The Symphony of the Old and New Testaments in the Biblical Theology of Benedict XVI

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"For Benedict, the Church's sacramental liturgy, the worship of the new covenant, is the goal and consummation of the biblical story, and the history of salvation."

1. Introduction: the centrality of Sacred Scripture in Benedict's pontificate

Never before in the history of the Catholic Church has a world-renowned biblical theological scholar been elevated to the papacy. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's election on 19 April 2005 brought to the Chair of St. Peter one of the world's finest theological minds, a public intellectual long engaged in dialogue over the critical issues of the modern period, especially the crucial relationships between faith and reason, freedom and truth, history and dogma. Moreover, the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, to a degree not seen perhaps since the medieval papacy of Gregory the Great, has borne the stamp of a distinctive biblical theology.

For example, when, in early 2007, he published *Jesus of Nazareth*, the first of his two-volume work on spiritual Christology,

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many were genuinely surprised at the note of urgency sounded by the eighty-year-old pontiff:

> Since my election to the episcopal see of Rome I have used every free moment to make progress on the book. As I do not know how much more time or strength I am still to be given, I have decided to publish the first ten chapters . . . because it struck me as the most urgent priority to present the figure and message of Jesus in his public ministry, and so to help foster the growth of a living relationship with him.[1]

Jesus of Nazareth is not only a significant contribution to biblical Christology and theological exegesis, it also represents something of the culmination and convergence of Benedict's many works—as professor, pastor, prefect, and now pope.

Benedict's sense of Scripture's priority was subsequently reinforced when he called the 2008 Synod of Bishops to focus on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." Indeed, at the start the Synod, Benedict offered the following words of challenge in his opening remarks:

> The Word of God is the foundation of everything, it is the true reality. . . .Therefore, we must change our concept of realism. The realist is the one who recognizes the Word of God, in this apparently weak reality, as the foundation of all things . . . . The history of salvation is not a small event, on a poor planet, in the immensity of the universe. It is not a minimal thing which happens by chance on a lost planet. It is the motive for everything, the motive for creation . . . . Everything is created so that this story can exist—the encounter between God and his creature. In this sense, salvation history, the covenant, precedes creation . . . . One can say that, while material creation is the condition for the history of salvation, the history of the covenant is the true cause of the cosmos.[2]

One week later, Benedict surprised the Synod Fathers by giving them an unscheduled address, in which he reinforced his opening challenge:

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[1]Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xxiv.

[2]Pope Benedict, XVI, Meditation during the First General Congregation of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (6 October 2008).

> Today the exegetical "mainstream" in Germany, for example, denies that the Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist and says that Jesus' corpse remained in the tomb . . . . This happens because the hermeneutics of faith is missing: profane philosophical hermeneutics is affirmed instead, which deny the possibility of the entrance and presence of the divine in history . . . . When exegesis is not theological, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology, and vice versa; when theology is not essentially scriptural interpretation within the Church, then this theology no longer has a foundation. Therefore, for the life and mission of the Church, for the future of faith, it is absolutely necessary to overcome this dualism between exegesis and theology. Biblical theology and systematic theology are two dimensions of one reality, which we call theology.[3]

This is as compact and profound a statement as one might wish of Benedict's project—both as a pastor and as a scholar. Indeed, Benedict has defined his pontificate in these terms: "Leading men and women to God, to the God who speaks in the Bible: this is the supreme and fundamental priority of the Church and of the successor of Peter at the present time."[4]

2. *Sacred Scripture, living Tradition, and the Church's faith*

This scriptural emphasis does not represent a change of perspective for Benedict, however, as he himself has characterized all of his theology as having a "biblical character."[5] Moreover, in

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[3]Pope Benedict XVI, Address during the Fourteenth General Congregation of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (14 October 2008). While the meaning of "biblical theology" for Benedict should become clear during the course of this essay, here I can state it in summary form: By biblical theology I mean a unified understanding of the saving truths of the inspired Scripture as they have been handed on in the tradition of the Church, an understanding based on the unity of the Old and New Testaments, on Christ as the interpretive key of the Scriptures, and on the Church's divine liturgy as the fulfillment and actualization of Scripture's saving truths.

[4]Pope Benedict XVI, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church (10 March 2009).

[5]Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 66.

commenting on his own method, Benedict emphasizes the importance of biblical interpretation, going so far as to say: "Exegesis has always remained for me *the center* of my theological work."[6] Indeed, he describes his own theological project as a synthesis by which he is attempting to unfold the spiritual meaning of the history recorded in the Scriptures. As a result, he is less of a systematic theologian than he is a symphonic theologian, much like the Fathers.

> I have never tried to create a system of my own, an individual theology. . . . 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. For this reason exegesis was always very important. I couldn't imagine a purely philosophical theology. The point of departure is first of all the Word. That we believe the Word of God, that we try really to get to know and understand it, and then, as I said, to think it together with the great masters of the faith. This gives my theology a somewhat biblical character and also bears the stamp of the Fathers, especially Augustine. But 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.[7]

Here it is important to note how, for Benedict, a living faith is what gives the theologian the power to accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and the Church as the people of God in which the Scriptures remain a living Word.[8] This acceptance of the Church as the

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[6]Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927–1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 52–53, emphasis added; Address to the Community of the Roman Major Seminary (17 February 2007). *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 93. Benedict's views are mirrored in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, which was issued under his signature as prefect of the Congregation: "[The theologian's] role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God in the inspired Scriptures and handed on in the living tradition of the Church. . . . [T]he object of theology is the truth which is the living God and his plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English [2 July 1990], 1).

[7]*Salt of the Earth*, 66.

[8]*The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, ed. John F. Thornton and Suzanne B. Varenne (Nre York: HarperCollins, 2007), 145; *Jesus of Nazareth*, xx–xxi.

living subject of Scripture is vital for Benedict's approach to theology. Again, he has expressed this with almost axiom-like clarity:

> For the Catholic Christian, two lines of essential hermeneutic orientation assert themselves . . . . The first: we trust Scripture and we base ourselves on Scripture, not on hypothetical reconstructions that go behind it and, according to their own taste, reconstruct a history in which the presumptuous idea of our knowing what can or cannot be attributed to Jesus plays a key role; which, of course, means attributing to him only what a modern scholar is happy to attribute to a man belonging to a time that the scholar himself has reconstructed. The second is that we read Scripture in the living community of the Church, and therefore on the basis of the fundamental decisions thanks to which it has become historically efficacious, namely, those that laid the foundations of the Church. One must not separate the text from this living context. In this sense, Scripture and Tradition form an inseparable whole, and it is this that Luther, at the dawn of the awakening of historical awareness, could not see.[9]

Before treating aspects of Benedict's view of the symphonic relationship of the Old and New Testaments, we need to underscore how necessary the dimension of faith within the Church is for keeping theology, especially *biblical* theology, from descending into mere "historicism" or the archaeology of ancient texts. For Benedict, the faith of the Church is what gives the Bible its unity, integrity, and continuity. And the Word of Revelation can only be understood in light of this profound unity given to it by the living subject of the Church.

