

Porta Fidei: The Year of Faith: The Faith of Joseph Ratzinger

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For Bishop Vincent Nguyen Van Long OFMConv,
the first Vietnamese refugee Bishop in Australia
In thanksgiving for his generous service to the Australian Catholic Church.

Abstract: *The resignation of Benedict XVI was a surprise, but not unanticipated. The legacy of his Pontificate is now under scrutiny. This article examines the faith of Benedict XVI and reconnects it with his Apostolic letter Porta Fidei, issued on October 11th, 2011 to announce the Year of Faith. This essay claims that Porta Fidei can be seen as the spiritual testament of Ratzinger's understanding of faith.*

Key Words: Benedict XVI; Joseph Ratzinger; faith; *Porta fidei*; evangelization

On October 11th, 2011 Pope Benedict XVI issued the Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* in which he declared the Year of Faith which would take place from October 12th, 2012 until November 24th, 2013, the Solemnity of Christ the King. The Pope gave four reasons for his decision. The Year of Faith coincides with a) the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the opening of Vatican II; b) the 20th Anniversary of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by Blessed Pope John Paul II; and c) the convocation of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2012. Finally, Benedict admits that the Year of Faith also overlaps with his personal intention:

Ever since the start of my ministry as Successor of Peter, I have spoken of the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ.²

The Year of Faith is therefore a theological-spiritual outflow of the Year of Grace. Pope Benedict is not the first Supreme Pontiff who dedicated a whole ecclesial year for the celebration of the riches of faith; in 1967 Pope Paul VI proclaimed a Year of Faith to celebrate the nineteenth centenary of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul. It was sought as a response to the diminution of a religious sense in society, and to the rise of secular philosophies which threaten the foundation of faith and which deformed the sense

¹ Here I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Michael Endicott, OSA, who has kindly contributed to important linguistic improvements of this article.

² *Porta fidei*, n.2. All Papal documents and speeches etc. are taken from the official website of the Vatican; see www.vatican.va/holy_father_benedictxvi.

of truth.³ Its aim therefore was to "reappropriate exact knowledge of the faith, so as to reinvigorate it, purify it, confirm it, and confess it."⁴ In following his predecessor, Benedict also called for an authentic and sincere profession of the "same faith". The overall aim of the Year of Faith is therefore "a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world."⁵

This article endeavours to show that the Apostolic letter *Porta fidei* grows out of Ratzinger's earlier theological reflection and Papal teaching. It is an outcome of a spiritual journey initiated and perfected through his personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

THE LEADING TO THE YEAR OF FAITH

In his Apostolic letter Pope Benedict adds a personal dimension to the Year of Faith by admitting that this initiation emerges already at the very beginning of his Petrine ministry. Reviewing his earlier theological reflection, however, one could also go a step further. The celebration of the Year of Faith is a spiritual consequence of his theological thought. For the Pope, theology always includes a spiritual hermeneutic, connecting the words of God to the lives of the faithful. Truth is not some mere abstract notion, but this truth appears as a person, Jesus Christ, calling and inviting us to enter into dialogue with him. In this constant dialogue the life of a theologian is transformed. Thus, theology ought to be proclamation.⁶ Benedict writes:

Knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless the heart, the authentic sacred space with the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and to understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God.⁷

For the Pope, Augustine of Hippo and Bonaventure were models of this desired unity between academic theology and lived spirituality. Indeed, he considered Augustine not only as a theological partner, but more as a spiritual friend:

When I read St. Augustine's writings I do not get the impression that he is just a man who died more or less sixteen hundred years ago, but to me he seems like a man of today: a friend, a contemporary who speaks to me and to us with his fresh and contemporary faith.⁸

³ Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Petrum et Paulum Apostolos* (22 February 1967): 'E mentre vien meno il senso religioso fra gli uomini del nostro tempo, privando la fede del suo naturale fondamento, opinioni esegetiche o teologiche nuove, spesso mutate da audaci, ma cieche filosofie profane, sono qua e là insinuate nel campo della dottrina cattolica, mettendo in dubbio o deformando il senso oggettivo di verità autorevolmente insegnate dalla Chiesa, e, col pretesto di adattare il pensiero religioso alla mentalità del mondo moderno, si prescinde dalla guida del magistero ecclesiastico, si dà alla speculazione teologica un indirizzo radicalmente *storicistico*, si osa spogliare la testimonianza della Sacra Scrittura del suo carattere storico e sacro, e si tenta di introdurre nel Popolo di Dio una mentalità cosiddetta *post-conciliare*, che del Concilio trascura la ferma coerenza dei suoi ampi e magnifici sviluppi dottrinali e legislativi con il tesoro di pensiero e di prassi della Chiesa, per sovvertirne lo spirito di fedeltà tradizionale e per diffondere l'illusione di dare al cristianesimo una nuova interpretazione arbitraria e isterilita.' See the official website of the Vatican http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/index.htm

⁴ *Porta fidei*, n.4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, n.6.

⁶ With regard to the nature of the spiritual theology, see the insightful book by Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (London: Sheed & Ward), 1980.

⁷ *Porta fidei*, n.10.

⁸ General Audience on January 16th 2008; see also Joseph Lam Cong Quy, *Theologische Verwandtschaft: Augustinus von Hippo und Joseph Ratzinger/Papst Benedikt XVI* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), 14-23.

His love for and friendship with Augustine led him to Bonaventure⁹, whose theology is always embedded in proclamation.¹⁰ The scope of this article does not permit a lengthy presentation of Ratzinger's studies either on Augustine's ecclesiology¹¹ or on Bonaventure's concept of revelation.¹² Instead I would like to focus on the essentials by focussing first on Augustine's debate against a Donatist theology which emphasises the more voluntary aspect (martyrdom), to the detriment of the intellectual dimension, of faith.¹³ For Augustine, however, love includes reason and will because no one can love what is irrational. Particularly in Augustine's dealing with the Donatists, Ratzinger discovered the importance of "*gratia Christi*" which he considered to be the inner foundation of the sacraments and therefore of the Church.¹⁴ Between Christ and the Church, there exists an inner holy bond because the Spirit of Christ is present in her through love. In this context, Augustine quoted Rom 5:5: "Because God's love has been poured into our hearts thorough the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."¹⁵ Thus, the Church is spiritually gifted with the Holy Spirit who makes her holy. For this reason, the Church is not only expansively a Church of nations (extensive catholicity), but she is also a sacramental-spiritual reality through her faith in Christ (spiritual catholicity). In this sense the Church is not only horizontally structured, but also vertically oriented, because she is in communion with Christ who makes her his Body. Constituted through the faith in and love of Christ, the Church therefore is predestined to be the addressee of divine revelation. For the *Seraphic Doctor*, Bonaventure, revelation is not purely informative, but is performative, insofar as it includes a divine action by which the human heart and will are touched, enlightened and transformed. Thus, revelation is the self-manifestation of divine love, which God made visibly and sensibly real in the incarnation of his Son. It includes the divine descent (*exitus*) so that humanity can ascend (*reditus*) to Him. Revelation, therefore, involves an inner spiritual enlightenment which enables humans to see the meaning of Jesus' human deeds as divine salvation.¹⁶ Additional to the sensible manifestations, revelation also involves an intellectual and volitional enlightenment. The Christological centre of the Bonaventurian concept of revelation is evident. The seeds for a spiritual Christology, which emerged fully in Ratzinger's theology in 1981, are already sown by

⁹ *Salz der Erde*, 65.

¹⁰ *Joseph Ratzingers Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), 80. Henceforth *JRGS*.

¹¹ I have discussed it in an earlier publication; see Lam, *Theologische Verwandtschaft*, 40-99. For a detailed study, see also Maximilian H. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger. Life in the Church and Living Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007).

¹² See also Joseph Lam Cong Quy, "Joseph Ratzinger's Contribution to the Preparatory Debate of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*", in *Gregorianum* 94 (2013): 35-54; *Gegenwart der Offenbarung. Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzingers*, Ratzinger-Studien 2, ed. Marianne Schosser and Franz-Xaver Heibl (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011).

