



“Words Enfleshing the Word”: Joseph Ratzinger on the Prophetic Interpretation of Revelation in the Church

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Abstract

This paper begins by exploring how Joseph Ratzinger’s post-doctoral work on the *Theology of History in St Bonaventure* is shaped by his interest in how theology can be grounded in salvation history. Through this lens, he examines Bonaventure’s multi-form theories of scripture and the place of St Francis in salvation history to show how prophetic interpretations of scripture are consistent with Christ as the apex of history. The paper goes on to demonstrate that these insights also influence Ratzinger’s later work, particularly his reading of *Dei Verbum*, his recognition of the Mariological dimensions of hermeneutics, as well as his consideration of various prophetic manifestations of the life of the Church such as the monastic movement and the new ecclesial movements.

Keywords

Ratzinger, Bonaventure, scripture, revelation, magisterium

Ratzinger on Bonaventure’s View of History and Exegesis

In his post-doctoral research on Bonaventure’s theology of history, Joseph Ratzinger describes Bonaventure’s task as attempting a “synthesis of historical-symbolic thought with the conceptual-abstract thought of Scholasticism.”¹ Ratzinger explains that what he means by historical symbolism is “characterised by Alois Dempf as German symbolism” or ... by “Jean Leclercq as *moyen âge* monasticism.”²

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 168, footnote, 17.

As a “second generation *Ressourcement* theologian,”³ aiming to move theology beyond the confines of neo-scholasticism Ratzinger is drawn to Bonaventure’s treatment of salvation history and its impact on theology. Bonaventure’s understanding of history in the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* was written primarily in response to Joachim de Fiore’s controversial understanding of the three ages of history.⁴ Unlike Augustine who saw Christ as history’s culminating point,⁵ Bonaventure refines Joachim’s view so that while Christ is the apex of history, the age of Christ is not replaced by the age of the Holy Spirit. Hence for Bonaventure, Christ is the fulfilment of all that has come before him and continues to fill all that succeeds him through the work of the Spirit. Building on this foundation, Ratzinger explores in Bonaventure the possibilities of history understood in terms of the pneumatological and prophetic dimensions of Revelation.

In patristic and medieval understanding, theology was scriptural exegesis and *vice versa*. Since scripture was a living word that could be received in different ways by exegetes and believers, it had multiple meanings. Medieval exegesis with its four senses of the word was a more sophisticated development of ancient and patristic exegetical theories of “an inner and outer word.”⁶ This four-fold sense included the historical and allegorical meanings, the latter of which embraced both the tropological/moral and anagogical or contemplative meanings.⁷ According to Ratzinger, Bonaventure’s understanding of multiple interpretations of the Word differs somewhat from this schema since he goes beyond the allegorical and spiritual meanings to focus on multi-form meanings. Bonaventure acknowledges three levels of interpretation: (i) the spiritual meaning (*spiritualis intelligentia*), (ii) the level of sacramental figures (*figures sacramentales*) and (iii) multi-form theories (*multiformes theoriae*).⁸ The latter category is explained using the analogy of plants and seeds. Just as numerous seeds come from plants, so new meanings come from scripture, which “only God can grasp in his knowledge,”⁹ and are distinguished by their “unlimited” nature. Ratzinger points out that this theory is the application of the *rationes seminales* found in the natural world

³ See Lewis Ayres, Patricia Kelly and Thomas Humphries, ‘Benedict XVI, A *Ressourcement* theologian?’ in Gabriel Flynn, ed., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 423.

⁴ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶ See Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

⁷ See Henri De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol 1: Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 132-135.

⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

to scripture.¹⁰ He notes that this is connected to Bonaventure's conviction of the sign quality of all of creation.¹¹ As Ratzinger explains,

As the physical world contains seeds, so also Scripture contains . . . 'seeds' of meaning. And this meaning develops in a constant process of growth in time. Consequently, we are able to interpret many things which the Fathers could not have known because for them these things still lay in the dark future while for us they are accessible as past history.¹²

Ratzinger finds in Bonaventure a valuable theological approach, which acknowledges history and the Spirit. He describes it as "a new historical-typological and prophetic exegesis."¹³ While Ratzinger notes that Bonaventure is not exactly clear what he means by these future unlimited multi-form meanings, these can only be understood in connection to the past history of salvation.¹⁴ Hence the past, present and future must be held together in all interpretations of meaning. This is one of the main criteria for authentic development in Bonaventure's work. The theologian who explains history, therefore, "cannot abstract from history in his explanation of scripture; neither from the past nor the future." Thus as Ratzinger explains, in this way "the exegesis of Scripture becomes a theology of history."¹⁵

