

HOMILETICS AT THE THRESHOLD:  
POPE BENEDICT XVI'S INVITATION

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By

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## ABSTRACT

### HOMILETICS AT THE THRESHOLD: POPE BENEDICT XVI'S INVITATION

By

Joseph M. Mele

May 2008

Dissertation Supervised by Ronald C. Arnett, PhD

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Is the Roman Catholic Church reticent towards preaching and if it is, why is this so? In an age when people often prefer to hear the Word preached to personal likings and individualistic needs, why would an ecclesial institution, such as the Catholic Church, hesitate to embrace this popular trend? This dissertation places the ethos of Roman Catholic homiletics in dialogue with the writings of Pope Benedict XVI in light of his desire to “reform the reforms” made after the Second Vatican Council. The works of Simone Weil, a Jewish philosopher and mystic, are introduced into the conversation conducted at the threshold between cosmopolitanism and provincialism where contemporary Catholic preaching must take place if it is to be heard effectively today.

First is an overview of contemporary homiletics and a brief history of preaching's relationship with rhetoric. Sacred rhetoric is examined from a historical perspective as a propaedeutic to Pope Benedict's writings that are reminiscent of Christian classical works. Pope Benedict's works identifying the problem of homiletic technique in an age that tolerates no revealed, eternal, and commanding truths are analyzed.

Next, corollaries are presented between Pope Benedict XVI as a churchman and “insider” of the Church and Simone Weil, a devotee but an “outsider” of the Church, with both pointing to the threshold where the Catholic preacher must engage the conflicts of the secular and mundane. Standing at this threshold, Catholic preaching can turn from the Word towards the *end* or *aim* of all biblical proclamation, the Eucharist. This work answers why the *in-breaking* of Word of God relies upon fidelity to the traditional elements of liturgical preaching. The Church as a pre-modern institution makes a profound contribution by standing neither on the side of cosmopolitanism nor provincialism but preaching in the threshold between.

In conclusion, the Church is reticent towards preaching, assuring that the Gospel message remains grounded in the Gospel and not solely upon the creativity or individualism of the homilist in any given age. This threshold at which the Word is preached within a wider liturgical context advances a *homiletical turn* within a pedagogy for homiletics.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation in loving memory to my parents Joseph (Jack) and Rose Mele and my Aunt Isabel Bonacci who were the first to teach me the Word of God and witnessed by their lives how to put it into practice.

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A special thanks to the parishioners at Saint John the Baptist Parish and the parishioners at Saint Sebastian Parish for supporting me and never doubting that the time I took away from the parish was for a good reason. I pray that what I learned in these studies made a positive difference in the way I taught, preached and ministered to and with them while I served as their pastor. A special thanks also to Father Martin Barkin and the parishioners of Saint Gerard Majellan Parish for permitting me to stay at their rectory while I was writing my proposal.

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the world in transition in their moment of time. My hope is to be accepted into the Oblates of Saint Benedict someday if they find me worthy of such an honor.

A heartfelt thanks to my former parochial vicars: Father Clint Zadroga, Father Jim Holland, Father Bill Terza; deacons Rick Cessar and Patrick Egan, OSB; and Ginger Vannucci, Dolores and Hank Lauer, Rosalyn DeStefano, Rose Graziano, Lynda Hahner, Marie Seres, Sister Joan McGinley, Father Harry Nichols, Father Albie Schempp, Nancy McGervey, Sally Rose, Sylvia DeMarco, Marge Sarver, and all the pastoral staff members and the auxiliary staff members of Saint Sebastian Parish. They put up with a great deal, listening to me fret over this labor of love. I shall never forget them for their patience and untiring encouragement. I look up to them as co-workers in the vineyard, and as Catholics. I am honored to call them my friends.

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# Chapter 1

## Laying the Footer: Insights Into A Sense of Catholic Homiletics

“It is important for human beings that they hear not only the babble of life, but that someone speak to them of God and themselves and of what makes a person human. A world that lacks such words becomes infinitely boring and empty”(Ratzinger, Dogma and Verkündigung 129). This dissertation examines the principal elements of the central Catholic tradition of the ministry of liturgical preaching and restates those elements from the point of view of contemporary Catholic biblical and liturgical ethos, as offered particularly by Pope Benedict XVI. In this “cultural revolution of recent decades” (Ratzinger, Spirit of the Liturgy 147) the guiding question of this research comes to light: Why has the Roman Catholic Church been historically reticent towards the ministry of liturgical preaching?

Many of the works Ratzinger published are preludes to, or even a foreshadowing of, the “reform of the liturgical reforms”—an expression aptly used by Pope Benedict XVI(Ratzinger. Proceedings of the July 2001 Fontgombault Liturgical Conference. Qtd. In Reid 150). This reform impacts the preacher in his service to the Word that became flesh by reconnecting service to the Word with service to the *sacraments*, which embrace the whole of human life and are meant to place this life in a visible way into the hands of Mother Church and the hands of God himself (150). The significance of this work is to

demonstrate, in light of Benedict's "reform of the reforms," how liturgical preaching is in need of a recovery of certain qualities, and even particular techniques, that had been lost to the spirit of the post-conciliar age in an over-hasty rush of changes on the alleged basis of the Second Vatican Council. The liturgist, Klaus Gamber has been quoted saying, "It is easy to abolish something, but it quite difficult to put something better into its place" (Gamber, Roman Liturgy 111). Once an old order that has been the religious home for most people has been destroyed, what was fundamental to the former needs to be rediscovered in order to replace it. Then practical communicative implications in the field of homiletics will reveal themselves.

