Regula Fidei in the Light of Joseph Ratzinger's Writings

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Abstract: The study of the theological significance of *regula fidei* was embedded in Ratzinger's theology of the word of God through its connection with Christology, pneumatology and ecclesiology. The Bavarian theologian derived his reflections on the word of God from the historical structure of revelation and the genesis of Scripture in the Church. The article begins with a characterisation of the concept of Tradition, of which the rule of faith is a constituent element. The perspective adopted has made it possible to identify the main areas of the theology of the Word of God in which the rule of faith plays a role. Subsequently, the article addressed the relationship of revelation to the oral (*regula fidei*) and written (Scripture) canons, the connection between the Creed and the Church's liturgy, the relation of the oral and written canons, and the relevance of the Magisterium of the Church to the rule of faith. The theological approach to the rule of faith has also served to deepen reflection on the theology of the word of God, including the primacy of Scripture in the "one living organism of the word of God."

Keywords: *regula fidei*, rule of faith, Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, revelation, liturgy, Magisterium of the Church, organism of the word of God, primacy of Scripture, theology of the word of God

As noted by Scott Hahn (2009, 16–17; 2021, 17–19),[1] Joseph Ratzinger is not so much a systematic theologian as a symphonic one. Whoever studies the work of the Bavarian theologian encounters an organic thought in which all the elements come together to form a harmonious whole, without which they cannot be properly understood. As a result, a person discussing a particular issue from Ratzinger's legacy, firstly, cannot isolate it from the others in order not to lose sight of the synthesis and, secondly, must choose one of the many perspectives from which the issue can be considered. In *nexus mysteriorium*, "the slightest stirring in one place produces a wave of vibration in all directions." (Sesboüé 2007, 14) And Ratzinger's theology, wrote Kevin E. O'Reilly, is characterised precisely by an awareness of the links between the mysteries of faith (2020, 56).

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[1]   Naturally the American theologian is not the only one to characterise Ratzinger in this way. Of the others, it is worth mentioning at least Pablo Blanco Sarto (cf. his articles: Blanco Sarto 2013, 2018, 2020).

The search for the theological meaning of the rule of faith[2] must be framed within the broader background of Ratzinger's theology of the word of God, and that considered in its relation to Christology, pneumatology and ecclesiology (O'Reilly 2020, 56). In particular, looking closely at the process of the establishment of Scripture and the Church must prove fruitful because, as Hahn writes, Ratzinger's "hermeneutic of faith arises organically from the historical structure of revelation itself, that is, from the historical processes whereby the Scriptures were written down and handed on in the Church." (Hahn 2009, 46; 2021, 58)

This article proposes to start with Ratzinger's characterisation of the phenomenon of Tradition (par. 1), of which both Scripture and *regula fidei* are constituent elements. The perspective adopted will make it possible to identify the main areas of the theology of the word of God (par. 2–7) in which *regula fidei* plays a role. The theological approach to the rule of faith will also secondarily contribute to a deeper reflection on "Biblia Benedicti."

1. *Regula fidei* as an Element of Tradition

According to Ratzinger, the phenomenon of Tradition stems from the historical dimension of faith. As the author of the entry "Tradition" ("Tradition – Systematisch") in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* wrote, "the bond with the unique event of Christ [*Die Bindung an das einmalige Christusereignis*], which is the salvific transformation of human existence, does not take place except through incorporation into history, growing out of this source and representing the form of His permanent presence among men [*bleibenden Anwesenheit unter den Menschen darstellt*]." (Ratzinger 2018r, 384) The Bavarian theologian listed a number of elements that comprise Tradition, which must be considered together:

1. Scripture as part of Tradition transcending Scripture. The link between the two is already apparent from the very distinction between the two Testaments: the word of the New Testament is the living word interpreting the Old Testament, and the latter can only be Scripture in an ecclesiastical Christological reinterpretation (Ratzinger 2018r, 385). The establishment of the canon does not conclude this process, even if its continuation will henceforth have to take into account the New Testament writings created under inspiration. The account given of Jesus is not about archival confirmation of the past, but about the present presence of the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit"). From this it follows that

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2   Although the issue of *regula fide*i is the subject of many studies (cf. the literature collected in Zatwardnicki 2023d), I am not aware of any publications devoted entirely to Ratzinger's understanding of the rule of faith.

the word of the Lord, although it must not be detached from its historical foundation, unfolds and must be understood as present (cf. Ratzinger 2018r, 386; cf. Paciorek 2017, 210–11).

2. Apostolic succession, which functions as a safeguard of the word once delivered against gnostic speculations or references to alleged unwritten apostolic traditions. *Successio apostolica*, Ratzinger believes, has the character of a principle: "the primordial presence of the word is a personal presence in the form of a witness who, of course, as a witness, must not be arbitrary and who, precisely for this reason, ensures the primordiality of the word [*Reinheit des Wortes*]." He adds nothing to it, he preaches it and interprets it, and in his testimony "one word is assimilated into each present and is thus faithfully preserved [...]." (Ratzinger 2018r, 386 [quot. and paraphrase])

3. *Regula fidei* (and the later, not entirely identical to the rule of faith, *symbolum*) as the first "canon" of the Church. The Bavarian theologian referred in this connection to the medieval conviction that Scripture should be interpreted "according to *fides*, that is, according to the directive of the Creed." (Ratzinger 2018r, 386) It was not about material supplementation of Scripture by *symbolum*, but about a hermeneutical problem already solved in the early Church:

> Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of *regula fidei* and for the sake of *regula fidei*. Thus, in a sense, the principle of "*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*" is confirmed, since *regula* is taken from Scripture itself. However, it is clearly transcended by this, since the "canon within the canon" [*Kanon im Kanon*] is established by none other than the authority of the Church as an expression of its faith which primarily explains Scripture. (Ratzinger 2018r, 387; cf. Zatwardnicki 2022, 203; Humphrey 2013, 162)[3]

The rule of faith is more than a sum of claims, the *regula* as "*fides quae*" cannot be separated from "*fides qua creditur*." This, according to Ratzinger, is an expression of the fact that Scripture cannot have an effect except in the faith of the Church. Relevant here is the connection indicated by Ratzinger between the rule of faith and the liturgical-sacramental life and the catechumenate, to which I shall return later in this article. For now, suffice it to say that *regula fidei* is not merely a verbal formula, but the faith of the Church realised and expressed in the life of the Church (Ratzinger 2018r, 387).

4. The constant presence of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete promised by Jesus, who "takes care to ensure the preservation of the revelation once given [*die einmalige*

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[3] Robert Sokolowski, indicating the link between *Credo* and Scripture, pointed out that the formulation of the Creed is something that Scripture itself could not do (2013, 194–95). Christopher Seitz notes that when *regula fidei* was created, Scripture was still primarily the Old Testament, so the rule of faith, contrary to repeated opinions, could not be a summary of all Scripture (cf. 2011, 193).

Offenbarung], which sometimes – precisely in order to remain the same – must be uttered in a different way." (Ratzinger 2018r, 387–88 [quot. from p. 388])

5. Dogmas, i.e. binding claims arising from the authority given to the Church to interpret Scripture, as an objectified Tradition. In this secondary sense, Tradition transcends Scripture materially, but the latter's importance cannot be diminished. Therefore, dogmas must not be understood as if only the Church's expounding was clear and Scripture completely obscure. Indeed, a dogma also, as an objectified tradition, needs an interpretation that demands a return to the source (cf. Ratzinger 2018r, 388; 2018n, 511).[4]

In his *Attempt to Define the Concept of Tradition* (*Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs*), Ratzinger identified various sources of the reality of Tradition, which are simultaneously the planes that constitute the reality of Tradition. These are:

1. Surplus of reality [*Der Überhang der Wirklichkeit*] of revelation vis-à-vis Scripture.

2. "Impossibility of objectivising [*Nichtobjektivierbarkeit*]" (Bultmann) of revelation related to the nature of New Testament Revelation (*Pneuma* vis-à-vis *gramma*), which in the practice of the Church and medieval theology was expressed by placing *fides* above *scriptura*, the Creed (rule of faith) above what is written.

3. The presentness of the Christ-event, the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the Church-Body of Christ, and the related mandate to interpret "Christ yesterday" towards "Christ today" (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 45 [reg. all three points]; 2018m, 364. Cf. Brotherton 2015, 101; McCaughey 2018, 130–31; Pidel 2023, 113–14; Zatwardnicki 2022, 176).

In Ratzinger's view, these sources correspond to layers of transmission. The original *paradosis* consists in the Father sending his Son and the Son allowing himself to be delivered. This tradition is continued in Christ's abiding presence in the Church and his indwelling of believers through faith. Therefore, the decisive fundamental reality transmitted in Tradition is the full mystery of Christ, which is the proper content of the transmission preceding all explications (including inspired Scripture). This Tradition has its instrument in those exercising authority in the Church, but the Tradition has also already been expressed in what has become the rule of faith (*symbolum*, *fides quae*) (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 46; 2018m, 364–65).[5]

Referring, in turn, to the lecture *The Problem of the History of Dogma from the Perspective of Catholic Theology* (*Das Problem der Dogmengeschichte in der Sicht*

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4   A similar feedback occurs between the rule of faith and Scripture [Wall 2000, 105].
5   The Bible is the linguistic expression of revelation, which is not exhausted in words. Therefore, it is only where revelation "reaches" the recipient that a greater union with the word is possible and what could not be derived from the letter alone is discovered. This fact, according to Ratzinger, allows one to justify the phenomenon of Tradition and the Magisterium (cf. Ratzinger 2018l, 832).

der katholischen Theologie), it can be added that the form of dogma in the ancient Church was the Church's faith unveiling Scripture, which could not be reduced to a mere formula. These statements are important for our argument: in the early Church, Scripture is read within the framework of the Church's faith, which is expressed in – but not reducible to – a verbal formula. In other words: the rule of faith is to be seen as an expression of the Church's faith inherent in the life of that Church, in which the revelation event is still ongoing. Tradition is the expounding of "the Scripturally attested Christ-event in the history of the Church's faith," an interpretation carried out "under the guidance of the Spirit or through the risen Christ present because of Him," (Ratzinger 2018n, 505) Ratzinger concludes.

As Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger expressed his conviction that the meaning and value of living Tradition and Scripture in the Church can be better understood when one recognises the bond that exists between the Holy Spirit and the word of God (*VD* 17). If God gave the world his only-begotten Son (cf. John 3:16), "the divine word, spoken in time, is bestowed and 'consigned' to the Church in a definitive way, so that the proclamation of salvation can be communicated effectively in every time and place." (*VD* 1. Cf. *DV* 7 quoted by the Pope) However, the Tradition initiated by the Apostles is a living and dynamic reality, developing under the lead of the Holy Spirit (*VD* 17; *DV* 8). This means that "[t]he living Tradition is essential for enabling the Church to grow through time in the understanding of the truth revealed in the Scriptures," and even that "[u]ltimately, it is the living Tradition of the Church which makes us adequately understand sacred Scripture as the word of God." (*VD* 17. Cf. *DV* 8) Here, within this function inherent in all of Tradition, Benedict XVI also locates the task of the Magisterium of the Church:

> In short, by the work of the Holy Spirit and under the guidance of the magisterium, the Church hands on to every generation all that has been revealed in Christ. The Church lives in the certainty that her Lord, who spoke in the past, continues today to communicate his word in her living Tradition and in sacred Scripture. Indeed, the word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to revelation; together with the Church's living Tradition, it constitutes the supreme rule of faith. (*VD* 18. Cf. *DV* 21)

This view is slightly different from the claims of the young Ratzinger. In his commentary on *DV* 21, he seemed to regret the change introduced during the Council's work, weakening the normative character inherent in Scripture "possessing in a specific form the quality of a *regula*, as a self-contained, clearly delimited entity, a *regula* which, precisely because it stands so unalterably and indestructively in itself, requires that man constantly measures himself against it." (Ratzinger 1969, 264; 2016e, 691) In number 21 of the *Dei Verbum* constitution, the Council Fathers statehat the Church "has always maintained [Scripture – SZ] [....], and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition [*una cum Sacra Traditione*], as the supreme rule of faith [*supremam*

fidei suae regulam],” while no. 24 refers to sacred theology, which “rests on the written word of God [*verbo Dei scripto*], together with sacred tradition [*una cum Sacra Traditione*], as its primary and perpetual foundation.” Ratzinger comments that the formula used “expresses the fact that not only is Scripture related to tradition, but also that tradition, in its turn, is based upon Scripture.” (Ratzinger 1969, 268; 2016e, 697)[6] In the formulation “[f]or the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God [*verbum Dei continent*] and since they are inspired, really are the word of God [*vere verbum Dei sunt*],” (*DV* 24) he saw an attempt to work out “the essential difference between Scripture and tradition and the special pre-eminence of Scripture,” which is “the fundamental form of ‘tradition.’” This special significance of Scripture stems from 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.” (Ratzinger 1969, 270; 2016e, 699)[7]

This conviction, in turn, was reflected in the papal exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “Although the word of God precedes and exceeds sacred Scripture, nonetheless Scripture, as inspired by God, contains the divine word (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) ‘in an altogether singular way.’” (*VD* 17) However, “the Word of God must not remain confined to writing,” as emphasised by Benedict XVI in his message to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and therefore “becomes a supreme law of [...] faith and life force” not as an inert deposit, but in the living Tradition of the Church which “progresses with the help of the Holy Spirit.” (Benedict XVI 2012b, 2012a; *DV* 8, 21)

2. Revelation and the Oral and Written Canons

Ratzinger, as a conciliar expert, objected to the title of the schema *De fontibus revelationis*, which reflected the view popular after the Council of Trent – but not expressed by it – of two sources of revelation implying an incorrect account of Divine Revelation (cf. Ratzinger 2016d, 140–41).[8] The theologian pointed out that, according to the traditional understanding, “Scripture and tradition are not the sources of

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6   As Ratzinger wrote elsewhere, a theologian receives the statements of faith from the Church bound by the “double unity of testimony: Scripture and Tradition,” the Church-guardian of the word of God, for which “the norm is the historically transmitted word of revelation.” (cf. Ratzinger 2018q, 223)

7   On the other hand, the principle of wholeness means that individual biblical texts are to be understood and traced to their divine origin only in relation to the whole (cf. Benedict XVI 2023, 60). According to Ratzinger, in light of the broad horizon indicated in *Dei Verbum*, it becomes possible “to determine the concept of Tradition, which also goes beyond Scripture while having it as its centre, since Scripture is above all and by nature ‘tradition.’” (Ratzinger 2003; cf. 2018s, 734)

8   Instead, he proposed a change to, for example, *De revelatione*. He also postulated that the document should begin with the chapter *De revelatione ipsa* and the term *fontes* should be replaced with another (cf. Ratzinger 2016d, 142).

revelation, but instead revelation, God's speaking and his manifesting of himself, is the *unus fons* [one source], from which then the two streams Scripture and tradition flow out." (English quot. after: Wicks 2008, 270; Ratzinger 2016d, 140–41)[9] As Ratzinger recounts, the Fathers understood *paradosis* not as individual sentences existing "alongside" Scripture (as in gnosis), but as the integration of Scripture into the living organism of the Church and the Church's ownership of Scripture. For the Fathers, Tradition meant "*scriptura in ecclesia*," Scripture made alive through the living assimilation by the Spirit-filled Church (cf. Ratzinger 2016d, 145–46; Gaál 2010, 88).[10] Medieval theologians, including Saints Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, for all their reverence for Scripture, are not "scripturalists, since they both know well that revelation is always more than its material principle, the Scripture, namely, that it is life living on in the Church in a way that makes Scripture a living reality and illumines its hidden depths." (English quot. after: Wicks 2008, 276; Ratzinger 2016d, 147; cf. Hemming 2008, 114–15)

According to Ratzinger, the schema failed to distinguish between the order of being (reality) and the order of cognition (access to reality). It is only in the latter order that one can speak of Scripture and Tradition as sources, but not of Revelation itself, but of its congition (Ratzinger 2016b, 141). The conciliar advisor believed that it should be assumed that revelation is prior to the material testimonies of revelation (cf. Ratzinger 2016d, 141–42). "Then it is clear that revelation itself is always more than its formulated witness in Scripture, for revelation is the living reality that surrounds Scripture and expands it. [...] Scripture and Tradition are material principles of our knowing revelation, not revelation itself." (English quot. after: Wicks 2008, 271–72; Ratzinger 2016d, 142–43)

Ratzinger owes this firm view, persisting in his theology and affirmed, nota bene, in the *Dei Verbum*[11] constitution, to his research on the work of St Bonaventure. From the research it follows, as he wrote in his habilitation dissertation *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure* (*Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*), that the Seraphic Doctor did not call Scripture itself revelation. He associated *revelatio* with a certain inner understanding (*intelligentia*) of Scripture consisting in grasping its spiritual sense. If, under inspiration, there was a transition from *mundus sensibilis* to *mundus intelligibilis*, and thus a revelation or uncovering (*revelatio*) took

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9   German: "nicht Schrift und Überlieferung die Quellen der Offenbarung, sonderen die Offenbarung, das Sprechen und Sich-selbst- Enthüllen Gottes, ist der unus fons, aus dem die beiden rivuli Schrift und Überlieferung hervorfließen." (quot. after: Wicks 2008, 296)

10   Similarly, medieval theology, including Thomasian theology, "does not know [...] the two material principles of the history of dogmas – Scripture and Tradition, but only one material and formal principle: Scripture (which is materially sufficient) and the *auctoritas ecclesiae* or *Romani pontificis* interpreting the Scripture." (Ratzinger 2014a, 627)

11   This was emphasised by Ratzinger himself, according to whom *Dei Verbum* "defines the concept of Revelation, which is not to be wholly identified with its written testimony which is the Bible [...]." (Ratzinger 2003; 2018s, 734)

place, the inspired writer, in turn, had to convey this *visio intellectualis* wrapping it in the "swaddling clothes" of the written word. Consistently, revelation is not found in the letter, but in what is hidden behind it and needs a new unveiling (cf. Ratzinger 1989, 63 [together with n. 1], 67 [together with n. 22]; 2014b, 455 [together with n. 1], 460 [together with n. 22]; Pidel 2023, 56–57; McCaughey 2018, 125).

The risk of overemphasising the revelatory actualism marked by subjectivism (at the expense of the objectivism of the fact of revelation) was dismissed by medieval theologians by linking Scripture to the faith of the Church. Scripture would become revelation only in the Church's living understanding of Scripture, into which the reader entered through faith (a "mystical" attitude, analogous to that of the hagiographer receiving revelation) (cf. Ratzinger 1989, 67–68; 2014b, 461–62).[12] This is how Ratzinger explained it: "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." (Ratzinger 1989, 67; 2014b, 460–61)

In his contribution *Revelation – Scripture – Tradition: St. Bonaventure's Text and Its Significance for Contemporary Theology* (*Offenbarung – Schrift – Überlieferung. Ein Text des hl. Bonaventura und seine Bedeutung für die gegenwärtige Theologie*), the Bavarian theologian stressed that "to refer exclusively to Scripture as 'revelation' is a risky simplification," since "Scripture is the material principle of revelation." Revelation "remains outside Scripture and is not completely objectified in it. Therefore, Scripture, in order to be revelation, needs an interpretation that is consistent with revelation." (Ratzinger 2014a, 634–35; cf. also 2018l, 831; 1983, 27) Thus, revelation and Scripture cannot be reduced to one another *tout court*, which Ratzinger emphasised in *Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs*:

> Revelation [*Offenbarung*] means God's whole speech and action [*gesamte Sprechen und Tun Gottes*] with man; it signifies a *reality* [*Wirklichkeit*] which scripture makes known but which is not itself simply identical with scripture. Revelation, therefore, is more [*überschreitet*] than scripture to the extent that reality exceeds information about it. It might also be said that scripture is the material principle [*Materialprinzip*] of revelation […], but that it is not revelation itself. (Ratzinger 1966, 35; 2018m, 356; Wicks 2010, 642–43; Hemming 2008, 115)[13]

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12 Also in his article *On the Problem of the Demythologisation of the New Testament*, the Bavarian theologian recalled that in medieval theology, it was still believed that the letter of Scripture was not "revelation," it was only Scripture understood in the light of faith in Christ (cf. Ratzinger 2018j, 655).

13 However, it is not the case, Ratzinger added, that Scripture merely informs about facts existing outside of it. The reality of revelation as the reality of the word touches the addressee in the word of preaching. However, the word is not the reality of revelation. The linguistic character of revelation does not invalidate the distinction between the word and the reality occurring in it (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 70, n. 12; 2018m, 356, n. 12).

In his argument, Ratzinger highlighted the connection between revelation and the subject receiving it, without which it would not exist. Revelation becomes a reality only when there is faith that causes the veil covering the heart to be taken away (cf. 2 Cor 3:14–16) (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 36; 2018m, 356–57). In turn, in many other places, including in the lecture "Sources and Transmission of the Faith" ("Glaubensvermittlung und Glaubensquellen"), Ratzinger emphasised after Henri de Lubac that the faith of the believer does not exist outside the faith of the Church; by professing faith, the individual transcends the boundaries of their own "I" and becomes part of the Church subject with its knowledge that transcends time and boundaries. The act of faith is always an act of participating in the *communio* of witnesses, co-believing with the whole Church. It follows that faith cannot be experienced more directly from Scripture alone, to the exclusion of the faith of the Church, for this would be going beyond the certainty of the Church's memory transcending the individual "I" (cf. Ratzinger 1983, 26; 2018l, 830; cf. O'Reilly 2020, 53).

