

THE 'SPIRITUAL CHRISTOLOGY' OF JOSEPH RATZINGER/POPE BENEDICT XVI: An Exposition and Analysis of its Principles

Peter John McGregor

In 1979 the International Theological Commission asserted that the 'quest for the historical Jesus' carried out by some biblical scholars, combined with a tendency to make our humanity the prime analogate of Christ's humanity, was leading towards a certain dualism in Christology. The Commission encouraged Catholic theologians to overcome this dualistic separation between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'glorified Christ' by turning towards the dyotheletism of the Third Council of Constantinople in order to reassert the intrinsic unity of divinity and humanity in Christ.¹

In 1984 Joseph Ratzinger published a collection of Christological meditations and reflections with the title *Behold the Pierced One*.² In its preface, he recounts how the composition of one of these 'meditations' in 1981 had led him to

¹ See "Selected Questions on Christology," in Michael Sharkey (ed.), *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 185-206. Joseph Ratzinger was a member of the Commission which drafted the document. The Third Council of Constantinople taught that Christ had two wills, one human and the other divine (dyotheletism), not just one, the divine.

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

“consider Christology more from the aspect of its spiritual appropriation” than he had done previously.³ Upon realising that this same year was the 1300th anniversary of the Third Council of Constantinople, he decided to study the pronouncements of this Council, and came to believe “much to [his] astonishment, that the achievement of a spiritual Christology had also been the Council’s ultimate goal, and that it was only from this point of view that the classical formulas of Chalcedon appear in the proper perspective.”⁴ Ratzinger’s conclusion in attempting to define a ‘spiritual Christology’ is that “the whole of Christology—our speaking of Christ—is nothing other than the interpretation of his prayer: the entire person of Jesus is contained in his prayer.”⁵

Most recent analyses of Ratzinger’s Christology have focused upon *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*.⁶ One difficulty with trying to analyse Ratzinger’s Christology through *Jesus of Nazareth* alone is that this three volume work is not a systematic presentation of his Christology. In the forward to the second volume, Ratzinger states that he has not attempted to write a Christology. Rather, he says that his intention has been closer to that of writing a theological treatise on the mysteries of the life of Jesus. He compares it with the treatise of Saint Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* III, qq. 27-59), with the caveats that his *Jesus of Nazareth* is situated in a different historical and spiritual context from that of Aquinas, and that it also has “a different inner

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

objective that determines the structure of the text in essential ways.”⁷ It is a book more like Romano Guardini’s *The Lord* than Walter Kasper’s *Jesus the Christ*.⁸

The objective of this essay is to facilitate a more accurate understanding of Ratzinger’s Christology by analysing his attempt to develop a ‘spiritual Christology.’ Doing so should provide a firmer foundation for grasping the Christology of *Jesus of Nazareth*. However, it will not provide a complete foundation. This essay addresses only one of three tasks which must be undertaken if that goal is to be reached. The others are an analysis and critique of: (1) Ratzinger’s earlier but more systematic expression of his Christology, to be found primarily in *Introduction to Christianity*, and (2) his attempt to integrate the historical-critical method with a ‘theological’ interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

COMMENTARY ON RATZINGER’S ‘SPIRITUAL CHRISTOLOGY’

Oblique References

As has been said, most analyses of Ratzinger’s Christology have focused upon the first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*. For example, after the publication of this work in 2007, a colloquium was held at Nottingham University entitled ‘The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth.’⁹ A number of the presenters addressed specifically Christological questions. Fergus Kerr compared Ratzinger’s treatment of the self-knowledge of Christ with that of Aquinas, Rahner, von Balthasar and Thomas Weinandy. Kerr concluded that Ratzinger thinks that Jesus knew he was God,

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), xvi.

⁸ See Romano Guardini, *The Lord* (Washington, DC.: Regnery, 1996), originally published in 1954; and Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976).

⁹ For an account of the proceedings of this conference, see Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison (eds.), *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

that his approach to this question is closest to that of Weinandy, and that it was "above all through his intimate communion with his Father in prayer [that] Jesus came to understand who he was."¹⁰ Peter Casarella asserted that the literary, hermeneutical and theological key to *Jesus of Nazareth* is the "search for a discrete face of an otherwise invisible God," that is, "a personal encounter. . .the existential and ontological reality of a personal revelation."¹¹ In other forums, Eero Huovinen claims that Jesus' relationship with the Father is the underlying theme of *Jesus of Nazareth*.¹² Richard Hays asserts that the "single most dominant theme throughout *Jesus of Nazareth* is Jesus' 'intimate unity with the Father.' The key to interpreting Jesus' identity lies in his relation to God, which is ontologically grounded in his pre-existent unity with the Father and expressed in his communion with the Father in prayer."¹³ Thomas Weinandy believes the major theme of the *Jesus of Nazareth* to be that "Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who bestows upon all believers what he himself shares—a filial intimacy and knowledge of the Father," and that this revelation "results from his human prayer, which is 'a participation in this filial communion with the Father' ."¹⁴

¹⁰ Fergus Kerr, "If Jesus knew he was God, how did it work?" in Pabst and Paddison (eds.), *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth*, 50-67, at 53 and 66. Cf. Thomas G. Weinandy, *Jesus the Christ* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor), 30-39.

¹¹ Peter J. Casarella, "Searching for the Face of the Lord in Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth*," in Pabst, *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth*, 83-93, at 84.

¹² Eero Huovinen, "The Pope and Jesus," *Pro Ecclesia* 17 (2) (2008): 139-151, at 146. Cf. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 44, 66, 95, 265-266, 291, 304, 310 & 316.

¹³ Richard B. Hays, "Benedict and the Biblical Jesus," *First Things* 175 (Aug/Sept, 2007): 49-53, at 50.

¹⁴ Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap., "Pope Benedict XVI: A Biblical Portrait of Jesus," *Nova et Vetera* 7 (1) (2009): 19-34, at 23 and 24. The internal quotation is from Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism*, 7.

Explicit References

In his recent work on the Christocentric shift in Ratzinger's theology, Emery de Gaál touches only lightly upon Ratzinger's 'spiritual Christology,' yet he gives some important insights.¹⁵ He asserts that, for Ratzinger, the prayer of Jesus is the basic affirmation of his person, that it is Jesus' filial relationship with his Father which is at the root of the question of human freedom and liberation, that we must participate in the prayer of Jesus if we are to know and understand him, that both the Church and the Eucharist have their origin in the prayer of Jesus, that only in a spiritual Christology will a spirituality of the Eucharist reveal itself, and that theology is ultimately grounded in prayer.¹⁶ Apart from these points, the most important comment that de Gaál makes is upon the dyoethetic roots of Ratzinger's 'spiritual Christology' and its implication for human volition. He thinks that, for Ratzinger, the teaching of the Third Council of Constantinople "implies that there exists a proper dignity of Christ's human nature, which is being absorbed into the divine will; both blend into one will. The human and divine identities move into one subject as a pure affirmation of the Father's will. In Jesus, human volition acquires a divine form, and an 'alchemy of being' occurs."¹⁷ De Gaál's use of terms such as 'absorbed' and 'blend' is somewhat alarming. If he is correct, Ratzinger could be accused of positing a union of the human and divine wills in Jesus that seems to tend towards a monothelitic position. But de Gaál may be using his terms ambiguously.

