventure.” In fact, notes Ratzinger, “in the first period of Bonaventure’s scientific activity, which lasted until 1257, there are over four-hundred citations in which

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64 Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 126.


Aristotle is treated expressly in a friendly manner; and we have found no text which would indicate the opposite. During this period, Aristotle is the Philosopher for Bonaventure just as he would always be for Thomas.”

Against Van Steenberghen, however, a number of scholars, such as L. Veuthey, P. Alszeghy, and Da Vinca, argue that, while Bonaventure borrows much of Aristotle’s content, his formal approach to philosophy is drastically contrary to Aristotle. Gilson and Simon Brounts offer their own critique of Van Steenberghen, which Ratzinger thinks is more important than the other critique just mentioned. “According to them [Gilson and Brounts],” Ratzinger explains, “the decisive point is that Bonaventure rejected the autonomy of reason including the relative autonomy of Thomistic Aristotelianism. He demanded a philosophy that would be radically Christian, that is, a philosophy centered on Christ and worked out from Christian Revelation.”

Ratzinger essentially agrees with this criticism against Van Steenberghen. He concludes that “if we accept this thesis, then Bonaventure’s work must be seen to have its place in the controversy concerning the unity of Christian wisdom and the duality of philosophy and theology. . . . It then becomes understandable that the anti-Aristotelianism of Bonaventure is directed not primarily against the content of Aristotle’s statements but rather against the attempt to make philosophy independent.”

Despite the aforementioned affinity for Gilson’s critique of Van Steenberghen, Ratzinger’s divergence from Gilson’s own evaluation of Bonaventure’s thought emerges here:

68 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 120.
69 See Ratzinger, Theology of History, 129.
70 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 130.
71 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 132.
Certainly we cannot and should not speak of an Augustinian philosophy in opposition to an Aristotelian philosophy, for this would mean that we would miss the heart of the question. On the other hand, the notion of the undivided unity of Christian wisdom is a genuinely Augustinian concern and not simply a Platonic idea. It was this notion that Bonaventure defended against the new Aristotelian understanding of the Christian mode of thought. Nonetheless, it would seem to me to be an over-simplification if we should want to designate the entire structure of Bonaventure’s thought as an “Augustinianism” on this basis alone.72

The recognition that Bonaventure’s main concern was the proper relationship between philosophy and theology is at the heart of Ratzinger’s evaluation of Bonaventure’s relation to Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. As Ratzinger states: “When he [Bonaventure] criticizes Aristotle, he does not do so with the intention of recommending Plato or some form of ‘Augustinian’ philosophy; such notions would have been foreign to him. Rather, his concern is to criticize philosophy as such.”73 As will become clear later, this criticism of philosophy is not absolute, but limited. Nevertheless, the point is well taken: it is not primarily Aristotle himself that Bonaventure was concerned about—even though he did criticize certain points of Aristotle’s philosophy—but a tendency found particularly in Latin Averroism (from around 1267) to grant too much autonomy to philosophy.74

There are certain Aristotelian or Latin Averroist doctrines that Bonaventure does critique extensively. Ratzinger proceeds to develop the nuances of Bonaventure’s position in this respect in the next main section (#16) of his work, under the heading “The Historico-Theological Significance of Bonaventure’s anti-Aristotelianism.” There are three major errors in the Aristotelianism of his day to which Bonaventure strongly objected: the eternity of the world, the unity of the intellect in all men, and the necessity of fate. As Ratzinger explains:


There is a violation of the *causa essendi* in the doctrine of the *aeternitas mundi*; there is a violation against the *ratio intellegendi* in the thesis of the *unitas intellectus*; finally, there is a violation against the *ordo vivendi* in the affirmation of the *necessitas fatalis*. Thus, the triad of errors violates the three basic forms of truth to which the three primary philosophical disciplines—physics, logic, and ethics—are ordered.\(^{75}\)

Eventually, Bonaventure traced these three errors to a more fundamental, prior error: “the denial of the *exemplaritas divina*.”\(^{76}\)

Bonaventure’s concern over the rejection of exemplarity is connected with his growing emphasis on the centrality of Christ. He thus sees a denial of divine exemplarity as “an assault against the ‘Center,’ that is, against Christ who, as the ‘middle person’ of the Trinity, appears as the one who bears the *divina exemplaritas mundi*.”\(^{77}\) Here, the theological basis of Bonaventure’s philosophical concern is clear. Additionally, “we must realize that Bonaventure’s polemic is directed not primarily against Aristotle but against the Aristotelians of his age. . . . the concrete eschatological threat for Christianity arises not from Aristotle, but from the apparently Christian Aristotelians.”\(^{78}\)

At this point, Ratzinger turns his attention to Bonaventure vis-à-vis Aquinas. The opposition between the Angelic and Seraphic Doctors may not be as pronounced as many might assume. Ratzinger insists that “None of the main ideas of Bonaventure’s anti-Aristotelianism can be called expressly anti-Thomist.”\(^{79}\) While Bonaventure opposes Aquinas’s assertion that it is—

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\(^{75}\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 134.

\(^{76}\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 135.

\(^{77}\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 136. The theme of Christ as the center is an important part of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation.


\(^{79}\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 136. Interestingly, something similar can be said justifiably about Ratzinger’s relation to Aquinas. As Fergus Kerr states: “‘Non-Thomistic’ is one
philosophically—impossible to disprove the eternity of the world, Bonaventure does acknowledge Aquinas’s distinction between philosophy and theology on this point, and Aquinas himself, of course, affirms that the world is not eternal on theological grounds, and thus rejects Aristotle’s thesis of the eternity of the world.

Interestingly, epistemology does not factor into Bonaventure’s sharp critique. Typically, scholars highlight the illuminationist theory of knowledge as the main difference between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism. Yet, “the doctrine of illumination is entirely absent in the canon of anti-Aristotelianism. . . . As a matter of fact, for Bonaventure it was not a decisive question in the matter of Aristotle and Augustine.”80 Ratzinger continues: “First, Bonaventure sees Aristotle also as a witness for the doctrine of illumination; second, the Seraphic Doctor sees the epistemological theory of Aquinas to be a form of illumination. It is a form which Bonaventure himself rejects, but which nonetheless remains within the framework of theological possibilities.”81 Thus, Bonaventure’s criticism of Aquinas is focused elsewhere.

There are three specific tenets held by Aquinas that Bonaventure critiques: “the doctrine of the non-composition of *substantiae separatae* [i.e., Thomas’s rejection of universal hylomorphism]; the affirmation of the real distinction between the soul and its faculties; and, finally, the thesis that the *potestas intellectiva* is the primary seat of beatitude.”82 Despite these

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81 Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 137. It would have been valuable for Ratzinger to present in more detail the basic rationale behind Bonaventure’s assertion that Aristotle (and Aquinas) are proponents of an illumination theory and for him to evaluate whether or not Bonaventure is correct on this point.

82 Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 137.
differences, the tone of Bonaventure’s criticism of Aquinas on these points is relatively mild. According to Ratzinger, Bonaventure “does not include Aquinas himself among the Aristotelians with whom he differed. No text can be found to provide any serious support for the opposite view.”83 The main concern that Bonaventure has about Aquinas is his tendency “of putting too much confidence in Aristotle.”84

As already indicated, Bonaventure does not stand in wholesale rejection of Aristotle’s philosophy. In fact, he adopts aspects of Aristotle’s thought. Bonaventure’s chief concern is the adoption of any given philosophy in a way that is detrimental to the unity of Christian wisdom. “The statements in question are in no way decisively anti-Aristotelian; they are simply anti-philosophical. . . . every philosophy is inadequate. . . . Here we have a simple anti-intellectualism which is convinced that it must raise a warning voice against the tendency to place too much confidence in the intellect as such.”85 Ratzinger shares Bonaventure’s caution on this point. As Rausch testifies: “Ratzinger admires especially Bonaventure’s absolute rejection of any philosophy not integrated into Christian wisdom. For both, Christ is the true wisdom.”86

Despite some of the strong language employed in his criticism, Bonaventure’s caution against overconfidence in philosophy does not amount to a complete rejection of its usefulness. Quoting from Bonaventure, Ratzinger writes: “‘He who loves Scripture, loves philosophy as well; for with it he can strengthen his faith. . . . If, however, you are a fanatic for philosophy, then you say: How can Aristotle be mistaken? Then you do not love Scripture and you

necessarily fall from the faith.”⁸⁷ In light of this nuance, Ratzinger is able to conclude: “This anti-philosophical attitude, which is identical with anti-Aristotelianism, is limited and not total. It is directed against a philosophy which fails to recognize its true function; which makes itself self-sufficient and thereby becomes an eschatological sign of perdition”⁸⁸; and “For the Christian, he [Bonaventure] rejects any philosophy that is not ready to be integrated into the orderly structure of Christian wisdom.”⁸⁹ In other words, and corresponding more specifically to the topic of this dissertation, “Philosophy must be integrated into the truth coming from Revelation.”⁹⁰

Again, in Ratzinger’s analysis, Bonaventure’s view “does not intend to condemn a philosophy which is used properly. In particular, it does not intend to condemn the proper use of Aristotle.”⁹¹ Despite Bonaventure’s disagreement with Aristotle on some points, particularly on the question of the eternity of the world, this “objective difference does not keep Bonaventure from holding Aristotle in high regard nor from granting a basic recognition to the Aristotelian philosophy.”⁹²

Contra Gilson, Ratzinger posits that “Bonaventure had never set out to be an ‘Augustinian’”; “His intention had been merely to give that place to Augustine which he deserved just as he wished to give to Aristotle the place he deserved. . . . it is not only Aristotle


who has a subordinate and ministerial position, but Augustine as well.”

Ratzinger insists “that Bonaventure is quite capable of very critical observations about Augustine.”

In the final analysis, then, Bonaventure is not truly anti-Aristotle. Certainly, he rejects some of Aristotle’s ideas, but he also adopts several others as well. Bonaventure opposes, however, what he perceives to be a dangerous form of aristotelianism that arose in the late thirteenth century: Latin Averroism. Furthermore, despite Gilson’s analysis, Bonaventure is not a pure Augustinian and never intended to be. At bottom, Bonaventure is an advocate of a unified Christian wisdom that takes divine revelation as its primary source and uses philosophy judiciously insofar as it aids the enhancement of faith.

This Bonaventurian approach to philosophy is reflected in Ratzinger’s own writings on the subject. As Peter Hofmann contends, in reference to Ratzinger’s understanding of philosophy: “It [philosophy] must cross over into theology; theology in turn flows into holiness.” He insists on the necessity of metaphysics for theology and he advocates for a closer bond between philosophy and theology than many in the modern era would like, as was

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93 Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 158. Given this and similar statements in the text, it is curious that Thomas Rausch would say that “Ratzinger did his Habilitation . . . on the neo-Augustinian thought of St. Bonaventure” (*Pope Benedict XVI*, 52).

94 Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 158.

discussed earlier. Ratzinger expresses a preference for Augustine’s epistemology in comparison to Aquinas’s theory of knowledge. Nevertheless, Ratzinger is not a philosopher in any strict sense of the term. He is even much less involved in specific philosophical discussions than Bonaventure. Like Bonaventure, Ratzinger’s primary source for theology is sacred scripture. He is willing to utilize philosophy and scientific methods insofar as they aid in the understanding of revelation and help to explicate the truth of the faith. Ratzinger is not beholden to a set philosophical system and thus exemplifies the kind of theology that St. Bonaventure advocates.

2.3 Anthropology: Metaphysics and Epistemology in Relation to Salvation History

The study of revelation involves a nexus of important issues. Insofar as divine revelation is addressed to man, revelation relates to an understanding of the human person: philosophical and theological anthropology. Anthropology itself involves questions of metaphysics and epistemology: what man is as well as what man knows and how man knows it. In this section, these topics are explored as a means of gaining insight into the philosophical (and theological) foundations undergirding Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation.

The most extensive discussion of metaphysics and epistemology in Ratzinger’s vast corpus is found in the original version of his Habilitationsschrift. In that work, Ratzinger offers a detailed presentation and analysis of several metaphysical and epistemological aspects of Bonaventure’s thought, often comparing them with the work of Aquinas. Fitting for a study of

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Bonaventure, Ratzinger’s presentation is not purely philosophical; it involves philosophy insofar as it is crucial for the overall theological problematic. Hence, his presentation—as found in Chapter Three of his original Habilitationsschrift—is entitled: “The Relation of Salvation-Historical and Metaphysical Perspectives in the Theology of St. Bonaventure.”

It is beyond the purview of this present work to go into every detail of Ratzinger’s presentation. Thus, the current discussion will limit itself mostly to a general summary of Ratzinger’s presentation. Certain aspects of his treatment of the issues, however, are more important than others. Therefore, some topics will be treated in more thorough detail than other topics. The most important aspect of this part of the investigation is the epistemological component. However, to grasp Bonaventure’s—and by extension Ratzinger’s—epistemology some familiarity with the other issues is required. Hence, at least a brief treatment of such topics is warranted here.

Generally speaking, this section will follow the outline that Ratzinger follows in his own presentation as found in Chapter Three of the original version of his Habilitationsschrift. The chapter under consideration is divided into two main parts: 1) a terminological and historical investigation of nature and the supernatural (§8 in the original work) and 2) Bonaventure’s anthropology in the conflict of metaphysical and salvation-historical perspectives (§9 in the original text). The first part is further divided into two sections: a) nature and b) supernatural and related terms. The second part is subdivided into three sections (or, more precisely, two sections and an appendix): a) the concept of the image of God, b) divine-likeness through grace, and—of particular importance—c) Bonaventure’s epistemology. For the sake of simplicity, Ratzinger’s

97 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 256-374. The sheer volume of his treatment bespeaks the importance Ratzinger placed upon these considerations for his study of Bonaventure’s theology of revelation.
sections and subsections will be presented in the same order but not according to the same section headings. Instead, the current presentation will simply use one level of subdivision, as follows: 1) nature, 2) the supernatural, 3) image of God, 4) divine likeness, and 5) Bonaventure’s epistemology.

In what follows, it may be helpful to keep in mind that there is some correspondence between the first and third themes (nature and image of God) as well as between the second and fourth themes (the supernatural and divine likeness). Furthermore, the topic of Bonaventure’s epistemology will involve aspects of all four of those other themes, especially insofar as the distinction between natural knowledge and knowledge of revelation is discussed along with the concomitant difference between natural and supernatural illumination. While at first these topics might not appear to be crucial for theology of divine revelation, hopefully their relation to revelation will become clearer in subsequent chapters.

2.3.1 Nature

Ratzinger notes elsewhere that the concepts of nature and supernatural have a very broad range of meaning in the works of St. Bonaventure. Here, the various aspects of Bonaventure’s understanding of the term nature are considered.

Ratzinger’s treatment of the concept of nature is presented through a series of contrasts: natural science vs. intellectual science, natural science vs. theology, nature vs. spirit, and nature


99 Ratzinger presents the first three of these in the same order in the work mentioned in the last footnote: “Der Wortgebrauch von natura und die Beginnende Verselbständigung der Metaphysik bei Bonaventura.” Much of this article is drawn directly from his original Habilitationsschrift.
vs. grace. This method is employed, because the term ‘nature’ has different connotations depending on the context. Additionally, one’s understanding of nature can be improved through a consideration of other things that are related to—yet distinct from—nature.

Both of the first two contrasts involve ‘natural science,’ which Ratzinger defines as “that branch of scientific effort, which treats the objects of reality, which stand in contrast to artifacts, which owe their existence to the human mind. Thus, in this context, ‘natural’ is the opposite of ‘artificialis’; ‘nature’ in this understanding is fittingly that which is not made by man.” Here, an additional distinction must be made. Natural science, in this sense, only pertains to ‘natural’ things (i.e., not artificial things) as they appear and act in the sensible world. It corresponds to what Aristotle would have termed physics. Natural science, in this sense, does not include metaphysics. Here, the term ‘nature’ does not refer to the essences of things, but to their physical composition and natural operations.

Furthermore, just as ‘natural’ here can be contrasted with ‘artificial,’ that is, that which is made through human invention, so too can ‘natural’ in the same sense be contrasted with the miraculous: that which God does to intervene in the natural order or natural course of things. In that case, the opposite of ‘natural’ is not ‘artificial,’ but ‘supernatural’: the “antithesis of which is

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no longer man but the sovereign power of God himself, which stands ‘above’ [‘über,’ hence ‘super’] all nature and thus is ‘supernatural.’”

In Bonaventure’s De Reductio Artium ad Theologiam, there is a transition in the meaning of ‘natural science’ to one that includes ontology. There, natural science is divided into the areas of mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. It was said earlier that metaphysics was not included in the meaning of ‘natural science’ and was distinguished from physics. Here, a stronger connection between the two is ascertainable. “Certainly, physics is scientia ‘naturalis’ in the emphatic and strict sense . . . but beyond this is this whole [thing], the question not only about the superficially real forms but also the science about the hidden ideal structures of essence, of the ‘nature’ of things and so metaphysics is thus ‘natural’ science or ‘science of nature’ . . . here a still unbroken unity of physics and metaphysics is revealed.” The natural, then, can either be seen in contrast to the metaphysical or in close connection with it. In the latter case, the contrast is not between natural philosophy and metaphysics but between natural philosophy and the “‘Sancti,’” the saints.

But even in this case, Ratzinger does not see in Bonaventure’s work a complete separation and opposition between natural science and theology. Bonaventure is readily aware

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102 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 259-260: “dessen Antithese nicht mehr der Mensch, sondern die herrscherliche Macht Gottes selber ist, die »über« aller Natur steht und daher »übernatürlich« ist.”


104 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 260.
that “beyond the ‘natural course’ of things, which these natural scientists explore, there is the creative power of God, with which the science of the saints deals. Precisely in this knowledge lies . . . the thoroughly new and Christian [awareness] as opposed to the consciousness of the pre-Christian philosophers.”

Through the Christian doctrine of creation, nature is always in some way related to the supernatural: its origin is God who is wholly beyond nature and yet is also the source and goal of all natural creation. A proper understanding of natural phenomena, then, includes the reference of all natural things to God as their origin and end.

In light of this inescapable connection between nature and God, the source of creation, a different contrast comes into focus. Drawing from Henri de Lubac, Ratzinger notes: “before Thomas, ‘nature’ is in many cases not the opposite of ‘super-nature’ or ‘grace’ but first of all [the opposite] of ‘spirit’ [Geist] or ‘will.’” In this vein, Ratzinger considers a few different pairs of opposites to explore the breadth of meaning of the term ‘nature.’ First, he compares the natural and the spiritual in terms of the concrete and the abstract. Then, he contrasts natural operation with intellectual operation. He continues by speaking of spiritual nature, nature versus person, and nature versus will.

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106 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 261: “vor Thomas »Natur« vielfach nicht Gegensatz zu »Übernatur« oder »Gnade« ist, sondern zunächst einmal »Geist« oder »Wille«.” The German term, Geist, can be translated as ‘spirit,’ ‘mind,’ or ‘intellect.’ Here, the use of spirit or spiritual is more closely connected to man’s intellectual capacities, man’s mind. It is not meant in the sense of religious activity. In the footnote (n. 17), Ratzinger directs the reader to the second part of de Lubac’s Surnaturel, entitled “Esprit et liberté,” 185-321, esp. 251-260. See also Ratzinger, “Der Wortgebrauch von natura,” 771.
With respect to the concrete vs. the abstract, Ratzinger uses the following analogy: natural is to spiritual as concrete is to abstract. He explains the analogy thus: “Occasionally, the esse naturale signifies the concrete form of existence of the things in the nature encountering us and is thus the opposite of the abstracted human idea of the thing, which as such only exists in the human mind.”\textsuperscript{107} The natural being of a thing can be understood, then, as the concrete form in which a thing is present to the senses as opposed to the thing’s ‘nature’ as in ‘essence’: the kind of thing that it is, which is an abstraction present in the human mind. Thus, in this context, the natural is that which is concrete, and the spiritual or intellectual is that which is abstract.

This analogy relates to the next juxtaposition: natural operation in contrast to intellectual operation. In this context, a distinction is made between man’s production according to nature, such as procreation, and man’s intellectual activity, “in which the mind produces an idea.”\textsuperscript{108} “Here,” writes Ratzinger, “the contrast of nature and spirit is converted into that of necessity and freedom.”\textsuperscript{109} Ratzinger associates this concept of nature with the concept of nature presented earlier through the contrast of natural science with intellectual science. Here as there, he sees a path towards theology. The contrast between natural necessity and human free will can be replaced with the opposition between natural necessity and God’s miraculous freedom, “that is, 

\textsuperscript{107} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 261-262: “Gelegentlich bedeutet das \textit{esse naturale} die konkrete Existenzform der Dinge in der uns begegnenden Natur und ist so der Gegensatz zu der vom Menschen abstrahierten Idee des Dinges, die als solche nur im Menschengeist existent ist.”

\textsuperscript{108} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 262: “in dem der Geist eine Idee hervorbringt.” Here, Ratzinger points to different Latin expressions that highlight this distinction: \textit{productio secundum naturam} vs \textit{agere secundum intellectum}, \textit{operans naturaliter} vs \textit{a proposito}, and \textit{operans per naturam} vs \textit{per voluntatem et rationem}.

in them [miracles] God’s sovereign will personally intervenes in the course of nature, and this in a way that lies ‘above’ the possibilities of nature.”¹¹⁰

To understand the theological import of this point, Ratzinger argues, one must consider the epistemological issues involved. There are inferior causes at work in the natural order of things and superior causes at work in the supernatural order of things. Corresponding to these two types of causes is a two-fold order of knowledge. Natural philosophy and natural science are concerned with inferior causes and thus attain to the corresponding level of knowledge, while theology is concerned with higher causes and thus seeks a higher form of knowledge. This duality of orders of knowledge is seen particularly in the notion “that certain statements are true ‘secundum naturam’ [‘according to nature’], though false ‘supra naturam’ [‘above nature’]: As the things ‘above nature’ have their own causes, thus their own order of truth, which is not graspable to those which only move in the influence of nature, indeed, must appear to be false, so too conversely, of course, the theologian, who knows to assess the things ‘from above’, consigns the statements of the ‘natural scientists’ to their boundaries within which they have their validity, while outside of them they are ‘false’ for him.”¹¹¹

This discussion may appear to have gotten off track. The simple distinction between natural—or perhaps sub-rational—operations and intellectual operations of the mind would seem


¹¹¹ Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 263: “bestimmte Aussagen wahr seien »secundum naturam«, jedoch falsch »supra naturam«: Die Dinge »oberhalb der Natur« haben wie ihre eigene Ursachen, so ihre eigene Wahrheitsordnung, die demjenigen, der sich nur im Bannkreis der Natur begwegt, nicht fassbar ist, ja, als falsch erscheinen muss; so wie freilich umgekehrt der Theologe, der die Dinge »von oben her« zu beurteilen weiß, die Aussagen des »Naturwissenschaftlers« in ihre Grenzen verweist, innerhalb deren sie Geltung haben, während sie außerhalb davon für ihn »falsch« sind.”
to suffice and to be fairly clear. In the context of a work on divine revelation, which includes a consideration of God’s miraculous deeds, however, it is valid to consider how the various scientists (natural scientists and theologians) conduct their intellectual operations with respect to what occurs either in nature or in what is seen as a disruption of natural processes. Hence, what takes place in the concrete world can be understood as the result of natural processes according to natural causes and effects, or—in particular circumstances—viewed as God’s sovereign intervention into the natural world employing higher causes to accomplish some purpose that supersedes nature. From a purely natural-scientific view, such miraculous events must appear to be illusions or due to the lack of complete knowledge about the natural causes involved. The theologian, however, is aware of, and can explicitly acknowledge, supernatural causation and thereby view the truth behind such events from a perspective more appropriate to the miracles that occur. In any case, there is a distinction made between the natural course of things (or even the supernatural course of things) and the intellectual operations of the human mind that seeks to understand what is taking place. Thus, the distinction between natural and intellectual/spiritual remains valid.

Having commented on the contrast between nature and spirit, Ratzinger proceeds to speak about a context in which the two are taken together: spiritual nature, specifically, the spiritual nature of man, which is the “nature of operative spirituality”112 (or intellectuality). Whereas nature was previously distinguished from the spiritual, intellectual, and volitional, now it is associated with them in such terms as spiritual nature, natural will, and natural virtue. Here, however, there is still a distinction between natural will and elective will and between natural

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112 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 264: “Natur der wirkenden Geistigkeit.”
virtue and moral virtue. In this context, Ratzinger writes: “The real opposite of natura in a stricter manner of speaking, therefore, is called not simply voluntas, but ‘liberum arbitrium.’”

Aquinas and Bonaventure often speak of a duality of nature and the supernatural or nature and grace. On this point, however, Bonaventure speaks of three different kinds of habits that man possesses through three distinct means: 1) by nature (innate habit), 2) by free will (acquired habit), and 3) by God (infused habit). Human free will necessitates this three-fold division rather than a simple duality of nature and grace. “Between the general realm of nature and the specifically divine realm, he [Bonaventure] interpolates the realm of what is distinctively human.” This is due to “the peculiarly human power to make decisions, which is capable of disrupting nature and rejecting grace.” The simple duality of nature and grace or natural and supernatural is expanded to make room for human free will which can either correspond to nature and/or grace or set itself in opposition to either or both. Hence, there is an important distinction between natural will, that is, the natural inclination towards real or perceived goods, and the free will of the individual human person who is capable of choosing contrary to such natural inclinations, for good or for ill. “In this subdivision, ‘nature’ is distinguished from the free-will activity of the person: a man’s personhood is not included in the general concept of

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113 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 264: “Der eigentliche Gegensatz zu natura heißt daher in strenger Sprechweise nicht einfach voluntas, sondern »liberum arbitrium«.”


nature but, rather, represents a separate order between God’s revelatory actions and what is merely ‘natural’.”

Here, then, the contrast is not between nature and spirit (or intellect) as it was before, because even natural, innate habits can be of a spiritual (or intellectual) kind. An example drawn from Bonaventure is the natural faculty of judgment inherent in the human intellect. The contrast here is found in the distinction between natural will and elective will. Once again, Ratzinger wants to expand—through Bonaventure—the standard duality of nature and grace into a triad of nature, grace, and free will. There is something about free will that does not fit simply into the concept of human nature as such. While the possession of free will is an aspect of human nature, in Ratzinger’s view, the exercise of free will is more personal and in some sense mysterious.

Anticipating his discussion of salvation history and metaphysics in Bonaventure’s thought, Ratzinger notes that, in the present context of the three types of habits and the associated pairs of concepts (e.g., nature – will, natural will – elective will, etc.), “natura is meant not in a salvation-historical [sense] but in a metaphysical sense: it is the principle—not itself historical—by which history takes place.” Ratzinger indicates that the metaphysical character of nature in this context will become clearer in the discussion of the natural desire for the beatific vision, which he claims is connected with the current concept of natural will. In that

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118 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 265-266.

119 See Ratzinger, “Gratia praesupponit naturam,” 141.

120 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 266: “natura nicht in einem heilsgeschichtlichen, sondern in einem metaphysischen Sinne gemeint ist: Sie ist das selbst nicht geschichtliche Prinzip, an dem sich die Geschichte ereignet.”
later discussion, he will explain the relationship between this aspect of metaphysics and salvation history.

In the meantime, a salvation-historical—rather than a metaphysical—meaning of nature is discussed as he continues his presentation with a consideration of the relation between nature and person. On this point, St. Bonaventure follows St. Anselm, particularly with respect to Christology and the doctrine of original sin, both of which supply a salvation-historical dimension to the concept of nature.\footnote{See Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 266. It appears odd that Ratzinger says that, in this context, nature has a “purely historical sense” (“rein geschichtlichen Sinn”). After all, in Christology, nature has a decisively metaphysical dimension, even if this metaphysical dimension is closely tied to salvation history, particularly in Anselm’s soteriology. It would seem that metaphysics and salvation history are both significantly involved here: the metaphysical ‘natures’ of Christ have a salvific effect in history.}

With respect to original sin, nature and person are involved in a peculiar dynamic. “In connection with Anselm, the movement of original sin is depicted as a circular motion: it arises from the \textit{persona}, Adam, and from there infects his and all men’s ‘nature,’ so that every man, who is born henceforth, receives a nature infected by sin, whose infection then has an effect on the persona and makes her [the persona] likewise sinful.”\footnote{Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 266-267: “Im Anschluss an Anselm wird die Bewegung der Erbsünde als Kreisbewegung geschildert: Sie hebt von der \textit{persona} Adam an und infiziert von da aus seine und aller Menschen »Natur«, sodass jeder Mensch, der nunmehr geboren wird, eine von der Sünde infizierte Natur erhält, deren Infektion dann auf die persona zurückschlägt und sie gleichfalls sündig macht.”} First, an individual person’s exercise of free will led to the infection of his nature with sin. For all his progeny, the inverse happens: their inherited nature is infected by sin and through the reception of this infected nature, they become personally infected with sin. Ratzinger holds that this infection of the person, however,
is secondary. “The primary bearer of sinfulness is thus the nature, so much that the original sin can be designated as a *culpa non personalis, sed naturalis* [not personal, but natural guilt].”

Thus, the concept of human nature becomes somewhat ambiguous with respect to its concrete instantiation in history. There is a distinction between human nature as it was originally created and how it persists in the fallen state. Yet, the original nature is not entirely lost in sin. “This genuine humanity of man, the created order ‘man’, is completely extinguished in no man; it lies at the basis of every single human person and in many ways continuously has its effects on man’s concrete existence, summoning and guiding him. But of course in no man is it present without warping or falsification; instead, in every individual it is caked with the layer of filth.”

With Jesus Christ, the situation is different. Christ assumed a complete human nature, but, unlike fallen humanity, he was not infected with original sin. Here, “the ‘natura’ and the ‘Vitium’ ['defect'] are to be differentiated, they are separable.” Thus a distinction appears between the more internal, more abstract core of human nature itself and its concrete, sin-infected instances of human nature found in human history. This distinction “saves the fundamental goodness of human nature even after the original sin.”

At this point, Ratzinger believes, the problem of metaphysics and salvation history comes into sharp relief. In this new context, a parallel occurs with respect to the distinction between the

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natural-scientific concept of nature (more concrete and historical) and the theological concept of nature (more abstract and metaphysical notion). What is more, Ratzinger goes so far as to say that the current distinction is identical with that earlier distinction. The concrete-historical concept of nature proper to the natural sciences is the biological principle and thus also the principle of the natural operation of procreation, which—as discussed earlier—is the means by which original sin is propagated. This concrete, scientific, and at the same time salvation-historical concept of nature is contrasted with the abstract, metaphysical notion of nature. With respect to humanity, this distinction may be expressed in terms of what human nature is in itself (considered abstractly and ideally) and how it subsists concretely in history (infected with the defects of sin). The two places where the two are less distinguishable is the pre-lapsarian possession of human nature enjoyed by Adam and Eve as well as God the Son’s assumption of a complete and undefiled human nature in the Incarnation.

The next terms to be contrasted are nature and will, which have been alluded to several times before. Presently, their distinction is considered in greater detail. Ratzinger applies the opposition between these two terms to both God and man. “Even in God there is a double causality: that of the will and that of nature. The inner-trinitarian processions are ‘natural’; conversely, the world owes its existence to the divine will.” Created nature, then, only exists because of God’s will. Divine will precedes created nature. “It is [owing to] the special mode of

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127 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 269.
128 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 270: “Auch in Gott gibt es eine doppelte Ursächlichkeit: die des Willens und die der Natur. Die innertrinitarischen Hervorgänge sind »naturhaft«, die Welt hingegen verdankt ihr Dasein dem göttlichen Willen.” In footnote 51 on the same page, Ratzinger acknowledges a series of passages in Bonaventure in which one of the inner-trinitarian processions (of the Son from the Father) is said to be through nature, while the other procession (of the Holy Spirit) is said to occur through the will.
the divine *will*, that it can create *nature*: ‘Quod est Deo voluntarium, nobis est naturale.’”129 In this way, Ratzinger is able to say that “the *cursus naturalis* is at bottom a *cursus voluntaris*. All of nature is in its inmost depths the outpouring of a will, is voluntaristically structured in terms of the primordial creative will, to which alone it owes its existence.”130 Nature is the result of God’s free act of creation.

In this respect, Ratzinger expresses an important aspect of created nature in contrast with divine nature. God alone has power by his very nature; the ‘natural’ powers of created things ultimately do not derive from the creatures themselves but from God who gives them a nature and the powers associated with their natures. As Ratzinger explains: “for no creation stands entirely in itself; each is ultimately based in God and thus in fact every creaturely capacity is gifted: grace.”131 In a certain sense, then, “God’s being alone is natural being, while the being of a creature as such is gifted being, being of grace.”132 Again, Ratzinger emphasizes: “There is no completely neutral concept of being. All being is ‘grace.’”133

Every creature’s natural existence derives from God’s will. “It remains seen in all sharpness that any nature is a creature and in this respect is based in God’s *will*, but this creature is . . . capable of a special super-determination through a new application of divine will, as

129 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 271: “Es ist die Sonderart des göttlichen *Willens*, dass er *Natur* schaffen kann: »Quod est Deo voluntarium, nobis est naturale.«”


happens in grace and in the sacraments.” On this point, there is some connection with the previously discussed distinction between the natural course of things and miraculous divine interventions. This duality is turned into a three-fold formulation: natural course, voluntary course, and miraculous or supernatural course, which corresponds to the triad mentioned before: by nature, by free will, and by God. “This means: the human will is listed as a proper intermediate order between mere nature and God’s own freedom.” Put another way: “Between the general sphere of nature and the properly divine region, the space of the peculiarly human is engaged.”

In connection with revelation, Ratzinger writes: “Nature is thus separated from the volitonal conduct of the person: the personality of man is not included in the general concept of nature, but represents a proper order between the act of revelation of God and the merely ‘natural.’” All three of these orders—natural, voluntary, and supernatural—have their own objects and, accordingly, their own form of knowledge. Obviously, the distinction between


138 See Ratzinger, “Gratia praesupponit naturam,” 141.
God’s revealing action, on the one hand, and human free will, on the other hand, is an intriguing one for the present work. The link between human will and revelation comprises a central theme in Ratzinger’s theology of revelation, as will be made evident repeatedly.

At this point, the relation between human will and the supernatural enters into the discussion and leads to the topic of nature and grace. Unlike the body, which can heal itself from physical ailments, human will cannot overcome the guilt of sin by its own natural powers. “For, the principle of bodily health is nature, whereas the principle of spiritual health is something that is ‘above nature’ (supra naturam): grace.”  

Ratzinger explains this discrepancy as follows: “The nature stays preserved with bodily illness and can thus bring about healing, while grace gets lost through sin, so that a new deployment of divine love is necessary in order to give back to the spirit its original life.”

Ratzinger believes that this observation reveals something important about the nature of the spirit—or spiritual nature—itself. “Yet this means that the pure order of nature is absolutely exceeded with the spirit of man. A merely natural spirit is unthinkable, but rather it is essential to the spirit that it cannot stand on its own. It must be upheld by that which is more than itself, by what is ‘supernatural.’” Spiritual nature, then, by its very essence, according to Ratzinger, is always already connected to that which lies beyond its nature, to that which is above nature.

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Ratzinger denies that this understanding of the nature of the human spirit destroys the gratuity of grace or reduces the supernatural to the natural:

This ‘supernatural’ does not thereby stop being freely given grace; it does not stop being ‘supernatural’ and thus underivable from mere nature, but likewise at the same time the special structure of the spirit, whose divine immediacy is so intimate, really is such that it cannot rightly exist other than in this state of being directly held by God: where spirit is, there the space of mere naturalness is already abandoned.\textsuperscript{142}

As Ratzinger writes elsewhere: “In contrast to all attempts in past or more recent times to naturalize spirit, this makes perfectly clear the unique structure of the soul, which can exist only in the manner of dialogue and freedom.”\textsuperscript{143} Discussion of spiritual nature, then, leads quite directly to the next topic: the relation between nature and grace.

Ratzinger opens his presentation of nature and grace with a discussion of natural law and the law of grace. Interestingly, while he affirms that Bonaventure was well aware of the metaphysical conception of natural law, Ratzinger posits that Bonaventure widely uses “a purely salvation-historical sense”\textsuperscript{144} of the term. Bonaventure essentially equates natural law with right reason and thus roots it in the conscience, which refers to man’s capacity for moral thinking.


\textsuperscript{143} Ratzinger, “Grace Presupposes Nature,” 153.

\textsuperscript{144} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 274. Ratzinger makes use of two German terms that both translate to natural law: \textit{Naturgesetz} and \textit{Naturrecht}. It is not immediately clear whether he intends a distinction between them or if they are simply synonyms. Both can be translated as natural law or law of nature. \textit{Naturgesetz} can also be translated as scientific law, while \textit{Naturrecht} can be rendered natural justice. To the present author, Ratzinger seems to use the two German terms interchangeably.
Thus far, a metaphysical understanding of natural law appears to remain. However, when one considers that, in man’s actual concrete existence, “right reason (thus the bearing principle of this natural law) is darkened in man through concupiscence,” and yet “it remains fundamentally whole, however, in those who do not destroy their faculty of judgment through bad works. Thus, the whole metaphysical aspect of Bonaventure’s concept of natural law is moved into historical lighting.”\textsuperscript{145}

The historical character of Bonaventure’s view becomes clearer when one pays attention to his appropriation of a traditional three-fold division of time. Three periods of time are defined by three different types of law. First, there is the time of nature, which itself is subdivided into the time of nature as it was originally instituted and the time of lapsed nature (thus, before and after the Fall). This time of nature is also described as the time of the law of nature. The second time period is the time of the law of scripture or of the written law (Old Testament). Subsequent to this is the time of the law of grace (New Testament).\textsuperscript{146}

In light of these distinctions, Ratzinger poses an important question: “Is the lex naturae [law of nature], here, simply an expression of a certain historical state or an ontic foundation across time of the subsequent states?”\textsuperscript{147} The answer is complex. Bonaventure asserts “that this natural law is composed of the dictate of nature itself and of the assisting power of the light of

\textsuperscript{145} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 276: “die rechte Vernunft (das tragende Prinzip dieses Naturrechts also) in vielen verdunkelt ist durch die Begierlichkeit,” and yet, “sie jedoch grundsätzlich heil bleibt in denen, die ihre Urteilskraft nicht durch schlechte Werke zerstören. So wird auch der gesamte metaphysische Aspekt von Bonaventuras Naturrechtsbegriff in geschichtliche Beleuchtung gerückt.”


\textsuperscript{147} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 277: “Ist hier lex naturae einfach Ausdruck eines bestimmten geschichtlichen Standes oder zeitübergreifende ontische Grundlage der kommenden Stände?”
faith, which has been attached to it. The *historical* natural law is thus here examined in its
*objective* components and thereby a pure *metaphysical* natural law, so to speak, is now distilled
as the inmost core of the historical natural law.”

Despite the admission that a metaphysical dimension comprises the inner core of natural
law, Ratzinger argues that “an originally thoroughly concrete (historical or biological, natural
scientific) view is only gradually interspersed with new additional metaphysical thoughts.”
The original notion of natural law was historical. “The mere conformity to natural law is a
historical stage of mankind, its lowest, which does continue to be in effect as the basis for the
rest but is surmounted in principle by a stepwise ascent.”

Over time, a new path emerged, however, that lead to a change in the Pauline and
Patristic temporal triad of nature, law, and grace. Nature was removed from this historical,
temporal triad and became a metaphysical foundation to which law and grace were added. “Here,
nature is thus no longer a temporal order, which is replaced [by the time of law and the time of
grace], but a metaphysical structure which is built upon.” With this alteration, the original,
temporal triad is abandoned and replaced with the duality of nature and supernatural. Nature now

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148 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 277-278: “dass dies Naturgesetz sich
zusammensetze aus dem Diktat der Natur selbst und aus der helfenden Kraft des
Glaubenslichtes, das ihm beigegeben gewesen ist. Das *geschichtliche* Naturgesetz wird also hier
auf seine *sachliche* Komponente hin untersucht und dabei nun ein rein *metaphysisches*
Naturgesetz sozusagen als innerster Kern des geschichtlichen Naturgesetzes herausdestilliert.”

149 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 278: “Eine ursprünglich durchaus konkrete
(geschichtliche oder biologisch-naturwissenschaftliche) Auffassung wird eben erst allmählich
mit neu hinzukommenden metaphysischen Gedanken durchsetzt.”


151 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 278: “Die Natur ist also hier nicht mehr eine
zeitliche Ordnung, die abgelöst wird, sondern eine metaphysische Struktur, auf der aufgebaut
wird.”
comprises a metaphysical realm alongside the historical order of salvation. Ratzinger sees a connection here with the aforementioned struggle of Bonaventure for the unity of Christian wisdom against the Latin Averroist tendency to give too much autonomy to philosophy and natural reason.¹⁵²

The move from a temporal/historical to a metaphysical understanding of nature leads, in turn, to a metaphysical understanding of supernatural, and thus the duality of nature and grace or of nature and super-nature emerges. The rise of an abstract understanding of nature “promotes the danger of an equivocation, which had to blur the purity of the concept of grace in the course of a consequent further development. The pure opposition natura – gratia, which presupposes a comprehensive metaphysical concept of nature, is not unknown to Bonaventure, however it is again and again softened through mediating schemas with a very broad concept of grace.”¹⁵³ The abstract, metaphysical notion of nature is an alteration of the Patristic “salvation-historical notion, which understands ‘nature’ not as an abstract order of essence but as an historical state, which later on is replaced by the higher state of grace.”¹⁵⁴ In the end, Ratzinger desires to find a proper balance between metaphysical and salvation-historical understandings of nature. Such a

¹⁵² See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 278-279.


¹⁵⁴ Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 287-288: “heilsgeschichtlichen Auffassung, die »Natur« nicht als abstrakte Wesensordnung, sondern als geschichtliches Stadium versteht, das später abgelöst wird durch das höhere Stadium der Gnade.” Certainly the Church Fathers also had a metaphysical understanding of nature, however, as Ratzinger himself acknowledges in his discussion of the role of metaphysics in theology, as discussed earlier. A particularly strong example is the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed, which uses a metaphysical notion of nature.
balance, he says, has not yet been obtained at this point in his presentation of Bonaventure’s thought.  

In his discussion of nature and grace, Ratzinger distinguishes different senses of the word grace. It was mentioned earlier that, in a certain way, the natures and natural powers of all created things are ‘gifted’ by God’s free will and hence are in a particular sense the result of grace. All created beings receive this gratuitously given gift (or grace) of their existence. This grace, however, is in some sense ‘natural.’ It is God’s gift of nature. It is distinct from the gift given to spiritual beings through which they receive eternal blessedness: salvation. This grace is grace in the highest sense: “under grace in the real sense is understood only the grace of salvation.” This special meaning of grace is rooted in the already discussed distinction between nature and spirit. The grace of natural existence is distinct from the grace given to man’s spirit in the history of salvation.

In some way, nature is closely associated with man’s corporeality, while man’s spirit is ordered towards grace. Hence, the distinction between nature and grace closely aligns with the distinction between nature and spirit. Ratzinger notes, however, that this perspective is not without its dangers. He writes: “I believe rather, that a false view of the relationship of body and

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156 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 283.


159 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 288.
spirit and thus an adulteration of the Christian image of man looms here.” The earlier discussion of spiritual nature must be remembered, lest the human soul, of its own accord, be considered excessively in a supernatural sense. For, as Ratzinger reminds his readers: “All of the creature is ‘nature’ before God, the spirit as well as the body and the unanimated things of the world.”

These considerations lead up to Ratzinger’s presentation of Bonaventure’s understanding of man’s natural desire for the beatific vision, which he believes helps to illuminate more precisely Bonaventure’s understanding of nature. Two points summarize Bonaventure’s view. First, man is created for blessedness. “It is his sole, true goal, which therefore all recognize and strive for naturally”; second, “blessedness is only one, namely, union with God, who ‘alone suffices’”; therefore, the conclusion follows that “Man strives by nature for something that exceeds the boundaries of his nature.”

Ratzinger holds that the doctrine of the natural desire for the beatific vision is where the problem of metaphysics and salvation history reaches its apex. Bonaventure’s view is based upon his understanding of both nature and spirit. The tendency or appetite dwells within the nature; the


162 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 293: “Sie ist sein einziges, wahres Ziel, das daher alle naturhaft anstreben und erkennen”; “Die Seligkeit ist nur eine, nämlich die Vereinigung mit Gott, der »allein genügt«”; “Der Mensch strebt von Natur aus etwas an, was die Grenzen seiner Natur überschreitet.”
association with a blessedness based in a direct connection with God belongs to the nature of spirit.  

Theology in the 1950’s, according to Ratzinger, often got it backwards. It is still a standard neo-scholastic or neo-thomistic adage that a proper understanding of the supernatural (or grace) precludes an absolute natural desire for the beatific vision. Ratzinger, on the contrary, holds that “the concept of the supernatural does not justify or condemn the doctrine of man’s longing for God, but the doctrine of man’s longing for God justifies the distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural,’ which has in this teaching its true place and real meaning and becomes all the more dangerous and inadequate the farther it is removed from this place.”

Ratzinger thinks that Bonaventure’s concept of spirit and Thomas’s understanding of nature combine to form a solution to the problem. As Ratzinger explains:

One the one hand, the conceptual and fundamental distinctness of both orders [i.e., natural and supernatural] is highlighted with all decisiveness, while precisely the one side is identified as ‘nature,’ the other as ‘supernatural,’ ‘un-owed,’ ‘added.’ On the other hand, the factual inseparability of spirit and God and thus of spirit and grace is worked out no less clearly. The connection of these two statements signifies at the same time a connection and unity of fundamental-metaphysical and of factual-historical considerations of the spirit.

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163 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 299-300.

164 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 301: “Nicht der Begriff des Übernatürlichen begründet oder verurteilt die Lehre von der natürlichen Gottessehnsucht des Menschen, sondern die Lehre von der Gottessehnsucht des Menschen begründet die Unterscheidung in »natürlich« und in »übernatürlich«, die in dieser Lehre ihren wahren Ort und eigentlichen Sinn hat und umso gefährlicher und unzulänglicher wird, je weiter sie sich von diesem Ort entfernt.”

Thus, as Kerr explains a fundamental aspect of Ratzinger’s thought: “Metaphysics and salvation history need not be played off against one another. Ratzinger rejects the standard Protestant line, which is . . . to regard the ontological as unavoidably a projection upon and subversion of the history of salvation. On the other hand, he does not want to see the ontological and the saving-historical collapsed into one another.”

Ratzinger wants to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, he wants to avoid the rejection of philosophy, especially metaphysics, exemplified by many Protestant theologians. On the other hand, he does not want philosophy to be the primary foundation of theology, which often occurs in neo-scholastic theology. Ratzinger does not want to reduce theology to metaphysical speculation, or relegate the contents of revelation to something entirely already latent in human nature.

In short, Ratzinger wants metaphysics and salvation history to be seen as complementary yet distinct. In the next subsection, Ratzinger’s presentation of the supernatural will constantly reveal the concern he has for such a balance. He perceives in Bonaventure the beginnings of achieving this balance. Hans-Jürgen Verweyen offers a hint as to why this is the case, when he says of Bonaventure: “Yet his first great work already shows a tension between metaphysical and salvation-historical thought, which is never found in Thomas.” Precisely because Bonaventure already struggled with keeping salvation history and metaphysics united yet properly distinguished, he serves as great starting point for Ratzinger’s own efforts.

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2.3.2 Supernatural

In the prior subsection, various concepts of nature and natural have been explicated in contrast to corresponding opposites: natural science vs. intellectual science, natural science vs. theology, nature vs. spirit, and nature vs. grace. Following Ratzinger’s own order or presentation, we now proceed to discuss ‘supernatural’ and its related terms. This follows quite directly from the discussion of nature and grace above, where the supernatural was already mentioned to some extent.

In preparation for a more complete discussion of ‘supernatural,’ Ratzinger considers Dionysian and Augustinian uses of the prefix ‘super.’ Looking at the work of the Pseudo-Areopagite, Ratzinger notes that “In this respect,” hyper-, “is first of all a predicate of God or at least designates the sphere of the divine.”¹⁶⁸ This Dionysian usage influenced Bonaventure, particularly in his later works.

This use of ‘hyper/super’ is further differentiated, however, into two main lines of thought. As Ratzinger explains:

The first view, which is connected with the prefix “super-,” is doubtlessly the exclusion of God from the world’s existence in the sense of the theologia eminentiae, the emphasis of the fact that all our words are too weak to speak of him. God is situated outside all categories of the ascertainable being, denoted as the “super-categorical” in the sense of the “uncategorical”: “... Deus non est ens inter omnia, sed super omnia.”¹⁶⁹


¹⁶⁹ Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 304: “Die erste Meinung, die sich mit dem Präfix »super-« verbindet, ist zweifellos die Ausklammerung Gottes aus dem Weltsein im Sinn der theologia eminentiae, die Betonung der Tatsache, dass all unsere Worte zu schwach sind, ihn zu sagen. Gott wird außerhalb aller Kategorien des erfassbaren Seins gestellt, als der »Überkategoriale« im Sinn des »Unkategorialen« gekennzeichnet: »... Deus non est ens inter omnia, sed super omnia.«”
Another view is contrasted to this one. With respect to a Platonist understanding of the structure of the cosmos, ‘super-’ takes on a spatial connotation, meaning ‘above.’ This aspect leads, ironically, to a view opposed to the first one: “Instead of God being removed from all categorization, it threatens to become ‘the category’ of God, and this—to boot—in a cosmic-local sense.”

Augustine also speaks about God as ‘above’ in connection with the neoplatonic concept of ‘super-.’ However, with Augustine, the cosmic dimension of this notion is replaced with “a radical concentration on the interiority of man, an interpretation of the world, as it were, from the inside of the personal spirit of man. Thus now, even the being-above of God is understood no longer as a cosmic but as a psychological assertion.”

“We hear the echoes of Augustine’s spiritual experience that ‘intimum’ and ‘summum’ coincide, that the distant God is a God who is most near to man, nearer than man is to himself.”

Bonaventure adopted this understanding explicitly.

This view has particularly important implications for epistemology. As Ratzinger explains:

For Augustine, God is the light, which shines ‘over’ the human spirit, shining a light into it ‘from above.’ Bonaventure scholasticizes this statement, in that he inserts it into a general schema of human illumination . . . : man receives knowledge (‘light’) from that which is

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172 Ratzinger, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes,*” 128.
above him, what is in him, what is outside him, and finally even from that which is under him.\textsuperscript{173}

In this way, the ‘superior light’ becomes an additional, special illumination, a special knowledge that is differentiated from man’s general mode of knowing. In the \textit{Reduction of the Arts to Theology}, this light from above is “defined as the ‘light of grace and of the sacred scripture.’”\textsuperscript{174}

Thus, we find here a distinction between natural and supernatural illumination, which will be discussed at greater length later on.

After the above discussions about the Pseudo-Dionysian and Augustinian influences upon Bonaventure’s understanding of ‘super-,’ Ratzinger proceeds with a more direct consideration of the term ‘supernatural.’ The usual contexts in which St. Bonaventure uses the term ‘supernatural’ are those connected with the concepts of miracles or the miraculous. As Ratzinger writes in an article: “Bonaventure distinguishes numerous times between the ‘natural course’ of worldly things and a ‘miraculous process,’ with which God interrupts the ‘natural course.’”\textsuperscript{175}

There are two different kinds of miracles in Bonaventure’s thought. Some miracles are said to be against nature. Those miracles work against the natural course of things as God established it in creation. They are events that normally would take place in a different way. An example of this kind of miracle is when a blind person’s sight is restored, not through medical

\textsuperscript{173} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 307: “Für Augustine ist Gott das Licht, das »über« dem menschlichen Geist leuchtet, »von oben« in ihn hineinleuchtet. Bonaventura scholastisiert diese Aussage, indem er sie in ein Gesamtschema der menschlichen Erleuchtungen einfügt . . . : Der Mensch empfängt Erkenntnisse (»Licht«) von dem, was über ihm, was in ihm, was außer ihm ist, und schließlich auch von dem, was unter ihm ist.”

\textsuperscript{174} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 307: “definiert als das »Licht der Gnade und der Heiligen Schrift«.”

intervention or via some other natural healing process, but through direct divine action. In other words, the same result (healing of the blind) could potentially take place via natural means, even if natural means were not the direct cause in a specific case. There are other miracles that are said to be above nature. They exceed the very boundaries of the natural order. These miracles involve something that could never take place through purely natural causes or processes. Some examples are the Incarnation as well as “the transformation and glorification of the body through the resurrection.”\footnote{Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverst"andnis}, 309: “der Verwandlung und Verherrlichung des Leibes durch die Auferstehung.”} The former kind is called \textit{miraculum}, while the latter is called \textit{mirabile}. It is this latter kind that is referred to as being ‘above nature’ or ‘supernatural.’\footnote{See Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverst"andnis}, 310.}

There is another context in which ‘supernatural’ is used: the distinction between three orders of power: supernatural power, super-celestial power, and elementary power. The latter two powers both occur within the order of nature and the cosmos. “The ‘virtus supernaturalis,’ however, is God, the living and personal self. . . . And this is, as it were, the central meaning of the word ‘supernaturalis’: wherever this word occurs, it wants to point out first of all that God is \textit{personally} at work here.”\footnote{Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverst"andnis}, 311: “Die »virtus supernaturalis« aber ist Gott, der lebendige und persönliche selb... Und dies ist zugleich das Sinnzentrum des Wortes »supernaturalis«: Wo immer dies Wort auftritt, will es zunächst darauf hindeuten, dass hier Gott \textit{persönlich} am Werk ist.”} There is a personal dimension to miracles. God is present and active in his divine Personhood. “Thus, there are opposed ‘nature’ with its normal regularity and the freedom of God.”\footnote{Ratzinger, “Gratia praesupponit naturam,” 141: “Es stehen sich also die ‚Natur’ mit ihrer normalen Gesetzlichkeit und die Freiheit Gottes gegenüber.”}
Towards the end of his time at the University of Paris, Bonaventure had studied the work of Pseudo-Dionysius extensively, and these studies had a strong influence upon his thought. As a result, a new concept of supernatural, drawn from the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, appears in Bonaventure’s *Breviloquium*. “In the prologue,” writes Ratzinger:

‘supernaturalis’ is here no longer used in the previous, scholastic sense but rather, so to speak, as a loan word from the areopagitic vocabulary. When the faith is designated there as the foundation of all supernatural illumination, it is thus clear that Dionysius’s hierarchical doctrine, his entire mystical schema of illumination stands in the background, and that ‘supernatural’ wants to express here simply the origin from above.”

Ratzinger sees in this conception a rapprochement with the aforementioned thought of Augustine with respect to the four-fold light: outside, inside, below, and above.

After his rather extensive discussion of the issues presented above, Ratzinger attempts to provide a brief, clear summary of the main themes. He seeks to clarify the general understanding of nature and grace (or supernatural) along with the relation between metaphysics and salvation history. The fundamental basis for understanding these matters is Bonaventure’s conception of the cosmos, including the notions of *exitus* and *reditus*:

The whole world is an enormous circular movement, which begins with creation and fulfills its full shape in Christ Jesus, a movement, which is first ‘egress’ and then ‘return.’ The duality natura – gratia (and thereby natura – supernaturale) is now . . . melted down in this comprehensive understanding of the world: inasmuch as things are in the movement of egress from God, he is present to them in the way of nature; inasmuch as they are in the movement of return, he is present to them in the three stages of grace. . . . In Christ, God and man, creator and creature are one and so the great circle of reality is closed. ‘Nature’ and ‘grace’ is equated with the two great branches of the movement ‘expressio’ and

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‘reductio’ and thereby achieves a truly astonishing ‘reductio’ of the nature-grace theme on the cosmic thematic of Bonaventurian work.182

The movement out from God in creation is thus equated with nature, while the return to God is associated with grace in such a way that metaphysics and salvation history are likewise shown in their interrelation. As Ratzinger explains: “In this classification . . . now at the same time lies the real Bonaventurian answer to the relationship of metaphysics and salvation history in the concept of nature: nature and grace are included together in the idea of a cosmic being, which as such is in motion; they are located within a . . . world-history, of which salvation history is only a section.”183 Salvation history is the process of the ‘reductio’ or the leading back of creation to God, the creator. Thus, salvation history is the process whereby nature (and natures in a metaphysical sense) are returned to God through supernatural grace.

These discussions about nature and grace provide background for the next two subsections on man as the image of God and man as divine likeness. Ratzinger offers an extensive treatment of both, which are summarized in what follows. As already mentioned, both of these notions will connect to the section on epistemology.


183 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 317: “In dieser Einordnung . . . liegt nun zugleich die eigentlich bonaventurianische Antwort auf das Verhältnis von Metaphysik und Heilsgeschichte im Naturbegriff: Natur und Gnade werden zusammen einbezogen in die Vorstellung eines kosmischen Seins, das als solches in Bewegung ist, sie werden eingeordnet in eine . . . Welt-Geschichte, von der die Heilsgeschichte nur ein Ausschnitt ist.”
2.3.3 Image of God

Bonaventure’s anthropology “is decisively determined by the concept of the *imago Dei*.“¹⁸⁴ Bonaventure’s understanding differs from that of Aquinas, who held that there was a natural image of God in man that cannot be lost alongside a supernatural image of God that could be lost.¹⁸⁵ “Bonaventure indeed knows the salvation historical duality of imago creationis and imago recreationis (reformationis),” writes Ratzinger, “but not the time-spanning, more metaphysically conceived doubleness of imago naturalis and supernaturalis.”¹⁸⁶

Bonaventure places the notion of ‘image’ within two triads that express increasing modes of relatedness to God: shadow – vestige – image and vestige – image – likeness. Image means the same thing in each case. It differs from the lower forms of shadow and vestige in that they reflect a connection to God in terms of causality, while image bespeaks a connection to God through knowledge. “Thus, for ‘vestige’ and ‘shadow,’ God is only ‘Cause’; for the ‘image’ [God is] also ‘object of knowledge (obiectum).’”¹⁸⁷

Ratzinger sees this understanding of the image of God in man as an indication of man’s relatedness to God. Man’s nature is relational. “It signifies not a state or rank of a being closed in itself, but it signifies the openness of a being to God; it bespeaks a connection of knowledge and

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¹⁸⁵ See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 318. See also, Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I-II q 85 a 1 Sed contra.


of love to God.”

This reflects Augustine’s understanding of the image of God in connection with man’s ability to know and to love, the so-called psychological analogy of the Trinity in man.

