



Introduction to Joseph Ratzinger's Opera Omnia

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Abstract: Joseph Ratzinger's famous work *Introduction to Christianity* (Ratzinger 1968a, 1968b) presented the essence and central teachings of the Christian religion. In the case of the "Introduction to Joseph Ratzinger's Opera Omnia," it is similarly a question of identifying the essence of the theology of this contemporary Church Father. Without a doubt, what constitutes this principle is the priority of God, not only as Creator but also as Redeemer and Saviour. From this arises the second main dimension of Ratzinger's theology, namely man as a gift and a person, who is properly realized through originating from God (*Urbild*) whose most perfect image (*Bild*) is Jesus Christ, and whose reflection (*Abbild*) is man. Thus, man can ultimately be fulfilled only in God, in eternal life with him. And therefore, man's origin, justification, and fulfillment is in God. He is God's unfolding *imago: naturae, gratiae et gloriae*. God's creation is saved and transformed by Christ's redemption. This fulfillment of God's plan for creation is expressed in the person of Mary. To better understand the central thought of Ratzinger's theology, the author of the text proposes eleven key issues in a certain confrontation with the Italian theologian Bruno Forte and the Polish journalist Krzysztof Tomasik.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger's Opera Omnia, God, liturgy, Church, priesthood, Christianity, reason and faith, Christian love, St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, Vatican II, man, eternity

One year after Benedict XVI's apostolic journey to Bavaria (2006), where he delivered his famous lecture to the world of science at the University of Regensburg, entitled *Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections* (Benedict XVI 2006), the pope tasked the then Bishop of Regensburg Gerhard L. Müller with publishing all of his works. In 2008, the Bishop of Regensburg established the Pope Benedict XVI Institute to realize the planned 16-volume edition of his entire theological thought. In that year, the Institute published Volume 11, *Theology of the Liturgy* as the first of Joseph Ratzinger's collected works *Gesammelte Schriften*. It was an explicit request of Benedict XVI to begin publishing his writings with the central theme of the liturgy, pointing to the primacy of God in the entire world (Ratzinger 2008, 5; 2012c, 1; Bachanek 2010, 205–14). The original edition was followed by other language editions: Italian (from 2010), Spanish (from 2012), English (from 2014) and French (from 2021). A Polish edition was also published. In February 2011, an agreement was signed between the The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and the Libreria Editrice Vaticana publishing house, to which Benedict XVI entrusted the management of its copyright. In early 2012, the first volume of the Polish edition of Joseph Ratzinger's Opera Omnia was published. At present, the German and

Polish editions are at the same point of publication – with 14 volumes, of a total of 23 volumes. The Italian edition has so far published five volumes (6, 7, 8, 11, 12), the Spanish edition eight (1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12), the English edition one (11) and the French edition two (6, 11). Two new language editions have recently been added: Russian (2017) and Portuguese (2021).

This “Introduction to Joseph Ratzinger’s Opera Omnia” presents a thematic account of the great pope’s theological thought. The initial difference of four years between the original German version and the Polish edition made it possible to create a distinct path for the latter. It began with Volume 11, in accordance with the pope’s wishes, but subsequent volumes were published according to theological necessity: Liturgy (11), Priesthood (12), Church (8), Resurrection (10), Augustine (1), Bonaventure (2), Jesus of Nazareth (6), Vatican II (7), Christianity (4), In Conversation with Time (13), Faith (9), Sermons (14), God of Faith and God of the Philosophers (3), Origins and Destiny (2). This list, which expresses at the same time the order in which the individual volumes were published, simultaneously constitutes a thematic presentation of the entirety of Opera Omnia and, above all, indicates the eleven main “keys” for understanding the work as a whole.

1. *Status quaestionis*

Among the multitude of attempts to define the theology of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, three representative theologians should be chosen for clarity: from Poland – Jerzy Szymik, from Germany – Jan-Heiner Tück and from Spain – Pablo Blanco-Sarto. From their work, one can identify the main themes of Ratzinger’s monumental Opera Omnia published in the Polish edition at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, can be shown.