Joseph Murphy, in his brief exposition of Ratzinger's Christology, is aware of the importance of the prayer of Jesus in that Christology and, indeed, makes the

¹⁵ Emory Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See 61-161 for de Gaál's exposition of Ratzinger's Christology.

¹⁶ De Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 4-5 and 86-88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

assertion that the Church's Christological dogmas owe much to "her reflection on [Jesus'] relationship with God, particularly as expressed in his prayer."¹⁸ Murphy looks at the dyotheletic teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor and the Third Council of Constantinople and how, in *Behold the Pierced One*, "Ratzinger develops the theme [of the Council as to] how our freedom is realized through its insertion into Christ's prayer."¹⁹ Murphy also points out that the Council sought to oppose not only monothelism, but also its precursor, the heresy of monoenergism, which held that Christ had only one energy or active force, and hence could not engage in genuinely human activity (*energeia*).²⁰

Scott Hahn, in his study of Ratzinger's biblical theology, also focuses briefly on Ratzinger's 'spiritual Christology.' However, although brief, Hahn's conviction is that Ratzinger's emphasis on the relationship between the person and the prayer of Jesus is one of his "most unique and important contributions to Christology."²¹

Two other works which deal specifically with Ratzinger's 'spiritual Christology' are an essay by Aaron Riches on the human and divine wills of Christ, which draws, in part, upon Ratzinger's work on the dyothelite Christology of Maximus and Constantinople III, and another by Helmut Hoping on the relationship between Ratzinger's 'spiritual Christology' and his understanding of the liturgy.²² Riches refers to Ratzinger's endorsement in *Behold*

¹⁸ Murphy, *Christ Our Joy*, 120-121.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²¹ Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 143. Hahn regards this emphasis as so important that he has reprinted Ratzinger's seven theological theses from *Behold the Pierced One* in the *Journal* of which he is the editor. See "Seven Theses on Christology and the Hermeneutic of Faith," *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007): 189-209.

²² Aaron Riches, "After Chalcedon: The Oneness of Christ and the Dyothelite Mediation of his Theandric Unity," *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 199-224; and Helmut Hoping,

the Pierced One of the Maximian Christology of Constantinople III; he claims it overcomes “a residual binary logic in Chalcedonian Christology” by clarifying the mode of unity of the humanity and divinity of Christ.²³ According to Riches, Ratzinger holds that

a theology of the filial prayer of Jesus specifies the mode of mutual indwelling of divinity and humanity in the Son’s singular synthetic Person. Therefore, speculative reflection on the prayer of the Son concretely abolishes whatever latent binary logic is unwittingly preserved at Chalcedon. . . [for Ratzinger] the Maximian achievement lies pre-eminently in the abolition of every dualism of the two natures in Christ.²⁴

Riches believes that Ratzinger is attracted to the Maximian Christology because he thinks it will help overcome a certain dualism in the contemporary liturgy, which

suffers on account of a dualism in Christology, a discretely dissociated anthropology that presumes it is possible to imitate the ‘human’ Jesus apart from the ‘divinity’ of the Son of God. Under this condition, the liturgy becomes increasingly focused on ‘our’ humanity (the self-evident ‘given’ of our nature). The liturgy is thus inclined to become a ‘self-enclosed’ parody of *latria*, a parody that fails to doxologically open in *metanoia* to the divine horizon of the filial-union Jesus gifts to the world in gifting himself (i.e., his own personhood). In this way, the contemporary form of the liturgy is posited as betraying a Nestorian dissociation of humanity and divinity in Christ. Attempting to discretely follow the ‘pure’ humanity of Jesus, the liturgy loses the Person of the Son and in so doing loses the personal pattern of humanity’s divine *sequela*.²⁵

“Gemeinschaft mit Christus: Christologie und Liturgie bei Joseph Ratzinger,” *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 35 (2006): 558-572.

²³ Riches, “After Chalcedon,” 207.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 208.

Riches claims that "the quasi-Nestorianism that expressed itself in neoscholasticism before Vatican II (paralleling 'grace' and 'nature') is reincarnated after the Council among those theologians who would dispense with the impassable Logos and attempt to find comfort in the dissociated 'humanity' of a Jesus who merely 'suffers with us.'"²⁶

Hoping's essay seeks to establish the relationship between Ratzinger's Christology and his understanding of the liturgy. He does so under three aspects, the first of which looks at Ratzinger's understanding of *der spirituelle und doxologische Kern der Christologie* (the spiritual and doxological core of Christology).²⁷ Thus Hoping sees Ratzinger's 'spiritual Christology' as the basis for Ratzinger's understanding of the liturgy.

THE ORIGIN OF RATZINGER'S SPIRITUAL CHRISTOLOGY

Ratzinger's spiritual Christology grew from two roots. The first was a talk on the Sacred Heart.²⁸ The second was the 1300th anniversary of the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD).²⁹ On the development of this spiritual Christology, Ratzinger remarked that he "had no time to make a study of this particular theme, but the thought of a spiritual Christology remained with me and found its way into other works."³⁰ The first occasion on which this thought were developed was in an address given in 1982 to a CELAM congress on Christology. In this address, Ratzinger saw his task as presenting "in some way

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hoping, "Gemeinschaft mit Christus," 558.

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 9. The talk referred to was given in 1981 at a Congress on the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

the inner totality and unity...of christology...[since] the loss of a total view is the real central problem of the contemporary christological debate.”³¹

Ratzinger maintains that, since Vatican II, the axis of theological debate has shifted from particular *quaestiones disputatae* to the nature of theology itself. In the case of Christology, this has been made manifest by questions on the relation between Christological dogma and the testimony of Sacred Scripture, between biblical Christology and the real historical Jesus, and between Jesus and the Church.³² The penchant for speaking of ‘Jesus’ rather than ‘Christ’ “reveals a spiritual process with wide implications, namely, the attempt to get behind the Church’s confession of faith and reach the purely historical figure of Jesus.”³³ A faithfulness to Jesus which has no place for the Church is the result of this division between the ‘Jesus of [the theologian’s] history’ and the ‘Christ of [the Church’s] faith.’ According to Ratzinger, “This in turn goes beyond Christology and affects soteriology, which must necessarily undergo a similar transformation. Instead of ‘salvation’ we find ‘liberation’ taking pride of place...[which] automatically adopts a critical stance over against the classical doctrine of how man becomes a partaker of grace.”³⁴

For Ratzinger, authentic theology “understands itself as interpreting the common faith of the Church, not as reconstructing a vanished Jesus, at long last piercing together his real history.”³⁵ In order to arrive at an authentic

³¹ Ibid., 13.

³² Ibid., 13-14.

³³ Ibid., 14.

³⁴ Ibid., 14.

³⁵ Ibid., 15.

Christology, he proposes seven theses which outline "certain fundamental characteristics of the indivisible unity of Jesus and Christ, Church and history."³⁶

PROLEGOMENA TO A SPIRITUAL CHRISTOLOGY

The fact that Ratzinger had this insight in 1981 does not mean that he had not previously given *any* thought to this aspect of Christology. Rather, in his *Introduction to Christianity*, and more so in *The God of Jesus Christ*, we can find the beginnings of what he later came to call a spiritual Christology.