Ratzinger recommended viewing the sources of faith in relation to the source from which they originate; this source is God acting through Christ, and this source can only be accessed in the living organism of the Church. If Scripture is isolated from the life foundation of divine communication taking place in the "We" of the community of believers, then it becomes merely a "letter" (*Buchstabe*), a "flesh" (*Fleisch*) (cf. Ratzinger 1983, 27; 2018l, 831–32). "That the Bible […] says more than we are now able to comprehend from its letter, comes from the fact that it expresses a Revelation, reflected but not exhausted by the word." (Ratzinger 1983, 28; 2018l, 832])[14] The exclusion of this self-transcendence of Scripture results in a one-dimensional interpretation by the historical-critical method. Affirming that the content of the Bible, which is the record of the process of revelation, can only be recognised when the reader is included in this process changes the competence to interpret it (cf. Ratzinger 1983, 27–28; 2018l, 831–32). Then this competence belongs "to a whole network of references by which the living God communicates himself in the Christ by the Holy Spirit," and "it is expression and instrument of the communion thanks to which the divine 'I' and the human 'Thou' touch one another in the 'We' of the Church through the intermediary of Christ." Therefore, it is only when the revelation "reaches" the recipient and becomes a living revelation that a deeper union with the word takes place than when the text is analysed (Ratzinger 1983, 28; 2018l, 832).

What, then, is the relationship of revelation thus understood to the rule of faith and the rule of Scripture? This problem was addressed by Ratzinger in his paper *Das Problem der Dogmengeschichte in der Sicht der katholischen Theologie.*

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14   Cf. Pidel (2014, 319): "[...] Ratzinger's ontology of Scripture carries a further implication. Since the subject that produced Scripture lives on in the Church, it follows that Scripture (*qua* revelation) will overreach its own textual canon."

The Bavarian theologian, having opposed the axiom that revelation ended with the death of the Apostles (cf. Ratzinger 2018n, 502–3), identified two poles of revelation, past and present:

> In the Bible, revelation is not understood as a system of propositions, but as the event of a new relationship between God and man that has happened and is still happening in faith [*das geschehene und im Glauben immer noch geschehende Ereignis*]. This perfective nature of this event is reflected in the fact that for the believer the relationship between God and man has been realised in Christ in a supreme, unsurpassed, and ever new way. It retains its presentness, however, because it is always to be realised anew. (Ratzinger 2018n, 503)

It can be said that "the word of revelation uttered in Christ remains present in history and reaches men."[15] Verbal formulas may be only or as much as a testimony and explanation of a revelation event, but they are not revelation itself. The "moment of closure and exemplarity" related to κανὼν τῆς πίστεως oraz κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν was explained by Ratzinger as follows: "by establishing an oral and written canon (*regula fidei* and sacred texts), the Church has subjected herself to a permanent norm of explication. However, this norm is not a finite and closed set of propositions of revelation, but rather a norm that gives form to the everlasting and advancing history of faith." (Ratzinger 2018n, 503; cf. Nichols 2007, 163; Zatwardnicki 2022, 212) If I understand this correctly, the oral and written canons constitute the normative criterion for interpreting revelation, or even the condition for abiding in revelation which, however, is not exhausted in them.

In an article entitled "On the Problem of the Demythologisation of the New Testament" ("Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung des Neuen Testamentes"), obviously prompted by the views of Rudolf Bultmann, Ratzinger took the position that attempts at "demythologisation" (*entmythologisierung*) are also important for Catholic theology, except that what is revelation is not determined by a single theologian on the basis of scientific data, but is decided by the living community of faith which, being the Body of Christ, is Christ present in time and deciding on his work. In this sense, it is God himself – acting through the community of faith that formulates dogmas (the extension of the Symbol) as criteria defining the boundary between the seed and the husk – who provides the measure of what is possible and real (*des Möglichen und des Wirklichen*) (cf. Ratzinger 2018j, 655, 659–60).

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15   This is actually a quotation from another text (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 26; 2018m, 349).

3. Interpreting Scripture "According to Faith"

In *Attempt to Define the Concept of Tradition*, Ratzinger pointed out that, just as the old and new covenants "are different in kind, so too is the fact of scripture not identical in the two cases." (Ratzinger 1966, 37; 2018m, 357) The title of "Scripture" [*Schrift*] was reserved by both New Testament hagiographers and the early Church as a whole to the Old Testament. The "new" Scripture was not placed alongside it, since it was understood that it was the Christ-event [*Christus-Ereignis*] that was the interpreting spirit [*auslegenden Geist*] of Scripture, the true meaning of Scripture (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 38; 2018m, 357–58; similar reflections in: 2016a, 417). Saint Paul even contrasted the New Covenant as *pneuma* with the Old Covenant as *gramma* (cf. 2 Cor 3:6–8). According to the apostle, the Lord Himself is the Spirit (*Pneuma*) (v. 17) which is the meaning, the true and living (non-literal) content of Scripture. As Ratzinger notes, the oldest creeds [*Glaubensbekenntnisse*] (e.g. "Jesus is the Christ") express this conviction of the fulfilment of the Old Testament message about the Messiah in the historical Jesus (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 37; 2018m, 358).[16]

The Bavarian theologian maintains that this state of affairs is not merely transitory and that its essence, even if more difficult to discern, remains permanent even after the New Testament literature has taken shape. The salvific-revelatory Christ-event makes it necessary for Scripture to assume a different place than was accorded to it in the Old Covenant (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 38–39; 2018m, 358–59). Thus began an ongoing process of interpreting Scripture in the light of Christ lasting "within the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ [*Geistwirklichkeit Jesu Christi*], who remains with his own 'always, to the close of the age' (Mt 28:20), who by his going through the Cross has come again in the Holy Spirit (as John expresses it) and, through the Spirit, expounds to the disciples what they once were still unable to bear, when the Lord still visibly dwelt among them (Jn 16:12 f.)." (Ratzinger 1966, 39; 2018m, 359)

This Christocentrism of revelation is decisive for a proper grasp of the relationship between the reality of revelation itself and its verbal, including inspired, expoundings. Since for Christians, Ratzinger emphasises, the reception of revelation means entering into the reality of Christ, who is revelation in the proper sense of the word (cf. John 14:9), individual propositions in this process play a secondary role. Reception of revelation, i.e. the reality of Christ, involves faith through which

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16 Cf. also Emery de Gaál (2010, 125): "They are crystallizing moments when early Christians 'explosively' discovered their faith contained an explicit Christology. He called these very early statements '*praesymbola*' and thus coined a new term. A *praesymbolum* is not the sum of a gospel narrative that came about later but its inner structure. It precedes canon formation and even the written form of many New Testament texts." Hugolin Langkammer divides the post-paschal creeds into: formulas of faith, acclamations and doxologies (cf. 1976, 43–44). The biblical scholar notes that the earliest creeds link the earthly Jesus to the risen Christ, which is relevant in the age of modern Christological and exegetical research (cf. 1976, 49).

Christ dwells in a Christian's heart (cf. Eph 3:17), as well as the "Body of Christ," i.e. the community he gathered that makes it possible to participate in the presence of Christ (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 40–41; 2018m, 359–60; cf. also: Benedykt XVI 2023, 59). Therefore, Ratzinger writes of "[t]he explication of the Christ-reality, which is revelation and which has its double yet single enduring presence [*zwiefach-eine Anwesenheit*] in faith and in the Church." (Ratzinger 1966, 41; 2018m, 361)

In the next step of his argument, Ratzinger emphasises that the explication of this Christ-reality, present in faith and in the Church, takes place in preaching which is intrinsically explanatory. This takes two forms: The Old Testament is explained in the light of and in relation to the Christ-event, while the Christ-event itself is explained in the light of the *Pneuma* and in the light of the presence of the living Lord in the Church, which is his Body, in which his Spirit is at work (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 41–42; 2018m, 361). It can therefore be said – and Ratzinger does so in the text of the "Conciliar Discussion on the Relationship between Scripture and Tradition" ("Zur Konzilsdiskussion über das Verhältnis von Schrift und Überlieferung") – that the principle of Scripture was transcended with the coming of Christ. In contrast, Scripture itself is conditioned by the existence of ecclesiastical Tradition, for it is only in the faith of the Church that Scripture becomes Scripture. This also becomes apparent in the conclusions reached by historical-critical research: indeed, already in the New Testament itself, we are dealing not with a mechanical transmission of the "archival" words and deeds of the Lord, but with a certain development arising precisely from the conviction that the Risen Lord, by means of the Spirit, lives in the Church (Ratzinger 2016a, 416–17).[17]

Similar thoughts, with a more direct reference to *regula fidei*, were expressed by Ratzinger in *Das Problem der Dogmengeschichte in der Sicht der katholischen Theologie*. According to the scholar, the original form of the concept of Tradition consisted "in the division of Scripture into Old and New Testaments, and this in such a way that the New Testament appears as a Christological interpretation of the Old, as a 'Tradition' [*Tradition*] which gives 'Scripture' [*Schrift*] its meaning." (Ratzinger 2018n, 504) Even though, as a result of the amalgamation of the two Testaments into a single "Scripture," the concept of Tradition has begun to overlap to some extent, the conviction remains that all "Scripture," not excluding the New Testament, must henceforth be interpreted "according to faith" (cf. Ratzinger 2018n, 504).

This faith is understood as the Trinitarian baptismal confession (the extended Christological confession) or the associated *regula fidei* (cf. Ratzinger 2018n, 504; cf. also Królikowski 2020, 53). This rule of faith is regarded as:

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17   Cf. Ratzinger 2018r, 385 on the distinction between Old and New Testaments as a transgression of the principle of Scripture, and on how the Old Testament ("Scripture" in the early Church) can only be Scripture in an ecclesiastical Christological interpretation, which in turn shows the bond of Scripture and Tradition.

the proper canon of the Church – the canon that constitutes the canon for the "canon" [*eigentliche Kanon der Kirche, der den Kanon für den „Kanon" bildet*]. This notion of canon, or the conviction that Scripture is to be interpreted according to faith, is a form of the notion of dogma in the ancient Church. Dogma is not understood here as a claim, it is rather the faith of the Church that unveils and interprets Scripture. It should be clear that there is not yet a dissonance here between the concept of Tradition and the concept of dogma, but above all that this understanding of the Christian canon necessarily implies a dynamic element, since according to it Scripture always requires interpretation and the faith that unveils it is always more than a mere formula. (Ratzinger 2018n, 504–5; cf. Zatwardnicki 2022, 306)[18]

In both the rule of faith and the subsequent dogma, one can see an interpretation that makes it possible to express the ambiguous, figurative language of the Bible in terms that are unambiguous and reveal the essence of the message of Scripture (cf. Ratzinger 2018n, 511).[19]

In a commentary on one of the documents of the International Theological Commission, Ratzinger pointed out that the early Church rejected a political interpretation of the Old Testament and followed a Christological expounding of the Old Testament (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 152).[20] Oriented towards the Lord risen from the dead who is Spirit, the Old Testament was "pneumatised" (spiritualised) [*pneumatisiert (vergeistigt)*]. However, this pneumatisation is at the same time an incarnation, an attribution to the Spirit dwelling in the Body of Jesus. Given that the Lord entrusted his word to the recollective action of the Holy Spirit present in the community of disciples, it should be added that the concretely incarnational character of the pneumatisation is expressed in the fact that the word was committed to the recollective faith of the Church, which makes possible a "simultaneity" [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] with the word (i.e recognition of the present in the word of the past) (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 153, 155–56).