The unity of the canon of Scripture is also something that can only be grasped by faith. Indeed, for Benedict, this is one of the weaknesses of relying exclusively on the tools of historical criticism to interpret the Bible. With these tools one is limited to studying "the individual books of Scripture in the context of their historical period, and then analyzing them further according to their sources." Such critical study is essential, but without reference to the faith of the Church, it can only yield hypotheses about individual texts. Its

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[9] *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 145.

conclusions can only leave us in the past. It cannot provide us with interpretations that make sense within the totality of Scripture.[10]

> The faith of the Church does not exist as an ensemble of texts, rather, the texts—the words—exist because there is a corresponding subject which gives them their basis and their inner coherence. . . . In this regard, the basic tension between the Old and New Testaments already indicates to what an extent the truth of the faith can become accessible in language only within the inner coherence of the whole, and not in separate propositions. If one strikes out the continuity of a subject which organically traverses the whole of history and which remains one with itself throughout its own transformations, nothing is left beyond contradictory speech fragments which cannot subsequently be brought into any relation. The tendency to search for what is most ancient and original behind present developments is the logical conclusion of the loss of the binding element which holds history together and unifies it in the midst of its contradictions. Theology becomes archeology and busies itself with exhuming the authentic ideal behind what really appears before our eyes as Christianity. Such reconstructed Christianity, however, is always a selective Christianity, which loses the tension and the wealth of the whole. The disjointed pluralism of subjectively minted selective Christianities comes to replace the inner plurality of the symphony of the faith.[11]

Indeed, it is the faith of the Church alone that can make the disparate texts into a single book, a Bible. "Without faith, Scripture itself is not Scripture, but rather an ill-assorted ensemble of bits of literature that cannot claim any normative significance."[12] Alter

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[10] *Jesus of Nazareth*, xvii.

[11] *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 93–95; cf. 105: "[T]he Church, as a living subject which endures amid the changes of history, is the vital milieu of the theologian; the Church preserves faith's experiences with God. Theology can remain historically relevant only if it acknowledges this living environment, inserts itself into it and attains an inner participation . . . in the organic structure of the Church; [the theologian] needs that faith which is prayer, contemplation, and life. Only in this symphony does theology come into being."

[12] *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 146. "Since the inner unity of the books of the New Testament, and that of the two Testaments, can only be seen in the light of faith's interpretation, where this is lacking, people are forever separating out new components and discovering contradictions in the sources. Then, as a result, the figure of Jesus also is continually splitting into new pictures of Jesus: there is the

nately, by faith, the theologian not only can trust the basic reliability of the historical texts; he is also able to see the internal unity of Scripture, the connections and patterns that exist within and between texts.[13] A unified way of reading the Scriptures is rooted in the preaching of Jesus—who "imparted his message as a new interpretation of the Old Testament"—and thereby made this way of reading normative for the New Testament writers.[14]

This is what Benedict calls a "christological hermeneutic,"[15] which sees Christ as the hinge, the unity of the Scriptures—the "one that Moses and the prophets had spoken of," thus uniting in explaining the Old and New Testaments.[16] Read as a whole with a hermeneutic of faith, Scripture is seen to have its own dynamic synthesis that moves inexorably toward the figure of Christ.[17] As Benedict states: "[T]he New Testament itself wished to be no more than the complete and full understanding of the Old Testament, now made possible in Christ. The whole Old Testament is a movement of transition to Christ, a waiting for the One in whom

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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. In all these cases some preconceived idea determines the principles of interpretation; once these have been adopted, the historical method is applied, with varying degrees of care and subtlety, in order to try to prove, to oneself and to others, that the Jesus of one's own preconceptions is the only possible historical Jesus. In reality this process of dividing-up only reflects the divisions in man's mind and in the world; indeed, the process only serves to intensify them" (*Behold the Pierced One*, 44). See also Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday (13 April 2006).

[13]Benedict aligns himself, generally speaking, with the movement of "canonical exegesis." See *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism: Sidelights on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 67. "'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" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, xviii–xix).

[14]*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 146.

[15]*Jesus of Nazareth*, xix.

[16]*Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, 52 n.17, 53.

[17]"The synthesis of the testaments worked out in the early Church corresponds solely to the fundamental intention of the New Testament message, and it alone can give Christianity its own historical force" (*A New Song for the Lord*, 72).

all its words would come true, in whom the 'covenant' would attain fulfillment as the new covenant."[18] The unity of the Old and New Testaments is more than a literary (canonical) or historical (economic) phenomenon; indeed, faith grasps the nature of that unity as a theological mystery—as something theandric—namely Christ. Thus, the unity of sacred Scripture, the compenetration of the Old and New Testaments and their understanding in the light of Christ, is the key to Benedict's biblical theology.[19]

3. The Covenant as the meaning of the divine economy

Since he reads Scripture typologically as a unity (and makes use of the insights afforded by modern historical and literary tools) the Bible tells a "coherent story" for Benedict.[20] It is the story of God's creation and salvation of the human race. For Benedict this typological reading—which consists in "the elucidation of signs" found in the biblical text—reveals a divine "economy" or salvation history.[21]

Although he apparently prefers to talk about "salvation history" rather than the "economy" in his own writings, Benedict's understanding of salvation history reflects the patristic distinction between "economy" (*oikonomia*) and theology (*theologia*), wherein the *economy* consists in the deeds and words by which God reveals himself in history, and *theology* refers to the inner trinitarian life of God that is revealed to us by the economy.[22]

Adopting another patristic term, Benedict sees in the economy the working out of a divine "pedagogy." By a long historical tutelage that culminates in the revelation of Christ, God is adapting the human race to his own ways and preparing man for

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[18]*Feast of Faith*, 58; *Jesus of Nazareth*, 56.

[19]Benedict writes approvingly of the Second Vatican Council's "understanding of Holy Scripture as an inner unity in which one part sustains the other, has its existence in it, so that each part can be read and understood only in terms of the whole" (*Principles of Catholic Theology*, 135–36).

[20]*On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 147; *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 215.

[21]*Principles of Catholic Theology*, 317; for Benedict's discussion of the theological issues of salvation and history, see 153–90.

[22]Ibid., 172.

communion with him, Benedict says, embracing the ideas of St. Irenaeus.[23] The divine pedagogical intent is the meaning of the Old and New Testaments, understood in their "inner continuity and coherence."[24] In fact, as Benedict sees it, "The totality of the Scriptures on which the Christian faith rests is God's 'testament' to mankind, issued in two stages, as a proclamation of his will to the world."[25]

The content of Scripture, then, is the divine *economy*. This economy, by which the history of the Old and New Testaments is unified into a single history of salvation, reveals a *theology*, the "mind" or intention of God. God's intent, his will for the world, is his *testamentum*, or *covenant*, with mankind. By his *covenant*, God desires to father his people, making all men and women one family with him in a communion of love. The plan of the covenant, which Benedict calls an "ineffable plan of love,"[26] is the ultimate content and meaning of Scripture. This notion of covenant and economy in turn lies at the heart of Benedict's Christology and ecclesiology, expressed in his magisterial teaching that the Church is "God's family," the living subject by which "the Father . . . wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son."[27]

Benedict's biblical theology of the covenant synthesizes a great deal of scholarship, beginning with the modern exegetical finding that "the internal beginning of the Old Testament lies . . . with the reality of the covenant."[28] He presents the covenant not as a contractual relationship entered into by parties of equal standing, but as "modeled after" ancient near Eastern pacts between feudal lords and their vassals. "The 'covenant' is not a two-sided contract

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[23]*Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, 32; *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 55–56; *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 270; *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 344–345; *In the Beginning*, 9, 16. On Irenaeus, see Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Solemnity of Ss. Peter and Paul (29 June 2005).

[24]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 36.

[25]Ibid., 47.

[26]Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Mass in Błonie Park, Krakow (28 May 2006).

[27]Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, Encyclical Letter on Christian Love (25 December 2005), 19, 25.