However, Bonaventure’s view goes a bit further. He has a dynamic view of the image. He sees in it “a movement, a desire for a more complete unity with God. In this respect, the doctrine of man’s divine imagery is identical with the doctrine of the natural desire of man for God.”

Ratzinger proceeds to discuss the precise locus of the image of God in man’s soul. There is a difference between man’s higher and lower reason, and the image of God resides in the higher realm. For Bonaventure, this is not so much a question of different faculties, however, but of a different direction in which the faculties are aimed. As Ratzinger explains: “here, it is not about a distinction of certain ‘capabilities’ or abilities of the spirit but only just about different forms of actualization, about different factual ‘perspectives.’” Quoting directly from Bonaventure, Ratzinger offers his own translation of Bonaventure’s words:

“The image subsists exquisitely and primarily in the capabilities of the soul, inasmuch as they are facing God; secondarily, it subsists in it also, inasmuch as they consider the soul itself; inasmuch as they turn to lower objects of knowledge, however, they are no longer an image but only a vestige of the Trinity.” The divine imagery is here, then, seen in a

188 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 321: “Sie bedeutet nicht einen Zustand oder eine Ranghöhe eines in sich geschlossenen Seins, sondern sie bedeutet die Offenheit eines Seienden auf Gott hin, sie besagt eine Beziehung des Erkennens und des Liebens zu Gott.”


190 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 322: “es handelt sich hier nicht um eine Unterscheidung bestimmter »vermögen« oder Fähigkeiten des Geistes, sondern eben nur um verschiedene Aktualisierungsformen, um verschiedene faktische »Blickrichtungen«.” The term ‘perspectives’ here is meant in the sense of ‘directions of view,’ which is clearer in the German word used.
direction of an act of the human spirit, not in its static, substantial being, as this is usually common in contemporary Catholic dogmatics.\footnote{191}{Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 322-323: “»Das Bild besteht vorzüglich und in erster Linie in den Seelenvermögen, sofern sie Gott zugewandt sind; in zweiter Linie besteht es in ihnen auch, sofern sie sich mit der Seele selbst befassen; sofern sie sich jedoch niedrigeren Erkenntnisgegenständen zuwenden, sind sie nicht mehr Bild, sondern nur noch Spur der Dreifäligkeit.« Die Gottebenbildlichkeit wird hier also in einer Aktrichtung des menschlichen Geistes gesehen, nicht in seinem stehenden substanzialen Sein, wie dies in der heutigen katholischen Dogmatik gemeinhin üblich ist.” Ratzinger quotes Bonaventure from I Sent d3 p2 a1 q2 c (I 83 a).}

Since Bonaventure says that the soul is no longer an image of the Trinity when it is fixed upon lower objects of knowledge, then there is some sense in which the image in ‘losable,’ according to Gilson’s interpretation of Bonaventure.\footnote{192}{See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 323. See also Étienne Gilson, Der heilige Bonaventura, trans. Philotheus Böhner (Hellarau: Hegner, 1929), 314.}

However, Ratzinger thinks that the matter is more complex and nuanced than Gilson allows. Bonaventure does not simply cast aside Augustine’s idea that the image remains. Furthermore, Ratzinger claims that Aquinas and Bonaventure essentially offer the same definition of the image of God in the soul. Aquinas answers ‘yes’ to the question of whether the image of God is in man to the extent that it is in act. Nevertheless, when the soul is not—in a given moment—directly considering God or the soul itself, it maintains the image of God insofar as it retains the faculty of doing so.\footnote{193}{See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 323-324.} Similarly, Bonaventure states: “We do not claim the image is found in the faculties of the soul mentioned inasmuch as they are actually turned to God, but inasmuch as they are this in principle . . . ’. Bonaventure again completely joins Aquinas in this answer, who likewise supports the fundamental remaining of the image.”\footnote{194}{Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 324-325: “»Wir behaupten nicht, das Bild finde sich in den genannten Seelenfähigkeiten, sofern sie tatsächlich Gott zugewandt sind, sondern}
At first glance, this may seem to contradict Bonaventure’s earlier statement that the soul is not the image insofar as it turns to lower objects of knowledge and that it is the direction of the soul’s attention that determines its status as image of God or not. The point Bonaventure is trying to make, according to Ratzinger, is that the human person’s soul is the image of God insofar as it has the capability to turn to God (or secondarily, to reflect upon itself) and not insofar as it has the capability of turning to other objects of knowledge. Bonaventure does not think—as Aquinas does—that there are two different sets of faculties: one set of faculties capable of knowledge of God and another set capable of knowledge of lower things; rather, they are but two potential directions in which one and the same set of faculties can be turned. Insofar as this set of faculties is capable of knowledge and love of God, it is an image of God, whether or not it is actually turning to God (or itself) in a given moment. However, due to the principle of potency and act, it is true that the image can be sharpened or blurred depending on the extent to which it is in act: “in the sinners it is dark and disfigured, bright and luminous only in the righteous.”

Despite the fact that Aquinas and Bonaventure disagree as to whether the faculties for higher and lower knowledge are distinct faculties (Aquinas) or one and the same faculty capable of turning towards different classes of objects (Bonaventure), they are in agreement that the image of God is found in the soul insofar as it is born with a nature capable of knowing and loving God, whether or not its faculties are turned towards God in a given instance, although the image is more clear when one is actually using those faculties in knowledge and love of God.

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sofern sie dies grundsätzlich sind . . . «. Bonaventura trifft sich in dieser Antwort wiederum völlig mit dem Aquinaten, der ebenfalls für das grundsätzliche Verbleiben des Bildes eintritt.”

Nevertheless, there is still a contrast to be made between Bonaventure and Aquinas on this issue beyond what has already been noted. Ratzinger thinks that—however subtly—a change in direction is indicated in Aquinas’s treatment of the question. This change, he believes, helps clarify the peculiarity of Bonaventure’s own doctrine of the image of God in man. In his Commentary on the Sentences, Aquinas necessarily spoke of the image of God in the section on creation as well as in the section on the knowledge of God. In the Summa, however, Aquinas does not speak about the image of God in the section on the knowledge of God.196 This alteration leads to the conclusion that, in the Summa, the image of God “is no longer a statement about the actual knowledge of God but only a statement about the spiritual nature of man.”197 Bonaventure, on the other hand, consistently maintains the connection between the image of God and knowledge of God. “Following Lombard, Bonaventure treats the imago doctrine not only in the tractate on creation but also in that part of the doctrine of God which treats man’s knowledge of God. ‘Imago Dei’ is a concept of the knowledge of God, its central concept even; one cannot be understood without the other.”198

Since Aquinas no longer connects image of God with knowledge of God, he also treats the distinction between vestige and image differently than does Bonaventure. As already discussed, Bonaventure says that God relates to vestiges as their cause while he relates to images both as their cause and as their object of knowledge. Aquinas agrees that vestiges only point to

196 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 326

197 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 326: “ist nicht mehr eine Aussage über das aktuale Gotterkennen, sondern nur noch eine Aussage über die Geistnatur des Menschen.”

God as their cause, but for him, images indicate both their cause and the form of the cause. “Thereby, the thesis is practically expressed that the divine image of man consists in his spiritual nature as such and not (as Bonaventure says) in a certain direction of act of his spirit.”

While a number of scholars, such as Adolf Hoffmann and Johann Auer, argued that Aquinas emphasizes the act-character of man’s image, Ratzinger argues that this is not really the case when one looks at Aquinas’s thought as a whole. According to Ratzinger, Aquinas “fundamentally and explicitly shifts the divine imagery more in the spiritual nature as such and then emphasizes that it represents the actual God better when it is in act than when this is not the case, and once again better when the object of this act is God than when it is about a different object.”

Ratzinger’s argument is nuanced here. Aquinas certainly admits that the image is sharper the more the soul is in act and even more when its action is directed towards God. Nevertheless, Ratzinger perceives in this perspective the fundamental separation between the divine imagery and the object of the soul’s action. For while the image is sharper when God is the object of the soul’s activity, this is only an accidental change—or increase—in the imagery, not an essential component of the divine imagery in man. Ratzinger claims, then, that Thomas has inverted the pre-Thomistic conception of the image of God and that the pre-Thomistic and Franciscan tradition actually emphasizes the act-character of the image more than Aquinas does. He writes:

199 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 327: “Damit ist praktisch die These ausgesprochen, dass die Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen in seiner Geistnatur als solcher und nicht (wie Bonaventura sagt) in einer bestimmten Aktrichtung seines Geistes besteht.”

200 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 330: “verlegt grundsätzlich und ausdrücklich die Gottebenbildlichkeit mehr in die Geistnatur als solche und betont dann, dass sie den aktuellen Gott besser repräsentiere, wenn sie in Akt sei, als wenn dies nicht der Fall sei, und abermals besser, wenn der Gegenstand dieses Aktes Gott sei, als wenn es sich um einen andern Gegenstand handle.”
“Namely, according to Thomas, there are now three stages of representation within the one imago: the *intellectualitas* as such, the *intellectualitas in actu*, the *intellectualitas actu Deum cognoscens*. In the pre-thomistic tradition represented by the Franciscans, there was only one stage: the *intellectualitas actu Deum cognoscens*. Who has thus emphasized here more strongly the actualitas?”

Ratzinger thinks it is obvious that the Franciscans, including Bonaventure, have the stronger act-character notion of the image of God insofar as they connect the image directly with the act of knowing God, not in the intellect merely as such nor in the act of the intellect in knowledge of lower objects of knowledge.

This traditional view, which St. Bonaventure follows, has precedent in the work of St. Augustine. As Ratzinger notes elsewhere: “With Augustine (*De Trinitate*, XIV, 8, 11) the image of God is interpreted as capacity for God, qualification to know and love God. That is what for Augustine gives the idea of man as the image of God its dynamic aspect; man is the image of God to the extent in which he directs himself to God.”

Included in the epistemological and dynamic view of the image of God is man’s relationality. “And that, for the [Second Vatican] Council, is the content of the doctrine that man is made to the image of God. Man stands in immediate relation to God, he does not merely have to do with God indirectly through his work and his relations with his fellow-men. He can know and love God himself.”

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202 Ratzinger, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes,*” 121.

203 Ratzinger, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, 123.”
2.3.4 Divine Likeness

Following his treatment of man as the image of God, Ratzinger presents Bonaventure’s understanding of divine likeness in man through grace. In Bonaventure’s thought, the duality of image and likeness is equated with that of the image of creation and the image of re-creation, which was discussed before, and once again demonstrates a salvation-historical view of the matter.\textsuperscript{204} Ratzinger offers a definition of “likeness” as follows:

“Likeness” in its special sense means . . . making similar and the alignment of man to God. It is a transformation of the “image,” whose “expressed similitude” now becomes expressed even more. So it is clear, however, that a dynamic tendency must appertain to the “likeness,” for if the deformity of the image in its ossification consists in a lack of a vital directedness towards God, then the increase of the likeness must consist in a growing vitality of the relationship with God. In fact, it can thus be said that the likeness ultimately consists in unification with God.\textsuperscript{205}

For Ratzinger, this understanding bespeaks the act-character of likeness. “The likeness is thus not a new substance, but an act, which happens to the substance of the image: Therefore, the expression ‘likeness’ is in principle more significant than the comparison of ‘image of creation’ and ‘image of the new creation.’”\textsuperscript{206} The latter notion, ‘image of the new creation,’ does not adequately encapsulate the act-character of the likeness and gives the impression that a totally

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{204}] See Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 333-334.
\item[\textsuperscript{206}] Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 334: “Die Ähnlichkeit ist also nicht etwa eine neue Substanz, sondern ein Akt, der sich an der Substanz des Bildes ereignet: Deshalb ist der Ausdruck »Ähnlichkeit« in Grunde bezeichnender als die Gegenüberstellung von »Schöpfungsbild« und »Bild der Neuschöpfung«.” Ratzinger referred to ‘the substance of the image’ and thus appears to return to a metaphysical notion of image in this context.
\end{itemize}
new or second ‘substance’ or ‘essence’ is being superadded to the one that is already there. This would be erroneous. As likeness, the “‘image of the new creation’ is merely a making-like of the old image; thus, a second image is not added to this, but only provides for it a new actual vitality.”

If likeness is to be understood in an active sense as something done to the human subject, then there must be one who is enacting the divine likeness in man. Of course, this one who ‘makes-like’ is God himself working through grace: “The ‘likeness,’ which comes from God, is grace.” Ratzinger would return to this idea in a later work, where he says “that grace is not an independent creature existing for itself, but that it constitutes an act of God on an already existing creature, thus that it is not itself substance but event.” The axiom, grace presupposes nature, then, “first of all thus contains no value judgment about nature but is a statement about the ontological place of grace.”

Grace is understood here through the image of light. “In principle, however, grace signifies nothing other than that the God whom scripture calls ‘light’ (John 1:5) becomes light for man, shining into him as the sun shines into the sphere of our bodily life with its corporeal

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207 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 334: “»Bild der Neuschöpfung« lediglich Verähnlichung des alten Bildes ist, diesem also nicht ein zweites Bild hinzufügt, sondern ihm nur neue aktuale Lebendigkeit verschafft.”


209 Ratzinger, “Gratia praesupponit naturam,” 139-140: “daß die Gnade kein für sich bestehendes, selbständiges Geschöpf ist, sondern daß sie ein Tun Gottes an einem schon vorhandenen Geschöpf darstellt, daß sie also nicht selbst Substanz, sondern Ereignis ist.”

One must keep in mind that light is more than just an analogy for Bonaventure: “This comparison is, for Bonaventure, much more than a comparison; it is a precise definition of the reality ‘grace.’ . . . in general, for Bonaventure, light is a fundamental metaphysical principle, the radical ground of all reality, the first form . . . or, as the saint says, the quinta essentia, the fifth element, which stands behind the other four.”

Ratzinger further says “that Grace for him [Bonaventure] is spiritual ‘light’ from the primordial light, God.” Ratzinger interprets this concept of grace as a form of light to be a transference of Bonaventure’s metaphysics of light into the realm of spiritual history; thus, once again, metaphysics and salvation history are brought together, this time in a theology of light.

Bonaventure’s conception of grace includes the relational character of grace. It always involves man’s relationship to God, who is the source of grace. Grace is constantly being poured into the graced soul in a way akin to light constantly emanating from the sun. Thus, grace never becomes a static thing possessed by man in his own right. A contemporary example could be electrical appliances. They rely on a constant flow of electricity from an electrical source such as a battery or a power station. So, too, the divine likeness in man relies on a constant influx of

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211 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 335: “Gnade aber bedeutet im Grunde nichts anderes, als dass der Gott, den die Schrift »Licht« nennt (Joh 1,5), Licht für den Menschen wird, in ihn hineinleuchtet wie die Sonne mit ihrem körperlichen Licht in den Bezirk unseres leiblichen Lebens hineinleuchtet.”

212 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 335-336: “Dieser Vergleich ist für Bonaventura viel mehr als ein Vergleich, er ist eine genaue Definition der Wirklichkeit »Gnade«. . . . das Licht für Bonaventura metaphysisches Grundprinzip überhaupt ist, das Grundradikal alles Wirklichen, die Erst-form . . . oder, wie der Heilige sagt, die quinta essentia, das fünfte Element, das hinter den anderen vieren steht.”

213 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 336: “dass Gnade für ihn geistiges »Licht« aus dem Urlicht Gott ist.”

214 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 336.
grace from the source of grace, God himself. It is not a static, one-time donation of grace but a continual flow of the divine light of grace into man’s soul and thus denotes a constant and active relationship between man and God.

Ratzinger thinks Bonaventure’s view of grace as thus expressed is contrary to Aquinas’s understanding. Aquinas speaks of grace as a supernatural quality of the soul and as a form with a completed act of existence in the soul.\textsuperscript{215} In this view, grace becomes man’s possession once it has been given by God. Bonaventure, however, understands grace as ‘esse semper in fieri’: existing always in becoming. Grace “is in the soul, but not from the soul; it is in man and yet above man, and thus never becomes man’s own actual property.”\textsuperscript{216} Thus, Ratzinger sees a repetition of the difference between Aquinas and Bonaventure discussed earlier: “The difference between the two great thinkers of the high Middle Ages is not established first of all with the terms ‘salvation historical’ and ‘metaphysical,’ but is to be designated as a difference of dynamic-actual and static-substantial ways of thinking.”\textsuperscript{217}

Earlier, it was asked where the image of God resides in man. Now, likewise, Ratzinger treats the locus of divine likeness in man. The contrast between Aquinas and Bonaventure on this point is similar to the contrast between them with respect to their understandings of nature. The contrast between dynamic (Bonaventure) vs. static (Aquinas) points of view applies here as well.

\textsuperscript{215} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 340; see also, \textit{ST} I-II q 110 a 2 and \textit{ST} III q 63 a 5 ad 1 as well as Johann Auer, \textit{Die Entwicklung der Gnadenlehre in der Hochscholastik, Freiburger theologische Studien} 62 and 64, 2 vols. (Freiburg i. B.: 1942 and 1951): I, 201 n. 84.


With respect to Aquinas’s understanding of the locus of divine likeness in man: “Thomas brings to its logical conclusion a doctrinal tendency apparently founded by Philip the Chancellor, which establishes an entire cosmos of grace in man, which is thoroughly constructed in parallel to the natural cosmos of being. As natural being is formed from substance and powers . . . so too, [with] the being of grace. . . . human nature itself must be changed and raised up to a new ‘divine’ way of being.”218

It is not so much a matter of the creation of a ‘supernature,’ “but that the (one) nature must be made ‘supernatural’; i.e., he concludes that grace directly attaches to man’s nature as such.”219 Thus, there is a decisively metaphysical approach to the grace of divine likeness in Aquinas’s thought. Divine likeness is achieved through the transformation and elevation of human nature.

Bonaventure’s understanding of divine likeness has a different starting point. “For him, grace is indissolubly bound up with the actual conversion of man, with his concrete directedness to God, wherefore it is impossible to search for it in the abstract order of essence.”220 Once again, the act-character of divine likeness is highlighted. Rather than conceiving of divine likeness in

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219 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 344: “sondern dass die (eine) Natur »übernatürlich« gemacht werden muss; d.h., er folgert, dass die Gnade unmittelbar an der Natur des Menschen als solcher ansetzt.”

220 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 345: “Für ihn ist Gnade unlösbar verbunden mit der wirklichen Bekehrung des Menschen, mit seiner konkreten Hingewandtheit zu Gott, weswegen sie unmöglich in der abstrakten Wesensordnung gesucht werden kann.”
terms of an abstract essence, Bonaventure connects it to man’s concrete action in turning towards God, which thus carries a salvation-historical tone. Grace is to be found, according to Ratzinger, “in the order of action, not in the purely abstract zone of being.”

The difference between Aquinas and Bonaventure on this point is significant. For Bonaventure, in contrast with Aquinas, “The real starting point of grace thus lies not in the ultimate depths but in the real apex of the soul, there where the decision between turning toward God or turning away from God occurs: in the free will (liberum arbitrium). In other words: grace belongs to the order of voluntas [will], not to that of nature . . . or said in modern terms: grace, in a strict sense, belongs to the personal order.”

Thus, Aquinas and Bonaventure’s respective understandings of divine likeness correspond to their understandings of the nature of the image of God. As Ratzinger explains:

Thomas, who had located the natural image of God in the spiritual nature as such, consequently also interprets grace in a substantial-static sense. Conversely, Bonaventure, who had already decided to emphasize the actual character of the natural image of God, does this necessarily even more where it concerns grace. The natural image of God consists in memoria, intelligentia, and voluntas, inasmuch as they are turned to knowing and loving God, so too the gracious image of God consists in fides, spes, and caritas, in that gracious trinity of action, which gives back to the spirit its original direction and first truly puts it in that position, in which alone it is image of God.

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221 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 345: “in der Ordnung des Tuns, nicht in der rein abstrakten Zone des Seins.”

222 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 345-346: “Der eigentliche Ansatzpunkt der Gnade liegt also nicht in der letzten Tiefe, sondern in der eigentlichen Spitze der Seele, da wo die Entscheidung fällt zwischen Gottzugewandtheit und Gottabgewandtheit: Im freien Willen (liberum arbitrium). Mit anderen Worten: Gnade gehört der Ordnung der voluntas, nicht derjenigen der natura zu . . . oder modern gesagt: Gnade gehört in einem strikten Sinn der personalen Ordnung an.” Ratzinger’s use of voluntas here is curious, considering the distinction he made earlier between voluntas and liberum arbitrium and the use of the latter in the prior sentence.

In Bonaventure, a shift takes place in the transition from the natural capacities of memory, intellect, and will to the triad of grace: faith, hope, and love. As Ratzinger explains:

With the trinity of the natural faculties, the accent lies on the intellectual-cognitive powers, with which the duality of memoria and intelligentia has the predominance over the voluntas. Not so with grace: here, a heavy shift in weight enters from the cognitive to the affective side, with which now the duality of spes and caritas gains the predominance in comparison to the intellectual power represented only by the fides.  

Bonaventure’s Franciscan background leads him to this position “that love stands above knowing, as the will is above the understanding, and that, therefore, grace has its main emphasis precisely in love.” For Bonaventure, then, “the transition from the state of nature into the state of grace simultaneously and necessarily signifies the transition from the position of knowing to that of loving.” If Bonaventure connected the image of God with knowledge of God, so too, he connects man’s divine likeness with love of God.

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225 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 347: “dass die Liebe über dem Erkennen steht, wie der Wille über dem Verstände ist, und dass mithin die Gnade gerade in der Liebe ihren Schwerpunkt hat.” A conflict appears here. In the last quote, Ratzinger said that with respect to the natural faculties, intellect predominated over the will, but here he uses the phrase “as the will is above the understanding.” If the latter is true, then there is no shift in weight from the natural to the supernatural order.

Once again, the above considerations flow smoothly into the next topic. Insofar as man as the image of God is connected to human knowledge of God and insofar as this is elevated in the supernatural virtue of love of God, a more detailed exposition of epistemology is appropriate here. In turn, epistemology will become important in the consideration of divine revelation, since it concerns both man’s knowledge of God through God’s self-disclosure as well as man’s loving response to God in free assent to God’s gift of grace.

2.3.5 Bonaventure’s Epistemology

The prior discussions of the image of God and the divine likeness in man, which were shown to be connected with knowing and loving God, lead to an exposition of Bonaventure’s epistemology. In fact, Ratzinger holds that the divine image of God in man is a key for understanding Bonaventure’s illuminationist theory of knowledge.227

In the period of high scholasticism, it was generally held that any certainty of knowledge involves a knowledge based upon the eternal reasons. Augustine’s influence stands behind this general consensus. Nevertheless, there were a myriad of divergent interpretations of what precisely that means. Bonaventure himself points to two main viewpoints, rejects both, and offers his own, third approach to the problem, which stands as a golden mean between the other two.

The first approach holds that “the light of eternal truth is the sole and exclusive basis of knowledge in the certainty of knowledge.”228 Bonaventure rejects this claim, because it would lead to erroneous conclusions. If it were true, then the knowledge of those still on earth would be


no different than the knowledge enjoyed by the saints in glory. Additionally, there could be no
distinction between science and wisdom as two forms of knowledge. Likewise, knowledge based
on reason (natural knowledge) and knowledge gained from revelation (knowledge of grace)
could no longer be differentiated. Ironically, still today, these objections are used against
illuminationist theories of knowledge, including Bonaventure’s epistemology. However,
Ratzinger shows that Bonaventure was aware of these objections and addresses them; even more,
he raises them himself against this form of illumination theory, which he himself rejects. 229

The second approach to the question, which Bonaventure also rejects, approximates
Aquinas’s view. This theory holds that “Not the eternal light itself, but only a created power
proceeding from it is presented here as a basis of the certainty of knowledge.” 230 According to
Ratzinger, “Thereby, however, the double-function of the eternal truth is misunderstood, which,
according to another passage, is at the same time veritas causans and informans for human
knowing . . . here the blurring of the relation of the order of nature and the order of grace is the
inevitable result of a false simplification.” 231 Bonaventure also rejects the theory, holding that
“this interpretation is, in reality, only a cloaked rejection of the doctrine of illumination, which
does violence to the doctrine of Augustine and completely misinterprets it.” 232

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229 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 351.

230 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 353: “Nicht das ewige Licht selber, sondern nur
eine von ihm ausgehende geschaffene Kraft wird hier als Grund der Erkenntnisgewissheit
ausgegeben.”

231 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 353: “Damit wird aber die Doppelfunktion der
ewigen Wahrheit verkannt, die, nach einer andern Stelle, für das menschliche Erkennen zugleich
veritas causans und informans ist . . . hier ist die Verwischung des Verhältnisses von Natur- und
Gnadenordnung die unausbleibliche Folge einer falschen Vereinfachung.”

232 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 353: “diese Auslegung in Wirklichkeit nur eine
getarnte Ablehnung der Erleuchtungslehre ist, die der Lehre Augustins Gewalt antut und sie
völlig missdeutet.”
The rejection of the two other interpretations of the role of eternal reasons in the act of human knowing provides background for Bonaventure’s solution to the problem. According to Ratzinger, Bonaventure’s epistemology proceeds from the reality of the divine image in the human person. As Ratzinger relates: “The concept of the imago Dei is . . . in Bonaventure, unlike in Thomas Aquinas . . ., a concept of theological epistemology.”

Even more strongly, Ratzinger remarks at length:

Reciprocally, any epistemology, which does not mistake the peculiarly human and creaturely character of human knowledge, is bound to the imago-concept. So little can the essence of man be grasped correctly apart from the image-concept; so little can the faculty of knowledge and the process of knowledge precisely of this man be understood aright apart from this concept. And so little can there be a theologically neutral concept of being, which refrains from the creature-character of non-divine being; so little can there be a theologically neutral epistemology, which disregards man’s being the image of God. Similarly, as the wisdom-concept just as much as the doctrine of grace is a concept of epistemology [Erkenntnistheorie], anthropology and epistemology [Erkenntnistheorie], being and knowledge, philosophy and theology are also indissolubly linked with one another in the imago-concept.

Ratzinger is not interested in a purely philosophical notion of knowledge that ignores the insight of man’s divine imagery received from revelation. He thinks that such a philosophical project cannot help but be erroneous, since it would leave out something fundamental about the nature of

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humanity and its intellectual capacity. Hence, following Bonaventure, Ratzinger insists that epistemology can be conceived of only in light of the concept of humans as the image of God.

Before proceeding, Ratzinger offers a reminder of the three different ways in which creatures can reflect God: as vestige, as image, or as likeness. “For the ‘vestige,’ God is only cause; for the ‘image,’ he is a known object; for the ‘likeness’ [he is] infused gift.” Thus, creatures are vestiges insofar as they come from God. A human person is an image of God insofar as he or she knows God. One bears a divine likeness insofar as God dwells within one.

Similarly, Ratzinger finds in Bonaventure an exposition of three ways in which God cooperates with creatures insofar as they are vestige, image, and/or likeness of God. In this instance, the normal order is not followed. He first treats God’s cooperation with vestiges, then with likenesses, and finishes with God’s cooperation with man as an image of God. God is the creative principle of the works of vestiges. With respect to the works of man conducted through divine grace, and thus by man as divine likeness, God is the infused gift. “For that work, finally,” writes Ratzinger, “which suits it [the creature] as ‘image’ in the real sense, he is the moving interior reason (ratio movens), i.e., a manner of divine cooperation is present here, which indeed remains behind the filled similarity of grace, but which at the same time extends far beyond the general assistance.”

God cooperates with the human person as the image of God in the act of knowledge. This distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation and hence removes humankind from the realm

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236 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 355: “für jenes Werk endlich, das ihr [der Kreatur] als »Bilde im eigentlichen Sinn eignet, ist er bewegender innerer Grund (ratio movens), d.h. hier liegt eine Weise des göttlichen Mittuns vor, die zwar hinter der gefüllten Gemeinsamkeit der Gnade zurückbleibt, die aber zugleich über den allgemeinen Sukkurs weit hinausragt.”
of pure nature. This represents a “peculiar concept of spirit of the Seraphic Doctor, which allows him to grasp ‘spirit’ as a middle order between nature and grace. This concept of spirit . . . is the true and real key for Bonaventure’s doctrine of illumination.”

In contrast to the first illuminationist theory mentioned earlier, which was rejected by Bonaventure, and which posited that the eternal reasons are the sole and exclusive basis of all certainty of knowledge, “Bonaventure defines his own doctrine of illumination to the effect that the eternal truth is indeed not the sole and exclusive—yet still real—ground of knowledge; it is effective in knowledge ‘ut regulans et ratio motiva, non quidem ut sola et in sua omnimoda claritate, sed cum ratione creatae, et ut ex parte a nobis contuita secundum statum viae [as a regulative and motive cause, however, not as the sole cause or in its full clarity, but along with a created cause and as contuited by us ‘in part’ in accord with our present state of life].’”

The reason that divine illumination is not the exclusive principle of human knowledge is because the soul is only partly the image of God, that is, not every part of the soul is the image of God.

Furthermore, divine illumination is not the only basis for human knowledge: things themselves are principles of knowledge. Along with the eternal reasons, the soul contacts “the phantasms abstracted out of the objects, which in their objective difference work as real grounds of knowledge. The objective content of knowledge (in this respect Bonaventure is an

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238 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 356: “Bonaventura definiert seine eigene Erleuchtungslehre dahingehend, dass die ewige Wahrheit zwar nicht alleiniger und ausschließlich, aber eben doch wirklicher Erkenntnisgrund sei, sie sei in der Erkenntnis wirksam »ut regulans et ratio motiva, non quidem ut sola et in sua omnimoda claritate, sed cum ratione creatae, et ut ex parte a nobis contuita secundum statum viae.«” The translation of the Latin is taken from an online article on March 24, 2016: [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bonaventure/#5.1](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bonaventure/#5.1)
Aristotelian) is gained through abstraction out of the reality present at hand; the formal element of certainty (by contrast, Augustinian) is derived from divine illumination.”

Things themselves provide the content of knowledge; divine illumination provides the certainty of knowledge. On this point, Bonaventure himself writes: “Things have existence in the mind, in their own nature (proprio genere), and in the eternal art. So the truth of things as they are in the mind or in their own nature — given that both are changeable — is sufficient for the soul to have certain knowledge only if the soul somehow reaches things as they are in the eternal art” (De scientia Christi, q.4 resp.). The reason for certainty’s basis in divine illumination is explained in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as follows: “Certain knowledge requires steadfast unchangeability. Since that can be found only in the divine mind, and since we have access to the divine mind only through illumination, certain knowledge requires illumination.”

An objection is raised against Bonaventure’s illumination theory with respect to natural knowledge. Divine illumination “is, however, a free act of God’s will, not a process of the natural order established by God. Knowledge, which is established through a divine act of the will, however, is knowledge of revelation. Consequently, with the presupposition of the illumination doctrine, every knowledge would be prophetic or knowledge of revelation.”

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Bonaventure’s response to this objection indicates that the divine mirror of knowledge has two forms of representation. The first form belongs to the natural order insofar as natural objects reflect their creator. This reflection of the divine “is accessible at any time and to all . . . and thus it may be said about them that the ‘naturalia in rationibus aeternis cognoscuntur naturali iudicatorio rationis.’”242 This process may be referred to as natural illumination, whereby the eternal reasons illuminate the human intellect enabling it to judge things in the natural order and according to natural reason and natural judgment. Supernatural illumination, by contrast, enables the human mind to know things that are beyond nature, supernatural things as well as future things. Knowledge of these things is not accessible all the time and by everyone. It requires divine revelation. It involves “a hidden and in the real sense deliberate [willentliche] self-presentation of God.”243 For Ratzinger, this understanding of the knowledge of divine revelation is crucial. It is important “that ‘revelation’ for Bonaventure is an internal process between God and the human subject, a personal contact of man by his God. Likewise . . . ‘supernaturale’ simply signifies a direct-personal act of God in the special sense.”244

Further conclusions can be drawn from Bonaventure’s conception of revelation as a divine action within the interiority of the human person. As Ratzinger explains:

bei Voraussetzung der Erleuchtungslehre jede Erkenntnis prophetische oder Offenbarungserkenntnis sein.”

242 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 360: “jederzeit und allen zugänglich ist . . . und über die sich daher sagen lässt, dass die »naturalia in rationibus aeternis cognoscuntur naturali judicatorio rationis«.”

243 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 360: “eine verborgene und im eigentlichen Sinne willentliche Selbstdarbietung Gottes.”

“Epistemologically, no exact distinction can be ascertained between the peculiar experience of God of the prophets and mystics on the one hand and the specific contact with God of the Christian believer on the other hand. Each of these experiences is called ‘revelatio’ and requires a special donation of God to the relevant subject.”

Ratzinger admits that there is no precise, well-defined concept of supernatural illumination that provides clear content to what it entails. Nevertheless, he insists that it involves an “exceeding of that process of illumination which befits every man on the basis of his spiritual nature.”

To understand this point more clearly, the difference between humanity’s situation before and after the Fall must also be considered. Originally, the book of creation was able to reflect the trinitarian life of God through vestiges and images clearly. But now this book has become dark, making the divine origin of creation more obscure. Additionally, human vision has become weakened. Thus, there is, respectively, an objective and a subjective hindrance to one’s ability to see the trinitarian life post-Fall. A remedy is required for both of these hindrances:

The deficiency of the ‘first book’ demands a compensation, which is achieved through the addition of a second witness, the ‘book of scripture.’ However, this new book only remedies the objective deficiency, which consists in the eclipse of the mirror of creation. The subjective deficiency of the darkening of the human eye remains. It cannot be remedied through a new external witness but only through a new, internal light. . . . the illumination coming from God himself, which is a part of the human process of knowledge.

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These considerations feature prominently in Ratzinger’s presentation of Bonaventure’s theology of divine revelation, as will be seen in subsequent chapters. As a preview, revelation properly understood must involve not only an external presentation of divine truths but also a divine act working within the interiority of the receiving subject. As Ratzinger reiterates:

The scripture has for the faith only an externally leading character, not it, but the internal illumination by which God donates himself to each individual, is decisive. . . . for ‘revelation’ is always only thinkable in the duality of doctrina and revelatio, [it] is never simply given through merely objective announcement [Kundmachung] . . . but always only in the duality of concepts, in which objective and subjective elements are joined to one another.248

Both scripture and the infused light of grace are required for revelation to take place, just as the similitudes abstracted from sense objects as well as the implanted light are required for natural knowledge.

Natural illumination and supernatural illumination, Ratzinger contends, are related to one another “as beginning and consummation, certainly as a consummation, which does not follow necessarily from this beginning, indeed which even this beginning cannot bring about of itself, which must rather be given to it in a new onset of divine love.”249 This is particularly the case

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249 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 366: “als Anfang und Vollendung, gewiss als eine Vollendung, die aus diesem Anfang nicht notwendig folgt, die dieser Anfang auch gar nicht aus sich hervorbringen kann, die ihm vielmehr in einem neuen Anlauf der göttlichen Liebe geschenkt werden muss.”
after the Fall. Perhaps boldly, Ratzinger asserts that “in the primitive state, the witness of nature sufficed for the knowledge of the Trinity, and that only the two-fold darkening of the world and the human spirit made a new attestation of this reality necessary.” In other words, if man had not fallen through sin, scripture would not have been necessary for humans to know the Trinity. The book of creation coupled with—still!—interior supernatural divine illumination, would have sufficed for man’s knowledge and supernatural union with God.

That last part is crucial. While the added, second, external witness of scripture would not have been necessary if man had never sinned, the additional illumination through supernatural grace would have still been required. As Ratzinger insists: “The difference between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural-gracious’ revelation exists also thoroughly in the original state before sin as well, but it touches here not upon a duality of external sources, but upon a duality of interior illumination.” This does, then, qualify the need for scripture with regard to supernatural revelation. Without sin, it would not be necessary. Because of sin, it is necessary. But with or without sin, a second divine illumination of supernatural grace shining into the interiority of man would be required, and hence must be given a crucial place in the theology of divine revelation.

Once again, the relationship between metaphysics and salvation history becomes an important theme within Ratzinger’s treatment of Bonaventure’s thought. According to Ratzinger, Bonaventure’s solution “unites the salvation historical and the over-arching metaphysical aspect

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251 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 368: “Der Unterschied von »natürlicher« und »übernatürlich-gnadenhafter« Offenbarung existiert also durchaus auch im Urstand, vor der Sünde, aber er beruht hier nicht auf einer Zweihit äußerer Quellen, sondern auf einer Zweihit innerer Erleuchtungen.”
in a true synthesis as it distinguishes the order of internal and external revelation.”²⁵² Ratzinger thinks that Bonaventure’s solution helps avoid both a Thomistic error as well as a Protestant error. For his part, “Thomas . . . must claim for both times of salvation a duality of external revelations and thereby indeed salvages the purity of the metaphysical order, but loses the salvation-historical distinctions about it.”²⁵³ In reaction against the Thomistic viewpoint, reformed Protestant theology ended up at the opposite extreme. It only recognizes the salvation historical aspect and fails to acknowledge the importance of the metaphysical dimension of grace.

Ratzinger believes that the validity of Bonaventure’s conclusion is demonstrated through a consideration of two further notions. First, as even Thomas maintains, pre-lapsarian Adam did not have knowledge through faith, whose necessity is tied to the fallen state. This means, then, that Adam’s knowledge of God was attained through seeing the truth as it is reflected in creation, which even allowed him to attain to the state of contemplation.²⁵⁴ Thus, Bonaventure’s idea that the second, external witness to revelation (i.e., scripture) was not necessary for man before the Fall is warranted. The witness of creation sufficed. Now, however, the external witness of scripture is necessary to overcome the dullness of the mirror of creation in its fallen state.

Yet, even scripture does not suffice, and this point is crucial for the present study. This duality of external objects of knowledge and interior supernatural illumination is a hallmark of


²⁵³ Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 370: “Thomas . . . muss für beide Heilszeiten eine Doppelheit äußerer Offenbarungen behaupten und rettet damit zwar die Reinheit der metaphysischen Ordnung, verliert aber darüber die heilsgeschichtlichen Unterscheidungen.”

Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation. Ratzinger insists that revelation cannot be reduced to the mere presence of the external witness but must include the interior illumination through supernatural grace.

As a good Bonaventurian, however, Ratzinger does not stop there. Dualities are great, but triads are better in a Bonaventurian mindset. Just as Bonaventure insisted on adding free will to the triad of nature and supernatural (or nature and grace), so too, Ratzinger insists on adding the free act of faith to the components of divine revelation in addition to the external witness of doctrine and the interior witness of divine illumination. All of this will be shown in the subsequent chapters.

2.4 Summary

This lengthy chapter is necessary to place the discussion of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation into sharper relief than other commentaries and presentations provide. Hitherto, commentators on Ratzinger’s theology of revelation have focused narrowly on specific propositions or positions that Ratzinger takes with respect to various themes that fall within the field of divine revelation, such as his stances on scripture and tradition and on the subjective dimension of revelation. While we will cover those issues as well, this chapter on Ratzinger’s theological method and philosophical preferences provides a more fundamental insight into the rationale behind Ratzinger’s positions on those issues. To aid this enhanced understanding of Ratzinger’s theology, let us summarize more succinctly the main elements of what has been discussed in this chapter.

First of all, Ratzinger has a specific theological method. Like Bonaventure, he gives priority to sacred scripture, which he reads in light of the great saints and doctors of the Church within the context of the entirety of the Church’s tradition and in faithfulness to the definitions of
magisterial statements. This takes precedence over any preconceived philosophical viewpoint.

Revelation trumps pure reason. Following Bonaventure, Ratzinger takes seriously the weakness of the human intellect in the fallen state, and he thus appreciates that true wisdom cannot be derived from philosophy alone. Philosophy is not self-sufficient. It needs the truth gained from God’s revelatory self-disclosure in order attain its goal: wisdom.

At the same time, because revelation is addressed to the human person, who has been endowed with reason and who grows in understanding through the use of reason, philosophy is necessary for theology. Revelation is reasonable; it is compatible with reason. In fact, revelation from the one true God dispels the myths created by humanity and offers a more reasonable explanation for the human person, human life, and human destiny. The Christian faith—as intrinsically missionary—must make use of reason—of sound philosophy—in order to bring revelation to those who have not yet received it.

Because Christian faith makes claims about the way things are, metaphysics is an essential element of this rational defense and explication of the faith. Thus, theology must defend and be an advocate for the importance of metaphysics in an era that tends to reject it. While revelation takes precedence over human wisdom, and thus theology has priority over philosophy, nevertheless, theology must defend philosophy, who can serve her well if utilized properly.

Now that the proper place and use of philosophy have been established as an important part of theology in the eyes of Joseph Ratzinger, his particular philosophical positions that undergird his theology of revelation can be explored. Essentially, the key issue is theological anthropology, which includes the philosophical elements of metaphysics and epistemology. Theological anthropology rooted in sound metaphysics and epistemology is crucial because divine revelation can only be understood in connection with the state of revelation’s addressee:
the human person. And since revelation and grace presuppose nature, then one must have a concept of the relation and distinction between nature and the supernatural in order to properly understand revelation. This discussion involves the consideration of man as the image of God and as the likeness of God, which correspond to the human capacities to know and to love God, which are both intrinsic aspects of divine revelation.

For Ratzinger, following Bonaventure, the human person has a peculiar essence and form of existence that distinguishes one from the rest of creation. Part of a person’s nature is spirit, which is already somehow beyond the merely natural insofar as it is directed towards that which is above nature: God. By nature, a person’s spirit is already the image of God insofar as it has the capacity to know God. There is a natural dynamism of the spirit towards that of which it is the image. It is also a part of humanity’s essence to have free will, which can be exercised in correspondence with nature or against nature. And thus, while the possession of free will is ‘natural’ to humanity, its exercise is distinct from nature. Free will constitutes a personal level of existence that is not reducible to nature or necessity.

Additionally, salvation history must be taken into account with respect to human nature. Metaphysics must be understood with due reference to human history. Human nature has been damaged through the Fall. In fact, all of creation has been damaged. Whereas before the Fall, one could see the reflection of God, the Creator, more clearly in the mirror of creation, that reflection has been dulled. As a result, one’s ability to know God has been impeded. Simultaneously, one’s own interior capacities have become defective.

In order to overcome this fallen state, there must be a remedy for both the objective (external) and subjective (internal) defects. This is where supernatural grace comes into play. Since the image of God is understood in terms of its dynamism, that is, its act of knowing God,
the effect of grace, too, is understood dynamically. Grace should not be conceived of in substantial terms. It is not a static, substantive gift given to man in such a way that it becomes his proper possession. Rather, grace involves a continual inflow of divine life; it is a divine action upon an already existing substance or nature. It is primarily to be understood in terms of one’s concrete relation to God. It reorients this nature back to its proper perspective. That is, it turns a person back towards God and enables one to know God more clearly and love him more fervently.

Thus, all of this leads to the question of epistemology, which relates directly with theology of revelation. One’s knowledge, according to Ratzinger’s interpretation of Bonaventure, involves both content and certainty. For the content of knowledge, man relies upon external objects known through the senses. These objects are real principles of knowledge. However, for certainty, one requires illumination, for only that which is eternal and unchangeable can be the basis for certainty. Even in natural knowledge (knowledge of natural things) God cooperates in this process; this is called natural illumination, which grants the human mind access to the eternal reasons in order to know natural things with certainty.

As already mentioned, in the fallen state, the external witness of creation no longer suffices, for creation no longer reflects its creator as clearly. The mirror has been darkened. Thus, a supplemental external witness must be supplied. This is found primarily in the witness of sacred scripture, which testifies to God’s revelation in history. At the same time, supernatural revelation also requires a specific act of divine illumination that enables one to perceive divine truth that is beyond the natural order. This special illumination by God is thus also required. The external witness of scripture does not suffice. Thus, revelation always involves an external
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ness (scripture and/or doctrine) and an interior witness (divine illumination), which

Once again, however, the duality must be turned into a triad if it is to be complete. In

addition to nature (creation) and spirit (intellect) there is free will. Thus, the new external witness

(scripture, doctrinal instruction, etc.) and the interior influence of God (divine illumination) still

need one’s free assent to complete the process. Free will must be involved. This free will is aided

by grace, of course, in what is called the act of faith. Thus, as will be shown in subsequent

chapters, revelation involves an external witness, the interior witness of divine light, and the

human person’s positive response in faith. Without all three components, revelation is

incomplete. This understanding of divine revelation, which will be elucidated even further in the

chapters to follow, is rooted in philosophical and theological anthropology, that is, metaphysics

and epistemology, which involve a proper understanding of the relation between nature, grace,

and free will.

The themes discussed in this chapter will emerge again in the later chapters. Thus, it is

hoped that this chapter’s extensive discussion of philosophy—which is normally lacking in

works about Ratzinger’s understanding of revelation—has provided a firmer foundation for the

reading and interpretation of his theology of revelation.
PART TWO: RATZINGER’S THEOLOGY OF DIVINE REVELATION

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION ITSELF

Ratzinger’s own understanding of divine revelation was greatly influenced by his study of Bonaventure. Remaining unconvincing by Schmaus’s criticism of his account of Bonaventure’s understanding of revelation, Ratzinger defends his interpretation of Bonaventure and continues to hold many of the positions he gleaned from Bonaventure’s work. As Ratzinger himself relates, “Although I had some rudimentary knowledge of Bonaventure and had already read some of his shorter writings, new worlds opened up as I made progress with my work.”¹ Noting specifically Bonaventure’s influence for his subsequent work, he writes: “These insights, gained through my reading of Bonaventure, were later on very important for me at the time of the conciliar discussion on revelation, Scripture, and tradition.”² Hence, in order to comprehend Ratzinger’s own theology of revelation, this part of the dissertation must consider many of the insights presented in the original version of Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift.

This chapter first explores terminological considerations. An evaluation of the term ‘revelation’ opens the discussion. Next, the term ‘revelation’ is considered in connection with two related terms: ‘apparition’ and ‘manifestation.’ Then, two other terms, namely, ‘word’ and ‘light,’ are compared and contrasted with respect to their application to theology of revelation. Ratzinger’s extensive treatment of terminology is barely discussed in commentaries on his thought. Presenting and discussing that portion of his work is another way this dissertation seeks to contribute to an understanding of his theology of revelation in a way that other works have not done so far. Following these terminological considerations, a presentation of the essence (or

¹ Ratzinger, Milestones, 104.
² Ratzinger, Milestones, 109.
nature) of revelation is offered under three aspects: 1) the inner-trinitarian foundation of revelation, 2) the Christological core of revelation, and 3) the completion of revelation in the response of faith.

3.1 Terminological Considerations

3.1.1 The Term ‘Revelation’

Ratzinger’s study of Bonaventure’s understanding of divine revelation met certain difficulties. At first glance, it appears that Bonaventure does not have a precise and consistent use of the term revelation. For, “there is on the one hand no tractate on revelation by Bonaventure, indeed no fixed terminological expression [Begriffswort] for this subject in general, no linguistically tangible terminological space [Begriffsraum], which we could abide by.” In fact, “If, for a start, one superficially reviews the places in which Bonaventure uses the word ‘revelatio,’ an abundant confusion thus seems to dominate in the usage of the word; a uniform meaning does not seem to be able to be found at all.” Additional difficulties arise when attempting to explore terminology in depth. “Obviously, there exists the danger that familiar words mislead, simulate propositions which in truth are not given, and conversely that essentials remain unseen, because no known word-trail renders service as a signpost.” When one

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3 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 83: “Es gibt einerseits bei Bonaventura keinen Offenbarungstraktat, ja überhaupt kein festes Begriffswort für diese Sache, keinen sprachlich greifbaren Begriffsraum, an den wir uns halten könnten.”

4 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 85: “Wenn man die Stellen, an denen Bonaventura das Wort »revelatio« gebraucht, einmal oberflächlich überblickt, so scheint in der Verwendung des Wortes eine reichliche Verwirrung zu herrschen, irgend eine einheitliche Sinngebung scheint nicht auffindbar.”

5 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 84: “Es besteht augenscheinlich die Gefahr, dass vertraute Wörter irreführen, Aussagen vortäuschen, die in Wahrheit nicht gegeben sind, und dass umgekehrt das Wesentliche ungesehen bleibt, weil keine bekannte Wortspur Wegweiserdienste leistet.”
encounters a common word, such as ‘revelation,’ one instinctually reads it in light of one’s own assumptions about what the word denotes and connotes. This instinct can cause one to read one’s own understanding of a term into another’s use of that word, especially if the text being read originates from a different historical and linguistic context. In some cases, this can result in missing important nuances in the original author’s understanding.

In order to avoid such difficulties, Ratzinger set out to examine carefully Bonaventure’s use of significant terms in the various contexts in which they are found in order to attain greater clarity with respect to the core of Bonaventure’s understanding of those terms. In what follows, the results of Ratzinger’s detailed analysis are presented insofar as they contribute to a greater understanding of his own theology of divine revelation.

There are similar difficulties for the present work. One such difficulty is that the Latin word, *revelatio*, can be translated into various German words. The most common German term used to translate *revelatio* is *Offenbarung*. Other words terminologically linked to *Offenbarung* are: *offen*, meaning ‘to open’; *offenbar*, which means ‘apparent(ly),’ ‘obvious(ly),’ or ‘manifest(ly)’; and *offenbaren*, ‘to reveal,’ ‘to expose,’ ‘to unlock,’ ‘to evince,’ or, more peculiarly, ‘to unbosom.’ The core of the German word *Offenbarung* has the connotation of ‘open.’ *Eröffnung* has the same root and can mean ‘disclosure’ or ‘opening’ (among other things). While not as commonly used as *Offenbarung*, *Enthüllung* is the German term most closely related to the Latin *revelatio*, as both have the connotation of removing a covering (such as a ‘veil’: Latin = *velum*; German = *Hülle*). Most of the linguistic analysis that Ratzinger gives for the meaning of the term revelation is drawn from the Latin, *revelatio*. This fact should be kept in mind when one considers his comments on revelation where he does not refer to the original Latin term, even if he uses *Offenbarung* instead of *Enthüllung*. 
Despite the fact that Bonaventure never wrote a specific treatise on revelation, and despite the fact that numerous connotations seem to apply to the term *revelatio* in different contexts, there are places “in which Bonaventure himself strives for a delimitation of meaning, in which he says what he understands by ‘revelation’ and what he does not intend to understand by it.”\(^6\) With respect to these specific passages, Ratzinger looks first at instances in which Bonaventure expresses the outer limits of the meaning of the term more than he defines its proper core. Thus, he proceeds from the least precise to the most precise meanings of ‘*revelatio*’ recognized by Bonaventure.

Bonaventure distinguishes the properly theological meaning of the term *revelatio* both from a general, worldwide understanding of the term as well as from a broad theological usage. In this vein, Bonaventure differentiates between ‘*praedictio*’ (prediction) and ‘*revelatio*.’ “Not every prediction of a future mystery by God or his prophets is also already a ‘revelation.’”\(^7\) Ratzinger asserts that, for Bonaventure, simply predicting something about the future does not, in itself, denote revelation in the proper sense.

Bonaventure does say that there are two kinds of revelation, including one that only takes place through mere prediction. “Thus here, Bonaventure nevertheless now concedes the name ‘revelation,’ which he denied a little earlier. It is clear that, at bottom, this happens only for the sake of the authority of the Fathers and that the ‘*praedictio-revelatio*’ is to be interpreted as ‘*revelatio*’ figuratively in contrast to the graced-revelation, which befits this name in the real

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\(^6\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 85: “an denen Bonaventura selber sich um eine Bedeutungsumgrenzung müht, an denen er sagt, was er unter »revelatio« verstehen und was er nicht darunter verstehen will.”

\(^7\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 85: “Nicht jede Vorhersage künftiger Geheimnisse durch Gott bzw. seine Propheten ist auch schon eine »Offenbarung«.”
In other words, out of respect for the writings of the Church Fathers, Bonaventure acknowledges that the term *revelatio* can be used to denote prediction but thinks this usage is more figurative than literal, since it does not get to the real core of the term as he understands it.

There is a further, clearly theological use of *revelatio* that Bonaventure also does not consider to represent the most authentic understanding of the term. Once again, the lack of precision is tied to the relation between revelation and grace in his thought. To highlight this theological—but somewhat imprecise—use of *revelatio*, an example found in patristic sources is given: instances where demons are said to receive revelations (*revelationes*) from holy angels.

In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure argues that this use is problematic. Bonaventure’s argument can be summarized in three steps as follows: 1) “revelation is a ‘*cognitio gratiae, non naturae,*’” but 2) “the receptivity for grace has left the demons,” 3) “and therefore a ‘*revelatio*’ to the demons constitutes a contradiction.” Bonaventure’s *Commentary on the Sentences* is not the only place where this distinction occurs. “In fact, in the *Questiones disputatae de scientia Christi*, Bonaventure himself has used the pair of opposites *cognitio naturae – gratiae* practically synonymously with the other pair *cognitio rationis –*

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9 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 86. Ratzinger points to Augustine, *Gen litt* II 17, 37 (PL 34, 278 f.) and as cited by Peter Lombard in *II Sent* d7 p2 cap5 (II 171).

Thus explicitly connecting revelation with grace. Natural knowledge is equated with human reason, unaided by grace, i.e., what one can think and know through one’s own natural powers. Knowledge of revelation, on the other hand, is equated with knowledge aided by grace: what one knows through supernatural illumination rather than through purely natural reason.

In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure also responds to a current of thought that links the term ‘sending’ to revelation. Regarding this topic, different weight is given to alternative kinds of revelation depending on the one sent to reveal. Ratzinger asserts that “on the one hand, the ‘revelatio’ granted the highest theological weight is that which is bound to the sending of the Son and therefore to the second divine Person himself; on the other hand, it is devalued when it is equated with any and every communication of mystery from the realm of transcendence.”  

Thus, Ratzinger sees in Bonaventure a qualitative difference between revelation that involves the mission of God the Son and the proclamation of divine knowledge through the mediation of angels; the former carries a greater theological significance than the latter. The relative greatness of the ‘one sent’ to reveal correspondingly determines the qualitative character of the revelation that results. This view relates to the centrality of Christ to be discussed later.

These considerations already start to move from an imprecise meaning of the term *revelatio* towards a theologically precise understanding of revelation. As already shown, natural

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12 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 88: “einerseits der »revelatio« höchstes theologisches Gewicht zuerkannt wird, indem sie an die Sendung des Sohnes und damit an die zweite göttliche Person selber gebunden wird, andererseits wird sie abgewertet, indem sie gleichgesetzt wird mit jeder beliebigen Geheimnismitteilung aus dem Bereich der Transzendenz.”
or rational cognition does not constitute revelation in the full sense. Rather, Bonaventure equates
revelation with graced cognition. Ratzinger explains this understanding further in contrast to
mere prediction: “To ‘revelation’ belongs the inner, faithful acceptance of what has been said,
the knowledge of the ‘pro me’ of the relevant prediction. Talk of real revelation can only exist
where it does not remain in the external word but where it arrives at a true, inner contact with
God, to an inner enlightening of the man addressed by God.”

Thus, for Ratzinger, following Bonaventure, revelation in its truest sense, besides exterior
proclamation of words, includes within it an offer of grace to the subject receiving the divine
words. He reiterates this point on numerous occasions. Again distinguishing between prediction
and revelation proper, Ratzinger writes: “The one happens in fact through gracious
enlightenment, but next to this stands that other ‘revelatio,’ which takes place ‘sola
praedictione’: through mere prediction.” In even more explicit terms, Ratzinger cites
Bonaventure’s distinction between ‘aliqua revelatio’ and ‘illa revelatio, in qua est animae
illustratio per gratiam.’ The ‘aliqua revelatio’ can proceed from angels as well, while true and
real revelation proceeds not only from God alone, but also induces the inner transformation of
man.”

Here, it is clear that the immediacy of a revelation event (i.e., from God alone)—in

13 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 85-86: “Zur »Offenbarung« gehört die innere,
gläubige Annahme des Gesagten, die Erkenntnis des »pro me« der betreffenden Vorhersage. Von
wirklicher »Offenbarung« kann nur die Rede sein, wo es nicht beim äußeren Wort bleibt,
sondern wo es zu einem wahren inneren Kontakt mit Gott, zu einer inneren Erleuchtung des
angeredeten Menschen durch Gott kommt.”

14 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 87: “Die eine geschieht in der Tat durch
gnadenhafte Erleuchtung, aber daneben steht jene andere »revelatio«, die sich »sola
praedictione«: durch bloße Vorhersage vollzieht.”

15 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 88-89 (italics for Latin added): “illa revelatio, in
qua est animae illustratio per gratiam«. Die »aliqua revelatio« kann auch von Engeln ausgehen,
 während die wahre und eigentliche Offenbarung nicht nur allein von Gott ausgeht, sondern auch
die innere Verwandlung des Menschen mitbedingt.”
contrast to the mediation of revelation by angels, for example—is not the sole and sufficient factor for establishing a revelatory event as the most authentic form of revelation.

Rather, the (resulting) condition of the one to whom it the message is delivered is also fundamentally decisive for revelation to take place in the fullest sense. The transformation of the human subject through grace is an inherent part of the Bonaventurian understanding of divine revelation in the highest sense. Hence, divine revelation proper always involves a sending, to be sure, but not merely an externally sensible sending. “Bonaventure’s thesis is as follows: Where ever invisible ‘sending’ (of the Son or of the Spirit) in the strict sense takes place, there it arrives at the possession of God, to the indwelling of God, man becomes pleasing to God (gratia gratum faciens).” 16 Here, not surprisingly, the inner transformation through grace is tied to the indwelling of God and hence to the invisible sending of the Son and/or the Holy Spirit. It becomes clear, then, that the type of sending—externally sensible or interior—also plays a role.

In the meantime, however, the aforementioned complexity of Bonaventure’s writings on revelation seems at first to cast these last claims into doubt. In the Commentary on the Sentences, Bonaventure employs various scopes for the meaning of ‘sending.’ 17 As Ratzinger explains:

For the preceding solution applies the distinction just mentioned of sending in the narrower and broader sense to the Holy Spirit and directly calls the sending of the Spirit, broadly understood and not attached to transforming grace, ‘revelatio.’ Indeed, this does not result in an identity with the »alia revelatio« mentioned earlier – which can also proceed from angels, whereas here the bond to the Holy Spirit of God is essential – but it shows that ‘revelation’ is not necessarily tied to grace, that there, rather, a real gradation of meaning exists. 18

16 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 88: “Bonaventuras These ist hier folgende: Wo immer unsichtbare »Sendung« (des Sohnes oder des Geistes) im eigentlichen Sinne stattfindet, da kommt es zur Gott-Habe, zur Einwohnung Gottes, der Mensch wird gottwohlgefallig (gratia gratum faciens).”