The Prayer of the Son in the Gospel according to John

For Ratzinger, the self-identification of Jesus as 'Son' is the 'guiding thread' in John's Christology. He believes that it reveals the total relativity of Jesus' existence as the one sent 'from' the Father 'for' us. It reveals "the starting point of all Christology: in the identity of work and being, of deed and person, of the total merging of the person in his work and in the total coincidence of the doing with the person himself."³⁷ For Ratzinger, the description of Jesus as 'Son' comes from the prayer of Jesus, in that it is the natural corollary to 'Abba.' If Jesus addressed God thusly, then he is the 'Son' in a unique way. Ratzinger holds that

³⁶ Ibid. These Christological theses are not the first proposed by Ratzinger. In "Thesen zur Christologie," *Dogma und Verkündigung* (München/Freiburg: Erich Wewel, 1973), 133-136, he gives ten Christological theses. However, the only bibliographical details given for this article is 'Unveröffentlicht' (Unpublished). No date is given. Reading these theses, one gets the impression that they were composed prior to *Introduction to Christianity*. In them, the starting point for Christology in the New Testament is the Resurrection. The Crucifixion, the Lordship of Jesus and his claim to divinity are grounded in the Resurrection. The formula of the Father's identification of Jesus as his Son is presented as an interpretation of the Resurrection and what it reveals about Jesus. John's Gospel is presented as giving the clearest view of the identity of Jesus as the Word and Son of God. The Church's professions of faith and Christological creeds reach a certain completion in the Council of Chalcedon.

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 225-226.

John 'ontologises' the 'phenomenal' character of what Jesus says and does. These phenomena reveal the truth about his being; that he is Son, Word and mission. Foundational amongst these phenomema is how Jesus prays. Thus Ratzinger traced the foundation of John's Christology back to the prayer of Jesus.

Furthermore, Ratzinger saw the dogmas of Nicea and Chalcedon as developing out of John's Christology, which presents Jesus' self-sacrifice for human beings as a prolongation of his converse with the Father. He thinks that these dogmas put into ontological terms that which is revealed by the prayer relationship 'Abba-Son,' and the actions of Jesus which arise from this relationship.³⁸ These 'acts' reveal the 'being' of Jesus, and an identity of these acts and that being.³⁹

The Prayer of Jesus and the Theology of the Incarnation

One would expect that a concentration upon the prayer of Jesus would contribute to a theology of the Cross, especially as most examples of Jesus' prayers found in the Gospels are in the context of his Passion (cf. Mt: 26:39-44, 27:46; Mk: 14:35-40, 15:34; Lk: 22:31-32, 40-44, 23:34, 46; Jn: 17:1-26). Yet, in *The God of Jesus Christ*, in looking at the Incarnation, Ratzinger characterises it as an act of prayer. He bases this on his reading of Hebrews 10:5-7. He sees this passage as presenting the Incarnation as a dialogue between the Father and the Son, as an event within the Trinity. He interprets the 'body' which is given to Jesus as human existence itself. In Jesus, obedience has become incarnate. The dialogue between the Father and the Son in the Godhead becomes the Son's obedient acceptance of a 'body.' The humanity of Jesus is "prayer that has taken on a concrete form. In this sense, Jesus' humanity is something wholly spiritual,

³⁸ Ibid., 227.

³⁹ Ibid., 227-228.

something that is 'divine' because of its origin."⁴⁰ While one may ask how the Father-Son dialogue within the Trinity can also be prayer, and how human existence itself can be prayer, there can be no denying that this passage from Hebrews seems to present the *kenosis* of the Son as prayer. Consequently, if one wishes to dispute Ratzinger's interpretation, one must propose a better interpretation. What we have here is a desire to connect a theology of Incarnation with a theology of the Cross. For Ratzinger, the *kenosis* of the Son reveals a profound link between the Incarnation and the Cross. Divine 'sonship' is "the release and handing back of himself" to the Father. Within creation, it becomes 'obedience unto death' (Phil 2:8).

The Prayer of Jesus in the Gospel according to Luke

The most explicit precursor of a 'spiritual Christology' is to be found in Ratzinger's exposition of the public ministry of Jesus as portrayed by Luke. Indeed, he goes so far to say that "Luke has raised the prayer of Jesus to the central christological category from which he describes the mystery of the Son."⁴¹ Ratzinger holds that, "What Chalcedon expressed by means of a formula drawn from the sphere of Greek ontology is affirmed by Luke in an utterly personal category based on the historical experience of the earthly Jesus; in substantial terms, this corresponds completely to the formula of Chalcedon."⁴² Ratzinger sees the prayer of Jesus as a "dialogue between the Son's will and the Father's will."⁴³ It reveals the "innermost essence of the mystery of Jesus."⁴⁴ It reveals that "the inner foundation of the Resurrection is already present in the

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

earthly Jesus,” that the core of his existence is revealed in his dialogue with the Father.⁴⁵ Only those “who share in the solitude of Jesus in this dialogue with the Father can profess who Jesus really is.”⁴⁶

The Absence of the Holy Spirit

However, when looking at the beginnings of a ‘spiritual Christology’ in Ratzinger’s earlier Christology, it becomes apparent that there is a substantial *lacuna*: the almost complete absence of the Holy Spirit. Except for the briefest of references to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation and Resurrection, the Spirit plays no part in Ratzinger’s understanding of *the Christ*.⁴⁷ That is to say, Ratzinger speaks of the Anointed One, and of the Father who anoints him, but of the One with whom he is anointed there is hardly a sign. In both *Introduction to Christianity* and *The God of Jesus Christ*, the respective sections on the Holy Spirit are little more than appendices; even then, in these sections Ratzinger focuses exclusively on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church.⁴⁸

Even where we would most reasonably expect to find some reference to the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, none is to be found. When Ratzinger turns to Luke and looks at three of his accounts of Jesus praying, one would expect that some attention would be paid to the Holy Spirit, given the prominence of the role of the Spirit in the person and mission of Jesus as portrayed in that Gospel. Yet, such is not the case.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 81-82.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 272; and *The God of Jesus Christ*, 99.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 331-359; and *The God of Jesus Christ*, 103-113.

For example, in Ratzinger's analysis of the Transfiguration, as found in Luke, there is no mention of the prominent place of the Holy Spirit, manifested in the form of the cloud which overshadows Jesus and the three disciples, and from which the Father's voice is heard, testifying to the Son (Lk: 9:34-35). Even though Ratzinger speaks of the dialogue between the Son and his Father as being a "total dialogue of love, [transformed by] the fire of love," the person who is the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father is not mentioned.⁴⁹ Again, when Ratzinger analyses Matthew 11:27 in terms of the light it sheds upon how the Son is able to reveal the Father to us, although he places a great emphasis upon the self-giving of the Father and Son to each other in an "exchange of eternal love, both the eternal gift and the eternal return of this gift," there is no allusion to the One who is 'gift' personified.⁵⁰ Finally, in looking at the Son's dialogue with the Father as the reason for the Resurrection of Jesus, Ratzinger states that the Resurrection brings the human existence in Jesus "into the trinitarian dialogue of eternal love itself."⁵¹ Once again, even though a specific reference is made to the Trinity, the personal nature of this eternal love, and his role in bringing the humanity of Jesus into the divine *perichoresis*, is not addressed. The question of whether or not Ratzinger, in developing a 'spiritual Christology,' fills in this *lacuna* is of crucial importance for assessing the validity of that Christology. For how can one have a 'spiritual Christology' without the Holy Spirit?

