

I Influences

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Deciding how a scholar has been influenced by particular individuals is fraught with difficulty. This is particularly true of someone with a corpus as large and as complex as Joseph Ratzinger. His assuming of the highest clerical office also inevitably heightens tensions in the scholarly reception. The quantity of writings and the complexity of their interpretation mean an exhaustive study of Ratzinger's influences would require many volumes longer than this one. Yet, by delimiting the period of his life under scrutiny, and the number of influences investigated, it is possible to gain a general sense of the fruits of Ratzinger's intellectual formation and its enduring significance for his later writings.

Ratzinger's formal period of intellectual formation officially began when he entered the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising's minor seminary at Traunstein at Easter 1939, but his studies were entirely suspended by war until he began his studies proper at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule in Freising in January 1946, where he completed his philosophy studies before moving on to the Ludwig Maximilians University in 1947. He continued his studies there, completing his doctorate in 1951, and then lectured at the Freising Hochschule between 1952 and 1954 while working on his *Habilitationsschrift*, which was accepted in 1957.

The literature on these eleven years includes some of the most fascinating passages on Ratzinger's life. He was among the very first cohort of Munich and Freising seminarians to begin formation after the war, in a Germany undergoing the most catastrophic period of its history. Yet, amid all the disruption, he relates his excitement – and sheer enjoyment – to be studying theology at last.¹ Ratzinger's memories

¹ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 41–114; *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium, An Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 59–70, and Benedict XVI, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, trans. Jacob Phillips (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 67–100.

of his milieu are worth reading simply as a historical record of a time marked by intellectual fecundity and transition on the German-speaking theological scene.

Certain figures stand out in Ratzinger's reminiscences, and these figures have a legacy that can be traced in his later writing. This chapter works from Ratzinger's own discussions of those who formed his mind in his salad days, before sketching examples of the lineage of those teachers in some of his best-known writings. Ratzinger situates himself – open-mindedly but carefully – in relation to great witnesses of the Catholic tradition in dialogue with contemporary streams of thought, before continuing to adapt and strengthen his early theological positions in relation to the rapidly changing contexts in which he found himself in the following decades.

Looking closely at how Ratzinger was influenced during his studies suggests his *oeuvre* can be characterized in part by what might be termed “dynamic fidelity.”² The reasons for this will be elucidated in what follows, but suffice to say the general pattern is indicated by his comment about his first months at Freising, that “[w]e wanted not only to do theology in the narrow sense but to listen to the voices of man today.”³ From here, we get the first glimpses of what was to become an enduring approach of Ratzinger's, what de Gaál describes as “a balancing act” between “the theology of Christianity's complex intellectual heritage” and “current theological scholarship.”⁴ In *Milestones*, Ratzinger suggests that what is distinctive about his approach to theology is that “I simply want to think in communion with the faith of the Church, and that means above all to think in communion with the great thinkers of the faith.” He then adds: “it goes without saying that I try not to stop with the ancient Church but to hold fast to the great high-points of thought and at the same time to bring contemporary thought into the discussion.”⁵ In what follows, therefore, this chapter outlines three of the most important of the “great thinkers” Ratzinger frequently references from his days in formation and then three representatives of that “contemporary thought” he learned at the hands of his academic mentors.

² See Benedict XVI, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia* (December 22, 2005): “the dynamic and fidelity must converge.”

³ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 42.

⁴ Emery de Gaál, *O Lord, I Seek Your Countenance: Explorations and Discoveries in Pope Benedict XVI's Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 4.

⁵ Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 66.

“GREAT THINKERS OF THE FAITH”

St. Augustine

In the opening passage to Benedict XVI's *Last Testament*, Peter Seewald notices a portrait of St. Augustine hanging in the reception room to the Mater Ecclesiae convent. He describes Augustine as a “great spiritual teacher that meant so much to Benedict XVI, because he too [was] driven by that dramatic human struggle to scrutinize the truths of the faith.”⁶ From near the very beginning of Ratzinger's academic work, the significance of Augustine is just as apparent as it was for Seewald in 2016.