[28]"Problems in Catechesis Today: An Interview with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 11, no. 2 (1984): 145–56, at 151–52.

but a gift, a creative act of God's love. . . . God, the King, receives nothing from man; but in giving him his law, he gives him the path of life."[29]

As in other ancient near eastern cultures, the notion of covenant in the Hebrew Bible is ordered to *sacred kinship*—to the creation of a kind of "blood relationship" or filial bond between God and his people.[30] In the biblical covenant we see the true image of God and the true image of the human person. The covenant shows man to be made for relationship with God as the "ground of his existence." At the same time it reveals that the covenant is *who God is*. In the covenant, we see the perfect "manifestation of his self, the 'radiance of his countenance.'"[31]

In Benedict's reading, God's testament or covenant is "the central theme of Scripture itself, thus giving a key to the whole of it."[32] Covenant provides the narrative structure of Scripture, with the canonical text unfolding in the sequence of covenants that God makes—with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses and Israel, and finally with David. The plurality and interrelatedness of these covenants forms the single "old covenant" which points to its fulfillment in the new covenant made by Jesus Christ.[33]

4. The goal of creation and the soul of worship

Benedict reads God's covenant will and desire beginning on the very first pages of Scripture, in the account of creation. He does

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[29]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 50–51.

[30]Ibid., 60–61. See also Joseph Ratzinger, "The New Covenant: A Theology of Covenant in the New Testament," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 22, no. 4 (1995): 635–51; S. W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 37–48.

[31]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 77.

[32]Ibid., 48.

[33]"[T]he one covenant is realized in the plurality of covenants. If this is so, there can be no question of setting the Old and the New Testaments against each other as two different religions; there is only *one* will of God for men, only *one* historical activity of God with and for men, though this activity employs interventions that are diverse and even contradictory—yet in truth they belong together" (ibid., 57).

so through an exegesis that sees the parallels in the canonical text between the creation of heaven and earth and Moses' building of the tabernacle. In both the Genesis and Exodus accounts, a place is being made for God to dwell with his covenant people. There is also the centrality in each of a rhythm involving the cosmically significant number seven, and the law of the seventh day, the Sabbath, which is a law of worship. The world, as Benedict sees it, is fashioned by God to be the sacred space in which his covenant can be established. "The goal of creation is the covenant, the love story of God and man."[34]

> Creation is oriented to the Sabbath, which is the sign of the covenant between God and humankind. . . . [A]s a first step, we can draw this conclusion: Creation is designed in such a way that it is oriented to worship. It fulfills its purpose and assumes its significance when it is lived, ever new, with a view to worship. Creation exists for the sake of worship. As St. Benedict said in his Rule: *Operi Dei nihil praeponatur*—"Nothing must be put before the service of God." This is not the expression of an otherworldly piety but a clear and sober translation of the creation account and of the message that it bears for our lives. The true center, the power that moves and shapes from within in the rhythm of the stars and of our lives, is worship. . . . [T]he universe exists for worship and for the glorification of God.[35]

We notice here another important characteristic of Benedict's theological work. The work of theology for him is "academic," and for the sake of learning, only in the service of the Word he is seeking to explain. In this case, for instance, he does not limit himself to explaining the meaning of the biblical creation account. He wants his readers to know the implications of this biblical text for their lives. This is a constant in Benedict's writing. It lends his biblical theology an urgency that is rare in scholarly theology today.

To return to our discussion of his project: The world was created to be a kind of temple-kingdom of God. The human person, made "in the image of God" according to the biblical text, is given,

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[34] *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 26–27.

[35] *In the Beginning*, 27–28. "The Sabbath is the goal of creation, and it shows what creation is for. The world exists, in other words, because God wanted to create a zone of response to his love, a zone of obedience and freedom" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 83).

in a sense, a priestly vocation—to offer worship to God. In Benedict's writings, we see the importance of the dialogic or relational character of the human person. Man is created in and for relation and dialogue with God, who is in turn a communion of divine persons, a Trinity.[36] The call of the loving God, addressed to the human person, is a call to a relationship of love and communion. The human response takes the form of prayer, worship, and freely given obedience in love to the divine Word that is spoken.

Hence, we see that for Benedict, "worship, law, and ethics are inseparably interwoven" in God's covenant relationship with man.[37] God's covenant Word is always expressed as law and liturgy. This is seen most clearly in the giving of the Law at Sinai, which includes the Sabbath ordinances as part of "a covenant concretized in a minutely regulated form of worship."[38] Throughout the Scriptures, there is to be found a profound inner connection between the "legal and cultic" orders, between the moral order and the liturgical order, between the commands and ordinances of God and the sacrificial worship of God.[39]

Law and worship are two sides of the covenant relationship, which is intended by God as a relationship of familial (i.e., filial and marital) love. The legal and cultic orders are "an expression of God's love, of his 'yes' to the human being that he created, so that he [the

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[36]Summarizing the development of the theological notion of personhood in the writings of the Fathers, Benedict writes: "[T]he concept of 'person' grew out of reading the Bible, as something needed for its interpretation. It is a product of reading the Bible. Secondly, it grew out of the idea of dialogue, more specifically, it grew as an explanation of the phenomenon of the God who speaks dialogically. The Bible with its phenomenon of the God who speaks, the God who is *in* dialogue, stimulated the concept of 'person.' The particular interpretations of Scripture texts offered by the Fathers are certainly accidental and outdated. But their exegetical direction as a whole captures the spiritual direction of the Bible inasmuch as the fundamental phenomenon into which we are placed by the Bible is the God who speaks and the human person who is addressed, the phenomenon of the partnership of the human person who is called by God to love in the world" (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 17, no. 4 [1990]: 439–54, at 443). See also *In the Beginning*, 47–48; *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 75–77.

[37]*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 18.

[38]Ibid., 17.

[39]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 68; *In the Beginning*, 29.

human being] could both love and receive love. . . . God created the universe in order to enter into a history of love with humankind. He created it so that love could exist."[40]

Worship is "the soul of the covenant." Through the worship offered by the human person created in his image and likeness, God's purposes for creation are realized. Human worship "not only saves mankind but is also meant to draw the whole of reality into communion with God."[41] For Benedict, our worship is meant to take the form of a giving back, a handing over of our selves and our possessions to God in an act of thanksgiving and love. Authentic worship never begins as human initiative, but is rather always a response to the divine gift. In its purest form, worship is sacrifice; "the only real gift man should give to God is himself."[42]

God's purpose in this primal order of covenant worship is what Benedict calls *theiosis*, or divinization, a term he adopts from the Eastern Fathers of the Church.[43]

> True surrender to God . . . consists—according to the Fathers in fidelity to biblical thought—in the union of man and creation with God. Belonging to God . . . means losing oneself as the only possible way of finding oneself (Mk 8:35; Mt 10:39). That is why St. Augustine could say that the true "sacrifice" is the *civitas Dei*, that is, love-transformed mankind, the divinization of creation and the surrender of all things to God: God all in all (1 Cor 15:28). That is the purpose of the world. That is the essence of sacrifice and worship. And so we can now say that the goal of worship and the goal of creation as a whole are one and the same—divinization, a world of freedom and love. But this means that the historical makes its appearance in the cosmic. The cosmos is not a kind of closed building, a stationary container in which history may by chance take place. It is itself movement, from its one beginning to its one end. In a sense, creation *is* history.[44]

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[40] *In the Beginning*, 29–30.

[41] *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 27.

[42] Ibid., 35.

[43] *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 198, 274.

[44] *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 28.

All of biblical history, as Benedict sees it, is ordered to the realization of the purposes of creation, this exalted and glorious state in which God will be "all in all." Men and women are made to share in the life of God and to cooperate in the accomplishment of this *theiosis*.