Prophetic Words and the Example of St Francis

Ratzinger goes on to show how the prophetic dimension of Bonaventure's exegesis is expressed concretely in the life of St Francis of Assisi. For Bonaventure, like all Franciscans, St Francis was not just a saint, but his life was a sign of the final eschatological age.¹⁶ The final age will allow "a new and extensive 'revelation,' by which he means new insights into Scripture,"¹⁷ or "a time . . . of the Holy Spirit who leads us into the fullness of the truth of Jesus Christ."¹⁸ Since the "seal of the living God" was impressed on Francis' body (Rev 7:2)¹⁹ Francis thereby reveals a new prophetic appropriation of the Gospel, and in particular his life embodies the Sermon on the Mount.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Francis is the “herald of the Kingdom of God,”²⁰ as the archetypal form of the new eschatological people, the Church.²¹

Revelation and the Dynamic, Ecclesial Dimensions of Development

Ratzinger continues his study of revelation in Bonaventure by drawing out its interior dimensions. Bonaventure notes that for Revelation to truly be a disclosure of God to the human being, (a “*revelatio, inspiratio* or *illuminatio*”),²² that it should engage the spirit of the individual through the level of the senses when meaning is given.²³ This connects to Wisdom, which is attained not just by learning but by holiness.²⁴ While there are various forms of this Wisdom,²⁵ the fourth and highest form is the mystical knowledge of the “*sapientia nulliformis*,” where the believer enters into the night of the intellect and approaches God in silence.²⁶ According to Bonaventure, this will be the wisdom of the new eschatological age of the Spirit. It will be a simple, inner familiarity with the mystery of the Word of God,” understood as the “*gratia gratis data*, and thus as the working of God on the individual.” It has been given to Francis, who is humble and childlike (Mt 11.25).²⁷

At this point in his theological journey, Ratzinger is aware of the organic understanding of tradition in German Romanticism and particularly in the Tübingen school.²⁸ Hence for Ratzinger, the significance of St Francis embodying the Word in this way testifies to the Church’s understanding that tradition is not merely canonical but also dynamic. Like the Church Fathers, Francis is a bearer “of a new spiritual revelation” upon which the effectiveness of scripture as revelation is utterly dependent.²⁹ Yet Ratzinger cautions that this does not mean that revelation is rooted in subjectivity or individualism.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

²¹ Ibid., p. 40.

²² Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften: Offenbarungs-Verständnis und Geschichts-Theologie Bonaventuras* (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2009), p. 106.

²³ Ibid., p. 107.

²⁴ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, p. 59.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 60. *uniformis, multiformis, omniformis and nulliformis.*

²⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁸ For a summary of this, Ratzinger refers to J.R. Geiselman, *Lebendiger Glaube aus geheiligter Überlieferung* (1942) in Ratzinger, ‘Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Origin and Background,’ in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol III (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 1967), pp.155-262, and especially p. 184, footnote 9.

²⁹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, p. 80.

Rather, it is also *ecclesial*, since it was the Church who canonised Francis and approved his rules.³⁰ This ecclesial reference could be highlighted as another criterion for the development of doctrine, which Ratzinger has imbibed through Bonaventure. Ratzinger then goes on to show how this principle exists today where the "holy people of God" or the Church of the present "is understood to be a new criterion of interpretation with equal rights" to the Church Fathers and saints of the past.³¹ Here Ratzinger is drawing out the importance of the future-oriented nature of interpretation as distinct from confining interpretation to "the purely retrospective allegory of Scholasticism."³² While he does not explain the nature of future possibilities here in more depth, this idea shapes some of this later thought on the prophetic vocation of the People of God in terms of the role of the Magisterium and the *sensus fidei*.

In his later work Ratzinger is keen to represent the Magisterium for today in a way that explains that its work is not just about protecting the universality of the faith as a binding norm by imposition. This work also reveals some criteria used by the Magisterium to discern true from false ideas. The Magisterium preserves the universality of faith not by the "dogmatisation of a special theological opinion," reducing universality to a "quantitative standard."³³ Rather the teaching authority of the Church ensures that what is defined by the Church is not something new but "simply articulating what already exists in the Church of the Lord, and therefore making it publicly binding as a mark by which the *anima ecclesiastica* can be known."³⁴ Universality is about upholding Christological standards which are at the same time the foundations of ecclesial faith.³⁵ By defending its foundational Christo-centric nature, the Magisterium in fact protects the universality of the *common faith*, the "faith of the simple" reflecting the "great truths about human nature," since although not everyone can be a professional theologian, "access to the fundamental cognitions is open to everyone."³⁶ Universality also includes prophetic elements since only with reference to the future can the "comprehensive form of her message [be] ... one day ... revealed definitively."³⁷

³⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

³¹ Ibid., p. 82.