The sheer humanity of Augustine's writings is undoubtedly vitally important for Ratzinger, but the former's influence on the latter goes much further than this.⁷ Ratzinger chose Augustine as the topic for his doctoral dissertation at the suggestion of his teacher, Gottlieb Söhngen: “Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche” (The People and the House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church).⁸ The most obvious point is that, through Augustine, Ratzinger adopts an ecclesiological focus that remains prevalent henceforth for all his subsequent work. He says of his approach to theology that “I began with the theme of the Church” and that remains “present in everything.”⁹ As put by Gerald Mannion, this theme “runs throughout the entire corpus.”¹⁰ The key primary text is of course *De civitate Dei*. Ratzinger also points out that, after deciding upon his topic, he read Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme* and *Corpus Mysticum*.¹¹ He says de Lubac brought to the fore not only a way of the faith “with the Fathers” as “a present reality” but also a way of moving from “a narrowly individualistic and moralistic mode of faith and into the freedom of an essential social faith.”¹²

The dissertation came just a few years after Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis*, which had argued that the mystical indwelling of Christ's

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, ix.

⁷ See Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 61, where he argues that he “spontaneously associated” personalism “with the thought of St. Augustine.”

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche: Dissertation*, in JRG 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 2011), 41–419 (first published in 1954).

⁹ Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 65.

¹⁰ Gerald Mannion, “Understanding the Church: Fundamental Ecclesiology: Introduction,” in *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 81–87, at 81.

¹¹ This was the translation by Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Katholizismus als Gemeinschaft* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1943). See also his translation *Corpus Mysticum: Kirche und Eucharistie im Mittelalter. Eine historische Studie*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1995).

¹² Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 98.

Body must always be inseparable from the “external” or juridical belonging to the Church’s institutional dimension. De Lubac had argued in *Corpus Mysticum* that, for the early Church, the Eucharist was cause and sign of the unity of Christ’s Body.¹³ Against this background, Ratzinger scrutinized the meanings of the terms “people” and “house” of God in Augustine’s writings. He finds that these terms refer firstly to Israel as God’s Chosen People. They refer secondly to “all those baptized in Christ Jesus” insofar as Israel was called to be a sign for all people. Thirdly, they refer to the Church Triumphant, the “heavenly and eschatological counterpart” to the earthly Church, or Church Militant.¹⁴

Part of what Ratzinger achieves is to incorporate some of the dynamism of his intellectual context with fidelity to the teachings of a great Doctor of the Church. For example, *Mystici Corporis* had taken issue with those who highlighted the “mystical” or invisible dimension of the Church to undermine or soften the boundaries of ecclesial belonging between Catholics and others, described by Pius XII as being “without the fold of the Church.”¹⁵ Pius XII had balanced an acknowledgment that those without the fold can, “by an unconscious desire and longing,” have “a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer,” while maintaining that such people “remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.”¹⁶ In his *Doktorarbeit*, Ratzinger skillfully roots the terms “people” and “house” of God in the specific, concretely delimitable community of Israel, affirming that ecclesial boundaries are integral to the terminology. Yet he also highlights the seemingly limitless horizon of Israel’s promise and fulfilment, affirming the ever-widening parameters of the Church’s witness for all who are called to communion with Christ.

These findings are highly significant for Ratzinger’s later work. Maurice Ashley Agbaw-Ebai rightly notes “how remarkably similar” his conclusions are with *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁷ The dissertation shows Ratzinger engaging in a measured accommodation to lines of thought that were to prove so important at the council, and which have provoked

¹³ *Corpus Mysticum* begins with a discussion of Augustine’s writings on Donatism; see Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, CJ, with Richard Price (London: SCM Press, 2010), 13.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes*, 198–206.

¹⁵ Pius XII, Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ *Mystici Corporis* (June 29, 1943), no. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 105.

¹⁷ Maurice Ashley Agbaw-Ebai, *Light of Reason, Light of Faith: Joseph Ratzinger and the German Enlightenment* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2021), 15.

lively discussion since. Some interpret the title “people of God” in the broadest possible terms, for example often quoting *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16: “those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God.”¹⁸ Early on, Ratzinger offers “a necessary correction to the horizontalization of the Church.”¹⁹ That is, he makes clear that being “related in various ways to the people of God,” which Pius XII had associated with “unconscious desire,” remains different from being baptized into fellowship with that people and partaking of heavenly citizenship thereby. This same impulse can arguably be detected many years later in *Dominus Iesus*. This references *Mystici Corporis* when it states, “the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, [but] it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”²⁰

It should also be mentioned that Ratzinger’s early study of *De civitate Dei* includes the rudimentary elements of what would later be termed “*communio ecclesiology*.” This would eventually arrive at an understanding of ecclesial belonging as participation in God’s nature (see 2 Pt 1:4), working with *Lumen Gentium*’s quoting of Augustine’s contention that the Church is “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²¹ Strongly influenced by de Lubac, this communion finds both its “source and summit” in the Eucharist. Ratzinger discusses Augustine’s rebuttal of pagan cult in *De civitate Dei*, and the bishop of Hippo’s argument that the daily life of Christians is grounded on Christ only insofar as it is united with the sacrifice of the mediator at Calvary, that is, insofar as it follows from and leads toward the Holy Sacrifice of Christ on the altar. Moreover, he also discusses how, for Augustine, the love of God (*caritas*) might well “serve as a unifying force for humanity” insofar as humanity “recognizes God as the *summum bonum* of the entire world.”²² But “if love is severed from God, it becomes self-serving.” The two loves of *De civitate Dei* are central to both Ratzinger’s dissertation and his theological work to

¹⁸ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), no. 16.