In Benedict's canonical reading, this beautiful vision is marred by the sin of the first man and woman. He affirms the ancient dogmatic and liturgical interpretation of Adam and Eve's "fall," although not without first considering how Israel's conflict with the ancient fertility cults influenced the final form of the text; he also notes the significant parallels between the story of the first couple's temptation and the accounts of Israel's temptations in the desert.[45]

These exegetical considerations lend nuance to his reading. He locates the origin of sin in "refusals and . . . doubt concerning God's covenant."[46] Sin, for Benedict, is essentially a selfish, inward turning in which the person closes in on himself, seeking to become "divine," to realize happiness by his own means, apart from God's covenant of love.[47] Thus sin involves a distortion of freedom and the denial of the truth about the dialogic relation of God and the human person.

From the garden at Eden, biblical history moves on towards the realization of God's plan in Jesus Christ. It is beyond our scope here to present even a partial picture of Benedict's canonical reading of the Old Testament. We can say summarily that he reads the canonical text as a "great historical pilgrimage of the people of God"[48]—beginning with the call of Abraham, continuing through his sons, the patriarchs, and on to the revelation to Moses, the exodus of Israel, and the covenant made at Mount Sinai. The

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[45]*In the Beginning*, 65–66.

[46]Ibid., 77.

[47]"Unfortunately, from its very origins, mankind, seduced by the lies of the Evil One, rejected God's love in the illusion of a self-sufficiency that is impossible (compare Gn 3:1–7). Turning in on himself, Adam withdrew from that source of life who is God himself, and became the first of 'those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage' (Heb 2:15)" (Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2007 [21 November 2006]).

[48]Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Clergy of the Dioceses of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso (24 July 2007).

promise of "an everlasting kingdom" to David marks the final stage of the Old Testament, as the people of God await their Redeemer, who is to come in Jesus Christ.[49]

What characterizes his reading of this history are his accent on the sacrificial-liturgical dimension of the covenant, his stress on the corporate and familial nature of God's redemptive plan, and his keen awareness of the "universalist" orientations written into the old covenant. The distinctive and foundational element of his biblical theology remains his insistence on the "indivisibility"[50] of the Old and New Testaments and on Jesus Christ and his new covenant Church as the true meaning and fulfillment of the economy of salvation, intended by God from the beginning.

5. Christology in the unity of Law and Gospel

The figures of Christ and the Church stand at the heart of Benedict's biblical theology. In a certain sense, we might say that Benedict posits an ecclesiological culmination of the economy of salvation—so long, however, as we keep in mind that Benedict's understanding of the Church is both profoundly christological and profoundly liturgical-sacramental. In Jesus and his Church, God's covenant plan of making all humanity into a divine family, a people of God, begins to come to fulfillment. God's fidelity to this plan—announced in the covenant with Abraham, renewed in the covenant with Israel at Sinai, and assured in the promises made to David—is revealed in Jesus and the founding of his Church, while awaiting its definitive culmination at the end of the age.[51]

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[49] *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 270–71.

[50] *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 28.

[51] "With Abraham's call, the story of the blessing begins: it is the beginning of God's great plan to make humanity one family through the covenant with a new people, chosen by him to be a blessing among all the peoples (compare Gn 12:1–3). This divine plan is still being implemented; it culminated in the mystery of Christ. It was then that the 'last times' began, in the sense that the plan was fully revealed and brought about in Christ but needs to be accepted by human history, which always remains a history of fidelity on God's part, but unfortunately also of infidelity on the part of us human beings. The Church herself, the depository of the blessing, is holy and made up of sinners, marked by tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.' In the fullness of time Jesus Christ came to bring the

Benedict rejects as unbiblical the sharp dialectic between Law and Gospel introduced by Martin Luther and presumed rather uncritically by the modern exegetical establishment.[52] To the contrary, Benedict establishes from his close readings of the texts "the inner continuity and coherence of Law and Gospel" and the "deep unity between the good news of Jesus and the message of Sinai."[53] The hinge upon which this unity depends is, again, the figure of Jesus Christ.

In his theological writings, Benedict sees Jesus at once as the Christ, the Messiah anticipated in the Old Testament texts;[54] the Torah of God made flesh;[55] the new and greater Moses;[56] the definitive David;[57] and the new Adam.[58] In these interpretive assertions, Benedict relies on solid historical and literary exegesis and judicious appropriation of patristic precedents. For instance, he reads the early christological hymn in Philippians 2:5–11 as an allusion to the story of Adam.[59] He finds good critical grounds for accepting the Fathers' allegorical interpretation of the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son as likewise referring to Adam.[60] He makes a careful comparison of the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke to illuminate the twin aspects of Christ's soteriological project. By tracing his lineage to Abraham, Matthew highlights

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covenant to completion: he himself, true God and true man, is the sacrament of God's fidelity to his plan of salvation for all humanity, for all of us" (Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord [6 January 2008]).

[52]On Benedict's rejection of this dialectic, see "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis," in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 250–51; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "The Renewal of Moral Theology: Perspectives of Vatican II and *Veritatis splendor*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32 (2005): 357–68, at 360.

[53]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 33, 36.

[54]*On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 57.

[55]*In the Beginning*, 30; *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 70; *Jesus of Nazareth*, 110–11.

[56]*Jesus of Nazareth*, 66.

[57]*Dogma and Preaching*, 23.

[58]*In the Beginning*, 49.

[59]*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 168; Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Holy Mass with the Members of the Bishops' Conference of Switzerland (7 November 2006).

[60]*Jesus of Nazareth*, 199–200, 205–06; *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 86.

God's faithfulness to his covenant promises to the patriarch and especially to David. Luke's genealogy, which fixes Jesus in a line descending from "Adam, son of God" (3:38), establishes Jesus' mission as transcending ethnicity and nationality. As Benedict interprets: "In Jesus Christ the creation of man first attains its true goal; in him the Creator's conception of man finds its full expression."[61]

It is not possible here to do justice to Benedict's important contributions to biblical Christology. It is enough for our purposes to acknowledge that he has made a compelling scholarly case for trusting the biblical portrait of Jesus as Messiah ("Christ"), Lord, and Son of God. And we must note, as he does in concluding his detailed exegesis in *Jesus of Nazareth*, that the christological titles found in the New Testament are all "deeply rooted . . . in the Word of God, Israel's Bible, the Old Testament. And yet all these terms receive their full meaning only in him; it is *as if they had been waiting for him.*"[62]

Here we must recognize again the value of typology in Benedict's project. "[I]t is not at all unusual for different typological connections to converge in the events occurring along Jesus' way. This makes it plain that Moses and the prophets all speak of Jesus."[63] While granting that typology has been excessively and inappropriately applied at times in the history of interpretation, Benedict nonetheless affirms:

> But the central and quite justified significance, the essential message of typology is absolutely right here: there is a line running right through the history of faith and worship. Inwardly, things correspond to this—there are deviations, but there is also a path in a particular direction: the inner harmony with the figure of Jesus Christ, with his message and his existence, simply cannot be ruled out, in spite of the variety of historical contexts and stages. . . . Christ is moving through history in these forms and figures, as (again with the Fathers) we may express it.[64]

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[61] *Dogma and Preaching*, 22.

[62] *Jesus of Nazareth*, 354, emphasis added.

[63] Ibid., 308.

[64] *Truth and Tolerance*, 97.