Polish theologian Jerzy Szymik from Katowice believes that the structure of Benedict XVI’s theological thinking can be put into the model of theologoumenon: “existential problem – response of Revelation – diagnosis and ambivalence of contemporary times – theological solutions – ecclesial context of the whole.” (Szymik 2010, 8) These five elements express atheology focused on its essence: the question about God, about salvation, hope, life, and ethos. It spans from Augustine to Bonaventure to Romano Guardini, supported by the Church Fathers, and also looks from the perspective of contemporary thinkers such as Josef Pieper, Jürgen Habermas, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. The guide to this theological thought is undoubtedly St. Benedict of Nursia himself, in honor of whom Ratzinger adopted as his papal name. *Theologia benedicta* is therefore “theology *par excellence*, or radical theology, the science about God.” (Szymik 2010, 10)

Although the German theologian Jan-Heiner Tück, working in Vienna, did not produce a comprehensive theology of Benedict XVI, he published the critical

work *Der Theologenpapst. Eine kritische Würdigung Benedikts XVI*. He summarizes the pope's theology as follows: "Without Jesus Christ, there is no access to God, and there is no access to Jesus Christ without the living memory of the Church." (Tück 2013, 12) At the same time, he believes that Ratzinger's Bible-based theology has been the compass for Catholic orthodoxy since his tenure as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – not always to the delight of academic theology. This implies a dissonance between the papal ecclesiastical Magisterium and academic theology (Tück 2013, 19). At the same time, however, the first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* shows that Ratzinger, hitherto described as "tank-Cardinal," as a pope speaks of love in precise terms. Benedict XVI writes about "eros" and "agape" as compared to the philosophies of Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche. Likewise, speaking about the essence of Christianity in the work *Jesus of Nazareth*, he heals the dramatic gap between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. In doing so, he also expresses the hope that the Messiah of Israel will ultimately also be recognized by Israel itself (Tück 2013, 25).

On the other hand, the Spanish theologian Pablo Blanco-Sarto, employed in Pamplona, considers Joseph Ratzinger to be the best-known and most discussed theologian of the 20th century. For him, the three main pillars are the most important: faith, reason, and beauty (Blanco Sarto 2011, 12). The synthesis of Ratzinger's theology is founded on three planes. First, the sources of his thinking are Scripture, the Liturgy, the Church, and art itself – especially music. Second, the main foundation and development of the principle of personhood in unity with faith and religion, truth and love. The third plane stems from his profound "experience of the Council" and its influence on the doctrines he applied to ecumenism, the theology of ministry, and even to preaching, eschatology and Mariology (Blanco Sarto 2011, 13–14). On the practical side, one can distinguish between Ratzinger's time as a bishop, when he focused on the theology of creation and the mystery of the Eucharist, as well as his time as prefect when his interest focused on catechesis, the relationship of Christ to various religions, and the roots of Christian Europe.

These three selected attempts from Szymik, Tück, and Blanco-Sarto to perceive the theology of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, present different approaches to the presentation and evaluation of his thinking, but ultimately, they all converge in a deep appreciation of his theological and humanistic genius and, at the same time, the humble simplicity of his presentation. This is undoubtedly illustrated by one of his earliest works, *Einführung in das Christentum: Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis*. As a Professor of Catholic Dogmatics at the University of Tübingen, he presented lectures to students of all faculties in the summer semester of 1967. The lectures discussed four fundamental themes: faith in today's world, God, Jesus Christ, the Spirit, and the Church (Ratzinger 2014a, 15–300; 2017, 27–282).

These themes are reflected in the remaining texts of Opera Omnia and can be derived by analogy with the Tübingen work as a contemporary *Introduction to*

Christianity. They can be seen precisely as “keys” to understanding the theological thought of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI (Gózdź 2023b, 5–9; Ferdek and Trojnar 2019; Krasinski 2009). This shall be done with reference to Archbishop Bruno Forte’s assessment of eight such “keys” that he spoke of at the University of Santa Croce in Rome as early as 2006 (Forte 2006), as well as based on *Panorama myśli Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* (The Panorama of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI Thought) presented by Catholic News Agency journalist Krzysztof Tomasik (2023). In the Polish edition of *Opera Omnia*, on the other hand, one can easily discover as many as eleven main keys that will help to understand more fully and comprehensively the great theological legacy of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, rightly described by many as the Mozart of Theology or even a modern Doctor of the Church.