One way to investigate this missing link between liturgical truths and the delivery of liturgical preaching is to compare it to an analogy by the famous musician Pablo Casals described by Strongin:

The magnificent Spanish cellist, Pablo Casals used to begin each morning by going to the piano and playing two preludes and fugues of Bach. It was a sort of benediction on his house. He could not imagine a day passing in his life when he failed to look with fresh amazement at the miracle of creation. Casals once said, "What I think is that *sensibility* has been lost today, [sic] so many things have happened in the world lately. Today we see fantastic things in science, in everything, in machines that do a lot of things. But the world has forgotten sadly the most elemental things. What I feel very deeply is that the world has retrogressed, gone back in many ways, and especially in sensibility. (Strongin, Casals Pictorial 43)

Clearly, sensibility to truth and beauty is not some sort of hybrid by-product of the piously impractical but rather foundational to the central place in Catholic understanding of liturgical preaching and the liturgy itself.

Casals's concerns of lost capacities for emotional and artistic influences may not be exactly what Pope Benedict XVI has in mind when he says that Catholic priests must



not surrender to philistinism by diminishing the sacred office that has been entrusted to them when it comes to communicating the Word of God within the liturgy. However, Pope Benedict and Pablo Casals both agree that the most elemental notions of truth and beauty are being forgotten in each discipline. Catholic priests must avoid philistinism that could eclipse their unique role as herald of the Word if they define themselves as no more than their functions. Accordingly, Hannah Arendt addresses this concept of philistinism in Elizabeth Young-Bruhl's book, For Love of the World. Arendt defines philistinism as becoming just like everybody else, members of society, functionary, and, consequently, behaving in a similar fashion. Hannah Arendt believed that all leaders should be keeping a watch on the words and the deeds of people around them so distinctive duties remained respected and cherished. This vigilance is particularly important regarding sacred liturgy.

The format of this dissertation might be compared to creating a reredos altarpiece in a chapel. It begins with the presentation of the raw materials out of which the back piece is made, comparably: a brief history and the current state of homiletics; a discussion on Vatican II documents and the effect the Word had on the biblical documents that have shaped contemporary liturgical preaching; an overview of the life of Benedict XVI and the Word, as well as a presentation on his "reform of the reforms" and his writings; a brief biography of Simone Weil; a conversation between the voices of Benedict XVI and Simone Weil; and the connection of all of these aspects of the topic with the world at large. Then analysis of the raw materials can be used in sculpturing venerable figurines, in this case, Ratzinger and Weil, within the altarpiece and placing them in conversation with each other. Out of these revered images is crafted a window-like threshold through which a story is heralded where the figurines converse about

Someone who begins to appear, a Wholly Other. This wholly other one seems to be absent during the homiletic conversational delivery of the Word in today's liturgy. This holy one will become more visible when I answer the question "Why has the Catholic Church remained reticent to preaching?" My question has everything to do with preserving sensibility to truth and beauty and how celebratory walking in dialogue creates a method for homiletics that is appropriate to this age. In terms of worship, the liturgy is and will be the *lex orandi* (Guardini, Spirit of the Liturgy 8).

## 1.1 Introduction

Liturgy is the encounter with the beautiful itself, with eternal love (Ratzinger, New Song 225). The Pope has every intention of restoring what is most fundamental to Catholic worship.

It is in terms of this order of sensibility that the Pope describes the most urgent problem of all: to help priests and members of religious communities attain a rediscovery of the sacrament's reality. "In the sacraments the personal achievement of the officeholder does not matter, but that he retreat and make room for the other, the more magnificent One, so that 'His Church' comes into being" (Ratzinger 195). When applying this principle to liturgical preaching, one may easily recognize that the premiere lesson of Catholic worship is that the office of preacher must be guided within a corporate body and sustained by thought, a law that Ratzinger affirms from the liturgical master, Romano Guardini (Guardini, Spirit of the Liturgy 9). Preaching is entirely governed and interwoven with dogma that is full of interior enlightenment. The liturgy is the treasure house of the thought of Revelation (Guardini 124) and the appearance of the

divine “Wholly Other.” Sometimes it is essential for man to get out of the way in order for God to enter in.

In light of this corporate approach to homiletics I present this introductory chapter’s premise through using a metaphor of *embedded sacrament* as a means of illustrating what might be required of homiletical praxis in order for preaching to proclaim the word “in the midst of the assembly” (New American Bible, Sir. 15:5) and to be effective in this historical moment. Scott W. Hahn makes an indirect reference to this concept when he explains that theologian Jeremy Driscoll sees the word as a means to an end; and the end Driscoll attests is “the presence of the living Word in the midst of the believing assembly, accomplishing and extending to that assembly what has been accomplished in concrete historical events” (Driscoll, *Theology at the Eucharistic Table* 165). Hahn quotes Driscoll in even more lapidary terms: ““Scripture is the *announcement* of the Word of God; liturgy is its *actualization*”” (Hahn, Letter and Spirit 86).