¹³ Wilhelm Gessel, "Der nordafrikanische Donatismus", in *Antike Welt. Zeitschrift für Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte* 11 (1980): 3-16.

¹⁴ "Donatismus als Lehre", in *JRGS* Vol.1, 667-668.

¹⁵ *Volks und Haus Gottes*, in *JRGS* Vol. 1, 29.

¹⁶ *JRGS* Vol.2, 103-110.

Augustine and Bonaventure.¹⁷ Contemplating the documents of Vatican II from the Augustinian and Bonaventurian perspective,¹⁸ Ratzinger finally realized that:

much to my astonishment ... 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.¹⁹

Thus, spiritual Christology is seen as the foundation of the pastoral-ecumenical intention of Vatican II. This "new" discovery must be seen together with Ratzinger's view on the historical-critical method of exegesis. In contemporary exegetical practice Ratzinger observes a change bearing wide implications:

In contemporary writing, the title of "Christ" has largely given way to the personal name "Jesus". This linguistic change reveals a spiritual process ... namely, the attempt to get behind the Church's confession of faith and reach the purely historical figure of Jesus.²⁰

According to Ratzinger, this type of biblical exegesis cannot close the gap between faith in Christ and the historical Jesus. Hence, the historical method cannot lead us to the knowledge of the real Jesus. While Ratzinger acknowledges the indispensability of the historical method for theology, he nevertheless points to its limitation. Not only is it impossible to reconstruct the entire past, but historical exegesis, if "it remains true to itself ... not only has to investigate the biblical word as a thing of the past, but also has to let it remain in the past."²¹ In this context Ratzinger suggests that historical exegesis must be completed by a theological hermeneutic. He strongly advocates an exegesis which includes the faith of the Church, because the Scriptures emerge within the faith tradition. Ratzinger promotes a canonical exegesis which he exemplifies in his three volumes on *Jesus of Nazareth*, published during 2007-2012.²² This completion is imposed by the spiritual-confessional nature of the Scriptures itself. The historical Jesus is also seen from the perspective of faith which leads us to the real Jesus, who is Lord.

A spiritual Christology, conducted in faith in Jesus Christ, leads us to a deeper understanding of the real nature of Jesus because it is done from within. The most intimate insight into the real Jesus happens through prayer. In order to illustrate this point, I cite here a lengthy quotation:

¹⁷ In this year the Congress of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Toulouse and the Eucharist Congress in Lourdes took place. Additionally, this year also marked the 1600-year jubilee of the Council of Constantinople and the 1550th anniversary of the Council of Ephesus.

¹⁸ Tracey Rowland in her book *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2008) advocates for an "Augustinian Thomism" influence of Ratzinger's theology. First Rowland does not demonstrate the nature of Augustine's theology, except to point to his Platonic background. She also neglects the fact that Bonaventure was an opponent of Aristotelian Thomism. See Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of Bonaventure*, (New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild, 1965), 22-24.

¹⁹ *Behold the Pierced One. An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹ *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), xvi.

²² *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, xix: "Canonical exegesis – reading the individual texts of the Bible in the context of the whole – is an essential dimension of exegesis. It does not contradict historical-critical interpretation, but carries it forward in an organic way toward becoming theology in the proper sense."

According to Luke, we see who Jesus is if we see him at prayer. 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 ... only by entering into Jesus' solitude, only by participating in what is most personal to him, his communication with the Father, can one see what this most personal reality is; only thus can one penetrate to his identity ... The person who has beheld Jesus' intimacy with the Father and has come to understand him from within is called to be "rock" of the Church. The Church arises out of participation in the prayer of Jesus.²³

While the historical-critical method is important, it still remains external to the lives of the people. Hence, Ratzinger promotes a more interior, indeed a more spiritual approach which draws the faithful into the divine joy and love. For this reason, the Apostolic letter recommends that during the Year of Faith the Church should keep the gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