2. The Main “Keys” to Understanding *Opera Omnia*

2.1. The God of Jesus Christ

In his lecture, Bruno Forte (2006) described the time after 1968 as an “age of utopia” and a vision of a “dispensable God.” Similarly, the young Ratzinger understood the “student revolt” of 1968 as the progressive secularization of the Western world, which not only seemed to be running away from God but was also attacking the foundations of Christianity. Therefore, in the aforementioned lectures in Tübingen, he wanted to convince the man of those times that it is precisely the Christian faith that makes it possible for man “to be truly human” (Ratzinger 2014a, 32; 2017, 28).

Ratzinger also remained faithful to this motto as pope. He tirelessly, yet with dignity, preached the truth, the personal Truth, Jesus Christ. He even wielded the mighty weapon of a personal, illuminating kerygma – the trilogy *Jesus of Nazareth* (Ratzinger 2013a, 2015). This work, although not a statement of the Magisterium but the result of a personal search for “the face of the Lord” (Ps 27:8) (Ratzinger 2013a, 25; 2015, 21), has been translated into many languages of the world and has become a true bestseller and a great testimony to the foundations of Christianity. Most people of our world associate Benedict XVI precisely with this personal meditation, which points to the figure of Jesus in the perspective of His communion with the Father (ὁμοούσιος – *homoousios*). He comes forth from the Father, by the Father he is sent into the world and, finally, he returns to the Father by offering himself on the Cross for the sins of the world.

This communion of the Father and the Son, not only expresses the person and work of Jesus but, also, our own understanding of him, our personal meditation, stems from it, and at the same time it constitutes the first very important key to understanding Ratzinger’s entire work. This is because it points to “the fact of the dethronement

of the Lord God in our epoch” (Tomasik 2023) and thus to the need for a new construction of the world precisely on the primacy of God.

2.2. The Spirit of the Liturgy

Benedict XVI saw the face of the Lord and His presence among us in the divine liturgy, above all in the sacrifice of the Mass. He believed that the future of faith and the Church is decided precisely in the celebration of the liturgy (Gózdź 2012, VIII). This is why it was the Holy Father's wish to begin his planned 16-volume Complete Works with Volume 11: *The Theology of the Liturgy* (Ratzinger 2008, 6; 2012c, 2; 2014d).

The subject of the Christian liturgy is Jesus Christ and His historical work, which, through the faith and prayer of the Church, continually makes its way to us in concrete time and space. In this way, the liturgy makes present the imperishable divine-human act of redemption. In this act, Jesus draws all creation to himself and incorporates it in His sacrifice of the cross in the service of the Father. It is not the service of a slave but of a free man, a man of love. And it is only here, in the act of Sacrifice, that the love of the Father and the Son is met in a new way. This sacrifice is union with God. Therefore, the greatness of the liturgy (Ratzinger 2008, 656; 2012c, 617) today lies not in what we make of it, such as singing beautifully or listening, but in the fact that in the mystery of the liturgy God comes to man. It is in this that the true Spirit of the liturgy is expressed. Therefore, it is necessary to join in this Spirit and thus to transform and purify oneself in order to become holy. At the same time, Benedict XVI highlighted another value in the liturgy: its beauty. For there is a specific “link between the mystery believed in and the mystery celebrated [. . .]. Because the liturgy, like Christian revelation itself, has an intrinsic connection with beauty: it is *veritatis splendor*.” (Tomasik 2023)

Bruno Forte also sees in Jesus Christ a kind of key to understanding liturgy, which centers around the personal God, the Father of Jesus Christ. Only such a “living” God can be loved and addressed. The guarantee of this relationship is provided by Jesus Christ himself, in whom “the divine and the human meet” (Forte 2006).

2.3. The Church of Christ

The priesthood in the Church of Christ is necessary for the existence of the communion of man with God. Isaiah's prophecy announces the coming of the Messiah, the righteous King, who will be a signal to the peoples (Isa 11:10).