Having established this premise I now present a blueprint for the organizational structure of this work. My image of the construction of a reredos is associated with constructing, restoring, maintaining, refining, and then expanding the piece, which turns out to be the passageway for the Word. The chapters of this work are:

- Chapter One: Laying the Footer: Insights Into A Sense of Catholic Homiletics
- Chapter Two: The Impact of Vatican Council II on Catholic Homiletics
- Chapter Three: Pope Benedict XVI, the Word and Catholic Homiletics
- Chapter Four: Simone Weil, the Word and Universal Worship
- Chapter Five: Voices of Provincial Implications: Defrocking Priestly Individualism
- Chapter Six: Voices of Cosmopolitan Implications: Turning to the Threshold

## 1.2 Dissertation Overview

This dissertation developed out of the single idea that although the Catholic Church has been blessed with many notable preachers, the Church has traditionally been recognized as being reticent to emphasize preaching compared to other Christian denominations. I began to ask why. The Church has been around for over two thousand years. Certainly there is wisdom behind its tradition even in an age when many Catholics are calling for better homilies. My thinking proceeded as follows:

- 1) Catholic preaching is like an embedded sacrament. As early as Saint Augustine's time the sacred rhetoric of preaching has been absorbed into the liturgy.
- 2) If Catholics recognize that most homilists work hard at preaching (and they certainly have a high regard for their priests), but nevertheless surmise that something is missing in preaching, could it be that the liturgy has smothered the homily, making it a mere section of the liturgy causing the exposition of Scripture to dry up. Is there another dynamic at work that might be prophetic for Catholics called to action when we listen to the homilies that are preached at Mass? I began asking myself what this call to action might be.
- 3) I started to realize that if the fullness of Catholic worship is the Eucharist, word and sacrificial meal celebrated together, then the theology of the liturgy should in some way inform preaching, just as it should inform all aspects of the Mass.

In other words, my reasoning was that the part (preaching) should be informed by the whole (the Eucharist).

This idea is not original to me. There are a number of works, many of which are readily available in the bibliography, which seek to articulate and build insights to discern answers to the questions that I am asking. In fact, in a most pertinent way, Pope Benedict XVI seeks to improve the integration of liturgical theology into all the parts of the Eucharistic Liturgy by reforming the liturgical renewal of the twentieth century, especially some of the abuses that have crept into the liturgy since Vatican II. Most of these efforts take the general pastoral perspective that a) scripture is an integral element of worship, and b) preaching is intimately related to the scriptures. A third element that I contend is related to this widely-held perspective is that a key purpose of liturgical preaching is that the preacher should model expectations for the listeners as the faithful move from the table of the Word to the table of the Eucharist. This “model” will be the greatest contribution to preachers in this age as a result of Pope Benedict’s reforms. This work, then, includes a core of six chapters, as detailed below.

### 1.3 Chapter One: Laying the Footer: Insights Into A Sense of Catholic Homiletics

Chapter one is the introductory chapter, exploring a few of the building blocks in the tradition of homiletics and the contemporary understanding of preaching. Chapter one provides a preliminary analysis and interpretation of the problem Pope Benedict recognizes in the Church’s liturgy and how the crisis impacts liturgical preaching today. This examination of homiletics sheds light on why Pope Benedict XVI is calling Christians to respond to the contemporary “crisis in the Church” that will bring a tremendous benefit to humankind through the restoration of Catholic liturgy and

liturgical preaching. This introductory chapter draws on resources that are historical and philosophical but are also embedded in the liturgical tradition of the Church. As a theologian, Joseph Ratzinger often touched on liturgical matters. Many of his writings reflect a synthesis from his principal work in the area of liturgy, The Spirit of the Liturgy (2000). As laid down in this chapter, The Spirit of the Liturgy and the related writings of the Pope will constitute my standard references throughout the dissertation.

Chapter one proposes that unintended liturgical abuses became part of an aftermath caused by many of the changes that took place after the Second Vatican Council. These abuses led to societal and cultural disharmony. Therefore, the, “reform of the reforms” that the Holy Father is advocating must recreate a harmony in spirit and substance, not simply a revolution of. This chapter supplies a vision which precedes the project and sees it to completion. This vision is best understood as a paradox. Sacred Scripture shows that God’s Word is both God’s gift and our responsibility.

My attempt to carry the discussion of Pope Benedict’s personal vision for the Church’s liturgy into the field of homiletics in this historical moment is complicated by the conditions of modern rationalism and post-Christian developments. Fluid boundaries and hybrid identities have become the norm. In this chapter I introduce placing Benedict in dialogue with Simone Weil, a Jewish religious philosopher, essayist, dramatist, and poet. She is one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century. By introducing Weil in dialogue with Pope Benedict, this chapter opens the way for this dissertation to reveal deeper clarity in why the Pope’s contextual perspective can play a universal role to benefit all religions, especially in resisting the nihilistic forms of postmodernism.

The chapter concludes by showing how the insights gained from an overview of Catholic Homiletics support Pope Benedict's notion that God is wholly other and invites liturgical preaching to be "set apart" while simultaneously calling forth an intimacy between the Word and God's listeners.

What does Pope Benedict expect of Catholic Homiletics? Much of the answer to such a question relies on what he expected of the Second Vatican Council. Chapter two takes up this expectation.