¹⁹ Agbaw-Ebai, *Light of Reason*, 34.

²⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000), no. 22. Emphasis in original.

²¹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

²² Agbaw-Ebai, *Light of Reason*, 41; see Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei*, books 11–22.

follow.²³ Indeed, Agbaw-Ebai is right to state that the “Augustinian sense of battle never actually leaves Ratzinger.” Insofar as Augustine’s writings are profoundly human, then, he gives an unsurpassed witness to how human love is ever “torn in opposite directions.”²⁴

St. Bonaventure

Up to and including his doctorate, Ratzinger’s intellectual formation proceeded smoothly. This was to change with his *Habilitationsschrift*. The second dissertation proved highly contentious for the faculty at Munich and remains so among Ratzinger scholars to this day.²⁵ The topic is St. Bonaventure’s understanding of salvation history and revelation: *Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras*. As with the doctorate, Ratzinger tells us the choice of subject was made by Gottlieb Söhngen, who had himself been studying Bonaventure intensely.²⁶ The work shares with the doctoral project a subtly ecumenical background, this time in one of the fieriest debates of twentieth-century German theology. In 1932, Erich Przywara’s *Analogia Entis* appeared on the scene and featured heavily in theological discussions not least because of the way the Reformed theologian Karl Barth responded to its publication. Przywara seeks to defend the Fourth Lateran Council’s statement that “a similitude between the Creator and the creature cannot be discerned without there being a greater dissimilitude between them to be noted,” in dialogue with Barth’s early dialectical work that consistently stressed God’s ever being *ganz anders* (wholly other) to creaturely life. Przywara is sympathetic with Barth’s desire to affirm and safeguard God’s transcendence, and the book gives considerable attention to how the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) was correcting the errors of the rogue Franciscan Joachim of Fiore, which collapsed the creature/Creator distinction into a purely immanent

²³ See the *eros/agape* distinction in Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), especially nos. 3–11.

²⁴ Agbaw-Ebai, *Light of Reason*, 41.

²⁵ The *Habilitationsschrift* was criticized by Michael Schmaus, who ordered extensive revisions. Nearly all of Schmaus’ criticisms were on the section of the manuscript covering Bonaventure’s scholastic period. Ratzinger lightly reworked just the second section, which was published in 1959. While the text can now be read in full in JRGS 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), this volume has the reworked second section with the original first section. Debate surrounds the reason for Schmaus’ criticisms; see now Branislav Kuljovsky, “The Living Faith of the Church: Joseph Ratzinger’s Theological Perspectives on the Relationship Between Faith and Culture” (doctoral dissertation, KU Leuven, 2021), 76–83.

²⁶ See Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 104.

scheme.²⁷ Yet Przywara argues that between Joachim's immanence and Barth's radical alterity there lies a genuine similitude between man and God, which, while always second to dissimilitude, nonetheless presents an ontological analogy between creaturely and Divine being; hence the *analogia entis* is the "fundamental Catholic form" of thinking that articulates "the inner unity of nature and supernature."²⁸

Barth's reaction has been well-documented. He described Przywara's *analogia* as "the invention of the Anti-Christ."²⁹ He meant that this is the primordial error at the root of all human presumption, arrogating a pseudo-divine status to creaturely being as such. Nonetheless, the encounter between Przywara and Barth was not just negative. Barth went on to modify his earlier dialectical period during his mature "analogy" period, based at least in part in his acceptance of a similitude of sorts, an analogy granted by the act of faith, a similitude *sola fide*, if you will.³⁰ Here, however, God graciously elevates human beings; the act of faith has no stability of its own as such. It does not reach "the 'being' of humankind" and change it "ontologically."³¹

Ratzinger had probably read Hans Urs von Balthasar's celebrated article *Analogie und Dialektik* of 1944. This is an extensive and constructive critique of a Protestant theologian of the sort then rare in Catholic theology, which mediated the work of Barth to a Catholic audience.³² Ratzinger joins the debate through a close study of St. Bonaventure's texts, the latter of which were written as the Joachim controversy continued while the Seraphic Doctor was Master of the Franciscans. Ratzinger's concern is with one particular ramification of the similitude debate: the place of salvation history. If God is exclusively *ganz anders*, then history is of little or no significance for revelation. If between God and man there is only similitude, then history *is* revelation, and historical changes trump even dogma and Scripture. Ratzinger sees Joachim as an exemplar of the second option, particularly through his millenarian scheme of the Age of the Father (described in the Old Testament), the Age of the Son (described in the New Testament), and the final eschatological Age of the Spirit (heralded by St. Francis of

²⁷ See Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 353–364, especially 360.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik, I:1, Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980), viii–ix. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, viii.