Around this signal, the Lord will gather the exiles and the dispersed from all parts of the world. This signal is also referred to by the Second Vatican Council which describes the Church as “a sign among the nations.” The path marked out by

this sign is clear and defined in the words: development, holiness, and permanence. But the history of humanity is different, as if inverted: instead of development, we have the Church as a stagnant association; instead of holiness, we have the accumulation of all human depravity; instead of permanence, we have submission to all the currents of history (Ratzinger 2010a, 1175; 2013b, 1089). This is how today's Church becomes not so much a sign calling to faith, but rather a major obstacle to it. In order to change this, it is necessary that "the Church finally turns anew to Jesus Christ, the message of the Gospel, and lives it every day." (Tomasik 2023)

This is why Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI strongly emphasizes where the essence of Christ's Church lies. Following the example of the Church Fathers, he depicts it in the relationship of the moon to the sun (Ratzinger 2010a, 1177; 2013b, 1091). From Earth, we see the moon as a luminous sphere. However, we know that this light does not come from the moon itself, but from the sun. The same is true of the Church, which shines even though it is itself dark. It becomes bright not with its light but with the light it receives from Christ, the actual Helios. The Church therefore exists for Christ. The heart of the Church is Christ.

Similarly, Archbp. Forte sees the Church as an important key to understanding Ratzinger's entire theological thought. The Church is the place where God dwells. But at the same time, the Church must listen to the workings of the Holy Spirit and be ready to "admit the errors of the past" (Forte 2006).

2.4. Priesthood

The same is true of the sacramental priesthood. It belongs to the single mystery of Christ's priesthood (Szczurek 2021, 2023). Thus, there is no difference in priesthood between a bishop and a presbyter. There is one priesthood of Christ into whose service men are called by the Holy Spirit. The essence of priesthood, then, consists in "being in Christ," in forming ever more perfectly the person of the priest in the Person and mission of Christ the Priest. This new way of being a priest is a grace, a gift of the Lord. This is why Ratzinger rightly says that priesthood is not something of one's own, something learned or earned, something due to one's personal qualities, but is a gift (Ratzinger 2010b, 678; 2012b, 635), participation in the Person and work of Someone other – Jesus Christ sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit (Ratzinger 2010b, 39; 2012b, 38). Hence, the vision of priesthood according to Benedict XVI is based on two main pillars: the giving of oneself to someone other – Christ, and the personal relationship with Christ (Ratzinger 2010b, 127; 2012b, 119), which is expressed by the images: shepherd, mediator, preacher of the Word, servant and witness of Christ. This is why Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed a Year for Priests (2009–2010) under the motto "Fidelity of Christ, fidelity of the priest," whose model was St. Jean Marie Vianney (Tomasik 2023).

The Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto does not mention priesthood as a separate key but describes it theologically as “a diakonia (service of love) to the truth in the house of truth, that is, in the Church.” (Forte 2006)

2.5. Christian Life

Based on the knowledge of the main priorities in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, and the keys to understanding his theological thought: God, the Church, and the priesthood of Christ, one can also outline the foundations of Christianity itself. A seemingly trivial conversation with a foreign medical student who asked Ratzinger, as a professor at the University of Tübingen, about what the essence of Christianity is, contributed to the development of these keys. The conversation took place in the general context of the so-called cultural revolution in the West in the 1960s (Ratzinger 2014a, 38; 2017, 34). The work *Introduction to Christianity* was written in response to these events. The path of this introduction leads through separate stages. The first is “to believe like a Christian.” The content here is our Creed, the profession of faith. The second stage is to “live like a Christian.” This is about becoming a new person in Christ, understanding faith as imitating Christ, and through this striving for personal holiness. The third stage is to “act like a Christian” and the fourth is to “pray like a Christian.” The priority of faith in what is Christian shows that faith is not an idea (Ratzinger 2014a, 105; 2017, 93), but real life and moving towards its definitive form in eternity.

Bruno Forte similarly sees Christian life as another key, but more through the lens of the act of faith itself. Following Ratzinger, he defines faith as “the assent to that sense which is not created by ourselves, but which we can only receive as a gift, so that we need only accept it and surrender ourselves completely to it.” (Forte 2006) Tomasik, on the other hand, additionally emphasizes the contribution of the Christian heritage to the history of Europe and the world. And, although Europe now seems to be moving further and further away from Christianity, the role of the latter should be to “integrate faith and modern rationalism” and to seek dialogue through “a new humanism, which is a synthesis of the Gospel message and European culture.” The essence of this humanism is to work out the notion of “the human person and its transcendent vocation.” (Tomasik 2023)