#### 1.4 Chapter Two: The Impact of Vatican II Upon Catholic Homiletics

In chapter two I trace what Roman Catholics believe to be the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit to the Catholic Church and to the world in modern times: the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II was the twenty-first Ecumenical Council in the life of the Church. I show how this Council meant *continuity* with all of the Councils that preceded it. Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated his pontificate, pledging its continued implementation. This chapter serves as an exposé of how the Council was a great opportunity for the Church to concentrate above all on Jesus Christ, His Gospel, and His Church. I accomplish this by interpreting the documents of the Council that directly relate to liturgy and preaching through five principal metaphors or concepts. These are *aggiornamento*, *ressourcement*, holiness, dialogue, and ecumenical.

First, *aggiornamento* is an Italian word that has come to signify the throwing open of the Church's windows to allow reform and freshness to replace all that has grown stale. It means, literally in Italian, to make all things ready for today, today's needs, today's times, today's people (Huebsch, The Council 75).

This chapter employs a hermeneutical approach to understanding Church documents, particularly those that address biblical studies, revelation, and the delivery of God's Word. Vatican Council II was not intended to define new doctrine or dogma. Pope John XXIII said that the Council would not be necessary for that. Rather, he said, "The world expects a step forward toward doctrinal penetration and the formation of consciences" ( 75). This chapter examines modern thought in light of the Council.

*Ressourcement* is a French term meaning a "return to the sources" of Catholic theology in the Bible and the early Fathers of the Church. George Weigel writes that theologians believed that *ressourcement* would free Catholic theology from the cold logic and bloodless propositions of the neoscholastic system; and having been liberated in that way, theology would revitalize the Church (171). My analysis of this second concept of "bringing up to date" the institution of the Church serves as a gateway for the two-way dialogue between Pope Benedict and Simone Weil that follows in a subsequent chapter. A scholarly consideration of *ressourcement* further establishes Benedict's sincerity in wishing to engage modernity and its aspirations and its discontents.

The third metaphor that I use to interpret the Vatican Council and the related Church documents that it inspired is *holiness*. In the Opening Address of the Council, Pope John XXIII declared that the greatest concern of this council is: that the sacred and central truths of our Christian faith should be guarded and preached more effectively. Pope John was declaring a perspective that Catholics are to use earthly things only to attain a divine good, but he was also teaching, as it is revealed in the Gospel of John, that if we seek holiness first, all worldly things would be given as well. The treatise of Chapter two includes an opening up of various texts through the metaphor of holiness and



provides the substance of how homiletics and communication must improve and articulate the preacher's ability to pass on the message of Christ and his Church in this age.

The fourth metaphor of chapter two is *dialogue*. Vatican Council II makes no qualms about recognizing, as the church must, that the truth of Jesus is permanent. To inspect what the Council understands dialogue to mean is critical to the contribution of this work. Homiletics deals with substance. The substance of the Church's central beliefs is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. Theologians can be ambivalent about traditions, even their own. Sometimes theologians can be influenced more by culture than a search for truth. A study such as this one that examines what the Council meant by dialogue which can surface where even theologians have accentuated the trend toward individualism and fragmentation.

Forty years have passed since the Council, enough time to assess and evaluate evidence that too often certain theologians and others have featured the thought experiments of individual performers rather than focused on the magisterium of the Church. This trend is not to be confused with the Council fathers' unprecedented respect for diversity. As I look deeply at the metaphor of dialogue, I see, as I state to my readers in chapter two, that errors creep in. Just as in the past, they are opposed and sometimes have to be condemned. The treatment of Church documents and Counciliar teachings through the prism of dialogue shows that today we prefer to make use of mercy rather than severity. Homiletics in this time of Church history will be highly inspired by an approach of demonstrating the validity of the preached Word rather than by the condemnation of others.

The final metaphor that this work employs to discern the Council's message and how these teachings have an effect upon the world is *ecumenical*. The term "ecumenical," as it is used in reference to Vatican II, does not mean that it was an "interfaith council." The term "ecumenical" used in context simply means "worldwide." When used in most other contexts in today's Church, it means interfaith, especially between Protestants and Catholics, Anglicans and Catholics, or Jews and Catholics (Huebsch 53). The study of the concept "ecumenical" defines what the church means when it addresses pluralism—that pluralism already exists, and is welcomed as healthy. The Church is slow to move beyond a world that is not Eurocentric and Christocentric, but the desire of the Council is realizing that this is no longer the world out there. The ecumenical concept researched in this chapter surfaces the legitimacy of a revisionist scheme of faith, revelation, Scripture, religious symbols, and method, each element eventually refined by Benedict. Chapter two ends with a discussion of historicity and how the identified metaphors can help us understand the impact of Vatican II's accomplishments in terms of preaching to the world in which we now live.

One of the basic theological questions is: Can a Council be interiorly a failure? The assistance of the Spirit does not protect a Council against failure. The Church will prevail even should a Council fail. Chapter three looks at the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council and what Pope Benedict intends to do to make sure that the Council's purpose will not fail, especially with reference to the renewal of the Church.