17 See Bonaventure, I Sent d 14 p2 q1 ad 1 (I 271 a).

18 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 89: “Denn die vorangegangene Solutio wendet die eben besprochene Unterscheidung von Sendung im engeren und weiteren Sinne auf den
This last statement seems to contradict sharply the previous claim that transforming grace is an inherent part of revelation.

Despite this apparent contradiction, Ratzinger provides an interpretation that strives to resolve the confusion. Referring to the statement just quoted about revelation not necessarily being bound to grace, Ratzinger explains: “In this context, an offshoot of the ‘non-technical’ use of the word ‘revelatio’ is still indicated, which in fact first of all seems to lead quite far away from a linguistic use that binds ‘revelation’ and grace closely to one another.”19 The form of revelation not necessarily tied to grace finds its clearest example in prophecy: “By it is meant mainly that becoming aware of hidden realities, as it is given to the prophets through divine enlightenment.”20 This use seems to connote the process whereby a prophet is given divine knowledge, perhaps akin to inspiration, but not necessarily connected—at least notionally—with the inner, graced transformation of the prophet himself. Perhaps Jonah, who received the message to be proclaimed but only under duress delivered it to the Ninevites, can approximate the type of distinction envisioned here.

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In this same section of the *Habilitationsschrift*, Ratzinger deals with an even more peculiar usage of the term revelation: revelations given by the devil. In some ways, because this use of the term is so different than the other uses, it actually proves to be less problematic, insofar as it is more easily seen as a quite unusual—and hence, imprecise—use of the term, which is more of an imitation of revelation than actual revelation, what Ratzinger refers to as “(Pseudo-) ‘revelations’ of the devil.”

In order to summarize the results of his study of Bonaventure’s various uses of *revelatio* and the relative weight given to each one of them, Ratzinger provides an outline. This outline consists of two main genera, each of which—in turn—is further divided into three species.

With the first genus, “It is granted for the moment the possibility of an un-theological, more or less profane usage of the word ‘revelatio’; at the same time, however, no doubt is left about this that this usage is a concession to a linguistic use, which is in contradiction to that technical terminology to which Bonaventure holds himself bound.” Three examples, two of which have already been discussed, are given to indicate different species within this non-technical use of the term: 1) the devil’s revelation, 2) revelation between human persons (i.e., *revelatio voluntatis*), and 3) “revelation by God, but without an interior enlightenment of man: ‘praedictio.’”

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22 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 90: “Es wird zunächst die Möglichkeit einer untheologischen, mehr oder minder profanen Verwendung des Wortes »revealatio« eingeräumt, zugleich wird aber kein Zweifel darüber gelassen, dass diese Verwendung ein Zugeständnis an einen Sprachgebrauch ist, der sich im Widerspruch zu jener Fachsprache befindet, an die sich Bonaventura selber gebunden hat.”

23 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 90: “Revelatio von Gott, aber ohne innere Erleuchtung des Menschen: »praedictio«.” It is noteworthy—and perhaps peculiar—that Ratzinger places the last form, in which revelation is given by God, within the group of non-
Ratzinger refers to the second genus of linguistic usage of *revelatio* “as pure terminology which Bonaventure has personally made his own.”

All three of the species within this genus have already been discussed. The first species is “the ‘*alia revelatio,*’ which does not have to come immediately from God, but can proceed from his angels and saints as well;” nevertheless, “by the insertion of ‘*alia*’ even this revelation and—with it the associated linguistic use—is admittedly characterized as somewhat improper. Here, ‘*revelatio*’ signifies simply any mysterious proclamation from the realm of transcendence.”

The second species is marked by the sending of the Holy Spirit, but not necessarily in the sense of divine indwelling through grace. The prime example is, again, the divine inspiration or enlightenment given to a prophet in order to enable him to proclaim a divine message to a chosen audience.

Petrus Dempsey confirms this use in his study of Bonaventure’s exegesis, in which he “points out that the Seraphic Doctor uses the notions *revelatio* and *inspiratio* interchangeably.”

Revelation in this technical, profane, un-theological uses of the word *revelatio.* This somewhat surprising categorization will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis,* 91: “die sich Bonaventura als reine Terminologie persönlich zu Eigen gemacht hat.”

Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis,* 91: “Die »*alia revelatio*«, die nicht unmittelbar von Gott kommen muss, sondern auch von seinen Engeln und Heiligen ausgehen kann”; nevertheless, “durch die Beifügung »*alia*« ist freilich auch diese Offenbarung und damit der zugehörige Sprachgebrauch als einigermaßen uneigentlich gekennzeichnet. »Revelatio« bedeutet hier einfach jedwede geheimnishaft Kündgabe aus dem Bereich der Transzendenz.” Once again, Ratzinger’s categories seem suspect here, insofar as he simultaneously refers to this genus as pure terminology, yet labels his first example as ‘improper.’ Additionally, it is not clear whether an event of revelation mediated by an angel or other messenger but which also includes the offer and free reception of sanctifying grace as well as the assent of faith is still ‘improper’ insofar as it is not directly revealed by God alone but through intermediaries.

One may legitimately ask: how is this differentiated from the same species in the first genus?

Ratzinger, *Theology of History,* 64. On the same page, Ratzinger notes that this meaning of revelation is not unique to Bonaventure: “we must keep in mind that the definition of
sense is linked with the three types of ‘vision’ that Bonaventure and others acknowledged: *visio corporalis*, *visio spiritualis*, and *visio intellectualis*. Revelation as inspiration corresponds to the third kind of vision, “which must be called ‘mystical,’” for “Scripture is born from a mystical contact of the hagiographers with God.”

The third and final species of revelation bears the highest and most precise meaning of the term. Its defining characteristic is the fact that “‘in this the soul is enlightened by grace.’”

Ratzinger is convinced that this discovery is “the most important result of our present efforts –, that with the word ‘revelatio’ according to Bonaventure, we do not tread on a theologically neutral or as yet uncultivated terrain, but that this word is, for him, a technical theological expression.” As Verweyen says: “The most important result of this analysis is that, according to Bonaventure, there is no concept with which revelation can be denoted as an objectively presented fact, which one has to believe or can scientifically describe.”

Ratzinger insists that revelation “signifies . . . in the strictest sense that self-disclosure of God to men, to which the prophecy first given by Cassiodorus and generally accepted by Medieval theology clarifies prophecy as ‘inspiratio vel revelatio.’” See also, Petrus Dempsey, *De principiis exegeticis S. Bonaventurae* (Rome: Collegium S. Laurentii a Brundusio, Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum, 1945), 10-11.


29 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 91: “›in der die Seele erleuchtet wird von der Gnade‹.”

30 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 91: “das wichtigste Ergebnis unserer bisherigen Bemühungen –, dass wir mit dem Wort ›revelatio‹ bei Bonaventura nicht auf theologisch neutrales oder noch unbebautes Gelände treten, sondern dass dieses Wort für ihn ein theologischer Fachausdruck ist.”

man of faith must—for his part—respond in order, then, in this self-disclosure of God, to make that same man a sharer in that indwelling of Christ, which is called ‘grace’ there.”

This analysis of the various uses of the term ‘revelatio’ has aimed at delineating its most precise, technical, and theological meaning. Now that this has been established, an understanding of revelation can be enhanced by its comparison and contrast with two other terms: apparition and manifestation.

3.1.2 The Relation between Apparition, Revelation, and Manifestation

Once the term ‘revelatio’ has been considered in light of its own various—more or less precise—uses in Bonaventure’s works, Ratzinger proceeds to clarify its meaning further through a comparison with two other distinct, yet related terms: ‘apparitio’ and ‘manifestatio.’ Interestingly, Ratzinger asserts that “Manifestatio is here firstly the super-ordinate term, for which the other two [apparitio and revelatio] strive and in which their movement comes to rest.”

Ratzinger also expresses this idea another way. He presents it in the form of an equation: “Apparitio + revelatio = manifestatio personae.” The proximate aim of the current subsection is to show how revelation relates to both apparition and manifestation. The present discussion will support the information presented in the next section on the nature of revelation itself.

32 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 92: “bedeutet . . . im strengsten Sinne jene Selbsterschließung Gottes an den Menschen, welcher aufseiten des Menschen der Glaube antworten muss, um dann eben diesen Menschen in dieser Selbsterschließung Gottes jener Einwohnung Christi teilhaft zu machen, die da »Gnade« heißt.”

33 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 102: “Manifestatio ist hier zunächst der übergeordnete Begriff, auf den die beiden anderen zustreben und in dem ihre Bewegung zur Ruhe kommt.”

34 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 100.
As already indicated, Ratzinger organizes these terms into a specific order: 1) *apparitio*, 2) *revelatio*, and then 3) *manifestatio*. Upon reflection, this order is deliberate, insofar as Ratzinger conceives of these terms as having a conceptual or logical—if not temporal—order.

For Ratzinger, apparition is a condition for the possibility—and hence a preamble or medium—for revelation to take place, which in turn ultimately leads to manifestation, the inherent goal of both apparition and revelation. In an attempt to define the meaning of apparition, Ratzinger says that apparition “is a becoming visible of a sensible sign for the presence of the Divine Person sent. It is assigned to sensible knowledge [Erkenntnis], but a sense-knowledge . . . which does not remain in itself, but points beyond itself, which thus grasps its object not as something final, but understands it as a sign which points to something greater.”\(^{35}\) Apparition, in the theological sense, refers to an event in which the presence of a divine Person is indicated by some kind of external, sensible sign that immediately causes the human subject perceiving it to recognize it precisely as a sign of something beyond what is present to the senses. Ratzinger does not provide any examples of this kind of apparition in this immediate context. Later on, though, he does speak about three specific ‘apparitions’ of the Holy Spirit: 1) the dove descending upon Christ during his baptism in the Jordan River, 2) Christ’s breath when he breathes the Holy Spirit upon the disciples after the Resurrection, and 3) the tongues of fire that descended upon the disciples at Pentecost.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{35}\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 101: “ist ein Sichtbarwerden eines sinnlichen Zeichens für die Anwesenheit der gesandten Gottperson. Ihr ist sinnenhafte Erkenntnis zugeordnet, aber eine Sinnenerkenntnis . . . die nicht in sich steht, sondern über sich hinausweist, die also ihren Gegenstand nicht als etwas Letztes erfasst, sondern als Zeichen begreift, das hinweist auf Größeres.”

\(^{36}\) See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 105.
Perhaps it would not be too presumptuous to offer some further examples that might apply. The event presented in Exodus 3 in which Moses encounters the burning bush seems an apt example. During Jesus’s baptism, the voice coming from heaven, which declares Jesus to be “my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” is a sensible—even if not visible—sign of the presence of God the Father. These examples seem to fit the criteria set down by Ratzinger for the meaning of ‘apparition.’ In addition to God the Father’s and God the Holy Spirit’s apparitions, there is also a sense in which the sending of God the Son through the Incarnation bespeaks a one-time—yet temporally protracted—apparition of God the Son throughout the entirety of Jesus’s life on earth. As Ratzinger points out, according to Bonaventure, “the historical existence of Jesus . . . in the ‘mission tractate’ . . . is designated as *apparitio.*”

God the Son, the Eternal Word, has appeared in the flesh.

A problem arises, however, when one considers the fact that “in the line of presentation related to ‘reductio,’ the historical existence of Jesus is designated as . . . *revelatio.*” Once again, Ratzinger is charged with explaining a disparity within Bonaventure’s word usage. Which term—revelation or apparition—more fittingly applies to Jesus’s life on earth?

Given what was said thus far, it is not surprising that Ratzinger thinks apparition is the more proper term here: “There can be no doubt that the latter manner of expression [*apparitio*] is the more precise.” Basically, Ratzinger’s argument is that God the Son’s appearance in human

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37 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 105: “die geschichtliche Existenz Jesus . . . in dem »missio-Traktat« . . . als *apparitio* bezeichnet wird.” See n. 52, where Ratzinger notes that the Latin word ‘apparitio’ is the translation for the Greek word ‘επίφανεια’ (epiphany), while ‘revelatio’ is the translation of ‘αποκάλυψις’ (apocalypse).


39 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 105: “Es kann kein Zweifel sein, dass die letztere Ausdrucksweise [*apparitio*] die genauere ist.”
form through the hypostatic union does not, in and of itself, lead to faith, which—as was seen earlier and will later be elaborated even more—is an essential component of both Bonaventure’s and Ratzinger’s understanding of revelation. Many saw Jesus’s human visage, yet not all recognized who he is. Even for those who did, a distinction is made between their visual perception and their spiritual perception. The disciples were capable of both seeing and believing. “It is said that ‘fides’ and ‘visio’ with respect to the visible Jesus were possible at the same time, hence that the disciples of Christ could simultaneously see and yet believe in him, without the look abolishing the faith, and this is so, because faith and look each have a different formal object (if one may express it thus).” The disciples’ physical eyes could gaze upon the human figure of Christ, but only the eyes of faith could behold his divine nature and recognize him as a divine Person.

An apparition, then, as an external, sensible appearance, is not sufficient in itself to secure the fulfillment of its purpose; something more than a mere external, sensible sign is needed. “The humanitas is indeed accessible to the sensible look, but not the divinitas: it discloses itself only in the ‘revelatio.’” In this regard, revelation serves as “the inner complement of the apparitio, without which this meaningless fragment, as it were, would remain

40 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 105: “Da wird einmal davon gesprochen, dass »fides« und »visio« gegenüber dem sichtbaren Jesus zu gleicher Zeit möglich waren, dass also die Jünger Christus gleichzeitig sehen und dennoch an ihn glauben konnten, ohne dass die Schau den Glauben aufhob, und zwar deshalb, weil Glaube und Schau ein je verschiedenes »Formalobjekt« haben (wenn man sich so ausdrücken darf).” There is some tension here. On the one hand, apparition has been defined as the appearance of an external sign that causes the human subject to recognize that it points to something beyond itself. On the other hand, Jesus’s bodily appearance is said to be apparition and not revelation because some saw him without recognizing his divinity.

41 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 105-106: “Die humanitas ist zwar dem sinnenhaften Schauen zugänglich, nicht aber die divinitas: sie erschließt sich nur in der »revelatio«.”
a word from a foreign language. Thus, the proclamation of the divine is only realized in revelation and *never without it.*”\textsuperscript{42} As Eckart Schmidt phrases this idea: “For Bonaventure, revelation occurs through a *verbum internum,* the divine Word, the *Logos,* which first—in order to adopt the diction of Bonaventure—must become sensible in an *apparitio,* i.e. in a *verbum externum,* but can arrive at the becoming-known of the divine only through the *revelatio.*”\textsuperscript{43} These statements correspond quite well with what has been presented thus far about the true nature of revelation. It is more than the external appearance of a messenger, more than the simple proclamation of some word from the realm of transcendence, more than the physical vision of a sign. That might suffice for apparition, but revelation—as Ratzinger says here—is the *inner* complement, without which the event remains ineffective. With respect to the relationship between apparition and revelation, Hansjürgen Verweyen explains Ratzinger’s interpretation of Bonaventure as follows: “Bonaventure understands the appearance (*apparitio*), accessible to the senses, the external historical process, as a ‘wake-up call’ to the spirit. . . . Through such a wake-up call, *it prepares* for the revelation (*revelatio*), and after the revelation it awakens to love.”\textsuperscript{44}

Thus far, then, Ratzinger’s analysis of Bonaventure envisions a two-fold process with respect to God’s turning towards humanity. The first component is “an externally

\textsuperscript{42} Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis,* 101: “das innere Komplement der *apparitio,* ohne das diese sinnlose Bruchstück, gleichsam Wort aus einer fremden Sprache bliebe. So vollzieht sich erst in ihr und *niemals ohne sie* die Kundgabe des Göttlichen.”

\textsuperscript{43} Schmidt, “»... das Wort Gottes,” 53: “Offenbarung geschieht für Bonaventura durch ein *verbum internum,* das göttliche Wort, den *Logos,* der zunächst – um die Diktion Bonaventuras zu übernehmen – in einer *apparitio* sinnliche, d.h. zu einem *verbum externum,* werden muss, aber erst durch die *revelatio* zum Kundwerden des Göttlichen werden kann.”

\textsuperscript{44} Verweyen, *Unbekannter,* 45: “Bonaventura versteht die den Sinnen zugängliche Erscheinung (*apparitio*), den äußeren historischen Vorgang, als einen ‘Weckruf’ an den Geist. . . . Durch solches Wachrufen *bereitet sie vor* auf die *Offenbarung* (*revelatio*), und nach der Offenbarung erweckt sie zur Liebe.” See also, Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis,* 107.
comprehensible ‘historical’ event – which however taken by itself alone is blind, empty of meaning, and therefore still no ‘revelation,’ no truly making-known of the divinity.”

This phase corresponds to apparition. The second component is the “inner self-disclosure of the divinity, which alone is revelation in the true sense and is given the name ‘revelatio,’ ‘inspiratio,’ ‘illuminatio.’” These two aspects of the process of revelation correlate with the external and interior witness of revelation spoken of in Chapter Two, where Bonaventure’s epistemology was shown to involve both some kind of exterior, sensible object which is a true principle of knowledge coupled with divine illumination as necessary for the certitude of knowledge. Here, as there, the external and the internal witnesses must work in concert with one another. This theme will also recur in later chapters as well, since it forms a very important aspect of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation, for which he drew heavily upon Bonaventure.

For now, one may ask: what occurs after revelation? What precisely is manifestation? At face value, one may find it hard to distinguish clearly between apparition and manifestation, on the one hand, and revelation and manifestation, on the other hand. Manifestation is able to carry connotations that befit either apparition or revelation. Some spirit may appear and thus manifest itself; or, some mystery can be revealed and, hence, become manifest. Yet, it has already been stated that manifestation is the goal towards which apparition and revelation are directed. Thus, manifestation cannot simply be a synonym for either apparition or revelation. There must be some specific denotation for manifestation that distinguishes it from apparition and revelation.

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Ratzinger offers a clarification when he writes: “If revelation is the *becoming*-known [Kundwerden] of the divine, then manifestation is its *being*-known [Kundsein].” 47 This description corresponds to what Ratzinger said previously, namely, that revelation leads to manifestation. The process of *becoming*-known finds its terminus in *being*-known.

Admittedly, the further explanation given in the same passage is less clear, at least at first glance. Ratzinger goes on to say that “*manifestatio* is Kundwerdung in man.”48 Even to native German speakers, the difference between ‘Kundwerden’ and ‘Kundwerdung’ can be rather difficult to grasp or explain. This becomes problematic in a passage where revelation (Kundwerden) is being differentiated from manifestation (Kundwerdung). ‘Kundwerdung’ appears to be more akin to ‘Kundwerden’ than to the previous word Ratzinger used to describe manifestation, i.e., ‘Kundsein.’ This creates confusion. ‘Kundwerden’ is normally a verb meaning ‘to become known.’ In Ratzinger’s use, it functions as a gerund—indicated by capitalizing the first letter—and hence means, ‘becoming-known.’ Kundwerdung is simply a substantive form (noun) of the same concept.

Another, far more well-known theological term can help illuminate this issue. One of the German words for ‘incarnation’ is ‘Fleischwerdung.’ Since this German word, like ‘Kundwerdung,’ has the ‘-werdung’ ending, it can help one understand the linguistic form. Incarnation is the noun denoting the process or event of becoming incarnate. The gerund form would be ‘incarnating,’ translatable into German as ‘Fleischwerden’ or separated as ‘Fleisch


werden.’ So far, this linguistic analysis, however, does not solve the problem of confusion; in fact, it highlights the confusion.

But a solution is possible if one considers that ‘incarnation’ can also be used to denote the thing that is incarnate. Usually, in English, this would be used figuratively. A made-up example would be: ‘he is the incarnation of generosity.’ Certainly, here, the statement does not mean that the man being referred to is the process of generosity becoming incarnate, but that he is the result of that process: he is generosity in the flesh; he is generosity ‘made flesh,’ just as we speak of the Word ‘made flesh.’ Hence, when this usage is transferred to ‘Kundwerdung,’ it would then indicate that which is made (or has been made) known. In this way, we are able to equate the two terms for manifestation, ‘Kundwerdung’ and ‘Kundsein,’ much more easily. In English, both ‘revelation’ and ‘manifestation’ can have this two-fold possibility of meanings: 1) the process or event of something being revealed or manifested or 2) the result of such processes: something that is (or has been) revealed or manifested. It is clear from the context, however, that Ratzinger wants to distinguish between ‘Kundwerden’ (revelation) and ‘Kundwerdung’ (manifestation). By using the gerund to denote revelation and the substantive to denote manifestation, Ratzinger is trying to indicate that the former is the active process of revelation, whereas manifestation is that which results from the process. Thus, we could say that, in this context, Ratzinger is speaking of revelation as the act of revealing (verbal sense: Kundwerden), whereas manifestation is used to denote the substantive result (substantive sense: Kundwerdung), i.e., that which is revealed, that which is manifest. His decision to use two linguistically very similar German terms in order to distinguish two linguistically distinct Latin terms is a cause for confusion. At the same time, it does show how, for him, revelation and manifestation are related, but different.
To highlight this issue further, it is helpful to consider a similar use of the term ‘Kundwerdung.’ Emil Brunner, the well-known 20th Century Swiss Reformed theologian, also uses the term ‘Kundwerdung’ in reference to revelation in a work that precedes Ratzinger’s original Habilitationsschrift by about fourteen years. The German text, published in 1941, reads: ‘Mit Offenbarung ist immer und überall Kundwerdung eines Verborgenen, eines Geheimnisses gemeint. Die biblische Offenbarung aber ist die unbedingte Kundwerdung des unbedingt Verborgenen.’ 49 A somewhat belabored English translation from 1946 reads: “Revelation always means that something hidden is made known, that a mystery is unveiled. But the Biblical revelation is the absolute manifestation of something that had been absolutely concealed.” 50

This translation reveals the difficulty of capturing the full sense of the text in English without changing the grammatical structure. In the original German text, the verbal phrase is clearly ‘ist gemeint’ (is meant), not ‘is made known,’ while ‘Kundwerdung’ is a noun, not a verb or even a gerund; yet, the above English translation renders it as ‘is made known.’ To do so, it has to render the genitive ‘eines Verborgenen’ (literally, ‘of a hidden thing’) as a nominative (‘something hidden’) coupled with a passive voice ‘is made known,’ a grammatical structure not found in the original German version of the text. Perhaps a more literal translation of the first sentence that more accurately reflects the grammatical structure of the German would be as follows: “By revelation is always and everywhere meant a process of becoming known of a hidden thing, of a mystery,” or, “By revelation is always and everywhere meant a hidden thing’s—a mystery’s—having been made known.” Alternatively, the translator could have

49 Emil Brunner, Offenbarung und Vernunft: Der Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis (Zurich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1941), 24 [emphasis added].

simply used the same translation for ‘Kundwerdung’ in both sentences. It would have been a much cleaner and more precise rendering: “By revelation is always and everywhere meant a *manifestation* of a hidden thing, of a mystery.” Nevertheless, without knowing it, the translator supports Ratzinger’s translation of the Latin ‘manifestatio’ as ‘Kundwerdung’ by translating ‘Kundwerdung’ as manifestation, which is obviously the Anglicized form of the Latin ‘manifestatio.’ Notably, however, Brunner equates revelation with manifestation whereas Ratzinger differentiates the two terms.

As a matter of fact, a careful examination of Ratzinger’s use of language and grammatical structures sheds more light on the subject. Just as he renders revelation as ‘Kundwerden’ and his first rendering of manifestation is ‘Kundsein,’ there is a similar distinction between the suffixes ‘-werden’ and ‘-sein’ expressed in relation to these concepts. With respect to revelation, Ratzinger writes: “Zur Offenbarung gehört vom Begriff selbst her ein jemand, der ihrer inne wird;” in reference to manifestation, Ratzinger writes: “so ist *manifestatio*…das menschliche *Innesein* der göttlichen Kunde.” The first sentence uses an expression ‘inne werden,’ which can be found in a dictionary; it means “to become aware of something.” *Innesein,* like *Kundsein,* is not to be found in a dictionary but—by comparison with ‘inne werden’—can be understood as ‘being aware of something.’ Hence, the two sentences may be translated, respectively, as follows: 1) “To revelation belongs—from the concept itself—a someone, who *becomes aware* of it,” and 2) “thus, manifestation is . . . the human[ly] *being aware* [or human awareness] of the divine message.” It is quite plausible that Ratzinger used ‘*Innesein*’ rather than ‘Bewusstsein,’ a common translation of awareness that uses the root ‘bewusst’ (aware) with the ending ‘-sein’ (being) (being aware = awareness), precisely in order

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51 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis,* 102 [emphasis added].
to simultaneously connect and distinguish revelation (as ‘inne werden’) with manifestation as (‘Innesein’) in parallel fashion to the distinction between _Kundwerden_ (revelation) and _Kundwerdung_ (manifestation). These examples may be confusing for the reader; yet, they are linguistically creative ways to balance the relation with the distinction between revelation and manifestation, as Ratzinger understands them. Once the labor has been done, his work becomes clear, and the expressions do become more useful than simply using non-linguistically related terms. In both cases, manifestation is shown to be the result of revelation.

Given the fact that Ratzinger calls manifestation the superordinate term and indicates that it is the goal of both apparition and revelation, one might expect him to grant greater theological weight to manifestation than to revelation. This is not the case, however. Aware of this possible misconception, he preemptively explains his counter-intuitive conclusion: “Thus, however, the really religious and theological accents still do not fall on _manifestatio_, but on _revelatio_. For if _revelatio_ is a proclamation [_Kundgabe_] from God and thus is a divine act, so _manifestatio_ is having been made known [_Kundwerdung_] in man, the human awareness [_Innesein_] of the divine news.”

Revelation is the more theologically significant word precisely insofar as it denotes God’s action: “Now, this definitively means, however, that _revelatio_ is an act-concept, a concept of each new divine act towards the human subject.” As an action, divine revelation is dynamic,

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52 Ratzinger, _Offenbarungsverständnis_, 102: “So fallen aber die eigentlich religiösen und theologischen Akzente dennoch nicht auf _manifestatio_, sondern auf _revelatio_. Denn wenn _revelatio_ Kundgabe von Gott her und damit göttliches Tun ist, so ist _manifestatio_ Kundwerdung im Menschen, das menschliche Innesein der göttlichen Kunde.”

53 Ratzinger, _Offenbarungsverständnis_, 102: “Das bedeutet aber nun endgültig, dass _revelatio_ ein Akt-Begriff ist, ein Begriff eines jeweils neuen göttlichen Tuns am menschlichen Subjekt.”
not static. Revelation is “never a statement about a once current event, which, however, would then be congealed into objectivity and in this would be ‘tangible’ from now on.”

For Bonaventure and Ratzinger alike, then, revelation primarily denotes God’s action towards man and not a concrete thing or proposition that results from God’s activity, nor is it something contained in the divine action. “Revelatio appears, according to [Bonaventure] as a concept of a divine deed, nothing else.” This conception of revelation as an event of God’s self-communicating action is a hallmark of Ratzinger’s theology of revelation. The distinction between God’s saving words and deeds, on the one hand, and the concrete results, including propositional truths known through it, on the other hand, is crucial for him. He reiterates it time and again in his writings, including in his memoirs, Milestones, when he says that revelation “refers to the act in which God shows Himself, not to the objectified result of this act.”

In a separate section (§3) of the Habilitationsschrift, Ratzinger explains the meaning of manifestation more fully. He argues that this is necessary for the full elucidation of the meaning of revelation. He writes: “This word [manifestatio] arises . . . in the context of revelation so frequently that the question about its real significance for our investigation is imperative.”

Ratzinger is aware of general, common uses of the term manifestatio, but he is, of course, more concerned with the specifically theological sense of the term. He notes that “it appears in

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54 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 102: “niemals eine Aussage über ein einstmals aktuelles Geschehen, das aber dann zur Objektivität geronnen und nunmehr in dieser sozusagen »greifbar« wäre.”

55 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 102: “Revelatio erscheint bei [Bonaventura] als Begriff eines göttlichen Tuns, nicht anders.”

56 Ratzinger, Milestones, 108.

multiple places almost as a synonym for revelatio, indeed, as we heard, as the goal towards which apparitio and revelatio strive, even more: it bespeaks the essential task of the eternal Logos, which is the ‘manifestatio’ of the Father.”

Obviously, this issue concerns knowledge. The distinction between comprehension and apprehension is particularly important. Comprehension occurs “through total-encirclement,” apprehension “through mere perception of the object.” Manifestation is associated with apprehension, not comprehension. “The knowledge of perception consists in the manifestatio, in the becoming-visible of the truth of the object of knowledge.” In order to attain comprehension, the act of knowledge would have to include the totality of the object, something not possible for the finite human mind to achieve with respect to God who is infinite. “Manifestatio is thus here the antonym to inclusio . . . and total containment; it is thus the self-showing, the stepping-into-view of a truth, which in the course of this nevertheless remains in its objective independence, in its own existence and thereby in its distance. . . . it has never simply become the inner possession of the knower.”

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58 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 120: “es erscheint an mehreren Stellen geradezu als Wechselwort zu revelatio, ja, wie wir hörten, als das Ziel, dem apparitio und revelatio zustreben, mehr noch: es besagt die Wesensaufgabe des ewigen Logos, der die »manifestatio« des Vaters ist.”

59 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 121: “durch Totalumfassung” and “durch bloße Auffassung des Gegenstandes.”

60 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 121. “Die Auffassungserkenntnis besteht in der manifestatio, im Sichtbarwerden der Wahrheit des Erkenntnisgegenstandes.” Here, Ratzinger’s translation of Bonaventure equates manifestation with becoming-visible, rather than being visible. This seems to be at variance with our earlier considerations.

61 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 121: “Manifestatio ist also hier der Gegenbegriff zu inclusio . . . und Totalumschließung, es ist also das Sich-zeigen, das In-Sicht-Treten einer Wahrheit, die dabei dennoch in ihrer gegenständlichen Selbständigkeit, in ihrer Eigenexistenz und damit in ihrer Distanz . . . sie ist nie einfach zum inneren Besitz des Erkennenden geworden.”
importantly refers to the manifestation of God, or particularly, of a divine Person, as has been seen. When a divine Person is manifest, the human subject’s knowledge remains limited. There is always something more to the reality of a divine Person than a human subject could ever comprehend. Yet, the divine Person has indeed become known as a Person.

Summarizing the relation between apparition, revelation, and manifestation, Ratzinger remarks: “Manifestatio appears as the superordinate entelechy, as the resting place, to which the double-event apparitio – revelatio strives: these two signify the act of proclamation [or making-known: Kundgabe], as manifestation implies its result, the being known [Kund-Sein].”

This discussion of manifestation—and necessarily both apparition and revelation along with it—leads to the next subsection of this dissertation, insofar as it relates to two other key terms in Bonaventure’s and Ratzinger’s theologies of divine revelation: word and light.

3.1.3 Word and Light

Ratzinger provides a rather lengthy consideration of two terms that are relevant for the process of divine revelation: word and light. He does so within a section on manifestation as well as a later section specifically on word and light themselves. Here, these terms are discussed in view of the issues raised in both of those contexts.

Theologically, the words ‘word’ and ‘light’ are synonymous in some ways, yet distinct in others. As already stated, they relate to the triad just discussed: apparition, revelation, and manifestation. The unity of the two terms becomes evident “when we consider that”—in Bonaventure’s Commentary on the Sentences—“alongside the Axiom ‘luminis est manifestare’

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62 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 129: “Manifestatio erscheint als die übergeordnete Entelechie, als der Ruhepunkt, dem das Doppelereignis apparitio – revelatio zustrebt: Besagen diese zwei den Akt der Kundgabe, so besagt manifestatio dessen Ergebnis, das Kund-Sein.”
the thesis ‘*verbum est, quo res manifestatur et exprimatur*’ occurs elsewhere.”

Thus, it is an inherent characteristic of light that it manifests, and a word is the means by which a thing is manifested and expressed. Hence, both terms are directly tied to the notion of manifestation. Ratzinger also notes: “There is, in fact, a series of places, in which the identification of word and light, hearing and seeing, is expressly made.”

For Ratzinger, this equation of the two terms presents a puzzle that needs to be solved; for, despite the fact that both terms are designated as agents of manifestation, “in their origin, ‘word’ and ‘light’ are apparently two very different things, and if they are identified by an author, this can surely only happen by this means: that one of the two loses its own rank and is absorbed by the other.” This fact leads Ratzinger to ask: “Does the motif of ‘seeing,’ of being illuminated, or that of ‘hearing’ predominate?”

After a long exposition of various historical factors surrounding the use of these and related terms, Ratzinger offers a solution, which involves both a distinction and a unity between

63 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 123: “wenn wir beachten, dass dem Axiom »luminis est manifestare« anderwärts die These an die Seite tritt »verbum est, quo res manifestatur et exprimatur«.”


65 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 123: “»Wort« und »Licht« sind doch offenbar ihrem Ursprung nach zwei sehr verschiedene Dinge, und wenn sie bei einem Autor identifiziert werden, kann dies doch wohl nur dadurch geschehen, dass eins von beiden seinen eigenen Rang verliert und von dem anderen aufgesogen wird.” On the same page, Ratzinger raises an interesting question but one that he does not solve in the immediate context: “Must we thus accept, perhaps, that the biblical theology of the word has been suppressed by the neo-platonic theology of light, that the bonum diffusivum, the self-radiating Ur-good of the neo-Platonists has stepped into the place of the personal-speaking of God of the Bible?”

the two concepts. The distinction is firstly based upon active and passive stances with respect to a known object: “To seeing is assigned the inventio [discovery], the proper reaching out towards reality, to hearing [is assigned] doctrina, receiving acceptance.” Thus, seeing is associated with discovery, while hearing is associated with the reception of teaching.

With respect to the latter, Ratzinger insists that this reception of teaching involves both an external, corporeal hearing of a preacher as well as an internal listening of the heart to the instruction of the Holy Spirit. Once again, then, the interplay of an external and internal witness comes to the fore. “The bisection into auditus exterior and interior, into external message and being addressed by God interiorly, is well-known to us: it is quite obviously identical with that duality of doctrina and revelatio (inspiratio or the like), which we have encountered earlier as the real, constitutive [element] of Bonaventure’s concept of revelation.”

Ratzinger goes on to clarify that doctrine maintains its duality here. Doctrine is not just external witness. Rather, as Ratzinger insists: “The word doctrina denotes here, in opposition to the other linguistic use, both the external as well as the internal process of revelation. However, the duality of principles in this process of revelation and their functional classification is definitely unbroken.”

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The above considerations lead to a two-fold response to the question of which concept dominates. In brief, the answer is: it depends on the context. As Ratzinger explains: “There is after all a sphere in which ‘hearing’ and ‘word’ express what is meant better than ‘seeing’ and ‘light’: this lies in the sphere of the external process of teaching and proclamation. Conversely, there is a sphere in which ‘seeing’ and light’ are the real concepts. It lies there, where it is about the inside of the process of revelation, about that speech of God, which ‘is seen rather than heard.’” Again, the related but distinct concepts of ‘word’ and ‘light’ correspond to the two-fold process of knowledge, which—according to Ratzinger and Bonaventure—requires both an external object as well as an interior illumination as cooperating principles of knowledge.

3.2 The Essence of Divine Revelation

Now that the relevant terminological considerations have been expounded, the precise nature of divine revelation can be explored more directly. Here, it will be considered in three subsections: 1) the inner-Trinitarian foundation of divine revelation, 2) the Christological core of divine revelation, and 3) the completion of revelation in the response of faith. Once more, this order of presentation is intentional. It corresponds to the metaphysical and temporal order of things (if one may speak this way). It begins with the Triune God, proceeds through Christ as the preeminent mediator of revelation of God to humankind, and concludes with the human response to revelation in faith. The source is the Triune God, the primary mediator is the Word Incarnate, and the addressee is the human person responding to the exterior and interior witness with a

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faith-filled affirmation, a positive response to the one, God, who is disclosing himself for the sake of the receiver.

3.2.1 The Inner-Trinitarian Foundation of Divine Revelation

The process of divine revelation “is bound to the outside of certain historical institutions or processes,” but, “according to Bonaventure, the rank of this revelation reaches very much deeper: for him, it is precisely a metaphysical, or better, a cosmic event.”\textsuperscript{72} This view highlights the unity of metaphysics and salvation history in Bonaventure’s understanding of divine revelation spoken of in Chapter Two. History and metaphysics go together. The source of all things, of course, is God himself. He is also the telos of all things. This idea of \textit{reductio}, the leading back of all things to their divine origin, is central to Bonaventure’s thought: “‘Reductio’ – homecoming, repatriation is the true theme of Bonaventurian world history, in which world-history is to be taken in the full sense: not merely as history of men, but as history of the cosmos, of all beings in general, as perhaps it is hinted at in that Pauline goal-determination of the entire history: God is all in all (1 Cor 15:28).”\textsuperscript{73}

This recurrent theme of Bonaventure’s thought indicates that “for him, God and world are not two opposing [gegenüberstehende] realities, but the meaning of the world is fulfilled in a


\textsuperscript{73} Ratzinger, \textit{Offenbarungsverständnis}, 136: “‘\textit{Reductio}‘ – Heimkehr, Heimholung ist das wahre Thema der bonaventurianischen Weltgeschichte, wobei Welt-Geschichte im Volksinn zu nehmen ist: nicht bloß als Menschengeschichte, sondern als Geschichte des Kosmos, alles Seienden überhaupt, wie sie sich etwa auch andeutet in jener paulinischen Zielbestimmung der ganzen Geschichte: Gott alles in allem (1 Kor 15,28).”
powerful circular movement [Kreisbewegung], which proceeds from God and returns to Him."\(^7^4\)

This truth applies quite directly to the concept—and reality—of divine revelation, precisely as the means by which creation is led back to its Creator. As Ratzinger relates: “Thus, the saint’s speculation about revelation reaches into the middle of his doctrine of the Trinity and finds there its real foundation.”\(^7^5\)

Ratzinger offers an insightful and detailed exposition of the way in which Bonaventure links revelation and salvation history, especially in connection with the Incarnation, to the very depths of the Trinity itself. This line of thought is based on an analogy between human communication through words and intra-Trinitarian communion.

Given the link with verbal communication, it is not at all surprising when Ratzinger says: “The train of thought, which we intend, ties onto that primordial philosophical word, which through John’s Prologue has become at the same time a primordial word of theology: the concept of ‘Logos.’”\(^7^6\) This fact also means that the present discussion is directly connected to the previous consideration of ‘word’ (and ‘light’). Here, Ratzinger inquires about the theological significance of professing that God the Son, who is consubstantial with the Father, is the eternal ‘Word.’

\(^7^4\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 136: “Für ihn sind Gott und Welt nicht zwei gegenüberstehende Wirklichkeiten, sondern der Sinn der Welt erfüllt sich in einer gewaltigen Kreisbewegung, die von Gott ausgeht und zu ihm zurückkehrt.” See the discussion of *exitus* and *reditus* in Chapter Two.

\(^7^5\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 131: “So greift die Offenbarungsspekulation des Heiligen bis mitten in seine Trinitätslehre hinein und findet dort ihre eigentliche Grundlegung.”

\(^7^6\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 131: “Die Gedankenreihe, die wir meinen, knüpft an jenes philosophische Urwort an, das durch den Johannesprolog zugleich zu einem Urwort der Theologie geworden ist: an der Begriff des »Logos«.”
In this context, there is some basis in St. Augustine’s psychological analogy of the Trinity. Notably, however, St. Bonaventure expands upon St. Augustine’s thought in important ways, adding his own insights. Ratzinger summarizes the chief difference between Bonaventure and Augustine on this point when he asserts that, “while Augustine and . . . apparently the greater part of the scholastic tradition as well, knew only the duality of the external and internal word, Bonaventure builds a triad and thus also on this point commits himself to that triadic construction of the world, with which he sought to correct everywhere the traditional, ancient Christian duality principle.”

The designation of the second Person of the Trinity as ‘Word’ leads to an important question that must be addressed. As Ratzinger notes: “and so it was certainly not only a compulsion of scholastic questions, but a real question of necessity, when the objection was raised against the meaning of Christ as Word, the Word in its transience, externality, perverseness, and powerlessness could not after all appear as an analogy for the consubstantial Son of God.” In fact, “For a Greek understanding, the Incarnation of the Word is the incomprehensible contradiction to that which Logos originally should mean.”

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78 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 132: “und so war es sicher nicht nur scholastischer Quaestionenzwang, sondern echtes Fragebedürfnis, wenn gegen die Bezeichnung Christi als Wort der Einwurf erhoben wurde, das Wort in seiner Vergänglichkeit, Äußerlichkeit, Verkehrtheit und Ohnmacht könne doch nicht als Analogon für den gleichwesentlichen Gottessohn auftreten.”

79 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 136, n. 16: “Für griechisches Verständnis ist die Fleischwerdung des Wortes der unbegreifliche Widerspruch zu dem, was Logos ursprünglich besagen soll.”
In response to this pressing question, Bonaventure draws upon Augustine’s recognition of two kinds of words: *verbum intelligibile* and *verbum sensibile*. To these, however, Bonaventure adds a third type of word: *verbum medium*, which stands in between the other two ‘words.’ In connection with these three ‘words,’ he proceeds to elucidate three levels of similarity between human words and the eternal Word. In order to grasp Bonaventure’s analogy, what is meant by these three ‘words’ must be explained. Ratzinger succinctly expresses their meaning:

The *verbum intelligibile* moves in the pure inwardness of the spirit and is identical with the thought process, the thinking appropriation [or acquisition] of a thing; the *verbum sensibile* signifies the announcement, the sensible proclamation of the thought; it is the task of the *verbum medium* to manufacture the connection between the two; it is ‘the thinking of speech,’ thus that process, in which the pure thought is first inwardly formed into the word.\(^80\)

Thus, in addition to the Augustinian notion of an intelligible word (idea) and an external word (a word spoken aloud or written down), Bonaventure posits a middle word, which describes precisely the interior process whereby one tries to put one’s ideas into words so that they can then be expressed externally. There is, then, a distinction between the pure thought or idea and the linguistic terms one may use to describe them. Whether there is a real (i.e., not simply notional) distinction between the *verbum medium* and the *verbum sensibile*, is an intriguing question. It seems that, in some way, there is a difference, insofar as the *verbum medium* is described as a *process* of thinking whereby one arrives at or decides upon the proper language to use to convey the mind’s original idea, which is not itself identical with the word(s) that express(es) it. Furthermore, one could, in fact, think of the appropriate words of speech that have

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\(^{80}\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 132-133: “Das verbum intelligibile bewegt sich in der reinen Innerlichkeit des Geistes und ist mit dem Denkvorgang, der denkenden Aneignung einer Sache identisch; das verbum sensibile bedeutet die Verlautbarung, die sinnenhafte Kundgabe des Gedankens; Aufgabe des verbum medium ist es, zwischen beiden die Verbindung herzustellen, es ist »das Denken des Sprechens«; jener Vorgang also, in dem der reine Gedanke sich zunächst innerlich zum Wort formt.”
the potential to convey the original idea without actually speaking them aloud or putting them into writing, without which they cannot become sensible in fact.

Now that the meanings of the three different concepts of ‘word’ have been presented, the ways in which they serve as analogues to the eternal Word can be set forth. It is important to note that the three types of ‘words’ do not all have equal weight with respect to their analogical characteristics. The pure thought of the *verbum intelligibile* is the most appropriate analogue to the eternal Word. The analogies between the eternal Word and both *verbum medium* and *verbum sensibile* are weaker. As Ratzinger notes: “The analogy to the eternal Word . . . is at home in the true sense in the intelligible word, though weakened in the two other forms of the word, and so reflects the triple mode of existence of the human word and at the same time the threefold form of the essence of the eternal Word.”\(^{81}\) The pure thought, the *verbum intelligibile* precedes the other two forms of word, and hence, this is the primary kind of word. Likewise, with respect to the eternal Word, “It is first of all Son, proceeding in eternal origin from the Father, God’s interiority eternally comprehending itself; beyond this, however,” corresponding to the *verbum medium*, “it is ‘archetypus mundi,’ archetype of the world, not only God’s eternal thinking of Himself, but at the same time God’s world-thought, not only *conversio rationis ad se ipsam*, but also *conversio ad sensum*, thinking towards the external word and so medium of the creation of the world.”\(^{82}\) Finally, there is the analogy of the *verbum sensibile*, the word expressed outwardly,

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\(^{81}\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 133: “Die Analogie zum ewigen Wort . . . ist im eigentlichen Sinn im intelligiblen Worte beheimatet, abgeschwächt jedoch auch in den beiden andern Formen des Wortes, und so spiegelt die dreifache Existenzweise des menschlichen Wortes zugleich die dreifache Wesensgestalt des ewigen Wortes wieder.”

\(^{82}\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 133: “Es ist zunächst Sohn, in ewigen Ursprung aus dem Vater hervorgehend, ewig sich selbst erfassende Innerlichkeit Gottes; es ist aber darüber hinaus »archetypus mundi«, Urgestalt der Welt, nicht nur ewiges Sich-Selbst-Denken Gottes, sondern zugleich Weltgedanke Gottes, nicht nur *conversio rationis ad se ipsam*, sondern auch *conversio ad sensum*, Denken zum äußeren Wort hin und so Medium der Weltschöpfung.”
which most clearly corresponds to the Incarnate Word. “In the Incarnation, that process to which human thought is subjected in its becoming word—the union of the spirit with the sensibly—comprehensible—analogously takes place with the eternal Word.” Just as words present in the mind can be expressed through matter as sensible words, so too, through the Incarnation, the eternal Word has become united with material creation and thereby accessible to the senses.

It is here that the co-existence of metaphysics and salvation history in the process of revelation becomes most evident. The divine Word has assumed—or taken into himself—a complete human nature and has therefore become Verbum sensibile. Likewise, so-to-speak, in the Incarnation of the Word, “the real salvation-historical process of revelation is thus . . . taken into this metaphysics of the Trinity.” It is also possible to look at this matter the other way around: “but one can also say, conversely, the Trinity itself would be seen here salvation-historically and the Logos-formula would receive here a salvation-historical tone. . . . Thereby the eternal Truth, God, stands from the outset in a certain intrinsic opening toward the outside.”

may ask whether the verbum medium as the ‘archetype of the world,’ would correspond better to the divine ideas: God’s eternal thought about creation, or expressed another way, the existence of creation in the mind of God from all eternity. Nevertheless, there is certainly a correspondence between the term verbum medium and the eternal Word, insofar as “all things were created through” the Word, highlighting the verbum medium not only as a ‘middle’ word but also as a ‘mediating word,’ a ‘medium.’

83 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 133: “In der Menschwerdung vollzieht sich mit dem ewigen Gotteswort analog jener Vorgang, dem der menschliche Gedanke in seiner Wortwerdung unterworfen wird: die Einung des Geistigen mit dem Sinnenhaft-Fassbaren.”

84 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 134: “der eigentliche heilsgeschichtliche Offenbarungsvorgang also ist . . . in diese Metaphysik der Trinität hineingenommen.”

85 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 134-135: “man kann aber auch umgekehrt sagen, die Trinität selbst werde hier heilsgeschichtlich gesehen und die Logosformel erhalte hier heilsgeschichtlichen Klang. . . . Damit steht die ewige Wahrheit, Gott, von vornherein in einer gewissen wesenhaften Öffnung nach außen.”
Fittingly, the last statement *leads back* to the thesis proposed at the beginning of this subsection, Bonaventure “explains the human word in all its stages through the analogue of the God-Logos, which now accordingly . . . somehow exists from essence to incarnation, to revelation. . . . the designation of the Son as ‘Word’ in light of the essential expression-function for the Word highlights the aspect of the expressing forth of self to another; the appellation characterizes him as ‘*ut alias exprimentem*.’”

Here, a central theme of Bonaventure’s theology as a whole comes to the fore. As Ratzinger insists: “It is one of the fundamental thoughts of Bonaventure consistently held throughout all of his works that expression, the expressing of oneself to others, is essential to every truth.” This self-expression to another, of God to the world, has a further end in mind, however. To return to a theme expressed earlier: “the theme of the procession (which is identical with that of self-expressing) delivers only the prerequisite for that of the return: ‘Reductio’”; this “homecoming, repatriation is the true theme of Bonaventurian world history.”

Although what has been said seems inclined towards the theory of the ‘absolute predestination of Christ,’ which Ratzinger acknowledges is a common position among medieval Franciscans, he points out that it “is rejected by Bonaventure, hesitantly indeed, but nevertheless

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clearly.” Ratzinger insists once again that Bonaventure, “indeed still . . . emphasizes that the primary seat of the Logos-analogy is to be sought in the inner Word, to which corresponds the eternal intra-divine procession of the consubstantial Son.”

All that has been said in this subsection, as Ratzinger succinctly says, has been seen “as a trinitarian foundation of the idea of revelation as well as the idea of salvation history.” At the same time, the emphasis on the Incarnation in this discussion already leads to the theme of the next section: “the concept of Christ as the center, the absolute center of all.”

3.2.2 The Christological Core of Divine Revelation

One of the areas in which Christ is shown to be the center is the entire sphere of human knowledge. As Ratzinger indicates: “Equally at the beginning of the named work, the Seraphic Doctor declares his intention to render Christ as the absolute center of all human knowledge.”

Ratzinger proceeds to enumerate ways in which Bonaventure speaks of Christ as the center. He is the center of: 1) essence, 2) nature, 3) distance, 4) doctrine, 5) humility, 6) justice, and 7) harmony. Each one of these corresponds to a particular science, including metaphysics (as the

89 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 134, n. 11: “von Bonaventura zwar zögernd, aber doch klar abgelehnt wird.”

90 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 134-135: “betont . . . zwar noch, dass der primäre Sitz der Logosanalogie im inneren Wort zu suchen sei, dem der ewige innergöttliche Hervorgang des gleichwesentlichen Sohnes entspricht.”

91 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 137: “als trinitarische Grundlegung der Offenbarungsidee wie auch der Idee der Heilsgeschichte erkannt haben.”

92 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 140: “der Begriff Christi als der Mitte, der schlechthinnigen Mitte von allem.”

93 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 242: “Gleich am Anfang des genannten Werkes erklärt der seraphische Lehre seine Absicht, Christus als die schlechthinnige Mitte alles menschlichen Wissens zu erweisen.” The text in question is Bonaventure’s Collations on the Six Days of Creation.
center of essence) and logic (as the center of doctrine). Christ is considered the middle of each of these based on some characteristic or some historical act of his. For instance, Christ is the center of essence and hence of metaphysics insofar as the Logos is the archetype of all beings. Ratzinger does not go into the specifics of all seven of these areas in which Christ is the center, but he mentions them in order to show how important the concept of Christ as the center is for Bonaventure.

The only one of the seven that Ratzinger treats in depth in this context is Christ as the center of doctrine and thus logic, which—according to Bonaventure—is based upon Christ’s resurrection. While the connection between doctrine and logic seems fairly clear right from the start, Ratzinger acknowledges that basing Christ’s doctrinal and logical centrality on the resurrection may be surprising, and thus is in need of further explanation. “What should it mean that Christ—precisely in the resurrection—would be the ‘medium doctrinae’? What do resurrection and ‘doctrine’ have to do with one another?”

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94 See Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 242.

95 Emery de Gaál argues that Christ is the real center of Ratzinger’s theology as well, an argument he sought to prove through his book The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). On p. 1 of this book, de Gaál notes: “It is a commonly held opinion that Joseph Ratzinger’s theological contributions are essentially ecclesiological in nature. While it is true that he dedicated his dissertation and Habilitationsschrift . . . to ecclesiological themes, the inner motivation and fulcrum of his theology is supremely Christological.” It is curious that de Gaál would say that Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift was dedicated to ecclesiological themes, since it is not. In fact, Ratzinger was directed by Söhngen to write on something other than ecclesiology, since he had already done so for his dissertation. Furthermore, de Gaál does not list the original version of the Habilitationsschrift in his bibliography, let alone cite it anywhere in the book. (Although he lives and works in the United States, Emery de Gaál is a priest of the diocese of Eichstätt in Germany.)

96 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 243: “Was soll es besagen, dass Christus gerade in der Auferstehung »medium doctrinae« wurde, was haben Auferstehung und »Lehre« miteinander zu tun?”
Ratzinger holds that Bonaventure connects logic with history. Christ, in and through his resurrection, is viewed as the center of history: “History itself is logic-ized, is understood as the process of the Logos.”97 Through his death and resurrection, Christ marks the turning point of all history and both reveals and inaugurates God’s saving plan. The purpose of history is revealed in Christ. In this way, one may also say, as does Emery de Gaál, “God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, demonstrates for every age again what genuinely fulfilled human existence is.”98

Christ not only reveals the purpose of creation, of history itself, and thus God’s will for humankind, he also is the mediator of the revelation of God himself. Speaking of revelation as God’s self-disclosure in his Son, Ratzinger writes: “Here we encounter a train of thought, which stretches in a wide current through the entire work of the Doctor seraphicus, and which lies not only in the center of the doctrine of revelation but equally in the center of Bonaventure’s own thinking.”99 Thus, Christ stands at the heart of Bonaventure’s theology in general and of his theology of divine revelation in particular.

“In short,” writes Ratzinger, “this means that ‘Christ in the flesh,’ the visible, historical Jesus and inclusively his entire visible life’s work is designated as revelatio, as revelation of the divinity.”100 It is not just Christ’s words that are the high point of revelation, but his entire life

97 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 245: “Die Geschichte selbst wird logisiert, wird als Prozess des Logos verstanden.”


99 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 103: “Hier stoßen wir auf eine Gedankenreihe, die in breitem Strom sich durch das ganze Werk des Doctor seraphicus zieht, und die nicht nur im Zentrum der Lehre von der Offenbarung, sondern gleichermaßen in Zentrum von Bonaventuras eigenem Denken liegt.”

100 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 104: “Kurz gesagt bedeutet dies, dass »Christus im Fleisch«, der sichtbare geschichtliche Jesus und einschliessweise sein ganzes sichtbares Lebenswerk als revelatio, als Offenbarung der Gottheit bezeichnet wird.” There is some tension
and his whole self. “In the life of Jesus’ human existence, God becomes tangible.”\(^{101}\) As Tracey Rowland states: “For Ratzinger, Revelation is not a collection of statements—Revelation is Christ himself. He is the *logos*, the all-embracing Word in which God declares himself.”\(^{102}\) Along the same lines, de Gaál writes: “On the basis of the Johannine Christ as the Logos, the rationality of Christianity is laid forth. . . . Therefore, Jesus Christ is rational and divine self-communication.”\(^{103}\)

As the Incarnate Word, Christ is revelation par excellence, and as the Logos he is also supreme reason. Thus, Christ is also the primary object of theology as rational reflection upon divine revelation: “for Bonaventure Christ was always already the real and comprehensive ‘subject’ of theology.”\(^{104}\) Ratzinger retained this view in his own theology and also connects it with the Church as Christ’s continued presence: “the subject of revelation is precisely this Christ himself and that he is such through his Body.”\(^{105}\)

In connection with the previous section, one may say that the *verbum sensibile* of the Incarnation is that which gives humanity access to the intra-trinitarian *verbum intelligibile*. As Ratzinger explains: “The invisible God has made himself visible in Christ for man’s sake, ‘ut intelligibile fieret sensibile et manifestum’ [‘so that the intelligible would become sensible and here with what was said earlier, namely, that Christ in the flesh corresponds more to *apparitio* than to *revelatio*.

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\(^{103}\) de Gaál, “Pope Benedict,” 278.

\(^{104}\) Ratzinger, “Offenbarungsverständniss,” 413: “. . . war für Bonaventura immer schon Christus das eigentliche und umfassende »Subjekt« der Theologie.”

\(^{105}\) Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 137.
manifest’]: in order to provide for . . . man cognitive access to himself.”

Referring again to the two historical notions of *exitus* and *reditus*, Ratzinger insists that the visibility of God in the Incarnation is only the beginning: “With this descent of God . . . it is not the end of the matter, but he only wants to initiate the ascent, the ‘repatriation’ of man. The inner telos of the whole event is thus not expressed in the word *revelatio* . . . but rather in the word *reductio.*” Here again, the intrinsic connection between creation, Incarnation, and salvation is seen. “Creation and [the] Christ-deed are not two different or indeed opposed works but only two stages of a single divine plan. Creation is understood christologically.”

As Ratzinger explains: “the whole reality is carried away in the great circular movement, which proceeds from God and through Christ, the turning point of the world, all is again ‘led back’ to God.” “Christ is the center and the goal of salvation history; the world is ordered to him in procession and return,” explains Peter Hofmann. From this perspective, Ratzinger is able to speak of Christ as the center of history.

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110 Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 85: “Christus ist die Mitte und das Ziel der Heilsgeschichte; auf ihn ist die Welt in Hervorgang und Rückkehr hingeordnet.”

he is the turning-point of history, which marks the transition from the procession out from God to the return back to God. “Pope Benedict with Bonaventure,” Hofmann writes, “understands history as the one ‘way of progress’ with the one God, because Christ himself is not ‘the end, but the middle-point of history; with Christ history does not end, rather a new age begins.’”

Revelation is a means to an end. God reveals himself in order to lead man back to God, and Christ, the Incarnate Word, is at the core of this revelatory process, which takes place in history. As Pablo Blanco Sarto writes: Ratzinger “[s]ituated revelation within the framework of the history of salvation, and the idea of God as person appears, and the center and summit of this revelatory action was occupied by Christ himself.” Ratzinger thus refers to a “statement, which thus understands revelatio in an entirely central sense, as God’s unique stepping out of himself in Christ Jesus.”