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 82.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

**THEORY - THE PRINCIPLES OF RATZINGER'S SPIRITUAL CHRISTOLOGY IN
*BEHOLD THE PIERCED ONE***

Ratzinger first outlined his seven theses in his talk to CELAM. His spiritual Christology is not an addition to his normal Christology. Rather, he sees it as a more effective way to arrive at an authentic Christology which overcomes the many divisions currently present in that portion of theology. Although Ratzinger simply numbers these theses, they can be denominated as follows—filial, soteriological, personal, ecclesial, dogmatic, volitional and hermeneutical.

The filial thesis: "According to the testimony of Holy Scripture, the center of the life and person of Jesus is his constant communication with the Father."⁵²

In this first thesis Ratzinger reiterates, in a condensed form, his thinking on the development of the title 'Son' as the Church's ultimate confession of who Jesus truly is.⁵³ Contrary to the view that can be found in modern exegesis and history of doctrine that "this kind of concentration of the historical inheritance may be a falsification of the original phenomenon simply because the historical distance is too great," Ratzinger puts forward the view that, in the use of this term, "the Church was responding precisely to the basic historical experience of those who had been eyewitnesses of Jesus' life."⁵⁴ He is convinced of this because he maintains that "the entire Gospel testimony is unanimous that Jesus' words and deeds flowed from this most intimate communion with the Father."⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 15-17. Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 213-228.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Once again, Ratzinger goes back to Luke's stress on this point.⁵⁶ He recalls the three examples which he gave in *The God of Jesus Christ*—the calling of the Twelve (Lk: 6:12-17), Peter's profession of faith (Lk: 9:18-20), and the Transfiguration (Lk: 9:28-36). In the first of these, Ratzinger sees not just the calling of the Twelve as proceeding from the Son's converse with the Father, but the Church as being "born in that prayer in which Jesus gives himself back into the Father's hands and the Father commits everything to the Son."⁵⁷ The communication of the Son and Father constitutes the "true and ever-new" origin and foundation of the Church.⁵⁸

In Peter's confession of faith, Ratzinger sees the second stage of the Church's development. It is when the disciples begin "to share in the hiddenness of [Jesus'] prayer...[that they grasp and express] the fundamental reality of the person of Jesus as a result of having seen him praying, in fellowship with the Father."⁵⁹

Ratzinger holds that, according to Luke,

The Christian confession of faith comes from participating in the prayer of Jesus, from being drawn into his prayer and being privileged to behold it; it interprets the experience of Jesus' prayer, and its interpretation of Jesus is correct because it springs from a sharing in what is most personal and intimate to him.⁶⁰

In essence, Ratzinger identifies the Christian profession of faith in Jesus not as a proposition, but as prayer. It is from participation in the prayer of Jesus that the Church arises.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Ibid., Cf. Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 66-68.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

In the third example, the Transfiguration makes visible what actually takes place in Jesus' prayer–revelation. As Ratzinger says, "Jesus' proclamation proceeds from this participation in God's radiance, God's glory, which also involves a seeing with the eyes of God—and therefore the unfolding of what was hidden."⁶² Revelation and prayer are united in the person of Jesus, in the mystery of his Sonship. Moreover, Jesus' communication with the Father is the true reason for his Resurrection. The Son, who shares in the glory of the Father, cannot remain in death. Taking these three examples together, Ratzinger concludes that, for Luke, "the whole of Christology—our speaking of Christ—is nothing other than the interpretation of his prayer: the entire person of Jesus is contained in this prayer."⁶³

Ratzinger gives three more examples from the other Evangelists to illustrate that his view is not unique to Luke. He calls attention to Mark's preservation of Jesus addressing the Father as *Abba*, a familiarity which demonstrates the absolute uniqueness of Jesus' relationship with the Father, and makes the term 'Son' the only possible one for fully expressing the relationship from Jesus' side (Mk: 14:36).⁶⁴ Further illustrating the uniqueness of this relationship is the account of Jesus teaching his disciples to pray (Mt: 6:9-13). The fact that the disciples are told to address God as 'Our Father' shows that although the disciples pray as a community, and through their common prayer participate in Jesus' relationship with God, the mode of their relationship with God is nevertheless not absolutely identical with that of Jesus, who is able to prayer 'my Father' in a unique way.⁶⁵ Finally, having seen that this relationship is not only expressed in the word 'Son,' but also in a series of formulas found throughout

⁶² Ibid., 20.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 20-21.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

Jesus' preaching in the synoptic Gospels that express his awareness that he speaks and acts not from himself, but from another, we can see that the emphasis in John's Gospel on 'Word,' 'Son,' and 'send' is not alien to the synoptic tradition. For Ratzinger, the fourth Gospel shows who Jesus is from the experience of intimate friendship.⁶⁶

The soteriological thesis: "Jesus died praying. At the Last Supper he had anticipated his death by giving himself, thus transforming his death, from within, into an act of love, into a glorification of God."⁶⁷

Ratzinger believes that in the prayer of Jesus we have the clue which links together Christology and soteriology, "the person of Jesus and his deeds and sufferings," and that Jesus fashioned his death into an act of prayer, of worship.⁶⁸ The fact that the 'death cry' of Jesus was misunderstood by the bystanders serves to demonstrate that only faith can recognise the messianic fulfilment of Psalm 21. Ratzinger holds that all the Evangelists agree on this Psalm being uniquely and complete fulfilled in the Passion of Jesus; it was the key Christological text of the early Christians.⁶⁹ The last words of Jesus were an expression of his innermost essence, which was to be in dialogue with the Father. His death was his handing over of himself to the Father completely. He fulfils Scripture in that Scripture becomes flesh in him.⁷⁰

According to Ratzinger, once we see this, we can understand the indissoluble bond between the Last Supper and the death of Jesus. When Jesus anticipates his

⁶⁶ Ibid., 21-22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22-24.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 24.

death by sharing his body and blood, he transforms his death into an act of love. This is why John sees the death of Jesus as a glorification of God and of the Son (Jn 12:28; 17:21). What by nature is the destruction of communication is transformed into the supreme act of communication, having the power to redeem because it “signifies the triumph of love over death.”⁷¹

The personal thesis: “Since the center of the person of Jesus is prayer, it is essential to participate in his prayer if we are to know and understand him.”⁷²

Following the axiom of the co-naturality of the knower and the known, and what follows from it regarding the knowing of a person, (that there needs to be an entering into, a becoming one with, the one who is known in order to reach an understanding of that one), Ratzinger applies this axiom to religion. According to Ratzinger, the fundamental act of religion is prayer, and in Christianity prayer is “the act of self-surrender by which we enter the Body of Christ,” and is thus an act of love.⁷³

Since the prayer of Jesus, his communication with the Father, is the central act of his person, “it is only possible really to understand this person by entering into this act of prayer, by participating in it.”⁷⁴ Ratzinger sees Jesus’ comment that no one can come to him unless drawn by the Father (Jn 6:44) as confirmation of this. Unless one has a relationship with God “there can be no understanding of him who, in his innermost self, is nothing but relationship with

⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

God, the Father."⁷⁵ One may know things *about* him, but intimate knowledge of the person himself will elude us. Thus Ratzinger states that,

Therefore, a participation in the mind of Jesus, i.e., in his prayer, which...is an act of love, of self-giving and self-expropriation to men, is not some kind of pious supplement to reading the Gospels, adding nothing to knowledge of him or even being an obstacle to the rigorous purity of critical knowing. On the contrary, it is the basic precondition if real understanding, in the sense of modern hermeneutics—i.e., the entering-in to the same time and meaning—is to take place.⁷⁶