### 1.5 Chapter Three: Pope Benedict XVI, the Word and Catholic Homiletics

Chapter three of this dissertation undertakes to identify for whom Pope Benedict XVI is writing and what perspective he is bringing to the reform of Catholic liturgy and

homiletics as well as to the whole of postmodern society. Alasdair MacIntyre poses the premise that in those religions that last we find built up a set of beliefs and ways of behaving which become relatively independent of particular, specific forms of social life (Short History 110–111). This chapter of the dissertation reflects upon the writings of the Pope as a possible means of discovering a great capacity for the Church’s preachers to come to terms with heralding the Word of God in a different time and in different places with quite different sets of moral standards. One key component of chapter three is an analysis of the way Benedict understands revelation as the act in which God encounters human beings, rather than as mankind’s mere propositions about God. In the same way that his understanding of revelation serves Benedict in his reform of the liturgy, where the worshipping assembly becomes an essential element of the exchange in worship, this dissertation bases its counterpoint in needed elements in the delivery of a homily within the liturgy. This chapter emphasizes the premiere distinction that Catholic preaching can only be fully understood when it is contextualized as preaching embedded in sacrament, a major theme in his work. Chapter three also presents how the Pope came to acknowledge the disintegration of the liturgy as he expresses it through the Latin phrase: *esti Deus non daretur*, raising the question that when the mystery of the living Christ is no longer visible in the liturgy, where else then is the Church to become visible in her spiritual essence (Milestones: Memoirs 149). This discovery and the question that Benedict raises are reviewed in terms of the biblical and liturgical works of Vatican II and those written since then by the Pope as they relate to the history of homiletics and the metaphors outlined in chapter two and as they contribute to the possibility of ushering in a “homiletical turn” for the period ahead.

For the Pope, liturgy presupposes that the heavens have been opened. In fact, Pope Benedict insists that only if this is the case is there liturgy at all. If the heavens are not open, then whatever liturgy was is reduced to role-playing and, in the end, to a trivial pursuit of congregational self-fulfillment in which nothing really happens (New Song 170). From the abode of God, liturgy and its preaching derive their unity.

This is the background against which to see Pope Benedict's insistence on the "givenness" of traditional rites and preaching embedded within liturgy in face of the "creativity" of some contemporary homilists.

## 1.6 Chapter Four: Simone Weil, the Word and Universal Worship

Chapter four focuses on the writings of Simone Weil. Weil believed that the world needs saints that do not love beings and things in God, but "*from the abode of God*" (Waiting 14). Being close to God (the soul) views all beings and things from there, and its gaze is merged in the gaze of God (Waiting 50). Chapter four answers the question what does Weil mean by the gaze of God and how does her comprehension of the gaze of God compare to the similar appearance of God in liturgy as Pope Benedict sees it? This perception is why Simone Weil has become an inspiration for the modern Popes, Pope Benedict included. Although Weil published very little while she lived, today volumes of works about Weil are available. In her original religious writings, however, she answers what precisely she might mean by the gaze of God and reveals the reason she can be of indispensable interest to this study of Pope Benedict XVI's reforms and how the desired reforms can impact the art of sacred rhetoric within the liturgy. Weil provides for this study a companion *en marche* toward the New World that has already dawned in the Word Jesus Christ. Although she came to love the Catholic Church, she

reaches a world beyond Catholicism and allows one to look at what is genuinely catholic and universal about the Church. Weil allows a shift in focus from that of Church as institution to that of Church as community. Chapter four is structured with this reality in mind: namely, that the assembly gathered to hear the Word transcends racial, cultural, social differences—indeed, all human affinities (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1097). Simone Weil identified Catholic worship as the great historical procession by which the world moves toward the fulfillment of God being “all in all.” This structuring of chapter four creates a smooth transition into the work of chapter five.

### 1.7 Chapter Five: Voices of Provincial Implications—Defrocking Priestly Individualism

In this chapter the conversation between the voices of Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil turns to engage the mystery of transcending the boundaries of times and places anticipated in the liturgy and hence opens history to its goal. What this might mean, however, is that the only way for Catholics to escape fully the draw towards individualism and the abuses connected with it lies somewhere in the turn to transcendence—that is, through the dimension of mystery that is supposed to appear. This mystery is about the cosmic character of liturgy that embraces heaven and earth when the priestly mode of homiletic discourse is defrocked of individualism.

As already declared, the guiding questions from this dissertation can be addressed by placing a French philosopher and mystic in dialogue not only with Pope Benedict XVI, but also with the Catholic Church itself. The method for conducting such an extensive dialogue is through philosophical hermeneutics. The intention of chapter five is not to offer a full treatment of either the works of Benedict or Weil, but to highlight key concepts set forth in their understanding of what it means to be Catholic in the provincial

sense of the word. The contemporary search for personal and social “identity” is often individualistically conducted. Roman Catholicism offers an available response. This chapter explains that Catholicism, in fact, can never be merely institutionally and academically planned and managed, but that it appears as a gift, a spiritual gift, a spiritual vitality—and in the process, Catholicism also has the gift of diversity (Ratzinger and Seewald, God and the World 455). The chapter concludes by contrasting these qualities with the Catholic Church’s tendency toward uniformity and explains how this quite diverse combination creates a mighty pulpit that is necessary for effective preaching today.

Chapter five explains how the purpose of Catholic Homiletics is about creating love-transformed mankind. This is the purpose of the world. Pope Benedict calls liturgy the true procession of nations. Chapter six distinguishes how at our particular time Catholic preaching can speak to an entire culture and its intellectual, social, and religious components.