³¹ Kuljovsky, "Living Faith," 41.

³² Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Analogie und Dialektik: Zur Klärung der theologischen Prinzipienlehre Karl Barths," *Divus Thomas* 22 (1944), 171–216.

Assisi). In this final age, reliance on the institutions and dogmatic structures would be rendered unnecessary.³³

Ratzinger does not abandon similitude entirely; far from it. He finds in Bonaventure a great thinker whose approach and nomenclature sidestep the contested divisions of twentieth-century theology, and thus an interlocutor from whom a properly nuanced similitude between revelation and salvation history might be drawn.³⁴ He discovered that, for Bonaventure, “the concept of revelation wasn’t simply put somewhere at the beginning, in some far-off place, but revelation was now bound-up with history.”³⁵ Ratzinger asks, “[i]f the Christian faith is tied to a revelation that was concluded long ago,” how can “it then keep pace with the continuing march of history?”³⁶ This offers a critical blow to pure dissimilitude, to exclusively *ganz anders* thinking.

He concludes that Bonaventure underscored “forcefully” the “connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit according to the Gospel of John.”³⁷ If revelation and history are only dissimilitude, tradition is a mere “handing down of fixed formulas and texts.”³⁸ If they are only similitude, however, the Church will be like those Ratzinger connects with Ephesians 4:14, being “tossed this way and that by the waves of time.”³⁹ Ratzinger’s reading of Bonaventure reveals a theology that highlights “the living process whereby the Holy Spirit introduces us to the fullness of truth and teaches us how to understand what previously we still could not grasp.”⁴⁰ He connects this with Jesus telling his disciples, “I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now” (Jn 16:12). Importantly, however, the understanding granted by these things is a *renewed* understanding of the original dispensation, the unfolding of hitherto neglected or unseen dimensions, which are prompted to come to light by the ever-changing vicissitudes of human history. The dynamic element thus offers a newness which is a Spirit-infused continuity with tradition, described as a “remembering.” Again,

³³ Joachim’s overreaching immanence is also important for Ratzinger because he sees therein parallels with modern philosophy, particularly Hegelianism, and thus as an early prototype for much twentieth-century totalitarianism. See Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 64.

³⁴ See Ratzinger, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (1959), in JRGS 2, especially 504–557.

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, 62.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 62.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

³⁹ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 182.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 59.

the Jesus of the farewell discourses is referenced where he says, "I have told you all this" so that "you may remember" (Jn 16:4).⁴¹

The foregoing discussion strongly suggests the *Habilitationschrift* is absolutely vital for understanding Ratzinger's later work. As put by Marianne Schlosser, its themes "remained a central matter of concern which evidently represents in a large part his theological position until today," or by Branislav Kuljovsky, its "importance" is realized "when one looks at it from the perspective of his entire theological *oeuvre*."⁴² The influence of Bonaventure is acknowledged in Pope Benedict's audiences on the Seraphic Doctor, and its effects were clearly felt at the council with the formulation of *Dei Verbum*.⁴³ The centrality of revelation in *Dei Verbum*, chapter 1 is worth mentioning here, as is the measured accommodation to historical scholarship in paragraph 13, which brings history into fruitful dialogue with tradition. Ratzinger later described the document as combining "fidelity to Church tradition with an affirmation of critical scholarship" that "realizes that fidelity in the sphere of the Spirit can be realized only through constantly renewed appropriation."⁴⁴

Indeed, one might even suggest that Bonaventure's dynamic yet faithful understanding of the relationship between revelation and history sowed the first seeds for one of Pope Benedict's most famous phrases: the "hermeneutic of continuity." This hermeneutic means to approach Vatican II as involving a newness provoked by history, specifically the relationship between "faith and modern science," which includes issues presented to Sacred Scripture by the historical-critical method; the "relationship between the Church and the modern State"; and "the problem of religious tolerance." But those who "expected that with this fundamental 'yes' to the modern era all tensions would be dispelled and that the 'openness towards the world' accordingly achieved would transform everything into pure harmony" were in need of correction, the pope argued. In short, they had adopted positions roughly analogous to Joachim's followers.⁴⁵ He thus sought to avoid rupture and discontinuity

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, 58–59. Emphasis added.