Elsewhere, the Bavarian theologian showed the related fact that the Church appeared in place of the Kingdom of God as a result of Israel's failure to convert. Its establishment as a decision made in the Holy Spirit justifies, according to Ratzinger, the existence of an ecclesiastical interpretation of the New Testament (dogma) – different from the biblical theology – which, he argues, is called Tradition. It goes all the way back to the heart of Scripture, since the origins of ecclesiastical theology are

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[18] The International Theological Commission pointed out that the interpretation of dogmas is a spiritual event connecting to life with Christ in the Church (cf. 2000, B, III, 4).

[19] St. Thomas Aquinas believed that the truth of faith, scattered throughout Scripture, had to be expressed in the form of a summary of its content so that it would be accessible to all believers (cf. *ST* II–II, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 1; Nichols 2002, 29).

[20] Ratzinger defended this Christological interpretation against modern accusations, arising from a developed historical consciousness and its distinctive criteria of interpretation (cf. 2018o, 725–28).

already present in the pages of the New Testament (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 44; 2018m, 362–63; Pidel 2023, 112).

4. *Regula fidei* and the Sacramental-Liturgical Life

Ratzinger emphasises the connection of *regula fidei* with baptism and the catechumenate, which helps to dismiss the temptation to see the rule as a verbal expression functioning "separately" from the broadly understood (and lived) faith of the Church (cf. Ratzinger 2018r, 387; cf. also Królikowski 2018, 68–69 on the relationship of the rule of faith to baptism). He shows "the bond that exists between the Church's faith and her liturgical-sacramental life, through which the Church realises her faith and at the same time continues to experience anew its sealing by the Lord's saving action." The Bavarian theologian believes that "in the liturgical life of the Church one can therefore find the most effective form of active transmission." (Ratzinger 2018r, 387; cf. also: 2018p, 629)[21]

In the ancient baptismal rituals, as Ratzinger noted in his text "Baptism and the Formulation of the Content of Faith – Liturgy and the Development of Tradition" ("Taufe und Formulierung des Glaubens – Traditionsbildung und Liturgie"), there was no baptismal formula in the form we know today, but rather it featured a Symbol divided into questions and demanding answers. This baptismal dialogue would constitute the oldest surviving form of a creed [*Glaubensbekenntnis*] (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 109; 2018a, 419).[22] According to the Bavarian theologian: "We can state with certainty, then, that the formulation of the content of faith in fixed formulas – *symbola* – originally occurred primarily in the context of baptism: it is referred to the baptismal event in which it originates, which occasions the need for such formulas and to which they continue to be referred." (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 109; 2018a, 419)[23]

Baptism as not the only, but the primary "place" for the formation of confessions of faith determined the formation of two types of confession: *regula* (*didascalia*) as

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21 "For Benedict an essential aspect of *sentire cum ecclesia* is accepting the liturgy as a normative witness to tradition." (Ciraulo 2015, 232) Larry Hurtado (2005, 25) compares the emergence of Christ worship to a "volcanic eruption," but the "point-based" experience of a powerful religious experience had to find a continuation in the Church community. The continuation of the source experience must be sought in the liturgical-sacramental life of the Church (cf. Zatwardnicki 2023b, 129–30).

22 Today's confession of faith accompanying the sacrament of baptism "represents the surviving remnant of the former double rite of *traditio et redditio symboli*." (Ratzinger 1987, 106; 2018a, 416)

23 In an interview with a German journalist, Ratzinger referred to Rom 6:17 for confirmation that the formulas of faith associated with baptism had already developed at an early stage (cf. Ratzinger 2002, 261). Tomas Bokedal (2013, 233–34, 246) claims that *regula fidei* was the sum of the content of the apostolic teaching contained in Scripture and in the (pre)baptismal creeds and apostolic teaching patterns. Cf. also: Quasten 1963, 1102.

a compendium of doctrine related to the catechumenate and the Symbol, i.e. the "declarative" [*declaratorische*] and "interrogatory" [*interrogatorische*] confessions of faith belonging to the essence of baptism itself. Both types fulfil the functions from which they grew and express and realise the two planes of faith (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 109–10; 2018a, 419–20 together with note 29 on page 419; cf. also: Królikowski 2020, 54). For faith, Ratzinger continues,

> […] encompasses the level of the *didascalia* [*Didaskalie*], the comprehensive instructional manual, which is standardized and fixed in its overall structure but flexible and not susceptible of standardization in its individual ramifications. Faith also encompasses the level of the act of *pactio*, of the neophyte's Yes to the summons of the creed, and is here, in its trinitarian and salvation-historical structure, an organically constructed form, a *symbolum*, in which question and answer are united in the indissolubility of a definitive event. (Ratzinger 1987, 109–10; 2018a, 420)

In this form of celebration of the sacrament, faith was expressed both in the act of decision, when the catechumen was subscribed to the Church's confession of faith which simultaneously constituted the promise of new life, and in the developed *didascalia* regulated by the baptismal dialogue (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 110; 2018a, 420).

According to Ratzinger, the subsequent separation of the Symbol from the baptismal formula and locating it within baptismal preparation blurred the distinction between the *didascalia* (*regula*) and the Symbol. As a result, the sacrament became fossilised in ritual and theology in pure doctrine; there was a devaluation of the Symbol into what we today call dogma. Above all, however, the dimension of *pactio* gave way to the act of administering baptism itself, and thus the connection between baptism, confession and faith was lost. What was lost was the conviction that faith is not merely a private decision of the converting person, but it is also an encounter, an act of opening oneself to and being welcomed by a community of believers (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 110; 2018a, 420–21). "Thus the act of faith can take place and be what it is supposed to be in no other way than by referring itself publicly to the Church and letting itself be received in the mutuality of question and answer, letting itself be buried, immersed, made one with the one subject of the *credo*: *Mater Ecclesia*." (Ratzinger 1987, 111; 2018a, 422)

Ratzinger referred to the relationship of the rule of faith to the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church also in other places.

In a lecture entitled *What in Fact is theology?* (*Was heißt Theologie?*), he first emphasised that scientific research has confirmed the Catholic belief in the connection between the People of God and the Word of God, the Church and Scripture. According to the Bavarian theologian, it should be accepted that the word of God given in Scripture is not merely a book. The human subject of this word is the People of God preserving their identity throughout history. If part of the essence of Scripture is to

unite synchrony and diachrony, present and past, then Scripture can be "contemporary [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] to believers of each time only in the Church. The confession of faith, Ratzinger noted, was shaped throughout the path of faith of the community of believers, from Abraham to the end of the creation of the canon." (Cf. Ratzinger 1998; 2018b, 330–31)[24] The original place of existence of the Christian confession was, as Ratzinger emphasises, "the sacramental life of the Church." Yet, the Symbol of the Church "is not a piece of literature: for a long time, people quite consciously avoided writing down the rule of faith [*Glaubensregel*] that produced the Creed, just because it is the concrete life of the believing community [*konkretes Leben der glaubenden Gemeinschaft*]." (Ratzinger 1998; 2005, 35; 2018b, 331)[25]

In his published lecture "On the Question of the Historicity of Dogmas" ("Zur Frage nach der Geschichtlichkeit der Dogmen"), Ratzinger showed that the original form of dogma was the baptismal symbol and its initial, dialogical part. The "place" of this "dogma," understood as a binding pledge of faith and the binding of the believer's existence to a particular path, was baptism as the liturgical sealing of conversion and the manifestation of this binding. The etymology of the term "symbol" (the Greek *symballein* means the assembling of the parts [„halves"] of an identifying sign enabling people to recognise each other) indicates that the language of faith refers back to the other believers and represents the unity of the spirit, which in turn demands the unity of the word in order to be able to praise God together (cf. Ratzinger 2018i, 532, 534). "The primary meaning of dogma is to enable a communal liturgy, to enable communion in the sacred." (Ratzinger 2018i, 534) *Symbolum* (and secondarily also dogma) is "communicative, liturgical, verbal" in nature, and its sense is "the word as a form of communication of thought, thought as communication," and thus "making a way for the collective utterance of what can never be sufficiently uttered [...]" and thereby "making possible the community of the spirit through the community of the word." (Ratzinger 2018i, 535)[26]

The verbal character of the dogma is thus ascribed to making communal liturgy possible. Then, it is also a matter of developing a "grammar of faith" [*Grammatik*

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24 Cf. Ratzinger (cf. 2018f, 163): "A Christian believes always together with the whole of history, not only synchronically but also diachronically. Ultimately, the unifying point of their faith is not a particular time (or a particular system), but one living entity, the Church, which exists in and encompasses the various times [...]."

25 In "Die Bedeutung der Väter im Aufbau des Glaubens," Ratzinger considered the role of the Church of the first centuries in the formation of the Christian canon and the rule of faith (and its continuation in the Symbols) in a selection of writings (cf. Ratzinger ; 1987, 149–50; 2018t, 459). In doing so, he noted that "[i]n the ancient Church, the reading of Scripture and the confession of faith were primarily liturgical acts of the whole assembly gathered around the Risen Lord." (Ratzinger 1987, 150; 2018t, 459–60)

26 Cf. Zatwardnicki (2023b, 132): "Thus, in the beginning there was worship and a concomitant confession, for Christian faith was never reduced solely to inner experiences; indeed, the very fact of communal worship demanded adequate means of expressing this worship. In the rule of faith, therefore, one can see the 'recapitulation' of the beliefs born 'at once', although their full assimilation and expression in this particular form of content and structure took time."

des Glaubens], a kind of *regula loquendi*, through which a mystery (e.g. the Trinity) found in the biblical message becomes conceivable because it is utterable in human language (cf. Ratzinger 2018i, 535–37; Nichols 2007, 166). Ratzinger thus derives the common confession from the very necessity of faith:

> It is clear that all speaking is merely an attempt to grasp the ineffable, and is therefore subject to the strict law of analogy: it is more dissimilar than similar ("*symbolum*"!). Finally, it is also evident that the binding power of this grammar (in parallel with other grammars) is based not on the necessity of a thing that can only be expressed in such a way, but on the necessity that can be confessed collectively. Confession as something collective is, of course, a necessity of faith. (Ratzinger 2018i, 537)[27]

The question of the Symbols was also addressed by Ratzinger in his statements on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In the texts "Why a Catechism of the Catholic Church?" ("Wozu ein Katechismus der katholischen Kirche?") and "What does it mean to believe? ("Was heißt ,Glauben'?") Ratzinger pointed out that baptismal catechesis always followed the baptismal creed – the Symbol of the Apostles – and thus was not merely a theory, but was integrated into the process of life. The *Symbolum* as a confession of faith in the Triune God is an elaboration of the baptismal formula, with which it remains connected. The *Apostolicum* in its Trinitarian structure is, like the baptismal formula itself, a confession of faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this way, it properly establishes a hierarchy of truths (all of which are derived from the truth of the Triune God), and shows that faith is an event – an encounter with God who is the Father, who has embraced humanity in the Son, and who unites us together in the Holy Spirit (cf. Ratzinger 2018k, 877; 2018c, 886).[28] In his publication "The Way to the Catechism of the Catholic Church" ("Hinführung zum Katechismus der katholischen Kirche"), Ratzinger recalled that the Old Christian catechumenate listed the following as the fundamental elements of being a Christian: faith, sacraments, commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Corresponding to this were the *traditio* and *redditio Symboli*, meaning the transmission of the creed and the confession by the candidate for baptism, the mystagogical catechesis introducing

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[27] The inseparable, and resulting from the biblical concept of faith, connection between the object of the act of faith and the object of faith, i.e. trust in God (*fides fiducalis*) and the confession of faith (*fides dogmatica*), is pointed out by Królikowski (2020, 61–62).