### 1.8 Chapter Six: Voices of Cosmopolitan Implications— Turning to the Threshold

Chapter six sets forth the cosmopolitan implications that I hope to introduce by extending the earlier conversations that I have researched. This chapter traces the connections to engagement with the larger world. The scope of this work is to synthesize the elaboration of the preceding chapters that rest in the theories of existential encounter. This chapter claims that God is revealed and known in the self’s encounter with God’s Word in faith through the Spirit of the Liturgy. It emphasizes that knowledge of God is real, personal, and existential, leading to transformative communication with a divine reality that is over against the self. By grounding these claims in a communal encounter

with the personal ground of liturgy, this approach can recover the truly religious reality of communicating the preached word to the poor, multi-ethnic environments, the world, while avoiding conflicts with the secular and mundane. Chapter six demonstrates how Pope Benedict is correct when he states in his book The Spirit of the Liturgy that “man is always looking for the right way of honoring God, for a form of prepared common worship that pleases God and is appropriate to his nature” (117). How will the Church *take on* the Word and the world?

My purpose in this dissertation is not in conflict with any current church documents addressing “liturgical preaching” as it is. These documents are all common ways in which preaching is informed by and integrated with liturgy. My argument is that preaching can be additionally informed by the overall reform being called for by the Pope. The assumption that I am making is that not only does the tradition of preaching hold the experiential memories of earlier communities of faith, but that the Eucharist also holds these memories. If preaching is informed by the tradition of the church’s interpretation of biblical texts and acts, then it can be further enhanced by the renewal of liturgical theology and the correction of the over-arching enacted Eucharistic rites.

A word about vocabulary is in order: There are three sets of terms used throughout this work that carry both general and technical definitions. I use *homily* and *sermon* interchangeably and do not try to distinguish between the two. I also use *liturgy* and *worship* interchangeably. I want to honor the efforts among Christians towards Church unity, which is very important to me, so I understand worship to be a larger category than *liturgy*; it is so common for other Christians to refer to *liturgy* as the *worship* service that I make no distinction between these terms. One exception is where I

refer to the *Eucharistic Liturgy* specifically, which I do many times. By *Eucharistic Liturgy*, I mean the sacred mysteries that we enter into during the Mass. I address the term *Eucharistic Liturgy* more fully in chapters two, three, and four. Briefly, however, I use *the Eucharistic Liturgy* to refer to the entirety of the Mass that includes reading(s) from scripture, preaching, prayers of intercession, and thanksgiving and actions surrounding a Eucharistic Prayer and a common sacrificial meal of bread and wine. I ordinarily refer to the words and actions surrounding the celebration simply as *the sacrifice* or as *the meal*. This section of my dissertation enables homilists to touch on-going larger communities of Faith and the Word by the way one turns with the Faith towards the Word.

### 1.9 Homiletics: Faith and the Word

Charles Rice offers a liturgical perspective on preaching in *The Embodied Word* where he argues that the Eucharist is properly seen as the *end* or *aim* of preaching. His view expresses a general understanding shared by those that approach preaching from what might be described as a “strongly liturgical perspective” (19). Rice says that the homily is completed in the Eucharist. Almost every preacher would agree that no sermon worth preaching seems complete in itself. Does not the sermon find its conclusion as members of the community gather around the table in anamnesis of Jesus to lift up their hearts in praise and thanks to God (19)?

The earliest evidence for the preaching of the word within the Eucharistic Liturgy, as we know it today, is found in the testimony of Justin Martyr, ca. 150 CE.

And on the day called Sunday an assembly is held in one place of all who live town or country, and the records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as time allows. Then, when the reader has finished, the president in a discourse admonishes [us] to imitate these good things.



Then we all stand up together and send up prayers. When we have ended, we greet one another with a kiss. (65.1 and 67.1)

Here one can easily identify why preaching became associated with the Greek term for conversation (homilia).

Homiletics as sacred rhetoric is like all other categories of communication in the sense that it is influenced by the philosophies and human conditions that exist in the various critical periods of history. The intention through this study is to suggest a “homiletic turn” that might be useful in exercising the ministry of preaching in this age of postmodernity. By continuing an examination of other “turns” within the history of preaching we may be able to understand with greater clarity why the need for a turn now exists. Investigating how the word of God was preached at Mass in the past and the methods used is crucial for a reflection on the problem of preaching today. Michael Pasquarello in An Essay in the Grammar of Assent cites John Henry Newman, who makes this same point:

Instead of trusting logical science, we must trust persons, namely those who by long acquaintance with their subject have a right to judge. And if we wish ourselves to share in their convictions and the grounds of them, we must follow their history, and learn as they have learned. We must ... depend on practice and experience more than on reasoning ... by following this we may ... rightly lean upon ourselves, directing ourselves by our own moral and intellectual judgment, not by our skill in argumentation.<sup>(35)</sup>

Because liturgical preaching emerges from the scriptures in the context of a liturgical event, it remains free from high rhetorical design. Nevertheless, liturgical preaching’s own style would evolve. The first major change that takes place in liturgical preaching is the inevitable influence of Greco-Roman rhetoric. George A. Kennedy describes the

contours of the Christian homily that began to change, “as the Church gradually began to employ more artificial rhetoric addressed to cultured audiences” (Classical Rhetoric 136).