What Ratzinger is proposing he calls a 'theological epistemology.' As he claims to find in the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:11), "The person who prays begins to see...as Richard of St. Victor says—'Love is the faculty of seeing.'"⁷⁷ While critical exegesis, the history of doctrine, and the anthropology of the human sciences are necessary, they are also insufficient. They "must be complemented by the theology of the saints, which is theology from experience. All real progress in theological understanding has its origin in the eye of love and in its faculty of beholding."⁷⁸

The ecclesial thesis: "Sharing in Jesus' praying involves communion with all his brethren. Fellowship with the person of Jesus, which proceeds from participation in his prayer, thus constitutes the all-embracing fellowship that Paul calls the 'Body of Christ.' So the Church—the 'Body of Christ'—is the true

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 27. Cf. PL 196:1203.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

subject of our knowledge of Jesus. In the Church's memory the past is present because Christ is present and lives in her."⁷⁹

As we have seen, according to Ratzinger, for us, God is not 'my Father' as he is for Jesus, but 'our Father.' We have the right to call God 'Father' because we have been created by him and for each other. However, "To recognize and accept God's Fatherhood always means accepting that we are set in relation to one another: man is entitled to call God 'Father' to the extent that he participates in the 'we'—which is the form under which God's love seeks him."⁸⁰

Besides a biblical foundation for this experience, Ratzinger posits a supporting existential one—human reason and historical experience. For him, the "history of religion and of the mind...[reveals] a peculiar dichotomy in the question of God."⁸¹ On the one hand, there has been an acceptance of rational evidence for the existence of God (cf. Wis 13:4; Rom 1:19f), and on the other, "a tremendous obscuring and twisting of the image of God," a point which St. Paul also takes up in the passage from Romans.⁸² When people try to name and describe the God whom we know to exist, "the image of God falls apart in contradictory aspects. They do not simply eliminate the primary evidence, but they so obscure it as to make it unrecognizable; indeed, in the extreme cases, they can actually destroy it entirely."⁸³

In addition, Ratzinger posits a recurring theme of revelation in the history of religions, showing that although man cannot himself create a relationship with God,

⁷⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 27-28. Cf. Cyprian, *De dominica oratione* 10-11, CSEL III 1:273f.

⁸¹ Ibid., 28.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

the existing means of relating to God go back to an initiative on the latter's part, the tradition of which is passed on within a community as the wisdom of the ancients. To that extent, even the awareness that religion must rest on a higher authority than one's own reason, and that it needs a community as a 'carrier,' is part of mankind's basic knowledge, through found in manifold forms and even distortions.⁸⁴

Ratzinger then applies these biblical and existential insights to Jesus, maintaining that, although Jesus's personal relationship to God was unique, it did not depart from the pattern just described. For Ratzinger, Jesus' dialogue with the Father was also a dialogue with Moses and Elijah, the Law, and the Prophets (cf. Mk: 9:4). Jesus revealed the 'spirit' of the Old Testament and, in doing so, revealed the Father 'in the Spirit.' In doing so he fulfilled, rather than destroyed, the 'letter' of the Old Testament. He did not destroy the People of God, but renewed them, and gave 'the nations' access to the 'Spirit of revelation,' and hence to God the Father. Jesus did not found a new 'People of God,' a new Church. Rather, "Jesus made the old People of God into a new People by adopting those who believe in him into the community of his own self (of his 'Body')."⁸⁵ According to Ratzinger, this adoption was made possible by the death of Jesus, which he transformed "into an act of prayer, an act of love, and thus by making himself communicable."⁸⁶ Putting it another way, Ratzinger states that

Jesus has entered into the already existing subject of tradition, God's people of Israel, with his proclamation and his whole person, and by doing so he has made it possible for people to participate in his most intimate and personal act of being, i.e., his dialogue with the Father.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

For Christians, this means “that we are in communication with the living subject of tradition,” the Church.⁸⁸ According to Ratzinger, the New Testament bears witness to this reality in presupposing that the Church is its subject, in the sense of the one who ‘speaks’ it. The Johannine corpus expresses this in what Ratzinger calls the ‘ecclesial we’ (cf. 1 Jn 5:1-20; Jn 3:11), a ‘we’ that “points to the Church as the subject of knowledge in faith.”⁸⁹

Ratzinger also points to the concept of ‘remembrance’ in John’s Gospel, as demonstrating how “the Church’s tradition is the transcendental subject in whose memory the past is present.”⁹⁰ Over time, the Holy Spirit leads the Church to a deeper and clearer understanding of what she remembers; not an absolutely new knowledge, but “the process whereby the memory becomes aware of itself (cf. Jn: 14:26; 16:13).”⁹¹

According to Ratzinger, this ‘memory’ of the Church provides the hermeneutical context for the individual’s exercise of reason in understanding the faith of the Church. In understanding, as well as in love, there needs to be a ‘fusing’ of the ‘I’ with the ‘other.’ The ‘memory’ of the Church is enriched and deepened in two ways: “by the experience of love which worships...[and by being] continually refined by critical reason.”⁹² In other words, theology has an ecclesial quality which is “not an epistemological collectivism, not an ideology which violates reason, but a hermeneutical context which is essential to reason if it is to operate at all.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 32.

⁹³ Ibid.

The dogmatic thesis: "The core of the dogma defined in the councils of the early Church consists in the statement that Jesus is the true Son of God, of the same essence as the Father and, through the Incarnation, equally of the same essence as us. Ultimately this definition is nothing other than an interpretation of the life and death of Jesus, which was preordained from the Son's primal conversation with the Father. That is why dogmatic and biblical Christology cannot be divorced from one another or opposed to one another, no more than Christology and sociology can be separated. In the same way, Christology 'from above' and 'from below,' the theology of the Incarnation and the theology of the Cross, form an indivisible unity."⁹⁴

According to Ratzinger, this thesis follows from theses one and two, the testimony of Sacred Scripture regarding the prayer of Jesus, in particular his prayer on the Cross. Ratzinger holds that the dogma that Jesus is the true Son of God, of the same essence of the Father and of us, is simply puts the meaning of Jesus' prayer into the language of philosophical theology.⁹⁵

Ratzinger is aware of the charge that dogma has distorted the original 'Hebraic' faith in Jesus by replacing trust in saving grace with a 'Greek' doctrine about ontology. His response is to address the nature of salvation. His argument runs thusly: If Christ saves man, 'liberates' him, what is the nature of this liberation? What is 'human freedom?' Freedom without truth is not true freedom. Moreover, human freedom means being 'like God,' 'becoming like God,' even 'being God.' All human programs of liberation have this as their goal, since "the yearning for freedom is rooted in man's being."⁹⁶ Therefore, when we ask questions about truth and freedom we are asking ontological questions.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 32-33.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 33.

Ratzinger maintains that, because the question of being arises from the desire for freedom and the need for truth, it does not belong to any particular stage of man's intellectual development, but is perennial.⁹⁷

According to Ratzinger, the contemporary rejection of ontological questions does not spring from a desire for a return to a simple 'Hebraic' faith, but from a 'positivist' position that only looks at the phenomenal level and rejects the possibility of knowing the truth of being. However, "The question of truth and the question of freedom are involved in the question of being and therefore also in the question of God."⁹⁸ Ultimately, these questions *are* the question of God. Particular times may develop particular methods of addressing these questions, but they can never be put aside, and any interpretation of the New Testament which does so is theologically irrelevant.