⁴² Marianne Schlosser, "Zu den Bonaventura-Studien Joseph Ratzingers," in *JRGS* 2, 29–38, at 35, and Kuljovsky, "Living Faith," 43.

⁴³ Benedict XVI, *General Audience* (March 3, 2010).

⁴⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Origin and Background," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–1969), vol. 3, 155–166, at 164–165 (emphases added).

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia* (December 22, 2005). There are arguably similarities between the discussion of "the spirit of Vatican II" and Joachimite enthusiasm.

with the past, questioning any pure similitude between doctrine and contemporary urges, and said that the council should be viewed as a place where “the dynamic and fidelity must converge.”⁴⁶ In short, fidelity alone suggests pure dissimilitude and dynamism alone pure similitude. The former tends to mummification, the latter to baseless enthusiasm. The heart of Ratzinger’s theology is thus rooted in Bonaventure’s influence.

St. John Henry Newman

The third “great thinker” was not the subject of a dissertation, but his influence is felt consistently and pervasively throughout Ratzinger’s writings. This influence is generally unquestioned, and indeed Pope Benedict said on the eve of Newman’s beatification, “Newman has long been an important influence in my own life and thought.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, a problem confronts the Newman–Ratzinger relationship, for Ratzinger rarely references Newman directly in his writing.⁴⁸ Yet Ratzinger does mention Newman as influential during the eleven years of his studies. Söhngen is again important here, as someone for whom Newman was a “favorite author.” The key figure, however, is Alfred Läpple. On arrival at Freising in 1946, Läpple was appointed as prefect for the new cohort of seminarians, and he was himself writing a dissertation on Newman’s understanding of conscience, published as *Der Einzelne in der Kirche* in 1952.⁴⁹

Ratzinger states that “Newman’s teaching on conscience became an important foundation for theological personalism.”⁵⁰ Ratzinger discusses this teaching directly in a 1991 lecture.⁵¹ Of course, Newman’s *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* is an important primary text here, particularly the oft-misunderstood comment about toasting conscience before the pope. As Ratzinger points out, Newman means that the papacy

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, *Address on the Eve of the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman*, Hyde Park, London (September 18, 2010).

⁴⁸ Although there are overlaps with Bonaventure’s dynamic approach to tradition and Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, it is curious that in his 1968 commentary on *Dei Verbum* Ratzinger references Newman only once and states that his approach to development came from the Gregorian University in Rome, which Newman had not visited when he wrote his *Development* essay; see David G. Bonagura Jr., “The Relation of Revelation and Tradition in the Theology of John Henry Newman and Joseph Ratzinger,” *New Blackfriars* 101 (2020), 67–84.

⁴⁹ See Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 56.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁵¹ Published in Joseph Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” in *On Conscience: Two Essays* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 11–41.

should not “be put in opposition to the primacy of conscience” but is rather “based on it” and guarantees it.⁵² It should be borne in mind, however, that it is the witness of Newman’s entire life that most influences Ratzinger. In fact, the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* is surely the crucially influential work. The *modus operandi* of the book is to show that Newman had consistently valued truth above all else from the outset of his life.⁵³ Ratzinger perceived that conscience, in its intrinsic relation to truth, is thus central “in the whole of Newman’s life and thought.”⁵⁴

Newman enters Ratzinger’s 1991 lecture as someone who introduces a vital “middle term” between “authority and subjectivity,” namely truth.⁵⁵ The lecture starts with the problem presented by an erroneous conscience. *Dignitatis Humanae* had affirmed that even an erroneous conscience must always be respected, for man must never “be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience.”⁵⁶ In the years following the council, however, Ratzinger relates that this affirmation had led to an encroaching “subjectivism,” whereby conscience always trumps other considerations. His aim, therefore, is to establish the parameters for maintaining both an unswerving faith in the rectitude of Church teaching and the need always to respect the individual conscience. Ratzinger applies Newman’s witness to conscience to find a way through the impasse presented particularly by common misunderstandings of *Dignitatis Humanae* in relation to *Humanae Vitae*, especially where individual conscience was thought to permit deviating from Church teaching.