Herein lies the mystery of the interrelation between the universal and the concrete; one may even speak of the mystery of the metaphysical and the historical. As Hofmann attests: “This paradox of the historical power of the biblical God, who stands at the same time in and above history, Ratzinger connotes again and again with the relation of universality and particularity or concreteness: The universal divine gives itself for us . . . a concrete figure, which really contains


113 Pablo Blanco Sarto, La Teología de Joseph Ratzinger: una Introducción (Madrid: Pelícano, 2011), 87: “Situaba la Revelación dentro del marco de la historia de la salvación, y aparecía la idea de Dios como persona y el centro y la cumbre de esa acción reveladora lo ocupaba el mismo Cristo.”

the divine which transcends everything historical.”¹¹⁵ The Word Incarnate denotes the union of
the universal and particular, of God and man. “This Logos dominates the cosmos in the
Johannine sense; it applies historically and ontologically.”¹¹⁶

This fact enables Ratzinger to speak of Jesus Christ as the ‘concrete universal,’ and
explains why it is true that “Whoever sees the countenance of Jesus Christ can recognize the
Father in the Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ is ‘the Image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15; see 2 Cor
4:4).”¹¹⁷ “This Christo-centrism,” writes Hofmann, “is salvation-historical ontology.”¹¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, one of Ratzinger’s goals is to show the complementarity of
metaphysical and salvation-historical views. This goal is achieved most effectively through a
consideration of the centrality of Jesus Christ, the concrete universal, in whom ontology and
historicity combine to reach salvific effects. In de Gaál’s words, “Only the God-man Jesus
Christ, as the eternal Son of God, grants unity, comprehension of the whole, and the world’s
deepest meaning. With singular coherence this expresses itself in Ratzinger’s ōuvre.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 87: “Dieses Paradox der Geschichtsmächtigkeit
des biblischen Gottes, der zugleich in und über der Geschichte steht, bezeichnet Ratzinger immer
wieder mit dem Verhältnis von Universalität und Partikularität bzw. Konkretheit: Das universale
Göttliche gibt sich für uns . . . eine konkrete Gestalt, die wirklich das über alles geschichtliche
hinausweisende Göttliche enthält.”

¹¹⁶ Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 87: “Dieser Logos beherrscht im johanneischen
Sinn den Kosmos; er gilt geschichtlich und ontologisch.”

¹¹⁷ Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 88: “Wer das Antlitz Jesus Chrisi sieht, kann
den Vater im Heiligen Geist erkennen, denn Jesus Christus ist ‚das Bild des unsichtbaren Gottes’
(Col 1:15; vgl. 2 Cor 4:4).”

¹¹⁸ Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 88: “Diese Christozentrik ist heilsgeschichtliche
Ontologie.”

¹¹⁹ De Gaál, The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI, 1.
3.2.3 The Completion of Revelation in the Response of Faith

This centrality of Christ as the objective summit of God’s revelatory activity needs to be complemented by another aspect of revelation that is crucial to Ratzinger’s understanding of divine revelation: faith. “To ‘revelation’ belongs the inner, faithful acceptance of what has been said, the knowledge of the ‘pro me’ of the relevant prediction. Talk of real revelation can exist only where it does not remain in the external word but where it arrives at a true, inner contact with God, to an inner enlightening of the man addressed by God.”¹²⁰ The response of faith is thus an inherent aspect of revelation in the full sense. Without the obedience of faith, revelation has not truly taken place. As Ratzinger explains:

For revelation always and only becomes a reality where there is faith. The unbeliever remains under the veil of which Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 3. He can read scripture and know what it contains. He can even understand, purely conceptually, what is meant and how its statements cohere, yet he has no share in the revelation. Revelation is in fact fully present only when, in addition to the material statements which testify to it, its own inner reality is itself operative in the form of faith. Consequently revelation to some degree includes its recipient, without whom it does not exist. Revelation cannot be pocketed like a book one carries around. It is a living reality which calls for the living man as the location of its presence.¹²¹

This turn to the individual subject is necessary, according to Verweyen, “if it truly is to be God’s opening-up to man.”¹²²


From this perspective, Ratzinger is able to say quite directly that “the receiving subject is always also a part of the concept of ‘Revelation.’ Where there is no one to perceive ‘Revelation’, no re-vel-ation has occurred, because no veil has been removed. By definition, revelation requires a someone who apprehends it.”

Thus, according to Tracey Rowland, “Like von Balthasar, [Ratzinger] holds that Revelation can only be mediated from a standpoint of ‘engraced’ participation within the horizon of faith. Otherwise, ‘there are lights, but no Light; words, but no Word.’” According to Rudolf Voderholzer, for Ratzinger, “a divine revelation only purely from the outside is not conceivable. Rather, the process of the acceptance of revelation as the becoming revealed for someone is always also considered along with this.”

“In the act of faith,” Peter Hofmann writes, “he [man] hands himself over to God, who is the truth in person.”

The inclusion of the response of faith as an intrinsic aspect of revelation is closely linked with the interior, graced illumination already discussed earlier in this chapter, when discussing the terminological considerations in section 3.1. There it was stated that the transformation of the human subject through grace is an inherent part of divine revelation in the strictest sense of the term. Since grace is received through faith, then it is no surprise that the response of faith is included in the notion of revelation.

123 Ratzinger, Milestones, 108. Here, Ratzinger explicitly credits his study of Bonaventure as the source of this perspective, which he also acknowledges was extremely important during his work as peritus at Vatican II.

124 Rowland, Ratzinger’s Faith, 50. See Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, 64-65.


126 Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 87: “Im Akt des Glaubens übereignet er sich Gott, der die Wahrheit in Person ist.”
To highlight this point more fully, it is helpful to provide a more extensive quotation from a passage in Ratzinger’s *Habilitationsschrift* that was only partially cited in section 3.1. As Ratzinger writes: “This conceptual word ‘revelatio’ in its narrowest formulation is associated essentially with the same set of facts as our word ‘revelation’ [Offenbarung] (which is indeed the translation of the neo-scholastic ‘revelatio’); it thus means in the strictest sense that self-disclosure of God to men, to which the man of faith must—for his part—respond in order, then, in this self-disclosure of God, to make that same man a sharer in that indwelling of Christ, which is here called ‘grace.’”\(^{127}\) If revelation is the interior illumination of the human person by God, but the human person remains blind—veiled—without the faith to see, then the human response in faith, which is itself a gift from God, is part of the process of revelation. Therefore, unless the human person receives God’s self-disclosure in faith, no true event of revelation has occurred. “By definition,” Ratzinger insists, “revelation requires a someone who apprehends it.”\(^ {128}\) Without faith, there is no apprehension, and thus, the response of faith is an inner moment of the process of divine revelation itself.

### 3.3 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of the meaning of the term ‘revelation.’ Various uses of the term in Bonaventure’s writings were presented with the conclusion that the


\(^{128}\) Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 108. The original German version of this statement is actually embossed on the back of Volume 2 of Raztinger’s collected works containing the original *Habilitationsschrift*. It reads: “Zur Offenbarung gehört vom Begriff selbst her ein jemand, der ihrer inne wird.”
most strict, theologically precise sense of the term involves internal, graced illumination that accompanies exterior words or signs. It is primarily a divine action on the human person, who in turn responds in faith in order for the process of revelation to be complete.

Revelation was also compared and contrasted with both apparition and manifestation. While apparition refers to the external signs (or words) that point to the divine reality that lies beyond them, revelation is God’s action within the human person that enables him or her to see and to be transformed in grace. Revelation, as divine action—the process of becoming known—is thus also distinct from the result of the action, which is the “being known” called manifestation.

Revelation was also considered in relation to two metaphors or analogies: word and light, along with their complements hearing and seeing. Depending on the context, one or the other pair of concepts is more fitting for understanding revelation. In general, though, Ratzinger thinks that hearing the word corresponds more to the external witness of teaching and proclamation (and thus more on the side of ‘apparition’), whereas seeing and light better express the process of revelation as the interior vision that comes from divine illumination.

Following the above terminological considerations, the essence of divine revelation was elucidated in terms of: 1) the inner-Trinitarian foundation of divine revelation, 2) the Christological core of divine revelation, and 3) the completion of revelation in the response of faith. In regards to the intra-Trinitarian concept of the term Logos, Ratzinger noted that Bonaventure turns Augustine’s duality into a triad. To the notions external (sensible) word and internal (intelligible) word, Bonaventure added the notion of a mediating word (verbum medium), which is a process that mediates the intelligible word’s expression into the sensible word. While all three are analogues to the Eternal, divine Word, the primary analogy is the intelligible word, since it corresponds to the Word of God (God the Son) within the Trinity,
whereas the mediating word corresponds to the Word insofar as it is that through which all things have been created, and the sensible word corresponds to the Word made flesh in salvation history.

Thus, the inner-trinitarian foundation of revelation leads directly to the christological core of revelation. The eternal self-expression to another within the God-head leads to the outward expression of the eternal Word in the incarnation, where the triune God, in the Person of Christ, gives the most concrete and comprehensive self-revelation of God possible. The reason it is a Christological core, is because the Incarnation not only flows from the Trinity but is the pivot point of a return back to the Trinity. Christ is the means of God’s supreme self-expression to another of revelatory truth in order to lead humanity back to God. The incarnation is the center point of the exitus-reditus process. As such, Jesus Christ marks the logical center of history. As that through which all things came to be, the eternal Word is the center of metaphysics. As the one through whom all things are to be restored and returned to God, Christ is the center of history. Insofar as Christ expresses the fullness of truth about both God and humanity through his perfect possession of both natures, Christ is also the center of doctrine.

Once more, however, it must be said that the objective revelation of divine truths must be accompanied by the interior illumination of the human person through grace and the response of faith. Thus, the adherence to the doctrine expressed in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ must also be a response to the Person of Christ in faith. In this way, the person to whom Christ—and through Christ, the entire Trinity—is revealed is also part of the concept of revelation. God is revealing himself to the human person. As a removal of a veil so that one may perceive, revelation includes as part of its intrinsic concept the human subject. Insofar as faith itself is a divine gift, revelation nevertheless retains its character as an essentially divine action.
But this divine action of revelation is both in the external, sensible realm through Christ, through
the Scriptures, through doctrine as well as interiorly through graced-illumination and the gift of
faith in the depths of the human soul. Revelation is thus an event of interpersonal communication
between God and the human person by means of external and interior aids, corresponding to
human nature as an embodied spirit.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REVELATION, SCRIPTURE, AND TRADITION

In Chapter Three, Ratzinger’s understanding of revelation was elucidated with respect to its key terms and its essence. Both of those considerations now make it possible to consider more precisely how divine revelation relates to scripture and tradition. The relationship between scripture and tradition, which is one of the most pressing issues for ecumenical dialogue as well as a fundamental question still dividing Catholic theologians, is also an important issue for this discussion.

It is not altogether easy to separate out these discussions; there will necessarily be some overlap. Nevertheless, the present chapter will proceed in three main sections corresponding to the three relations amongst the three theological realities of revelation, scripture, and tradition. First, the relationship between revelation and scripture is explored. There, the issues to be treated include: 1) the (false) equation of revelation and scripture, 2) the question of scripture as a material source of revelation, and 3) the idea of the New Testament as revelation of the Old Testament. The second section discusses the relationship between revelation and tradition. The third and final section describes Ratzinger’s understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition. An important part of that discussion involves the much-debated question of whether scripture and tradition are two ‘sources’ of revelation, each with its own distinct material content.

Justifiably, it may be said that these questions regarding the relationships between revelation, scripture, and tradition have remained the most important ones for Ratzinger with regard to the theology of divine revelation. He treated these topics repeatedly over the years. Hence, this chapter is essential to a proper and comprehensive understanding of Ratzinger’s
theology of divine revelation. The material discussed here also consists of some of the most important contributions that he made to discussions at Vatican II as well as to the theology of revelation as a whole, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

4.1 The Relationship between Revelation and Scripture

In order to bring to the fore Ratzinger’s contribution to the theology of divine revelation in general and to the work of the Second Vatican Council in particular with respect to the relationship between revelation and scripture, his criticism of the title of the original schema on divine revelation, De fontibus revelationis (On the Sources of Revelation) is called to mind at the beginning of this subsection. After all, as Gianni Valente relates: “The rejection of this schema, which occurred in the aula on November 21st and 22nd, is considered the true turning-point of the council by Ratzinger.”1 “In this way, a significant majority of the council decided for the second alternative, this council has become a new beginning,’ concludes Ratzinger.”2

Ratzinger himself contributed to this ‘new beginning.’ In August of 1962, Cardinal Frings of Cologne sent Ratzinger, at that time a professor at the University of Bonn, a copy of seven schemata for conciliar texts that had been approved by the Central Preparatory Commission. Frings asked Ratzinger to review these works. In mid-September of the same year, Ratzinger submitted his critiques to Cardinal Frings in the form of a letter. In the end, Cardinal Frings sent the contents of this letter under his own signature (dated September 17th, 1962) to the


Papal Secretary of State, Amleto Cicognani. Ratzinger gave positive reviews to only two of the seven schemata: on liturgical renewal and on unity with the Orthodox Churches. Two of the five remaining drafts relate to the topic of revelation: *De fontibus revelationis* and Chapter Four of *De deposito fidei*. Ratzinger’s contribution did not end there, however. He also gave a lecture in Rome to German-speaking bishops—about 65 in number—on October 10th, 1962, the eve of the start of the Second Vatican Council. The lecture focused on a critical analysis of *De fontibus revelationis*. As Jared Wicks relates: “Prof. Ratzinger’s incisive critique of the prepared draft anticipated many of the arguments made against its suitability as a conciliar text when the Council members took it up on November 14, 1962, leading to the vote of Nov. 20 in which 1368 Fathers expressed their judgement that the text should go back to the Doctrinal Commission for extensive revision.”

Ratzinger’s criticism of the schema starts from its very title. Ratzinger takes issue with the term ‘sources’ in this context. Interestingly, Ratzinger admits that the title does not present anything unusual in the world of Catholic theology at the time: “To be sure, all theological textbooks speak this way. Also, admittedly, Vatican I, in its chapter on revelation, used this phrase as the section-title of its reaffirmation of the Council of Trent’s decree regarding Scripture and tradition.” Given that a previous ecumenical council uses the phrase ‘sources of revelation’ and that it was a standard phrase for the teaching of Catholic theology, it is quite bold of Ratzinger to criticize the phrase. Yet, admitting right from the start the precedents in favor of it

3 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 242; See also, ibid. 239-242.


speaks to his honesty and openness about the issues as well as his ability to anticipate objections. He is not trying to hide the fact that he is critiquing a point that has some substantial support. He then goes on to point out, in his favor: “But Trent itself did not speak this way and in Vatican I’s text itself [i.e., other than in the aforementioned section title] this way of speaking does not occur.”

Before Ratzinger’s criticism of the title, *De fontibus revelationis*, is explicated in detail, it is helpful to consider briefly what was intended by it. According to Valente, “The title of the schema, which intentionally set the accent on the duality of the sources of revelation—holy scripture and tradition—, in order to distance itself dialectically from the Protestant *sola scriptura*, is not a traditional formula for Frings, but arose only in the modern era as a reaction to theological historicism.” With regard to reactionary formulations of theology, Ratzinger also believed that the Council was facing an important dilemma: should this “‘mental attitude’ be continued, or,” Valente writes, citing Ratzinger, “‘does the Church want, after the necessary boundary is fixed, to turn a new leaf and enter into a new positive encounter with her origins, with her brothers, with the world of today?’”

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7 Valente, *Student*, 75: “Der Titel des Schemas, der absichtlich den Akzent auf die Dualität der Offenbarungsquellen – Heilige Schrift und Überlieferung – legt, um sich dialektisch vom protestantischen *sola Scriptura* zu distanzieren, ist für Frings keine überlieferte Formel, sondern erst in der modernen Zeit als Reaktion auf den theologischen Historizismus entstanden.” This anti-Protestant tone can be traced back at least to a second version of the text prepared by Tromp and Garofalo (July 20, 1960), about which Schelkens remarks: “Articles one to nine deal with the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, giving prominence to the material insufficiency of the Scripture and insisting that the Tradition had to be understood as a source of revelation for theology if one wanted to avoid the risk of ‘Protestantism’.” Quote from Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation*, 83.

8 Valente, *Student*, 78-79: “,Geisteshaltung’ fortpgesetzt werden oder,” . . . “,will die Kirche, nachdem die nötige Abgrenzung besorgt ist, ein neues Blatt aufschlagen und in eine neue positive Begegnung mit ihren Ursprüngen, mit ihren Brüdern, mit der Welt von heute treten?”
It is clear, then, that one of Ratzinger’s concerns was the attitude and tone conveyed by the choice of certain phrases, including the title, *De fontibus revelationis*. Ironically, Ratzinger’s criticism itself takes on a fairly biting tone: “the draft was ‘entirely and indeed determinately of the anti-modernist kind of spirit,’ of ‘an “anti,” of a negation.’ Its tone functioned ‘frigidly, yes almost shockingly.’”\(^9\) In light of the condemnatory style of previous Ecumenical Councils, the similar tone of the schema would not be surprising. However, the use of that style went against the explicit directives for the council regarding its intent.\(^10\)

Ratzinger’s critique of the document is more than stylistic. The conceptual implication of the title and the contents of the document are also problematic. Ratzinger thinks that referring to scripture and tradition as ‘sources’ of revelation confuses the order of knowledge with the order of ontology. The relation between scripture (and tradition) and revelation is—ontologically—precisely the inverse of the schema’s title. As Ratzinger says: “the formula is completely false if one looks at it on a metaphysical level.”\(^11\) God’s revelation is “the source of Scripture and tradition, which however the schema called ‘sources’ (*fontes*) of revelation.”\(^12\) Epistemologically, one may say, as Ratzinger does, that “‘Scripture and Tradition are the two sources of the knowledge of revelation.’”\(^13\) “This expression [of the two sources] can suffice,” acknowledges Ratzinger, “if one understands it strictly on the epistemological level: we


\(^10\) See Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights*, 42-44.

\(^11\) Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 137.

\(^12\) Wicks, “Six Texts,” 242.

\(^13\) Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 67 (emphasis added): “»Schrift und Überlieferung sind die beiden Quellen der Offenbarungserkenntnis«.”
experience what revelation is from Scripture and tradition.”

However, the ontological priority still lies with revelation itself: “revelation does not flow from Scripture and tradition, but both flow from revelation, which is their common source.”

Ratzinger summarizes the difference between metaphysical and epistemological sources with respect to revelation as follows: “Scripture and tradition are for us sources from which we know revelation, but they are not in themselves its sources, for revelation is itself the source of Scripture and tradition. Accordingly, it was traditional in the Middle Ages to call Scripture *fons scientiae* [the source of knowledge], but never *fons revelationis* [the source of revelation].”

In his critique of the original schema, *De fontibus revelationis*, Ratzinger offered a possible explanation for how scripture and tradition became referred to as sources of revelation. “The reversal by which the composed and formulated expressions of revelation, Scripture and tradition, are made sources and revelation becomes something following from them, probably became common in the early phase of historicism, when people everywhere were asking about sources and Christians came to call Scripture and tradition the sources in which they found revelation,” but he refers to “[t]his way of speaking” as “flawed.” Thus, rather than simply accept uncritically a phrase that came into common usage in the modern era, Ratzinger called for the Council to ponder the realities more deeply, ascertaining the important distinction between the order of ontology and the order of knowledge with respect to divine revelation. Ratzinger also brings the dynamic aspect of revelation into this discussion. “For revelation,” he insists, “is

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14 Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 137.

15 Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 137.


not something following upon Scripture and tradition, but is instead God’s speaking and acting . . . the one source that feeds Scripture and tradition.”

Another important aspect of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation also emerges from these points: revelation and scripture are not identical. Writing elsewhere about pre-Tridentine theology and doctrine, he asks—and replies to—an important question. In the writings from that time-period, “Is there a knowledge about this, that the concepts ‘scripture’ and ‘revelation’ are not congruent – and on that the answer can only read ‘yes.’” Even more strongly, he insists: “It is a disastrous simplification time and again to designate scripture plainly as ‘revelation’ . . . Revelation does not simply equal scripture, so that one could say simply ‘in revelation is written.’”

Here, Ratzinger clearly follows his reading of Bonaventure. As Ratzinger notes: “As far as I can see, at no time does Bonaventure refer to the Scriptures themselves as ‘revelation.’” Bonaventure was not alone in this regard. As Ratzinger recalls: “When . . . I tried to make a study of the way Revelation was treated in thirteenth-century theology, I collided with an unexpected fact: nobody in that period ever thought to call the Bible ‘Revelation,’ nor was it

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called ‘source.’”

Rather, “Revelation means God’s whole speech and action with man; it signifies a reality which scripture makes known but which is not itself simply identical with scripture. Revelation, therefore, is more than scripture to the extent that reality exceeds information about it. It might be said that scripture is the material principle of revelation . . . but that it is not revelation itself.” In fact, reflecting on this theme later in life, Ratzinger writes: “if Bonaventure is right, then revelation precedes Scripture and becomes deposited in Scripture but is not simply identical with it. This in turn means that revelation is always something greater than what is merely written down.”

“The insight into the added value of revelation as historical event in comparison with its attestation in sacred scripture,” writes Voderholzer, “is fundamental for the fundamental theology of Joseph Ratzinger.”

Aaron Canty explains Ratzinger’s view in connection with the need for faith when he writes: “First,” Ratzinger “gives priority to God’s initiative in revealing himself to humanity. Second, this revelation transcends the text of Scripture in such a way that faith must precede its reading for it to be transformative.”

In a similar vein, Ratzinger makes a simple yet bold statement when he opines: “There can be scripture without revelation.” He ties this assertion to the idea presented in Chapter

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23 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 35.


27 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 36.
Three that “revelation only becomes a reality where there is faith.”

28 As a reminder, the main point here is that, even if one understands what the words of scripture convey on a conceptual level but does not actually receive those words in faith, then there is still a veil that has not been removed, i.e., there is no re-vel-ation. There are two additional reasons why revelation goes beyond the mere fact of scripture: 1) “as a reality deriving from God it always extends upwards into God’s action” and 2) “as a reality which makes itself known to man in faith, it also extends beyond the fact of scripture which serves to mediate it.”

29 As Tracey Rowland indicates, “Ratzinger underscored the principle that actio (action) is an antecedent to verbum (speech), reality to the tidings of it. For him it is important to understand that the level of reality of the Revelation event is deeper than that of the proclamation event, which seeks to interpret God’s action in human language.”

30 Following from what has just been said, Ratzinger draws an important conclusion. “This non-coincidence of scripture and revelation makes it clear that quite apart from the question whether scripture is the sole material source or not, there can never really, properly speaking, be a sola scriptura in regard to Christianity.”

31 Without directly answering the question as to whether tradition adds any material not already contained in scripture, Ratzinger states here that—even if tradition does not add more content—this would not amount to sola scriptura, precisely because revelation always remains something more than what is contained in scripture.

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28 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 36. Cf., above, p. ??

29 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 36.

30 Rowland, Ratzinger’s Faith, 50.

31 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 36.
Revelation, as God’s action, always includes the invisible workings of divine grace on the human person as well as his or her response in faith, without which there is no revelation.

This aspect of revelation is one reason that Ratzinger is disinclined to accept Joseph Rupert Geiselmann’s thesis that scripture possesses material sufficiency. In Ratzinger’s view, ‘material sufficiency’ is a meaningless term: material is never sufficient. More will be said about this later. In the meantime, it is important to note that Ratzinger thinks Geiselmann’s conclusion was erroneous. “He [Geiselmann] thought he had found the reconciliation of the Catholic principle with the Protestant principle of sola scriptura. He was mistaken.”

Another aspect of Ratzinger’s understanding of the relationship between revelation and scripture needs to be discussed: the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. For one, Ratzinger writes: “Just as the two covenants are different in kind, so too the fact of scripture is not identical in the two cases;” the Old Testament, “is and remains ‘scripture.’ . . . Consequently they [i.e., New Testament writings] do not oppose to the old scripture, or set side by side with it, a new scripture, but they place in contrast to the one single scripture, i.e. the Old Testament, the Christ event as the spirit which explains scripture.” Ratzinger argues here that this was precisely the understanding of the New Testament authors themselves. This position is very clear in Paul’s writings, “for on its basis he even contrasts the old and new covenants as gramma and pneuma, i.e. as letter (scripture) and spirit (2 Cor 3:6-18), and designates the Lord

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33 Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 136.

34 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 37.
as the *pneuma* who makes scripture intelligible, or is its meaning, its true, living (not merely literary) content (2 Cor 3:14-18).”35

Ratzinger goes on to contend that this was not the case only because the New Testament canon was not yet conceived as such. Rather, he insists, “In the new order of salvation which began with Christ, ‘scripture’ occupies a different position from the one it had under the old covenant. . . . the New Testament . . . is rather the means of opening out the Old Testament into the wide vistas of the Christ-event.”36 This corresponds to what he had already written in the original version of his *Habilitationsschrift*, namely, that the New Testament is the revelation of the Old Testament.37 “The New Testament theology of the Old Testament is . . . not identical with the actual intrinsic and historically observable Old Testament theology of the Old Testament; it is a new interpretation in the light of the Christ-event which does not arise from the purely historical consideration of the Old Testament alone”; yet, the New Testament still “continues the inner structural pattern of the Old Testament, which itself lived and grew by such re-interpretations.”38

On this point, Ratzinger makes an important clarification. Ratzinger argues that, while “the New Testament brings a new revelation of the meaning of the Old Testament. . . . the meaning is not that the text of the New Testament is a deciphering of the text of the Old Testament, but that the New Testament is a time of understanding, of ‘revelata cognitio’, after the time of darkness. Therefore, here also ‘revelatio’ is not a book, but the inner

38 Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 43-44.
The importance of a subject who is enlightened again comes to the fore here. As already stated, scripture is a source of the knowledge of revelation, and knowledge only occurs in a knower.

In Bonaventure’s use, revelation is often tied to one’s grasp of the spiritual sense of scripture. While, “At times in the Hexaemeron, revelatio means the unveiling of the future. . . . More often, it is the hidden ‘mystical’ meaning of Scripture that is referred to as the hidden mystery of revelation. Revelatio, therefore, effects a pneumatic understanding of Scripture.”

According to Ratzinger, Bonaventure connects revelation to his understanding of the four-fold wisdom. In this context, revelation corresponds to multiform wisdom, “which consists in grasping the three-fold spiritual sense of Scripture—the allegorical, the anagogical and the tropological.” Here again, one can perceive Bonaventure’s resistance to reducing revelation to the letter of scripture. The idea that revelation is more than the mere letter of scripture recurs in Bonaventure’s writings. As Ratzinger notes: “Not only in the Hexaemeron, but just as much so in the short dogmatic treatise known as the Breviloquium and in the Reductio artium ad theologiam, it is expressly stated that we grasp that which we are to believe not from the letter of Scripture, but first of all by the use of allegory. The letter by itself is merely the water which is transformed into wine in the spiritual understanding.”

Returning to the theme of the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, Ratzinger—commenting on Bonaventure—indicates that the New Testament as revelation of the

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Old Testament can be understood only in a spiritual way. It must involve God’s own action upon the person understanding the Old through the New. Hence, as Ratzinger writes insistently: “The mere letter is not ‘New’ Testament; the New Testament is truly present precisely where the letter has been surpassed by the Spirit. Consequently, that which is properly New Testament does not consist in a new book, but in the Spirit who makes these books full of life. Here, therefore, ‘revelation’ is synonymous with the spiritual understanding of Scripture; it consists in the God-given act of understanding, and not the objective letter alone.”  

The graced enlightenment of the receiving subject is essential to revelation properly understood. “Only those who understand Scripture spiritually have a ‘facies revelata.’” Revelation thus involves an intellectual and spiritual vision that can see further or deeper than the written words. The written words are important, but they are not sufficient. Ratzinger writes further, “This means that that which truly constitutes revelation is accessible in the word written by the hagiographer, but that it remains to a degree hidden behind the words and must be unveiled anew.”

If revelation is in some way equated with the spiritual sense, which is recognized by a human subject, then the interior dimension of revelation also comes to fore once again. In this vein, Ratzinger, as Pope Benedict XVI (in *Verbum Domini*), quotes a definition of the spiritual sense of scripture taken from *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, which was promulgated under his leadership as the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “As a

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general rule we can define the spiritual sense, as understood by Christian faith, as the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”

4.2 The Relationship between Revelation and Tradition

In his work on Bonaventure’s theology of revelation, Ratzinger treats the concept of tradition. He first speaks about the widely held impression “that the Middle Ages indeed lived entirely from the tradition but gave little thought to the essence of tradition.” Nevertheless, Ratzinger investigates Bonaventure’s use of the relevant words, such as ‘tradere’ and ‘traditio’ in order to glean the latter’s understanding of tradition.

Ratzinger offers a lengthy quote from Bonaventure relating to the issue of the worship of images. “If we had only this text, then it could entice us to the false assumption that there exists no difference between Bonaventurian linguistic use and our own, which understands the word [tradition] in the sense of a content-based tradition of defined doctrine and customs, which are passed on from generation to generation outside of scripture.”

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47 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 210: “dass das Mittelalter zwar ganz von der Tradition gelebt, aber nur wenig über das Wesen der Tradition nachgedacht habe.” In support of this view, Ratzinger points to the work of de Gehllink, *Argument de tradition*, which offers a treatment of the concept of Tradition in the high middle ages.

follows that such a concept of tradition does not correspond to Bonaventure’s own understanding.

For Bonaventure, with respect to tradition, “It is not generally even so much a question here of the *content* handed over as to the *act* of handing over. . . . , so one can go a step further and say that traditio in these passages is understood not in the sense of our temporally extended doctrinal tradition.”49 He points to two significant differences between Bonaventure’s concept of tradition and more recent understandings of tradition: authoritatively handing something down vs passing something on to a successive generation.

With respect to the first difference between Bonaventure and the common notion in the mid-20th century, Ratzinger uses two different German words to represent each view. He uses “Übergabe” for Bonaventure’s approach and “Überlieferung”50 for more recent views. “Traditio = Übergabe sets a relationship of superordination and subordination; traditio = Überlieferung necessitates above all the coordination of historically successive generations. Traditio = Übergabe looks at the one-time act of handing over from above to below; traditio = Überlieferung looks at the continuous act of passing on from hand to hand.”51 In the first view, tradition has to do with those in authority handing something down to their subjects, while the second view primarily concerns something that is passed on from one generation to the next.

49 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 212: “Es kommt hier eben überhaupt nicht so sehr auf den übergebenen *Inhalt* als auf den *Akt* der Übergabe an. . . . , so kann man noch ein Stück weitergehen und sagen, dass traditio an diesen Stellen nicht im Sinn unserer zeitlich erstreckten Lehrüberlieferung verstanden wird.”

50 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 212:

Ratzinger explains the second difference as follows: “Traditio in the Bonaventurian sense signifies the act-concept of the delivery, traditio in our sense the static object-concept of tradition. In the first case, the event of the handing over is emphasized; in the second, the accent lies on this, that specific contents are at hand, which are handed over.”

Related to this theme, elsewhere, Ratzinger ties tradition and apostolic succession together. As I have indicated in an article on primacy and collegiality in Ratzinger’s thought:

Ratzinger maintains that successio and traditio were virtually synonymous terms in the early Church. In fact, he holds that they ‘were expressed by the same word διαδοχή.’ For Ratzinger, ‘succession’ highlights the personal dimension of tradition, which ‘is never a simple anonymous passing on of doctrine, but is personal, is the living word, concretely realized in the faith.’ . . . The very term ‘tradition’ means a handing over, and the personal means of this process are indispensable.

The notion of the intrinsic connection between succession and tradition is extremely ancient in the life of the Church. As Ratzinger observes: “Christians had already formulated the principle of successio-traditio before they yet understood the New Testament as ‘Scripture.’” In fact, tradition relies upon succession as its fundamental justification. Ratzinger makes this assertion in the context of tradition as an authoritative interpretation of scripture: “This Scripture [i.e., the Old Testament] needed a canon, that is, a rule of interpretation, in accordance with the New Christian Covenant. This the Church found in tradition, guaranteed by succession.”

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52 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 213: “Traditio im bonaventuranischen Sinn bedeutet den Aktbegriff der Übergabe, traditio in unserem Sinne den statischen Gegenstandsbebriff der Überlieferung. Im ersten Fall wird das Ereignis des Übergabens betont, im zweiten liegt der Akzent darauf, dass bestimmte Inhalte vorhanden sind, die übergeben wird.”


54 Ratzinger, The Episcopate and the Primacy, 49.

55 Ratzinger, The Episcopate and the Primacy, 50.
In light of these facts, Ratzinger seeks to reinterpret the “claim that the Apostles ‘handed over’ much that is not written down.” With respect to this, Ratzinger distinguishes between “the hierarchical-formal” and “the historical-material” understandings of this process: “One could thus set the two concepts of tradition, which loom in the background, against each other as the hierarchical-formal and as the historical-material. While for the former, tradition is given functionally, as a function of the auctoritas, the latter sees it in specific historical content.”

Ratzinger takes issue with a common theological notion that understands tradition as a set of doctrines handed on from the Apostles to their successors. In refutation of that idea, Ratzinger writes: “History can name practically no affirmation that on the one hand is not in Scripture but on the other hand can be traced back even with some historical likelihood to the Apostles.” Ratzinger then proceeds to refute appeals to three classic examples that many claim prove the concept of tradition mentioned above: the canon of scripture, the existence of seven sacraments, and infant baptism. With respect to the canon of scripture, Ratzinger argues simply but forcefully: “The Church possessed no formulated communication left as its own legacy by the last living Apostle concerning which books should go together to make up Scripture.” As regards the seven sacraments, Ratzinger does not deny that they existed from the beginning but the determination that there are only seven sacraments did not derive from some direct Apostolic

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56 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 213: “Die Behauptung, dass die Apostel vieles »übergaben«, was nicht aufgeschrieben ist.”

57 Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 214: “Man könnte demnach die beiden Traditionsbegriffe, die sich dahinter abzeichnen, als den hierarchisch-formalen und als den historisch-materialen einander gegenüberstellen. Während für den ersteren Überlieferung nur funktional gegeben ist, als eine Funktion der auctoritas, erblickt der letztere sie in bestimmten geschichtlichen Inhalten.”


doctrine; the enumeration of the sacraments took place in the twelfth century. Indeed, this is also true of “the insight into them as belonging to the classification «sacrament».”60 Admittedly, infant baptism is a slightly different case. Most likely, infant baptism was in practice during the time of the Apostles, “but then again it was not transmitted as a statement, but as a part of the actual being of the church and of her life in the Holy Spirit.”61

That last statement moves the discussion closer to what Ratzinger sees as an authentic understanding of tradition. He insists that “one may not define tradition as the communication of unwritten affirmations” and “Neither the Fathers nor pre-Tridentine scholastics held this position.”62 Rather, with the establishment of the canon of Scripture, for example, “the Church had to ponder the effects in herself of the work of the Holy Spirit amid arduous historical questioning. . . . This living struggle in the Holy Spirit is a process of tradere [handing on].”63 From this perspective, Ratzinger is able to say: “Tradition” is “not merely the material transmission of what was given at the beginning to the Apostles, but the effective presence of the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus, who accompanies and guides in the Spirit the community he has gathered together.”64 Therefore, Tradition is not “the transmission of things, or words, a collection of dead things [but] the living river that links us to the origins.”65 According to Voderholzer, Ratzinger’s definition of tradition can be summarized thus: “Tradition is for

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64 Ratzinger, Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Church, 27.
65 Ratzinger, Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Church, 28. Cf., Benedict XVI, 53.
Ratzinger the process—made possible and supported by the Holy Spirit—of the ever new appropriation and of the deepened understanding of the event of revelation attested to in scripture in the Church’s consciousness of faith.”

On this issue, Ratzinger posits approvingly that the scholastics had neither a doctrine of *sola scriptura* nor a conception of tradition as a parallel material but unwritten principle of revelation. He does so in the same context in which he argued that scripture and revelation are not synonymous: “Scripture is the material principle of revelation, which as such remains behind scripture and is not completely objectified in scripture.” Thus, Ratzinger—following the scholastics—maintains a distinction between the formal and material principles of revelation. Moreover, he thinks that this distinction makes an appeal to tradition as a material principle unnecessary. “Because the Scholastics clearly drew out the formal principle ‘revelation’ from the material of scripture, they could now conversely unselfconsciously assert a material *sola scriptura*, i.e., grasp scripture as [the] sole material principle of the faith, without having to attempt the questionable construction of material, oral traditions.”

Furthermore, tradition is understood by Ratzinger in a very broad sense to include all aspects of the ecclesial life, not just defined doctrines. As Voderholzer interprets Ratzinger’s

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thought: “This process of ever new appropriation and deepened understanding is not limited to the theological auditoriums or the desks of the theologians, as a rationalistic position attempts to demonstrate time and again, but includes the liturgy, prayer, meditation, includes the Church’s whole life of faith.”

Despite the distinction between revelation and tradition, tradition is still intimately tied to revelation, and is even part of the whole process of revelation. As Voderholzer explains: “In dialogue with Bonaventure, Ratzinger develops a view of tradition, which links it with the reception of revelation and thus allows it to be constitutive for revelation itself.”

A quote from Jared Wicks summarizes the above treatment of the relationship between revelation and tradition and leads directly into the topic of the next section on the relationship between scripture and tradition. Wicks succinctly remarks: “As a theologian of the ressourcement, Ratzinger proposed the patristic notion of tradition as the vital transmission of revelation in the believing Church, in the midst of which scripture gives the once-for-all witness of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles.”

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69 Voderholzer, “Der Grundduktus,” 49: “Dieser Prozess der je neuen Aneignung und des vertieften Verstehens ist nicht auf die theologischen Hörsäle oder die Schreibtische der Theologen beschränkt, wie eine rationalistische Position das immer wieder darzutun versuchte, sondern schließt die Liturgie, das Gebet, die Meditation, schließt das gesamte Glaubensleben der Kirche ein.”


71 Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 734.
4.3 The Relationship between Scripture and Tradition

According to Tracey Rowland, “the central issue of Dei verbum became the relationship of Scripture to Tradition and the way in which faith is related to history.” Therefore, this subsection’s treatment of Ratzinger’s approach to the scripture-tradition relationship will also aid Chapter Six’s evaluation of Ratzinger’s contribution to theology of divine revelation at Vatican II and beyond.

Previously, Ratzinger’s objection to describing scripture and tradition as ‘sources’ of revelation was presented. Along the same lines, Ratzinger insists that “the relation between the two realities Scripture and tradition can be only be [sic] grasped rightly when one subordinates them to a third reality, which actually comes first, namely, revelation itself, which precedes its positive attestations and transcends them.” Along with the criticism of the schema’s title, De fontibus revelationis, Ratzinger also argues that the draft document purported to close authoritatively a hitherto debated—and still debatable—matter. As Wicks notes:

Furthermore, the draft text overstepped proper bounds when it proposed giving conciliar ratification to the position that some parts of God’s revelation come to us from the Apostles via tradition alone and not by Scripture. This would amount to censuring the contrary conclusion of J. R. Geiselmann of Tübingen, drawn from the absence of the famous partim-partim phrasing from the Council of Trent’s promulgated decree on the Gospel and its transmission.

Even though Ratzinger does not agree with the totality of Geiselmann’s thesis, he believes that the matter should be left open to various theological opinions. As Verweyen writes:

The Council of Trent is said not to have claimed that in Scripture and Tradition is contained only a part of the truth of revelation in each case, but even wanted to leave untouched the opinion [that] “all things necessary for faith are also contained in the

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72 Rowland, Ratzinger’s Faith, 49.
scripture alone.” In his presentation, Ratzinger stresses “that up to that hour in the Church both the opinion of those who believe in the existence of specific truths only contained in Tradition, as well as the opinion of some, who think about a material completeness of scripture” had a right. He cites comments of the “two greatest” scholastics, Bonaventure and Thomas, who stress that all truths necessary for salvation are found in the sacred scripture or can be attributed to it but subsequently clearly poses: “Despite such texts, neither Bonaventure nor Thomas are scripturalists [advocates of the principle “the Scripture alone”], because they know that revelation is always more than its material principle, scripture, that it is alive, that it lives in the Church and only this way makes the Scripture alive and can illuminate its hidden depths.”

On the other hand, Verweyen continues, “At the end of this section, Ratzinger stresses, though, that it does not follow from this—under condemnation of those, who maintain a material transmission of revelation ‘partly in scripture, partly in tradition’—that ‘scripture’ must be ‘taught as [the] single material principle of revelation.’ Rather, the new council should furthermore remain open for both perspectives, as the Tridentine council already appears to suggest.” Not without justification, Verweyen perceives a similarity between Ratzinger’s intention and the motives of Maurice Blondel. The latter waged a “‘Two Front War’ against an

75 Verweyen, *Unbekannter*, 32-33 (text in brackets is Verweyen’s text): Das Konzil von Trient habe nicht behauptet, in Schrift und Überlieferung sei nur je ein Teil der Offenbarungswahrheiten enthalten, sondern auch die Meinung derjenigen unangetastet lassen wollen, „alles zum Glauben Notwendige sei auch in der Schrift allein enthalten“. In seinem Referat betont Ratzinger, „daß bis zur Stunde in der Kirche sowohl die Meinung derjenigen ein Recht hat, die an die Existenz besonderer, nur in der Überlieferung enthaltenen Wahrheiten glauben, wie auch die Meinung derjenigen, die an eine materiale Vollständigkeit der Schrift denken“. Er zitiert Äußerungen der „zwei größten“ Scholastiker, Bonaventura und Thomas, die betonen, dass alle für das Heil notwendige Wahrheit sich in der Hl. Schrift findet oder auf sie zurückgeführt werden kann, stellt aber anschließend klar: „Trotz solcher Texte sind weder Bonaventura noch Thomas Scripturisten [Verfechter des Prinzips „die Schrift allein“], weil sie darum wissen, dass die Offenbarung immer mehr ist als ihr Materialprinzip, die Schrift, daß sie Leben ist, das in der Kirche lebt und so erst die Schrift lebendig macht und ihre verborgenen Tiefen aufleuchten läßt“.

‘extrinsicist’ interpretation of scripture, which confronts the sacred text from the outside, by supposedly immutable tenets, as well as against the position of ‘historicism,’ according to which the historical-critical scientists are entitled to the final decision about what can be considered as rationally responsible statements in the scripture.”77

Ratzinger’s view of the relationship between scripture and tradition is quite nuanced. On the one hand, he agrees with Geiselmann that Trent has been falsely interpreted as teaching that the deposit of divine revelation is presented partly in Scripture and partly in tradition. On the other hand, Ratzinger is hesitant to adopt Geiselmann’s theory of the ‘material sufficiency’ of scripture. Ratzinger expresses this nuance when he writes: “It seems to me quite indisputable that it [i.e., Geiselmann’s thesis] represents in fact a considerable material advance. Yet as soon as the thesis is rather more closely examined in regard to its historical and intrinsic grounds, a whole series of difficulties emerge that make it impossible to rest content with it.”78 In a different work, Ratzinger speaks much more critically of Geiselmann’s thesis, when he writes that it is “in my eyes an insufficiently thought through and premature theory.”79

According to Ratzinger, Geiselmann correctly argues that the Council of Trent did not teach that revelation is contained partly in scripture and partly in tradition. Beyond the question of accurate interpretation of Trent, like Geiselmann, Ratzinger himself does not like the partim-partim expression. In this connection, Ratzinger writes:

77 Verweyen, Unbekannter, 33: “Zweifrontenkrieg’ gegen eine ,extrinsezistische’ Interpretation der Schrift, die von außen, von vermeintlich unverrückbaren Lehrrätzen, an die heiligen Texte herantritt, wie gegen die Position des ,Historizismus’, demzufolge dem historisch-kritischen Wissenschaftler die letzte Entscheidung darüber zusteht, was in der Schrift als rational verantwortbare Aussage betrachtet werden kann.”

78 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 33.

79 Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 135.
One will do surely well, however, to grasp tradition not so much as a substantive principle alongside scripture (which almost always happens in false interpretation of Trent), as to find expressed in it, rather, simply the ecclesial bond of the word of Scripture. The sentence: alongside scripture, sacred tradition is a source of “revelation” (= knowledge of revelation) implies therefore accordingly in the first place not that there is a stockpile of “truths of revelation” beyond scripture, which is handed on further alongside scripture; it bespeaks, rather, that scripture is not simply already “revelation” of God as a dead, historical book, which therefore would be accessible and “disposable” (!) to everyone, even to the profane reader, but rather that it only becomes revelation in the hands of the living Church in her proclamation. In short, it could be expressed thus: the sentence “scripture and tradition are the two sources of the knowledge of revelation” is synonymous with the other: scripture is God’s revelation only in the living Church of God. 80

It is clear from the above quote that Ratzinger does not view tradition as a collection of revealed truths not found in Scripture. “Tradition must not be depicted, as in De fontibus, as an autonomous source offering a plus of revealed content beyond scripture.” 81 Ratzinger believes this holds true even for dogmas. For, Ratzinger insists, “dogma is nothing other than interpretation of Scripture.” 82 Hence, tradition is not a second, material source for the knowledge of revelation. As Ratzinger himself states: “The question of whether certain express affirmations were transmitted from the beginning side by side with scripture, whether, therefore, there is a


second material principle besides scripture, independent from the beginning, becomes quite secondary in comparison; but it would probably have to be answered negatively.” 83 For Ratzinger, according to Voderholzer, “Tradition is not a second material principle of revelation alongside sacred scripture but a mode of transmission of revelation through the Church.” 84

“Tradition,” in Ratzinger’s own words, “by its very nature is always interpretation, does not exist independently but only as exposition, interpretation ‘according to the scripture.’ . . . As ‘tradition’ . . . it must recognize that it is under an obligation to scripture and linked to it.” 85 “For we must now ask,” Ratzinger poses, “whether a person can be a witness to tradition in any other way than by being a witness to the interpretation of Scripture, to the discovery of its true meaning. Perhaps, indeed, the wisdom of the pronouncements of Trent and of 1870 consists precisely in the fact that they allow tradition to bear upon scriptural interpretation; that they recognize the Fathers as the expression of tradition because they are revealers of the Bible.” 86

Ratzinger goes on to qualify the nature of tradition as interpretation. He explains: “It is true that it is not interpretation in the sense of purely exegetical exposition, but in virtue of the spiritual authority of the Lord operative in the whole existence of the Church, its faith, life and

83 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 46. N.B.: There is some contrast here with what Ratzinger wrote in his “Observations on the Schema” (p. 272 in Wicks, “Six Texts”): “Scripture and Tradition are material principles of our knowing revelation.”


85 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 47.

86 Ratzinger, Principles, 138.
worship.” As Pablo Blanco Sarto explains Ratzinger’s thought: “Scripture and tradition . . . do not form two difference sources [of revelation], but just one in which both intimately unite.”

In addition, one should not consider tradition as something subsequent to scripture, in Ratzinger’s view. “As the Bible [itself] attests, for Ratzinger, tradition is not only a process, which temporally begins after sacred scripture, but a process, which can already be observed and is documented within scripture.”

Here is found a preview of a later discussion that will be developed in Chapter Five relating to the objective and subjective dimensions of revelation and the role of the Church therein: for the Church and her living tradition are already present during the writing of the New Testament. “In this way, it can be recognized that behind the sacred scripture stands the subject of the covenant people, in whose faith revelation ‘arrives’ anew again and again.”

In a similar vein, Ratzinger suggests that tradition should not be understood primarily in oral (unwritten) or verbal terms. Rather, he wants to suggest a real understanding of tradition. Appealing to a Father of the Council of Trent, Cardinal Marcello Cervini, Ratzinger posits that “Tradition refers to the institutio vitae, to the mode or realization of the word in actual Christian

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87 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 47.

88 Pablo Blanco Sarto, La Teología de Joseph Ratzinger, 85-86: “Escritura y tradición . . . no forman dos fuentes diferentes, sino una sola en la que ambas se unen íntimamente.”


90 Körner, “Übereignung,” 70: “Auf diese Weise lasse sich erkennen, das hinter der Heiligen Schrift das Subjekt des Bundesvolkes steht, in dessen Glauben die Offenbarung immer wieder neu ‚ankommt’.”
living. In other words, it is the form in which the word finds reality and without which the word would remain unreal.”

In some way, then, Ratzinger is comfortable with speaking of scripture as the one material source for the knowledge of revelation. Although, elsewhere, he suggests another approach that equally negates the partim-partim expression but from a different angle: “the relation has to be conceived more as a totum-totum than a partim-partim.” This expression would seem to indicate that both scripture and tradition independently contain the whole. It is not entirely clear, then, whether Ratzinger’s personal view as expressed in the last quote is that scripture is the sole material source of the knowledge of revelation. As the last quote intimates, tradition could also be considered another—but equally comprehensive—material source. Such an interpretation appears to conflict with his other statements on the matter, which makes its intended meaning ambiguous. What is clear, however, is that Ratzinger does not approve of the theory that Scripture is materially sufficient. As Verweyen relates:

The . . . interpretation of Scripture as a single material principle is said to be “not synonymous [...] with the idea of a material completeness [Vollständigkeit] of scripture, against which there are serious difficulties. . . . The view of a truth of a revelation completely given materially in scripture was soon after the Council, even by Catholic theologians, connected with the search—rejuvenated again since the middle of the 20th Century—for “authentic” words and deeds of Jesus, which would have been considered as a criterion for the teaching of the Church. From this perspective, Ratzinger justifiably stresses in the retrospective of his “Memoirs” of 1997/1998 that the thesis of Geiselmann coarsened in this way undermines the faith from within and surrenders to the daily-revised results of exegetes’ research.

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91 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 59. See also, p. 54, where he contrasts explicitly the idea of “verbal tradition” with the much preferred notion of “a real tradition.”


The theory of material sufficiency of scripture severs the interpretation of scripture from the living tradition, which leads to many problems. “In 1970 Ratzinger analyzed the virulent postconciliar crises arising from doctrinal interpretations sundered from Christian foundations, from a biblicism oblivious of the tradition.”

Additionally, Ratzinger argues that Trent did not teach material sufficiency of Scripture. Geiselmann’s attempt to interpret Trent in that way is based dubiously on one of the members of that Council, Giacomo Nacchianti, who argued for the material sufficiency of Scripture. On this point, Ratzinger “cites the testimonies of Cervini and Massarelli that the bishops were scandalized by Nacchianti’s position on the sufficiency of Scripture, calling him a ‘lover of new things’ and ‘reprehensible to many.’”

Furthermore, Ratzinger doubts the very idea of material sufficiency; matter cannot be sufficient. “The question has to be raised, after all, what from a Christian point of view, material sufficiency can mean. It is only the Christ-reality which is ‘sufficient.’” In addition, the history of dogma demonstrates that scripture is not materially sufficient and calls into question the sensibility of the notion of material sufficiency itself. Explicitly writing against Geilemann’s thesis, Ratzinger notes:

94 Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 738 (emphasis added).


96 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 40.
Geiselmann himself, as a Catholic theologian, has to hold fast to Catholic dogmas as such, but none of them is to be had sola scriptura, neither the great dogmas of Christian antiquity, of what was once the consensus quinquescacularis, nor, even less, the new ones of 1854 and 1950. In that case, however, what sense is there in talking about the sufficiency of scripture? Does it not threaten to become a dangerous delusion with which we deceive first ourselves and then others . . . ? At least, in order to maintain both that scripture contains all revealed truth and that the dogma of 1950, for example, is a revealed truth, recourse has to be had to such a wide sense of the term ‘sufficiency’ that the word loses all serious meaning.97

Explaining the false conclusion that the material sufficiency of scripture would require, Joshua Brotherton writes: “Asserting that all the propositional truths of revelation are implicit in sacred scripture conflates the material content of revelation and the written word, reducing tradition to the formal understanding of such.”98

According to Brotherton, it is not only the term ‘sufficiency’ that is problematic in this context but also an overemphasis on ‘material.’ He writes: “‘Form’ and ‘matter’ (conceived in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense) are not adequate categories applicable to either revelation or tradition, for Ratzinger.”99 However, Brotherton’s interpretation goes beyond and even contrary to what Ratzinger himself has said. As already seen, Ratzinger frequently refers to scripture as a material principle of revelation. He has also spoken of the scholastics’ differentiation between formal and material principles of revelation,100 and he supports that distinction, thus arguing for both formal and material principles of revelation. Despite the questionable accuracy of Brotherton’s interpretation, his comments raise an important question: in what way can

97 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 33-34.


100 See Ratzinger, “Offenbarung – Schrift – Überlieferung,” 27. See also Ratzinger, “Cardinal Frings’s Speeches,” 136 and especially 137 where he says that “the speculations about the material completeness are themselves irrelevant because another formal principle rules.”
Ratzinger claim that scripture is not materially sufficient on the basis of the dogma of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and yet claim that tradition is not a separate, material principle of revelation? Here, Ratzinger seems to suggest that tradition does contain revealed truths not found in scripture, which would mean that scripture is not the sole material source and that tradition does contain revealed truths not contained in scripture, which makes tradition something other than an authoritative interpretation of—and witness to—scripture.

Ratzinger employs an analogy to help explicate his position on the relationship between scripture and tradition. He starts by referring back to what he had said about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, as discussed above. He explains: “there is the Church’s interpretation of the New Testament just as there is a Christological interpretation of the Old Testament.”\(^\text{101}\) In *Revelation and Tradition*, Ratzinger insists that within both the Old and New Testaments themselves, prior material found in each had been re-interpreted. Later books of the Old Testament re-interpreted words and events testified in the earlier Old Testament texts. Similarly, the New Testament reinterpreted Old Testament texts. Likewise, within the New Testament, a growth is discernible by means of a “new understanding of the old in a new situation.”\(^\text{102}\)


\(^\text{101}\) Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 43.

\(^\text{102}\) Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 43.
theology of the Old Testament is related to the Old Testament theology of the Old Testament.”  

What Ratzinger says next is particularly noteworthy for the present discussion: “What is actually ‘additional’, and what, therefore, distinguishes dogmatic theology from biblical theology, is what we call, in a precise sense, tradition.”

Ratzinger goes as far as to claim that, without tradition, scripture cannot be revelation. “The understanding which elevates the Scripture to the status of ‘revelation’ . . . is realized only in the living understanding of Scripture in the Church.”  

Separating scripture from tradition yields poor results, as was already mentioned earlier. The converse is also true. As Wicks relates: “As commentator on Dei Verbum, Ratzinger singled out the point made . . . by Cardinal Albert Gregory Meyer of Chicago that tradition not only progresses but also declines and so needs ongoing correction from scripture.”

Hence, scripture and tradition must always work symbiotically. They each need the other to be fully themselves. “And so revelation is shown as a

103 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 44.

104 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 44.


106 Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 738-739, n. 45. See Joseph Ratzinger, “Commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, ed. H. Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 185: “not everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition; in other words, not every tradition that arises in the Church is a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ. There is a distorting, as well as a legitimate, tradition. As examples of this negative kind of tradition Meyer mentioned a kind of piety that is opposed to the spirit of liturgy and a casuistic and untheological moralism. He asked that the text should state not only that in statu viatorum tradition proceeds in a spirit of progress and ever deeper insight into faith, but that there is also the possibility of a deficere, and in fact, this possibility is constantly being realized. Consequently, tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically; we have Scripture as a criterion for this indispensible criticism of tradition, and tradition must therefore always be related back to it and measured by it.” In footnote 10, referring to these statements, Ratzinger points to A. Wegner, Vatican II, III (1965), pp. 145f; and to L. A. Dorn and G. Denzler, Tagebuch des Konzils. Die Arbeit der Dritten Session (1965), p. 103. See also Joseph M. Gile, Dei Verbum: Theological Critiques, 166-170 and 320-323.
dynamic reality, which also becomes reality in the present in the interplay of scripture and tradition."

One can thus view Ratzinger’s understanding of the relationship between revelation, scripture, and tradition as an attempt to overcome what he perceives to be misguided notions derived from conflicts over the Protestant reformation. On the one hand, Ratzinger objects to the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura*, which mistakenly conflates revelation and scripture, failing to make a distinction between formal and material principles of revelation. On the other hand, Ratzinger also takes issue with widespread views of the Counter Reformation. In particular, Ratzinger argues against an overly materialistic understanding of tradition. At bottom, he thinks both of these views stem from the same basic error: the false need for revelation to be seen as materially and objectively complete ever since the time of the Apostles. “On the contrary, this notion only becomes necessary in the instant in which revelation is erroneously identified with its material principle and so an utterly material completeness of revelation from the beginning on must be required. On this false objectification of the concept of revelation rests both the old-Protestant Biblicism as well as the post-Tridentine material interpretation of the concept of tradition.”¹⁰⁷ From this, one may conclude, as Ratzinger does in another context, “we must go behind the positive sources, scripture and tradition, to their inner source, revelation, the living word of God from which scripture and tradition spring and without which their significance for faith cannot be understood.”¹⁰⁸


¹⁰⁸ Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 34.
On this matter, Ratzinger believes that his understanding corresponds to the view of the Fathers of the Church. “For them,” he writes, “tradition was the insertion of Scripture into the living organism of the Church and the Church’s right of possession of Scripture. . . . For them tradition is simply *scriptura in ecclesia* [Scripture in the Church].”109 “The tradition,” writes Pablo Blanco, “thus becomes something subordinate to the biblical text, which helps and complements its proper understanding.”110 What is more, Ratzinger argues that the Fathers explicitly rejected what would later become the common post-Tridentine, neo-scholastic view: “For most of the Fathers the idea of tradition as a set of affirmations communicated alongside Scripture was an idea they rejected as gnostic.”111 In fact, Ratzinger argues that, in the early Church, succession and tradition were employed precisely to combat the Gnostics’ claim to special revelation apart from scripture.112 Tradition, for the Fathers and for Ratzinger alike, does not mean “exhaustive doctrines of apostolic origin,” but “the connection of the living faith with the authority of the Church, embodied in the episcopal succession.”113 He also thinks that his view is supported by the best of the authentic scholastic tradition: Bonaventure and Aquinas.114

The erroneous neo-scholastic view of tradition advocated in *De fontibus revelationis* has its source precisely in the false reduction of revelation to material sources coupled with a narrowly Counter-Reformational perspective. Ratzinger’s call for a deeper reflection on the


110 Blanco, *La Teología*, 86: “La tradición se convierte así en algo subordinado al texto bíblico, que ayuda y complemente su propia comprensión.”


112 See DeClue, “Primacy and Collegiality,” 653-654.

113 Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 50.

priority of revelation over the sources of the knowledge of revelation is meant to provide an antidote:

If one identifies revelation with its material principles, then tradition has to be set up as a proper material principle in order to keep revelation from being totally in Scripture. But if revelation is prior and greater, then there is no trouble in having only one material principle, which even so is still not the whole, but only the material principle of the superior reality revelation, which lives in the Church.\footnote{Ratzinger, “Observations on the Schema” in Wicks, “Six Texts,” 276.}
CHAPTER FIVE: THE PROCESS OF REVELATION: SALVATION HISTORY

We turn now to a consideration of the process of revelation in salvation history. This chapter will unfold in three main parts. First, we discuss the historical character of revelation. Next, we will treat the objective and subjective aspects of the problem. Finally, we will consider revelation through the development of doctrine.