[28] Cf. also: Ratzinger (2018d, 900; 2018f, 173): "The structure of the *Creed* – in the light of Matt 28:19 – is Trinitarian: the faith is faith in the triune God." That Scripture itself does not establish a hierarchical order of the transmitted deposit of revelation was pointed out by Paweł Leks (1997, 42). Cf. also: Królikowski (2018, 72–73): "The *Creed*, intrinsically connected to the liturgy, thus goes beyond a simple enumeration of the main theological truths – it appears primarily as a mystically and ecclesially concentrated expression of the history of salvation concretely realised and continued in the sacrament in the time of the Church. The liturgy is about the lived – personally and communally – experience of faith in pursuit of salvation."

the sacramental life, learning the Lord's Prayer and the moral instruction. The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explained that everything is interconnected here: in order to be a Christian, one must learn to believe, to follow the Christian way of life and prayer, and one must engage in the mysteries of faith, i.e. the liturgy of the Church (cf. Ratzinger 2018d, 897).

5. Κανὼν τῆς πίστεως vs κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν

In the second volume of the trilogy on the person and work of Jesus, Ratzinger wrote that in faith in Christ – whose essence is "being sent" by the Father – the structure of mission is also present. The Son, departing to the Father, promises to send the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:13), and after his resurrection, he incorporates the disciples into the stream of mission (cf. John 20:21). As the author maintains, the formula of "apostolic succession" precisely expresses the "being sent" of the disciples and their connection with the word of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ratzinger 2011b, 98–99; 2015, 450–51). However, three elements together determine the unity of the Church:

> Together with "apostolic succession", the early Church discovered (she did *not* invent) two further elements fundamental for her unity: the canon of Scripture and the so-called *regula fidei*, or "rule of faith." This was a short summary – not definitively tied down in every detail to specific linguistic formulations – of the essential content of the faith, which in the early Church's different baptismal confessions took on a liturgical form. This rule of faith, or creed, constitutes the real "hermeneutic" of Scripture, the key derived from Scripture itself by which the sacred text can be interpreted according to its spirit. (Ratzinger 2011b, 99)[29]

In one of his speeches, the Pope added that this threefold decision was the response of the early Church to the question of the presence of the Word in the world. The establishment of the canon emphasises the sovereignty of the Word, while the establishment of the episcopal ministry expresses the awareness that the Word is alive and present only through the testimony that constitutes the interpretation given by the witness testifying about the Word. *Regula fidei*, on the other hand, is the key to the interpretation of the Word of God. Benedict XVI expressed his conviction about the reciprocal compenetration of these three elements. He emphasised that it testifies

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[29] Cf. Ratzinger 2015, 451; Ratzinger [Benedict XVI] 2011, 112; Hahn 2009, 47; 2021, 60; Jenson 2010, 71. Bogdan Ferdek writes (2010, 179–80) about the "Ratzinger quadrilateral" formed by symbols of faith, liturgy, episcopate, and Scripture (cf. also: Blowers 1997, 199, 225–26). The author emphasises that *regula fidei*, although open to further change, was already functioning in its integrity at a time when the canonicity of the books of the Bible was a matter of debate.

to the humility of the Lord that he entrusted his word and its interpretation to witnesses, with their testimony always being compared with *regula fidei* and the integral word (cf. Benedict XVI 2005; Hahn 2009, 48; 2021, 61; cf. also: Dieter 2018, 463).

In his commentary "Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism" ("Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theologische Pluralismus"), Ratzinger wrote that the formulas "the confession constitutes the Church [*das Bekkentnis konstituiert Kirche*]" and "the Holy Spirit constitutes the Church [*der Heilige Geist konstituiert Kirche*]" refer to the same two-fold reality, since "celebration and proclamation take place 'in the power of the Holy Spirit.'" (Ratzinger 2018f, 167) The Bavarian theologian strongly opposed the views of Ernst Käsemann maintaining that the canon of the New Testament alone establishes the unity of the Church. In Ratzinger's conviction, only the prior unity of the Church could establish the canon in its unity and still remains the assumption of this canon and its unity (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 167–68). Ratzinger argues that:

> After great struggles, the Church recognised in these books the legitimate expression and measure of its faith, and on the basis of this faith, it was able to read them as one book. Without the faith of the ancient Church and without its unity, there is no New Testament canon, just as without this faith, there is no unity between the Old and New Testaments. In this sense, this faith, as a hermeneutical point [*hermeneutische Punkt*] that creates unity, is itself an essential part of the New Testament as a canon. [...] It is only the hermeneutic of the ancient Church that forms it as *one* book. (Ratzinger 2018f, 168–69; cf. a similar statement in: Ratzinger and Rahner 2016, 181–82)

Only by recognising all this can one attempt to reconcile the relationship between the diverse forms of biblical books and the unity of ecclesial faith. Because the Church, in the act of establishing the canon, and thus creating one whole from many books, accepted the books as they are, they – and not just the canon as a whole – are the measure for the Church (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 169).[30] The Church's fundamental decision thus establishes the counterpoint of plurality and unity in the Church: the New Testament must be read no differently than in the Church, while the Church must be experienced in the light of the New Testament testimony. In this way, it will be confirmed that the judgment of the ancient Church arose from the internal perspective of the New Testament writings and was not imposed on them (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 169).[31]

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[30] Here we encounter a certain circularity: "just as the Christian community shaped the canon, so the community and its basic identity were shaped by the canon." (O'Collins 2018, 144) Cf. also Armstrong (2010, 44): "The development of a definitive body of Christian literature came to define the orthodoxy by which the final form of the canon was adjudicated."

[31] In this context, cooperation between exegesis and systematic theology is necessary, due to the need to speak about the entirety of the Christian reality (the role of systematic theology), but with consideration of exegetical research (historical-critical method) (cf. Ratzinger 1969, 267; 2016e, 695–96).

For the matter of *regula fidei*, it is important to consider Ratzinger's lecture "Theology and Magisterium" ("Teologia e magistero"), where he emphasised that Scripture as the Word of God is "above" the Church (or vis-à-vis it), but it is also "within" the Church because it is not a "naked" [*nacktes*] word, but a mediated [*vermitteltes*] one. According to Ratzinger, the Incarnation of the Logos extends to the entire dialogue between God and man, and the inspired authors are to be seen as belonging to the future Body of Christ (cf. Ratzinger 2018p, 627).[32] Due to the humility of the Word and its nuptial union with the Church ("one body" from Eph 5:31), the Church becomes *hen pneuma* (cf. 1 Cor 6:17) with the Lord and speaks with him in one voice. Human word has been received by Christ, and rejecting the human and ecclesiological mediation of the Word of God would be akin to Monophysitism (cf. Ratzinger 2018p, 627–28).[33] The Bavarian theologian identifies two factors in the dialogue between the Lord and the Church: the establishment of the canon and the Symbol of faith, which

> at various stages of its development is present in Scripture, but the primary place of the Symbol is the sacramental life of the Church (primarily baptism, the act of conversion). Through the Symbol, the praying and supplicating [*bettende und bittende*] Church is present in Scripture, the praying and preaching [*betende und predigende*] Church is the condition (not the cause!) [*Voraussetzung (nicht die Ursache!)*] of Scripture. The canon was created according to the criterion of the Symbol, and therefore the Symbol is the first hermeneutical instance of interpreting Scripture. (Ratzinger 2018p, 629; cf. 2018f, 175; Kasper 2014, 98)

In the published paper entitled "Importance of the Fathers for the Structure of Faith" ("Die Bedeutung der Väter im Aufbau des Glaubens"), Ratzinger expressed the relationship between Scripture and the Fathers in terms of the relationship between the word, which by its nature is relational and presupposes a speaker, and the response given by the one who listens to the word and accepts it. Although the response does not have the same rank as the word, nevertheless, "[o]nly because the word has found its answering word [*Ant-wort*] does it continue to be a word and to become effective." (Ratzinger 1987, 147 [quot. and paraphrase]; 2018t, 456) The word and response can neither be mixed nor separated; the response remains constitutive for the continuation of the word (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 147–48; 2018t, 457–59). According to Ratzinger, the uniqueness and irrevocability of the first response given by the Church Fathers are determined by four processes:

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32   Similar views were expressed by Ratzinger together with Rahner in a sketch of a schema titled *De revelatione Dei et hominis* (cf. Ratzinger and Rahner 2016, 179–81).

33   Cf. also: Ratzinger (1969, 270; 2016e, 699): "Scripture, too, is the word of God only as and in the human word; it also includes an element of mediation and cannot be dissolved into a direct immediacy of the divine." Cf. also Rosik 2009, 229–30.

1. The canon of Scripture originates from the Fathers and the early Church, which entails the selection of books comprising the New Testament and the association of the Greek canon of the Jewish Bible as the Old Testament. The establishment of the canon and the establishment of the early Church are one and the same process but viewed from different perspectives (Ratzinger 1987, 148–49; 2018t, 457; cf. also: O'Reilly 2020, 37, 39, 57–58).[34]

2. The early Church, in selecting the writings belonging to the canon, applied the criterion known as the rule of faith (κανὼν τῆς πίστεως, *regula fidei*, *regula veritatis*). This canon played an important role in distinguishing false from true sacred writings. *Regula fidei* finds its continuation in both conciliar and extra-conciliar Symbols, in which the Church of the Fathers sought to specifically define Christian content of faith while also rejecting errors (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 149–50; 2018t, 459; cf. Hahn 2009, 53; 2021, 67–68; O'Reilly 2020, 58; Lienhard 2019, 68; Sosnowski 2021, 250).[35]

3. Ratzinger points to the liturgical heritage left to the Church by the Fathers, which is important because the reading of inspired texts and the common confession of faith took place during church liturgy.

4. The Fathers also advocated for the rationality of faith (understood as *philosophia*) and thus initiated the programme *credo ut intelligam*, which is a condition for the survival of Christian faith (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 150–52; 2018t, 459, 461).