³² Ibid., p. 82.

³³ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), p. 37.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics, New Essays in Ecclesiology* (London: St Paul Publications, 1988), pp. 129-130 (note 13).

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, p. 37.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), p. 63.

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, p. 36.

Recognising the prophetic dimensions of faith and discerning how they can be included in its universality also relates to the understanding of the *sensus fidei* and how this connects to the role of the Magisterium. In 2012, as Pope, Ratzinger addressed the International Theological Commission and highlighted the importance of certain criteria to distinguish the authentic voice of the People of God who participate in the prophetic office of Christ from inauthentic voices contrary to the truth of revelation. He clarified that the *sensus fidei* is "not some kind of public opinion of the Church, and it is unthinkable to mention it in order to challenge the teachings of the Magisterium." This is because it only grows in the believer "to the extent to which he or she fully participates in the life of the Church, and this requires a responsible adherence to her Magisterium."³⁸

Revelation and Reception: Mariological and Pneumatological Dimensions

Ratzinger's commentaries on *Dei Verbum* after the Second Vatican Council reveal his continued belief in the necessity of the future dimensions of exegesis or the reception of the Word for its interpretation. He associates this with the dynamic concept of tradition.³⁹ With reference to Article 8, he notes that, "what is assimilated" (Revelation/the Word) and the "process of understanding" are interdependent and yet are two different stages.⁴⁰ Yet the *process* of assimilation and *what* is being assimilated cannot be completely isolated from each other. While the Word "develops" as the understanding of it grows in the minds and hearts of believers who have assimilated it (Tradition), this is a "growth in understanding of the reality which was given at the beginning."⁴¹ Bonaventure's "plant and many seeds" analogy or Newman's criteria for the development of doctrine may be Ratzinger's reference here, though neither are credited in his footnotes. Christopher Collins also highlights the Bonaventurian influence here.⁴² Ratzinger credits the Tübingen school for the organic understanding of Tradition that emerged at the Council.

³⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, 'Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the International Theological Commission on the Occasion of its Annual Plenary Assembly,' Friday, 7 December 2012, accessed 10 October 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121207_cti.html

³⁹ See Dorothee Kaes, *Theologie im Anspruch von Geschichte und Wahrheit* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1997), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Origin and Background', p. 188.

⁴¹ Ratzinger, 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation', p. 187.

⁴² See Christopher Collins, *The Word Made Love: The Dialogical Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), p. 46.

In this commentary, Ratzinger also explains clearly the pneumatological basis of development and how this means that scriptural interpretation cannot be confined to "sola scriptura." Nor can the meaning of scripture be confined to one unique and positivist interpretation that is given through historical criticism alone, something that patristic and medieval exegetes, as well as Bonaventure, would have rejected as completely reductive. Ratzinger discusses *Dei Verbum's* understanding of revelation in light of criticisms by the scripture scholar Oscar Cullmann, who felt that it did not come sufficiently close to a Protestant position of scripture alone.⁴³ He points out perceptively that while on the one hand Cullmann accepts that the exegete with the most correct historical interpretation is being led by the Holy Spirit, he cannot follow the logic through and accept that the Holy Spirit is working in a similar way in the Magisterium.⁴⁴

As we have demonstrated, for Ratzinger, scripture is elevated to the status of revelation only within the living context of the Church.⁴⁵ The reference to the Church includes the whole people of God, and their reception of the Word in the Spirit and ultimately in their religious experience. In his commentary on *Dei Verbum* he writes, "the progress of the word in the time of the Church is not seen simply as a function of the hierarchy, but is anchored in the whole life of the Church; through it, we hear in what is said that which is unsaid."⁴⁶ The acknowledgement of the "religious experience" of believers as a source of tradition in article 6, led to accusations on the Council floor, that the Schema incorporated ideas of progress bordering on theological evolutionism and blurring the links between apostolic and post-apostolic tradition. Ratzinger points out, however, that the document carefully guards against such discontinuity and also any post-apostolic subjectivism by stating that "the growth of Tradition is a growth in the understanding of the reality given at the beginning."⁴⁷ With clear Bonaventurian overtones, he writes, "the whole spiritual experience of the Church, its believing, praying and loving intercourse with the Lord and his word, causes our understanding of the original truth to grow and in the today of faith extracts anew from the yesterday of its historical origin what was meant for all time and yet can be understood only in the changing ages and in the particular way of each."⁴⁸

This acknowledgment of religious experience by Ratzinger, also differs from an existentialist approach that de-historicises the Word.