There are various personalistic influences on Ratzinger’s formative years. There are firstly those mentions of Augustine’s humanity. There are important works of contemporary philosophy that Ratzinger studied. These include his reading of Martin Buber’s *Ich and Du* of 1923, described as “a spiritual experience.”⁵⁷ There is also Theodor Steinbüchel’s *Umbruch des Denkens* of 1936, which he says was particularly important.⁵⁸ However, Newman is said to be someone whose personalism

⁵² Ibid., 23.

⁵³ See Jacob Phillips, *John Henry Newman and the English Sensibility* (London: T&T Clark, 2023).

⁵⁴ Ratzinger, “Conscience and Truth,” 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁶ Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965) no. 3.

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 44.

⁵⁸ Theodor Steinbüchel, *Des Umbruch des Denkens: Die Frage nach der christlichen Existenz erläutert an Ferdinand Ebners Menschdeutung* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1936). See Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 75–76.

"is in the line of Augustine," and one can surmise therefore what Ratzinger means by Newman's "theological personalism" specifically: a personalism grounded primarily on revelation, on God's dealings with humanity. As he states in *Last Testament*, God is "person," and "the truth is person." For Newman, conscience is the "aboriginal vicar of Christ," an oracle of God given forth in our souls, the very voice of "truth [which] is person."⁵⁹

Newman's work is also particularly important because of its unquestionably modern foci, and the fact he managed to occupy an epistemological space that is markedly similar to the specifically German personalism Ratzinger encountered as a student. This is a way of philosophizing that situates "the Person" as able to "overcome the Kantian noumenon/phenomenon dichotomy."⁶⁰ Personhood emerges in each thinker as important because it is both always concretely manifest (related to phenomena) and yet always an "end in itself" (related to the "noumenal" dimension of human being). The same is true of conscience, as the kernel of personhood. Its emergence is always concrete (do this/don't do that) while being grounded in God himself.

CONTEMPORARY TEACHERS

Gottlieb Söhngen

The foregoing discussion gives ample reason as to why Söhngen should have first mention among the teachers that most influenced Ratzinger. He suggested the topics of the two dissertations, the second of which directly builds on Söhngen's own academic work. Ratzinger says of his first encounter with Söhngen that from "the first lecture I was spellbound." He also agrees with Seewald's suggestion that Söhngen was his great theological teacher, answering "Yes, you must say that," for Söhngen "moved" him "the most."⁶¹

On the question of influence, specifically, there are at least two tangible elements of Söhngen's thinking to note. The first is what Ratzinger calls his "preoccupation with Protestantism," which arose presumably in part because Söhngen was born into a mixed marriage. Ratzinger points out that this helps explain why his teacher engaged deeply with the works of Barth, particularly. Indeed, as Richard Schenk

⁵⁹ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 239 and 241. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁰ Thomas D. Williams, *Who Is My Neighbor? Thomistic Personalism and the Foundations of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 114.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 81.

has shown, Söhngen's contribution to the Przywara–Barth debate firmly sided with the latter as early as 1935.⁶² Something of Söhngen's preoccupation endures in the later Ratzinger. Ratzinger describes himself theologically as "a sort of Barthian," because Barth is "one of the fathers of theology" with whom he grew up.⁶³ Ratzinger's concern with Protestant theology is never a false irenicism, of course. It arguably finds its fulfilment in *Anglicanorum coetibus*, which holds fast to the normative character of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, while acknowledging a distinctive patrimony that can be brought into full communion with Rome.

A second element is Söhngen's approach to philosophy. Ratzinger mentions that his teacher's dissertation was on Kant and that his approach to Thomas is described in terms that broadly align him with the *nouvelle théologie*: "[h]e belonged to the dynamic current in Thomism." He says that Söhngen took from Thomas "the passion for truth and the habit of asking questions about the foundation and goal of all the real" and that Söhngen was always concerned to discover "the immediate reality of what is believed."⁶⁴ Ratzinger says that what "moved" him was that Söhngen was not interested in some merely academic system "but intended to ask: How is this real? Is this possible for me?"⁶⁵ Ratzinger also connects Söhngen's preference for real questions with the reemergence of the possibility of metaphysics on the mid-twentieth-century German philosophical scene.⁶⁶ Here, we see a recurring concern of Ratzinger's writings, the rediscovery of metaphysics, something he considers necessary if philosophy is to be joined again to theology.

Söhngen's impact here is significant. At various points in his writings, Ratzinger embarks on a genealogy of the philosophy–theology relationship and consistently singles out the Enlightenment as a time when "the collapse of metaphysics" meant philosophy could no longer impact on real life, for *verum* was ruptured from *ens*. Examples are found in his inaugural lecture, in the *Introduction to Christianity*, in *The Nature and*

⁶² Richard Schenk, "Bonaventura als Klassiker der analogia fidei: Die Rezeption der theologischen Programmatik Gottlieb Söhngens im Frühwerk Joseph Ratzingers," in *Gegenwart der Offenbarung: Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzingers*, ed. Marianne Schlosser and Franz-Xaver Heibl, Ratzinger-Studien 2 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011), 18–49.