In summary, according to Ratzinger, the lasting significance of the Fathers can be expressed in the characteristic unity of Scripture, liturgy, and theology typical of patristic thought (cf. Ratzinger 1987, 151–52; 2018t, 461; cf. Michalik 2023, 272).[36]

Ratzinger also addressed the relationship between the formation of the canon and the rule of faith on other occasions. He emphasised that the canon did not originate from the oral transmission of the Apostles, but is an expression and result of the same authority of the Church, by virtue of which the Church first established *regula fidei* as a canon, which then served in the establishment of the biblical canon (Ratzinger 2018r, 388). Both the formation of the New Testament and the recognition of the canon were ecclesial events occurring in the act of common faith (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 23; 2018g, 790). The canon was formed according to the criterion of

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[34] The Church did not inherit a ready-made canon from the apostles; it had to listen to the Holy Spirit operating within it and choose those books in which it recognised this Spirit (cf. Ratzinger 2016d, 144; Rahner 1969, 196).

[35] Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014, para. 61): "Criteria for this discernment were gradually established, among which were public and universal reading, apostolicity understood as the authentic tradition of an apostle, and especially the *regula fidei* (Irenaeus), that is, that the text does not contradict the apostolic tradition transmitted by the bishops in all the churches." Cf. also: O'Collins 2018, 5, 140, 143–45; Williams 2006, 23.

[36] Ratzinger wrote with greater reserve about the role of the Fathers of the Church in a commentary on *DV* 23 written much earlier (cf. Ratzinger 1969, 267; 2016e, 695).

the Christian confession, with *regula fidei* associated with the Symbol not being written down for a long time, as it was simply the life of the believing community (Ratzinger 1998; 2018b, 331).

6. The Magisterium of the Church and the Rule of Scripture

It was pointed out above that, in Ratzinger's view, one expression of the dialogue between the Lord and the Church is the Symbol, already present in the books of the New Testament, whose proper place was the sacramental life of the Church. This means, according to the Bavarian theologian, that the Church is a condition of Scripture. It is not only a question of the role played at the stage of the formation of the biblical canon, but of the constant reference of the authority of the teaching Church – as the concretisation of the living voice of the Church in constant dialogue with the Lord – to Scripture. "The Symbol is the living voice of the living Church [*lebendige Stimme der lebendigen Kirche*]. The principle of the 'Magisterium' [*Prinzip 'Lehramt'*] is contained in the always living reality [*in der immer lebendigen Wirklichkeit*] of the Symbol." (Ratzinger 2018p, 629 [quot. and paraphrase])

Ratzinger came to the same conclusions in a lecture given on the occasion of being awarded the *honorary doctorate* of the University of Pamplona. The axis of the argument became the question of the relationship of the Magisterium of the Church to Scripture and theology. Is the office held by virtue of apostolic succession grounded in the biblical word or does it, as the Reformers would have it, 'colonise' the word of God? (Ratzinger 2018b, 327 [introductory remarks to the lecture]; 1998). Ratzinger showed that the principle of Scripture postulated by the Reformers (*sola Scriptura* and the related conviction of the *perspicuitas* of Scripture) was called into question for several reasons: (1) by virtue of the objective internal structure, the word contains more than what is written in the book; (2) research has shown that the word involves oral transmission on the one hand, and subsequent interpretations (so-called *relectures*) on the other; (3) the history of exegesis has proved to be a history of contradictory interpretations, and the biblical word identified with the book a victim of manipulation (cf. Ratzinger 2018b, 329–31; 1998).[37]

Ratzinger expressed the conviction that the word does not belong to the author, but lives in history, and hence its scope and depth (in this transcendence of human authorship incidentally lies, in his view, the essence of inspiration) (Zatwardnicki 2023a). Scripture is not a meteorite falling from the sky, the word of God reflects

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37 Luther's conviction of *perspicuitas* has been challenged by historians and hermeneuticists (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 27; 2018h, 795). The view of the unambiguity of Scripture is closely related to the Reformation rejection of the office (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 29; 2018m, 351).

the thinking and life of God's people at a given stage of salvation history. In this identity-preserving community in history, the Creed was formed, which then became the criterion for the formation of the canon. The place of the Symbol was the sacramental life of the Church, and the rule of faith assigned to this Symbol was the concrete life of the community (cf. Ratzinger 2018b, 330–31; 1998). Therefore, Ratzinger argues, "the authority of the Church that speaks out, the authority of the apostolic succession, is written into Scripture through the Creed and is indivisible from it." (Ratzinger 2005, 35; 1998; 2018b, 331–32)

This statement is important insofar as the Magisterium of the Church, Ratzinger argues later in the lecture, should not be seen as a second authority existing parallel to Scripture or even less as a substitute for it. "The teaching office of the apostles' successors does not represent a second authority alongside Scripture but is inwardly a part of it," and the task of this *viva vox* is to safeguard the authority of Scripture and to protect its unambiguity (*perspicuitas*) in the thicket of emerging exegetical hypotheses (Ratzinger 2005, 35; 2018b, 332; 1998]).[38] Thus, we are dealing with a mutual relationship: "Scripture sets limits and a standard for the *viva vox*; the living voice guarantees that it cannot be manipulated." It is important to add that such a role can be played by the Magisterium of the Church only under the condition of acknowledging the guiding power of the Holy Spirit: "An ecclesiastical authority can become arbitrary if the Spirit does not guard it." (Ratzinger 2005, 35–36; 1998; 2018b, 332)

Following the Vaticanum Secundum, Ratzinger emphasised in his commentary *Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism* that the Magisterium of the Church serves the word of God and does not stand above it (*DV* 10). "In this lies the essence of the Church, which is not its own possession, but what is most essential for it is precisely what does not belong to it, but what it has received." (Ratzinger 2018f, 170)[39] The Bavarian theologian noted that in recent centuries there has been an overemphasis on episcopal and papal teaching (Ratzinger 2018f, 170), with the result that "the formal principle of the Magisterium [*das formale Prinzip der Lehramtlichkeit*] dominated over the intrinsic weight [*Eigengewichtigkeit*] of the individual material elements [*materialen Elemente*]." (Ratzinger 2018f, 171)[40] Instead of wrongly making the Magisterium of the Church a formal principle, the theologian continued, it should be perceived in a material connection with the Church's Creed and Scripture:

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[38] Ratzinger noted that the isolation of the Bible from ecclesiastical traditions (so-called biblicism) makes the Bible fall prey to ambiguity and arbitrariness (2016c, 517).

[39] It is important to recall one of Ratzinger's most famous maxims that the Church is not ours, but his (cf. Seweryniak 2011, 29; cf. also Ratzinger 2018r, 389–90).

[40] In his commentary on *DV* 23, Ratzinger emphasised that progress is a matter of science, and that "the teaching office has the negative function of describing impenetrable terrain as such." (Ratzinger 1969, 268; 2016e, 696)

> The Magisterium of the Church is first expressed in its material connection with the *Creed* of the whole Church and with Scripture read in the light of the *Creed*. Only this *Credo* establishes the Church as a distinct entity. The Magisterium is the authentic expression of this entity because, by the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables the acceptance of *Credo*, it expresses *Credo* and preserves it. The Magisterium is not a formal principle [*ist kein rein formales Prinzip*], but an expression of the material bond [*materialen Bindung*]: it has no authority over *Credo*, but all its authority is rooted in and flows from *Credo*. (Ratzinger 2018f, 171)

In *Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs*, Ratzinger recalled that while revelation is indeed present in preaching, preaching is always an expounding of what has already been said. Therefore, Tradition always exists as an expounding "according to the scriptures" [*Auslegung "gemäß der Schrift"*]. Although it is accomplished by virtue of the Lord's spiritual authority and thus in the faith, life and worship of the Church (and not merely in exegesis), it remains bound by the one-time salvific and revelatory events and Scripture as their witness (cf. Ratzinger 1966, 47; 2018m, 365–66).[41] Therefore, Ratzinger writes about two official instances allowing the Church to persist in revelation. The first is the Magisterium of the Church, which derives its authority from the contemporaneity of Christ with the time of the Church (cf. Heb 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever") and from the presence of his Spirit in the Church. The second is the office of testimony of the once-for-all given Word of Scripture [*das Zeugenamt des einmaligen und ein für alle mal gesetzten Schriftwortes*], drawing its solemnity from the uniqueness of the historical salvific work of Christ and ensuring the purity of the *efapax* (cf. Heb 10:14; 7:27), once-for-all given testimony (cf. Ratzinger 2018m, 366–67; 1966, 48–49; cf. 2018r, 388 [on the permanent presence of Jesus' promised Paraclete as a constitutive part of Tradition]). In other words, the Bavarian theologian opts for dual criteria, the counterpoint of faith and knowledge:

> On the one hand there is what the ancient Church called 'the rule of faith' [*Glaubensregel*], and with it the regulative function of the official witnesses as against scripture and its interpretation [...] On the other hand, however, there is also the limit set by the *littera scripturae*, the historically ascertainable literal meaning of scripture [...]. What can be unambiguously recognised from scripture, whether by scientific methods or by simple reading, has the function of a real criterion, the test of which even the pronouncements of the magisterium itself have to meet. (Ratzinger 1966, 48–49; 2018m, 366–67; cf. Bossu and Advani 2020, 76–77; Pidel 2023, 130)[42]

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41 Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner wrote about the mutual relationship that unites the Church and Scripture, from which it follows that the Church proclaims only Scripture, and Scripture lives in the proclamation and faith of the Church, elucidating and defining its meaning (cf. Ratzinger and Rahner 2016, 183).

42 Also as the author of the entry 'Tradition', Ratzinger emphasised the *Moment der Bindung*; although the canon is internally open, ecclesiastical interpretation must not be detached from its historical basis

Reflecting on the *Conciliar Discussion on the Relationship between Scripture and Tradition*, Ratzinger referred to exegetical studies which have shown that Tradition is the inner principle of the creation of Scripture. According to the Bavarian theologian, even the existence of Scripture is still conditioned by the existence of Tradition (cf. Ratzinger 2016a, 415–17; cf. also: Scheffczyk 2001, 33). He recommends assuming that Scripture and Tradition coexist inseparably and are mutually subordinate to each other, performing their proper and unchanging functions:

> Scripture provides a connection to history, to the singular Christ-event, and to His message; it serves as a protective wall, safeguarding faith from dilution in the speculations of arbitrary thought. Tradition, on the other hand, embodies the living "Today" of the faith, which must be realised, developed and preserved anew in every time; it preserves the Church from the mummification of what is past. Taken together, Scripture and Tradition embody the collaboration of singularity and continuity, which is essential for the Christian faith. (Ratzinger 2016a, 417)[43]

7. The Primacy of Scripture and the Concept of the "Living Organism of the Word of God"

At the end, it remains to resolve how Ratzinger understood the mutual relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and the rule of faith as its component, as well as the Magisterium of the Church. We know that, as a conciliar *peritus*, he maintained 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." (English quot. after: Wicks 2008, 277; Ratzinger 2016d, 147; Pidel 2023, 63)[44] However, is it possible to

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(cf. Ratzinger 2018r, 385–86; cf. also DeClue 2008, 653). This is also relevant for theologians, for if the word of God is the measure of theology, then the word needs the authority of the Magisterium (cf. Ratzinger 2018e, 611).