6. The proclamation of the Kingdom and the identity of the Church

At the center of Jesus' preaching and mission is the Kingdom of God. Benedict has done a great deal of work in this area, which, along with debate over the historical Jesus, is among the most contentious domains of New Testament scholarship. As with his christology, we can only glance here at his larger work of Kingdom ecclesiology, keeping in mind that our aim is to sketch the fundamentals of his overall biblical theology and to see how his theological method opens up new doors for understanding the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

In this biblical theology, the identity of the Kingdom and the relationship of the Kingdom to Christ and to the Church are crucial. Benedict confronts openly the famous barbed quip of Alfred Loisy, the modernist exegete: "Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom; what came was the Church."[65] Benedict sees the presumed dialectic of Church and Kingdom as another artificial byproduct of the erroneous philosophy that underlies the historical-critical method. His response is calm and simple: "[A] historical reading of the texts reveals that the opposition of Kingdom and Church has no factual basis."[66]

While he rejects the individualist and political interpretations of the Kingdom common in the modern era, he also seems intent not to be drawn into superficial sidebar debates about whether or to what extent the Church on earth can be identified with the Kingdom. That said, his ecclesiological work presumes a deep interpenetration of Church and Kingdom, and presumes the Catholic Church to be at the summit of the divine economy written into the pages of the Old and New Testaments.

At times his language regarding the Kingdom is indistinguishable from his language regarding the Church. Thus, he can identify, using statistical analyses and word studies, the Kingdom as the "the true *Leitmotiv* of Jesus' preaching,"[67] and as "the

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[65] *Eschatology*, 24; *Jesus of Nazareth*, 48–49.

[66] *Called to Communion*, 21.

[67] *Jesus of Nazareth*, 48.

foundation of the Church, and thus the realization of Christ's mission."[68]

As Benedict reads it, the Kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching means not a temporal institutional monarchy, but something far greater—the reign of the living God over all creation, God's sovereign presence in the world established finally and forever, his command as King and Lord.

> When Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, he is quite simply proclaiming God, and proclaiming him to be the living God, who is able to act concretely in the world and in history and is even now so acting. . . . The new and totally specific thing about his message is that he is telling us: God is acting now—this is the hour when God is showing himself in history as its Lord, as the living God, as the way that goes beyond anything seen before. "Kingdom of God" is therefore an inadequate translation. It would be better to speak of God's being-Lord, of his lordship. . . . The announcement of God's lordship is, like Jesus' entire message, founded on the Old Testament. Jesus reads the Old Testament, in its progressive movement from the beginnings with Abraham right down to his own time, as a single whole; precisely when we grasp this movement as a whole, we see that it leads directly to Jesus himself.[69]

The identity of Jesus as the Davidic "Son" of God, the royal son promised to David (2 Sam 7:14), is vital to Benedict's understanding of the Church and the Kingdom. In his detailed treatment in *Jesus of Nazareth*, he notes that this christological title reflects a long development of thought in the Old Testament. In the covenant, Israel is regarded as God's "first-born son" (Ex 4:22). By the time of the Davidic kingdom, the king was "personified" as God's first-born son. The application of the title to Jesus in the apostolic preaching reflects hopes later in the Old Testament for a Davidic son, "the king who was to come."[70] The New Testament understands Jesus as that long-awaited "true king of the world."[71] He embodies the dynamic thrust of the Old Testament, which, from

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[68] *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, 75.

[69] *Jesus of Nazareth*, 55–56.

[70] See the full discussion in *Jesus of Nazareth*, 335–45.

[71] *Dogma and Preaching*, 23.

the call of Abraham onward, envisions a universal gathering of Israel and the nations under the lordship of God.[72]

Benedict's theology pressumes a certain historical trajectory in the biblical narrative. He illuminates a strain of prophetic expectation in which Israel's hopes for restoration from exile and the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom at Zion are described as an eschatological "gathering" of the children of God scattered among the nations.[73] Jesus himself alludes to this expectation, and Benedict often uses the word "gathering" to characterize the essence of this mission. "For he came in order to gather together what was dispersed (see Jn 11:52; Mt 12:30). His entire work is thus to gather the new people."[74]

Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom is seen as the fulfillment of the promise inherent in the old covenant. It is pivotal for Benedict's interpretation that the covenant with Abraham, which established the people of God, was universalist in its intention—promising that all the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham's family.[75] "With Jesus Christ, Abraham's blessing was extended to all peoples, to the universal Church as the new Israel which welcomes within her the whole of humanity."[76]

Here we glimpse the inseparability of Church and Kingdom and their essential continuity with the people of God, Israel. The calling of the twelve apostles is an obvious symbolic allusion to the patriarchal structure of Israel and the twelve sons of Jacob. As Benedict says, it must be "understood in the light of his special

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[72]"[T]he Old and New Testaments, Jesus and the Holy Scriptures of Israel, appear inseparably joined together. The new dynamism of Jesus' mission, the bringing of Israel and the nations into unity, corresponds to the prophetic dynamism of the Old Testament itself. Reconciliation, which takes place in the common acknowledgement that God is king and that his will is our way, is the core of Jesus' mission. And in his mission, the person and the message are inseparable" (*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 28; *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, 79).

[73]See, for example, Is 11:12; 13:4; Jer 3:17; 23:3; Ez 34:13, 23.

[74]*Called to Communion*, 23.

[75]See Gn 22:17–18; *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 68.

[76]Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord (6 January 2008); "In the Son of Man, man is revealed as he truly ought to be" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 325).

relationship with Israel, the community of the Covenant, in continuity with the history of salvation."[77] The Kingdom that Jesus announces is the new family of God, the new Israel.[78]

Drawing again from historical and exegetical research, he observes both Abrahamic and Davidic notes in Christ's authority structure for this new people of God. Establishing Peter's primacy among the apostles, Jesus designates him as a "rock," alluding to biblical and rabbinic characterizations of Abraham's faith as the solid rock of Israel's foundation. In the same passage (Mt 16:18–19), Jesus gives Peter "the keys" of the Kingdom—a clear reference to a prophetic tradition regarding authority and succession in the kingdom of David.[79]

Benedict notes something, too, that many scholars overlook. There is a cultic and liturgical character to the apostolic office. The odd sounding phrase in the Gospel of Mark—literally, "he *made* twelve" (3:14)—is used in the Old Testament for the appointment of priests. The leaders of the Church are, then, in the literal historical sense of the text, being established by Jesus as both prophets and priests in continuity with the Old Testament tradition.[80]

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[77]*Jesus of Nazareth*, 65–67; Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience (15 March 2006).

[78]Among the several images for the Church that we find in Jesus' preaching, Benedict believes the image of "the family of God" is clearly Jesus' "favorite": "God is the father of the family, Jesus the master of the house, and it therefore stands to reason that he addresses the members of this people as children, even though they are adults, and that to gain true understanding of themselves, those who belong to this people must first lay down their grown-up autonomy and acknowledge themselves as children before God (compare Mk 10:24; Mt 11:25)" (*Called to Communion*, 23–24). See also his discussion in terms of the "family" structure of the Passover and the Last Supper. "Jesus too celebrated the Passover . . . at home with his family; that is to say, with the apostles, who had become his new family. . . . That is how the Passover became a Christian feast. We are Christ's *habhûrâ*, his family. . . . thus, the Church is the new family" (*Behold the Pierced One*, 105).

[79]See the discussion in *Called to Communion*, 53–65.

[80]Compare Mk 3:14; 1 Kgs 12:31; 13:33; *Jesus of Nazareth*, 171. On the importance of the image of the twelve, see *Called to Communion*, 25–26. On the priesthood of Jesus, see *Jesus of Nazareth*, 302.

7. *The new* qahal *and the Covenant people of God*

Benedict also sees important lines of continuity between Israel's Sinai covenant traditions and the Church's cultic and liturgical character. For him, there is deep significance in the fact that the New Testament word for "church"—*ecclesia*—is used in the Septuagint to translate *qahal*, the liturgical assembly of the People of God. The original purposes of the *qahal* were cultic, to remember and renew the covenant made at Sinai. Again, Benedict stresses the nature of the covenant as forging kinship bonds. "[T]he assembly at Sinai goes beyond the Word: in the covenant, it united God and man in a kind of community of blood, as blood relations, symbolically represented there, which is the heart of the covenant."[81] Jesus, of course, evoked the "blood of the covenant" at Sinai in establishing the Eucharist as the heart of his New Covenant (see Mk 14:24). Here it is important to note that in the years of Israel's exile and division—extending into the time of Christ—the restoration of the *qahal* "increasingly became the center of Jewish hope."