⁶³ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 152.

⁶⁴ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 55.

⁶⁵ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 81–82.

⁶⁶ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 55.

Mission of Theology, and the Regensburg Address.⁶⁷ Interestingly, the place of Aquinas in relation to Kant also shifts slightly in these genealogies, which, given Ratzinger's connecting of Söhngen's dissertation on Kant with his teaching on Thomas and a renewed metaphysics, might suggest he continued to grapple with Söhngen's thought.⁶⁸ In any case, when Ratzinger states in *Truth and Tolerance* that "a philosophy that no longer asks who we are, what we are here for, whether there is a God and eternal life, has abdicated its role as a philosophy," this directly resonates at least with the way he remembers what Söhngen himself taught.⁶⁹

Friedrich Wilhelm Maier

In *Milestones*, it is Munich's exegetes that are singled out as particularly important.⁷⁰ The key figure here is Maier, who had a remarkable professional trajectory insofar as he single-handedly arrived at one of the most impactful hypotheses of historical-criticism of the Bible: the Q hypothesis.⁷¹ The argument was made in his *Die drei älteren Evangelien* in 1912, but he was swiftly condemned on the advice of the Pontifical Bible Commission and accused of Modernism. Ratzinger relates that, years later, Maier "harboured a certain bitterness against Rome," although he "was a man of deep faith and a priest who took great pains in the priestly formation of the young men entrusted to him."⁷²

Ratzinger says Maier "offered a prime example of that orientation which Guardini experienced in his teachers at Tübingen," which he called "a liberalism restricted by dogma." For Maier, dogma was not "a shaping force" but "only ... a shackle." At the same time, he praises "the candid questions from the perspectives of the liberal-historical method" that opened up the Bible in refreshing ways, offering "a new

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the relevant passage from the inaugural lecture, see Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 72–77; Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. Joseph R. Foster, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 30–31; Joseph Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," in *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 13–29, at 16–17 (first published in 1984).

⁶⁸ See Jacob Phillips, "Ratzinger and Kant," in *Ratzinger in Dialogue with Philosophical Traditions: From Plato to Vattimo*, ed. Alejandro Sada (London: Bloomsbury, in press).

⁶⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, "Reflections Prompted by the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*," in *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 183–209, at 209 (first published in 1999).

⁷⁰ See Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 55.

⁷¹ See Günter Stachel, "Friedrich Wilhelm Maier," *Tendenzen der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1967), 212–218.

⁷² Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 51.

directness" for Sacred Scripture that was difficult to discern with an "all-too-determined dogmatic reading." Both elements in Maier can be detected in Ratzinger's later writings. In the first place, Ratzinger remains throughout always open to the findings of the historical-critical method, always willing to encounter that "immediacy and freshness" he experienced in Maier's lectures.⁷³ In *Jesus of Nazareth*, for example, he writes that "the historical-critical method" is "an indispensable tool."⁷⁴ But when it comes to Maier's limitations, Ratzinger arrived at a position whereby dogma could be just that "shaping force" it could not be for his teacher. This can be seen as early as the *Habilitationsschrift*, where Ratzinger discusses the importance of "free-floating logia" of Matthew's Gospel. He concludes that these logia are only important insofar as their meaning is situated contextually by the evangelist, and this is perfectly in line with the revealed character of the Word, because the early Christian communities are just as caught up in the revelation of Christ through history as his own disciples were.⁷⁵ Almost exactly the same point is made in his reflections on the work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 2003.⁷⁶

Joseph Pascher

Ratzinger's writings on the liturgy include some of his most well-known works, and Pascher is the liturgist whom Ratzinger mentions as a formative influence. Pascher was Director of the Georgianum in Munich and gave a series of lectures on the Mass that Ratzinger attended in 1948, based on the book *Eucharistia* published the previous year. He says Pascher taught him to see liturgy as "the living element" of theology's soul, "without which" it would "shriveled up." Of particular importance here is Pascher's relationship with the liturgical movement. Ratzinger relates that his *Schott* missal was "a precious possession" of his and that he accepted "the unquestionably positive gain of the liturgical movement" in making its contents "accessible" and encouraging that the liturgical celebration be conducted "in a manner befitting its nature." Nonetheless, he is candid about his early reservations toward

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xv.