2.6. The Relationship of Faith and Reason

Ratzinger, initially as a professor and later as pope, correctly positioned the relationship between faith and reason, as well as emphasized Christian love (FR; Ratzinger 2020a, 252–70; 2021a, 205–20). Faith needs reason with an ability to listen and not just provide ready-made “products.” Faith challenges reason, gives it grounding, and binds it to eternity, and so faith is a mission for reason to be itself. Faith

enlightens the mind, and reason accepts faith as its own, as personal, as its own structure, and the believer is fully rational. At the same time, faith is accepted by rational freedom and free reason. Such faith is rational for man because it is free, it gives man freedom and does not nullify him. Reason thus makes faith rational and real (Gózdź 2013, 43–52). Thus, the bond of faith and reason “helps to overcome the temptation to irrationalism so prevalent in our time.” Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes that “faith is always rational and human reason is always open to its crowning achievement, namely, personal knowledge of God and His love for man.” (Tomasik 2023)

The relationship between Greek thinking (reason) and biblical thinking (faith) is shown even more clearly in the link established by the Church Fathers between the God of faith and the God of the philosophers (Ratzinger 2021a, 2020a). This link is even necessary for Christian monotheism, which overcame polytheism in this way. Where polytheism speaks of God as the Absolute, which in itself is inaccessible to man, the essence of monotheism consists in turning to the Absolute – the God of the philosophers – and recognizing him as the God of men – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is how monotheism becomes the link between the God of the philosophers and the God of faith, between Neoplatonic ontology and the biblical revelation of God (Gózdź 2021, IX). According to Ratzinger, Augustine expressed this figuratively: “the silent and inaccessible God of the philosophers became in Jesus Christ a speaking and hearing God.” (Ratzinger 2020a, 204–5; 2021a, 163)

The relationship between faith and reason is not mentioned by Forte in his lecture of July 5, 2006. This is because he was not yet familiar with the so-called “Regensburg Lecture,” which Benedict XVI delivered on September 12, 2006. Nonetheless, faith is recognized by the Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto as a specific and important key to understanding Ratzinger’s theology.

2.7. The Priority of Love

The priority of love is another key that Benedict XVI made clear in his three encyclicals (*DCE*; *SpS*; *CiV*). He reversed the order of the cardinal virtues: faith, hope, and love, and in so doing showed a new image of God as Love (Gózdź 2018, 709; 2023a, 7–10). God’s love prevenes everything: it culminates in the cross of Christ (*DCE*), gives the hope that fulfills human life (*SpS*), and is ultimately the force that leads to God as Truth (*CiV*). Faith is to be aware of exactly this kind of love because it leads to the foundations of faith. Thus, the pope showed the astonishing relationship of the most important realities of Christianity: God – love, hope – salvation, love – truth. We can justifiably say, drawing on Tomasik’s observation that “the essence of Christianity is not an idea, a doctrine or a system. It is Jesus who is the center of our faith: Jesus Christ as true man and true God.” (Tomasik 2023)

Bruno Forte, on the other hand, linked this key to the years of the student protests of the 1960s, which were seen as times of disillusionment and the “death of God,” and Ratzinger was then revealing “horizons of meaning, joy, and hope.” (Forte 2006) But it is perhaps too early for Forte to express the idea that “it was during these years that the present pope developed the ‘concept of *Deus caritas*.’” (Forte 2006)

2.8. Augustine, Bonaventure, and the Second Vatican Council

One may ask, what are the grounds for Ratzinger’s theological logic and methodology which show the fundamental principles of Christianity in full light: God, truth, love, faith, and salvation? The answer is probably in the good guidance received by the young theologian from his teacher Gottlieb Söhngen, who proposed to his doctoral student to investigate the question of whether St. Augustine considered the concept of the “people of God” to be the most important in ecclesiology, as Trent seemed to suggest? (Ratzinger 2011, 6; 2014b, 2–3). This is how the doctoral dissertation, (1953) *The People and the House of God in St. Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church* (Ratzinger 2011, 2014b) was born, which did not confirm the thesis supervisor’s expectations. Augustine, according to Ratzinger, knew that “the people of God” was the New Testament term for Israel and showed that the pagan nations only become “the people of God” through communion with Christ, and thus can only become “the people of God” in the “Body of Christ” (Ratzinger 2011, 222–23; 2014b, 210–11; Gózdź 2023a, 46).