5.1 The Historical Character of Revelation

The previous reflections on the essence of revelation, particularly with respect to the centrality of Christ and the completion of revelation in the response of faith, already hint at—and are included in—the theme of this chapter on the process of revelation in history. Considerations deriving from one of Ratzinger’s earliest and most celebrated books, *Introduction to Christianity*, express the link between all of these topics. In this book, Ratzinger investigates the significance of Christian faith in the world of today. It is not merely a reflection on the Apostles’ Creed but also a profound reflection upon the very nature of faith itself and the challenges that faith encounters in the contemporary world. In the midst of such reflection, he corrects potential misunderstanding about the nature of Christian faith by highlighting the importance of history for Christianity and connects the historical aspect of faith to the notion of revelation. In this way, the following selection is an apt starting point for the present chapter:

Christian belief is not merely concerned, as one might at first suspect from all the talk of belief or faith, with the eternal, which as the ‘entirely Other’ would remain completely outside the human world and time; on the contrary, it is much more concerned with God in history, with God as man. By thus seeming to bridge the gulf between eternal and temporal, between visible and invisible, by making us meet God as a man, the eternal as the temporal, as one of us, it understands itself as revelation. Its claim to be revelation is indeed based on the fact that it has, so to speak, introduced the eternal into our world. . . . so that he whom no one has ever seen now stands open to our historical touch.¹

Precisely as God’s self-revelation to man, who is an historical creature, the eternal God communicates within the milieu of man’s existence: time, history. As already indicated, divine self-communication has its historical apex in the Incarnation of the Word. Thus, historicity is a constitutive element of revelation; revelation takes place in history. As Peter Hofmann puts it: “Not only is history to be considered theologically, but *theology in general* is to be thought and practiced historically.”²

The nature of God’s revelation in Christ leads to a paradoxical result. For, as Ratzinger states:

But things are curiously double-sided: what at first seems to be the most radical revelation and to a certain degree does indeed always remain revelation, *the* revelation, is at the same moment the cause of the most extreme obscurity and concealment. The very thing that at first seems to bring God quite close to us . . . also becomes in a very profound sense the precondition for the ‘death of God’, which henceforth puts an ineradicable stamp on the course of history and the human relationship with God. God has come so near to us that we can kill him and that he thereby, so it seems, ceases to be God for us. Thus today we stand somewhat baffled before this Christian ‘revelation’ and wonder, especially when we compare it with the religiosity of Asia, whether it would not have been much simpler to believe in the Mysteriously Eternal . . .whether God would not have done better, so to speak, to leave us at an infinite distance.³

Here, Ratzinger highlights one of the common objections to Christian faith: how could the life and death of one man in one historical time period be essential for the salvation of all people of all time periods. Does not the rather short duration of Christ’s earthly life in comparison to human history call into question the Christian claim that he is the one, absolute, universal savior of mankind?

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² Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 84: “Nicht nur die Geschichte ist theologisch zu bedenken, sondern *Theologie überhaupt* ist geschichtlich zu denken und zu treiben.”

³ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 55.
Herein lies the paradox: in order to reveal himself to man, God must meet humanity where humanity is; he must enter into history and speak in human terms. Yet, by doing so, God has also supplied unbelievers with their strongest argument against faith in Christ: Jesus is a man who was born and has died. What is more, he is a man that was killed. How, then, can Christians claim that he is God? It is difficult for the man of today to “give oneself up to the positivism of belief in one single figure and to set the salvation of man and of the world on the pinpoint, so to speak, of this one chance moment in history.”

The Incarnation of the Word stands as the highest, most profound, most appropriate form of divine revelation to man, and yet simultaneously is the greatest stumbling block, making it difficult for many to believe.

In Chapter Three of this present work, the centrality of Christ as the concrete universal who unites metaphysics and historicity, God and humanity, in his own person was discussed. One may refer back to that section as a reminder of how Christ’s own personal history is able to achieve universal salvific significance. In fact, it may be said, that there is no more appropriate way of God to save man than precisely through the unique history of the God-man. God meets the human person where the human person is: in history. He assumes not just a complete human nature (and thus human ontology) but also a personal, human history in and through which he works out salvation for all mankind. On this point, Ratzinger speaks about the paradoxical Christian historical consciousness in connection with the universal salvific significance of Christ. The Christian historical consciousness

is characterized simultaneously by both personalization (individualization) and universalization. The beginning and end of this new history is the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is recognized as the last man (the second Adam), that is, as the long-awaited

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4 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 55.
manifestation of what is truly human and the definitive revelation to man of his hidden
nature; for this very reason, it is oriented toward the whole human race.\textsuperscript{5}

To use the terms discussed extensively in Chapter 3: if the Logos had only assumed a
complete human nature but never lived a full human life in history, then there would be no
‘apparition’ that could awaken man to ‘revelation’ perceived in faith that enables God to become
‘manifest.’ Since it has already been established that Christ is the center of history as well as the
summit of divine revelation, then it is plain to see that Christ is the key figure within divine
revelation in history. Speaking of the revelation of the Father in the Son, Ratzinger writes, “This
is, in essence, the principle of ‘salvation history’: salvation comes through history, which
therefore, represents the immediate form of religious experience. . . . it is precisely in the
reception of the historical that that which transcends history—the eternal—becomes present.”\textsuperscript{6}

The historical nature of revelation is highlighted further by another characteristic of
Bonaventure’s works on revelation. It is tied to the notion of revelation as an act, an event. As
Ratzinger notes:

We could say that Bonaventure does not treat of ‘revelation’ but of ‘revelations.’ Or to
express this more in line with Greek thought, Bonaventure recognizes and deals with the
many individual revelations which have taken place in the course of history; but he never
inquires about the one revelation which has taken place in these many revelations. . . . In
Bonaventure, we find clear and detailed analyses concerning the process of revelation
which can be repeated, and which in fact are often repeated by God.\textsuperscript{7}

History is comprised of various moments, of particular events that have a specific temporal
duration. Hence, rather than speaking of ‘one revelation’ that has taken place, Bonaventure tends

\textsuperscript{5} Ratzinger, \textit{Principles}, 156.

\textsuperscript{6} Ratzinger, \textit{Principles}, 154.

\textsuperscript{7} Ratzinger, \textit{Theology of History}, 57.
to speak of specific instances in which revelation has taken place, or even continues to take place.

With respect to these instances of revelation, there is a distinction made between the process of revelation as the Apostles experienced it and the process of revelation for those living in the post-apostolic period. Both involve exterior witness and interior illumination, but the former is of a different kind in the two instances. Rudolf Voderholzer summarizes Ratzinger’s thought on this question as follows: “For the apostles, then, revelation occurs when the subjective moment of enlightenment or even inspiratio enters into the apprehension of the historical event (apparitio), to which belongs the quality of a ‘wake-up call,’ whereby the divine reality becomes manifest to the believing observer.” An important aspect of this process of revelation as experienced by the apostles is the fact that they actually saw Christ both before and after the resurrection. The witness of the Christ-event with their own eyes constitutes an important distinction between their situation and that of believers in later times.

In post-apostolic times, even to the present day, a shift occurs with respect to the external aspect of revelation. “Hearing takes the place of seeing.” The ‘apparition’ no longer takes place through a direct, sensible experience of the Christ-event. Now, the ‘apparition’ is received in a mediated way through the apostolic witness, especially through scripture. “Here as well an interaction of exterior and interior is necessary: an interior enlightenment must correspond to the

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Thus, joined to the notion of revelation as an historical event is that other characteristic of revelation spoken of earlier: the subjective dimension of revelation. “In these acts” of revelation, “God turns toward the individual recipient of revelation.”

5.2 The Objective and Subjective Aspects of the Problem

Insofar as Ratzinger approves of Bonaventure’s understanding of revelation with its decisive emphasis on the graced illumination of the human subject who receives revelation, one may begin to wonder whether this view leads to an overly subjective notion of revelation that leaves each individual believer to his own devices with respect to what God has revealed. In other words, it is valid to ask how Ratzinger balances the objective and subjective dimensions of the process of revelation. It has already been noted that Schmaus felt Ratzinger’s original Habilitationsschrift failed to achieve the necessary balance.

In the ultimately approved version of his Habilitationsschrift, Theology of History in St. Bonaventure, Ratzinger tackles the question quite directly. After positing that graced-illumination or inspiration enables the individual to perceive the truth of revelation that lies behind the merely sensible words of scripture, Ratzinger admits that this could lead to a misunderstanding of Bonaventure’s position. “We might well ask whether such a view would not destroy the objectivity of revelation in favor of a subjective actualism.” Ratzinger assures the reader that this is not the case. He writes:


11 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 57.

Such an idea has no foundation in the intellectual world of Bonaventure. For the deep meaning of Scripture in which we truly find the ‘revelation’ and the content of faith is not left up to the whim of each individual. It has already been objectified in part in the teachings of the Fathers and in theology so that the basic lines are accessible simply by the acceptance of the Catholic faith, which – as it is summarized in the *Symbolum* – is a principle of exegesis.¹³

In other words, despite the subjective reception of grace, which aids the individual in the process of receiving divine revelation, the individual is still beholden to the faith of the Church with respect to the actual content of revelation. Again, *sola scriptura* has no place in this view, precisely because Scripture cannot be understood apart from the living tradition of the Church.¹⁴

“The understanding which elevates the Scripture to the status of ‘revelation’ is not to be taken as an affair of the individual reader; but it is realized only in the living understanding of the Scripture in the Church. In this way the objectivity of the claim of faith is affirmed without any doubt.”¹⁵ Hence, while revelation has a decisively subjective dimension, this subjective dimension has an ecclesial character and is therefore not individualistic but communal, ecclesial. In agreement with Johann Adam Möhler, Ratzinger insists that “the Scripture cannot be separated from the living community in which, alone, it can be ‘Scripture.’”¹⁶ The subjective-personal dimension of revelation and the objective-communal dimension of revelation coalesce in Ratzinger’s ecclesial notion of revelation. As Ratzinger himself says in yet another place: “One has not grasped the heart of the act of faith if one constructs it as a relationship between a

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¹⁴ See Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 109: “This in turn means that there can be no such thing as pure *sola scriptura* . . ., because an essential element of Scripture is the Church as understanding subject, and with this the fundamental sense of tradition is already given.” See also Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI*, 68.


book and the thinking of an individual. Essentially it is an act of union. . . . to the act of faith belongs—as part of its basic structure—the insertion of the individual into the Church, the community, the communality of that which unites and that which is united.”

The communion of the Church is an integral part of the process of receiving and properly understanding revelation. This point is highlighted rather starkly in an example that Ratzinger borrows from Bonaventure. With respect to the introduction of the Filioque into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, Bonaventure responds to the question of why the Latin Church did not consult the Eastern Churches in this process. In addition to saying that this would have been too arduous, given the difficulties of distance and travel in those days, Bonaventure boldly claims that it would also have been fruitless. The reason he gives pertains to the lack of ecclesial unity in the East. As Ratzinger relates: “the Greeks were said to have poorly maintained the unity of the Church and for that reason to have been punished with a blindness with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity.” Ecclesial unity is shown here to be an intrinsic part of the process of understanding divine revelation. As Ratzinger notes: “Now, it is important in our context . . . that it is elevated to a dogma-historical principle.”

Ideas found in Ratzinger’s later work help illuminate this issue. Three just-mentioned ideas enter into his later discussion: 1) faith is a prerequisite for revelation to take place; 2) the

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18 Ratzinger, “Offenbarung – Schrift – Überlieferung,” 18: “die Griechen hätten die Einheit der Kirche schlecht gewahrt und seien dafür mit einer Verblendung hinsichtlich der Trinitätslehre bestraft worden.” See Bonaventure, Questiones disputatae de perfection evangelica, q 4 a 3 ad 12. One may object that, during the time of the Filioque controversy, the Great Schism had not yet happened. The other reasons Bonaventure offers for the legitimacy of the Latin Church’s actions may be considered stronger in light of this fact.

Creed is a hermeneutical principle for the understanding of scripture, and, relatedly; 3) Scripture cannot be understood apart from the Church’s living tradition. In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger brings together these themes of an individual’s faith, the Creed, and the Church’s living tradition. He writes:

Historically, this means that the ‘I’ of the credo-formula is a collective ‘I’, the ‘I’ of the believing Church, to which the individual ‘I’ belongs as long as it believes. In other words, the ‘I’ of the credo embraces the transition from the individual ‘I’ to the ecclesial ‘I’. In the case of the subject, the ‘I’ of the Church is a structural precondition of the creed: this ‘I’ utters itself only in the *communio* of the Church; the oneness of the believing subject is the necessary counterpart and consequence of the known ‘object’ [i.e., the Triune God].20

In this way, Ratzinger refers to the Church as a “trans-temporal subject, the *communio Ecclesiae*.”21 In a very real way, then, the Church is both the bearer and receiver of revelation throughout the centuries. As a single, trans-temporal subject, the Church is the one who receives revelation.

Rudolf Voderholzer shares this interpretation of Ratzinger’s theology of revelation. According to Voderholzer, any individualistic, arbitrary, or subjectivist notion of revelation is precluded, because “When Ratzinger speaks of this in his memoires, [that] revelation requires a someone, to whom it becomes known, thus first of all this is not the isolated individual, but the great-subject Church, embedded in whose faith access to the encounter with the self-disclosing God and thereby revelation is possible also for the individual.”22 As Ratzinger contends: “the

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human individual entrusts himself directly to the faith of the Church.”

Voderholzer writes elsewhere: “Without developing this further here, let it be pointed out that this process in fundamental theology is itself described as the turning away from an information-theoretical or instruction-theoretical to a personal-dialogical understanding of revelation. . . . Church is constitutive for the process of revelation insofar as only in that case can revelation in the full sense be spoken of justly, when something has been revealed to someone, when revelation has been accepted in faith.”

Similarly, Maximilian Heinrich Heim connects the idea of the Church as a trans-temporal subject to sacred tradition. As he attests: “the Church is the trans-temporal subject of faith. . . . For this reason, she is also ‘the condition for real participation in Jesus’ traditio.’”

“Accordingly,” Heim explains, “the individual does not believe out of his own resources but, rather, as Ratzinger stresses, always believes ‘along with the whole Church.’”

Reflecting on the

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words of 1 John 1:1-4, Ratzinger writes: “Faith then is not only an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou,’ it is also a ‘We.’”

The reception of revelation by an individual is ordered to and ultimately increases within the communion of the Church in the light of her reading of scripture from the vantage point of tradition. “Tradition,” writes Ratzinger, “always presumes a bearer of tradition, that is, a community that preserves and communicates it and that becomes, by the oneness of the historical context in which it exists, the bearer of concrete memory. The bearer of tradition in the case of Jesus is the Church. . . . This bearer is, consequently, the *sine qua non* of the possibility of a genuine participation in the *traditio* of Jesus, which, without it, would be, not a historical and history-making reality, but only a private memory.” Without the Church, true faith would not be possible: “there is no faith without Church.”

It may be argued, then, that Ratzinger’s ecclesiology helps correct a potential misunderstanding of his theology of revelation. As Pablo Blanco Sarto explains: “Scripture is part of a living organism from which it takes . . . its origin; and that is why scripture and the Church remain as two complementary instances that allow an adequate reading of history and of the events narrated there.” Schmidt also notes Ratzinger’s stance on this issue, when he writes: ‘in order to allow reading of the Bible to remain theologically fruitful, exegesis would consequently have to remain in correlation to ‘Church.’”

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31 Schmidt, »... *Das Wort Gottes*, 55: “um Bibellektüre theologisch fruchtbar bleiben zu lassen, würde Exegese konsequent in Korrelation zu ‚Kirche’ bleiben müssen.”
the emphasis on the individual’s reception of revelation through grace from becoming an individualistic—or, in Schmaus’s terms, a subjective and modernist—understanding of revelation. For Ratzinger, “the Church is co-recognized as constitutive for the occurrence of revelation.” The Church, along with her sacred tradition, is a necessary factor in the individual believers’ reception of divine revelation as such. “The Church,” he says in a 1961 address, “is by her nature the living presence of the Word of God in the World.” This view is expressed so frequently in Ratzinger’s writings that Bernhard Körner includes among the recurring themes of Ratzinger’s thought “the conviction that the Church is the place of an authentic interpretation of sacred scripture as Word of God.”

Thus, when Ratzinger emphasizes the subjective interiority of revelation, he does not intend to negate either the objective, external or the communal aspects of revelation and faith. As Fergus Kerr interprets Ratzinger’s thought, “Believing certainly means belonging: Catholics have inherited a certain historical tradition.” Obedience to the Church, then, is always part of an individual’s authentic reception of—and assent to—revelation. In fact, as Körner notes: “Every knowledge which wants to be based on revelation must wonder where the revelation is"


35 Kerr, Twentieth-Century, 191.

attested – and this place is the community of faith, that is the Church.” 37 To be sure, “For this thought, indeed, every knowledge which touches upon spiritual realities is a thoroughly internal event. So even revelatio, which discloses the most interior of the interior, the most spiritual of the spiritual, namely God, can never simply . . . be an objective, external fact. It must be an at least partially interior event.” 38 Nevertheless, revelation is never only an interior event. The internal and external work together. “‘Revelation’ . . . is made up as always out of an external, objective and an internal, actual aspect.” 39 Thus, while, on the one hand, “revelation is the interior immersion into the heart of the individual I, standing in front of God,” so, too, on the other hand, “Echoing de Lubac’s seminal book Catholicism, he observes such revelation is transmitted in community. While there is an internal inspiration by virtue of the (subjective) verbum inspiratum, an equally important second component must be noted: the doctrina externa, which is based on the (historical) verbum incarnatum—Jesus Christ. Together, these two moments describe revelation.” 40

Ratzinger’s view of the duality of revelation—its coexistent objective and subjective aspects—draws upon his study of Bonaventure. As Ratzinger insists, “This duality of the origins

37 Körner, “Übereignung,” 74-75: “Jede Erkenntnis, die sich auf die Offenbarung stützen will, muss sich fragen, wo die Offenbarung bezeugt wird – und dieser Ort ist die Glaubensgemeinschaft, also die Kirche.”


of revelation is one of the consistent principles of the Doctor seraphicus.”

Faith is closely tied to revelation in this view. “‘Revelation’ is only there, where ‘faith’ is; there is not the one without the other. Bonaventure has never known a neutral, objective revelation outside of the faith.”

The close bond between faith and revelation in its objective and subjective dimensions explains how, in Bonaventure’s understanding of revelation, “The word fides can mean both the external doctrine of faith (‘revelatio obiectiva’) as well as the inner illumination of faith (‘revelatio subiectiva’) and ultimately of course the properly human act of faith.”

The objective aspect of revelation differs with respect to the apostles and post-apostolic period according to the ‘seeing’ or ‘hearing’ mentioned earlier. According to Voderholzer, for the apostles, “The objectivity of the content of revelation is guaranteed through the historical uniqueness of the event.” In post-apostolic times, “the aspect guaranteeing the objectivity is not lacking: it is doctrina, ecclesial teaching as guiding principle of the faith.”

Ratzinger argues that even when some objective content has been divinely revealed in a specific historical moment, the subjective side of revelation still continues to occur throughout the ages. On this point, he writes: “‘Revelation’ in the sense of inner turning of God toward man

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41 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 220: “Diese Zweiheit der Offenbarungursprünge gehört zu den durchgängigen Prinzipien des Doctor seraphicus.”


43 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 221: “Das Wort fides kann sowohl die äußere Glaubenslehre (»revelatio obiectiva«) wie auch die innere Glaubenserleuchtung (»revelatio subiectiva«) und endlich natürlich den eigenen menschlichen Glaubensakt bedeuten.”


45 Voderholzer, “Offenbarung und Kirche,” 58: “das die Objektivität gewährleistende Moment fehlt nicht: Es ist die doctrina, die kirchliche Lehre als Richtschnur des Glaubens.”
must take place ever anew even in a time in which the objective side of divine self-disclosure has concluded long ago.”\textsuperscript{46} Hence, Ratzinger is able to say, “the Word remains presence.”\textsuperscript{47} Again, both the subjective and the objective aspects must coexist.

These considerations of the objective and subjective dimensions of divine revelation provide a basis for the following subsection. It will delve into more detail about how the objective aspect unfolds in the Church through the ages, especially by means of the development of doctrine.

\textit{5.3 Revelation through the Development of Doctrine}

Before delving into the specifics of the process of revelation as it occurs through the development of doctrine, it is helpful to summarize the essence of revelation and the role of doctrine in the process as it has been discussed thus far. Voderholzer provides a precise and succinct explanation: “Talk of revelation in the true sense can only ever exist when the self-disclosure of God, mediated through scripture in accordance with doctrina, has led to the manifestness of God in the believer.”\textsuperscript{48} The crucial role of doctrine for the interpretation of scripture is highlighted further when Voderholzer writes: “Only scriptural interpretation

\textsuperscript{46} Ratzinger, “Offenbarung – Schrift – Überlieferung,” 26: “‘Offenbarung’ im Sinn innerer Zuwendung Gottes zum Menschen muß auf jeden Fall je neu erfolgen auch in einer Zeit, in der die objektive Seite der göttlichen Selbsterschließung längst abgeschlossen ist.”


\textsuperscript{48} Voderholzer, “Offenbarung und Kirche,” 58: “Von Offenbarung im eigentlichen Sinne kann immer erst die Rede sein, wenn die Selbsterschließung Gottes, vermittelt durch die Schrift nach Maßgabe der doctrina, im Glaubenden zur Offenbarkeit Gottes geführt hat.”
accomplished in the light of ecclesial faith is revelatory, and only the revelatory interpretation of scripture allows God’s self-communication to become genuine revelation for the recipient.”

From Bonaventure, Ratzinger has gained an appreciation for the fact that knowledge of revelation is dynamic: it continually grows throughout time. “Bonaventure’s thought presupposes a very lively notion of a salvation historical process, which also encompasses the development of dogma, in which progressive ‘revelatio’ can come about.” It may very well be here that Bonaventure’s theology of history has the most direct impact on theology of revelation. Many of the insights connected to this topic are rooted in Ratzinger’s reading of the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. In that important work, Bonaventure expresses a correlation between six levels of knowledge, the six days of creation, and six periods of salvation history. These ideas have import for Bonaventure’s understanding of the interpretation of scripture. “In this way, Bonaventure arrives at 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.”

Bonaventure’s insights also draw upon another well-known aspect of his thought: the seminal reasons. In a manner parallel to the presence of seminal reasons in the created world, Bonaventure posits that there are an unlimited number of seeds present within Sacred Scripture. New insights give rise to further insights in an inexhaustible manner. Because of this,

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contemporary interpretation of scripture grows from the insights of the past. Naturally, then, the role of tradition once again becomes visible. The Church’s past understanding of the scripture forms a foundation from which new insights into revelation arise. As Ratzinger explains:

Certainly Scripture is closed objectively. But its meaning is advancing in a steady growth through history; and this growth is not yet closed. As the physical world contains seeds, so also Scripture contains ‘seeds’; that is, seeds of meaning. And this meaning develops in a constant process of growth in time. Consequently, we are able to interpret many things which the Fathers could not have known because for them these things still lay in the dark future while for us they are accessible as past history. Still other things remain dark for us. And so, new knowledge arises constantly from Scripture. Something is taking place; and this happening, this history, continues onward as long as there is history at all. . . . In this way, the exegesis of Scripture becomes a theology of history.52

Again, Ratzinger writes, “Scripture is full of hidden seeds which are developed only in the course of history and therefore constantly allow new insights which would not have been possible for an earlier age.”53 There is an important conclusion that follows from this premise: “This means that the total meaning of Scripture is not yet clear. Rather, the final ‘revelation,’ i.e. the time of a full understanding of revelation, is yet to come.”54

In this process, one can perceive once again the relationship between the individual believer’s experience of receiving revelation and the Church. The Church’s faith is not only synchronic but also diachronic. The Church’s understanding of revelation advances from one generation to the next. The Church, as the one trans-temporal subject, continues to advance in her understanding of what God reveals, which affects the knowledge and understanding of revelation for individual believers. Of course, this process itself comes through insights gained from individual believers, which they communicate to their contemporaries as well as to


53 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 83.

54 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 83-84.
posterity. Communal and individual growth in the knowledge and understanding of revelation are correlative. In this vein, Ratzinger speaks about the possibility of new content of revelation becoming clearer in the course of ecclesial history. This process takes place through the reception of God’s word in new historical contexts. “The Church can implement a new illumination of a text in new contexts without thereby becoming unfaithful to the Word of God.”55 Thus, development of doctrine does not negate the biblical foundation: “Above all, however, the new content only emerges through a new interpretation of the scripture.”56

Another well-known theme of Bonaventure’s thought also enters here in connection with the notion of historical development mentioned above. Arguably drawing from the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Bonaventure (among others, including Aquinas) is fond of the notion that all things proceed from God and are led back to God: egressio-reductio.57 This concept applies to the Church as well insofar as there is advancement throughout salvation history. Bonaventure sees this process of being led back to God as playing out in the course of history in a way that corresponds to the different levels of knowledge. As Ratzinger explains: “there is also a development of knowledge which reaches from the lowest level of knowledge to the highest form of super-intellectual affective-mystical contact with God. The historical ascent

55 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 67: “Die Kirche kann eine neue Beleuchtung eines Textes in neuen Zusammenhängen vollziehen, ohne damit dem Wort Gottes untreu zu werden.”

56 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 67: “Vor allem aber tritt der neue Inhalt nur in Erscheinung durch eine neue Auslegung der Schrift.”

57 See Ratzinger, Theology of History, 89. Ratzinger notably points out that along with the rediscovery of Aristotle’s works, the re-emergence of Pseudo-Dionysius’s work also had a profound effect on thirteenth-century thought: see ibid, 87.
of the Church from the Patriarchs at the beginning to the People of God of the final days is simultaneously a growth of the revelation of God.”

The above passage clearly relates to the concept of the development of dogma. In this realm, Ratzinger finds a passage from Abelard to be of particular significance, insofar as it draws upon a statement from St. Benedict but applies it to the development of dogma. Notably, the statement explicitly uses the term ‘reveal.’ What is more, Ratzinger states that the dogma discussed in Abelard’s text is that of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was not solemnly defined until 1950. Ratzinger’s quote of Abelard is presented as follows: “Abelard writes: ‘We know quite well that Saint Jerome […] with respect to this resurrection […] doubted […]. However, after this […] St. Benedict says in the Rule, that God often “reveals” to the young, what he does not “reveal” to the “elderly,” it could happen that what was hidden in the dark at the time of Jerome, was made known later through the “revelation” of the Holy Spirit.’”

Ratzinger explains this passage thus:

It is clear: here, from the plain instruction for the monastic community, as Benedict had once given to it, by the hand of the Scholastic it has become an axiom of the history of dogma. The word of the ‘young’ and ‘elderly’ becomes the lever for the presentation of an ascending line of the development of dogma, which already has unmistakable similarity with the Bonaventurian idea depicted above of the continuing history of salvation.

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58 Ratzinger, Theology of History, 92.

59 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 192: “Abaelard schreibt: »Wir wissen recht wohl, dass der heilige Hieronymus […] hinsichtlich dieser Auferstehung […] zweifelte […]. Aber nachdem […] der heilige Benedikt in der Regel sagt, dass Gott oft dem Jüngern >offenbart<, was der >Älteren< nicht >offenbart<, konnte es geschehen, dass, was zur Zeit des Hieronymus im Ungewissen verborgen war, später durch die >Offenbarung< des heiligen Geistes kund wurde«.” See Peter Abelard, Sermo 26 in assumptione beatae Mariæ in PL 178, 543 D.

60 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 192-193: Es ist klar: Hier ist aus der schlichten Anweisung für die Mönchsgemeinde, wie Benedikt sie einst gegeben hatte, unten der Hand des Scholastikers ein dogmengeschichtliches Axiom geworden. Das Wort vom »Jüngeren« und »Älteren« wird zur Handhabe für die Vorstellung einer aufsteigenden Linie der Dogmenent-
The important point in the present context is the idea of an ongoing process of revelation. God continues to reveal in later times that which was obscure in ages past. Revelation continues to occur up to the present day. "So the idea can arise that in this and that passage of history 'revelation' gains again special mightiness: the Church in her whole historical extension is understood as a pneumatic community in the Pauline sense, as a spirit-pervaded monastic community in the Benedictine sense, in which presently here, presently there, the Spirit begins to speak, in the younger generations just as well as in the older." As Voderholzer reports, "Ratzinger's sympathy [for Bonaventure's view] is unmistakable . . . that revelation . . . extends dynamically in Church history."  

Lest this be understood in a way that seems to cast aside the importance of past tradition, one must understand that each and every instance in which revelation is said to increase is still the unfolding of one and the same reality. As Ratzinger points out:

[T]he binding of the growing revelatio to the one apparitio, to the historical Christ-event remains standing unshakably: all revelatio is as it were only interpretation, becoming interiorly seen for the mystery, which stands behind this apparitio: the growing revelatio signifies at bottom only that the intended sense of this apparitio becomes ever more clear, the brighter the sheen of the revealing divine light pours itself into the hearts of believers/of the faithful.

\[\text{Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 197: “So kann die Vorstellung aufkommen, dass an dieser und jener Stelle der Geschichte die »Offenbarung« wieder besondere Mächtigkeit erlangt: Die Kirche in ihrer gesamten geschichtlichen Erstreckung wird als pneumatische Gemeinde im paulinischen Sinn, als geistdurchwehte Mönchsgemeinde im benediktnischen Sinn verstanden, in der bald hier, bald dort der Geist zu reden beginnt, in den jüngeren Generationen ebenso gut wie in den älteren.”}

\[\text{Voderholzer, “Offenbarung und Kirche,” 61.}

\[\text{Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 198-199: die Bindung der wachsenden revelatio an die eine apparitio, an das geschichtliche Christusereignis unerschütterlich stehen bleibt: Alle revelatio ist gleichsam nur Deutung, inneres Sehendwerden für das Geheimnis, das hinter dieser}

\[\text{wicklung, die mit der oben dargestellten bonaventuranischen Idee der weitergehenden Heils-}

\[\text{geschichte bereits unverkennbare Ähnlichkeit hat.}
From this perspective, it is clear that neither Bonaventure nor Ratzinger envisions a new revelation that contradicts or completely replaces any revelation from the past. “Development of dogma is completion, perfection of the knowledge of faith in the sense that in increasing measure it strives toward . . . perfection as an intrinsic value.”

There is a development, a deepening of the understanding—individually for believers and collectively for the Church—of what God has revealed in Christ. “Indeed, the entire pre-Thomistic tradition was able to assert so courageously the movement of revelation, therefore, only because the unity and unicity of the Christ event was so unshakably certain to it.” Thus, all developments or advancements in the understanding of God’s revelation in Christ always remain unified and faithful to the one center and summit of all revelation: Jesus Christ himself. Rudolf Voderholzer sees this relation between the “unique historical Christ-event, a time-outlasting constancy of the process of revelation and every new actualization of God’s self-disclosure in the individual believer” as the center of Ratzinger’s work on Bonaventure’s understanding of divine revelation.

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65 Ratzinger, Offenbarungsverständnis, 199: “Ja, die ganze vorthomistische Überlieferung konnte die Bewegung der Offenbarung nur deshalb so beherrscht behaupten, weil ihr die Einheit und Einzigkeit des Christusereignisses so unerschütterlich feststand.”

On this point, Ratzinger presents a contrast between Aquinas and Bonaventure regarding the nature of theology. According to Ratzinger, Aquinas views theology as a science of inference, meaning that it starts from the truths of the faith and deduces new insights from them. Bonaventure sees it differently. For the Seraphic Doctor, theology is to be understood principally as the external expression of the faith. “It does not behoove theology to bring forth new thoughts; rather it behooves it only to find the right words for thoughts, which derive not from it but from God himself. Its task would thus be simply to hear the kerygma, to understand [it] and then to recast it in scientific conceptual language.” Theology is merely the third intellectual act in a series of three acts that occur in descending order: to believe, to understand, and to put into words what is understood in faith.

In this way, Ratzinger is still able to speak about a once-for-all revelation that ended with the death of the last apostle. He spoke about this in comments he sent to Karl Rahner on June 19, 1963. As Jared Wicks relates: “Ratzinger thought De revelatione should tell why revelation ‘ends’ with Christ’s Apostles—namely, because it reaches in Christ such fullness that no more can be added.” In that sense, revelation has ceased. But, insofar as the fullness of revelation in

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67 See Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 204-205.


70 Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 735. See Joseph Ratzinger, “Brief von Joseph Ratzinger,” in “Texte im Umfeld des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils” in Mitteilungen Institut Papst Benedikt XVI., vol. 5 (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012). See also, Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 65, where Ratzinger hints that the idea of the closure of revelation after the Apostles should be not be understood in an absolute sense: “From the point of view of the branch of mediaeval theology, strongly marked by patristic influence, which still persisted in
Christ is made known to new generations and insofar as an increase in both individual and collective understanding of God’s revelation in Christ are possible, revelation still occurs; veils are still being lifted; God is still communicating with man—revealing himself to man—in history. Ratzinger nuances the issue as follows: “revelation is indeed closed as regards its material principle, but is present and remains as regards its reality. . . . because what was once accomplished remains perpetually living and effective in the faith of the Church.”

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed the process of revelation in salvation history via three main considerations: 1) the historical character of revelation, 2) the objective and subjective aspects of the problem, and 3) revelation through the development of doctrine. With respect to the first, Ratzinger dispels a misunderstanding that thinks Christianity is only concerned with the afterlife or atemporal realities. In fact, he asserts, Christianity is first and foremost concerned with God in history, with God as man. God comes to meet us where we are: history, space and time. Here again, Jesus as the concrete universal reprises as a theme that leads to a difficulty for skeptics: how can this one person’s life that is so specifically delineated in a small time-frame within relatively small geographical boundaries be the one for whom the salvation of all people of all times hinges? Yet, that is the truth of Christianity, that God has entered our spatio-temporal order and become one of us so that he can redeem humanity from within. For the apostles and other disciples, this means that they were given a unique form of the exterior witness aspect of revelation (the ‘apparition’) insofar as they saw Christ with their own eyes. For fact in Cervini’s speeches [at the Council of Trent], the thesis that revelation closed with the death of the last apostle must have appeared far too unqualified.”

71 Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, 65.
those of us in the post-apostolic age, who do not have that direct vision of Jesus, our external witness (the ‘apparition’) comes to us through the apostolic witness, especially in the scriptures. The apostles’ seeing has become our hearing. (Note the return of the light and word, seeing and hearing relation.)

In addition to the forms of external witness in history, there is also the interior illumination within the believing subject. This interior witness also takes place in history, in each individual’s life through the reception of grace and the gift of faith to which one gives the obediential response. Thus, there is an salvation-historical dimension to both the external and internal aspects of divine revelation: God continues to reveal himself concretely in history through the kerygma of the apostles handed on in scripture and tradition as well as within the depths of the human soul.

This point leads into the objective and subjective dimensions of the problem. Lest one—as Schmaus did—accuse Ratzinger of holding a subjectivist notion of revelation, Ratzinger explicitly affirms that there is an objective dimension to revelation, even a real doctrinal content that cannot be left out of the equation. The content of Scripture, especially as summarized in the Church’s creed, binds the individual believers. The objectivity of the faith cannot be ignored by individuals according to their own subjective whims. Thus, while Ratzinger did want to overcome a one-sided overemphasis that equated revelation with a set of doctrinal formulas, he never intended to thereby vitiate the objective content of revealed truth.

In some sense, the subjective aspect of revelation is counterbalanced by another aspect of Ratzinger’s theology: ecclesiology. For Ratzinger, revelation and Church are inseparable. In a real way, the Church’s subjectivity—her subsistence as a trans-temporal subject, a corporate personality—forms a basis for the preservation of the objectivity of revelation over-and-against
the individual believer’s limited understanding and personal will. One believe as a member of the Church, the body of Christ. The Church’s faith, even as expressed in dogmas, is not optional for individual Christians. One must accept the external witness of the Church as a real condition for revelation to take place. Modernist subjectivism has no place in Ratzingers’ theology of divine revelation. The objectivity of the Church’s doctrine is a real and important aspect of the process of divine revelation.

Our third main consideration comes into play here: the development of doctrine as an aspect of revelation. Revelation does have an aspect that is objective, but this does not mean that it is static. For Bonaventure, knowledge of revelation is dynamic, it grows over the course of time. Similar to the seminal reasons that Bonaventure posits in the realm of created nature, he likewise speaks of seeds that are present in the sacred scriptures. New insights into the scriptures give rise to further insights in an inexhaustible fashion. While scripture is closed objectively speaking there is a real advancement in the comprehension of the meaning of scripture that is expressed over time through the Church. Ratzinger importantly holds that this development is a completion, a perfection of doctrine, not a revolution. Thus, even in his early work, there is a pre-cursor to what he refers to as the hermeneutic of continuity. It is the understanding of one and the same reality that unfolds throughout history. Therefore, Ratzinger can affirm both that revelation’s material principle closed a long time ago and that it remains present and effective throughout the ages even today. Dogma continues to develop from the same spring of the saving revelation of Jesus Christ and individuals continue to receive the truth of the faith both exteriorly and interiorly. In this sense, God’s divine action of revelation perdures as salvation history continues until the end of the age.
As a part of this dissertation’s consideration of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation, this chapter raises the question of his actual and potential contributions to the theology of revelation. The basic contention of this chapter is that he has already contributed to the theology of divine revelation but that there still exists the potential for an even greater influence of his thought. While the organization of the previous chapters was generally set around the flow of concepts and themes, this chapter is organized chronologically and pivots around the Second Vatican Council.

The first section treats texts from before the start of the Second Vatican Council. It highlights themes within the realm of divine revelation found in notable works of Ratzinger that were created with a view towards the approaching Council. Each text is discussed in chronological order as follows: 1) a lecture written by Ratzinger and delivered by Cardinal Frings on “The Council and the Modern Thought-World” (in Fulda: late August, 1961; in Genoa: Nov. 20, 1961); 2) Ratzinger’s draft of an “Introductory Constitution” outlining the aims of the Second Vatican Council (June, 1962); 3) Ratzinger’s first but brief evaluation of the seven initial schemas, which was published as a letter (in Latin) from Cardinal Frings to the Papal Secretary of State, Amleto Cicognani (Sept. 17, 1962); 4) Ratzinger’s fuller explanation of those proposed changes to the schemata (Oct. 3, 1962); and 5) Ratzinger’s lecture in which he presented criticisms of the schema, De fontibus revelationis, to German-speaking bishops on the eve of the Second Vatican Council (Oct. 10, 1962).
The second section presents an overview of Ratzinger’s works on the topic of divine revelation during the Second Vatican Council and emphasizes his attempts to influence the Council directly while present at the Council. Again, the texts are treated in chronological order. Those texts include: 1) Ratzinger’s first, solo attempt at an alternate schema on divine revelation (October, 1962); 2) the alternate schema that Ratzinger co-authored with Karl Rahner and which was widely distributed in mimeograph form to Council Fathers (around 2,000 copies; Oct./Nov. 1962); 3) a draft of Cardinal Frings’s speech at the nineteenth general congregation of the Council on “The One Source of Revelation” (Nov. 14, 1962) together with a supplement to that speech given at the 21st general congregation (November 17, 1962); and 4) a letter that Ratzinger sent to Karl Rahner in which he offered comments on some of the revised schemas (June 19, 1963). Then, a brief account of Ratzinger’s involvement with a subcommission in which periti were tasked with emending earlier drafts on divine revelation to create what was eventually promulgated on November 18, 1965 as the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, commonly known as Dei verbum.

The third section will then provide a general comparison between the positions Ratzinger promoted as a conciliar peritus and the actual content of Dei verbum to see which of Ratzinger’s preferences were included in the document and which suggestions that he made were not adopted in a way that is readily discernible in the text itself. On this basis, this third section will conclude with a discussion of Ratzinger’s contribution to Vatican II’s teaching on divine revelation.

A word of caution is warranted here. As will be discussed in more detail in the relevant section, despite claims of several commentators, who assert that Ratzinger was highly influential in the drafting of the final version of Dei verbum, the extent to which any specific content found in Dei verbum can be traced back to Ratzinger specifically is—at present—questionable. Thus,
the present work takes a moderate approach when it comes to asserting the extent of Ratzinger’s influence on *Dei verbum*. There will be suggested, however, a possible method for future research to ascertain more precisely the extent of Ratzinger’s influence on the content of *Dei verbum*, which may confirm, qualify, or negate the claims various commentators have made in that regard thus far.

Section four offers a more concrete and verifiable aspect of Ratzinger’s contribution to theology of divine revelation in connection with Vatican II: his role as a commentator on—and interpreter of—*Dei verbum*. His treatments of Vatican II’s teaching on divine revelation are well known, and the main insights presented in those commentaries are summarized and discussed in section four.

6.1 Texts in Preparation for the Council

Joseph Ratzinger was a professor of fundamental theology at the University of Bonn from 1959 to 1963. Located in the Archdiocese of Cologne, Bonn is less than twenty miles to the south (and slightly east) of Cologne. After his arrival in Bonn, Ratzinger reports, “a very straightforward and even affectionate understanding developed at once between the archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Frings, and me,” and “Cardinal Frings heard a conference on the theology of the Council that I had been invited to give by the Catholic Academy of Bensberg, and afterward he involved me in a long dialogue that became he starting point of a collaboration that lasted for years.”

This collaboration with Frings would prove to be monumental in Ratzinger’s life and work. The Cardinal’s confidence in Ratzinger was shown repeatedly insofar as he regularly

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1 Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 120.
assigned tasks for Ratzinger to aid him in his own work. He invited Ratzinger to accompany him to the Second Vatican Council, and eventually Ratzinger was named a conciliar *peritus*.

6.1.1 Frings’s Genoa Lecture (Nov. 20, 1961)

Ratzinger’s work at Frings’s behest began before the Council even started. In view of the upcoming Ecumenical Council, Frings was asked to give a lecture in Genoa (November 20, 1961). “The Cardinal had been asked to compare the situation in which Vatican II will be meeting with conditions ninety years earlier when the First Vatican Council was held (1869-70).”

Cardinal Frings asked Ratzinger to write something to this end. The Cardinal was so impressed with Ratzinger’s draft (in German) that, before the presentation in Genoa (in Italian translation), Frings decided to present mimeographed copies to “his fellow German bishops at their meeting at Fulda, August 29-30, 1961.”

A translation of the lecture’s title from German into English could read: “The Council and the Modern Thought-World.” Pope John XXIII read the Italian version of the lecture. As a result, “he summoned Card. Frings to a private audience to thank and commend him for setting forth ideas which agreed with ways in which he, Pope John, saw the situation and tasks of the coming Council.” This shows that Prof. Ratzinger—even before the Council—was well attuned to the purposes for which the Holy Father convoked it.

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2 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 234.

3 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 234. From 1945-1965, Cardinal Frings was the Chairman of the Fulda Conference of Catholic Bishops, re-designated in 1966 as the German Bishops’ Conference (*Deutsche Bischofskonferenz*).

4 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 235. For a presentation of the text, including an outline and summary of its contents with English translations of select portions of the text, see Wicks, “Six Texts,” 253-261. For the complete German text, see JRGS 7/1, 73-91.
Only two small—but nevertheless significant—portions of the Genoa lecture are pertinent for the present work. The first portion concerns the effects of technological advancement on man’s ability to perceive the divine in nature. Hence, it correlates to a degree with what has been traditionally called ‘natural’ revelation. About this, Ratzinger makes the following observation: “In all previous cultures, man lived in a close and direct dependence on nature. In most of the occupations which were open to him he was led into a straightforward, direct encounter with nature as such. That has largely changed since the breakthrough of technology.”

In contrast with previous times, “the world we now encounter bears the mark of human work and organization.” Thus, in everyday human life, one is confronted more and more with what humanity has created for itself rather than what God has created in nature. A man now finds himself—at least superficially—disconnected with the natural world. “He encounters not God’s work, but the works of men.”

By itself, this observation may seem obvious. However, there are important theological implications that derive from man’s new, technologically-saturated situation. As Ratzinger astutely notes: “In the history of humanity, the encounter with nature was always one of the most important starting points of religious experience.” At least in part, the rise of atheism could

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6 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 257.


rightly be seen as connected with this new situation. As Wicks explains Ratzinger’s point: “God was to be known through the things he made (Rom 1:20). But now we lack this significant source of religious existence, as shown by the decline of faith among modern industrial workers.”

Humanity has become the creator of the world around itself. One’s ability to read the book of creation in order to perceive the divine cause has dwindled to the extent that one’s contact with natural creation has waned.

The second portion of the Genoa lecture that is of particular interest is found in the closing remarks. After statements regarding the Church’s call to be a suffering witness of the Gospel, Ratzinger makes the following comments about what should and should not be the principal task of the Council. The end of the lecture reads:

The sign of suffering is the sign of her [the Church’s] unconquerable life. To serve this life will be the task of the coming Council, which—as a Council of renewal—will have less the task of formulating doctrines than to a greater degree to enable anew and more deeply the witness of Christian life in the world of today, so that it may truly be demonstrated that Christ is not merely a ‘Christ yesterday,’ but the one Christ ‘yesterday, today, and in eternity’ (Heb 13:8).

In these words, one is able to see once more the importance that Ratzinger places on the witness of the Church’s life. Here, he expressly states that witness is more important for the Council than doctrinal definitions. It is the Church’s lived existence more than her doctrines that bears witness to the reality of Christ. This conclusion to the lecture also reflects Ratzinger’s emphasis on making Christ present and known in every age. Hence, reference to the ongoing occurrence of

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9 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 257.

10 Ratzinger, “Das Konzil und die Moderne Gedankenwelt”, 91: “Das Zeichen des Leidens ist das Zeichen ihres unbesiegbaren Lebens. Diesem Leben zu dienen wird die Aufgabe des kommenden Konzils sein, das als ein Konzil der Erneuerung weniger die Aufgabe haben wird, Lehren zu formulieren als vielmehr das Zeugnis christlichen Lebens in der Welt von heute neu und tiefer zu ermöglichen, auf dass sich wahrhaft erweise, dass Christus nicht bloß ist ein »Christ gestern«, sondern der eine Christus »gestern, heute und in Ewigkeit« (Hebr 13,8).”
revelation in each new generation finds a place in the text. The Christocentric emphasis is also clear in the Genoa lecture. Wicks describes Ratzinger’s view of the witness of Christian life’s goal: “This [witness] will show the world what is central, namely, that Christ is not merely «Christ yesterday», but is the one Christ «yesterday, today, and forever» (Hebr 13:8).”  

6.1.2 Ratzinger’s Draft of an “Introductory Constitution” (June, 1962)

The Genoa lecture discussed above is only one of several works that Ratzinger produced at the request of Cardinal Frings, who was a member of the Central Preparatory Commission for Vatican II. As the commencement of the Council neared, Frings became increasingly dissatisfied with the quality of the preparations. Among his recommendations to the Central Preparatory Commission given on May 5, 1962, Frings suggested that an Introductory Constitution should be drafted that would explain the Council’s aims. After the meetings of the Central Preparatory Commission, with a view towards fulfilling this proposal, he once again made a request of Ratzinger, asking him to compose “a draft of the Introductory Constitution on the goal of Vatican Council II,” which he completed in June of 1962.

The text opens with a statement about the reason Christ founded his Church. The words he uses to express Christ’s intention reflect both scripture as well as aspects of his theology of revelation derived from his study of St. Bonaventure, especially the theme of ‘light’ and the correlative notion of ‘illumination,’ harkening to the interior dimension of revelation. The

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12 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 237. This draft of an Introductory Constitution was published for the first time in Wicks, “Six Texts,” 262-264 (in English translation) and 293-295 (in the original Latin).
Church exists so that “the true light of the divine word (cf. Jn 1:9) would enlighten people who walk in darkness in this world and in «the shadow of death» (Is 9:2; Lk 1:79).”¹³

To elaborate on the “darkness in this world,” Ratzinger raises the same point he made in the Genoa lecture about the effects of technology on man’s capacity for perceiving the divine in the work of creation. He writes: “For the human condition has been transformed in the brief interval of one century by striking advances in the natural sciences and by marvels of technological invention which human genius has produced with disturbing rapidity. As a consequence, the truth of God, the Creator of the world, seems almost inaccessible to people inhabiting a world largely made by themselves. This world no longer «shows forth the glory of God and the work of his hands» (Ps 18:1 Vulg.), but instead speaks of the glory of humans and of their genius.”¹⁴ In three sentences, then, Ratzinger succinctly indicates the circumstances in, to, and for which the Council must present its message as well as touches upon themes that would eventually be discussed in—at least—Dei verbum and Gaudium et spes.¹⁵

After this stark presentation of the dangers and challenges of the modern world, Ratzinger proceeds with a word of hope that finds its basis in man as the image of God. While he does not explicitly connect the image of God with knowledge of God as he did in the original Habilitationsschrift, there is still a connection with his early work insofar as he appears to associate the image of God with the natural desire for God. He writes: “But there still remains in


the hearts of those created in God’s image (cf. Gn 1:27) an outcry for God, for the God who alone can fill human hearts which are made with a capacity for the infinite, hearts which come to rest in infinite love alone.”¹⁶ Themes in the Habilitationsschrift, including man’s inherent desire for God as well as the knowledge of God that derives from man’s reflection upon his own soul, find further reflection in the introductory constitution when Ratzinger speaks of “this hidden desire” and “God not being absent in the abyss that is the human spirit.”¹⁷

Ratzinger also presents an important aspect of his theology of revelation that concerns the relationship of the magisterium with revelation. This point is made when he refers to “This holy Synod” as “a humble handmaid of the divine word.”¹⁸ Following upon this description of the humble role of the Council, Ratzinger once again expresses the centrality of Christ and the ongoing nature of revelation through continual witness in every age while addressing the Council’s intentions. The Council, he proclaims, “desires nothing more than to give witness to Jesus Christ for those now living at this hour of world history,” and “The Council wants to be a contemporary of people of today, for Christ the Lord is not only «Christ yesterday», but He is Christ «today and the same forever» (Heb 13:8).”¹⁹ The theme of Christ’s contemporaneity with the present age expressed here is found in many of his works on revelation, as has been seen at various parts in this present work. That notion concerns the persistent presence of Christ through the Church’s life as well as the continual acts of revelation that God works in and through the Church and within the depths of human souls. This important idea that God has not stopped

addressing humanity is expressed in another way when Ratzinger says that the Church “recognizes in the needs of the day that God is somehow speaking to it.”

In the Genoa lecture, Ratzinger indicated that the Church’s living witness was more important than doctrinal definitions. A hint of this idea is also found in the draft of the “Introductory Constitution.” Rather than speak of proclaiming the truth through doctrine, he opts to express the revelatory impact of the reformation and renewal of ecclesial life in her existential existence. As he writes: “By modifications of its disciplinary order, which this synod must undertake, it hopes for a new surge of the apostolic spirit, by which the light of truth will radiate more clearly «even to the ends of the earth» (Acts 1:8) and will shine into the clouds of unbelief arising among Christian peoples.” Of course, the twin motifs of light and illumination are also present in that statement.


The next text treated also originates from a task that Cardinal Frings assigned to Ratzinger before the Council. In August of 1962, seven preparatory schemas were sent to the future members of the Second Vatican Council so that they could review them and offer their impressions (to be sent by letter to Cardinal Cicognani in his capacity as Papal Secretary of State) before the Council began. Once again employing Ratzinger to assist him in his work, “Cardinal Frings sent his copy of the book of seven schemata to Prof. Ratzinger requesting the latter to examine them from the perspective of three questions: (1) What has been changed in the light of the discussion of draft texts on these topics in the Central Preparatory Commission? (2)


What should simply be rejected? (3) What can be improved?” Ratzinger obliged the Cardinal’s request and submitted his analyses to Frings on September 14, 1962. Frings did not alter the main body of the text prepared by Ratzinger (in Latin). As Wicks relates: “Frings was quite pleased with Ratzinger’s draft letter and so the Cardinal simply added the date (September 17, 1962), a salutation to Cardinal Cicognani, and his own signature.”

After noting the only two draft schemas he found to be well suited for the Council without much revision (the text on the Liturgy and the one concerning unity with the Orthodox Church), Ratzinger states what he perceives to be the goals of the Council. Here, he echoes statements made in the other texts already examined. “The aim,” Ratzinger writes, “is the renewal of Christian life and the adaptation of church discipline in the light of today’s needs, so that the witness of faith might shine forth with new brightness amid the shadows of the present age.” Once again, witness to faith is expressed in terms of Christian life, and the reform of Church discipline is viewed as a means of making this life a more effective witness. The ‘light’ motif is also alluded to yet again.

After stating the goals of the Council, Ratzinger offers some principles that he thinks are suited to their attainment and—by implication—were not followed in the five remaining texts he found less worthy for the upcoming Council. First, he opines: “It seems very important that the Council, in its first meetings, avoid entangling itself in difficult questions posed by theologians

22 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 240.


24 Ratzinger, “Evaluation of the First Draft-Texts for Vatican II, prepared for Cardinal Frings and submitted by him to the Cardinal Secretary of State (September 1962)” in Wicks, “Six Texts,” 265. N.B. There is no title given to the document, since it was composed as a letter. The title used here corresponds to Wicks’s heading given before his English translation of the text from the Latin original, which was published in Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Appendix (Vatican City, 1983), 74-77.
which people of our day cannot grasp and which upset them.” He reiterates this point later in the text, when he says: “The Council . . . should not decide points now disputed in the Church among Catholic theologians, but it ought to issue judgments only on errors truly incompatible with a Christian spirit.” Again, the implication is that one or more of the initial schemata did not follow this principle. As has already been seen, he notices a violation of this principle in De fontibus revelationis with respect to the question of the material (in)sufficiency of scripture and the relation of tradition to scripture. He points this out explicitly as follows: “The draft On the Sources of Revelation has to be revised to make it no longer prejudicial to internal disputes of Catholic theologians.”

Specifically speaking about the five less desirable texts, Ratzinger remarks: “the texts should not be treatises in a scholastic style, as if they were taken over from textbook theologians, but should instead speak the language of Holy Scripture and of the holy Fathers of the Church.” Obviously, this remark corresponds to what was already indicated to be a central concern in Ratzinger’s theological project: to overcome neo-scholasticism and to enrich Catholic theology through scripture and patristic texts (read: ressourcement). He repeats this charge again and adds to it their lack of ecumenical concern, when he says: “But the other drafts are excessively scholastic and still take too little account of the outlook of our separated brethren.”

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28 Ratzinger, “Evaluation of the First Draft-Texts,” 266. Notably, Ratzinger indicates at that these were principles called for by the Fathers of the First Vatican Council.
Of special interest to the present work are Ratzinger’s comments about the two preparatory schemata discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation: *De fontibus revelationis* and *De deposito fidei*. He found the latter text to be so inappropriate for the upcoming council that it ought to be abandoned altogether. Certain themes treated within it could be handled elsewhere, he surmised. In the first two chapters, he sees confusion between the realm of philosophy and that of theology and with it an inappropriate foray into the former. Despite his general rejection of *De deposito*, he suggests that parts of Chapter IV, “On Public Revelation and Catholic Faith,” could be borrowed to form a much-needed first chapter on revelation itself. He also suggests that a work not included in the packet of seven schemata should be revived. “In place of Chapter V, much of the draft text presented by Cardinal Bea, *On the Word of God*, could well be substituted, since it treats the same topic and does this better.”30 “Thus,” writes Jared Wicks, “a letter penned by peritus Ratzinger and signed by Cardinal Frings was an early call for Vatican II to give to the Church and to the world an updated account of Catholic teaching on God’s revelation.”31

It is noteworthy, however, that Ratzinger did not suggest that *De fontibus* be rejected outright, only that it needed to be revised and augmented. Jared Wicks summarizes three of Ratzinger’s suggestions for improving the text that were in fact enacted in the course of the Council’s work. The points are as follows: 1) “statements should be struck which settle inner-Catholic controversies”; 2) “the text needs a first chapter on God’s own word of revelation before it treats the ‘sources’ from which we know God’s word”; and 3) “the text could well take

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30 Ratzinger, “Evaluation of the First Draft-Texts,” 267. Another peritus, Pieter Smulders, found Chapter IV of *De deposito* much more flawed than did Ratzinger. As Wicks relates: “In chapter 4 of the schema on preserving the deposit, Smulders perceived such a one-sided insistence on revelation as *locutio divina* that the schema leaves divine works, God’s *opera magnalia*, outside revelation itself.” Quote from Wicks, “Vatican II on Revelation,” 643.

over passages from the draft-text *De verbo Dei* of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity with the aim of improving the Theological Commission’s chapter on the Bible in the life of the Church. As it turned out,” Wicks continues, “Vatican II did take these steps as it moved towards completing its most profound text, *Dei Verbum*, on God’s revelation and its communication in the Church.”

The fact that Ratzinger only called for changes to *De fontibus* rather than an outright rejection of the text did not prevent him, however, from offering a detailed and thorough critique of *De fontibus* in a lecture to German-speaking bishops. That lecture will be discussed after the next text, which is a more detailed explanation for his suggested amendments to the initial schemas, which he gave to Cardinal Frings on October 3, 1962. Only his commentary on *De fontibus* (Schema I) and *De deposito* (Schema II) are considered here.

### 6.1.4 Rationale for Suggested Changes to the Schemata (Oct. 3, 1962)

The first part of Ratzinger’s critique of *De fontibus* concerns the title and the first chapter. The principal topic is the relationship between revelation, scripture, and tradition. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, he takes issue with the title of *De fontibus*, because of its inversion of the ontological and epistemological orders. He says that behind the understanding of scripture and tradition suggested by the title and presented in the document there is “an insufficient distinction between the *ordo essendi* and *cognoscendi*. . . . In the *ordo essendi* . . . scripture and tradition do not represent the sources of revelation, but conversely revelation is the preceding

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32 Jared Wicks, *Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI* (New Orleans: Loyola University Press, 2012), 7. Wicks does not make the claim that Ratzinger is the one directly responsible for these changes. He is merely highlighting here that some of Ratzinger’s own suggestions leading up to the Council correspond to what eventually became a reality in and through the Council.

33 See Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 734, note 22.
source, from which scripture and tradition emanate as the two currents of the transmission of the one revelation, i.e., revelation is the superordinate quantity, the one source, as the entire pre-Tridentine theology and the Council of Trent itself express it.”

His reference to pre-Tridentine theology no doubt harkens to the research he conducted for his Habilitationsschrift.

He also argues that the draft document tries to define the relationship between scripture and tradition in an overly restrictive fashion. Again, he offers an interpretation of Trent to counter that attempt. He also warns that it would be hard to reconcile it with the most recent scholarship on the topic. Ratzinger writes: “From the Tridentine dogma it is not necessary to understand tradition as an additional and material source wholly independent from scripture. On the basis of recent historical research, a view of this sort would in fact run into considerable difficulties. Were the text to be adopted in its present form, however, precisely this doctrine would thus thereby be declared the official ecclesiastical position, which would not be justified in the current state of theological discussion.”