Concretely, when we address the question of Jesus' prayer we are asking about the nature of his person, that which is central to his humanity. For Ratzinger,

the New Testament designates [the prayer of Jesus] as the place where man may actually become God, where his liberation may take place; it is the place where he touches his own truth and becomes true himself. The question of Jesus' filial relationship to the Father gets to the very root of the question of man's freedom and liberation, and unless this is done, everything else is futile. Any liberation of man which does not enable him to become divine betrays man, betrays his boundless yearning.⁹⁹

To the charge that 'of one substance with the Father' departs from the biblical understanding of who Jesus is, Ratzinger replies that it simply translates the word 'Son' into philosophical language. According to him, such a translation

⁹⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

became necessary when faith began to reflect upon and ask questions about what exactly the word 'Son' meant when applied to Jesus. Was it being used metaphorically, or did it have a more concrete meaning? According to Ratzinger, 'of one substance' means that the term 'Son' is to be understood literally, not metaphorically. Thus, the phrase does not add to the testimony of the New Testament; it defends it from being allegorised. "Jesus is not only *described* as the Son of God, he *is* the Son of God."¹⁰⁰

The volitional thesis: "The so-called Neo-Chalcedon theology which is summed up in the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) makes an important contribution to a proper grasp of the inner unity of biblical and dogmatic theology, of theology and religious life. Only from this standpoint does the dogma of Chalcedon (451) yield its full meaning."¹⁰¹

According to Ratzinger, the Council of Chalcedon left a residual parallelism of the two natures in Christ. It was this parallelism which enabled the genesis of certain post-conciliar divisions. What needed to be clarified was the mode of unity of the true humanity and divinity of Jesus. This meant a clarification of the nature of the one Person in Christ, so that there could be seen a unity of mutual indwelling and not just a juxtaposition. According to Ratzinger, "Only in this way can there be that genuine 'becoming like God,' without which there is no liberation and no freedom."¹⁰²

In Ratzinger's view, the achievement of the Third Council of Constantinople was twofold. First, it preserved the human nature of Christ from any amputation or reduction. Secondly, it abolished any dualism or parallelism of the two

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰² Ibid., 38.

natures, which had been adopted in order to protect the human freedom of Jesus. Ratzinger maintains that this attempt to safeguard Jesus' human freedom forgot that "when the human will is taken up into the will of God, freedom is not destroyed; indeed, only then does genuine freedom come into its own."¹⁰³

Ratzinger's reading of Constantinople III is that when the human will of Jesus follows the divine will it is not absorbed into the divine will, but becomes one—not in a 'natural' manner, but in freedom. The metaphysical twoness of the wills remain, but unity is achieved in the realm of the person. The two wills become one personally, not naturally. This free unity, a form of unity created by love, is "higher and more interior than a mere natural unity," corresponding to the highest form of unity, the trinitarian.¹⁰⁴

The text which the Council cites in order to illustrate this unity is John 6:38: "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who send me." Ratzinger understands the passage thusly:

Here it is the divine Logos who is speaking, and he speaks of the human will of the man Jesus as his will, the will of the Logos. With this exegesis of John 6:38 the Council indicates the unity of the subject in Christ. There are not two 'I's in him, but only one. The Logos speaks in the I-form of the human will and mind of Jesus; it has become his I, has become adopted into his I, because the human will is completely one with the will of the Logos. United with the latter, it has become a pure Yes to the Father's will.¹⁰⁵

Ratzinger maintains that this distinction, which he thinks has received little attention until now, was worked out by St. Maximus the Confessor in his distinction between "the *θέλημα φυσικόν*, which belongs to the nature and thus exists separately in Christ's godhead and manhood, from the 'gnomic' *θέλημα*,

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 39.

'which is identical with the *liberum arbitrium* and pertains to the person; in Christ it can only be a single *θέλημα* since he subsists in the divine person,' (citing J. Beck in H. Jedin (ed.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte II*, 2 (Freiburg: 1975): 39-43, at 41.)¹⁰⁶ According to Ratzinger, Maximus illuminates the context of the Council's teaching by way of reference to the prayer of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, a prayer in which the inner life of the Word-made-man is revealed. In the prayer, "Not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk: 14:36), we see the human will of Jesus assimilating itself to the will of the Son. Ratzinger states that,

In doing this, [Jesus] receives the Son's identity, i.e., the complete subordination of the I to the Thou, the self-giving and self-expropriation of the I to the Thou. This is the very essence of him who is pure relation and pure act. Wherever the I gives itself to the Thou, there is freedom because this involves the reception of the 'form of God.'¹⁰⁷

Ratzinger thinks that this is even clearer if we approach it from the side of the Logos, who

so humbles himself that he adopts a man's will as his own and addresses the Father with the I of this human being; he transfers his own I to this man and thus transforms human speech into the eternal Word, into his blessed 'Yes, Father.' By imparting his own I, his own identity, to this human being, he liberates him, redeems him, makes him God. Now we can take the real meaning of 'God has become man' in both hands, as it were: the Son transforms the anguish of a man into his own filial obedience, the speech of the servant into the Word which is the Son.¹⁰⁸

Ratzinger is convinced that it is only our participation in this freedom of Jesus, the Son, this unity of our will with that of God, which meets our desire to become divine. The prayer "which enters into the praying of Jesus and becomes

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 39-40. Here Ratzinger is citing Hans-Georg Beck in Hubert Jedin (ed.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte II* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975): 39-43, at 41.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 41.

the prayer of Jesus in the Body of Christ [is] freedom's laboratory."¹⁰⁹ The only way to the right ordering of the world is through a conscience that has been radically recreated through this participation.

*The hermeneutical thesis: "The historical-critical method and other modern scientific methods are important for an understanding of Holy Scripture and tradition. Their value, however, depends on the hermeneutical (philosophical) context in which they are applied."*¹¹⁰

Ratzinger thinks that an incorrect use of the historical-critical method can lead to a divorce between scholarship and tradition, reason, and faith. Critical exegesis does not *ipso facto* poison faith, but neither is it the real magisterium. Faith and reason are not contradictory if exercised properly. Rather, an irrational faith is inhuman, and a faithless reason is blind.¹¹¹

Ratzinger holds that, like any tool, the effectiveness of the historical-critical method depends on how it is used—that is, on the hermeneutical and philosophical presuppositions one brings to its application. Such a context always exists, whether the historical critic is aware of it or not. There is no difficulty with a critical investigation of history, only with unexamined presuppositions.¹¹² The initial presupposition was that of the Enlightenment, which thought that history could correct dogma, could uncover a genuine historical Jesus who would correct the Christ of faith. Despite continual attempts to purge the method of rationalistic presuppositions, attempts which have yielded many important insights into the biblical testimony, the rationalistic

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 42-43.

¹¹² Ibid., 43.

approach which sidelines faith has led to multiple divorces, not just of Jesus and Christ, but the inner unity of the New Testament books, of the New and the Old Testaments, and of the historical Jesus himself. Rather than establishing who the 'real' Jesus is, this approach has produced multiple and conflicting portraits of Jesus, "the Jesus of the logia, the Jesus of this or that community, Jesus the philanthropist, Jesus the Jewish rabbi, the apocalyptic Jesus, Jesus the Zealot, Jesus the revolutionary, the political Jesus, etc."¹¹³ According to Ratzinger, these divisions reflect the divisions in human thinking and action, divisions which the real Jesus came to overcome.