The deepening of theological thought, in turn, was brought about by Ratzinger’s subsequent university degree thesis *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (1957, 2009, 2014c), defining the relationship between Revelation and the history of salvation (Ratzinger 2009, 6; 2014c, 2; Renzikowski 2024). Both of these realities – God’s revelation and the Church – also formed the basis of theology during Vatican II. Therefore, it was an excellent move for Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne to choose the then 35-year-old professor from Bonn as his theologian and conciliar expert. The theme of Revelation resounded in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, and of the Church – in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (Ratzinger 2012d, 177–220; 2016c, 159–94). Thus, Ratzinger not only through his collaboration with Cardinal Frings (Ratzinger 2012d, 239–89; 2016c, 211–52) but also on his own in the various conciliar commissions, became a real witness to Vatican II.

Also, this typical theological key is not mentioned by Archbp. Forte. Likewise, Tomasik also misses this aspect of Ratzinger’s scientific influence. One could say that in its place he cites other issues, perhaps of more interest to the journalist, such as ecumenism, the issue of the Society of Saint Pius X, the secularization of the faith, secularism, relativism, and contributions to the social teaching of the Church, as well as the issue of sexual abuse in the Church (Tomasik 2023).

However, the key to Ratzinger's scholarly career is very important for understanding his entire theological thought, which grounded him in Augustine's excellent ecclesiology and Bonaventure's theology of history.

2.9. Church Renewal and the New Evangelization

There is still another key of Church renewal that was not mentioned by Bruno Forte. Although he mentioned the "errors of the past" when considering the Church, he stopped there. However, the very idea of Church renewal (Ratzinger 2010a, 1186–202; 2013b, 1099–113; 2019; 2020b) and the idea of new evangelization (Ratzinger 2010a, 1231–62; 2013b, 1140–69; Ratzinger 2016b; 2017–2018) were already slowly emerging at Vatican II. This renewal is not about satisfying the wishes of today's world, nor about escaping from it. Nor is it about the Church adopting democratic structures based on which man himself would create the kind of Church he wants, but on leaving free room for the light "from above." Christian renewal is much more about restoring the original splendor that the Lord gave it. It is accomplished by *ablatio* – by purification, removal. This is illustrated by an example taken by Ratzinger from Michelangelo (Ratzinger 2010a, 1221; 2013b, 1131), who saw an already pure image of a sculpture in a lying block of rock, waiting for the removal of what still covers it. The task of the artist, then, is to liberate the sculpture from that which covers the image, not to create the image. The sculptor does not create but removes the unnecessary elements to reveal the fine shape. So it is with the Church – it is necessary to remove that which prevents the face of the Bride (the Church), and with it the Bridegroom himself, the living Lord, from being seen.

Similarly, the new evangelization is to show the way, how to live, how to learn the art of living, when for a Christian this Way and Life is Jesus Christ. Seeking to live in this way means above all listening to the voice of the Father and passing on what one has heard from him. It is therefore not speaking in one's own name, but in the name of the Church. Therefore, the content of the new evangelization is converting; preaching that God is present in the world; following Christ; and proclaiming faith in eternal life. Thus, the Church of the new evangelization is not any organization, but a living WE with Christ (Ratzinger 2014a, 334–36; 2017, 293–95). It expresses the transmission of faith where it has been weakened. That is why Benedict XVI established a new dicastery in 2010: the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization (Tomasik 2023).

2.10. Man in the Embrace of God

Ratzinger's great anthropological thought links, in an interesting way, the beginnings of man to his finale, which is depicted in the person of the Mother of God (Ratzinger 2021b, 2022). The nexus of this beginning and end is, of course, God himself

as the Creator, Redeemer, and Saviour of man. This is because man comes from the eternal reason and love of God, is created as the image of God, and is expressed in Mary as the typological and personal anticipation of fulfillment in grace. Thus, man's origin and destiny are located unequivocally in God himself. It is in God that man has his origin, justification, and fulfillment. Thus, creation is transformed through Christ's redemption into the idea of salvation, which at the same time constitutes the fulfillment of God's plan for creation. Then, indeed, Ratzinger can say that man is "a being who can personally address God as 'You' for eternity." (Ratzinger 2021b, 123; 2022, 106)