⁷⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Offenbarung und Heilsgeschichte nach der Lehre des heiligen Bonaventura* (1955), in *JRGS* 2, 67.

⁷⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "Kirchliches Lehramt und Exegese: Reflexionen aus Anlaß des 100jährigen Bestehens der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 32 (2003), 522–529.

certain tendencies among its proponents: "I was bothered by the narrow-mindedness of the movement's followers, who wanted to recognize only one form of the liturgy as valid." Pascher caused Ratzinger to modify his reservations and become "a follower" of the new direction in liturgical theology. He describes this as provoked by the "reverential manner" in which Pascher taught the young men "to celebrate the liturgy, in keeping with its deepest nature."⁷⁷

The basic dynamics on display here broadly correspond with Ratzinger's mature position toward the liturgical movement. In *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ratzinger describes reading Romano Guardini's book of the same name in 1946 and says the liturgy emerged around this time "rather like a fresco" that had been "almost completely overlaid with whitewash by later generations." The whitewash was "instructions for and forms of private prayer."⁷⁸ Extending this metaphor, then, it seems Pascher enabled the young Ratzinger to appreciate the original fresco Guardini and others revealed through historical scholarship. The key aspect to this seems to be how that newly revealed fresco could seem very different from the whitewash and yet be an earlier expression of the same "deepest nature" shared by the liturgical practices with which Ratzinger had grown up. However, in his later work Ratzinger's reservations about the movement are, if anything, amplified. It was good, he says, that the "fresco was laid bare by the liturgical movement," and for "a moment its colors and figures fascinated us." But those good intentions were to peril the thing itself, to overshadow that same "deepest nature" Pascher had brought to light: "the fresco has been engulfed by climatic conditions as well as by various restorations and reconstructions."⁷⁹ Many criticisms of such reconstructions are found in Ratzinger's writings.

Nonetheless, Pascher remains centrally important, not least for his form/content (*Gestalt/Vollzug*) distinction. Some of this influence is perhaps lost in translation, insofar as the noun *Gestalt* has a much richer resonance than the usual English translation "form." *Gestalt* has a strong note of personal presence. Perhaps Pascher's differentiation of the "whitewash" from the *Gestalt* of the original "fresco" was one of the original impulses leading Pope Benedict eventually to arrive at *Summorum Pontificum*. This document outlines an intrinsic union between the Mass celebrated prior to 1970 and afterwards, stating that

⁷⁷ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 56–57.

⁷⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, in JRCW 11, 3–150, at 3 (first published in 2000).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the former is the ordinary form, and the latter the extraordinary form, of the same Rite, the same *Gestalt* ("two usages of the same Roman Rite"). Indeed, this harks back to Ratzinger's earliest reservations about the liturgical movement as evincing a narrowly one-sided exclusivism. Pascher can then be seen as the teacher who first showed Ratzinger that liturgical reform need not necessarily lead to discontinuity and rupture from the developments of liturgical practice that precede it.

SUMMARY

The great thinkers Ratzinger studied in his early days remain enduring sources of orientation throughout the development of his theology. This remains the case in the papal writings as much as those of the professor or prefect. Moreover, Augustine, Bonaventure, and Newman were each theologians who did not tread an exclusively contemplative or "academic" path. Their biographies, like Ratzinger's, include long periods where they were called into the service of the Church in the midst of worldly circumstances. For this reason, perhaps, each thinker contributes to that "dynamic fidelity" that so characterizes Ratzinger's own work, for each thinker had to appropriate, or realize afresh, the Incarnation of Christ in and through the demands made on the Church by history.

The contemporary teachers mentioned in this chapter have a more mixed standing in Ratzinger's later work. He describes the Munich faculty as "biblically orientated, working from Holy Scripture, the Fathers and the liturgy," as "very ecumenical," and as benefiting from the absence of manualist Thomism.⁸⁰ All this could apply to Ratzinger himself, but there is an important difference between him and his teachers. They generally tended more to dynamism than fidelity. This can be seen most clearly in Maier, and to a certain extent in Pascher's reformism. Even Söhnngen showed an overarching loyalty to contemporary thinking when it came to the discussions prior to the dogmatizing of the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the promulgation of *Munificentissimus Deus* in 1950. When asked how he would respond if the teaching was promulgated as dogma, Söhnngen responded: "I will remember the Church is wiser than I and that I must trust her far more than my own erudition."⁸¹ It was Ratzinger's own

⁸⁰ Benedict XVI, *Last Testament*, 83.

⁸¹ Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 58–59.

work that would go on to show that theology can be done without ending in a rupture between Church teaching and critical scholarship.

FURTHER READING

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