The issues addressed in his assessment of the second chapter of De fontibus are the divine inspiration of scripture, biblical authorship, and scriptural inerrancy. Once again, Ratzinger

34 Joseph Ratzinger, “Begründung der Änderungsvorschläge zu Band I der Schemata »Constitutionum et Decretorum«,” in JRGS 7/1, 142: “Eine ungenügende Unterscheidung... Im Ordo essendi... stellen Schrift und Überlieferung nicht die Quellen der Offenbarung dar, sondern ist umgekehrt die Offenbarung die vorausliegende Quelle, aus der Schrift und Überlieferung als die beiden Ströme der Übermittlung der einen Offenbarung entspringen, d.h. die Offenbarung ist die übergeordnete Größe, die eine Quelle, wie die gesamte vortridentinische Theologie und das Tridentinum selbst sich ausdrücken.”

35 Joseph Ratzinger, “Begründung der Änderungsvorschläge zu Band I der Schemata »Constitutionum et Decretorum«,” in JRGS 7/1, 143: “Vom tridentinischen Dogma her ist es nicht nötig, die Überlieferung als eine zusätzliche und von der Schrift gänzlich unabhängige Materialquelle zu verstehen. Eine derartige Auffassung würde in der Tat aufgrund der historischen Forschungen der neueren Zeit auf beträchtliche Schwierigkeiten stoßen. Würde der Text in seiner vorliegenden Form verabschiedet werden, so wäre damit aber gerade diese Lehre zum kirchenamtlichen Standpunkt erklärt, was bei dem augenblicklichen Stand der theologischen Diskussion nicht zu rechtfertigen wäre.”
thinks the document usurps the purpose of the council by attempting to solemnly define a dogma (concerning inspiration) that would settle unnecessarily matters currently in legitimate theological dispute. He argues that the definition proposed really represents only an aspect of school theology, which also happens to be ill suited for the expression of the uniquely Christian understanding of divine inspiration and is at odds with an authentic understanding of the human component of biblical authorship. He also thinks the schema’s presentation of inerrancy is exaggerated and suggests that it be replaced with a proper understanding of inerrancy.  

One may perceive a progressive strain in Ratzinger’s suggestions given thus far. However, one would hardly describe his next critique of the third chapter of *De fontibus* as progressive. The issue concerned is a proper understanding of the authority of the Old Testament. Ratzinger says that the text ventures to say both too much and too little at the same time. The text implies that only certain portions of the Old Testament are Christological in character. “In contrast,” Ratzinger suggests, “it should be made clear that the entire Old Testament speaks of Christ and therefore as a whole constitutes a foundation of Christianity.”

The centrality of Christ once again finds expression in that suggestion just as it does in the following one. Not only does the entire Old Testament, in Ratzinger’s view, speak of Christ, but

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36 See Joseph Ratzinger, “Begründung der Änderungsvorschläge zu Band I der Schemata »Constitutionum et Decretorum«,” in JRGS 7/1, 144.

Christ has universal salvific significance, “which extends beyond the outer walls of Israel and of the Church.”

Chapter IV of *De fontibus*, so Ratzinger believes, once again attempts to constrict theology too much through excessively narrow definitions. In general, he thinks the Council should avoid giving excessive certainty to specific historical questions, such as the authorship of the four Gospels. He also thinks it is at least questionable to place the infancy narratives, Christ’s miracles and resurrection, and the ascension on the same historical footing. Additionally, he thinks the document should preserve freedom for further scholarly research, specifically with respect to the role of ecclesial communities in the formation of the synoptic texts. Otherwise, Ratzinger fears that Catholic scholars will not be able to engage in a meaningful way with Protestant exegetes.

Ratzinger’s suggestion for Chapter V of *De fontibus* has already been mentioned before. Given that the text is brief, his remarks can be quoted in full here: “The suggestion to replace the present chapter with the schema, *De verbo Dei*, worked out by the Secretariat Bea, is made clear from the extensive substantive congruence of the two texts, whereby—upon a comparison between both—the preference is to be given to the named schema.”

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38 Joseph Ratzinger, “Begründung der Änderungsvorschläge zu Band I der Schemata »Constitutionum et Decretorum«,” in JRGS 7/1, 144: “die über die äußeren Mauern Israels und der Kirche hinausreicht.”

39 See Joseph Ratzinger, “Begründung der Änderungsvorschläge zu Band I der Schemata »Constitutionum et Decretorum«,” in JRGS 7/1, 144-145.

Moving on to Chapter IV of *De deposito*, Ratzinger thinks the draft text presents an overly intellectual understanding of revelation, thus again pointing out neo-scholastic tendencies in the preparatory schemata. With regard to paragraph 20 of the text, Ratzinger sees positives and negatives. On the one hand, it is correct, “when it opposes a Modernist dissolution of the truth of revelation into event of revelation, but in turn [it] resorts to an underestimation of the history of revelation and of God acting historically towards humankind.”41 Additionally, as in *De fontibus*, Ratzinger sees in *De deposito* a failure to distinguish adequately the order of knowledge from the order of ontology.42


One week after Ratzinger completed the text explaining his suggested amendments to the schemata, he was afforded the opportunity to express his views on revelation through a lengthy critique of *De fontibus* in a lecture given to German-speaking bishops. Notably, in Kurt Koch’s view, “Theological criticism and reorientation in the Council through the cooperation of Joseph Ratzinger become visible primarily and most palpably in his opinions on the prepared schema, ‘De fontibus revelationis.’”43 The lecture was given in Rome on October 10, 1962, one day prior


42 See Joseph Ratzinger, “Begründung der Änderungsvorschläge zu Band I der Schemata »Constitutionum et Decretorum«,” in JRGS 7/1, 147.

to the official start of the Second Vatican Council. It was certainly a great opportunity for him to make the case for his views of how the Council should handle the topic of divine revelation. He gave a copy of the lecture to Pieter Smulders, who was theological advisor to the Indonesian bishops and also became a Council peritus. The extent to which (if at all) Smulders utilized the contents of Ratzinger’s speech in his own work at the Council is an open question.

In a way, Ratzinger’s lecture is an expansion of the material found in the text from a week prior that was just examined. The order of topics is identical. He first treats the topic of scripture and tradition in relation to revelation. Then, he tackles the related issues of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, before concluding with remarks about the relationship between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and history. In Part Two, Chapter Four of this dissertation, the main points concerning the relationship between revelation, scripture, and tradition as found in this text have already been discussed, and hence, they do not need to be discussed in depth again here.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that—in this important venue—Ratzinger was able to argue at length for his understanding of revelation as having ontological priority over scripture and tradition, which are to be understood as sources of knowledge of revelation or as witnesses to revelation and means of transmission of revelation but are not to be equated with revelation itself. “Especially with this decided priority of revelation as the one source vis-à-vis scripture and tradition as the historical forms of transmission of the one revelation, Joseph Ratzinger has achieved an essential contribution to the theological resolution of the . . . controversial relationship of scripture and tradition.”

Likewise, Ratzinger was—on this basis—able to argue

44 Koch, “Ein konsequenter Papst,” 386: “Mit dieser dezidierten Vorordnung der Offenbarung als der einen Quelle gegenüber Schrift und Tradition als den geschichtlichen Übermittlungsformen der einen Offenbarung hat Joseph Ratzinger vor allem einen wesentlichen
before the German-speaking bishops that a Vatican II document on divine revelation should begin with a chapter on “revelation in itself before saying anything about the witnesses to revelation.” Eventually, this suggested order of presentation would take place in *Dei verbum*.

What is more, and perhaps surprisingly, Ratzinger felt that *De fontibus*’s presentation reflected modernity too much. He, who had once been accused of modernist tendencies himself, “was critical of the draft-text for being typically modern in its approach, that is, focused on our human discovery of God and his Word, on where we look for the Word. But the Council should begin, as Scripture does, with God, with God’s initiative to communicate to us, an initiative which comes before humans give the witness to God and the saving message, as we find this in Scripture and the other sources.” Again, this criticism was addressed at the Council. As Wicks notes: “The eventual text of *Dei Verbum* does have a new Chapter 1 on God’s initiative in revealing himself to humans in Israel and in a culminating way in Christ, who is the ‘mediator and sum total of revelation’ (DV 2).”

Ratzinger also took the opportunity to warn against the Council’s dogmatization of the *partim-partim* interpretation of Trent’s doctrine with respect to scripture and tradition. He argues from patristic as well as scholastic sources in defense of his position that tradition should not be seen as the material addition of revelatory material not found in scripture. Drawing from his research for his *Habilitationsschrift*, Ratzinger quotes Bonaventure and Aquinas. He offers two quotes from Bonaventure, who wrote: “The truth of faith and holiness of life is drawn from no Beitrag zur theologischen Lösung des . . . kontroversen Verhältnisses von Schrift und Tradition geleistet.”


46 Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II,” 7-8.

47 Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II,” 8.
other source than the Scriptures»” and “«All saving truth is either in Scripture, or flows from it, or is traced back to it».”48 Showing Aquinas’s concurrence on this point, Ratzinger writes: “St. Thomas is no less clear. He concluded that «in this doctrine (= in theology) nothing else is handed on other than what is drawn from Holy Scripture».”49 This point was a matter of significant contention during the Council. As Wicks reports: “In the Mixed Commission instituted by Pope John XXIII to revise De fontibus, the plus of revealed truths in apostolic oral traditions was fiercely debated in the work of a sub-commission and was not settled until votes were taken on February 23 and March 2, 1963, to observe abstinence and not settle this question.”50 Ratzinger’s desire that the Council not settle the matter one way or the other—that is, that it should remain an open question—was fulfilled.

Ratzinger fends off a likely concern with respect to this position, arguing that it does not lead to a Protestant notion of sola scriptura, because Bonaventure and Aquinas alike understood that scripture can be understood properly only within the Church, highlighting the role of tradition as well as that of the magisterium. Ratzinger concludes with a view that does find expression in Dei verbum itself: “This means, to be sure, that the three realities, Scripture, Tradition, and the Church’s Magisterium are not static entities placed beside each other, but have to be seen as one living organism of the word of God, which from Christ lives on in the


50 Wicks, “Six Texts,” 277. Cardinal Frings was one of the members of this sub-commission that encouraged this abstinence.
This formulation is quite similar to what *Dei verbum* itself states: “sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church . . . are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others.”

Turning to the topic of the divine inspiration of sacred scripture, Ratzinger suggests that the Council follow the example of its predecessors and “refrain from describing in detail the process of inspiration, which both Trent and Vatican I with good reason refrained from doing.” To bolster his argument for this suggestion, he offers a critique of the notion of inspiration as divine dictation described in *De fontibus* by tracing its origins. He says that *De fontibus* drew upon a Western theological tradition coming from Augustine, who—for his part—took it from Philo of Alexandria. He argues that Philo’s notion of inspiration reflects middle Platonism more than it does Jewish tradition. Philo’s work then influenced Augustine. Despite his general sympathy for Augustinian thought, in this instance, Ratzinger states: “It must be seen as unfortunate that this pagan view of inspiration, because of Augustine’s authority, later gained such widespread acceptance.” In other words, the concept of scriptural inspiration presented in *De fontibus* is not sufficiently *Christian*.

Ratzinger then explains two major reasons why this middle platonic, Augustinian notion of inspiration is “extremely unsuitable for a Christian doctrine of inspiration”: 1) “it assumes that the divinity wholly overpowers the human person,” and as a consequence of “this deprivation of human capability,” the document ends up proposing an “unhistorical nature of the inspiration—

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52 *DV* §10.


process.” The reason it is not suited for a Christian doctrine of inspiration is expressed through a contrast with ideas from other religions. As Ratzinger observes: “The Bible differs from the holy books of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam, precisely in this that these are taken to be timeless divine dictation, whereas the Bible is the result of God’s historical dialogue with human beings and only from this history does it have meaning and significance.” Positively expressed, Ratzinger insists: “An inspiration doctrine developed from what is properly Christian embraces these basic categories: the person, whom God calls personally, not as an «organ», and takes into his service; history; and the people of God.” Again, Ratzinger’s hopes for the conciliar teaching on revelation came to fruition. Speaking of Ratzinger’s suggestions for the doctrine of inspiration, Wicks writes: “The Council should confess the faith that God called and aided human authors in composing Scripture, but remain reserved about how this took place. Again, this is exactly what Dei Verbum, no. 11, on biblical inspiration, does in the text approved by the Council in 1965.”

According to Kurt Koch, Ratzinger’s view leads to the conclusion that “Christianity is not—like Judaism by way of example and in another way, Islam—a book-religion but a personal and interior relationship of friendship with Jesus Christ as the living Word of God.”

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58 Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger at Vatican II,” 8.
The question of inspiration leads directly to the topics of inerrancy and the historicity of scripture. Ratzinger admits that *De fontibus* argues logically from its own principles. If God did dictate the scriptures then it would follow that the Bible is free from error even in profane matters. “Here however,” argues Ratzinger, “the dictation theory that is assumed, as just indicated, expresses no single thought that is specifically Christian. Thus it is not surprising that according to a practically irrefutable consensus of historians there definitely are mistakes and errors in the Bible in profane matters of no relevance for what Scripture properly intends to affirm.”60 Phrased another way, Ratzinger’s understanding of revelation is expressed as follows: “Scripture is and remains inerrant and beyond doubt in everything that it properly intends to affirm, but this is not necessarily so in that which accompanies the affirmation and is not part of it.”61

After arguing for the removal of a curious insertion into *De fontibus* that stated Christ’s human nature was entirely free from ignorance, Ratzinger moves on to suggest that the preparatory document’s specification of the Gospels’ authorship by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John should be removed and that it should content itself with expressing the apostolic origins of the Gospels,62 which is another change that found its way into *Dei verbum*.

That suggestion corresponds with the principle Ratzinger expressed elsewhere that the Council should not settle specifically historical questions. In similar fashion, also reflected

60 Ratzinger, “Observations on the Schema,” 280. N.B.: Ratzinger offers some specific examples that are well chosen but which need not be discussed here.


elsewhere, he says that “it seems improper to list the infancy narrative, resurrection from the
death, and ascension beside each other on the same level” with respect to their historicity.

In the lecture, Ratzinger reiterates his criticisms of De fontibus’s third chapter that he had
already given to Frings. “First, in no. 15 we have a formulation that does not sufficiently do
justice to the unity of salvation history. . . . For the phrasing gives the impression that certain
parts of the Old Testament have no connection to the founding of the Christian religion and
therefore are simply relegated to the past.” Ratzinger’s Christocentrism is again made evident
when he remarks further: “The whole Old Testament, not just some parts of it, speaks of Christ,
for its intention is Christological and as such it is the basis and foundation of the Christian
religion. But the whole Old Testament also has to pass through a Christological transformation
and it then has force not from itself but from Christ and in reference to Christ, who is the one
who removes the veil that covered the face of Moses (2 Cor 3:12-18).”

It is not just the Old and New Testaments that are Christological, however; the whole of
human history centers on Christ. Admitting that, in comparison with Israel’s and the Church’s
histories, world history is much broader (quantitatively speaking), Ratzinger nevertheless asserts
that “this totality of history has a Christological structure and that in its totality history lives in an
unseen manner from the brightness of that trace of light that began to shine with Abraham and
then showed itself in Christ to be the true light of every human being who comes into this
world.” With these words, Christ is once more shown to be the center of history and to possess

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universal salvific significance. This latter notion is emphasized further in the following paragraph, where Ratzinger says: “A council of today, which the whole world, including non-Christians, will be watching, should make it clear that it knows well the breadth, height, length, and depth, that is, the truly cosmic dimensions, of salvation in Christ,” and “that salvation by Christ . . . is not hemmed in by the outer walls of Israel and the Church, has always been open to everyone.”

Interestingly, Ratzinger does not find much to criticize in De fontibus Chapter Five, whose topic became the subject of Dei verbum’s Chapter Six, the chapter he would eventually work on along with other periti before its promulgation. The subject matter for the chapter is the place of scripture in ecclesial life. He says that the fifth chapter “does not raise any particular issues and which in several passages represents real progress.” Still, he thinks that Cardinal Bea’s document is better and should replace De fontibus’s Chapter Five.

Ratzinger took the opportunity of speaking before so many bishops to go beyond a mere examination of De fontibus. He offered a pastoral reminder that those gathered at the Council should not be battling one another but the lack of faith found in the world of today. Consequently, the Council should not settle internally debated matters. Sadly, Ratzinger sees this tendency throughout many of the preparatory texts. As he notes: “A number of the schemas make it all too clear that here one theological school wants to finally drive the other school from the arena.” Ratzinger concludes with a reminder of whom the documents are truly written for.

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69 Ratzinger, “Observations on the Schema,” 284. N.B.: Ratzinger follows these words with a citation from de Lubac, who himself had been severely attacked by other theologians and censured by his own superiors.
The Fathers of the Council ought to remember that they are not there to settle theological disputes among themselves. As Ratzinger advises: “The army of Christ has in this hour other things to do than to enter into academic disputes. The world is not awaiting from us further refinements of a system, but it looks to hear the answer of faith in the hour of unbelief.”

Many of the criticisms that Ratzinger levied against *De fontibus* in this speech to German-speaking Council Fathers were echoed later on in the conciliar debate itself. As Wicks relates: “Prof. Ratzinger’s incisive critique of the prepared draft anticipated many of the arguments made against its suitability as a conciliar text when the Council members took it up on November 14, 1962, leading to the vote of Nov. 20 in which 1388 Fathers expressed their judgement that the text should go back to the Doctrinal Commission for extensive revision.” Speaking of Ratzinger’s lecture, John Allen, Jr. remarks: “Ratzinger was thus essential in forming the first impressions of the German-speaking bishops—who represented undoubtedly the single most influential block in the council—and his influence grew steadily.”

It is worth making the observation that no one person’s contribution to the Council was a solo effort. Without the approval of the vast majority of Council Fathers, no text could be approved. In that sense, even if Ratzinger was not directly responsible for the formulation of specific phrases or statements in *Dei verbum*, he still had an impact on what the bishops would find appropriate and acceptable. Furthermore, nobody does theology in a vacuum. The *periti* themselves shared ideas and—at times—collaborated. Thus, they influenced one another.

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70 Ratzinger, “Observations on the Schema,” 285. N.B. These words did not, in fact, prevent Ratzinger himself from trying to overcome the school of thought known as neoscholasticism in his suggested amendments to the texts.


72 John Allen, Jr., *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith*, 55.
Ratzinger himself testifies to this fact in his memoirs, *Milestones*. Speaking of his time in Rome for the Council, Ratzinger mentions “the many encounters that were now granted to me—with great men like Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, and Gérard Philips.” Obviously, these figures had an effect on Ratzinger, since he recalls his meetings with them fondly.

More specifically, Ratzinger’s evaluation of the seven schemata that he sent to Frings was assisted by the thought of others. Bishop Hermann Volk of Mainz called together a group of seven German-speaking theologians, who met from September 9 to September 11, 1962 in Mainz to discuss the seven draft texts. Ratzinger attended this meeting. “Ratzinger waited,” writes Wicks, “until after the Mainz meeting with other theologians and then he sent the Cardinal [i.e., Frings] his own version of what he thought after meeting with the other theologians.” Thus, one ought to keep in mind that the *periti* were mutually influential, and sometimes they held similar positions, pushing for the same results. As befits an Ecumenical Council, it was a collaborative effort: the Council Fathers and the *periti* worked together to produce the promulgated texts. Ratzinger was a part of this effort and certainly made his own contributions, even if it is not always easy to trace an individual thought to him alone.

6.2 Ratzinger’s Contributions during the Second Vatican Council

This section presents the main insights and suggestions regarding divine revelation that Ratzinger offered while working as a theological advisor to Cardinal Frings and as a *peritus* of the Council. In chronological order, the works discussed here are: 1) Ratzinger’s solo attempt at an alternate schema on revelation (Oct. 1962), 2) the alternate schema on revelation that Ratzinger co-authored with Rahner (Oct./Nov., 1962), 3) Ratzinger’s speech written for Cardinal

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74 Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger,” 6.
Frings and delivered as an oral intervention on “the one source of revelation” (Nov. 14, 1962 with an addendum given on Nov. 17), and 4) a letter that Ratzinger sent to Rahner offering comments on revised schemas (June 19, 1963). Following the presentation of these texts, a brief description is given of Ratzinger’s work in the Spring of 1964 on a sub-commission for the revision of the texts that became *Dei verbum*.

6.2.1 Ratzinger’s Alternate Schema on Revelation (Oct., 1962)

In October 1962, the same month that Ratzinger gave his lecture to the German-speaking bishops and the Second Vatican Council officially commenced, Ratzinger wrote his own version of an alternate schema on revelation. Ratzinger read the text in the presence of Cardinal Frings and six other cardinals on October 25, 1962. Frings had arranged for this meeting of “leading cardinals to discuss the problems of the draft texts.”

Ratzinger’s alternate schema is written in Latin and bears the title, “De voluntate Dei erga hominem” (“The will of God for man”). It is comprised of five substantial paragraphs. Each paragraph is prefaced with an indication of its theme placed in brackets. These themes are as follows: 1) the kingdom of God as the goal of the world; 2) the way in which the world is led to this goal; 3) Jesus Christ: revelation of God and of man; 4) Jesus Christ encompassing all, and 5) the Lord Jesus, present in the Church. Straight away, the Christo-centrism of Ratzinger’s alternate schema is noticeable insofar as Christ is mentioned explicitly in the headings for the last three of his paragraphs.

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76 A German translation is presented side-by-side along with the Latin original in JRGS 7/1, 177-182. Both languages have been considered in offering the English translations given in this dissertation.
Paragraph One starts with humanity’s origins and nature as the image of God. Following his study of Bonaventure, Ratzinger immediately connects this image with man’s capability of knowing and loving God and entering into communion with God. The Bonaventurian elements continue through the emphasis on ‘reductio’ insofar as through man “through him [i.e., man] the world may be lead back to God,”\(^77\) which also reflects the cosmic aspect of salvation. The cosmic dimension is reiterated in the following sentence in which Ratzinger specifies the telos of revelation, which is specified as God’s act of speaking: “This is the goal of all God’s speech: that the whole creation may become God’s Kingdom, a kingdom of joy, of love, and of blessedness.”\(^78\) In this short paragraph, Ratzinger says a lot. He specifies from the start that salvation is the very purpose of creation, which therefore unites the two. Salvation is not an afterthought: it was the reason God created to begin with, and man’s nature was created precisely to enable the union of creation with God. The exitus-reditus theme thus provides the starting point and framework for Ratzinger’s entire schema.

Having expressed the goal of creation, Ratzinger discusses the means through which this goal is obtained in his second paragraph. The impetus comes from God. As Ratzinger states: “In order to achieve this end, God has addressed man ‘many times and in various ways’ (see Heb 1:1) throughout the whole of human history by drawing him in hidden ways to the desire for the

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\(^77\) Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §1 in JRGs 7/1, 177: Latin = “per eum mundus in Deum reducatur”; German = “durch ihn die Welt zu Gott zurückgeführt werde.”

\(^78\) Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §1 in JRGs 7/1, 177: Latin = “Hic erga est finis cuiuscumque locutionis divinae, ut omnis creatura fiat regnum Dei, regnum pacis, caritatis, beatitudinis”; German = “Das ist das Ziel alles Sprechens Gottes: dass die ganze Schöpfung Gottes Reich werde, ein Reich des Friedens, der Liebe und der Seligkeit.” Here, Ratzinger adopts the identification of revelation with “locutio Dei,” which was used in Dei Filius and which was prominent in neo-scholastic circles at the time, e.g. Sebastian Tromp and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. See Cahill, The Renewal of Revelation Theology, 35, especially n. 82.
infinite good, for infinite beauty, for love which never fails or becomes weaker.” With these words, Ratzinger reflects the notion of human desire for God, understood in terms of infinite goodness, beauty, and love.

After this general, abstract consideration of God’s action of attracting man to himself, Ratzinger gets more specific through a consideration of salvation history in the Old and New Covenants. Again, the impetus derives from God himself: “In order to achieve this end, He [God] has gathered together a people from the descendants of Abraham and from day to day has made known more clearly his Word, with which he calls man.” The reference to the word being made clearer day by day suggests the ongoing, personal character of revelation: God’s continual action of calling humanity to himself. The next sentence in Ratzinger’s work packs a lot of topics into one statement. It reflects the connection between the Trinitarian foundation of revelation, the Christological core of revelation, and the interior workings of grace upon the human subject (as discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation). It also resonates with the idea of revelation finding its apex in Christ himself. “In the man Christ Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, finally the inner Word of God, in whom God expresses himself in an eternal way and in an eternal way

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79 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §2 in JRG 7/1, 177-178: Latin = “Ad hunc finem prosequendum hominem »multifariam multisque modis« (cf. Hebr 1,1) alloquitor per to tum cursum historiae generis humani, alliciens eum occultis viis in desiderium bonitatis infinitae, pulchritudinis aeternae, amoris numquam deficientis”; German = “Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, hat Gott im Verlauf der menschlichen Geschichte den Menschen »viele Male und auf vielerlei Weise« (vgl. Hebr 1,1) angeredet, indem er ihn auf verborgenen Wegen zur Sehnsucht nach dem unendlichen Gut zog, nach der ewigen Schönheit, nach der Liebe, die niemals schwächer wird oder versagt.”

80 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §2 in JRG 7/1, 178: Latin = “Ad hunc etiam finem prosequendum ex Abraham populum sibi congregavit clariusque in dies verbum suum, vocans hominem”; German = “Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen hat Er sich aus der Nachkommenschaft Abrahams ein Volk gesammelt und von Tag zu Tag klarer sein Wort kundgetan, mit dem er den Menschen rief.”
knows and loves all his works, has become a Word spoken outwardly: His Word, which calls man, becomes man (see John 1:14).”

The first paragraph, then, specified the goal of creation. The second paragraph spoke of God’s internal dialogue and external locution, through which he calls man to himself, most especially through the Incarnate Word of God: Jesus Christ. Now, in the third paragraph, Ratzinger elaborates on the objects of revelation, remaining within a Christological vision thereof. In short, Christ reveals both God and humanity. Christ also overcomes human sinfulness, through which humanity has separated itself from God, and thus leads humanity back (‘reductio’) to God. The multiple references that Ratzinger makes to human sinfulness and error keep the discussion firmly planted within a salvation historical perspective, which once again reflects the work in his Habilitationsschrift. For the present discussion, it is especially important to highlight that God is the primary object of revelation and that Christ can rightly be equated with this revelation: “He, Christ himself, is the revelation” and “in the revelation of his Son, he ultimately bestows nothing other than himself.” Here, as in his Habilitationsschrift, Ratzinger also ties revelation and grace closely together. God bestows himself in revelation: divine indwelling is a part of God’s act of revelation. Thus, Ratzinger is able to say both that Christ is

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81 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §2 in JRGS 7/1, 178: Latin = “manifestavit et denique in homine Christo Jesu nato ex Maria virgine ipsum suum verbum internum, quo aeternaliter se ipsum loquitur et aeternaliter omnia opera sua cognoscit et amat, verbum factum est externum: Verbum suum vocans hominem factum est homo (cf. Jo 1,14)”; German = “Im Menschen Christus Jesus, geboren aus der Jungfrau Maria, ist schließlich das innere Wort Gottes, in dem Gott sich selbst auf ewige Weise ausspricht und auf ewige Weise all seine Werke erkennt und liebt, ein nach außen gesprochenes Wort geworden: Sein Wort, das den Menschen ruft, wurde Mensch (vgl. Joh 1, 14).”

82 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §3 in JRGS 7/1, 179 and 180: Latin = “Idem ipse autem, qui est revelatio” and “in revelatione finaliter nihil aliud quam seipsum donat”: German = “Er, Christus selbst, ist die Offenbarung” and “in der Offenbarung seines Sohnes schenkt er letztlich nichts anderes als sich selbst.” The German inserts “of his Son” (“seines Sohnes”) that is lacking in the Latin original.
revelation and that “he is also the grace of God for us.” Christ is the high point of revelation, who reveals both God and humanity and efficaciously conveys the graced union of humanity with God.

In the fourth paragraph, Ratzinger expresses the universal significance of Christ as well as the specificity of Israel in salvation history as preparing the way for the fulfillment of all human history in Christ. Thus, the notion of Christ as the concrete universal spoken of earlier in this dissertation is reflected here as well. The very heading of §4 intimates that Christ is all-encompassing and hence universally significant. In Christ, the goal of the entire human race (not just the goal of one people, but of every people) has already begun to be realized. Ratzinger also suggests that God has spoken throughout all of human history and not just through the canonical scriptures or in Christ. Nevertheless, whether explicitly or implicitly given, “All divine speech, which pervades history in hidden fashion . . . treats him [Christ], aims toward him and is fulfilled in him.” There is recognition, then, of God’s universal salvific will which is offered to all people of every age and is carried out in hidden ways everywhere, and yet, even this form of revelation is centered on Christ and has its fulfillment in Christ. In this context, Ratzinger also ties revelation to the obedience of faith, which is carried out in the depths of the human person.

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83 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §3 in JRGS 7/1, 179-180: Latin = “est et gratia Dei pro nobis”; German = “er ist auch die Gnade Gottes für uns.”

84 See Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §4 in JRGS 7/1, 180.

85 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §4 in JRGS 7/1, 180-181: Latin = “Omnis ergo locutio divina hanc historiam transcurrunt occulte . . . de eo agitur, in eum tendit et in eo completur”; German = “Alles göttliche Reden, das verborgen die Geschichte durchzieht . . . handelt von ihm, zielt auf ihn hin und wird in ihm erfüllt.”
“Wherever the voice of God, even if it speaks in hidden things, finds obedience, [Christ] himself and the salvation effected by him is present.”

Despite God’s universal call to human persons in every historical circumstance, there is still a unique role played by the people Israel. As Ratzinger acknowledges: “In a special way, however, the order of salvation of the Old Covenant aims at this perfect union of God with the human race, in which—through Christ—the wedding feast is prepared: this is the union of God with humankind (see Lk 13:29; Rev 19:9).”

Taken altogether, Ratzinger’s presentation shows that all of humanity—Jew, Gentile, and Christian—has the same end: union with God, and that this union is fulfilled in and through Christ. Once again, Christ is the only savior, but he is the savior of all men, and is thus universally significant.

The fifth and final paragraph continues the historical (and in some ways ontological) order of Ratzinger’s presentation. It presents an ecclesiology based upon Christology. Here, as in other works, Ratzinger denotes the vital or dynamic understanding of revelation. He does acknowledge that Christ is the truth that instructs us, but this is to be understood as a living truth,

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87 Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §4 in JRGS 7/1, 181: Latin = “Inprimis autem Veteris Testamenti oeconomia in hanc perfectam unionem Dei generisque humani tendit, inque, per Christum coena nuptialis, i.e. unio Dei cum hominibus peratur (cf. Lc 13,29; Apoc. 19,9)”; German = “In besondere Weise aber zielt die Heilsordnung des Alten Bundes auf diese vollkommene Vereinigung Gottes mit dem Menschengeschlecht, in der durch Christus das Hochzeitsmahl bereitet wird: das ist die Vereinigung Gottes mit den Menschen (vgl. Lk 13,29; Offb 19,9).”

88 Several of Ratzinger’s remarks in this text about salvation historical uniqueness (of Israel and of Christ and his Church) coupled with salvific universality foreshadow the view of Dominus Iesus (2000), which was promulgated under Ratzinger’s leadership as head of the CDF.
who is Christ himself and who remains present through his body, the Church.\textsuperscript{89} In this context, Ratzinger hints at the notion that revelation has attained its culmination with respect to its objective content, because it is Christ himself who is the living truth. As a result, he states: “The Church, therefore, does not reveal new truths, but she preserves faithfully that one and only truth, which has appeared in our Lord Jesus, to which the apostles and their writings bear witness.”\textsuperscript{90} The Church, insists Ratzinger, is subordinate to this truth. The individual truths, which she elucidates in her doctrine and preaching, “all go back to that one truth, who is Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{91} This same notion was discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation. There, Christ was said to be the one truth that makes possible the development of doctrine in history, which is merely the unfolding of what is already present in seed in the revelation of Christ.

6.2.2 The Rahner-Ratzinger Alternate Schema (Oct./Nov. 1962)

The solo effort of Ratzinger to proffer an alternate schema was short-lived. “K. Rahner was doing similar work, and in the following week, he and Ratzinger melded their texts into a short Latin treatise, The Revelation of God and Man in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{92} The decision to combine the text arose from an October 19, 1962 meeting of French, German, and Dutch speaking bishops

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{89} See Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §5 in JRGS 7/1, 181-182.
  \item \textsuperscript{90} Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §5 in JRGS 7/1, 182: Latin = “Non ergo novas veritates revelat ecclesia, sed hanc unam veritatem, quae in Domino Jesus apparuit, quam testantur apostolic eorumque scripta, fideliter custodit”; German = “Die Kirche offenbart also nicht neue Wahrheiten, sondern sie bewahrt treu jene eine und einzige Wahrheit, die in unserem Herrn Jesus erschienen ist, welche die Apostel und ihre Schriften bezeugen.”
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Ratzinger, “God’s Will for Man,” §5 in JRGS 7/1, 182: Latin = “omnes in hanc unam veritatem reducuntur, quae Jesus Christus est”; German = “gehen alle auf jene eine Wahrheit zurück, die Jesus Christus ist.”
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger,” 9. The English translation cited in this work is found side-by-side with the Latin original in Cahill, The Renewal of Revelation Theology, 300-317.
\end{itemize}
and theologians, which was organized by Bishop Herman Volk. The group assembled at Volk’s behest had divergent views about how to proceed with shaping the Council’s doctrine on revelation. Broadly speaking, two different approaches to the question developed: the ‘German approach’ (typified by the Rahner-Ratzinger draft) and the ‘French approach’ (exemplified by the work of Daniélou).  

93 “Two days later [October 21, 1962] Congar, Labourdette, Daniélou, Volk, Rahner, Semmelroth and Ratzinger met. At this meeting they endorsed two counter-projects, a schema for a prooemium to be prepared by Congar and an alternative schema to be prepared by Rahner and Ratzinger.”94

The Rahner-Ratzinger draft reached a much larger audience than that of the seven cardinals who listened to Ratzinger’s solo draft. “Card. Frings liked the text and got the approval of four other Conference presidents to circulate it in their name as ‘a compendium of points from the initial drafts, in a positive and pastoral tone.’ The text was mimeographed, stapled, and distributed in ca. 2,000 copies early in November 1962.”95 The new combined text is also significantly longer than Ratzinger’s solo effort. Whereas Ratzinger’s schema is comprised of only five substantial paragraphs, the Rahner-Ratzinger draft contains a prooemium and three chapters; altogether these amount to fourteen numbered sections (some containing more than one paragraph). “This second text,” Ratzinger states, is “much more Rahner’s work than my own.”96

There is no need to go through the text in detail here. One reason to avoid a lengthy presentation of the text comes from the fact that, despite its widespread distribution, it does not

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93 See Cahill, The Renewal of Revelation Theology, 160 and 172-176.

94 Cahill, The Renewal of Revelation Theology, 174.

95 Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger,” 9.

96 Ratzinger, Milestones, 128.
appear to have had much of a positive impact at the Council. Rather, according to Ratzinger’s own recollection, it “evoked some rather bitter reactions.”\textsuperscript{97} In fact, showing a desire to distance himself from the text, Ratzinger notes: “It now became clear that Rahner’s schema could not be accepted.”\textsuperscript{98} More will be said about this later. Nevertheless, “these alternate schemas [Ratzinger’s own schema as well as the combined Rahner-Ratzinger schema] show central motivations driving the advance from \textit{De fontibus} to \textit{Dei Verbum}, especially to the Constitution’s chapter I on God’s saving revelation centered in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{99}

\textbf{6.2.3 An Oral Intervention of Frings written by Ratzinger (Nov. 14 and 17, 1962)}

The Genoa Lecture is not the only speech that Joseph Ratzinger wrote for Cardinal Frings. There were at least ten speeches—given as oral interventions at Vatican II—that he helped Frings write. According to Jared Wicks, speaking of Frings, “His speeches in St. Peter’s had a notable impact since as a senior Cardinal he was often among the first to address a topic. Also, his promotion of development aid by the West German church for third-world and especially Latin American churches had gained him many grateful friends among the bishops of those area, who would listen carefully to the points he made when speaking in St. Peter’s.”\textsuperscript{100} Thus, Ratzinger had the opportunity to have his own insights presented before the Council with the full weight of Cardinal Frings’s influential status.

Among the interventions penned by Ratzinger on behalf of Frings, there is one specifically on the topic of revelation. It was given on November 14, 1962, which was the first

\textsuperscript{97} Ratzinger, \textit{Milestones}, 128.

\textsuperscript{98} Ratzinger, \textit{Milestones}, 129.

\textsuperscript{99} Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 735.

\textsuperscript{100} Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger,” 11.
day that the Council discussed *De fontibus*. Frings was the second speaker. His speech is offered in Latin with German translation (side-by-side) in volume 7/1 of Ratzinger’s collected works.\(^{101}\)

This oral intervention by Frings (written by Ratzinger) calls for *De fontibus* to be abandoned and expresses the need for a new draft. Frings concludes the speech by pointing out that he had already handed out an alternate schema to numerous Council Fathers and suggests that that draft text be the starting point for the development of a Constitution on divine revelation.\(^{102}\)

The intervention is not lengthy, but it is rather pointed nonetheless. It begins by stating quite plainly: “The schema, *De fontibus revelationis*, suffers from major deficiencies.”\(^{103}\) First of all, Frings notes that the document is too long, because it tries to consider particularities, some of which are superfluous to the purpose of the text. Furthermore, it goes into these unnecessary particularities while at the same time failing to provide an adequate view of the whole, especially insofar as it fails to treat the topic of revelation itself, something Ratzinger had repeatedly said should be treated in the first chapter of a document on revelation.

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\(^{101}\) Joseph Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle der Offenbarung,” in JRGS 7/1, 239–243. Both the Latin and German versions (with some prejudice in favor of the Latin) have been consulted for the English translations given herein. Henceforth, the title given to the speech in the collected works, “Die eine Quelle der Offenbarung,” is used for citation purposes. This version of the text includes and addendum given at the 21\(^{st}\) general congregation on November 17, 1962. In this version, there is no indication of where the addendum is distinguished from the first speech on November 14, 1962. However, the addendum is a short statement regarding the ‘two streams’ flowing from revelation. It was in the original typed version of the speech, but Frings missed it when reading it in the aula on the first day.

\(^{102}\) Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 243. The alternate schema referred to here by Frings was the Rahner-Ratzinger draft. Previously, Ratzinger himself had called for substantial revision of the text, not a complete rejection of the text.

\(^{103}\) Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 239: Latin = “Schema *De fontibus revelationis* magnis defectibus laborat”; German = “Das Schema *De fontibus revelationis* leidet an großen Mängeln.”
The lack of such a treatment of revelation itself leads to other problems. The intervention speaks of such negative consequences. “The first lies in this: that the schema unexpectedly begins with the order of knowledge, that is, with the sources of the knowledge of revelation,”\textsuperscript{104} thus skipping over God’s own words and deeds, which gives the document a “deplorable” [\textit{deplorabili}; \textit{beklangswert}] positivistic character. In this respect, \textit{De fontibus} “leaves the path of sacred tradition, which is manifest already in the title, because neither the Council of Trent nor Vatican Council I dared to speak of ‘sources’ in the plural; rather, the holy Trinitian Synod called the Gospel, i.e., the revelation preached by the Lord Jesus, the one source from which proceed both scripture as well as tradition.”\textsuperscript{105} Obviously drawing directly from Ratzinger’s research for his \textit{Habilitationsschrift}, the speech turns to mediaeval theology for support, which it distinguishes sharply from the “scholasticism” [“\textit{Scholasticismus}”; “\textit{Scholastizismus}”] of \textit{De fontibus}. “Also, the whole medieval theology teaches that revelation itself is the source from which the two streams, i.e scripture and tradition, flow.”\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 240: Latin = “Primum quidem est quod schema immediate de ordine cognoscendi i.e. de fontibus revelationis cognoscendae incipit”; German = “Die erste liegt darin, dass das Schema unvermittelt mit der Erkenntnisordnung beginnt, d.h. mit den Quellen, durch die man die Offenbarung erkennt.”

\textsuperscript{105} Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 240-241: Latin = “sacrae traditionis derelinquit, quod iam in titulo apparret, quod neque Concilium Tridentinum neque Conc. Vaticanum I de fontibus in plurali loqui ausa sunt, sed potius sacra synodus Tridentina Evangelium, i.e. ipsam revelationem a Domino Jesu praedictam unum fontem appellavit, ex quo tam scriptura quam traditio profluent”; German = “[Dieser Positivismus] verlässt den Pfad der heiligen Überlieferung, was sich bereits im Titel kundtut: Weder das Konzil von Trient noch das I. Vaticanum haben es gewagt, von »Quellen« im Plural zu sprechen; die Heilige Kirchenversammlung von Trient hat vielmehr das Evangelium, d.h. die vom Herrn Jesus verkündigte Offenbarung, die eine Quelle genannt, aus der sowohl die Schrift wie die Tradition hervorgehen.”

\textsuperscript{106} Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 241: Latin = “Et tota theologia mediis aevi docet, ipsam revelationem esse fontem, de quo duo rivuli, i.e. scriptura et traditio emanant”; German = “Auch die gesamte mittelalterliche Theologie lehrt, dass die Offenbarung selbst die Quelle sei, aus der die zwei Bäche, d.h die Schrift und die Überlieferung fließen.”
Here, too, is expressed Ratzinger’s opinion that the schema over-steps its proper boundaries by trying to definitively settle questions disputed by good-standing Catholic theologians. The intervention gives three examples, which include the document’s attempt to narrowly define tradition, divine inspiration, and biblical inerrancy.\textsuperscript{107} Ratzinger sees in these definitions an inappropriate attempt of one school of thought to dispel other schools of thought through the Council.\textsuperscript{108}

\textit{De fontibus} not only inappropriately treats matters of dispute among Catholic theologians; it also fails to meet proper ecumenical standards: “In the first place, new difficulties arise for the separated brethren both in the East as well as in the Protestant sphere, if such particularities would be defined as they are contained in the text. Furthermore, the linguistic style of the text does not awaken the impression of fraternal love but rather of a kind of ruthlessness, which is offensive to others.”\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{6.2.4 Ratzinger’s Letter to Rahner (June 19, 1963)}

After \textit{De fontibus} had been cast aside, a new draft text on revelation was created via a mixed commission under the aegis of Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea. The first draft of this document, \textit{De revelatione}, was circulated along with eleven other schemas to Council Fathers in

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} See Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 241.
\item \textsuperscript{108} See Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 241-242.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ratzinger, “Die eine Quelle,” 242: Latin = “Primum quia fratribus separatis tam orientalibus quam protestantibus novae difficultates oriuntur, si particularia definiuntur, quae in schemate contenta sunt, quod insuper in modo loquendi nihil caritatis fraternae prae se fert, sed potius violentiam quandam, quae offensiva est alis”; German = “Erstens entstünden für die getrennten Brüder, sowohl im östlichen wie im protestantischen Bereich, neue Schwierigkeiten, wenn solche Einzelheiten, wie sie im Text enthalten sind, definiert würden. Darüber hinaus erweckt der sprachliche Stil des Textes nicht den Eindruck von brüderlicher Liebe, sondern eher von einer Art Rücksichtslosigkeit, die bei Anderen Anstoß erregt.”
\end{itemize}
the Spring of 1963. In mid-May of the same year, Cardinal Frings gave Ratzinger a copy of the schemata and asked for his assessment. Ratzinger wrote comments in the margins of the draft, read and explained them to the nearly blind Frings, who took the annotated draft with him to Rome with a view to working through them alongside his secretary, Herbert Luthe.110

On June 8th and June 15th 1963, Rahner sent letters to Ratzinger asking for his thoughts on the new schemas. Ratzinger replied on the 19th of June. In the letter, Ratzinger reiterates—to the best of his recollection—the suggestions and comments he made on the schemas in his marginal notes for Frings. Only the material relating to the first draft of *De revelatione* is presented here.

In general, Ratzinger holds that the first draft of *De revelatione* breathes an air of resignation. This impression reflects the highly contentious nature of its genesis. Nevertheless, Ratzinger sees no reason to perpetuate the conflict *ad infinitum* and suggests that—once the awkward (or dangerous: *gefährliche*) parts are removed—one would do well to accept the draft. Corresponding to this view, Ratzinger notes that his marginal comments on the text were “almost purely of the stylistic kind.”111

Ratzinger gives only two specific examples for suggested improvements to the text. First, he “had . . . objected to the word ‘Christianismus’ on the first page and suggested that it be replaced by novum testamentum.”112 If one compares the first and second drafts of *De revelatione*, one sees that ‘Christianismus’ was replaced by a reference to the Christian economy


which is more or less equivalent to the ‘New Covenant’ recommended by Ratzinger, while maintaining an explicit reference to Christ via the adjective ‘Christian.’ This phrase was maintained in Dei Verbum §4.

Secondly, Ratzinger writes:

Above and beyond that, I only remember that before the sentence with ‘Christianismus’ I had made a small suggestion for improvement: When here (objectively legitimately) the Christ-revelation is designated as the ultima revelatio publica, the impression of a piecemeal series of individual revelations spoken one after another is very strongly referred to, when in reality it is that, in Christ, the one movement of God’s self-disclosure comes to its fullness and in this respect nothing more is to be said above and beyond that; therefore, one could perhaps say instead of ‘ultima’: revelatio completa est, or in Christo plenitudo revelationis venit, supra quam nihil addendum est or the like. However, I do not place absolute value on this correction.114

Thus, without denying the legitimacy of speaking of revelation in Christ as “final,” Ratzinger advocates for an expression of revelation’s “completeness” or “fullness” in Christ. Essentially, Ratzinger prefers references to the qualitative unsurpassable-ness of revelation in Christ over the notion of temporal finality. As Wicks explains: “Ratzinger thought De revelatione should tell why revelation ‘ends’ with Christ’s Apostles—namely, because it reaches in Christ such fullness that no more can be added.”115

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113 See Francisco Gil Hellín, Constituto Dogmatica De Divina Revelatione Dei Verbum: Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis in Ordinem Redigens Schemata cum Relationibus Necnon Patrum Orationes Atque Animaadversiones (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 28 (I [n. 3-4, 5, line 27]) and 32 (II [n. 4, 7, line 11])


115 Wicks, “Light from Germany,” 735.
Once again, if one compares the first draft of De revelatione with the second draft as well as Dei Verbum itself, one sees that the word ultima has been removed, and the expression has been added that Christ “perfected revelation by fulfilling it” ("revelationem complendo perficit"). Thus, whether directly tied to Ratzinger’s intervention or not, to a degree, both of his suggestions for improvement of De revelatione were implemented in the second draft of the schema and maintained in Dei verbum itself. Whether these or any other specific formulations found in Dei verbum can be traced to Ratzinger specifically is a difficult question to answer. The next section explicates the nuances of the problematic.

6.3 The Extent of Ratzinger’s Contribution to Dei Verbum: An Ongoing Question

From all of the texts considered in this chapter, it is evident that Ratzinger had the advantage of several different venues within which he could offer his own suggestions for a dogmatic constitution on divine revelation. In what follows, his suggestions for Vatican II regarding divine revelation are summarized together with indications of whether Dei verbum itself reflects the content of those suggestions.

First, there are some general suggestions that Ratzinger makes regarding the Council’s presentation of divine revelation that arguably match traits of the final text. As Ratzinger had suggested, the linguistic style of Dei verbum is more scriptural and pastoral than scholastic, in contrast with De fontibus revelationis. Furthermore, Dei verbum shows more restraint than De fontibus in its treatment of aspects of divine revelation that involve questions disputed among Catholic theologians. For example, Dei verbum refrains from determining whether sacred

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116 See Gil Hellín, Synopsis, 28 (I [n. 3-4, 5, line 25] and II [n. 4, 6, 34]).

117 Dei Verbum, §4. See Gil Hellín, Synopsis, 30 (II [n. 4, 7, lines 6-7]) and 31 (IV [n. 4, 6, lines 15-16]).
tradition adds any material content to the deposit of faith, i.e., whether revealed truth is *partly* in scripture and *partly* in tradition. Likewise, it does not purport to teach definitively on matters of a primarily historical nature, such as the authorship of the four Gospels, and it leaves room for further research on the role of Christian communities in the formation of the synoptic texts. Concomitantly, the document is more ecumenically sensitive than *De fontibus*. Perhaps most noticeable is the fact that *Dei verbum*’s opening chapter is on “Revelation Itself,” which corresponds to a suggestion that Ratzinger made repeatedly in several different contexts.

There are also some specific aspects of *Dei verbum*’s doctrine that correspond to Ratzinger’s own thought and suggestions. Chapter I of *Dei verbum* begins with God’s initiative rather than man’s and thus presents revelation primarily as God’s action in history rather than as a set of propositions contained in books and dogmatic formulas. The goal of revelation is said to be man’s fellowship with God (*DV* §2), which approximates—and functionally equates with—Ratzinger’s own emphasis on union with God as the goal of revelation. The word “Gospel” is also used in a broad sense to refer to the entire “good news” of the New Testament and not just narrowly to the books attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Scripture and tradition are no longer referred to as ‘sources’ of revelation but rather are shown to be modes of transmission of revelation, which restores the orders of ontology and epistemology as Ratzinger fervently argued should be done. *Dei verbum* also expresses both the universal salvific will of God together with the special place of the Abraham and his descendants in salvation history (§14). *Dei verbum*’s words “Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of His ways”\(^ {118} \) parallel those of Ratzinger’s own alternate schema, where it says that God “has gathered together a people from the descendants of Abraham and from day to day has made known more clearly

\(^ {118} \text{*DV* §14.} \)
The Old Testament is also affirmed as being “permanently valuable” (§14). The entire Old Testament is shown to be a foundation of Christian faith (DV §16), as Ratzinger had suggested. The removal and replacement of ‘Christianismus’ and ‘ultima’ from the first draft of De revelatione have already been treated above but deserves a reminder in this context.

Ratzinger’s views also found expression in Dei verbum with respect to tradition. Verweyen argues that Ratzinger’s position may have benefited from its similarities to Blondel (even though Ratzinger himself never treats Blondel at length in his own writings). “The kinship to the theses represented by Blondel in his correspondence with Alfred Loisy and then, above all, in his contribution from 1904, Histoire et dogme, may also have contributed to the fact that Ratzinger’s functional, not material understanding of tradition with respect to the transmission of divine revelation found expression in the final Conciliar text of Dei Verbum.”

Verweyen’s argument hinges on the French-speaking conciliar periti’s were familiarity with Blondel’s work. Those theologians who liked Blondel’s thesis on tradition may have been hesitant to support his thought openly, however, because certain members of the Roman Curia suspected Blondel of modernism. Here, Ratzinger’s study of Bonaventure in particular gave those theologians a way around the dilemma. “The insights of Ratzinger gained from Bonaventure gave to them [the Council Fathers] the possibility to confer influence to Blondel’s concept of tradition in the

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119 Ratzinger, “De Voluntate Dei,” §2 in JRGS 7/2, 177.

formation of the constitution on revelation, without directly invoking this Catholic scholar, who in Rome was still suspected as a ‘modernist.’”

Relatedly, there is a striking similarity between Ratzinger’s insistence on the unity of scripture, tradition, and magisterium and the words of *Dei verbum* on the same topic. Ratzinger writes: “This means, to be sure, that the three realities, Scripture, Tradition, and the Church’s Magisterium are not static entities placed beside each other, but have to be seen as one living organism of the word of God, which from Christ lives on in the Church.”  

*Dei verbum* reads:  

“It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

Additionally, *Dei verbum*’s teaching on the related topics of divine inspiration of scripture, biblical authorship, and inerrancy fit in with Ratzinger’s suggestions and ideas. Neo-scholastic views tended to downplay the role of the human writers of biblical texts. As Karim Schelkens relates: “(in line with the scholastic understanding of instrumental causality) the role of the human authors was reduced to that of technical executors.” Ratzinger presented his thoughts on these matters during his lecture to the German-speaking bishops on the eve of Vatican II’s commencement. Wicks summarizes Ratzinger’s position as follows:

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121 Verweyen, *Unbekannter*, 33: “Die von Bonaventura her gewonnenen Einsichten Ratzingers gaben ihnen die Möglichkeit, dem Traditionsbegriff Blondels bei der Gestaltung der Offenbarungskonstitution Einfluss zu verleihen, ohne sich direkt auf diesen in Rom noch immer als ‚Modernist’ beargwöhnten katholischen Gelehrten zu berufen.”


123 *DV* §10.

On biblical inspiration, Prof. Ratzinger criticized the schema *De fontibus revelationis* for proposing that the Council affirm as Church teaching a view of God’s influence on biblical composition which comes from Philo of Alexandria by way of Augustine. This theory of inspiration should not be espoused, because it fails to incorporate the factor of personal action by the human authors, while also taking no account of their placement both in God’s covenantal history with his people and in roles of service to the community of God’s people. Inspiration does not necessarily exclude erroneous biblical statements on matters outside the central intention of revelation, for its aim is to bring God in his mystery near to us by and through human language. Regarding the words by which Jesus taught and interacted with his contemporaries, the Gospels pass them on as words of a living person whom the evangelists have heard speaking to the community in which they wrote.¹²⁵

*Dei verbum* did, in fact, wind up clearly teaching the human aspect of biblical authorship of scripture: “In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.”¹²⁶

It is also known that Ratzinger was among the *periti* assigned to a subcommission charged with working on a new draft on revelation that would eventually become *Dei verbum*. As Wicks reports: “the work was divided according to the draft chapters, and Joseph Ratzinger assisted in drawing from the members’ comments new formulations to enrich what became, in *Dei Verbum*, Chapter VI (nos. 21 – 26), a many-sided promotion of ‘Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church.’”¹²⁷ In this and other ways, Dulles thinks that Ratzinger was able to influence *Dei verbum* despite the non-adoption of the joint Rahner-Ratzinger schema on revelation. Dulles states: “Notwithstanding the rejection of their schema, Rahner and Ratzinger had some input into the new text prepared by the mixed commission named by Pope John XXIII. Both were appointed as consulters to the subcommission revising the new text. . . . Ratzinger helped in

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¹²⁶ *Dei Verbum*, §11.

¹²⁷ Wicks, “Prof. Ratzinger,” 13.
responding to proposed amendments to the chapter dealing with tradition; he also had an opportunity to introduce modifications in the chapter dealing with the authority and interpretation of scripture.”

Given the number of points on which *Dei verbum* correlates well with what Ratzinger was advocating for before and during the Second Vatican Council and given his twin roles as conciliar *peritus* and as theological advisor to the influential Cardinal Frings, it is no wonder that a number of scholars have given him credit for contributing to the formation of *Dei verbum*. The aforementioned statements of Avery Dulles and Verweyen are examples. Rudolf Voderholzer likewise claims: “Joseph Ratzinger (since the year 2005, Pope Benedict XVI) made a major contribution to the development of the constitution on revelation.” Speaking of *Dei verbum*, Voderholzer even refers to Ratzinger as “one of its most important co-creators.” Christopher Collins similarly remarks: “Ultimately, serving as Frings’s *peritus*, Ratzinger would contribute along with several other theologians, including Karl Rahner, to the crafting of the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*).” More specifically, Collins writes: “What had often previously been matter consigned to the abstract language of propositional statements had, in *Dei Verbum*, been informed by a new theological personalism, thanks in no small part to the

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contributions of Joseph Ratzinger.” Peter Hofmann perceives Bonaventure’s influence on Ratzinger in the Christological aspects of *Dei verbum*: “Bonaventure’s Christological understanding of revelation, conveyed through the *peritus* Ratzinger, subsequently shaped the first fundamental magisterial statement on the concept of revelation.” John L. Allen goes as far as proclaiming that “*Dei verbum* (On the word of God) is the Vatican II document over which Ratzinger exercised the greatest personal influence.”

However, it is difficult to evaluate the accuracy of these authors’ attribution of significant influence on *Dei verbum* to Ratzinger. The scholars point out similarities between Ratzinger’s ideas and those contained in *Dei verbum*. They note the fact that he was present at the Council as *peritus* and assigned to a subcommission, working specifically on what would become Chapter VI of *Dei Verbum*. Thus, their conclusions and claims seem to follow quite naturally.

Nevertheless, the evidence is circumstantial at best. None of these authors uses concrete material from relevant sources that show the genesis of *Dei verbum*. None of them cites Vatican II’s *Acta Synodalia*, or Gil Hellin’s *Synopsis*, or Betti’s work on *Dei verbum* Chapter II, which give details about the *periti*’s contributions to the text.

While many of Ratzinger’s preferences were adopted, Ratzinger was not the only one among the theologians and Council members that promoted the ideas found in *Dei verbum*. Others had similar critiques of *De fontibus* and their own—at times quite similar—arguments for how to best approach the concept of tradition, for instance. Only a few particular examples can


be discussed here. The ‘French approach’ mentioned earlier provides the best examples of others influencing *Dei verbum* directly in ways that some have attributed to Ratzinger.

First, with respect to changing the style and tone of *De fontibus*, Archbishop Emile Guerry, on November 15, 1962, “presented a consensus of the French bishops. He began by clarifying that the call for a more positive form of presentation should not be understood as “sacrificing doctrine in favor of pastoral necessity». Thus he contended that those who had separated «doctrinal» and «pastoral» needs had created a false dichotomy.”

Guerry continued at length, giving multiple reasons why the language of the Council’s doctrine needed to be changed to better suit the needs of the day. His recommendations in this regard were far more extensive and elaborate than Ratzinger’s suggestions given through Frings. As another example, the bishop of Metz, France, Paul Joseph Schmitt, uses words similar to Ratzinger’s, when he suggests in an oral intervention that “the insights of biblical theology and the patristic renewal offered the chance for the Second Vatican Council to «proclaim a genuine, fuller and more fundamental concept of the Gospel» which also was «very traditional».”

Schmitt also argued for a Christological understanding of revelation, when he “stated that «all revelation is in the person of Christ, who is the revelation himself of God». “ Also akin to Ratzinger’s statements about Christ revealing God and man, Bishop Schmitt said in the aula that “in the person of Christ the epiphany of God is made in history, i.e. the revelation of who God is for man and who man is for God». “

In fact, Brendan Cahill dedicates an entire chapter (Chapter V) of his

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136 Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 198. He quotes from *AS I/3*, 129.