> The supplication for this gathering—for the appearance of the *ecclesia*—is a fixed component of late Jewish prayer. It is thus clear what it means for the nascent Church to call herself *ecclesia*. By doing so, she says in effect: This petition is granted in us. Christ, who died and rose again, is the living Sinai; those who approach him are the chosen final gathering of God's people (see Heb 12:18–24). . . . The self-description of the new people as *ecclesia* defines it in terms both of the continuity of the covenant in saving history and of the newness of the mystery of Christ, which is open to what lies ahead.[82]

The Church, then, is the new *qahal*, the new covenant People of God, and "the path by which God intends to come to all men."[83]

All of the strands of Benedict's ecclesiology of salvation are drawn together in his interpretation of the Pentecost event (Acts 2). If the resurrection revealed once and for all the true identity of Christ, the sending of his Spirit at Pentecost reveals the true nature of the Church and its purpose in the divine economy. Benedict

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[81] *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 105.

[82] *Called to Communion*, 30–32.

[83] *Jesus of Nazareth*, 22.

notes first the Old Testament significance of the feast, which the Jews celebrated fifty days after Passover, as a festival commemorating the Sinai covenant. For the nascent Church, it would become the feast of the new covenant. And as the covenant at Sinai was accompanied by wind and fire (Ex 19:16–19), these elements —perhaps indicators of a "new creation"—are present too in the upper room at Jerusalem. The repetitions of the number twelve in the narrative are a key to its interpretation, as is the presence of pilgrims from "every nation under heaven." The newly reconstituted college of twelve apostles is there, suggesting that Luke intends to signify the Church as a "new Israel . . . an authentic *qahal*, an 'assembly' in accordance with the model of the first covenant, the community summoned to listen to the Lord's voice and walk in his ways."[84] Luke lists the presence of people from exactly twelve countries or regions, apparently drawing from a list compiled under Alexander the Great intended to be representative of all the peoples of the world. All this cosmic symbolism of twelves is meant to convey the universal sense of the Church's "catholic" identity and mission.

Another "catholic" sign in the text is the way the apostolic preaching is understood by everyone present in his own native tongue. This Benedict sees as an echo of the biblical story of the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel (Gn 11:1–9). Stressing the etymology of the Greek word translated "catholic," he says the point of "the wonderful gift of languages" is to illustrate "that the Church is *kat'holon* from the very first moment—comprehending the whole universe."[85]

Benedict notes that in addition to the list of twelve nations, Luke identifies a delegation from Rome present as well. Rome, of course, is the imperial capital, and hence another symbol of the whole world. Indeed, as Benedict stresses, Luke's narrative in Acts begins in Jerusalem and concludes at Rome, with Paul preaching the gospel there (Acts 28:30–31). This movement is an expression of God's "providential plan," and represents the notion of the gospel

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[84]Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Eucharistic Celebration on the Solemnity of Pentecost (11 May 2008).

[85]*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 136–37.

having been preached "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[86] Hence, in Acts we have what Benedict describes as "narrative ecclesiology."[87] The text itself is structured to reveal "a dynamic view of the Church's role in salvation history, in which the dimension of catholicity is essential. Finally, it is a *liturgical ecclesiology*: the gathered community receives the gifts of the Spirit in the act of prayer."[88]

8. The Davidic dynasty and the Kingship of God over all the world

In the Church, the mission of Israel, the promise of the Old Covenant, is brought to fruition. Jesus himself, in continuity with those promises, had affirmed that "salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4:22). And through Christ and the Church, the divine Word first spoken only to the Jews is now spoken to all mankind.[89] The God who revealed himself first to Israel now addresses all men and women, of every race and nationality, calling them to communion in the Church, the new family of God in which they will find "filial communion with the Father."[90]

> [T]he mission of Jesus is to unite Jews and pagans into a single people of God in which the universalist promises of the Scriptures are fulfilled that speak again and again of the nations

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[86]Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Solemnity of Pentecost (11 May 2008).

[87]*Called to Communion*, 41. "[T]he whole book of Acts is arranged, not according to purely historiographical concerns, but on the basis of a theological idea. It portrays the path of the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles and thus depicts the fulfillment of the commission with which Jesus left his disciples: to be his witnesses 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). However, in the general plan of the book, the path of the witnesses—in particular of St. Paul—from Jerusalem to Rome becomes in turn a graphic synthesis of this theological way. In Luke's presentation, Rome is the recapitulation of the pagan world as such" (*Called to Communion*, 45). See also *Behold the Pierced One*, 73.

[88]*Behold the Pierced One*, 73–74, emphasis added. "With the arrival in Rome, the journey begun in Jerusalem has reached its goal; the universal—the catholic—Church has come into being, continuing the old chosen People of God and taking over its history, its mission" (*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 62).

[89]*Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, 79.

[90]*Jesus of Nazareth*, 117, 290.

> worshipping the God of Israel. . . . The mission of Jesus consists in bringing together the histories of the nations in a common sharing in the history of Abraham, which is the history of Israel. . . . The history of Israel is destined to become the history of all men, Abrahamic sonship is meant to be extended to the "many." . . . [A]ll nations . . . become brothers and receivers of the promises of the chosen people; they become the people of God together with Israel through adherence to the will of God and through their acceptance of the Davidic kingdom.[91]

Here Benedict alludes to the final covenant of the Old Testament—God's covenant with David and his promise to establish David's house as an everlasting kingdom.[92] The Davidic-dynastic covenant is at the center of the "element of promise and . . . hopeful expectation" that characterizes the "faith of Israel" at the time of Jesus. As Benedict reads Israel's history, "Davidic 'court theology'" is the source of Israel's hope for "the Messiah, a king of David's lineage who would shape the kingdom of Israel into its perfected form."

Yet he notes, too, that in the prophets there grows an at times apocalyptic hope for God's decisive entrance into the world to establish his rule through a divine "mediator." Daniel envisions God exercising power through the figure of the Son of Man; Isaiah foresees a "servant" of God; and Zechariah anticipates a priestly and kingly Messiah. Yet there persisted also a political formulation of the "Davidic national idea," as seen in the Zealot party and various messianic aspirants.[93]

Benedict's Christology and ecclesiology presume this diversified Old Testament background. His ecclesiology is likewise informed by a rich mariological understanding of the Mother of Christ as the personification of Zion, the eschatological kingdom of David.[94]

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[91] *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 26, 27–28; *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism*, 78–79.

[92] 2 Sam 7:11–16; 23:5; Ps 89.

[93] See the discussion in *Eschatology*, 24–28.

[94] "She is in person the true Zion, toward whom hopes have yearned throughout all the devastations of history. She *is* the true Israel in whom old and new covenant, Israel and Church, are indivisibly one. She is the 'people of God' bearing fruit through God's gracious power" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott [San

Moreover, Benedict finds in the New Testament the strong belief that Jesus is the "true David."[95] This belief is encoded in the genealogy that serves as the introduction to the New Testament. Benedict notices, as many ancient commentators did, that the genealogy is composed of three sections of fourteen names each. The number fourteen, in turn, if written in Hebrew letters, forms the three consonants that make up the name "David."