APOSTOLIC LETTER *PORTA FIDEI* - REDISCOVERY OF THE JOY AND ENTHUSIASM OF FAITH'S JOURNEY

The Year of Faith wants to awaken this joy and enthusiasm of faith in the heart of the faithful. In this context Benedict alludes to it as the "taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples."²⁴ Thus, joy is aroused when the word of God is preached. And life in its fullness is made visible through the celebration of the Eucharist. Faith, then, emerges.²⁵

In the first section of the document, which includes n.1–7, the Pope explains the meaning and contents of faith. Thus, he leads us into the theological and ecclesial dimensions of faith. According to the Apostolic letter, faith is essentially an outcome of the revelation of the Trinitarian love (cf. Jn 17:22). This love is seen as the foundation of human salvation:

The Father, who in the fullness of time sent his Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord's glorious return.²⁶

This divine revelation, which evokes faith, is explained as an invitation to share life in communion both with God and in the Church. Thus, divine revelation, as a result of love because God is love, is transformative because of the transforming power of grace which shapes the heart of the faithful when listening to the proclamation of God's words. The connection between love and revelation is elaborated masterfully in the Benedict's first encyclical *Deus caritatis est*, published in 2005. Therein, he teaches us that love leads to a growth "towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God."²⁷ This is only

²³ *Behold the Pierced One*, 19.

²⁴ *Porta fidei*, n.3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, n.9: "We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to profess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope."

²⁶ *Ibid.*, n.1.

²⁷ *Deus caritatis est*, n.6.

possible because of the "agape" which purifies inwardly and which therefore involves, a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation, ready and even willing for sacrifice.²⁸

Thus, faith is a movement towards the other. Faith, shaped by love and sustained by hope, then, is not understood as a once and for all event. It does not conclude with the faith of the Apostles who were the eye-witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection. On the contrary, faith can still progress because of the revelatory dimension of the divine love. Rather faith is "to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime."²⁹ In line with his earlier Encyclical *Spe salvi*, issued on November 30th 2007, Benedict sees faith therefore not solely from its informative objectives, but more in its performative dimension:

Christianity was not only "good news"—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only "informative" but "performative". That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open.³⁰

The "good news" is, of course, realized in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God. For this reason Benedict invites the faithful to "re-discover the journey of faith, so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ."³¹ He teaches us that this faith-encounter is "the way to arrive definitively at salvation."³² For this reason, the Year of Faith necessitates an "authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one saviour of the world."³³

This conversion leads into a consideration of the Church, the body of Christ. Faith, as we have said earlier, has a social and communal component.³⁴ It leads also to a discovery of the other because faith is shaped by love and hope. Thus, faith in Jesus Christ involves a missionary commitment "to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm of communicating the faith."³⁵ Evangelization is based upon a believing heart and a "systematic knowledge of the content of the faith."³⁶

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Porta fidei*, n.1; see also *Deus caritas est*, n.6: "Love is indeed 'ecstasy', not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a *journey, an ongoing exodus* out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: 'Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it' (Lk 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25)." Emphasis added.

³⁰ *Spe salvi*, n.2

³¹ *Porta fidei*, n.2.

³² Ibid., n.3.

³³ Ibid., n.6.

³⁴ Ibid., n.10: "Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility."

³⁵ Ibid., n.7.

³⁶ Ibid., n.11.

THE SEARCH FOR HUMAN GROWTH AND THE CERTITUDE OF FAITH

One of the most striking statements Benedict made in his Apostolic letter *Porta fidei* was the qualification of faith as certitude. Discussing the human journey and its related search for growth, he maintains that there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one's life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God.³⁷

This statement is intriguing because earlier in the same document he observes "a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people."³⁸ This crisis evokes uncertainty in the people's attitude to faith. According to the Benedict's analysis, faith cannot any longer be presupposed, and some strong currents in society and culture openly deny it. In this he detects a significant change in the contemporary mind. At the Wednesday general public audience on August 5th 2009, he spoke of the transition from the "dictatorship of rationalism" to the "dictatorship of relativism" which he considers as a degradation of human reason because it regards humans as incapable of truth. In a pluralist global society it is presumptuous to maintain that there is only one truth which is universally applicable to all religions. The responsibility for the denial of faith, as the Benedict observes, lies with the disappearance of "a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of faith and the values inspired by it."³⁹ Indeed, the crisis of Western culture and the impact of this crisis on Christianity are constant topics in Ratzinger's writings.⁴⁰ For the Pope, the shift of modern Western paradigms of thinking and experiencing downplays the significance of faith in God for the modern culture which is becoming increasingly technocratic and praxis-oriented:

Man, then, no longer comes into being as a gift of the Creator, but as the product of our action, a product that—for this very reason—can also be selected according to criteria of our own choosing.⁴¹

The same diagnosis of modern illness is repeated in his recent address to the officials of the Roman Curia on December 21st 2012.⁴² While the Pope acknowledges a sincere searching "for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world,"⁴³ he also alludes to the fact that many people still encounter considerable difficulties which prevent them from considering God as the response to their questions of life. Amongst the many reasons that could lead to the rejection of faith, Benedict identifies the positivist-functional conception of nature as the greatest philosophical-ideological obstacle for the perception of faith. This positivist thinking has changed the traditional concept of truth. In order to stress the gravity of the contemporary situation, he employed

³⁷ Ibid., n.7.

³⁸ Ibid., n.2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, with a Foreword by Marcello Pera (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006); *The Dialectics of Secularization. On Reason and Religion*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006); "Europe in the Crisis of Cultures", in *Communio* 32.2 (2005): 345-356.

⁴¹ "Europe in Crisis", 346.

⁴² *Address by His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia, 21st December 2012*: "When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being."

⁴³ *Porta fidei*, n.10.

the term "dictatorship of relativism"⁴⁴ which he says often ends up in a "negative tolerance".⁴⁵ In this positivist thinking religion must be excluded from the realm of objective reasoning. If nature, as Benedict suggested in a speech to the members of the German Parliament on September 22, 2011, "is viewed as 'an aggregate of objective data linked together in terms of cause and effect', then indeed, no ethical indication of any kind can be derived from it."⁴⁶ Therefore, religion belongs rather to the sphere of subjectivism, instead of in the public sphere:

Anything that is not verifiable or falsifiable, according to this understanding, does not belong to the realm of reason strictly understood. Hence ethics and religion must be assigned to the subjective field, and they remain extraneous to the realm of reason in the strict sense of the word. Where positivist reason dominates the field to the exclusion of all else – and that is broadly the case in our public mindset – then the classical sources of knowledge for ethics and law are excluded. This is a dramatic situation which affects everyone, and on which a public debate is necessary.⁴⁷

Benedict discovers in this technocratic-positivist scientific thinking a *disequilibrium* which cannot provide security for which human beings are looking:

The power of morality has not kept pace with the growth of science, indeed, it has rather diminished. This is because the technological mindset confines morality to the subjective sphere, whereas what we need is precisely a public morality, a morality that can respond to the threats that cast their shadows over everyone's existence. The true, and gravest, danger we face in the present moment is just this disequilibrium between technical capacities and moral energy. The security that we need as a basis for our freedom and dignity cannot, in the last analysis, come from technological systems of control, but can spring only from man's moral strength. Where this strength is lacking, or is only inadequately present, man's power will increasingly transform itself into a power of destruction.⁴⁸

In proposing faith as certitude, Benedict obviously does not mean a scientific objective sureness. Rather he takes into consideration the existential dimension of human existence. Faith is certain because it is based upon the hope in Christ, witnessed by many Christians. It is existentially more certain than scientific proof because it includes a personal conviction in a sure future, although such a future is not yet fully known to us:

Here too we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *Speech at Wednesday audience on December 16th 2009*: "relativism, which does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate good consists solely of one's own ego and desires." Perhaps the Pope accords here with the analysis of Charles Taylor who in his major work, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007) spoke of an "exclusive humanism" which has cut off its transcendent dimension and therefore intends to exclude religion from the public sphere; for a reading of Charles Taylor and his impact on Australian context see Neil Ormerod, "Secularism and the 'Rise' of Atheism", in *Australian eJournal of Theology* 17 (2010): 13-22.