137 Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 198. He quotes from *AS I/3*, 129.

138 Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 199, quoting from *AS I/3*, 129.
dissertation to the issue of “The Christocentric Renewal of Theology” in Vatican II’s doctrine of divine revelation. In that extensive study, the influence of several key figures is examined. Ratzinger’s name does not even appear.\(^{139}\)

One of Ratzinger’s strongest points of contention with respect to *De fontibus* is its stark separation of scripture and tradition as two separate realities standing side-by-side. Again, though, he was not the only person making this critique. Just as one example, the Melkite Archbishop of Akka-Nazareth, George Hakim expressed his concerns about this matter in his own oral intervention at the Council. “He declared that «every separation between Scripture and Tradition, as the project *De fontibus* has done, should be severely judged as a violent act against the effective unity of the ways of transmission, which are never separated in Eastern theology and which we can not even conceive separately».”\(^{140}\)

As alluded to before, the Rahner-Ratzinger alternate schema did not have much of an impact at the Council. In fact, after Congar, Rahner, and Ratzinger’s work was presented on October 28, 1962 to the theologians assembled by Volk, “the differences between the German and French approaches had become more apparent. Daniélou continued to work on his own plan for a *prooemium* to the dogmatic schemata for Bishop Veuillot. At a meeting on November 4, Volk expressed the hope to join the three into one counter-project. By that time the group had reached an impasse which could not be overcome. After this time, the three projects continued independently.”\(^{141}\) According to the conclusions of Brendan Cahill’s study, “The renewal of the theology of revelation would not come from the Rahner/Ratzinger alternative schema, rather it


\(^{140}\) Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 201, quoting from AS I/3, 152-153.

\(^{141}\) Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 174.
would come from the «French approach» that developed from Volk’s group.” From Cahill’s perspective, the French theologians and bishops had a much greater influence on the actual contents of *Dei verbum* than did Ratzinger.

As further evidence of the influence of the work of French speaking theologians, Jean Daniélou’s draft of a *prooemium* (mentioned in the quote from Cahill in the preceding paragraph) was eventually used by Cardinal Gabriel Garrone as the first chapter of the first draft of *De revelatione,* the schema that replaced *De fontibus* as the basis for the development of what became *Dei verbum*. As far as the reference to Christ perfecting and fulfilling revelation in *Dei verbum* §4, Pieter Smulders had a direct impact on the text. Yves Congar is credited with having a major influence on *Dei verbum*’s understanding of sacred tradition, especially in §8. In fact, Umberto Betti, who was the official conciliar reporter on Chapter II of *Dei verbum*, does not mention Ratzinger in his important study, while he does mention several others who influenced that chapter of *Dei verbum*, including Rahner and Congar.

There was an intervention by Cardinal Döpfner that reflects Ratzinger’s notion that faith is necessary for revelation to be complete. Döpfner had recommended that a statement be inserted to this effect and offered a possible phrasing: “‘God’s revealing word becomes effective in the hearing of faith.’” He argues that this would better show “that faith is primarily the work

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142 Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 183.

143 For two versions of this text (in both Latin and English), see Cahill, *The Renewal of Revelation Theology*, 292-299. See also, Wicks . . . 582-584.


of God himself” and that “in faith, the very essence of revelation comes to completion.” This suggestion was not adopted by the Council, not because it was incorrect, but because it would not have been possible to explain the idea satisfactorily in a concise manner.

It was noted that Ratzinger was assigned to the subcommission that helped draft *Dei verbum* using the interventions of the Council Fathers as the basis for its statements. In particular, he was involved in using the Fathers’ comments to help create what became Chapter VI. However, to date, no study has shown precisely what Ratzinger’s impact was in that process, if such a study is even possible. Thus, at present, no specific content of Chapter VI is directly traceable to Ratzinger’s work. In fact, Grillmeier’s commentary on *Dei verbum* Chapter VI in *Unam Sanctam* makes no mention of Ratzinger offering any specific contributions.

In short, while a number of commentators have attributed to Ratzinger a direct, positive influence on the contents of *Dei verbum*, so far no one has been able to trace the evidence in a conclusive way to support such claims. The method necessary to do so goes well beyond the scope of the present dissertation, but some indications of how such an investigation might be conducted is worth mentioning as a way of encouraging continued study of Ratzinger’s contribution to the theology of divine revelation.

In order to be able to trace any statement or statements in *Dei verbum* to Ratzinger specifically, one would first need to show what Ratzinger presented to whom at the Council. As a further step, one would need to investigate each of the interventions (both oral and written) on the topic of divine revelation by all of those individuals to whom Ratzinger’s ideas were presented. Then, one would have to show clearly whether any of their interventions drew upon what they received from Ratzinger specifically. Finally, one would need to show via the *Acta* 146 Döpfner in Gil-Hellín, *Synopsis*, 533. “quod fide s primarie est opus ipsius Dei” and “fide ipsa essentia revelationis compleatur.”
*Synodalia* that any of those interventions were actually cited as the impetus for a specific change in the redaction process that was maintained in the final draft of *Dei verbum*. Or, alternatively, one could start with the *Acta Synodalia*’s notes about which interventions were used to make the editorial decisions and determine whether any of those interventions were by those who heard or read a specific suggestion made by Ratzinger and clearly used that suggestion as the basis for their intervention.

So far, no such study has been conducted. Thus, one can only say that much of Ratzinger’s thoughts about what should or should not be included in the Council’s doctrine of divine revelation matched what actually came about. Granted, in order for any idea to make it into the final version of the text, the text itself needed to be accepted by a large majority of the Council Fathers. Since Ratzinger was advocating some of these positions, one may say that he at least attempted to prepare and to persuade the Council Fathers to approve such statements. It is well known that he was persuasive to Cardinal Frings and most likely many others. As Peter Hofmann notes: “Ratzinger’s influence on Cardinal Frings and the whole German episcopate is extensively documented.”

Even if Ratzinger could not be proven to have directly impacted the final draft of *Dei verbum*, his works at the Council are still quite valuable in and of themselves. They contribute to theology of divine revelation insofar as they shed light on the issues that were being debated, discussed, and decided upon at the Council. Whether or not he directly shaped the content of *Dei verbum*, his thought as expressed in those works for and during the Council offer at minimum ancillary arguments (alongside those of others who took similar stances) for why certain positions with respect to divine revelation should be accepted or rejected.

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147 Peter Hofmann, “Jesus Christus als Mitte,” 85: “Ratzingers Einfluss auf Kardinal Frings und den gesamten deutschen Episkopat umfassender dokumentiert.”
6.4 Ratzinger as a Commentator on Dei Verbum

While the extent of Ratzinger’s direct influence and positive contribution to the drafting of *Dei verbum* has yet to be deciphered with any considerable accuracy, Ratzinger’s contributions as a commentator on the document are much easier to substantiate. His interpretations of *Dei verbum* provide a unique and insightful contribution to the understanding of the document. “Ratzinger has been credited with detecting—sometimes alone and against the mainstream—insufficient, unbalanced, or biased readings of *Dei Verbum.*”\(^{148}\) Ratzinger’s most notable contribution to the interpretation of *Dei verbum* is found in the third volume of *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*\(^{149}\) edited by Herbert Vorgrimler. Rudolf Voderholzer described Ratzinger’s contribution to that series from 1967 as being “relevant for a long time and still not outdated.”\(^{150}\) For that well-known series of commentaries on the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger wrote many of the sections dealing with *Dei verbum*, including the sections on: 1) the Origin and Background, 2) the Preface, 3) Chapter I, 4) Chapter II, and 5) Chapter VI. While the entirety of these commentaries cannot be presented here, some of their more noteworthy insights are worth mentioning. Each of these sections will be presented in a separate subsection in the order indicated above.

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6.4.1 Ratzinger on the Origin and Background of Dei Verbum

Ratzinger opens his comments on the origin and background of *Dei verbum* with an acknowledgment of the contentious atmosphere surrounding the drafting of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. He then proceeds to discuss what he considers to be the three major themes that were the most central to the conciliar debates on divine revelation.\(^\text{151}\)

The first motif is the concept of ‘tradition.’ Ratzinger describes succinctly key intellectual movements that lay behind the discussion of tradition at the Council. The first is “the Romantic movement, for which tradition became a leading philosophical and theological idea.”\(^\text{152}\) There were two major sub-currents of Romanticism’s understanding of tradition. “In the one case it was seen as an organically evolving process, and in the other appeared to be practically identical with the voice of the Church as living tradition.”\(^\text{153}\) The two Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950 also stood behind this evolving, romantic notion of tradition in the years leading up to the Council. Since there is no explicit biblical proof of the Immaculate Conception, “tradition was made responsible, which could now, however, no longer be understood as the simple passing on of something that had been handed down once and for all, but had to be understood in terms of the categories of growth, progress and the knowledge of the faith that


\(^{152}\) Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” 155.

\(^{153}\) Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” 155.
Romanticism had developed.”\textsuperscript{154} Connected with these other facets, the influence of the Jesuit Roman School and—in turn—of John Henry Newman on the idea of development of doctrine also influenced the conciliar discussions. Additionally, the ecumenical movement played a role, primarily through the attempts to reinterpret the Council of Trent’s doctrine of tradition, with J. R. Geiselmann’s contribution and those writing against him as the main sources for the debate.\textsuperscript{155}

According to Ratzinger, the second motif that took main stage during the conciliar conflicts over revelation was the question of the legitimacy of historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation. Since Ratzinger’s thoughts on this matter and Dei verbum’s treatment thereof have already been discussed, they need not be repeated here. Nevertheless, one may justifiably maintain that the following words, written nearly 50 years before this present work, remain valid: “Even now, after the Council, it is not possible to say that the question of the relation between critical and Church exegesis, historical research and dogmatic tradition has been settled. All that is certain is that from now on it will be impossible to ignore the critical historical method and that, precisely as such, it is in accordance with the aims of theology itself.”\textsuperscript{156} In a fundamental way, the debates about proper exegetical methods were based on different notions of divine inspiration of scripture, the human dimension of biblical authorship, and biblical inerrancy.

Relatedly, the “third motivating element in the move towards a Constitution on Revelation is the most positive one: namely, the biblical movement that has grown stronger and stronger since the turn of the century and has already brought about a fundamentally new attitude

\textsuperscript{154} Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” 155-156.

\textsuperscript{155} See Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” 156-157.

\textsuperscript{156} Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” 158.
to Scripture in large areas of Catholic Christendom.” In some ways, the Council merely had to promote the movement that was already taking place and hope that the role of sacred scripture in the life of the Church would continue to grow and deepen.

The remainder of Ratzinger’s presentation of the “Origin and Background” is mostly historical and need not be summarized here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that he provides the reader with important details about the processes and main figures involved in creating Dei verbum.

6.4.2 Ratzinger on Dei Verbum’s “Preface”

In Ratzinger’s opinion, Dei verbum’s opening sentences are among its best:

Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John: ‘We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:2-3).

It expresses several key ideas all at once. First, God’s priority in the process of revelation is expressed: “the dominance of the word of God, its sovereign supremacy above all human eloquence and activity of the Church is given due prominence.” It also shows that the Church’s activity proceeds from its prior receptivity to God’s word. The Church hands on what she has received. Here, Dei verbum also provides a link with Lumen gentium, showing their coherence. The Church does not exist to bear witness to herself but rather to proclaim the glory of God. The Church is a herald who must be faithful in handing on the message entrusted to her care. The word is not her own to do with as she pleases but to fulfill the mission given to her by

157 Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” 158.

158 DV §1.

159 Ratzinger, “Preface,” 167.
the Lord. Thus, her task is defined with the very opening words as “hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith.”

_Dei verbum’s_ quote from 1 John 1:2-3 similarly reflects “the formal structure of the _Kerygma_, identifying it as an announcement that is based on historical witness—on oral and visual evidence—and thus points to the essential manifestation of Christian revelation, grounded as it is in the incarnation, and to the faith in it.” The quote also indicates the goal towards which the Church’s proclamation aims: fellowship with God.

While acknowledging the value of the opening words of _Dei verbum_, Ratzinger nevertheless admits that they are somewhat illogical. Using the quote from 1 John is a bit incongruous, because the Council is using it to describe its own activity, and yet its own activity is not the same as the activity of the apostles in 1 John:

For the scriptural text is dealing with the actual (material) proclamation, in which the Church passes on the good news of the salvation of God in Christ Jesus, whereas the conciliar text investigates the formal conditions of the proclamation: revelation, tradition, inspiration which, as basic categories, certainly dominate all theological and kerygmatic utterance, but only become clearly conscious in reflection on what has been said, and thus become accessible to investigation. Thus the claim made by the text, compared with the actual intention of the Council, is too great.

Still, the quote has value as an expression of how to understand the nature and purpose of all magisterial teachings.

The last sentence of the Preface expresses a connection between Vatican II and both Trent and Vatican I. Ratzinger understands this connection in a very nuanced and important way.

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160 _DV_ §1.

161 Ratzinger, “Preface,” 168. Ratzinger misrepresents where the quotation came from when he refers to it as “The quotation from the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel” and later in the same paragraph as “Jn 1.”

The statement obviously acknowledges the continuity of ecclesial doctrine and of the activity of Vatican II with prior Councils. However, this is to be understood as “a continuity that is not a rigid external identification with what had gone before, but a preservation of the old, established in the midst of progress.”163 Thus, in agreement with Karl Barth, Ratzinger thinks the inhaerere vestigiis (‘adhering to the footsteps,’ often rendered as ‘following in the footsteps’) of the prior Councils has the connotation of “‘moving forward from the footsteps of those councils.’”164 Dei verbum’s presentation is, in a certain sense, a re-reading (rélecture) of the prior Councils’ documents on revelation, “in which what was written then is interpreted in terms of the present, thus giving a new rendering of both its essentials and its insufficiencies.”165 Lieven Boeve takes this to mean that “In this sense, Vatican II indeed did not as such confirm Trent and Vatican I, but rather engaged in a critical hermeneutics of the teachings of these councils in relation to the theological and ecumenical developments which changed the ‘battle grounds’.”166

6.4.3 Ratzinger on Chapter I of Dei Verbum: “Revelation itself”

This dissertation has shown that Ratzinger strongly urged that the Council should include an opening chapter on “Revelation itself” in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. The fact that it does so, Ratzinger concludes, enables the document to avoid the false idea of the two-fold source of revelation that was present in De fontibus revelationis. Starting with a


presentation of revelation as deriving from God’s own deeds and words sets up the appropriate framework for discussing other related matters in subsequent chapters. Ratzinger sees in Article 2’s personalistic manner of expression the influence of Karl Barth, who himself was influenced by Ebner and Buber, among others. God’s revealing activity is given priority and is “described within a comprehensive survey of salvation history.” As Boeve states, “Revelation thus first of all concerns the encounter in person between God and humanity within concrete history; through this it becomes salvation history and culminates in the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus Christ.”

This marks a contrast with Vatican I’s treatment. As Tracey Rowland remarks: “He [Ratzinger] notes that 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 immediately to the question of its transmission in scripture and tradition, in Dei verbum 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.” Dei verbum gives “far greater emphasis to the personal and theocentric starting-point when compared with Vatican I: it is God himself, the person of God, from whom revelation proceeds and to whom it returns.” The personal character of revelation is also stressed on the side of the receiving subject. As Ratzinger notes: “thus revelation necessarily reaches—also with the person who receives it—into the personal centre of man, it touches him in the depth of his being, not only in his individual

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169 Rowland, “Ratzinger’s Faith,” 50.

faculties, in his will and understanding.”¹⁷¹ As Tracey Rowland phrases this point: “The starting point is now the notion of God as a person whose Revelation is personal.”¹⁷²

Ratzinger thinks that another difference between Dei verbum and Dei Filius is more important still. While Dei Filius spoke of God’s will in terms of decrees, Dei verbum refers to the sacramentum or mystery of God’s will. “Instead of the legalistic view that sees revelation largely as the issuing of divine decrees, we have a sacramental view, which sees law and grace, word and deed, message and sign, the person and his utterance within the one comprehensive unity of the mystery.”¹⁷³ At the heart of this article is the figure of Christ, “For,” Ratzinger states, “the mystery of God is ultimately nothing other than Christ himself.”¹⁷⁴ Concomitantly, revelation is understood dialogically, as a conversation between God and man. As such, there is also an intimation of the ever-present character of revelation, since God is always inviting us to respond to his invitation. This also bespeaks man’s relational nature; man is understood “as the creature of dialogue who, in listening to the word of God, becomes contemporaneous with the presentness of God” and receives “fellowship with God himself.”¹⁷⁵ Tracey Rowland expresses it thusly: “The purpose of this dialogue between God and the human person is not so much the transmission of information but rather the transformation of the person in the life of the Trinity.”¹⁷⁶


¹⁷² Rowland, “Ratzinger’s Faith,” 51.


¹⁷⁶ Rowland, “Ratzinger’s Faith,” 51.
With Rowland’s comment, we begin to see how Dei verbum’s Christo-centrism is placed within a trinitarian framework. In this way, Dei verbum shares aspects of Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift insofar as the latter likewise discusses the essence of revelation in terms of its trinitarian foundation coupled with the centrality of Christ. According to Ratzinger, in Article 2 of Dei verbum, “the movement of revelation proceeds from God (the Father), comes to us through Christ, and admits us to the fellowship of God in the Holy Spirit. . . . Christ stands in the centre as the mediator, his ‘place’ is characterized by the mediating word per; he enfolds us in the dimension of the Spirit, and our being in him means at the same time that we have been led to the Father.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, revelation is discussed in terms of its trinitarian, christological, and pneumatological dimensions.

Additionally, Article 2’s references to God’s deeds and words are significant. Ratzinger sees the addition of deeds alongside words and the expression of their interrelation as an attempt by the Council Fathers to overcome “neo-scholastic intellectualism, for which revelation chiefly meant a store of mysterious supernatural teachings, which automatically reduces faith very much to an acceptance of those supernatural insights.”¹⁷⁸

The emphasis on divine action alongside a Christocentric view continues in Article 3, which opens with God’s creation of the world through the Word, and thus paints knowledge of God through creation in Christological colors. By doing so, Ratzinger argues, the document “emphasizes the unity of divine action, thus excluding from the start any false extrinsicism. . . . creation was already orientated towards salvation.”¹⁷⁹

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¹⁷⁷ Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 172.

¹⁷⁸ Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 172.

¹⁷⁹ Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 173.
Dei verbum then proceeds to discuss the history of revelation and salvation leading up to the time of Christ. Here, the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders is expressed as a complement to the exclusion of extrinsicism mentioned above. As Ratzinger explains: “the revelation to the patriarchs is separated from the creation and treated as a new action (indicated by the use of the word insuper). Thus the idea of the duality of the orders is combined with that of the unity of Logos-determined divine action and a dialectic connection between the two levels of statement.”\textsuperscript{180}

At the same time, salvation history is shown to be universal. The special place of Israel does not negate the universality of salvation: “the particularism of salvation history and the universalism of the divine saving will have to be seen as related one to the other.”\textsuperscript{181}

The above approach is valid and necessary in its own right. However, Ratzinger offers a critique of the manner in which it is accomplished. He thinks that Dei verbum might be overly optimistic and that it would do well to include an acknowledgment of the sinfulness of fallen humanity that stands in need of justification. Article 3 does briefly acknowledge the Fall, but very quickly moves on to the hope established by God’s promise. There is not enough recognition of the fact that “grace is given through the judgment of the cross and thus itself always retains the character of judgment.”\textsuperscript{182}

Boeve thinks there is a connection between the criticism Ratzinger expresses here and Ratzinger’s critique of Gaudium et spes. Referring to Ratzinger’s comments on Dei verbum 3, Boeve writes: “Most probably, one can find here a trace of the serious discussions from 1964-5

\textsuperscript{180} Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 173.

\textsuperscript{181} Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 173.

\textsuperscript{182} Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 174.
about the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern Word, *Gaudium et spes*, on the occasion of which Ratzinger expressed his critical reservations against there being too large of an opening of the church to the world.”

At the end, Article 3 presents the time before Christ—both within and outside of Israel—as leading towards the coming of the redeemer. In doing so, it “expresses again very happily the unity of the whole of pre-Christian history and the special nature of God’s mission for Israel.”

Article 3’s treatment of pre-Christian history leads up to the theme of Christ, the ultimate word of God, in both senses of the term ‘ultimate’: final and supreme. With the coming of the Word made flesh, there is continuity with what came before (e.g., with the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Covenant) as well as something new: “instead of words, we have the Word. Christ no longer speaks merely of God, but he is himself the speech of God.”

Christ is the perfection of revelation not simply as some arbitrarily spoken last word but as the highest possible instance of God’s self-expression. There could be no higher form of revelation than God Incarnate: “beyond him there is nothing more to say. . . . In him the dialogue of God has attained its goal; it has become a union.”

Ratzinger thinks that this teaching moves beyond positivism, intellectualism, and doctrinalism. For the revelation of Christ is more than a matter of revealing something about something, it is about the interpersonal “relation of the human ‘I’ to the divine ‘thou’, so that the

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184 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 175.

185 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 175.

186 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 175.
purpose of this dialogue is ultimately not information, but unity and transformation.”187 As Aaron Pidel relates, “Ratzinger tries to evoke the richness of religious experience through the personalist language of dialogue and encounter. Even though there is no dialogue without meaningful content, dialogue always conveys more—union, person, presence.”188 This personal dimension is important for Ratzinger, since he personally witnessed dangers of overly objectivized attitudes towards the faith. As Tracey Rowland relates: “As a young priest he was often shocked to find Catholics who obeyed all the ecclesial rules and regulations and assented to all the doctrines but did not experience any joy in the faith because the whole affective side of their souls was not integrated with the intellectual side. Their faith as such was an intellectual assent they gave to a series of dogmatic propositions.”189 For this reason, it is important to stress the interpersonal relationship between Christians and Christ. The purpose, the goal, of revelation is to bring us into union with Christ and, through him, with the Holy Trinity.

According to Ratzinger, Christ is not only the end but also a new beginning, “a beginning that necessarily continues, remaining through the whole of history a presence and a promise of what is to come.”190 God continues to address man throughout the centuries. This on-going self-disclosure of God still occurs through Christ, who remains present. And Christ not only reveals God but also reveals humanity to itself.

Drawing upon the work of René Latourelle, Ratzinger points out an unintended parallel between Vatican I and Vatican II, the latter of which does not negate the former but shifts it into

187 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 175.


190 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 175.
a more appropriate light, moving away from a focus on the Church herself to a focus on Christ and his perfect witness. “Vatican I said that the Church itself was an unshakeable witness of its own divine mission because of its miraculous extent, its holiness, fruitfulness, unity and constancy. Vatican II says that Christ, through his own presence and revelation, through his signs and words, his death and resurrection, is the fullness of revelation, which he himself guarantees with his divine witness.”\(^{191}\) This statement expresses that the Church’s witness is dependent upon the life she draws from Christ, “who is himself the sign and content of revelation.”\(^{192}\)

Furthermore, revelation in Christ is final and definitive because there cannot and will not be any new period in the history of revelation. Christ has inaugurated the new, final, and definitive stage of salvation history, indeed of history itself. The eschaton has already started. Nevertheless, man’s progress and development has not been impeded but is rooted in Christ and is awaiting his return; man now stands in the final era of history, however long that era might be.\(^{193}\)

Article 5 discusses the proper response due to divine revelation: the obedience of faith. In this article, Ratzinger sees both an important connection with Vatican I’s presentation as well as notable differences. Like Vatican I, \textit{Dei verbum} speaks about the interior assistance of the Holy Spirit, the inner workings of grace that assist man in making free assent in faith with one’s entire self to God who reveals. However, in this context at least, \textit{Dei verbum} omits Vatican I’s reference to the external signs (e.g., prophecy and miracles). Given the modern world’s tendency to have a very positivistic outlook, Ratzinger sees this as a prudent tactical decision: “no further


\(^{192}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 176.

\(^{193}\) See Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 176-177.
attempt is made to make the certainty of faith measurable by positivist criteria so that it may compete with the positivism which dominates all contemporary thinking.”\(^{194}\)

Similarly, Ratzinger sees a development from Vatican I to Vatican II’s expressions about faith. In Vatican I, faith is defined in terms of believing that what God has revealed is true. In *Dei verbum*, however, assent to what has been revealed (revelato) is replaced by assent to the revelation (revelationi) given by God. Again, this is a qualified move away from positivism.\(^{195}\) For, it “in no way removes the intellectual component of faith, but understands it as a component in a wider whole.”\(^{196}\)

The final sentence of Article 5 adds something not expressed in *Dei Filius*: the effects of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in perfecting faith and leading to ever deeper insight into divine revelation. Ratzinger sees in this statement a characteristically Catholic understanding of faith in contrast with Protestant notions of faith. “For it would have been very difficult for Protestant theologians to use an expression such as the ‘perfecting’ of faith. For them faith is a decision between ‘yes’ and ‘no’, which is made either entirely or not at all, but which cannot be conceived of in terms of different degrees.”\(^{197}\) The Catholic understanding of faith as a theological *virtue* enables the conception of faith’s growth towards greater and greater

\(^{194}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 178.

\(^{195}\) Ratzinger skips over the fact that assent to truth is still expressed in Article 5. In fact, *DV* §5 cites Vatican I when it speaks of God’s grace and the Holy Spirit “opening the eyes of the mind and giving ‘joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it.’” The citation given in footnote 5 reads: Second Council of Orange, Canon 7: Denzinger 180 (377); First Vatican Council, loc. cit.: Denzinger 1791 (3010).

\(^{196}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 178. The translation of *Dei verbum* given on the Vatican website loses this change in terminology by rendering the Latin as “assenting to the truth revealed by him.” The word “veritas” (truth) does not even appear in the official Latin text.

\(^{197}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 178.
perfection. At the same time, God’s initiative remains in this understanding. Ratzinger argues that “it is the Holy Ghost that appears as the effective subject of the *perfectio* that is related to the *opus*. Thus God remains here the one who is really acting, but his activity penetrates man steadily and increasingly.”\(^{198}\) Thus, one’s increase in faith is still rooted in God’s gift of faith to one, but God’s gift can gradually enter into one’s life in deeper and more comprehensive ways. There is growth and development in the life of faith.

Ratzinger sees here a foundation for Chapter II of *Dei verbum*’s concept of “tradition,” which “takes place essentially as the growing insight, mediated by the Holy Spirit, into revelation that has been given once and for all; it is the *perfectio* of faith which the Spirit brings about in the Church.”\(^{199}\)

The last article of Chapter I, Article 6, shows a reversal in the order of presentation from Vatican I to Vatican II. Only at the end of the chapter does *Dei verbum* raise the possibility of natural knowledge of God. The reversal of presentation is advisable in Ratzinger’s view, but it also in no way downplays the importance of what Vatican I taught. Human reason bears a certain responsibility, which both Councils acknowledge. “Vatican II had no reason to suppress this basic idea developed with such care by Vatican I; on the contrary, in dealing with the onslaughts of atheism it will have increasing importance.”\(^{200}\)

6.4.4 Ratzinger on Chapter II of Dei Verbum

Chapter II (§7-10) of *Dei verbum* treats the transmission of divine revelation. Ratzinger thinks this chapter evidences the struggle out of which it was born. Article 7, he insists, is based

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198 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 179.

199 Ratzinger, “Chapter I,” 179.

upon a parallel text from the Council of Trent (DS 1501). However, it also employs new expressions. “By describing the activity of Jesus in relation to the Gospel not only as ‘promulgating’, but also as ‘fulfilling’, it plays down the narrow legal aspect to which the categorization of the Christian message under the idea of nova lex [new law] had ultimately led, which is what lies behind the concept of promulgation.”\textsuperscript{201}

Once again, the unity of salvation history and of the two covenants is expressed. Ratzinger sees in this “an historical and sacramental” rather than “a juridical and legal account of the Christian reality.”\textsuperscript{202} He sees the same movement away from legalistic accounts in the description of the Apostles’ preaching in terms of gift and communication: “again, instead of the legal concept, we have the idea of grace and the principle of dialogue: proclamation as communication in the giving activity of God.”\textsuperscript{203} According to Ratzinger’s interpretation, this has ramifications for the concept of tradition insofar as what is to be handed on is no longer understood as a promulgated law but graced communication.

Thus, there is an expansion of the idea of tradition. Tradition is more than doctrinal teaching coming from Christ. As Ratzinger notes: “above and beyond the word of the Lord, both living with him and seeing what he did are described as origins of tradition.”\textsuperscript{204} Similarly, the apostles are said to ‘hand on’ what they had received not by doctrinal instruction alone, but “by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances.”\textsuperscript{205} To these is added a pneumatological

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{201} Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 181.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 181.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 181.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 182.
\item \textsuperscript{205} DV §7.
\end{itemize}
dimension. Trent had spoken of the dictation of the Holy Spirit, but *Dei verbum* instead speaks of what the apostles learned through the Holy Spirit’s *prompting* (*suggerente*).

Ratzinger sees in all this an intentional advancement of the concept of revelation, which bears a striking resemblance to the objective of his own theology of revelation. He interprets *Dei verbum*’s intention thusly:

The point is certainly not to play off the theology of salvation history against word theology, but in place of a narrowly doctrinal conception of revelation, as had been expressed in the Tridentine word theology, to open up a comprehensive view of the real character of revelation, which—precisely because it is concerned with the whole man—is founded not only in the word that Christ preached, but in the whole of the living experience of his person, thus embracing what is said and what is unsaid, what the Apostles in their turn are not able to express fully in words, but which is found in the whole reality of the Christian existence of which they speak, far transcending the framework of what has been explicitly formulated in words.

The ‘handing on’ (*tradere*) of revelation both contains and is accomplished by more than words of instruction; tradition thus occurs through the whole life of the Church and is addressed to the totality of man’s being not just to man’s intellect.

Again, the Holy Spirit vivifies the process of the transmission of revelation understood as broader than the teaching of revealed truths. For, “the guidance of the Paraclete promised to the disciples is not a ‘dictatio’, but ‘suggestio’, the remembering and understanding of the unspoken in what was once spoken, which reaches down to the depths of a process that cannot be measured by the terms ‘praedicatio oralis’ (Trent has ‘ab ipsius Chrsi ore’), and the transmission of which cannot therefore be merely a process of the handing-down of words.”

Almost as a side-note, Ratzinger remarks that the reference to ‘apostolic men’ in addition to ‘the Apostles’ intentionally leaves open the question of the authorship of the Gospels.

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206 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 182.
The next point highlighted by Ratzinger reflects a theme we saw earlier in this dissertation as it corresponds directly with his own understanding of tradition and its relation to apostolic succession. The sentence in question is the first sentence of the second paragraph of *DV* §7 coupled with the opening of the following sentence. “But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, ‘handing over’ to them the authority to teach in their own place.’ This sacred tradition . . .” Sacred tradition is thus defined as the handing over (*tradere*) of apostolic authority to the apostles’ successors. Here is expressed “the connection between the principles of succession and tradition, first made by Irenaeus. . . . In fact for Irenaeus both principles are indissolubly one: ‘The succession is the visible manifestation of tradition, tradition is the manifestation of succession.’”

Ratzinger also points to Tertullian’s view as promoting the same understanding of tradition and once again contrasts this view with the gnostic understanding of tradition: “‘Tradition’ appeared in both cases (in contrast to the gnostic idea of tradition) not so much as a material principle as a formal one.”

The last sentence of Article 7 expresses the limitations of knowledge on this side of the eschaton. The Church on earth sees as in a mirror. Ratzinger sees a vague possibility of a criticism of tradition here: “for when everything is seen and read only in a mirror, one must expect distortions and shifts in emphasis.”

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207 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 182. In the footnote, Ratzinger points to his own attempt to explain Irenaeus’s position, which is also his own, as early as 1962 in Joseph Ratzinger, “Primacy, Episcopate, and Apostolic Succession” in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and the Primacy*, 51f.

208 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 182. Here we have a direct rebuttal to Brotherton’s interpretation of Ratzinger encountered earlier, which denied that Ratzinger presents a notion of tradition as a formal principle.

Additionally, Ratzinger notes that Trent spoke of traditions in the plural, while *Dei verbum* speaks of tradition in the singular (except in one instance, where 2 Thessalonians 2:15 is quoted\(^\text{210}\)). One again, Ratzinger perceives a significant difference here. “Vatican II starts from an abstract concept, whereas Trent was concerned with the concrete phenomenon, the actually existing traditions.”\(^\text{211}\) By traditions, however, Trent did not mean a collection of extra-biblical doctrines but the Church’s life as lived in the liturgy and other practices. “One saw the question of tradition as the actual problem of the Church’s existence, not the problem of the historical justification for each of the statements to be found in its catechism, as happened during the controversy of Vatican II.”\(^\text{212}\)

Article 8, according to Ratzinger, is the Council’s attempt to provide a clear and positive explication of the notion of tradition. Ratzinger explicitly points to Yves Congar’s influence on the text, which he says is also detectable in Article 7. In Article 8, one finds a “dynamic and organic idea of tradition.”\(^\text{213}\) As in Article 7, tradition is shown to be multi-faceted, involving the Church’s “teaching, life, and worship” (*DV* §8). Thus, tradition, according to Ratzinger, “has its place not only in the explicitly traditional statements of Church doctrine, but in the unstated—and often unstatable—elements of the whole service of the Christian worship of God and the life of the Church.”\(^\text{214}\)

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\(^{210}\) See *DV* §8: “Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15).”

\(^{211}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 183.

\(^{212}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 184.

\(^{213}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 184.

\(^{214}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 184.
Ratzinger proceeds by expressing his wish that Cardinal Albert Meyer’s suggestion that the Constitution on Divine Revelation should admit of negative traditions that can and should be cast aside had been incorporated by the Council to prevent a dangerous misunderstanding that this definition of tradition could lead to. In this regard, “Ratzinger complains that the constitution hardly makes room in its views on the development of tradition for a legitimate criticism of tradition.”\(^\text{215}\) Ratzinger’s interpretation of Meyer’s oral intervention on September 30, 1964 is as follows:

\([N]ot\) everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition; in other words, not every tradition that arises in the Church is a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ. There is a distorting, as well as a legitimate, tradition. As examples of this negative kind of tradition Meyer mentioned a kind of piety that is opposed to the spirit of liturgy and a casuistic and untheological moralism. He asked that the text should state not only that \textit{in statu viatorum} tradition proceeds in a spirit of progress and ever deeper insight into faith, but that there is also the possibility of a \textit{deficere}, and in fact, this possibility is constantly being realized. Consequently, tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically; we have Scripture as a criterion for this indispensable criticism of tradition, and tradition must therefore always be related back to it and measured by it.\(^\text{216}\)

Ratzinger laments that Meyer’s intervention was not reflected more substantially in the text. He concurs that scripture should be seen as having a corrective influence on tradition, which implies that sometimes tradition goes astray. Instead, the Council merely removed the clause referring to all that the Church has and thus reduced a triad to a duality: the Church “hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes” (\textit{DV} §8). According to the \textit{relatio} of an earlier draft of the document, the removal of ‘all that she has’ “is intended to make clear that all that, and only that, proceeds from the apostolic tradition ‘quae substantialia sunt Ecclesiae’ . . .

\(^{215}\) Boeve, “Revelation,” 426.

\(^{216}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 185.
Ratzinger thinks this limited concession is unsatisfactory, “and it is regretted that the suggestion of the American Cardinal was not, in fact, taken up.” This stands as one of Ratzinger’s most explicit negative criticisms of *Dei verbum* and of the Council in general: “On this point Vatican II has unfortunately not made any progress, but has more or less ignored the whole question of the criticism of tradition. By doing this, it has missed an important opportunity for ecumenical dialogue.” Thus, this lacuna is not only a failure of the Church to speak adequately *ad intra* but also a failure to improve her relations with her separated brethren.

According to Ratzinger’s report, Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger of Montreal, Canada had opposed a formulation found in the second paragraph of *DV* §8, which speaks of tradition’s dynamic character insofar as there is a growth in understanding that comes by way of the faithful and not just by means of magisterial proclamation. “Again, three factors of growth are listed: contemplation and study on the part of believers; inner understanding, which comes from spiritual experience; and the proclamation by the teaching office.”

Ratzinger proceeds to elucidate clearly and profoundly the controversy of the second paragraph of *Dei verbum* §8. Not all of the details can be presented here. In brief, Cardinal Ruffini and Cardinal Léger both opposed it. Vatican II left out a reference to Vincent de Lérins that had been cited by Trent and Vatican I. “The three basic principles offered by Lérins to distinguish the true tradition from heresy were that something had to have been held by

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217 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 185.

218 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 185.

219 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 185-186.

220 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 186. In the same paragraph, Ratzinger goes on to refer to the magisterium as a “critical” but “not a productive” component of the process.
everyone, everywhere in the Church from the earliest times.”

No reference is found to Lérins in *Dei verbum*. Rather, in §8, it states “The tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit.” In the end, Ratzinger argues that Vatican II was going beyond Trent and Vatican I without meaning to negate either. “It is not that Vatican II is taking back what was intended by those quotations [of Vincent de Lérins in the documents of the two previous ecumenical councils] . . . but it has another conception of the nature of historical identity and continuity.” Ultimately, *Dei verbum* tried to express that “the growth of tradition is a growth in the understanding of the reality that was given at the beginning.”

As Rowland explains, “Ratzinger noted that it is not an easy matter to distinguish between 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.” Thus there is a continuity with the growth in understanding and what was present at the origin.

The final paragraph of §8 uses the Fathers of the Church as an example of the dynamic notion of tradition developed earlier in the text. According to Ratzinger, “the purpose of the statement is to declare that the fathers are a specific source of tradition, not in the sense of settled individual questions, but as an expression of the act of understanding, which assimilates what has been passed down and holds it for the present.” This paragraph also affirms that Christ continues to speak to his bride. Ratzinger interprets this to mean that the individual believer’s

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221 Rowland, “Benedict XVI,” 54.


225 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 189.
dialogue with God is situated within the larger dialogue between God and the Church, “thus presenting in a wholly scriptural way the irreplaceable importance of the Church for the process of understanding Scripture.” Here, then, Ratzinger sees a correlation with his own thought: the Church is the one believing subject and recipient of revelation and the individual is a receiver of revelation as a member of this one, trans-temporal subject.

Article 9 of *Dei verbum* explains the relationship between sacred scripture and sacred tradition. First, Ratzinger notes that this text reflects the strong rejection of the ‘two sources of revelation’ theory, and they are both shown to flow from one and the same divine source, which more accurately reflects the order of ontology so important to Ratzinger’s own view of revelation. “Indeed,” writes Boeve, “a crucial distinction is made between (a) the occurrence of revelation in history and (b) the way in which Scripture and tradition bear witness to this revelatory occurrence (as their common divine source).” Despite the correspondence with his own thought, Ratzinger nevertheless takes the opportunity to raise the objection once again that the Council missed the opportunity to speak of the possibility of “a distorting tradition” and the possibility of scripture playing a corrective and critical role with respect to wayward traditions.

Article 9 offers a definition of scripture and of tradition. According to Ratzinger’s reading of the text, scripture is defined with respect to what it is, while tradition is defined

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226 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 189.
227 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 190.
228 Boeve, “Revelation,” 421.
functionally as “what it does: it hands on the word of God, but is not the word of God.” This interpretation corresponds to his own views of the matter. The text goes on to affirm that scripture does not by itself (alone) provide the Church with certainty about revelation. He explains the background to the formulation and inclusion of the text, which came after much controversy. The formulation itself likely came from Bishop Carlo Colombo (Auxiliary Bishop of Milan). Ratzinger cites Heinrich Ott as one who correctly argues that Protestants should not have a problem with this formulation either, since they also acknowledge that certainty does not come merely from the words on the page but requires the interior work of the Holy Spirit.

Ratzinger takes an opportunity to once again promote his understanding of tradition as a formal principle. He thinks the points made above can be explained that way, when he writes: “The function of tradition is seen here as making certain of the truth, i.e., it belongs in the formal and gnoseological sphere—and, in fact, this is the sphere in which the significance of tradition is to be sought.”

The last sentence of Article 9 does present some ecumenical difficulties, when it insists that scripture and tradition are owed the same reverence. Ratzinger notes that the history of the text is complex, since it draws from Trent, which—in turn—drew upon St. Basil. The meaning of tradition here must be taken into account then and not understood in ways foreign to the origins of its formulation as it is found in Dei verbum. As Ratzinger explains: “It is not a total

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231 See Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 195.
description of the relationship between Scripture and tradition, but simply a profession of faith in
the unassailability of dogma, the outward form of the Church’s faith.”

Article 10 treats the relationship of the Church to sacred scripture and tradition. The first
point made is that the entire populace of the Church (not just the hierarchy) works together to
preserve and actualize God’s word. The ecclesial understanding of the word thus comes to the
fore here in a way that is inclusive of all the faithful. Ratzinger sees the inclusion of the laity as
progress over the presentation of Humani generis (DS 3886). While the latter’s terminology of
“the magisterium alone” is echoed in the second paragraph of DV §10, it is contextualized by the
whole of §10 to make clear that “the function of authentic interpretation which is restricted to the
teaching office is a specific service that does not embrace the whole of the way in which the
word is present, and in which it performs an irreplaceable function precisely for the whole
Church, the bishops and the laity together.” Furthermore, it is particularly important to point
out, as Ratzinger does, that: “For the first time a text of the teaching office expressly points out
the subordination of the teaching office to the word, i.e. its function as a servant.” In an
interesting turn of phrase, He describes the task of the magisterium as including the defense of
“the dominion of the word of God both against modernism and against traditionalism.”

Ratzinger views the final paragraph of Chapter II as a sort of summary that expresses the
mutual relationship of scripture, tradition, and magisterium. The function of each of these is
understood only in connection with that of the others. In this way, they must go together: none of

234 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 196. See also ibid., 197 and Latourelle, La Révélation, 34.
235 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 197.
236 Ratzinger, “Chapter II,” 197.
them is independent. The text concludes with a reference to the Word itself—not just the seven individual sacraments—as having saving power.237

6.4.5 Ratzinger on Chapter VI of Dei Verbum

Chapter VI, the final chapter of _Dei verbum_, is the final chapter and is comprised of §§21-26. It discusses “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church.” Ratzinger was one of the _periti_ assigned to the sub-subcommission tasked with drafting this chapter using the in-put given by the Council Fathers. As with the creation of each chapter of _Dei verbum_, the _periti_’s role was to sift through the conciliar interventions and synthesize them into a coherent draft that incorporated the most valid and important points suggested by the Council members.

To start, Ratzinger points out the two sources that were united to form the basis of _Dei verbum_ Chapter VI: 1) _De fontibus_ (Texts A, B, and C) and 2) _De Verbo Dei_ written by the Secretariat on Christian Unity, Cardinal Bea (incorporated beginning with Text D). It has already been shown that in various instances Ratzinger suggested that Cardinal Bea’s work be used as the basis for a chapter on scripture in the Church. While it was not the only text used, it did form a substantial basis of Chapter VI.

Article 21 insists that the Church venerates the divine scriptures “as she venerates the body of the Lord,” which Ratzinger traces back to Jerome and Augustine. Like the author of this dissertation, for some of the Council Fathers this statement seems striking and in need of very important clarification so as not to down-play the uniqueness of transubstantiation and the worship (_latria_) due to the most holy Eucharist. The Theological Commission’s response to these concerns was limited to changing the word ‘_velut_’ (‘like,’ ‘just as,’ or ‘as though’) to ‘_sic ut et_’

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(‘as’). According to Ratzinger, the former could more easily be misinterpreted, but the latter is clearly a coordinating phrase. \(^{238}\)

On this point, further expressed through the images of ‘the table of God’s word’ and ‘the table of Christ’s body,’ there is a correlation between *Dei verbum* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* insofar as both aim to teach

that the liturgy of the word was not just a preliminary part of the Mass that could be more or less dispensed with, but of fundamentally equal value with the liturgy that is sacramental in the narrower sense; that the Church, as the community of the body of Christ, is definitely also the community of the Logos, living on the word, so that the ‘flesh’ and ‘word’ in which the ‘body of Christ’, the word made flesh, comes to us becomes our ‘bread’. \(^{239}\)

The next sentence of *Dei verbum* \(^{240}\) mentions why the sacred scriptures in particular are part of the “supreme rule of faith”: “since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles.”

While these words are powerful in their own right, Ratzinger nevertheless offers commentary that illuminates their meaning and deepens an appreciation for the reality they express. Ratzinger’s almost poetic explication of the central point is beautiful and is worth quoting at length:

> [T]he particular character of Scripture as opposed to tradition resides in the fact that, as it were, it breathes ‘the smell of the earth’ of the land of the patriarchs; it gives us the unmistakable tone in which the prophets talked, the way in which Israel prayed in its great and its sorrowful days; it gives us the voice of Jesus Christ—in the various and particularly striking Aramaic phrases that were handed down untranslated; we hear him speak his native language; we meet him across the gulf of centuries, as he lived, a man among men. We also encounter the passionate temperament of Paul; the peaceful voice of Luke—in

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\(^{238}\) See Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 262. The English translation on the Vatican website translates *sicut et* into “just as,” which does not seem to avoid the confusion that the choice of phrasing meant to avoid.

\(^{239}\) Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 263.

\(^{240}\) *DV* §21.
short, the humanity of the word of God, its original historical shape, remains close to us through this document and through it alone.\textsuperscript{241}

Sacred scripture provides the reader or hearer with a unique and intimate immediacy to the sacred authors themselves and to the Holy Spirit who inspired them. “Inspiration, then,” writes Pidel, “is nothing other than a privileged dialogue with God that has become permanently accessible.”\textsuperscript{242} Most importantly, in the scriptures, the words of Christ himself are attested to more than in any other source. Following from this, sacred scripture is normative, powerful, and full of strength; it “preserves for us the basic dialogue of God with man and constantly renews this possibility.”\textsuperscript{243}

Aaron Pidel sees connections between Ratzinger’s earlier and later work on revelation on this point. “We find great consistency, then, between the theology of the later Ratzinger and the desiderata of the earlier Ratzinger. The mystical origin of revelation in Bonaventure, becomes the dialogical origin of inspiration in Ratzinger. The language of dialogue evokes the interpersonal quality of revelation and its irreducibility to verbal formulae.”\textsuperscript{244}

While there was a stronger expression of the role of scripture as norm and rule in draft E of the document, there is still mention of the fact that the Church is both nourished and regulated by sacred scripture. Ratzinger explains well the intent of Text E and thinks its central contention remains valuable, even if only a shadow of its expression remained in the final text: scripture should be understood “as a self-contained, clearly delimited entity, a regula which, precisely

\textsuperscript{241} Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 263.

\textsuperscript{242} Pidel, “Biblical Inspiration,” 56.

\textsuperscript{243} Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 263.

\textsuperscript{244} Pidel, “Biblical Inspiration,” 56-57.
because it stands so unalterably and indestructively [*sic*] in itself, requires that man constantly measures himself against it.”

Article 22 seems fairly straightforward at first glance. It acknowledges the Church’s respect for ancient translations of the scriptures and desires that suitable translations continue to be prepared in many vernacular languages in this day and age so that the faithful may have easier access to its fruits and benefits. Against the backdrop of history, however, §22 takes on great historical significance. As Ratzinger notes: “The barriers that had been erected from the 13th, and especially from the 15th, century against the Bible in the vernacular and the reading of it by those who were not theologians, are here firmly removed. . . . If at that time the fight against the Reformation had led to a sequestration of Scripture, now the concern for dialogue led to a return to it in the most intensive way.” Additionally, past reference to the Vulgate as ‘authentic’ has been expanded to include the venerable ancient translations of various Eastern languages and encourages the creation of new vernacular translations based on the original texts.

The Septuagint is given special prominence, since it was heavily used in the early Church and had an impact on “the Greek New Testament and its Christian re-reading of the Old Testament.” Ratzinger thinks this also sheds light on the reason the Vulgate was and still is revered: “it is the Bible of the [Latin] Fathers, and as a translation it is inevitably also in part an interpretation, it shows us the way in which the ancient Church of the West read, understood and accepted the Bible. Hence it is not simply Scripture, but a piece of the Church’s interpretation of

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245 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 264.

246 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 264.

247 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 265.
Scripture and hence ‘part of tradition.’”\textsuperscript{248} Especially through Ratzinger’s helpful commentary on this passage, then, at the same time that the value of the Vulgate is moderated and contextualized alongside other valuable translations, so too is its value expressed in a very reasonable way that helps one understand its prominence as something much more than a merely cultural—or almost fanatical—attachment to the Latin language itself. Rather, it is important for a proper understanding of the Latin Fathers’ theology and their interpretation of scripture, just as the Septuagint is important for understanding the mind of ancient, Greek-speaking Jews as well as the formation of the Greek New Testament and the ancient Christian reading of both Testaments.

Ratzinger thinks that the explanation of the value of the Vulgate coupled with the irreplaceable value of the original texts may actually express Vatican II’s teaching on the relation between scripture and tradition better than the direct statements of Chapter II. Furthermore, he sees insights from \textit{Lumen gentium} and \textit{Unitatis redintegratio} having an impact here. He notes that “the isolation and the virtual absolutization of the Latin Church has been done away with, and it is seen together with the non-Latin Churches again as the one total Church, so that one cannot speak of the Latin tradition alone, though before they are mentioned, the same things must also be said about the traditions of the East. The extension of the horizon that Vatican II has brought about . . . proves here to be not only a human, but a truly theological phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{249}

Ratzinger sees in these comments about biblical translations as a well-balanced two-fold movement of going back as well as moving forward, indeed, of going back in a way that makes possible a new way forward. For one thing: “if both the Catholic and the Reformed Churches are

\textsuperscript{248} Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 265.

\textsuperscript{249} Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 265.
going back beyond the classical translations of their own tradition to the source that unites them all, the way is opened up for new translating in common, and with translating, reading and understanding in common.”

The return to the original texts, then, provides the basis for *Dei verbum*’s encouragement of new translations created and used jointly by Catholics and Protestants alike.

Article 23 of *Dei verbum* concerns the importance of biblical interpretation. In this text, exegesis is seen as serving the Church’s mission: “it follows from the constant duty of the Church to immerse itself ever anew and more deeply in the word of God, in order to be able to offer ever anew the water of life that it contains.” Ratzinger thinks the reference to the Church as spouse or bride of the word reflects the connection between love and profound understanding, which can only come from a true intimacy.

Ratzinger then presents different stages in the development of the text, which led to the final version “describing the task of the Church as a constantly renewed one, without making this to a continuous line of progress.” Ratzinger thinks this abandonment of the idea of progress makes sense from an ecumenical perspective as well. The Reformation and the Eastern Churches alike were skeptical of “progress,” albeit in different ways. “The Reformation was based on the denial of any continuous linear progress and on the constant direct return to Scripture; the Eastern Churches are based on a strict adherence to the position of the Church in the time of the

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250 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 265.

251 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 266.

252 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 266.
Thus, the emphasis in *Dei verbum* §23 is on renewal rather than on progress, which itself often has very modern connotations.

The encouragement of Patristic and liturgical study may seem out of place in the text. However, Ratzinger thinks its motivations are right and just. Ratzinger has been shown elsewhere to hold firmly that scripture cannot be understood properly apart from tradition or outside of the communion of the Church. Thus, with this encouragement, the text is trying to maintain the proper role of tradition in biblical interpretation. As Ratzinger warns: “to separate Scripture from the total tradition of the Church leads either to Biblicism or modernism or both.”

Ratzinger’s explanation continues from a particular acknowledgment of human intellectual tendencies: “For, given the way the human mind works, it [separating scripture from the whole tradition] would not result in a more immediate relation to Scripture, but would rather allow itself to be fitted into one’s own particular intellectual tradition. Thus it is factually justified to recommend the Fathers and the liturgies as helps in understanding Scripture.”

These remarks suggest that Ratzinger was among the minority of the members on the commission that pushed for such an expression to be included in the text.

The next sentence of the text calls for the cooperation of Catholic exegetes and other theologians in the study and explication of sacred scripture. This reflects a desire to overcome certain difficulties presented by the circumstances and habits of contemporary scholarship. As Ratzinger notes: “the development of theological studies has led to the situation that the various disciplines have grown far apart from one another and become so specialized that, in many cases,

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253 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 266.


they are scarcely able to understand one another.” The need for specializations within theology must not lead to the complete segregation of branches of theology. Theologians from all fields must make a conscious effort to remain connected to and informed by other branches of theology. Such cooperation is expedient for the healthy growth of theology in service to the Church.

Ratzinger thinks that the problem of isolation of disciplines “is most clearly seen in the relation between exegesis and systematic theology, as the basic form of the relation between critical historical method and statements, supported by faith, about the whole of Christian reality.” Going beyond what the text itself says in any explicit way, Ratzinger asserts that “The actual task will fall to systematic theology, which must attempt to speak of the whole and, in doing so, include and assimilate the more specific statement of the interpreter of Scripture.”

The final sentence of §23 does not reject historical-critical exegesis as many had tried in the past, but it does insist on the need for it to be incorporated into and balanced by other methods; in short, Catholic exegetes are reminded of the need for “following the mind of the Church” in their efforts. Similarly, they are reminded of the necessary submission to the authority of the magisterium.

Dei verbum’s understanding of the role of the magisterium vis-à-vis biblical interpretation is illuminated through a consideration of the development of the text. As Ratzinger relates: “Vigilantia [vigilance] was used in Text F to replace the previous term sub ductu [under the leadership], in order to express the fact that the function of the teaching office is not to lead

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256 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 267.
the way—progress is the concern of scholarship; basically, the teaching office has the negative function of describing impenetrable terrain as such.”

The reason that Catholic exegesis must remain connected to other theological disciplines, attuned to the mind of the Church, and needs to be conducted under the magisterium’s supervision is related to the *telos* of exegesis. Scholarly biblical interpretation cannot be isolated from other aspects of theology and ecclesial life, because it does not exist for its own sake. Its *raison d’être* is to assist the Church’s kerygma. “It is not self-sufficient, but ultimately serves the transmission of the word of God. Just as the Bible comes from preaching, work on the Bible must lead back to preaching.” With these words, Ratzinger skillfully expresses the relation between the Bible’s origins and its ends, which together inform sound hermeneutical principles for its interpretation.

Article 24 discusses scripture’s role within theology. While scripture acts as a foundation for theology, it also plays an active role insofar as it “strengthens” and “rejuvenates” theology. Here, too, the phrase “together with tradition” arises. Once again, Ratzinger thinks this reflects the desires of a ‘minority’ group. Again, it seems clear that Ratzinger agreed with the minority insofar as he argues in their favor. He says that, despite the fact that it reflects “the wishes of a Council minority . . . it corresponds also to the spirit of Chapter II and, properly understood, to the facts of the case as well.”

Given the fundamental and vivifying functions of the Bible with respect to theology, the depiction of scripture as “the soul of sacred theology”—an image drawn from Leo XIII—is apt

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259 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 268.

260 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 268.

261 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 268.
indeed. Ratzinger points out that Vatican II also employs the same image in the Decree on Priestly Formation, Optatam Totius. The practical implications are of grand importance. In the past, scripture was often used as a means of proving already formulated doctrinal statements. This new directive means “that in the future the Bible must first be seen, considered and questioned on its own terms, and that only then can the development of tradition and dogmatic analysis take place.”

Article 24 also says, “the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired, really are the word of God.” Somewhat dialectically, Ratzinger comments, on the one hand, that “This formulation . . . was intended to state in a quite central place the essential difference between Scripture and tradition and the special pre-eminence of Scripture,” and on the other hand, that this “is attempting to bring out the special importance of Scripture that is ultimately based on the fact that it is as a whole, the word of revelation, because it is inspired, which cannot be said of any other document of the Christian past, and thus proves Scripture to be the fundamental form of ‘tradition’.” Scripture is preeminent as the inspired word of God, which gives it a special place with respect to the ‘handing on’ of revelation.

The import of Article 25 is fully understood only in its historical context. For a long time, scripture had often not played a major role in the individual Christian’s spiritual life and prayer, and was not always the chief basis of sermons either. Here, Vatican II calls for the Bible to play a central role in Christian life, even for the individual, and cites St. Jerome’s famous dictum: “for ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” Ratzinger interprets the Constitution’s quotation of Jerome to mean that Dei verbum sees the reading of scripture as more than intellectual

262 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 269.

263 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 270.
instruction. It is viewed as “prayer, as entering into that dialogue with the Lord.”Interestingly, Ratzinger thinks that the renewal of scripture in Catholic piety could and should also influence “exegesis, which otherwise may easily find itself in a merely intellectual climate and will ultimately be lacking in depth, however much it may gain in historical knowledge.” Similarly, the individual reading of scripture and the reading of scripture in the midst of communal liturgical celebration must be mutually enriching.

Finally, the role of scripture in the Church’s missionary activity ad extra is mentioned. On this point, the Council encourages the publication of versions of the Bible with suitable footnotes that would help for non-Christians to read the Bible. This encouragement shows a renewed trust in the power of the Word and the desire to make Christ present everywhere by means of the sacred scriptures.

The first and last articles of Chapter VI (§21 and §26) form an inclusio insofar as both draw a comparison between scripture and the Eucharist. The point made here, according to Ratzinger, may be expressed thus: “the word of God and the body of Christ, word and sacrament, belong together and are the threefold, and yet one, way in which the incarnate Logos is with His Church and gives life to it.”

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264 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 270.


266 Ratzinger, “Chapter VI,” 272.
CHAPTER SEVEN: A SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF JOSEPH RATZINGER’S
THEOLOGY OF DIVINE REVELATION

This seventh and final chapter will summarize and assess Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation. Following a summary of the topics discussed throughout this dissertation, I will offer some criticisms of Ratzinger’s work. The criticisms are divided into four categories: 1) a need for greater balance between the subjective and objective dimensions of revelation, 2) matters of internal consistency, 3) questionable assertions, and 4) the need for clarification regarding the distinction and relation between the magisterium and tradition. That last critique is not levied against Ratzinger alone, as I think it is a topic that needs more development in Catholic theology in general. Finally, this chapter and dissertation conclude with a positive assessment of Joseph Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation. As I have gained much personally through my study of his thought, I hope others will likewise benefit both from his understanding of divine revelation as well as from this example of his theological method.