> Thus the number fourteen, which dominates the genealogy, is a symbol of kingship. It turns the genealogy into a royal genealogy in which not only is the promise to Abraham fulfilled but the promise as well that accompanies the name of David. The meaning is that the One who is coming is the true King of the world.[96]

Beginning on its first pages with a "royal genealogy," Benedict acknowledges that the New Testament writers see God's promise to David "as being fulfilled in Jesus the Son of David."[97] Yet he is aware that the New Testament bears witness to the fact that many, if not most, of Jesus' contemporaries misunderstood the true nature of his preaching of the Kingdom. We see this confusion even among Jesus' apostles (see Acts 1:6).

Many, like the Zealots, were expecting the restoration of an earthly kingdom, a political kingdom, to be brought about by revolutionary means. Benedict brings this out in his discussion of the trial of Jesus. The figure of Barabbas, he notes, is not simply a common criminal. The term used to describe him, often translated

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Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983 (1977)], 43). This is not the place for a presentation of Benedict's mariology. But it is important to note that Mary has a central role in Benedict's understanding of salvation history. Suggestive lines of biblical-theological inquiry are opened up in his discussion of the biblical establishment of Mary as "mother" of the new family of God. See *Co-Workers of the Truth*, 319. For Benedict, Mary "carries within her the whole mystery of the Church" (*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 151).

[95] *Daughter Zion*, 40.

[96] *Dogma and Preaching*, 23.

[97] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time, A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002 [2000]), 208.

"robber," actually has a political meaning.[98] Barabbas would appear to be a revolutionary, and a messianic figure, too, seeking to establish an earthly kingdom of God by violent political action. Noting that his name, "Bar-Abbas," means "Son of the Father," Benedict suggests that he is presented in the gospels as "a kind of *doppelgänger* [double] for Jesus."[99] Barabbas, then, represents those who would interpret the restoration of the Davidic kingdom in political and nationalistic terms. But the kingdom of the true David is not of this world. It is not political but spiritual, not national but international. Benedict sees in Jesus the coming together of the numerous lines of Old Testament expectation. Jesus is establishing a kingdom, but he is also establishing the direct rule of God.

"His kingdom is the Kingdom of God himself; it shares in the universality of God's rule, since in his person God himself has stepped into the history of the world."[100] The promise of the New Testament, the basic datum of Christology and ecclesiology, lies in this: "that Jesus is a son of David, the promised heir who will uphold the Davidic dynasty and will transform its kingdom into a kingship of God over all the world."[101]

If Christ is the true David, the one in whom the Davidic promise of the kingdom is being fulfilled, then it follows that the Kingdom proclaimed by Christ must in some sense be understood as the restored and renewed Davidic kingdom. Here we begin to understand the true relationship of essential unity that Benedict sees between Kingdom and Church.

Loisy was right—there is a marked difference between the preaching of Jesus, which was centered on the Kingdom, and the post-Easter proclamation of the Church, which was centered on Christ. Loisy's mistake, in which he was followed by generations of theologians and exegetes, was to see in that difference a sign of rupture or contradiction.

Recasting Loisy's jibe, Benedict says, "The Kingdom was promised and what came was Jesus."[102] The Church's proclamation

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[98]See Jn 18:40; Lk 23:19, 25; Mt 27:16.

[99]*On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 97.

[100]*God Is Near Us*, 15–16.

[101]Ibid.

[102]*Called to Communion*, 21–23, 142.

of Jesus was faithful to his preaching. Jesus was the Kingdom he announced.[103] Church and Kingdom, the gathering of the eschatological people of God, are one in the person of Jesus Christ, in his presence in his eucharistic Body and Blood until the end of the age. For this reason, Benedict concludes that Loisy's question is really the wrong one. "The basic question is actually about the relationship between the Kingdom of God and Christ. It is on this that our understanding of the Church will depend."[104]

Thus we are able to see that for Benedict, the divine economy revealed in sacred Scripture begins and ends in the Church. The Church is "God's great idea,"[105] the agent for the final realization of his plan for creation in the beginning. In this the Church is the fulfillment of the Old Testament idea of Israel, existing not for her own sake, but for the sake of God's covenant will for creation.

> [I]n the writings of the Fathers, the one and only Church precedes creation . . . . Here the Fathers are continuing a theme of rabbinic theology by which the Torah and Israel had been conceived of as being preexistent: creation was then conceived as a sphere for the exercise of God's will; this will, however, was held to need a people who might live for God's will and make it into the light of the world. Since the Fathers were fully persuaded that Israel and the Church were ultimately identical, they could not regard the Church as something that came into being at a late hour, by chance, but recognized in this gathering of the nations under the will of God the inner goal of creation.[106]

9. The Church of the New Covenant subsists as liturgy and in the liturgy

In Benedict's reading of salvation history, creation exists for Christ and for his Church. What the rabbis believed about the Torah and Israel, the New Testament writers and Church Fathers believed about the Church—that it was pre-existent, that before the

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[103]See the discussion in *Eschatology*, 25.

[104]*Jesus of Nazareth*, 49.

[105]*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 135.

[106]Ibid., 134.

world was made there was the Church. This belief in the "ontological precedence of the Church" can be seen in the Book of Revelation and Pauline letters such as Ephesians and Colossians. But it is also present in the theology of Paul, who spoke of "the Jerusalem above . . . our mother" (Gal 4:26).

For Benedict as well, the Church, the renewed Israel, was not an afterthought in the divine plan, but the forethought, the very reason for salvation history. Indeed, he agrees with what he describes as the testimony of the Fathers—that "Israel and the Church [are] ultimately identical" and that the Church, as the final "gathering of the nations under the will of God," is "the inner goal of creation."[107]

At the heart of his biblical theology he identifies a "dynamic ecclesiology of salvation history, of which the dimension of catholicity is an essential part."[108] This finding has implications both for how we interpret the Bible and for how we understand the Church and its relationship to history. "Christ and *ecclesia* are the hermeneutical center of the scriptural narration of the history of God's saving dealings with man."[109]

This history of God's saving dealings with man did not end with the coming of the Church. The Church is not the end of salvation history, but rather its decisive fulfillment and opening to the "last days," the eschatological future. As the inner goal of history, the Church has "already" arrived but "not yet" completely. The definitive divine in-gathering has begun, but it is still being worked out in history, which is now the age of the Church. The new covenant has been made in the blood of Christ shed on the cross. That new covenant, which is the salvation of the many, is being offered to all nations in the preaching and sacraments of the Church. This will continue until Christ returns for the final gathering up of his Kingdom.

The Church, established by Jesus on the basis of his new interpretation of the Old Testament and the sacrament of the Eucharist, is the realization "in practice" of the Kingdom that he proclaimed.[110] The Church is the Kingdom, the people gathered by

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[107]See the discussion in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 134–36.

[108]Ibid., 63.

[109]Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 30.

[110]*Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 146.

faith in the salvific event of the Cross, remembered and renewed in the liturgy of the Eucharist. At the heart of that Kingdom, then, are Cross and Eucharist. Indeed, Cross and Eucharist form a single "paschal mystery" which "sums up God's love story with man."[111]

> The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history (Eph 1:10; 3:8–11). There the *Deus Trinitas*, who is essentially love (1 Jn 4:7–8), becomes fully a part of our human condition. In the bread and wine under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the paschal meal (Lk 22:14–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26), God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us.[112]

The world was made in the beginning for this ultimate encounter with the living God, the Trinity, in the Church. And the world's encounter with the Trinity takes place in the liturgy of the new covenant, the eucharistic liturgy of the Church, in which we have real contact with the paschal mystery of Christ. Hence, the eucharistic liturgy is pivotal in Benedict's biblical theology.