⁴³ Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," p. 192.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," p. 186.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

In *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger critiques the existentialist exegesis of Rudolf Bultmann where the word is interpreted in a purely subjectivist way.⁴⁹ Ratzinger does not deny that the Word has to touch the individual but that it will do so at the level of what is common to human nature. Thus an existentialist "pure word," does not give the true meaning of the Word since in it "the voice of being-in-itself cannot be heard by human beings."⁵⁰ Preaching can address this problem since it connects the Word to human life, but should do so by making metaphysical claims rather than purely subjective ones, aiming to "tell man who he is and what he must do to be himself, that is, what he can base his life on and what he can die for."⁵¹ For Ratzinger, only in this way can the word touch human beings at a sapiential level, where gospel truths can be received deeply as transformative.

Ratzinger's conviction that the meanings of words are given through reference to their living, historical context, has roots in ancient exegesis and early Christian theology. For Plato and Augustine, the receptivity of the word in life is "speech", in that it is "the expression of the continuity of personal Spirit in the historical unfolding of man's essence,"⁵² yet this also requires an inter-subjective existential habitat. Ratzinger continues,

speech, which we have shown is the essential medium for the working out of human existence, is not achieved alone; it fulfils its meaning precisely through and in the fact that it places me in union with human beings around me and with those before me.⁵³

In terms of scriptural Word, this means the necessity of the living Church as its hermeneutical context. This relationship between "Word", and "words" (or "speech") in an intersubjective context is also evident in Ratzinger's connection between a Christological and a Mariological reading of scripture.⁵⁴ He writes that "the disappearance of Mary and of the ecclesia in one of the main currents of modern theology is an index of the latter's incapacity to read the Bible in

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology, Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), pp. 176-179.

⁵⁰ See Ratzinger, 'Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today', in R. J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: the Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁵¹ Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), p. 62.

⁵² Ratzinger, *Die Sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz*, 4th ed. (Friesing: Kyrios, 1973), p. 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: the Church at the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 44.

its integrity."⁵⁵ This is because Mary represents the corporate dimensions of faith represented by the Church and "it is the unity of the communion of the Church that gives access to the whole of the faith as the *theo-logos*."⁵⁶

In his book, *Salt of the Earth*, Ratzinger writes that revelation continues to be manifested in history as "definitive but inexhaustible"⁵⁷ This inexhaustible element connects not only to the prophetic dimensions of revelation rooted in exegesis but also to the Marian dimension of the Church. From a Mariological perspective it means that receptivity to the Word should point to subsequent fruitfulness and multiplicity. Mary is the "archetypal hearer of the Word, who bears the Word, keeps it, and brings it to maturity." That maturity or fruitfulness is manifested in "transcendence of self"⁵⁸ since ultimately it leads to fully sharing in the expropriation of Christ on the cross.⁵⁹ In a way similar to how Bonaventure understands the life of St Francis as exegetical, for Ratzinger, Mary is a real sign of the new creation or the eschatological age, the form of the contemplative whose abandonment to faith in darkness allows the word to be interpreted in and through her very body. As the archetype of the saint, Mary testifies to "a union with the Word more profound than that which can be analysed as a text."⁶⁰ She embodies holiness expressed as self-transcendent love which is the archetypal expression of Tradition.

The prophetic and pneumatological dimensions of interpretation are also evident in Ratzinger's work on the new ecclesial movements, where he compares their role in the Church to the monastic movements of the past, to "live out the Gospel radically," witness the "evangelical life"⁶¹ and be a "stimulating force" in the Church.⁶² Recognising these pneumatological and prophetic dimensions does not authorise the division of the Church into the prophetic class, including the orders and movements on the one hand, and a hierarchical class on the other.⁶³ Rather, movements and charisms represent a prophetic exegesis of the word for new contexts opening up what Ratzinger calls the "surplus" or universal dimension of apostolic

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, p. 44.

⁵⁶ Ratzinger, 'The Church and Scientific Theology', *Communio* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1980), p. 340.

⁵⁷ Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium, An Interview with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), p. 62.

⁵⁸ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, p. 350.

⁵⁹ Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, pp. 49-58.

⁶⁰ Ratzinger, 'Sources and transmission of the faith,' *Communio* 10, no.1 (Spring 1983), p. 28.