C. Colt Anderson has provided a fascinating study in Church homiletics in his examination of the great doctrinal preachers. He proposes that Saint Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana was perhaps the most significant source for the development of doctrinal preaching in the West (19). Augustine wrote this preaching guide to respond to the needs of the many men who had no formal training in rhetoric and who had been ordained bishops. Anderson explains that Saint Augustine’s use of the word *doctrina* signified to his audience that he was writing about something more than simple teaching (21). By reflecting upon the historical moment in which he was living and the liturgical problems that the Church was facing, he created a major metaphor appropriate to his time that offered a practical solution to the art of preaching. By studying Saint Augustine the rhetorical student learns that what is most important in homiletics is that a preacher acquire a sense of knowing how to speak in the midst of changing capacities, conditions, and circumstances while continuing to be joined to Christ and incorporated into his word, which is read and heard in the liturgical gatherings (Pasquarello 25).

Saint Augustine provided the basic form of preaching to the medieval church in how Incarnation and rhetoric—the embodied Word as speaking in the flesh to humanity—emerges and should enrich our understanding of both. Anderson raises the issue that Saint Gregory the Great might have suggested to the same medieval church the mistake of supplying too great an amount of content. In his Regula Pastoralis, Gregory taught the medieval preachers to consider the variety of people they had to reach with their preaching. He also trained them to be aware of the complex dynamics between

individuals and groups in their community (56). Maintaining the unity of faith becomes the measure by which the preacher discerns when and how to speak. The same pertains even more to today without the overloading of too much content at a given time.

The Middle Ages consistently followed one method, the *ars praedicandi*. In general, we might say that during much of the Middle Ages a great deal of catechesis was incorporated into liturgical preaching (56). Consequently, the sermon became less liturgical and more doctrinal; such instruction was reinforced by deductive argument, often of the most refined and elaborate nature (De Bona 14).

DeBona states further that later homileticians influenced by the Renaissance and the Reformation complained that such sermons relied too heavily on ingenious scholastic subtleties (14). Sloane cites Desiderius Erasmus, Philip Melancthon, and numerous Catholic rhetoricians in the sixteenth century as modifying the standards on contemporaneous rhetorical theory with strictures of varying severity for sticking to the scriptural text at hand. Nevertheless, the years that followed the Reformation and Counter-Reformation saw an increase in practical rhetorical guides that would argue from argumentation by the deductive. And indeed neoclassicists such as George Campbell, Hugh Blair, and Richard Whateley produced works on rhetoric that helped to influence deductive preaching in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for all traditions within Christianity (De Bona 14).

The Counter-Reformation's renewal of preaching resulted in the Catholic Church publishing the Catechism of the Council of Trent. Preachers were advised not to use the material in the catechism in the form of the traditional "scholastic" sermon but as a

proclamation and authority. This advice was not always taken. After the council of Trent, sermons frequently did not begin with a scriptural text.

The Counter-Reformation once again subtly brought into question the source of a priest's authority. Although the character and presence of the preacher was undeniably important, these still did not become the major points of emphasis within Roman Catholicism.

This work interprets official ecclesial, liturgical, and homiletics documents in relation to philosophical thinking of particular historical time periods, assisted in the discussion by rhetorical and communication theory. Because there is a major lack of scholarship on the pedagogy of homiletics from a Catholic standpoint of reticence, this work engages in a discussion of communication scholarship and praxis as it relates to homiletics. This work explores important time periods, and prominent writers, especially philosophers and theologians writing about sacred hermeneutics during those specified eras. This work is founded in Hans Gadamer's understanding of historicity and philosophical hermeneutics as expressed in his *iPhilosophical Hermeneutics*. This work is also indebted to an interpretive work in the theory of dialogic communication by Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson and its possible role in enriching the art of liturgical preaching and most especially for homiletic praxis *Dialogic Civility*. Arnett and Arneson point out that for Gadamer, interpretation lives between interpreter and a particular text—in the case of this study, a “homiletic event” (30). This analysis outlines the process of interpretation that is deeply dependent upon the historical horizons of the text but defined as a liturgical act. This work also discusses the responsibility of the individual homilist's

interpretation of that historical situation anchored in embedded sacrament or liturgical reality and inspired by it.

In conducting a database search of refereed scholarly journal articles via PROQUEST on the topic of “Catholic reticence toward preaching,” there were no articles identified from 1990–2005. However, there were six book reviews, five of which did relate to the topic of homiletics, but none of which related to reticence in preaching per se. When the search was performed for homiletics and pedagogy, only one article in the past twenty-five years was indirectly identified (Arnett, “Interplay” 143–163). A second enquiry was made through the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship (CIOS) “ComIndex” database which delivered many related results, but nothing that could substantiate the intended research. The journal articles found in additional theological databases discussed technology as employed by mega and multimedia churches. Some of these modern-day journal articles are useful in constructing illustrations of what this study shows as abuses of Catholic liturgical preaching. Obviously questions remain as to how to define, discuss, and attempt to construct practical scholarship and discussions about liturgical homiletics for post-modern students. Therefore, this work is an effort to extend the discussion of liturgical preaching as historically understood but within the context of liturgy and ritual. I use the contributions of Pope Benedict XVI to initiate this part of the discussion. The Church continues to wrestle with the question how we come to understand God’s message so that good preachers will be supplied for the care of souls. Pope Benedict XVI becomes one the key figures in this wrestling.