7.1 A Summary of Ratzinger’s Theology of Divine Revelation

In his original Habilitationsschrift, Ratzinger attempted to mediate between disparate camps: Catholic and neo-scholastic emphasis on the objective, doctrinal, perennial and abstract elements of revelation on the one hand and Protestant emphases on revelation as divine action as well as the subjective and salvation historical dimensions of revelation on the other hand. Ratzinger sought to incorporate all sides of the equation into a coherent whole. In order to accomplish that task, Ratzinger employed a medieval, scholastic theologian, St. Bonaventure, who could not be easily dismissed by Catholic scholastics and yet who provides a point of contact with Protestant sensibilities at the same time. In this vein, Ratzinger proposed a catholic,
that is, a holistic approach to theology of revelation rooted in the profound work of the Seraphic Doctor.¹

Ratzinger’s early work took place when the ‘modernist crisis’² was still an issue in Catholic intellectual circles. In response to the concern of relativizing revelation or reducing it to mere subjective sentimentality, neo-scholastic theologians and ecclesial documents between the two Vatican Councils³ often emphasized revelation as an objective revelation of divine truths. These truths were largely held to be perennial and thus abstractly detached from history and historical conditions as well as impervious to subjective, personal concerns or sentiments. Ratzinger sees this tendency as more counter-reformational than Catholic, a reaction against modernist and Protestant claims more than a full presentation of revelation as found in the wide and deep Catholic theological tradition. Ratzinger sought to bring back treasures from the past, primarily the work of St. Bonaventure, as a corrective measure to help overcome overly one-sided, unnuanced presentations of Catholic theology of revelation. In short, he wished to make Catholic theology of revelation more Catholic, not less.

Similarly, while being attentive to Protestant sensibilities regarding divine action and subjective, personal dimensions of revelation, Ratzinger remains solidly within Catholic and scholastic thought with respect to the importance of philosophy and metaphysics. Thus, Ratzinger not only tries to salvage the wider tradition from the Catholic side, he also challenges Protestant tendencies that eschew philosophy, especially metaphysics as an unnecessary, dangerous Hellenization of an otherwise pure acceptance of divine revelation. He argues that

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¹ See above 1.6, 42-48.
² See above 1.1, 10-16.
³ See above 1.2, 16-23.
philosophy is indispensable for theology and that both philosophy and theology need one another. Even more strongly, he argues that theology stands to lose the most by detaching itself from philosophy, especially metaphysics, and additionally argues that even the most prominent Protestants and reformers are not able to completely avoid appealing to philosophy in their own theological work.  

Nevertheless, Ratzinger’s theology gives pride of place to sacred scripture. For Ratzinger, the bible, especially the New Testament, is the soul of theology. Therefore, while philosophy is useful for enhancing one’s contemplation and elucidation of theology, it is still an ancillary—even if necessary—tool. One must thus avoid the danger of devising a human philosophical system into which one makes the sources of the knowledge of revelation fit in order to safeguard the system to the detriment of the revelation, which stands above and beyond what any human knowing could accomplish on its own. The proper limits of philosophy must be respected and taken into consideration when doing theology.

In this regard, Ratzinger discusses at length the relation between Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Augustine. In his view, Bonaventure was correctly cautious about natural reason’s—and thus philosophy’s—capabilities. This caution is at the heart of Bonaventure’s approach to Aristotle. Although Bonaventure quotes affirmatively many elements of Aristotelian philosophy, he is also leery of any philosophy being given too much weight. This cautious approach to human reason as such is where Ratzinger sees the biggest difference between Bonaventure’s and Aquinas’s thought. Entering into the dispute between Gilson and van Steenberghen, Ratzinger

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4 See above 2.1.2, 57-68.

5 See above 2.1.1, 51-57.

6 See above 2.2, 68-79.
offers his own analysis, arguing that Bonaventure never sought to be an anti-Aristotelian per se nor a strict Augustinian. Rather, Bonaventure merely sought to avoid over-emphasizing the role of any philosophy as such and demonstrated a willingness to be critical of philosophers, especially Aristotle, of whom he otherwise generally approves. Therefore, he is less Aristotelian than Thomas Aquinas insofar as Bonaventure is more critical and cautious. Still, this does not make Bonaventure anti-Thomist. Not being a Thomist does not mean one is anti-Thomist. This same analysis, I would argue, applies to Ratzinger himself, who, while not fundamentally a Thomist theologian, is not against Aquinas either. His approach corresponds to his essentially Bonaventurian influence. Like both Bonaventure and Aquinas, Ratzinger does take metaphysics and epistemology seriously as applicable to theology of revelation.

In this vein, Ratzinger treats questions of nature, the supernatural (grace), spirit (including mind), personhood, and free will. Without going into detail here, since that was done in Chapter Two, a few important reminders suffice for this present context.7

First, nature can be understood in the sense of physics, referring to natural (i.e., non-artificial) objects as they appear and operate in the physical world. Nature can also be understood in a metaphysical sense, referring to things’ natures or essences. In either case, the theologian keeps in mind that even the natural world with its many and varied essences has its origin in God, who is ‘above’ nature and thus constitutes what is supernatural. More precisely, the natural world has divine freedom (sovereign will) as its origin. Thus, in a limited sense, all things—including natures—are ‘grace’ insofar as they are a gift from God.

Additionally, the natural can be contrasted with the spiritual. Natural operations, such as bodily procreation, are of a different sort than spiritual (or intellectual) operations, such as

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7 See above 2.3, 79-135.
creative activity. It belongs to the nature of spiritual/intellectual beings to be able to perform such creative and intellectual operations. Thus, in a sense, the spiritual is already moving beyond the merely natural. Spiritual beings are oriented towards God who is both their origin and their end. They are capable of knowing God, who is supernatural. Following de Lubac, Ratzinger even insists that there is a natural striving or longing for the beatific vision, that is, union with God, even though the fulfillment of such a desire is unattainable by natural operations alone.

Relatedly, Ratzinger seeks to unite the metaphysical and salvation historical approaches to question of nature and grace through Bonaventure’s work, which—in turn—is indebted to patristic thought. Ratzinger holds that in the patristic era ‘nature’ was understood historically: it was a time period within history where natural laws reigned. It is subdivided into pre- and post-lapsarian timeframes. It is subsequently supplanted by the time of the law (the Old Testament period), which in turn gave way to the era of grace (the New Testament and subsequent periods). During the medieval period, he thinks a metaphysical notion of nature began to replace the historical, temporal understanding of nature.

Ratzinger, for his part, views Bonaventure as providing a means of holding metaphysics and salvation history together.

Following Bonaventure, Ratzinger links the traditional duality of exitus-reditus (procession from and return back to God) to metaphysics and salvation history. It is within that framework that he discusses questions of the relation between nature and grace (the supernatural) as well as the related topics of image of God and divine likeness. Nature corresponds to the exitus, the moving forth from God’s creative activity. Grace corresponds to the reditus, the return back to God. Both are dynamic processes that, while containing metaphysical dimensions, occur

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As mentioned earlier, I find this surprising, since metaphysical notions of nature were certainly present in the patristic era.
in history. In some sense, the natural is the substructure making possible the movements through history.

Most importantly, these thoughts relate to the human being as the image and likeness of God. According to nature, humans are created in the image of God. For Bonaventure, this is a dynamic understanding, since humans are the image of God insofar as they are at least in principle capable of knowing God, which is then heightened when they are actually knowing God. Thus, for Bonaventure, nature is not merely static, but dynamic, it pertains to an act. In this case, it is directly tied to the human capacity to know God that is a part of human nature. Similarly, the divine similitude, the likeness of God, is, for Bonaventure, a dynamic, not static reality. It involves human’s graced illumination and return back to God through grace. However, for Bonaventure, this means that grace is not to be understood substantially as a thing that is possessed by the human soul, but as a relation with God that is characterized by a continual flow of divine grace. The analogy I use is of electrical appliances: there needs to be a continuous influx of electricity from an external power source. Similarly, human divine likeness is sustained through an continual outpouring of graced illumination and union with God that one can never, therefore, simply possess. Hence, unlike nature, humans do not “have” grace as something properly their own and at their disposal. They receive it continuously, and it is characterized by relationship with God. Grace, then, is not a super-nature imposed on top of nature, even if it is a dynamic elevation of a creature’s nature, a return of the creature to God as the final end.

Here, as elsewhere, though, the duality of nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, is complemented by a third aspect, rendering a typical Bonaventurian triad: nature, grace, and free will. Free will, while a component of human nature, is also able to work against both nature and grace. It is, in this sense, something mysterious that moves beyond the realm of
necessity, of cause and effect. Personhood, then, is something more than mere nature. It belongs to a personal being to be able to act freely, deliberately and not merely follow the motions of natural laws.

With this triad of nature, grace (the supernatural), and free will, we already begin to see the philosophical and theological underpinnings of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation, insofar as it included dimensions of knowing through sensible data (external witness), graced-illumination (internal witness), and one’s free response (the obedience of faith). Relatedly, there is—at least roughly—a connection between image of God and human knowledge on the one hand and divine likeness and love on the other hand. These are likewise connected with nature and grace, respectively. Human nature includes the image of God insofar as humans have a capacity for having God as an object of knowledge, something proper to spiritual beings. Again, the spiritual already forms a sort of mid-point between purely natural and supernatural. Divine likeness, for its part, as belonging to the reitus of humans back to God, involves loving union made possible through grace.

The distinction between image/knowledge and grace/love is not entirely clean, however, since there is the issue of knowledge gained through supernatural means. Thus, here, the metaphysical discussions lead to epistemological concerns.

Ratzinger perceives in Bonaventure a union between Aristotelian (and to that extent, Thomist) epistemology and Augustinian epistemology. Bonaventure does not hold to pure illumination theories that assert illumination as the sole cause of knowledge. Rather, he affirms, along with Aristotle and Aquinas, that objects perceptible through the senses are real causes of knowledge, which takes place through a process of abstraction from sense data. The Augustinian

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9 See above 2.3.5, 124-135.
influence enters vis-à-vis the certitude of knowledge, since—in high scholastic fashion—Bonaventure affirms that certitude can only come through a grasp of the eternal reasons. Thus, in both natural and supernatural knowledge, humans are dependent upon some illumination for certitude, even if such illumination functions differently in each case.

More important for our present purposes is the process of human knowing with respect to God. According to Ratzinger’s interpretation of Bonaventure, in the pre-lapsarian state, the physical world reflected aptly the divine reality and humans’ ability to know God was unhindered by interior darkness. Even in this instance, however, some divine, graced illumination (the interior witness) was still necessary. Nevertheless, the book of creation sufficed as the exterior witness needed for knowledge of the divine.

In the post-lapsarian state, however, both the reflection of the divine in creation and the spiritual capacity of humans to see clearly have been obscured. Thus, in the fallen state, humans need both external and internal remedies. That is why scripture and interior purification through grace are necessary for knowledge of God to be received sufficiently. Nature no longer reflects the divine light clearly, and the human intellect has been wounded from seeing clearly even what is there. Thus, a new external witness and an additional interior aid are required. Scripture and interior illumination through saving grace are required for humans to have sufficient knowledge of divine realities, and both are aspects of divine revelation. That is why, as we will see, revelation is not equated with scripture because God’s act of revelation involves both the exterior witness to which scripture attests and the interior illumination of the individual human soul. Additionally, to complete the triad and corresponding to the dimension of free will (and thus personhood), the human response of obediential faith is also a necessary component, otherwise the process is not complete.
With this background information in mind, we can proceed to a discussion of Ratzinger’s theology of revelation proper.\textsuperscript{10} It is directly connected with all that has been said thus far. The necessity of exterior and interior witness in the process of receiving knowledge of the divine in a supernatural way is particularly important. Ratzinger links those epistemological terms with his consideration of another triad: apparition, revelation, and manifestation.\textsuperscript{11}

Generally speaking, apparition corresponds to the exterior witness, especially with respect to the appearance of a divine Person. We see such apparition with respect to the Holy Spirit appearing as a dove or tongues of fire. In a more prolonged and concrete way, the entire life and work of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, is a form of apparition. To these external witnesses is added the interior work of divine illumination on the human subject that enables one to perceive the exterior witness as true and certain. Such graced illumination, attributed to the working of the Holy Spirit, is a necessary aspect of revelation proper, which is emphasized as divine action. Again, both the exterior witness and the interior witness cooperate in the process of God becoming known and loved. Ratzinger associates the exterior with apparition and revelation with the interior witness.\textsuperscript{12}

Because Ratzinger closely associates revelation with divine action and not the static result of such action, such as doctrines about God, he also distinguishes God’s \textit{becoming known} (apparition and revelation) from God’s \textit{being known}, which he identifies with manifestation. God

\textsuperscript{10} See above Part II, 140-247.

\textsuperscript{11} See above 3.1.2, 152-165.

\textsuperscript{12} In my estimation, this view is questionable. This section of the \textit{Habilitationsschrift} reduces revelation to God’s action \textit{internally} while relegating the tangible words and deeds of God externally to the rank of mere apparition. Thus, I will include this as a point of critique in the following section.
being known is thus the result of the processes of apparition and revelation: apparition + revelation = manifestation. Again, the process and the result are distinct in Ratzinger’s view.

In this connection, Ratzinger also tackles the unity and distinction between the concepts of ‘word’ and ‘light,’ which are synonymous to a degree when used in Bonaventure’s theology of revelation, yet each with its own connotations. While they both refer in some way to manifestation, and are sometimes used interchangeably, Ratzinger thinks that, most precisely, seeing (light) is to the active aspect as hearing (word) is to the passive dimension. In this sense, we see yet again an exterior and interior aspect. Sometimes one word (light or word; seeing or hearing) is the more apt expression, and sometimes the other is the more fitting. The precise nuances need not be belabored here, but it is worth noting that the two terms, ‘word’ and ‘light,’ are a part of Ratzinger’s presentation of Bonaventure’s terminology.

Those terminological considerations are precursors to the exposition of the essence of divine revelation itself. In expounding upon the essence of revelation, Ratzinger highlights the intra-Trinitarian foundation of revelation, the Christological core of revelation, and the completion of revelation in the human response of faith. This order follows the metaphysical and temporal (even historical) order of the process, starting with the Trinity, proceeding through Christ (the Incarnate Word), to humanity’s response. Once again, the connection between metaphysics and salvation history becomes apparent.

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13 See above 3.1.3, 165-168.
14 See above 3.2, 168-186.
15 See above 3.2.1, 169-176.
16 See above 3.2.2, 176-183.
17 See above 3.2.3, 183-186.
Building upon Augustine’s psychological analogy of the Trinity, and the Second Person’s place within it as the Eternal Word, Bonaventure offers his own progression of the idea. In typical Bonaventurian fashion, the duality of internal and external word is augmented into a triad. Between the internal, intelligible word (here, the Eternal Word) and the external word, that is, the sensible word expressed out loud (here, the Incarnate Word), there is the middle word, the mediating word. This mediating word corresponds to the Word of God as the archetype of the world, and as such the Word through whom all things were created. When put together, these three types of word once again correspond to the exitus-reditus dynamic so common in Bonaventure’s thought. The origin is the Triune God, from whom there is a creating exitus, a proceeding forth of creation through the Eternal Word as the mediating Word, who in history becomes the Incarnate Word enabling the reditus or reductio of all things to God.

From the Trinitarian foundations just discussed, the Christological core of revelation already becomes apparent. The centrality of Christ is an ubiquitous theme in Bonaventure’s thought. He sees Christ as the center of all human knowledge, of all science, including metaphysics (as the center of essence) and logic (as the center of doctrine). Christ is also the center of history, precisely insofar as his death and resurrection marks the pivot point between the exitus and the reditus. With respect to revelation proper, the entire life of Christ stands as the perceptible, historical disclosure of God. Christ’s whole self, in his words and deeds, makes God tangible. Christ is the revelation of God par excellence.

God’s self-revelation reaches its apex in the person of Christ, the Incarnate Word, but as revelation to another, it is addressed to humankind. There is a recipient of revelation, without whom revelation would remain meaningless. Furthermore, because God’s revelatory action involves both exterior and interior witness, the process of revelation involves the inner depths of
the human person. The proverbial veil must be removed within the person in order for revelation to truly take place. Without faith, the veil remains and revelation is thus incomplete. While the objective dimension of revelation may exist outside of individuals, no revelation really takes place until it is interiorized and accepted by the receiver. Thus, for Ratzinger, the response of faith is an integral aspect of divine revelation itself. Revelation is graced illumination, and grace is received through faith. To use an analogy, if someone writes a letter to someone else, yet the language is unintelligible to the intended receiver, then authentic communication has not yet taken place. Likewise, if someone receives a letter but does not read it or really make an effort to comprehend the message, then yet again, communication is hindered. With respect to revelation, faith is required for apprehension to take place, and without such apprehension, God’s self-communication is incomplete. It is on this basis that Ratzinger insists that human response in faith in humble acceptance of both the external witness and in cooperation with the interior witness of the Holy Spirit is necessary for revelation to reach its completion.

Now that the essence of divine revelation has been discussed, we turn to specifics regarding the relationships between revelation, scripture, and tradition.18 Between the two Vatican Councils, it had become common for theologians to refer to scripture and tradition as sources of revelation. Hence, the original schema for a document on revelation for the Second Vatican Council carried the title *De fontibus revelationis*. As Cardinal Frings’s theological advisor before—and as *peritus* at—the Council, Ratzinger objected to this terminology as being imprecise. The order of ontology and the order of knowledge ought not to be confused. From a metaphysical perspective, revelation is the one source from which scripture and tradition flow. Scripture and tradition do not generate revelation; rather, God’s revelation leads to the testimony

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18 See Chapter 4, 189-222.
of both scripture and tradition. On the epistemological level, which often takes place in the reverse order of ontology, scripture and tradition can be referred to as the sources of knowledge of revelation. This distinction is important, because the ontological priority must remain with revelation itself and not the means of the transmission of revelation.

This distinction involves another important point: scripture and revelation cannot be equated with one another; they are not identical. Ratzinger insists that none of the thirteenth century scholastics called the bible revelation. Revelation, which involves all that God says and does with respect to humankind, is always more than what has been attested to in scripture. Revelation transcends what is written down in scripture. This observation is not only true on the objective side but is also true insofar as revelation also involves the interior witness. To this extent, revelation is always more than the words on the page precisely because revelation cannot be absolutely reified into a concrete letter that stands as a mere object. God reveals through the means of scripture, to be sure, but not only through the perceptible words; the interior light is offered along with the sensible medium. For these reasons, among others, *sola scriptura* is inadmissible to Catholic theology.

The question of the material sufficiency of scripture is related to this discussion. While Ratzinger from time to time speaks of scripture as a material principle of revelation, he emphatically denies the theory that scripture is materially sufficient (contra Geiselmann’s thesis). One reason for Ratzinger’s rejection of the material sufficiency of scripture is the fact that material is never sufficient. Again, even in its concrete form in the bible, the exterior witness alone does not constitute revelation and is not sufficient for revelation to take place.

Additional reasons for the rejection of scripture as materially sufficient involve the relationship between revelation and tradition. Part of the material dissemination of the content of
revelation, even of the content found in sacred scripture, involves tradition: the act of handing over.

With respect to tradition, Ratzinger contrasts neo-scholastic views of tradition with Bonaventure’s scholastic view. Tradition, for Bonaventure, connotes an act of handing down authoritatively from a superior to a subordinate, while modern terminology often emphasizes tradition as an objective content that is passed on from generation to generation. Preferring the Bonaventurian approach, Ratzinger speaks of the intimate link between apostolic succession and tradition, which—for him—are virtually synonymous. Succession and tradition go hand-in-hand. In fact, the succession-tradition principle preceded even the canonization of the New Testament. Insofar as this succession-tradition is part of the process even of arriving at scripture as scripture, one cannot speak of the material sufficiency of scripture. Even after the canon is settled, however, the materiality of scripture is still accompanied by the action of authoritative handing on that takes place in and through succession/tradition.

At the same time, Ratzinger does not want to adopt the material, content-based notion of tradition. Partly due to the more formal, authoritative understanding of tradition mentioned above, Ratzinger does not understand tradition as a set of doctrines handed on from the Apostles to their successors. Tradition is more like a living reality within which the understanding of revelation attested to in scripture grows.

In a very nuanced way, then, Ratzinger holds to the scholastic position that had neither a notion of scripture alone nor a concept of tradition as a set of material content passed on in parallel along with scripture. In this regard, Ratzinger is willing to speak of scripture as the, even the sole material principle of the knowledge of the faith. Yet, scripture is still not materially sufficient, since it is understood rightly only within the tradition, which includes all aspects of
ecclesial life. Tradition, in this sense, is the milieu within which the scriptures are received in the Church’s historical life.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ratzinger objected to the title of *De fontibus revelationis*, precisely because he wanted to affirm that revelation is the ontologically prior reality from which scripture and tradition flow. Revelation, then, stands before and above both revelation and tradition. An additional critique of *De fontibus revelationis* centers on its attempt to support one theological position on a disputed question that the Council of Trent intentionally avoided resolving in an authoritative way. At the Council of Trent, some held that there were parts of revelation that we receive from tradition and not from scripture. The formulation would suggest that revelation is transmitted to us partly in scripture and partly in tradition. Trent explicitly avoiding using the *partim-partim* expression in order to leave the question open. Ratzinger thinks the question should remain open and objected to *De fontibus revelationis* attempting to favor one side of the dispute in condemnation of the other side.

Ratzinger’s openness to both theological opinions is reflected in his own nuanced treatment of the relationship between scripture and tradition. He is hesitant to accept Geiselmann’s thesis of material sufficiency of scripture on the one hand as well as neo-scholastic assertions of revelation being transmitted partly in scripture and partly in tradition. Thus, there is some ambiguity in Ratzinger’s various writings on this topic, which will be discussed later in this chapter. On the one hand, he understands dogmas as interpretations of scripture and thus asserts that tradition is not independent of scripture; on the other hand, he admits that certain dogmas are not found materially in scripture and thus the idea of material sufficiency of scripture is false.

One aspect of Ratzinger’s thought provides a possible answer to the confusion. Just as the New Testament involves an interpretation of the Old Testament in light of new situations, so too,
the New Testament is interpreted within the Church throughout the ages. Nevertheless, there is inherent tension in Ratzinger’s works; one can perceive a continual strain in his attempts to explicate the relationship between scripture and tradition.

What can be clearly seen in Ratzinger’s writings, however, is that, for him, scripture requires tradition in order to be a proper source of the knowledge of revelation. The Church’s understanding of scripture is a necessary component of scripture, if one may put it this way. Thus, while tradition is not an entirely independent reality alongside scripture, neither is scripture independent of tradition. They work symbiotically. They belong together, and only together can they bear witness to revelation properly. Scripture and tradition flow from revelation, the one source, and thus both scripture and tradition are needed for us to gain sufficient access to the knowledge of revelation.

Already within the discussion of the essence of revelation there is the component of the importance of history, salvation history.19 Christ, the Incarnate Word, has entered into history as the means of salvation. Thus, Christianity is an historical religion; revelation takes place in history. In Christ, the eternal and the temporal coalesce. While his earthly life was necessarily limited to a specific time and place, his saving significance is universal. He is, so-to-speak, the concrete universal. He is the summit of revelation of God as well as the one through whom the fullness of humanity is disclosed in history.

Because revelation involves the individual subject and not just the external apparition, Ratzinger notes that Bonaventure tends to speak about revelations, specific instances of revelation. To the extent that individuals continue to receive revelation (through the external

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19 See Ch. 5, 223-247.
apparition and interior witness of the Spirit coupled with the response of faith), in some sense, revelation takes place even today.

There is, of course, a difference between the Apostles’ experience and that of our own, however. Both involve exterior witness and interior illumination, but the exterior witness is different in each case. The Apostles actually saw Jesus in the flesh; believers in post-apostolic times rely on the apostolic witness transmitted throughout the centuries as the embodiment of the external witness. Again, the ‘word’ and ‘light,’ the ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ motifs return. The Apostles’ seeing is passed on for our hearing in the kerygma.

There are both objective and subjective aspects of this process of revelation. Because Ratzinger, as we have seen, stresses the importance of the interior illumination within the human subject as an essential element of divine revelation, there can be the danger of subjectivism, which was a major concern during the modernist crisis. It was the fundamental criticism that Schmaus levied against Ratzinger’s original Habilitationsschrift. Yet, Ratzinger sought to affirm the objective character of revelation, nonetheless.

For Bonaventure and Ratzinger alike, the content of faith is not determinable by each individual subjectively. Through scripture, the Fathers, tradition (the life of the Church), and in the Creed, there is a real, objective character of divine revelation.

Thus, Ratzinger grounds the subjective dimension of divine revelation within the communion of the Church, which includes the faithful adherence to the dogmas of the faith. One does not decide for one’s self what God has revealed through private interpretations of the sources of the knowledge of revelation (scripture and tradition). While the individual subject’s response in faith is a constitutive element of revelation in Ratzinger’s view, faith itself is

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20 See above 5.2, 228-237.
inherently communal, ecclesial, and hence is not to be understood in a relativistic or subjectivist manner. Ratzinger’s theology of revelation and his ecclesiology cohere, and they must thus be taken together for either to be properly and fully understood. One would be hard pressed to make the case that Ratzinger’s ecclesiology is modernist. When one understands the connection between the Church and revelation as Ratzinger understands it, one is led to conclude that Ratzinger’s theology of revelation is also not modernist, despite Schmaus’s concerns. The trans-temporal subject of faith, the Church, is precisely what each individual believer is called to become a part of; therefore, the individual believes as a member of the one believing subject and not as an isolated ‘I.’ The subjective and the objective are united through ecclesial communion. Scripture and tradition belong to the Church and are thus also received in an ecclesial mode. One cannot set one’s self apart from the Church without doing damage to the reception even of the exterior witness of the knowledge of revelation. The Church, herself, then is an historical witness and means of coming to the knowledge of revelation. As the body of Christ, the Church is the living presence of the Word of God. The unity of the objective and subjective dimensions of revelation is why the ‘faith’ itself can denote the subjective, graced response to revelation as well as the objective content expressed in doctrines.

As a living reality that perpetually returns to the sources of the knowledge of revelation, the Church continues to grow and deepen her understanding of the contents of revelation and expresses this understanding throughout the ages to give voice to the faith in new historical contexts and in response to new questions that arise; knowledge of revelation is dynamic. Thus, there is development of doctrine. Such development is also due to the fact that, as Bonaventure believes, there are an unlimited number of seeds present within scripture that inexhaustibly give

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21 See above 5.3, 237-245.
rise to further insights. Growing from seeds within the context of the Church’s tradition means that such new insights develop from the insights of the past. Thus, while scripture is closed, the growth in the understanding of scripture continues throughout history. The Church’s faith, then, is not just synchronic but also diachronic.

This process of doctrinal advancement occurs, again, through an interplay of individuals and the Church as a whole. Members of the Body of Christ, in their personal study and reflection upon the scriptures in light of tradition, aid the Church’s collective understanding of the content of revelation. In this sense, there is an ongoing process of revelation, even if the seeds of revelation were present from the beginning, and in that sense, revelation has been closed since the death of the last Apostle, as is often stated. The dynamic growth in understanding revelation in the Church’s history is always rooted in the fullness of the external revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. In that sense, there is nothing added to the mystery revealed in the Incarnation, only an increase in the apprehension of what the mystery entails. Therefore, there is a unity of doctrine that remains within the development of doctrine.

Furthermore, insofar as the knowledge of revelation accessible through scripture and tradition is received in every age by new believers, who also are illuminated by the interior witness of the Holy Spirit, revelation continues: God still reveals himself in history through the proclamation of the Church and through the grace given to believers even today. In short, while the fullness of revelation’s objective dimension has reached its unsurpassable fullness in the Person of the Incarnate Word, this objective dimension is perpetually received by believing subjects, and in this sense, the once-and-for-all revelation continues to occur in the concrete history of the Church and her members.
The results of Ratzinger’s study of divine revelation in the works of Bonaventure proved useful in his work for Cardinal Frings before the Council as well as during and after the Council as a peritus and commentator. His prior work served as a foundation for his criticism of preparatory schemas that treated the topic of divine revelation. He stood against overly neo-scholastic language in those schemas. He also insisted on the primacy of revelation as the source from which the sources of knowledge of revelation (scripture and tradition) flow. He offered significant suggestions for what came to be Dei verbum, including an initial chapter on divine revelation itself, the presentation on the relation between scripture and tradition, the perduring importance of the entire Old Testament for Christianity, and the need to avoid settling legitimate theological disputes, such as the question of whether revelation is partly in scripture and partly in tradition, the historicity of the Gospels, and the authorship of the Gospels. He further suggests giving voice to Christo-centrism, not only with respect to the entire Old and New Testaments, but also with respect to world history.

In addition to these points, his preparation for and work during the Council afforded him the opportunity to tackle other questions regarding divine revelation, such as biblical inspiration and inerrancy, that his earlier work did not address. He criticized De fontibus revelationis for presenting biblical inspiration as essentially a process of divine dictation that does not account for authentic human authorship. Ratzinger saw this as essentially unchristian, since—unlike other religions, such as Islam—Christian faith sees scriptural authorship as God’s historical work in and through human authors. Similarly, the divine dictation approach does not take seriously enough questions of accuracy with respect to profane matters that historical research perceives in

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22 See above 6.1, 250-275.

parts of sacred scripture. While affirming biblical inerrancy with respect to everything the scriptures intend to affirm regarding saving truths, Ratzinger thinks it is important to avoid confusing this with absolute accuracy in every detail that accompanies the presentation of such intended truths of revelation.

As discussed in detail in Chapter Six of this dissertation, many of Ratzinger’s criticisms, suggestions, and thoughts are reflected in Dei verbum. Yet, as also discussed in Chapter Six, it is difficult to trace any specifics to Ratzinger’s personal intervention, since others often offered similar suggestions. At the very least, though, it can be said that Ratzinger’s work before and during the Council was part of the milieu that made such views better known and perhaps helped some Council Fathers receive them positively.24 Further, beyond dispute is Ratzinger’s work as a commentator on Dei verbum, especially in his contributions to the renowned Vorgrimler Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II.

In his writings for Vorgrimler’s Commentary, Ratzinger provides first-rate background and discussion of important parts of Dei verbum. He outlines influential and sometimes competing schools of thought that intermingled in the drafting of the text, including Romanticism, the Jesuit Roman School, Newman, the Ecumenical Movement, Geiselmann’s interpretation of Trent, Geiselmann’s critics, questions about the legitimacy of the historical-critical method, and the biblical movement. Ratzinger also provides illuminating commentary on the text of Dei verbum, the details of which were presented in Chapter Six of the present work.25

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24 See especially 6.3, 290-301.

25 See above 6.4, 302-337.
7.2 Critical Evaluation: Negative Criticisms

My overall evaluation of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation is positive. Nevertheless, there are some aspects of his thought that could use clarification and/or improvement. The types of negative criticism here can be divided into four main categories, including: 1) the need for greater balance, 2) matters of internal consistency, and 3) questionable assertions. To these is added a fourth observation, which is not so much a critique of Ratzinger in particular, but which stands as a question in need of further clarification in theology of divine revelation in general: what precisely are both the relation and the distinction between the magisterium (or magisterial statements) and tradition?

7.2.1 Imbalanced Emphasis on the Subjective Dimension of Revelation

First, I argued above that—when taken as a whole and in connection with his ecclesiology—Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation is not subjectivist and modernist as Schmaus feared. Nevertheless, with respect to the original Habilitationsschrift, there is a legitimate case to be made that Ratzinger fails to provide a proper and explicit balance between the objective and the subjective dimensions of divine revelation.

Granted, Ratzinger’s early work on revelation was developed during a time in which the objective aspect of divine revelation was strongly—sometimes exclusively—emphasized. In trying to overcome a narrowly objectivistic and propositional understanding of revelation, then, Ratzinger stresses both the (divine) act character of revelation and the importance of the receiving subject as intrinsic aspects of the process of revelation itself. That is understandable to a degree.

However, in overcoming an imbalance from one side of the equation, one must be careful not to create an imbalance on the other side. There is a common tendency for intellectual
pendulums to swing from one extreme to the other. To be clear, there is no doubt that—on the whole—Ratzinger’s views are balanced. No one familiar with the basic characteristics of Ratzinger’s theology would think that Ratzinger denies the need for dogma; he certainly sees dogma as a positive good. Ratzinger has been shown to affirm explicitly the need for Catholics to assent to dogmas. The assent to dogma involves the belief that such dogmas are in fact revealed truths. Modernist thinkers, by contrast, would tend to deny the need to assent to dogmas and may even question the possibility of knowing the truth with any kind of certainty. Ratzinger is far from holding any views close to that perspective.

Nevertheless, in many of Ratzinger’s writings on revelation, especially in his original *Habilitationsschrift*, it is hard to find the term ‘revealed truths’ used in a positive sense. It is typically referred to in passages describing the overly objective, propositional understanding of revelation, which his own thought is trying to overcome. This tendency to mention ‘revealed truths’ only in negative and critical contexts can give the impression that the objectivist understanding of revelation is completely wrong rather than incomplete. Because Ratzinger so emphatically distinguishes the process of revelation from the concrete results that derive from the process, one could easily be led to the misunderstanding that propositional truths have nothing to do with revelation proper. Such a view would be erroneous. Therefore, Ratzinger’s presentation would benefit from an explicit statement that God has revealed specific truths which can and have been expressed in propositions which must be believed and affirmed with divine and Catholic faith, even if such propositions never perfectly encapsulate the realities to which they refer and cannot by themselves be equated with revelation as if revelation were nothing more than such concrete, propositional statements.
As Ratzinger insists, it is true that revelation is primarily divine action and that conversely no revelation takes place unless there is someone who becomes aware of it and receives it. But, it is also true that no revelation takes place without an object that is revealed. God, of course, is the primary object of revelation, and not just as a theoretical concept but as living and relational, as three divine Persons. Nevertheless, there is also a content to faith in God. God has, in fact, revealed truths about himself and his will for humanity which are knowable and which the believer must affirm in faith. Yet, most of the time, Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift downplays the ‘content’ aspect (inhaltlich, to use one of his own terms) of divine revelation.

Again, I do not doubt that Ratzinger holds and affirms the objective dimension of revelation. However, most of the evidence supporting that certainty about Ratzinger’s acceptance of the objective dimension comes from works that are not primarily about theology of divine revelation. When one reads the Habilitationsschrift and other early works on divine revelation in Ratzinger’s theological corpus, one does—in general—find a much greater emphasis on the subjective dimension and an insufficiently explicit statement that the objective, propositional dimension of revelation is to be affirmed alongside the subjective dimension.

One may object to this criticism that Ratzinger understands revelation as primarily divine action and that is the reason he does not emphasize the objective aspect. But some actions require subjects and objects. If someone were to say simply ‘that man throws,’ the audience would be left wondering what that man throws: a ball, a javelin, or—figuratively—a ‘fit’? Similarly, saying simply ‘God reveals’ leaves the matter hanging. God’s action not only requires a receiving subject, it requires an offered and received object. This fact is not always obvious in Ratzinger’s Habilitationsschrift.
To the extent that this observation is true, one may say that Schmaus had a point. Schmaus is not entirely against admitting a subjective dimension of divine revelation. In fact, the subjective dimension of revelation found a considerable place in Schmaus’s own thought. Schmaus explicitly denies that revelation is solely and primarily a matter of intellectual, conceptual instruction.\textsuperscript{26} Despite the reports of certain commentators, Schmaus was not a strict, Suárezian neo-scholastic. He does not understand revelation narrowly as a set of propositions. He sees revelation as God’s action to a receiving subject and views the personal relation between the two as primary and essential.\textsuperscript{27} Schmaus even acknowledges that faith enables us to participate in divine revelation\textsuperscript{28} and highlights the historical character of revelation.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, when Schmaus concludes that Ratzinger’s original \textit{Habilitationsschrift} was overly subjective, this conclusion does not intend to deny that there is a subjective aspect of revelation. Schmaus was not saying that Ratzinger was wrong in affirming the subjective dimension. It is more likely that what Schmaus meant by “overly subjective” was that Ratzinger’s presentation lacked sufficient affirmation of the objective dimension of revelation, i.e., that his presentation overly emphasized the subjective side, lacking a proper balance.

Without access to Schmaus’s written criticisms of Ratzinger’s \textit{Habilitationsschrift}, that assertion remains speculative. Nevertheless, it is a reasonable suspicion when all of the evidence is taken together and as a whole. It is mentioned here for two reasons. The first is because I do think that Ratzinger’s original \textit{Habilitationsschrift}—although it contains a number of highly

\textsuperscript{26} See Michael Schmaus, \textit{Katholische Dogmatik}, vol. 1, Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1938, X, 8, and 11.

\textsuperscript{27} See Schmaus, \textit{Katholische Dogmatik I}, X-XI, 8, and 11.

\textsuperscript{28} See Schmaus, \textit{Katholische Dogmatik I}, 15.

\textsuperscript{29} See Schmaus, \textit{Katholische Dogmatik I}, 8-14.
valuable insights—does suffer from an insufficient affirmation and explication of the objective aspect of divine revelation. It is not even sufficient—as Ratzinger notes in his memoirs—to make the distinction between God’s act of revealing and the concrete results of that action. For, by a similar logic, one could conclude that it would be just as reasonable to exclude the receiving subject from that equation, if the object can be rightly excluded as well. While revelation cannot be equated with propositions or propositional truths exclusively, and thus Ratzinger is right in saying that revelation does not equal propositions, it is legitimate to speak of revealed truths, i.e., truths that God has *actively* revealed through his words and deeds and which, through the action of the Holy Spirit have become known and expressed in concrete propositions.

To use the metaphor of the veil, which corresponds to the root of the term ‘revelation’ and to which Ratzinger himself refers, the veil could be understood as either covering the object or as covering the eyes of the subject. In either case, there is a veil preventing the subject from seeing the object. Thus, the primary reference point for the unveiling is the position of the subject’s eyes in relation to both the veil and the object that it blocks. If the veil stands between the eyes and the object, then an unveiling—a revelation—is needed for the subject to receive knowledge of the object. But if a person’s eyes are veiled and the veil is removed only for the eyes to be faced with a black void, i.e., if there is no object to be perceived, is there still a true revelation in the strict sense?

The answer must be given in the negative. For revelation to take place in the deepest, purest theological sense, there must be both a receiving subject and a revealed object. That object is primarily God himself, who has made *himself* known. But this revelation of God includes revelation of truths about God and God’s will for humankind. Ratzinger’s emphasis on the noetic dimensions of man’s status as the *image of God* and—through grace—as divine likeness already
pave the way for this affirmation of the objective dimension of divine revelation. However, the connection is not elucidated in a sufficiently clear way in the *Habilitationsschrift* itself. Thus, I think Ratzinger’s original *Habilitationsschrift* suffers from an imbalanced presentation of the subjective and objective elements of divine revelation.

### 7.2.2 Questions of Internal Consistency

Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation contains several penetrating insights into the nuances of the topic. Often, the formulation of his observations is especially illuminating, making clearer both precise difficulties as well as possible solutions. However, there are certain statements in his presentations that, although providing clarification when individually considered, present new difficulties or confusions when juxtaposed.

This leads to a question of internal consistency. Here, questions of inconsistency are raised with respect to the following topics: 1) the distinction between apparition and revelation (specifically with respect to Jesus Christ), 2) the distinction between revelation and sacred scripture, and 3) the question of whether or not tradition is a material source of the knowledge of revelation.

Firstly, Chapter Three introduced the triad of apparition – revelation – manifestation as those terms were discussed in Ratzinger’s *Habilitationsschrift*. Ratzinger maintains the distinction between the concepts involved in those terms, but outside of the *Habilitationsschrift* he does not stick to the same vocabulary. In other words, he does not explicitly mention the relations and distinctions between apparition, revelation, and manifestation elsewhere in his theological corpus. He does, however, retain the duality of exterior witness that corresponds to apparition (e.g., teaching of doctrine) and interior witness that corresponds to revelation (graced illumination), even if he does not restrict himself to those specific terms. For example, the term
‘manifestation’ also does not to play a distinct or decisive role in his theology of divine revelation per se. Nevertheless, his thought on revelation as an event or action is still distinguishable from a state of habitually knowing the truth that results from receiving revelation.

Here, though, the inconsistency concerned does not center on the fact that he moves away from the strict terminology of the Habilitationsschrift. That could very well be explained simply by the fact that, in that work, he was presenting Bonaventure’s terminology. Ratzinger retains the basic insights gained from his investigation of Bonaventure’s terminological use, but he does not find it necessary to refer to those terms again and again in his other writings, and that is a legitimate decision on his part.

The question about Ratzinger’s consistency revolves around the clear demarcation between what is deemed apparition versus revelation. In response to the question of whether the life of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, conformed more to the notion of apparition or revelation, Ratzinger argued that the former is the more accurate classification, since the outward appearance does not necessarily come with the interior illumination and/or does not always lead to the obedience of faith, which he argues is necessary for revelation to be complete in the strict sense. Yet, Ratzinger maintains elsewhere that Jesus Christ is revelation, that Christ perfects and completes revelation. In the language of Dei Verbum §2, Jesus Christ is “the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.” Ratzinger’s argument for Christ as the perfection and fullness of revelation seems to correspond more to the notion of apparition, or—in other words—to the objective, sensible aspect of the process of revelation. But the external witness—no matter how insuperable it is in itself—still always requires the interior illumination and the response of faith for revelation to be completed and perfected. Thus, how can Christ be the fullness of revelation if something more is needed to complete revelation? There seems to be an inconsistency in this
respect. To say that Christ’s entire being and life is the fullness of revelation on the one hand but that it more properly corresponds to apparition—in contrast with revelation—on the other hand belies an inconsistency. Speaking of Christ as the fullness of revelation seems to be yet another way of falling into the objectification of revelation, which Ratzinger usually takes great pains to avoid.

Beyond the question of internal consistency, I find problematic the distinction between ‘apparition’ and ‘revelation’ as corresponding to external and internal witnesses, respectively. Granted, this distinction is found exclusively in the original Habilitationsschrift. Thus, it may be considered a criticism of Bonaventure, if Ratzinger’s presentation thereof is accurate, or a criticism of Ratzinger’s presentation of Bonaventure, if his exposition of the distinction is too sharp in comparison to Bonaventure’s own work.

That being said, I do appreciate the distinction to a degree. The point Ratzinger makes about mere apparition not being revelation is well-taken. In particular, the lack of the perception of Jesus’s divinity on the part of many who saw him is a powerful example. It shows that apparition by itself does not equate to revelation having taken place. Nevertheless, I think it is more accurate to speak of apparition as the external dimension of revelation coupled with an interior dimension that must go together in order for revelation to take place. In this way, I would change the equation of ‘apparition + revelation = manifestation’ to “apparition/exterior witness + illumination/internal witness = revelation.” I would not completely object if one wanted to insert “…+ response of faith” into the equation as well. In fact, throughout this dissertation, it became unavoidable to speak of apparition as something distinct from revelation. Time and again, following Ratzinger’s own presentation, we had to speak about the external aspects of revelation,
which thus means apparition is a part of revelation, not something clearly distinct from revelation.

I find it problematic to equate revelation with the interior witness alone. Even the exterior witnesses—such as God’s words to Moses, the person and work of Jesus, and the inspiration of sacred scripture—are part of God’s action to reveal himself. Thus, even in the objective, external dimensions of revelation, God is the one actively revealing himself, even if God is also working interiorly on the receiving subject. Since revelation as divine action is so essential to Ratzinger’s understanding of revelation, the external actions ought to be included within the concept of revelation proper. Again, in general, I think that is the vision that comes to the fore. The issue arises when Ratzinger tries to make a sharp distinction between apparition and revelation as two separate things entirely, rather than to see apparition as one component of revelation. If the problem is Bonaventure’s, then Ratzinger would have done well to point out that fact.

The second question of consistency involves the distinction between revelation and sacred scripture. On the whole, I think Ratzinger’s distinction is helpful, as it avoids reducing revelation to what is contained in the pages of sacred scripture. Further, the distinction between revelation and the sources of the knowledge of revelation is beneficial. The question of consistency arises, however, when Ratzinger speaks of scripture as being elevated to the level of revelation. “The understanding which elevates the Scripture to the status of ‘revelation’ . . . is realized only in the living understanding of Scripture in the Church.”

This point may be minor. Ratzinger could simply mean that apart from the tradition, understood here as the Church’s understanding of scripture, scripture cannot truly be a source of

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the knowledge of revelation properly speaking. Nevertheless, the phrase as it occurs stands out to me as incongruent with Ratzinger’s other discussions on the topic.

The third topic of inconsistency is whether or not tradition can be understood as a material principle of the transmission of revelation. Generally speaking, Ratzinger says that tradition is not a material principle. Yet, he is unable to avoid speaking of tradition in those terms from time to time. The discrepancy becomes most apparent in his critique of Geiselmann. He argues against Geiselmann that Catholics are committed to the dogmas of the faith and that, by way of example, some Marian dogmas cannot be said to be explicitly, materially in scripture such that speaking of material sufficiency would reduce the meaning of sufficiency to such an extent that it would become meaningless. In doing so, is not Ratzinger failing to acknowledge, then, that tradition has in fact provided material that is not sufficiently found in scripture alone? How can scripture, then, be the one material source of revelation? How can he claim that one can be a witness to tradition in no other way than by being a witness to scripture, if in fact, one must assent in faith to revealed truths that are not found in scripture in any meaningful way?

To be clear, one may state justifiably that Ratzinger does a great service to the Church and theology of revelation by pointing out the absurdity of positing a gnostic notion of tradition that speaks of tradition in terms of some unwritten, material content literally handed on from the apostles to their successors throughout the ages by word of mouth. That is clearly not the case. It is not as if there is some added content of revelation called tradition that is whispered into the ears of the bishops upon their episcopal ordination. Thus, the formal aspect of tradition plays a very important role in its proper understanding.

However, can one really say that there is no material aspect of tradition? The mere affirmation that the writings of the Church Fathers and the ‘monuments’ of the tradition (such as
ecumenical councils) are part of tradition testifies to the fact that there is a material quality to it. The fact that, in the process of handing on the faith, more and more precise formulations are developed to express adequately the Church’s growing understanding of the faith suggests that there is a growth in the *materiality* of the sources of the knowledge of revelation, and this material growth takes place within tradition through the development of doctrine.

Most of the time, this may be understood as a growth in the understanding of what is already present in scripture. Even then, however, the growth in the understanding as expressed through new formulations, which have become a part of tradition, becomes a material advance accessible for future generations. Further, Ratzinger cannot deny that the modern Marian dogmas are part of the tradition and are in some way a material addition to the contents of scripture alone.

### 7.2.3 Questionable Assertions

In this section, there are two main assertions made by Ratzinger that I find questionable to at least some significant degree. First, Ratzinger claims that, for the Church Fathers, nature was understood historically, temporally, rather than metaphysically. Second, Ratzinger’s insistence that the human response in faith is a *part* of revelation itself is at least questionable.

As already intimated in prior sections, I find the presentation of the Patristic understanding of ‘nature’ dubious. I do not think Ratzinger has provided enough evidence to show that ‘nature’ was a time period as opposed to a metaphysical concept for the Church Fathers. There may be a sense in which the Fathers understood there to be an era of history that was marked by the law of nature; but at the very least, the Fathers used metaphysical categories to discuss theological topics, especially Christology. The term *homoousios* in the Nicene Creed is just one example, but it is a powerful one. The important point here is that the presence of such
metaphysical notions of nature predates the medieval period. Thus, Ratzinger’s assertion that it was medieval scholastics who shifted the meaning of nature from an historical one to a metaphysical one is imprecise. The metaphysical use of the term ‘nature’ was well established before the scholastics continued such usage.

Another topic that I find difficult is the insistence that the response of faith is part of revelation. *Dei verbum* teaches that the obedience of faith is what we owe to God who reveals and involves a willing assent to revelation, that is, to what God has revealed.\(^{31}\) There is a distinction, then, between revelation and one’s response to revelation. This distinction also holds when one emphasizes that revelation is *divine action*, which is distinct from the human response to that action.

At the same time, I am sympathetic to Ratzinger’s position. There is a profundity to Ratzinger’s insight that, unless God’s revelation is received in faith, the veil remains, because one has failed to see. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish the subjective response that is a *sine qua non conditio* for revelation to take place and the actual revelation itself, which is God’s revealing action (externally and internally). Perhaps it would be more precise to say that revelation does not reach its goal until one responds obediently in faith than to say that God has not revealed himself.

Relatedly, is it possible for one to perceive the truth of revelation and still withhold the assent of faith? For example, *Lumen gentium* speaks of the impossibility of salvation for those who *know* the Church was made necessary for salvation and yet refuse to join or remain within the Church.\(^{32}\) This teaching suggests that it is possible to perceive the truth of revelation yet

\(^{31}\) See *Dei verbum* 5.

\(^{32}\) See *Lumen gentium* 14. Whether one could apply a similar logic to the fallen angels is an interesting and related question.
withhold the obedience of faith. The point is that there is the possibility of withholding faithful acceptance, adherence, or obedience to what God has revealed (such as his will) even if one has perceived the reality and truth thereof. In such instances, it is possible to speak of a rejection of revelation rather than a lack of revelation. Here, the mysterious character of free will is expressed. Even in the face of undeniable revelation, one remains free to reject the offer of grace and repel the gift of faith. That does not mean revelation has not occurred, that God has not revealed himself. It means, in one’s freedom, an individual has explicitly or implicitly chosen to oppose the revelatory action of God.

These questions are difficult, and I continue to grapple with them myself. I have not come to a final decision in that regard. Yet, I find the assertion that the response of faith is part of revelation to be at least questionable and in need of further consideration before being accepted wholesale. At the very least, Ratzinger does not address these questions and, to that extent, I think his position is not completely justified.

7.2.4 The Need for Clarification on the Distinction between Tradition and Magisterium

The question of whether tradition can be understood as a material principle of revelation, or material source of the knowledge of revelation that adds something to the material content already expressed in sacred scripture leads to another important question regarding the relationship between sacred tradition and the magisterium. Ratzinger understands the magisterium as being subordinate to scripture and tradition, that it serves the proper explication and interpretation of scripture and tradition. That is a proper position to have, and it corresponds to what Dei verbum itself proclaims.

In fact, it was shown earlier that Dei verbum’s expression of the intrinsic relation between scripture, tradition, and magisterium closely resembles Ratzinger’s own formulation of
that relation. All three go together and rely on one another. However, nowhere in *Dei verbum* or in Ratzinger’s theological corpus is there a precise distinction made between tradition and the magisterium. The relation between scripture and tradition and the relation of those two to revelation is well explicated. However, there is no clear treatment of the difference between magisterium and tradition.

To be sure, one says that the magisterium is subordinate to revelation and thus also to scripture and tradition: that is, the magisterium itself must continue to hold that which must be believed with divine and Catholic faith and cannot contradict those truths of the faith. But does that truly settle the matter?

What aspect of tradition is the magisterium precisely bound to? Past dogmatic definitions? Certainly. But were not those dogmatic definitions themselves exercises of the magisterium? Is there a distinction between magisterial teaching and tradition? Does magisterial teaching become tradition after a certain amount of time?

The only obvious distinction that comes to mind is that tradition is much broader than magisterial teaching. Since, as Ratzinger says and as was incorporated into *Dei verbum*, tradition involves all that the Church is. In some sense, the entire life of the Church is part of tradition. Magisterial teachings are a very limited subset. But still, would not magisterial teachings simply be a species within the genus of ‘tradition’?

Perhaps the distinction is more formal than material. The magisterium is the teaching office and the authority of that office which is thus a potency or power that is put into act to produce teachings which then become instantiations of the ‘tradition’ as magisterial teaching but which are distinguishable from the *authority* of the bishops who constitute the magisterium. In other words, the bishops are the magisterium and are distinguishable from their teaching,
which—though binding to greater or lesser degrees depending on the type of teaching with which they are issued—are distinguishable from those who teach authoritatively. But in this case, there is still not a clear distinction between magisterial teaching and Catholic tradition in a manner that would place magisterial teaching as something alongside and not within sacred tradition.

7.3 A Positive Assessment of Ratzinger’s Theology of Divine Revelation

Despite the above criticisms, I find Ratzinger’s works on divine revelation to be extremely profound and beneficial. The way he takes seriously contemporary perspectives about divine revelation from opposing camps and creatively engages with them to create a unified, holistic vision is nothing short of brilliant. He offers critiques to neo-scholastics and Protestants alike and yet also incorporates elements of their thought into his own theology. The way he draws upon St. Bonaventure to bridge the gap—insofar as it is possible—is remarkable. Ratzinger expertly brings together metaphysics, epistemology, salvation history, the Trinity, Christology, scripture, tradition, nature, grace, divine action, ecclesiology, and human free will into a coherent view of divine revelation. Overall, his theology of divine revelation is a significant advance in Catholic theology that at once helps overcome a narrow objectification of divine revelation while avoiding overly subjective, sentimental conceptions of revelation.

I think Ratzinger rightly emphasizes that revelation cannot be considered properly without reference to the believing subject. As divine self-communication, the very concept of revelation must include the one to whom revelation is addressed. This point is probably Ratzinger’s most famous contribution to theology of divine revelation and, arguably, his most important.
Ratzinger roots his understanding of revelation in epistemology. I find his discussion of external witness and interior illumination particularly helpful. His view establishes the proper distinction between God’s revelatory action and the concrete means of transmission of revelation (scripture and tradition). Ratzinger is correct that merely reading the sacred scripture is not itself revelation. Interior illumination through the Holy Spirit is necessary. This observation highlights the personal character of divine revelation. God does not just reveal himself in some general sense, but he reveals himself to us as individuals; he addresses us personally. This fact is both profound and essential for apprehending the splendor and majesty of divine revelation. Revelation is not merely a series of facts one must assent to intellectually; revelation is a call to intimate knowledge and loving union with the creator who is also our last end.

The way Ratzinger argues for the proper use of philosophy, especially metaphysics, in theology while at the same time giving primacy of place to sacred scripture is another aspect of his view of revelation that I applaud. I concur with him that ignoring philosophy is detrimental to theology. I also agree that one must not allow one’s philosophy to constrain one’s theology. Without naming names, I have encountered theologies that try to force revelation to fit into one’s preconceived notions. As helpful as philosophical frameworks can be, they can also be hindrances when they prevent one from seeing what is not calculable from a human, rational perspective. What one can gain from revelation is so much more than what one can deduce from first principles or formulate in abstract concepts. Relatedly, Catholic theology has, at times, been in danger of separating dogmatics (systematics) too much from sacred scripture. I think Ratzinger is correct to insist that scripture must be the heart of theology.

Ratzinger’s Christo-centrism is also praiseworthy. Afterall, as Ratzinger himself attests, the whole of scripture points us to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. In the person of Jesus, both
God and humanity are revealed most fully. Once again, revelation is not just about facts; it is about personal relationship. In Christ, God draws near to us so that we can draw near to him. As Vatican II rightly teaches, Christ is the mediator and fullness of divine revelation.\footnote{See 	extit{Dei verbum} 2.}

I especially appreciate the way Ratzinger combines his theology of revelation with ecclesiology in a way that takes seriously both the personal dimension of revelation and the objective—and thus unifying—dimension. The importance of the Church as a communion of believers who share the same faith is a fitting counterpart to the communion of the Trinity from whom revelation comes to us and to whom revelation leads us back. Revelation is a call to communion, not only with God as individuals, but as members of the body of Christ, the communion of the Church.

As one who studied Ratzinger’s ecclesiology in depth before delving into his theology of revelation, I was readily able to see from the start how revelation and ecclesiology go hand in hand. Before I saw it stated explicitly in Ratzinger’s writings, I was able to anticipate that his ecclesiology would be key to the way he avoids an overly subjectivistic notion of revelation. I was not disappointed. This unity between theology of revelation and ecclesiology is yet another example of how Ratzinger is able to keep subspecialities of theology together. There is wisdom in the way Ratzinger provides both incisive observations into specific topics as well as a view of the whole.

Furthermore, this study has made me appreciate the tremendous work he did before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council in the realm of divine revelation. Despite not being able to ascertain with scientific precision the exact degree to which Ratzinger is responsible for what became 	extit{Dei verbum}, I am impressed by the criticisms of the preparatory schemas he gave
and the suggestions for improvement that he offered. I am delighted that much of what he hoped for with respect to a document on divine revelation came to pass.

Similarly, I value Ratzinger’s commentaries on the documents of Vatican II (Dei verbum included) along with his vision for how to understand the Council and interpret it correctly. Within the Catholic Church, there are factions who have misrepresented the Council from the so-called right and left alike. Ratzinger has incisively shown how those on opposite theological extremes often make the same mistake of interpreting the Council as a rupture from the past. He challenges the faithful—theologians, clergy, and laity—to understand the Council from the perspective of the hermeneutics of reform and continuity. I not only agree with this view in principle, I think it is factually the proper way to interpret the Council.

This approach applies equally to Dei verbum. There is growth in the magisterial presentation of divine revelation, to be sure. However, there is an ever present continuity that Ratzinger as expertly elucidated. While many scholars after Trent began to assert the partim-partim understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition, Ratzinger accurately points to the Council of Trent’s explicit and intentional avoidance of such an expression as an important decision. At the same time, Ratzinger also shows that the conclusion that scripture is materially sufficient is an erroneous one, again, through appeal to the history of the Council of Trent itself. His scholarship on this front is commendable as is his willingness to allow certain topics to remain open for debate: not everything needs to be settled absolutely. The mysteries of the faith often contain nuances that are not easily cast into one camp or another.

Ratzinger’s scholarship is yet another part of his theology that I admire. Ratzinger draws from a vast number of sources for his theology. He does not hastily formulate an opinion based on his personal preferences and then seek to find support in others’ writings. Rather, he references scripture, the Fathers, scholastics, contemporary theologians—Catholic and Protestant alike—and magisterial texts in his elucidations of the topics, demonstrating a breadth of knowledge and depth of insight that is utterly remarkable. I marvel at how well-read Ratzinger is, and I am again and again impressed with how much he retains and shares from his sources.

It is precisely Ratzinger’s receptivity, which I believe is an aspect of his personal humility, that makes him such a great theologian. He does not seek to make God or theology in his own image. He strives instead to open himself up to the sources of the knowledge of revelation so that he can be illuminated, not by what he expects a priori, but from what he discovers as present and given as a gift. In short, it is Ratzinger’s faith, his stance first and foremost as a disciple, that I think characterizes his theology and enables him to be so illuminating for those who, in turn, avail themselves of his research and follow his example.

With this dissertation, I hope that others will obtain a more complete understanding of Ratzinger’s theology of divine revelation so that they, too, can benefit from the tremendous contributions he has made, yet which are still not widely available or readily accessible to many. More than just the contents of Ratzinger’s views on revelation, I hope that others—myself included—will appreciate and emulate his theological method. Following Ratzinger’s example, we can grow individually and collectively in our knowledge of the faith that comes to us from divine revelation.
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