[43] A slightly different take (Scripture as a voice in 'today') in: Ratzinger (2018p, 626).

[44] Regarding the relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and the creeds, see Kenneth Oakes (2021, 21–34). Also, interesting insights can be found in the work of Robert Jenson, who argues that on one hand, the canon serves the Church in preserving the Gospel only in connection with *Credo* of that Church; on the other hand, the creed fulfils its role in relation to the canon. Both the canon and the creed demand sacramentally established ministry. The Lutheran theologian referred to Irenaeus, in whose reasoning one can see an apparent vicious circle: on the one hand, it is the canon that affirms the faith of the Church; on the other hand, the faith affirms the canon. In fact, as Jenson notes, this is not faulty reasoning, since the argumentation is addressed not to heretics who remain outside the Church, but to members of the community (2010, 32, 34).

distinguish a hierarchical order within this structure that would not undermine its organic nature?

In his commentary *Die Einheit des Glaubens und der theologische Pluralismus*, Ratzinger proposed the following hierarchy of historical documents of faith:

1. The essential precedence [*grundsätzlichen Vorrang*] belongs to Scripture read in the light of the ecclesiastical *Credo* [*kirchlichen Credo*]. Ratzinger accepts the basic connection of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the New Testament and *Credo* (already the New Testament books are within the stream of the formation of the Symbol) as the axis of ecclesiastical faith. This particular character of Scripture and the central Symbol is reflected in the liturgy of the Word (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 175).[45]

2. *Credo* is more important than subsequent conciliar confessions, stemming from the primacy of the early Church (*Vorrang der alten Kirche*). This primacy is derived not by virtue of an "archaeological criterion," but "by reference to the criterion of content structure [*inhaltlichen Struktur*]," to the "criterion of what is content-centred and universal." Ratzinger explains that "the statement that shaped the Trinitarian *Credo* and its Christological centre is at the same time the central statement, in relation to which the other statements are developments, actualisations, and deepening, but they cannot have the same rank." (Ratzinger 2018f, 175)[46]

3. From this it consequently follows that an ecclesial "pronouncement is the more binding on the whole, the more directly it is concerned with the simple realities of God's salvific action; and it moves away from the centre as these realities are mediated at different levels of differentiated consciousness." (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 177) Dogmatic statements are essentially a second-order language, a dependent language, related to the language of the Bible and preaching, which in turn is a confrontation of biblical language with the questions of the people (Ratzinger 2018f, 185–86).

In turn, the text "Standards for Preaching the Gospel Today" ("Maßstäbe der Evangeliumsverkündigung heute") will provide an understanding of the organic structure of the Word of God, in which all factors are related to each other and, one might even say, to some extent subordinated to each other. Ratzinger believes that all

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45   Even after the written canon has already come into being, it demands a rule of faith that played a role in its origin and that is not, after all, identical to the written canon (cf. Zatwardnicki 2023d, 77).

46   Ratzinger emphasises the organic unity of the Church's faith expressed in the organic structure of *Credo* (cf. Ratzinger 2018f, 172–74). He diagnoses that attempts in catechesis to base faith solely on the Bible, bypassing the dogmas which are essentially interpretations of Scripture, were a result of a crisis of faith. There has been a shift away from believing with the Church of all times, and the organic totality of the faith has been lost from sight in favour of fragmentary accounts of it (cf. Ratzinger 1983, 20; 2018l, 822–23). Cf. also: Peter Hofmann (2018, 25): "Ratzinger starts from the communal structure of the (baptismal) faith and emphasises the importance of the symbols of the early Church, which, as creeds of the Church and testimonies of the Fathers, take precedence over contemporary 'short formulas of faith.'" Protestant theologian Brad East entertains the idea that the entire Tradition of the Church would be a kind of rule of faith, with privilege given to the first seven ecumenical councils (cf. 2021, 17, 127).

points of reference of ecclesial proclamation – Scripture, binding creeds, the living Magisterium of the Church and the faith of the community which has been promised to abide in the truth (*indefectabilitas*) – must be seen from the perspective of mutual overlapping (*gegenseitige Übereinanderschichtung*) in order to fulfil their task (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 27; 2018h, 794–95).[47]

If the norm of preaching is Scripture, Ratzinger wrote, then the transparent clarity (*durchsichtigen Klarheit*, from Latin *perspicuitas*) of Scripture advocated by Luther, which was supposed to be its own interpreter, has been questioned by historians and hermeneuticists (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 27; 2018h, 795).[48] Perspicuity is not possible on the basis of a merely historical study of the Bible, but can be sought from the perspective of the bond of faith and the Church, the theologian argues (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 28; 2018h, 796). Specifically, this means that in approaching Scripture, one must also consider the Church's creed as the guiding principle of Scripture: "[a]nd this is just the reason why from the beginning the Church's faith, in that same fundamental decision by which it found Scripture to be Scripture and decided in favor of it, has also identified the pivotal elements of this Scripture [*die Achse dieser Schrift*] in the formula of the Symbol [or Creed] and thus pointed out the path of interpretation [*Leitweg der Auslegung*] that leads to clarity." (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 28; 2018h, 796)[49]

However, as Ratzinger admits, "[t]he problem of historicism and the problem of hermeneutics arise" in the interpretation of creed and dogma "exactly as they did in relation to Scripture." (Ratzinger 2011a, 30; 2018h, 798; cf. 2018i, 528; 2014a, 619; 2016c, 516) Also, the introduction of a third factor – the living voice of the Church as the subject of Scripture and faith – did not solve the problem, and the awareness of erroneous decisions by the Pontifical Biblical Commission or statements by popes gave rise to scepticism about the Magisterium of the Church. Attention then turned towards the faith of the People of God, in which an attempt was made to see the principle of continuity, constancy and preservation. As a result, religious experience could take the place of Church Tradition (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 31–32; 2018h, 798–800).

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[47] Cf. Benedykt XVI 2023, 59: "There is a double exchange here [ital.: *C'è qui un duplice scambio*], a relationship of subordination and superordination [ital.: *un rapporto di subordinazione e di sovraordinazione*]. On the one hand, the Church clearly submits to the Word of God, always having to let itself be guided and judged by it; on the other hand, however, Scripture, starting from its whole, can only be adequately interpreted in the living Church" [English quot. after: Benedict XVI 2023].

[48] Exegetical research has led some Protestants to make the landmark shift from the principle of *sola Scriptura* to *sola Traditio* (cf. Ratzinger and Messori 1986, 139).

[49] The hermeneutical significance of *regula fidei* does not mean that without it, it is impossible to read Scripture in accordance with the faith of the Church. Rather, it is that the rule makes it possible to identify ὑποθέσις of the inspired books and to refute unorthodox interpretations (cf. Zatwardnicki 2023d, 78–79). The World Council of Churches proposes a basic hermeneutical key to Scripture in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Credo (cf. Wainwright 1995, 639–62).

In Ratzinger's view, it is necessary, having reversed the hierarchy outlined above, to examine the system from the bottom up by looking for the underlying context (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 32; 2018h, 800).

The faith of the People of God (their *sensus fidei*) can serve as an authority in the Church because, in the Holy Spirit, it is the preserver of continuity (a conservative, not productive factor) and the repository of what is common to the entire Church, understood synchronically and diachronically (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 34–35; 2018h, 801–2). "The simple faith of the living Church is an authority for preaching, insofar as and because it embodied the faith of the universal Church and gives a hearing to the authentic acting subject of the Creed: the one, whole Church of all ages." (Ratzinger 2011a, 35; 2018h, 803)[50]

The Magisterium represents the whole Church, and its statements are meant to express the reality of the whole Church, taken diachronically, which implies thinking not only about the past but also about the future (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 35–36; 2018h, 803–4). As Ratzinger maintains, the fact that the faith "exists diachronically means that its reality must be thought and lived anew into the present. Thus there are necessarily two functions in the Church that supplement each other: the function of adhering to the one faith and the function of opening it up, of making it present." (Ratzinger 2011a, 38; 2018h, 806)

Also, the criterion of creed and dogma applies because of the representation of the whole Church: "the Creed is a norm [*Das Symbol ist Norm*], because in it the universal Church declares herself in faith and prayer." (Ratzinger 2011a, 37; 2018h, 805)[51] Similarly, "the Bible has such an absolutely unique normative importance because it alone is really the sole book of the Church as Church." The Holy Spirit forming the Church is the one who "builds up her central and universal [*zentralen und universalen*] self-expression, in which she does not express just herself but Him from whom she comes." (Ratzinger 2011a, 38; 2018h, 806)[52]

Ratzinger emphasised both the unity of the Church and the word of God and the need to take into account the fact that the word of God is vis-à-vis the Church.

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[50] Cf. Ratzinger's reminder from his speech "Glaubensvermittlung und Glaubensquellen" that, according to the testimony of the Apostle John (cf. 1 John 2:20), as well as the later position of St Irenaeus expressed in his dispute with gnosis, the instance of simple ecclesiastical faith is situated above the instance of theological theory never transcending more or less plausible hypotheses (2018l, 827–28 [together with n. 6]; 1983, 25).

[51] Ratzinger writes about the tension between the Church already gathered and the one yet to be gathered, which means that the subject of proclamation is the universal 'I' behind *Credo* (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 24; 2018g, 792).

[52] Because a given formula of faith carries greater weight the more universal it is, Ratzinger argues, one can say that the Bible is therefore the most binding book of Christianity precisely because it alone is accepted by the entire *Ecclesia universalis* (Ratzinger 2018f, 174). Cf. also Ratzinger (2011a, 25; 2018g, 792–93): "the reason why the Bible is the central standard is because it is the sole universal book of universal Christianity as a whole, just as the most central creed – the Resurrection of the Lord, the rescue of the truly Just Man from the pit of death – is at the same time the most universal."

In his article "The Church as a Place of Preaching" ("Kirche als Ort der Verkündigung"), he wrote that the Church receives the word of God but does not identify with it. Therefore, the word of God is the basis of its existence and even the critical instance making a judgement of its specific form of existence (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 23; 2018g, 791).[53] The Word is both in and above the Church, "not to be identified with any one of her empirical stages. The Church of this time and this place must always be measured against the Church of all times and all places, but especially against the exemplary self-expression of the faith that is found in the Bible," argues Ratzinger (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 23; 2018g, 791; cf. Zatwardnicki 2022, 375–76). Because church preaching is meant to be truly synchronic and radically diachronic, it must at the same time become a call for the here and now, as well as immerse and purify today's views in the universal faith 'I' of the entire Church throughout all times. Also from this perspective, this implies the centrality of the Bible as the only book of the whole, universal Christianity. (cf. Ratzinger 2011a, 24–25; 2018g, 792–93)

Recapitulation

1. Ratzinger emphasised the priority of the reality of revelation over Scripture as the established testimony of revelation. The Bavarian theologian recognised in Scripture and Tradition the cognitive and material principles of revelation, but not revelation itself. Revelation can become a reality only through faith, and that faith must be shared with the Church. If we consider, as Ratzinger does, that the recipient of revelation also belongs in a certain way to revelation itself (without him, revelation would not have occurred), then the emphasis on the faith of the Church and its expression in *regula fidei* becomes understandable. The same recipient of revelation lives by it and expresses its faith (faith, by its very nature, must be expressed). The *Symbolum* and the dogma that follows it, in Ratzinger's view, derive from the necessity of the faith to be confessed together.