⁴⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Licht der Welt*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 69-79. As one example the Pope mentions the debate about the presence of the Crucifix in state schools.

⁴⁶ *Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI, Reichstag Building, Berlin, Thursday, 22 September 2011*. Here the Pope cites Hans Kelsen; see W. Waldstein, *Ins Herz geschrieben. Das Naturrecht als Fundament einer menschlichen Gesellschaft*, (Augsburg, 2010), 15-21.

⁴⁷ *Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI*.

⁴⁸ "Europe in Crisis", 346.

⁴⁹ *Spe salvi*, n.2; also n.7: "Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this

Thus, the certainty of faith is based upon a personal encounter with Christ and with Christian witnesses throughout the ages. This personal-existential character of proofs presents a higher certitude than that presented by external-objective facts.

In order to achieve this certitude, the Pope recommends a continual growth in the "maturity of Christ". By this then Cardinal Ratzinger meant a firm foundation upon Jesus Christ who is the measurement between falsehood and truth:

He is the measure of true humanism. An "adult" faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth.⁵⁰

Thus, the certitude of faith is based upon friendship with Christ (*vademecum*) who is the true paradigm of humanism which is always pointing beyond oneself:

Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. This "standing with him" points towards an understanding of the reasons for believing. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes.⁵¹

THE JOY OF FAITH AND EVANGELIZATION

Social responsibility is an important aspect of the Christian faith. Faith in God, who is love, always involves a missionary dimension. Here Benedict reminds us of Paul's missionary zeal by commenting on 2 Cor 5:14: "It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize."⁵² For Benedict the renewal of faith goes hand in hand with a stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith. In rediscovering his love day by day, the missionary commitment of believers attains force and vigour that never fade away.⁵³

Renewal is therefore an inward condition for an outward activity. Thus, the confession of faith done with the heart is externalized in a public testimony and commitment. He sees the essence of mission in the communication of an "experience of grace and joy."⁵⁴

The opening of faith towards others is a constant in Ratzinger's theological academic writings. His doctoral thesis on Augustine's ecclesiology⁵⁵ and his post-doctoral work on Bonaventure's concept of revelation⁵⁶ were dominated by ecumenical concerns. Here also

present reality constitutes for us a 'proof' of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a 'not yet.' The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future."

⁵⁰ *Homily at the Mass "Pro eligendo romano pontifice"*, on April 18th 2005.

⁵¹ *Porta fidei*, n.10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, n.7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ This is clear in his examination of Augustine's anti-Donatist writings in which the Bishop of Hippo emphasised against the exclusive Donatist church the communal aspect of *caritas* of the Catholic Church.

⁵⁶ Ratzinger's emphasis on the *analogia fidei* showed his concerns for the Lutheran theology.

we should not forget that Ratzinger's doctoral supervisor G. Söhngen was also son of a mixed marriage. But it was the great Patristic scholar Henri de Lubac, whose book *Catholicism*, published in 1938 as *Catholicism: Aspects sociaux du dogme*, made a significant impact on the young Ratzinger. In his *Memoir* the Cardinal recalled:

This book was for me a key reading event. It gave me not only a new and deeper connection with the thought of the Fathers but also a new way of looking at theology and faith as such.⁵⁷

In this book Ratzinger discovered the social dimension of the Christian faith as taught by the Fathers of the Church. This insight was crucial for the direction of Ratzinger's own studies of Augustine. From his earliest writings on, we can see Ratzinger's effort to present an inclusive universal Church which, nevertheless, has a distinctive core message to transmit to the world. In pointing to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples Ratzinger maintains that the Christian brotherhood is truly universal because it goes beyond the rabbinic concept of brotherhood. Citing John 20, 17: "But go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father, who is your Father, to my God, who is your God", in 1960 Ratzinger wrote:

Instead of kinship Jesus now calls for a spiritual relationship. Jesus' brothers are those who are united with him in the acceptance of the will of God. The joint submission under the one will of God establishes the innermost relationship between Jesus and his disciples.⁵⁸