Archbishop Forte is enthusiastic about Mary and sees the entirety of ecclesiology in her. According to him, Mary is "the synthesis of ecclesiology, a very concrete and personal icon in which the harmonious order of Christian thought is expressed." (Forte 2006) Tomasik, on the other hand, in his text does not see Mary's role in the history of salvation. He does, however, emphasize the important role of the family in its significance for the common good of nations, and at the same time firmly opts for an understanding of marriage as "the union of a man and a woman, while opposing once again the tendency to equate homosexual unions with marriage." As pope, Benedict XVI pointed out the elements that build the family. Among the most important are: "maintaining a constant relationship with God and participating in the life of the Church, caring for dialogue, respecting another person's point of view, being ready to serve, being patient with the other person's faults, forgiving and asking for forgiveness, overcoming possible conflicts with intelligence and humility" (Tomasik 2023).

2.11. Desire for Eternity

For both theologians, the last of the discussed keys to understanding the works of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, is eschatology. This aspect is missing from the Polish Catholic News Agency journalist, Tomasik. Forte believes that eschatology "defines the identity of a Christian, a 'prisoner of God's future' who makes decisions against the backdrop of an infinite God." (Forte 2006) Ratzinger, on the other hand, asks a question at an even deeper level: what is most human in us? What distinguishes us amid the vast world of living creatures? What element is our exclusive and imperishable asset? There can be very different answers to these important questions about the essence of the human being. But the most important answer lies in the fact that man has an immortal soul, that his body will be resurrected, and that as a whole (with soul and body) he will attain eternal life with God.

Ratzinger thus constructs his theory of the dialogical immortality of man into a very clear motto: "If all love desires eternity – God's love not only desires but also creates eternity and is eternity." (Ratzinger 2012a, 357; 2014e, 333) Yes, God's Love makes us immortal and guarantees us immortality! Eternity, then, is not a matter of

our action and is absolutely not in our power. It is solely the gift of the One who is Immortal and Eternal. Man can only accept this gift of a living relationship and dialogue with God, or – to his own misfortune – reject it.

Conclusions

Recently, Cardinal Marc Ouellet stated that “the era of Christianity has come to an end. A new era has begun in which Christians must change their attitude toward the environment in which they live if they want to pass on the cultural and spiritual heritage of Christianity. Christianity is alien to this environment; it is met with indifference and even hostility, even in traditionally Catholic countries.” (Ouellet 2024) The Cardinal rightly notes the pervasive hostility towards Christianity, but I believe that this does not mean the end of its era in today’s world. Ratzinger himself spoke of the so-called Remnant, which will rebuild itself. But this is probably not about the ancient image of the Greek “rebirth from the ashes.” This is because Christianity has its *institutio* in Jesus Christ himself, the true God and true man (DH 301–302).

Similar hostility has been directed in various ways at the person and work of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI (Rodari and Tornielli 2010, 5–8; Guerriero 2018, 413–25, 493–518; Seewald 2020, 835–52, 912–48; 2021, 792–808, 863–97). Some people describing these events, however, ask how it is possible that the pope, who made concepts such as “love,” “joy” and “beauty” the keys of his preaching, is at the same time portrayed as an unyielding and divisive tank-Cardinal. Therefore, presenting the main keys to understanding the entire thought of one of the most learned minds in the Catholic world – which Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI undoubtedly is – is necessary to draw a true and personal picture based on his writings. His theology is very distinct. It rests on a thorough fidelity to the teachings of Christ, an absolute obedience to the word of God, a profound faith in Revelation and its interpretation, and on and making faith real and rational. This theological thought is deeply mystical, extremely real, and alive.

The keys to understanding the complete works of Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI are presented, both from the Italian and Polish theological perspectives. The former is based on a few introductory volumes published up to 2006, while the latter operates on the entire edition of the Opera Omnia. Ratzinger expressed the essence of Christianity in the genius and truth of Opera Omnia. Locally as a professor and archbishop, then globally as a Vatican prefect and pope, Ratzinger devoted his life and ministry to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That the Western world has often refused to understand him is another matter, namely that this world itself has entered a spiritual void, worships nihilism, has a distorted understanding of

rationalism, relativizes truth, etc. This makes today's world all the more in need of the light and spirit of what Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI – proposes in his *Opera Omnia*. He expressed it again at the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, on April 22, 2005, that his true program is “not to do [his] own will, not to pursue [his] own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by him, so that he himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.” (Benedykt XVI and Seewald 2016, 221)

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