10. The staggering realism of the New Covenant in the Eucharist

As radically new as it is, the new covenant's full significance nonetheless cannot be gauged except in light of the old covenant. Benedict's interpretation is again dependent upon the wealth of scholarship on the covenant. He sees in the upper room at Jerusalem a profound "spiritualization" of the Sinai event, yet with the same essential purpose—to seal a covenant by which a people are consecrated to God as his family, his "blood" kin.

As we discussed earlier, in sprinkling the sacrificial "blood of the covenant" on the altar and then on the people (Ex 24:8), Moses was evoking the ancient notion of covenant as forming a "blood association" between the covenant partners. In a literal and symbolic sense he was making Israel and God "brothers of the same blood."[113] At the Last Supper, when Jesus uses these same words to refer to the

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[111] *Behold the Pierced One*, 61.

[112] *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 8.

[113] Quoting Gottfried Quell, in *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 59–60.

cup, "*the words of Sinai are heightened to a staggering realism*, and at the same time we begin to see a totally unsuspected depth in them."[114]

What makes Jesus' words so staggeringly realistic is that, unlike Moses, he offers not a substitute, such as a fatted calf or lamb, but instead truly offers himself in sacrifice. The kinship made possible by Jesus' sacrifice is thus not "symbolic" or "representational" as in the case of Sinai, but *real*. It is "a blood brotherhood between God and man" effected by a true communion with God's own Body and Blood. What at Sinai was only "a hesitant attempt is here achieved. He who is the Son of God, he who is man, gives himself to the Father in dying and thus shows himself to be the one who *brings us all into the Father*. He now institutes true blood brotherhood, *a communion of God and man*."[115]

> What takes place here is both spiritualization *and* the greatest possible realism. For the sacramental blood fellowship that now becomes a possibility brings those who accept it into an utterly concrete—and corporeal—community with this incarnate human being, Jesus, and hence with his divine mystery. . . . The God who has come down thus draws man up into his own realm. Being related to God means a new and profoundly transformed level of existence for man.[116]

We should pause here to take notice of Benedict's theological hermeneutic at work. In his reading, the language and actions of the original Sinai covenant bear within them a fuller, spiritual significance intended by God. They point to the future new covenant to be made in the blood of Christ on the Cross, and to be represented and renewed in the eucharistic worship established at the Last Supper.

The symbolism of the sacred kinship of covenant is also radicalized, as a new people is born, not of blood or the will of the flesh, but of faith in the Son of God. "It is not blood kinship with the Lord that makes a person blessed—not flesh and blood, not race and descent, not blood and soil, not nation and class—but the spiritual kinship of faith."[117] We notice here, too, that in Benedict's

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[114]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 60, emphasis added.

[115]*God Is Near Us*, 38–39.

[116]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 60.

[117]*Dogma and Preaching*, 110.

reading the canonical text of Scripture is shown to have a certain liturgical trajectory and teleology. All of salvation history was straining toward the Cross, which can never be separated from the interpretation of the Cross given at the Last Supper.[118]

At the Last Supper, Jesus announces the new and final covenant in biblical salvation history. This covenant does not abrogate the old covenant at Sinai. Rather it prolongs and renews it. The blood of the covenant is Christ's, given for the sake of the world. He himself is the new covenant by which "God binds himself irrevocably" to his creation.[119] As the covenant blood at Sinai symbolized the sharing of flesh and blood between God and Israel, this sharing is universalized and made real, literal, in the blood of Christ—in which all nations come to worship the God of Israel and are made kin, flesh and blood, one body with Christ.

For Benedict, the Church's sacramental liturgy, the worship of the new covenant, is the goal and consummation of the biblical story, and the history of salvation. If everything in Scripture is ordered to the covenant that God wants to make with his creation, then everything in the Church is ordered to proclaiming that new covenant and initiating people into it through the sacramental liturgy. The mission of the Church is thus liturgical, its identity and actions defined by the Word revealed in history. The liturgy of the Church is the work of Jesus continuing in time, transforming history,[120] divinizing men and women, transforming them into "new creations," children of God, partakers of divine nature.[121]

11. Summary and conclusion

Christ is ultimately how the Old Testament relates to the New, how the Gospel relates to the Law. The Old Testament comes to be read as "a journey toward Jesus Christ."[122] Understood in the

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[118]Compare Scott W. Hahn, "Worship in the Word: Toward a Liturgical Hermeneutic," *Letter & Spirit* 1 (2005): 101–36, at 130.

[119]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 62–65.

[120]*The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 142.

[121]*The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 149.

[122]Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience (9 January 2008).

light of Christ, Israel's national history is thereby transformed into a universal history, one that embraces all peoples. Benedict's vision is similar to what he finds in the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem—"a 'symphonic' relationship between the two Testaments, arriving at Christ, the center of the universe."[123]

On a practical level, this means that Benedict always reads the New Testament in light of the Old, and the Old Testament in light of the New. Individual passages in Scripture are "read and understood only in terms of the whole,"[124] and "the whole derives its meaning from its end—from Christ."[125] Benedict often quotes Augustine: "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old; the Old is made explicit in the New."[126] In addition to this commitment to an exegesis that respects the content and unity of the Bible, Benedict also reads in faithful continuity with the Church's liturgical and dogmatic tradition.[127]

These are the essential characteristics of authentic *scientia Christi*, as Benedict proposes it to us. "We have to enter into a relationship of awe and obedience toward the Bible. . . . Historical-critical exegesis can be a wonderful means for a deeper understanding of the Bible if its instruments are used with that reverent love which seeks to know God's gift in the most exact and careful way possible."[128] And Benedict promises the theologian that reading in continuity with this ecclesial tradition "increases the excitement and fecundity of inquiry."

> [H]ow exciting exegesis becomes when it dares to read the Bible as a unified whole. If the Bible originates from the one subject

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[123]Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience (27 June 2007).

[124]*Principles of Catholic Theology*, 135–36.

[125]Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1986]), 9.

[126]*Many Religions, One Covenant*, 36.

[127]Benedict's methods reflect the "criteria" found in the Catholic magisterial tradition. See *Dei Verbum*, 12; *CCC*, 112–14.

[128]*A New Song for the Lord*, 50. "The state of theology and the Church will be so much the better the more the bond to the Lord inspires the thought and action . . . the more each individual can say like Paul: 'It is no longer I who live. . .'" (*The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 97).

> formed by the people of God and, through it, from the divine subject himself, then it speaks of the present. If this is so, moreover, even what we know about the diversity of its underlying historical constellations yields its harvest; there is a unity to be discovered in this diversity, and diversity appears as the wealth of unity.[129]

Here Benedict opens wide a new window into the scriptural text, one in which we see the unity of the Old and New Testaments, of Church and Scripture, Word and sacrament, the Bible and the liturgy—a unity in service of the divine plan, which is nothing less than our participation in the mystery of Christ.

In his biography of Benedict's predecessor, George Weigel suggested that Pope John Paul II's "theology of the body" might prove to be his greatest legacy to the Church.[130] That is a bold claim, and one that may prove to be accurate. In any case, I believe a similar claim can be made for the biblical theology of Pope Benedict, which may prove to be the legacy he bequeaths to future generations. It is a theology in which the essential unity and continuity can be seen between the faith and reason, the Old and New Testaments, Scripture and liturgy, exegesis and dogma, theology and history. It is a theology of great power and beauty.[131]□

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[129] *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 64–65.

[130] *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 342.

[131] In recent years, I have grown increasingly aware of how Benedict's writings have profoundly shaped my own theology over the last quarter-century, which became most apparent to me in the process of writing *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids: Baker Brazos, 2009), from which much of this essay was drawn and adapted.