Thus, Jesus' understanding of spiritual relationship expands the rabbinic idea of kinship. It now includes also socially disadvantaged persons (Mt 25:40) and foreigners, those who did not belong to the Jewish community, for example, the Samaritans. According to Ratzinger, only a spiritual understanding can open up faith to the other; faith therefore is inclusive and universal, in spite of the fact that it has a distinctive body of beliefs. This is very true for the Christian concept of *agape*. Love plays a double role in the relationship with non-Christians. It is the inner foundation of the Christian relationship. In this way Christians can be seen as credible examples. Here Ratzinger cites Mk 4:21 and Mt. 5:14: Christians are the lights put on the lamp stand, shining for the world.⁵⁹ But Ratzinger goes even a step further by saying that Christians should also suffer for those who do not yet believe in Christ:

The last and highest responsibility of a Christian is to suffer for and because of them. In doing so he truly follows his master who, short before his own passion, summarizes his life's task with these words: "For the Son of Man has not come be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many" [Mk 10:45]. These words are not only reflective of Jesus' own fundamental law of life, but it also identifies the essence of law which binds all disciples of Christ.⁶⁰

This inclusive dimension of faith emerged already in 1960s and becomes increasingly important for Ratzinger's future theological reflection. As we have said

⁵⁷ *Milestones, Memoirs 1927-1977*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997), 89.

⁵⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Die christliche Brüderlichkeit*, (München: Kösel, 1960), 51: "An die Stelle der Blutsverwandtschaft, sie an Rang überbietend, wird hier die Geistesverwandtschaft gesetzt. Brüder sind für Jesus die, die mit ihm in der gemeinsamen Annahme des Gotteswillens vereint sind. Die gemeinsame Willensunterstellung unter Gott schafft so die innerste Verwandtschaft."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

earlier, Ratzinger became aware of the achievements of spiritual Christology in 1981. This new insight also affected his perception of the Church. In reacting against an ecclesiology that is more and more focused on the idea of local community, Ratzinger, appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981 by Pope John Paul II, together with the Fathers of the Extraordinary Synod in 1985 advocated a communion-ecclesiology which gives priority to its universal character. Ratzinger wrote:

The point of departure of *communio* is clearly evident in this passage: the union with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who comes to mankind through the proclamation of the Church. Fellowship (*communio*) among men is born here and merges into fellowship (*communio*) with the One and Triune God. One gains access to communion with God through the realization of God's communion with man—it is Christ in person. To meet Christ creates communion with Him and therefore with the Father in the Holy Spirit. This unites men with one another. The goal of all this is the fullness of joy: the Church carries in her bosom an eschatological dynamic. This expression "fullness of joy" recalls the farewell address of Jesus, His Paschal mystery and the Lord's return in the Easter apparitions which prefigure His definitive return in the new world. "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy ... I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice ...ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full (Jn 16, 20.22.24)."⁶¹

It is evident that the fullness of joy derives not from its horizontal, but rather from its vertical orientation of the Church. Thus, it is through the rediscovery of faith, which assumes a dialogical encounter with the Risen Christ, that we also are renewed in the joy of being Christians. It is this joy of faith that makes Christians credible witnesses to the Risen Christ in the world of today – "capable of leading those many people who are seeking to the 'door of faith'."⁶²

CONCLUSION

The Year of Faith calls for an inner renewal of the Church through the rediscovery of the joy of faith. This inner renewal is the pre-condition for a credible witness to Christ in the world of today which has moved from the "dictatorship of rationalism" to the "dictatorship of relativism". The declaration of this special year, however, can be seen as a consequence of Ratzinger's theological reflection. Indeed, it follows pastorally and summarizes spiritually not only the three Papal encyclicals, issued between the years 2005-2009, but also the three volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth*, published in the years 2007-2012. The Apostolic letter *Porta fidei* may be considered as the spiritual testament of Pope Benedict XVI.

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⁶¹ "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II", in *Osservatore Romano*, 23 January 2002, 5.

⁶² Note with pastoral recommendations for the Year of Faith, by the Congregation of Faith, here Introduction.