The whole mystery of Christ – the fundamental reality transmitted in Tradition – precedes verbal explications, including inspired Scripture. If Christ is ultimately the revelation, then the reception of the revelation means entering into the reality of Christ, in which process the verbal assertions have a subservient role. The soteriological-revelatory Christ-event means that Scripture must play a different role from that of the Old Covenant period. Now, the inspired books are interpreted

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[53]   This function of Scripture was emphasised very strongly by the Anglican theologian John Webster (cf. Zatwardnicki 2023c, 119).

within the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ, in the light of his presence in the Church, where his Spirit operates.

Ratzinger viewed revelation as both accomplished and continually unfolding, with both poles – the past self-revelation of God realised in Christ, and the present reality of this revelation – being taken into account. Accordingly, he regarded the "moment of closure and exemplarity" in the oral and written canons. The formation of κανὼν τῆς πίστεως and κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν set a permanent standard for interpreting revelation and a requirement for remaining within revelation, although the revelation transcends them.

2. The earliest confessions of faith ("Jesus is the Christ") were expressions of the conviction that the Lord himself was the spirit of Scripture. The original form of Tradition was the division of Scripture into the Old Testament and the New Testament, which constituted the Christological "Tradition" of interpreting the Old Testament. In the ancient Church, the faith of the Church, which revealed Scripture and could not be reduced to a verbal formula, constituted the primary form of dogma. The New Testament revelation, as *Pneuma* compared to the Old Testament *gramma*, was expressed in medieval theology by placing the rule of faith above what is written (*fides* over *scriptura*). Ratzinger emphasises that the "pneumatisation" of the Old Testament read in the light of the Lord being Spirit is at the same time an incarnation, since the Lord has entrusted his word to the memory of the Church, in which this Spirit operates.

Interpreting the sacred writings "according to faith" meant that they were interpreted in the light of the baptismal creed or the associated *regula fidei*. A rule of faith is a kind of interpretation of the ambiguous and figurative language of Scripture in such a way that the factual essence of what Scripture speaks about is revealed. A rule of faith is, according to Ratzinger, a short collection of the essential content of faith. The terminology of the rule is not fixed in all its details, although in its essential structure the rule is "standardized and fixed." It takes on a specific liturgical form in baptismal creeds, which serve as a "hermeneutic" of the inspired books, providing a key to interpretation in accordance with the spirit of Scripture.

For a long time, the rule of faith ascribed to the baptismal Symbol was not written down, because the rule was the life of the believing community. Therefore, *regula fidei* is primarily the faith of the Church expressed and lived out in the life of the Church. Only secondarily can we speak of the rule as a verbal formula, expressing the faith of the Church inseparable from its life. The rule of faith as a "canon within the canon" does not mean that we use one text to explain another, but that Scripture should be interpreted in the light of the living faith of the Church – and only secondarily, not without the verbal formula of *regula fidei*. If faith is something more than a formula, then we must speak of the dynamic character of the canon.

3. The rule of faith should be seen in its relationship to the New Covenant established by Christ and continued in the Church. The *locus* of reading inspired texts

and of the common confession of faith is the Church's liturgy, where the Church actualises its faith and experiences the salvific action of the Lord. Ratzinger emphasised the connection of the rule of faith with the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, especially with baptism (and the accompanying catechumenate) as the primary place for the formation of the creeds; the necessity of the formulas of faith derives from baptism, and they are also related to it.

The oldest form of the creed is the baptismal dialogical Symbol. The Bavarian theologian distinguished between two types of creed in the early Church: *regula fidei* (*didascalia*) as a doctrinal compendium involving the catechumenate, and the Symbol as a declarative and dialogical creed belonging to baptism itself. The sacramental life of the Church was the place of the Symbol, and *regula fidei* attributed to the Symbol was the specific life of the community. The theologian noted that the subsequent transfer of the Symbol to the preparation for baptism and its separation from the baptismal formula blurred the distinction between the two types of creed and severed the connection between baptism, creed and faith. The point of the creeds is to enable a common liturgy and communion of spirit through the community of the word.

4. The significance of *regula fidei*, according to Ratzinger, stems from the genesis of the Church, Tradition, and the Scripture that emerged within it. He identifies enduring relationships between them in the experience of the early Church. The nuptial dialogue between the Lord and the Church includes the establishment of the canon and the rule of faith according to which the canon was created. Through the Symbol, present on the pages of Holy Scripture, the Church is present in the Scripture. Therefore, according to Ratzinger's conviction, the Church is a condition (but not the cause) of Holy Scripture. In the opinion of the Bavarian theologian, the fact that the Church, established "in the Holy Spirit," replaced the preached Kingdom of God is the basis for the existence of the ecclesiastical (dogmatic) interpretation of the New Testament by the Church.

Benedict XVI included apostolic succession, the canon of Scripture and the rule of faith among the fundamental elements of the Church's unity. All these elements were, according to the author of *Jesus of Nazareth*, "discovered" by the early Church and therefore come from the Holy Spirit. The connection between the celebration of sacraments and the preaching of the Church with the Holy Spirit allows us to say that the formulas "creed constitutes the Church" and "the Holy Spirit constitutes the Church" express the same reality seen from two sides. It can also be said that the establishment of the canon and the establishment of the Church are two sides of the same process. The Holy Spirit, in constituting the Church, also creates its central expression through which the Church expresses the One from whom it comes. Also, the ecclesiastical authority can properly play its role as a servant of the Word of God if it is guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. Κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν is the result of the same authority of the Church which also created the κανὼν τῆς πίστεως. According to Ratzinger, the Symbol is the living

voice of the living Church, and the principle of the Magisterium is contained in the living reality of the Symbol. Through the Symbol, whose presence is reflected on the pages of the New Testament, the authority of the speaking Church (i.e. the authority of the successors of the apostles) was recorded in the Scripture and remains inseparable from it. In other words, the authority of the Church neither replaces nor exists "alongside" the Scripture but belongs to the Scripture from within.

Ratzinger opposed attempts to make the Magisterium of the Church a formal principle; he saw in the Magisterium of the Church an expression of the material bond with *Credo* and with the Scripture read in the light of this *Credo* of the whole Church. He recognised that only *Credo* establishes the Church as a distinct entity, of which the Magisterium of the Church is the authentic expression. The authority of the Magisterium flows from *Credo*, over which the Magisterium has no authority. The Magisterium, by the power of the same Holy Spirit, which enables the acceptance of *Credo*, expresses *Credo* and preserves it. One of the expressions of the authority of the "episcopal magisterium" is the opposition to interpretations of Scripture put forward by "academic magisterium" that are contrary to *Credo*.

For the Magisterium of the Church, Scripture is the measure and the limit. The Magisterium is a servant, not the master of the Word of God – this is one of the expressions that what is most essential, the Church received as a gift from God. On the other hand, the *viva vox* of the office of the successors of the Apostles remains at the service of securing the authority of Scripture and protecting its clarity (*perspicuitas*). The early Church, Ratzinger notes, understood the "rule of faith" as the regulative function of official witnesses in relation to Scripture and its expounding. The personal witness acting by virtue of apostolic succession was supposed to serve to secure the once-given word.

6. Ratzinger emphasised that the pre-existing unity of the Church's faith constituted a condition for the establishment of the canon in its unity. It is the hermeneutics of the ancient Church that forms a single Bible out of the various books. The faith of the Church, by creating the unity of the Old and New Testaments, is an essential part of the New Testament. The biblical books are an expression of the Church's faith and at the same time serve as a measure of that faith. In this sense, Holy Scripture, in its unity and plurality (which corresponds to canonical exegesis as one of the principles of interpreting Scripture), is the rule of faith.

As a young theologian, Ratzinger emphasised that Scripture, as an independent and immutable category, befits the title of *regula*. He pointed to the dominance and special character of Scripture as a result of inspiration. As Pope, he recommended taking into account the bond between the Holy Spirit and the word of God. The Word has consigned itself to the Church, and the Tradition begun by the Apostles develops under the guidance of the Paraclete. This means that a living Tradition makes it possible to understand Scripture as the word of God (another of the theological principles used in Catholic exegesis). From this perspective, the word of God in Scripture,

as the inspired testimony of revelation, is only to be regarded together with living Tradition as *supremam fidei regulam*.

If Tradition is, in Ratzinger's view, an expounding "according to Scripture," then this expounding takes place not on a merely exegetical path, but in the faith, life and worship of the Church. While Tradition embodies the "today" of faith, Scripture provides the link to the "yesterday" of Christ-event. Tradition remains bound by the "once for all" revelation of God and Scripture being the witness to that revelation. Ratzinger opts for a counterpoint of two official instances that allow the Church to abide in revelation: the Magisterium of the Church acting by virtue of the present of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in the Church, while the office of the testimony of Scripture deriving solemnity from *ephapax* of Christ's work of salvation. This has implications for the relationship between exegesis and the Magisterium, which should submit to the criterion of *littera scripturae*.

7. The assertions of *Verbum Domini* regarding the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, repeated from *Dei verbum*, should be clarified in light of earlier statements made by Ratzinger. According to the Bavarian theologian, Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium constitute "one living organism of the word of God," but within this organic structure, priority belongs to Scripture read from the perspective of the Creed. The special character of Scripture and the central Symbol is reflected in the liturgy of the Word. *Credo*, as the central statement of faith, holds a higher rank than later conciliar confessions of faith or dogmatic pronouncements.

Since the rule of faith played a role in the formation of the Christian canon, the Symbol remains the hermeneutical instance in the interpretation of Scripture. The faith of the Church already in the same basic decision to accept Scripture as Scripture also determined the axis of that Scripture in the formula of the Symbol. Although the rule of faith as "canon within the canon" was taken from Scripture itself, the authority of the Church established it as an expression of ecclesial faith. In this way, *regula fidei* relativises the principle of *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. However, reflections by Ratzinger suggest moving away from understanding *regula fidei* as a sufficient criterion for grasping the unambiguous nature of Scripture. The hermeneutical problem concerns both Scripture and the creeds.

Consequently, the Bavarian theologian believes that it is necessary to take into account the organic interpenetration of Scripture, the creeds, the living Magisterium of the Church and the faith of the community, and above all to grasp their "common denominator." This is the expression of the faith of the whole Church as the subject of *Credo*, and thus the expression of the one and whole Church, understood diachronically. The entire Church is expressed in the creed, and the Bible is the book of the *Ecclesia universalis*, constituting the exemplary self-expression of the Church's faith.

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