Ratzinger then raises the question of how one can discern if a hermeneutic is valid or not. He takes a 'scientific' view, that "the legitimacy of an interpretation depends upon its power to explain things."¹¹⁴ Hence, the less an interpretation "needs to interfere with the sources, the more it respects the corpus as given and is able to show it to be intelligible from within, by its own logic, the more apposite such an interpretation is."¹¹⁵ The more an interpretation can truly unify, can truly achieve a synthesis, the more it is to be trusted.

Ratzinger holds that only the hermeneutic of faith can do this, and that this hermeneutic has a twofold unifying power. First, it alone has the unity of vision that can accept the whole testimony of the sources, with all their nuances, pluriformity, and apparent contradictions. For example, "Only the doctrine of the two natures joined together in one Person is able to open up a vista in which the apparent contradictions found in the tradition each have enough scope and can be moulded together into a totality."¹¹⁶ All rationalistic pictures of Jesus are partial, surviving only by absolutising a portion of the sources or postulating

¹¹³ Ibid., 44.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

theoretical sources behind the sources. Paradoxically, this involves “throwing doubt on some part of the historical corpus.”¹¹⁷ All histories are equal, but some histories are more equal than others.

The second unifying power of faith is its unique ability to transcend the differences between cultures, times, and peoples. Their particular values find a higher unity in the incarnate Word. Only the hermeneutic of faith can “initiate a spiritual fellowship in which everything belongs to everyone and there is a mutual relationship of giving and receiving, because of him who has given us himself and, in and with himself, the whole fullness of God.”¹¹⁸

Ratzinger concludes his elucidation of this thesis by stating that the unity of the person of Jesus, who embraces the human and divine, “prefigures that synthesis of man and world to which theology is meant to minister.”¹¹⁹ The theologian’s task is to “bring to light the foundations for a possible unity in a world marked by divisions...[and] to answer the question of how this unity can be brought about today.”¹²⁰ However, this can only be done if the theologian

enters that ‘laboratory’ of unity and freedom of which we have spoken, i.e., where his own will is refashioned, where he allows himself to be expropriated and inserted into the divine will, where he advances toward that God-likeness through which the kingdom of God can come. Thus we have arrived back at our starting point: Christology is born of prayer or not at all.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE THESES

An examination of Ratzinger's earlier Christology will show how he sought to reconcile some fundamental divisions in Christology: between faith and history, being and act, theology and anthropology, Christology and Soteriology, theology of the Incarnation and theology of the Cross.¹²² An investigation of the above seven theses present us with three immediate questions. First, how are these theses intended to help overcome the divisions just mentioned? Second, to what extent are these theses applied in Ratzinger's earlier Christology? And third, can one of the seven theses be regarded as a 'first principle?'

The Reconciling Intention of the Theses

All of the theses are intended to help overcome fundamental divisions in Christology and can indeed be applied to theology as a whole. The first thesis seeks to overcome the division between faith and history; the second seeks to overcome that between Christology and soteriology. The third thesis introduces the reconciliation of a division which Ratzinger sees as the ultimate division, that between theology and spirituality. This division has led to a rationalistic theology. It also has the potential, although this is not mentioned, of leading to an irrational piety. Another way of putting this is that this thesis intends to reconcile faith and reason.

This reconciliation between theology and spirituality could be likened to the replanting of a rootless theology—rootless, and hence lifeless and unable to give life. In this, Ratzinger is putting in contemporary terms a common patristic insight into the nature of theology: the theologian is one who prays. This insight

¹²² See Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 193-198 (for faith and history), 225-228 (for being and act), 211-212 (for theology and anthropology), 230-234 (for Christology and Soteriology), and 228-230 (for theology of the Incarnation and theology of the Cross).

was succinctly expressed by Evagrius Ponticus: “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.”¹²³ Before one can have an insightful conversation *about* God, one must have a conversation *with* God. This is the most fundamental reconciliation that needs to take place in contemporary practice of theology. This estrangement is the ultimate reason behind the other estrangements—the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, theology and anthropology, and even the theology of Incarnation versus the theology of the Cross. Ultimately, one should be able to see how all of the seven theses are related to the reconciliation of theology and spirituality—we can only come to the real Jesus through faithful prayer, through praying truly.

The fourth thesis aims at the reconciliation of faith and history, and also of the faith of the individual and that of the *ecclesia*. The fifth thesis continues the work of the second in seeking to reconcile Christology and soteriology, the theology of the Incarnation with the theology of the Cross. It also aims to address a divorce between dogmatic and biblical Christology. The sixth thesis contributes to the reconciliation of biblical and dogmatic Christology, theology and spirituality, and faith and reason. The final thesis also seeks to reconcile reason and faith, in the forms of scholarship (reason) and tradition (ecclesial faith).

The Earlier Applications of the Theses

We can see that the filial thesis is not new. In *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger had identified the prayer of Jesus as the probable source of his self-description as ‘Son,’ since it is the corollary to ‘*Abba*,’ revealing the uniqueness of this communion with God. In *The God of Jesus Christ*, Ratzinger had already come to the conclusion that Luke in particular revealed that the centre of Jesus’

¹²³ Evagrius Ponticus, *Treatise on Prayer*, 61.

life and person was his prayer. When we come to the soteriological thesis, we find that Ratzinger has simply applied the filial thesis to the defining act of Jesus' life—his death. When we come to the personal thesis we find that it is an application of Ratzinger's position, that the foundation of Christology is faith, to his position that the defining act of faith is participation in the prayer of Jesus. The ecclesial thesis originates from Ratzinger's understanding that as Christians we are incorporated into the 'exemplary man' being united to the personal thesis. The dogmatic thesis, as Ratzinger tells us, flows from the filial and ecclesial theses, united with his prior position that the Christological dogma in the Creed reveals to us that the real Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. The volitional thesis is the one which appears to be genuinely new. It is a realisation that Ratzinger claims he did not come to until he began to study the teaching of the Third Council of Constantinople and the relevant writings of St. Maximus the Confessor. The hermeneutical thesis regarding the historical-critical method pre-existed Ratzinger's 'spiritual' Christology, but Ratzinger's understanding of personal and ecclesial faith, and consequently of hermeneutics, has been given a new depth owing to his perception of the fact that, as a believer, the theologian's task is rooted in participation in the prayer of Jesus.

The First Principle of Ratzinger's Spiritual Christology

A 'first principle' is a principle that cannot be deduced from another principle, but is the basis for the deduction of all other principles. However, a first principle is not simply plucked out of thin air. Before deduction comes induction. Induction is demonstration by experience, while deduction is demonstration by argument. For example, the first principle of epistemology is that we know that things exist. We know the reality of being. We know that things, including ourselves, exist because we experience their existence. To give a more mundane example, a man does not arrive at the knowledge of his wife's love for him

through a syllogism, but through the experience of being loved by her. From that, he can deduce certain things about the nature of spousal love.