⁶¹ Ratzinger, *New Outpourings of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), pp. 45-46.

⁶² Ratzinger, *New Outpourings of the Spirit*, p. 42.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

succession.⁶⁴ Hence they are a gift, not to a local Church, but to the Church universal.⁶⁵ Like the mendicant movements, the new ecclesial movements manifest the universal dimensions of the faith to "guarantee the missionary task" and "the building up of the one Church." They therefore support the Petrine office rather contradict it.⁶⁶

Conclusion

By beginning with an exploration of Ratzinger's work on Bonaventure's theology of history, we have noted how Ratzinger found in his master, a way of allowing for a future and ongoing exegesis of the Word in history, or, in other words, a way to acknowledge a theology of history. Bonaventure's engagement with history is premised on accepting the role of the Spirit today, but not in a way that goes beyond Christ, nor in a way that is purely subjective, since it acknowledges his body the Church. This is possible by allowing for the reception of the Word (Christ) in new "words," namely in lives of self-transcendent love and inter-subjective charity that express the new eschatological state of the People of God. Inspired by this insight from his post-doctoral work, Ratzinger would have strongly embraced the dynamic concept of tradition expressed at the Second Vatican Council, that tradition is ultimately a "living word," developing in the "prayer, study and contemplation of (all) believers" (*Dei Verbum*, 8).

While we have noted that Ratzinger recognises the pneumatological dimensions of this process in his *Dei Verbum* commentary and his understanding of scripture and Magisterium, a general critique of Ratzinger's work is often his neglect of the role of the Holy Spirit. One would expect more attention to this especially in relation to his ideas on the prophetic dimensions of theological interpretation in the new ecclesial movements, the saints or the *sensus fidelium*. A second observation might be his failure to develop clear theological criteria for the development of doctrine or to engage more deeply with those of Newman even though some of these criteria can be drawn out of his work as we have begun to show here. At the Council, the Roman Catholic Church finally embraced the dialogue of theology with salvation history. However the years after the Council saw the urgency of setting guidelines for what this actually meant and what prophetic interpretation actually allowed, in order to avoid subjectivism and individualism.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

Engaging with Ratzinger's ideas on revelation, history and development prompts a reconsideration of what principles we need to discern again how and where Christ is manifested in the Spirit in new "words" in the Church today. While "newness" and "contextuality" are key terms that win popularity in a postmodern culture, in a theological context this can mean that they can often be misunderstood in a purely cultural or political way. Ratzinger's work highlights the paradoxical nature of revelation to embody something both new and old without contradiction. This tension is bridged by the Holy Spirit, who does not replace Christ but interprets him in a way that is truly of him, through him and for him.

Even in this short investigation of Ratzinger's work, we can see certain criteria for interpretation emerging. The first criterion for discerning new "words" is that development is always the growth in understanding of what was first given at the beginning. The second is that the development of pneumatological dimensions must be in accord with Christological premises and with the *logos*.⁶⁷ A third, would be that are universal and ecclesial in that they are consistent with what has always existed in the life of the Church and thus fourthly these prophetic elements will not contradict Magisterial teaching but eventually will be reflected in it if they are truly ecclesial and consistent with the persistent faith of the Church.

Embracing newness in the form of acknowledging prophetic testimonies to the word must acknowledge unchanging elements of revelation that unfold organically in the Spirit-led lives of believers. The testimony of the Spirit's presence in the prophetic dimensions of the Church today can be seen explicitly where a believer lives the life of grace for new times. These graced elements will reflect a certain Christo-centric form and content; perennial truths about God, who is unchanging. The fruits that testify to the life of grace, therefore, include expressions of theological virtues and new charisms that conform believers to the Christ of the cross. This means that prophet-disciples receiving and being transformed by the Word of God in today's culture, as in the past, are often destined, like their Master to be rejected (John 15.20). However as the revelation of Christ's resurrection testifies, suffering is not the end since it has been conquered. Thus the suffering of believers who live out their faith is transformative suffering as God continues to reconcile the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor 5.8) and works all things to the good for those who love him (Rom 8.28). With the criterion of the cross as the test to discern continuity in prophetic development, we can begin to understand how the Word truly has become enfleshed in new words in history that

⁶⁷ See how Ratzinger uses the *logos* as a premise for discerning points of dialogue in intercultural and inter-religious relations in Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance, Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), pp. 64; 182.

testify to Christ as the fullness of revelation. In this way theology and its development becomes authentically related to salvation history.

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