One would expect that the ‘first principle’ of Ratzinger’s spiritual Christology would be the first that he gives. But this is not so. In his first thesis Ratzinger proposes that, despite the claims of ‘modern exegesis and the history of doctrine’ to the contrary, we know that in the testimony of Sacred Scripture the Church was responding precisely to the basic historical eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life. But how can we claim this knowledge? It has not been arrived at by inductive reasoning, since we have no direct experience of how the Church responded to the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life. Nor is this conclusion deduced from prior propositions. Must it be placed in the category of knowledge accepted on trust from eyewitnesses, not on the basis of personal verification, a category into which much of human knowledge falls? The second thesis is a development the first. It, too, is based on the ‘testimony of Holy Scripture.’

It would seem that the actual ‘first principle’ of Ratzinger’s spiritual Christology is, in fact, a combination of the third and fourth theses—that we can only know and understand who Jesus truly is if we participate in his prayer, and that we do not participate in this prayer as isolated individuals, but as members of his Body, the Church. This is where Ratzinger claims to ground knowledge of Christ—in a personal experience which is also a corporate experience. This is knowledge that is ‘personally verified’ and not simply accepted on the word of another. The difficulty that another person has in accepting this kind of knowledge is that the other person can only be certain that it is true through their own personal verification. They too must discover the real Jesus in prayer.

Human beings have a tremendous capacity for misunderstanding and self-deception. If this is true of things to which we are ontologically equal or superior, how much more so when it comes to our knowledge of the mystery of God. However, we do not come to know God as isolated individuals. One’s

experience of Christ is not just the experience of the encounter with Christ in personal prayer, but the experience of encountering him when praying as a member of the Body of Christ. It is the experience of being drawn by Christ to himself in communion with other believers. Ultimately, the believer only comes to know Christ without misconception or self-deception through his Body. Faith comes through hearing the witness of other believers, and having that witness verified in one's own personal experience. Faith comes through the witness of the Holy Spirit *and* the teaching of the Apostles (Acts 2:37; 15:28), or rather, through the witness of the Holy Spirit through the teaching of the Apostles being personally verified by the Holy Spirit in one's own heart and mind. As St. Paul says, "For we know brethren, beloved of God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess: 1:4-5).

Thesis five, that the dogma defined in the councils of the early Church consists in the statement that Jesus is the true Son of God, of the same essence as the Father, is a consequence of theses one and two. Thesis six, on the neo-Chalcedon theology of the Third Council of Constantinople, builds on thesis five. Finally, the last thesis on the correct use of the historical-critical method follows from accepting theses three and four. The 'memory' of the Church provides the hermeneutical context for the individual's exercise of reason in understanding the faith of the Church. So, as to the correct order of the theses, if one begins with the 'testimony of Holy Scripture,' then the *logical* order is the one that is given. But if one begins with the 'testimony of the Holy Spirit,' then the *epistemological* order is three, four, seven, one, two, five, and six—personal, ecclesial, hermeneutical, filial, soteriological, dogmatic, and volitional.

THEORIA - BEHOLDING THE PIERCED ONE IN *JESUS OF NAZARETH*

In the forward to the second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger states that he has not attempted to write a Christology. If one compares *Introduction to Christology* with *Jesus of Nazareth*, one cannot dispute the assertion that the latter work is more in the *genre* of a meditation on the mysteries of Christ's life, or perhaps more in the form of a biblical Christology, than the earlier work. However, whilst it is not a fully worked out Christology as such, it cannot help *reveal* a Christology. It will not be possible within the constraints of this essay to give an exhaustive analysis the application of the seven theses in *Jesus of Nazareth*. However, a few brief pointers will be given as an aid to taking up that task.

It is no accident or poetic flight of fancy which causes Ratzinger to call *Jesus of Nazareth* his personal search for the face of Jesus. Right from the beginning, he introduces two fundamental themes of his spiritual Christology, the prayer of Jesus and the heart of God. His reflection on the mystery of Jesus focuses on him as the one who sees God 'face to face' in prayer, and thus is the one who can truly reveal him: "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, who has made him known." (Jn: 1:18).¹²⁴ Ratzinger sees Jesus as the one who is the ultimate prophet, the one who goes beyond Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Moses *spoke* to God 'face to face,' as to a friend. Yet he did not *see* God 'face to face.' He entered into the cloud of God's presence, but he could not see God's face. He had to be hidden in the cleft of a rock and only see God's back.¹²⁵ Because Jesus *sees* the Father 'face to face,' because he is the one 'closest to the Father's heart,' he can make the Father known in a definitive way. Jesus' teaching originates in this 'face-to-face' dialogue

¹²⁴ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 6.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

with the Father, "from the vision of the one who rests close to the Father's heart."¹²⁶ According to Ratzinger, "We have to start here if we are truly to understand the figure of Jesus as it is presented to us in the New Testament; all that we are told about his word, deeds, sufferings, and glory is anchored here."¹²⁷

Ratzinger goes on to state that the prayer of Jesus is fundamental for our understanding of who he is. The descriptions in the Gospels of Jesus praying 'alone' with his Father

lift the veil of mystery just a little; they give us a glimpse into Jesus' filial existence, into the source from which his action and teaching and suffering sprang. This 'praying' of Jesus is the Son conversing with the Father; Jesus' human consciousness and will, his human soul, is taken up into that exchange, and in this way human 'praying' is able to become a participation in this filial communion with the Father.¹²⁸

Jesus' message is not just about the Father. Rather,

Jesus is only able to speak about the Father in the way he does because he is the Son, because of his filial communion with the Father. The Christological dimension—in other words, the mystery of the Son as revealer of the Father—is present in everything Jesus says and does. Another important point appears here: We have said that in Jesus' filial communion with the Father, his human soul is also taken up into the act of praying. He who sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn: 14:9). The disciple who walks with Jesus is this caught up with him into communion with God. And that is what redemption means: this stepping beyond the limits of human nature, which had been there as a possibility and an expectation in man, God's image and likeness, since the moment of creation.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 6-7.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

Here, at the very beginning of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger delves into the divinisation of Jesus' humanity as effected by and revealed in his dialogue with the Father, and the divinisation of our humanity through participation in his prayer. One can also see three of Ratzinger's theses being given flesh—the filial, volitional and personal. Jesus' communication with the Father is the centre of his life and person; his human consciousness and will are taken up into that communication, and one who is in communication with Jesus is caught up into communion with God.

There has been much confusion as to the nature of *Jesus of Nazareth*. Is it exegesis or biblical theology? Is it scholarship or devotion? Our conclusion is that it is, in fact, an exercise in *theoria*, in beholding. However, Ratzinger's *theoria* is more than Aristotle's.¹³⁰ It is not just an activity of the mind, but of the heart as well. It is a 'heart to heart' beholding—the believer's heart beholding the pierced heart of Jesus, who, since he is the one nearest to the Father's heart, reveals that heart in his own.¹³¹ Nor is it an isolated beholding. It is a personal beholding in a corporate personality, the Body of Christ. 'It is no longer I that lives, but Christ that lives in me' (Gal: 2:20). Christ lives in the believer, and the believer lives in Christ. Christ prays in the believer, and the believer prays in Christ.¹³² Nor is it a passive beholding. It is a 'lived Christology,' not just a 'contemplated Christology.' Christ lives in the believer, and in his Body, and continues to love through them.

¹³⁰ See Chapter 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle presents *theoria* as an entirely self-contained activity of the mind.

¹³¹ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 7, 12 and 19.

¹³² Cf. Augustine, *En. In Ps.* 60:1-2; 61:4; 85:1, 5.