## 1.10 Benedict: Faith and the Word

As I have stated, chapter three focuses on Pope Benedict XVI, so only a brief synopsis of noteworthy dates and events of his life as a context for analyzing his significance and, therefore, his impact on liturgy, especially in the area of homiletics, are provided here. These life events called forth his writings; therefore, it is important to have a clear idea of them. Ratzinger wrote and expanded his teachings many times over to make his points clear and incisive when duty or circumstances in his life prompted his reaction or called for his ideas for the sake of his Catholic faith and the good of the offices he held. Nearly all of his many written works came about only as he experienced his life and the responsibilities that were placed upon his shoulders. It is the assumption of this research that his writings were certainly more than treatises. They were products of reflection and prayer that influenced how he came to realize that something similar was being required on a universal level by liturgists and consequently preachers in the Catholic Church. To look at his writings alone in the context of his life, as is done in chapter three, would only truncate the true reform to which Ratzinger is calling the faithful.

The methodology is, first of all to situate the man, Joseph A. Ratzinger, in his life setting, primarily at the German Universities of Freising, (1954–1959), Bonn (1959–1969), Munster (1963–1966), Tübingen (1966–1969), and Regensburg (1966–1977). This work explores Ratzinger’s writings while he was Archbishop of Munich (1977–1982); then as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1981–2005) and Dean of the College of Cardinals (2002–2005); and finally, as Pope and solemn beginning of Petrine ministry (April 19, 2005).

With this background, it is shown in chapter three that Benedict XVI, although he does not make direct application of his theory to the art of homiletics, nonetheless foresaw the danger of the growing abuses in preaching, and consequent emphasis that is placed upon the individual's reverence and worship. The onus of liturgical action and prayer does not rest with the individual. It does not even rest with the collective groups, composed of numerous individuals, who periodically achieve a limited and intermittent unity in their capacity as the congregation of a church. The liturgical entity consists rather of the united body of the faithful as such—the Church—a body, which infinitely outnumbers the mere congregation (Guardini 6). Why Benedict and his writings may be regarded as a significant theoretical contribution to the study of homiletics and the question of Catholic reticence to preaching are presented later in this work.

Benedict XVI's book The Spirit of the Liturgy is used as a framework for this work. This book is a foundational source on the liturgy, possibly the most important book yet on the topic in current times. The homily or the homiletic act is, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, "a part of the liturgy itself" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #52). Its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part determines the very meaning and function of the homily (Fulfilled In Your Hearing 17). Benedict XVI articulates the problem with a large part of modern liturgiology, that it tends to recognize only antiquity as a source, and therefore normative, and to regard everything later, in the Middle Ages and through the Council of Trent, as decadent (Spirit 82). Thus Benedict provides an outline of liturgical theologians and positions taken up by the teaching office of the Catholic Church that are crucial to the study of homiletics.

## 1.11 Homiletics and Delivery of the Word

Homiletics is the art of preaching. Thomas O. Sloane defines homiletics as a “rhetorical art that influences and is influenced by psychological, hermeneutical, ecclesiastical, and theological doctrines that reemerge, in differing combinations and with differing emphases, throughout the Christian tradition” (Rhetoric 346). This dissertation demonstrates that the Roman Catholic Church advocates that preaching must remain forever embedded within a homogeneous and harmonious development of liturgical rites and never establish a “manufactured” discipline of its own. All of liturgy is, by its very nature, transcendent. The stability of the sacraments govern the form for homiletics, so liturgical preaching must reflect the immutable celestial liturgy, and should detach man from a ceaselessly changing universe (Gamber viii). Catholic ethos works most vigorously against the concept of an autonomous, self-sufficient minister and assembly. The direction of homiletics does not take place between the preacher and the people but sets out unanimously towards the coming of the Lord. The importance of this work is the recommendation for a homiletical “turn” that provides a new kind of hearing of the word of God. Certainly the congregation can hear the word of God preached by the homilist, the same way that we can hear honesty, interior truth, loving expressions, and kind sentiments spoken by any person. All of these human qualities communicate to give men and women a certain likeness to God, but if the congregation is to hear the word of God preached by a priest or deacon, the congregation must learn a new kind of hearing, and that is what liturgy is for. It is again becoming apparent that people can live only facing forward and can go further only if they are standing in a context. Growth is possible only where there are roots, and new insight can flourish only if we have not lost our memory



(*New Song* 207–208). This dissertation explores what a homiletical “turning” might look like in regards to the reform of the liturgical reforms of this time.

“Preaching at the Eucharistic liturgy is as old as the Scriptures themselves, actually preceding the written word by many years. The most distinctive element of Christian preaching—the discussion of a scriptural text—has its origin in the rabbinical sermons delivered in synagogues” (Sloane 347). Regarding the preaching mandate of Jesus, and the early apostolic endeavors, the New Testament is replete with references. It is also ever contemporary with the on-going mission of the Church. Peter John Cameron, OP, explains the theology of preaching which he bases on the book of the Acts of the Apostles that recounts the story of the lame man daily placed at the Beautiful Gate of the temple who begs an alms of Peter and John as they approach the sacred place to pray (Acts 3:1– 26). This brief encounter provides a subtle yet profound paradigm of the dynamic of Catholic preaching. Preaching is the ministry of those chosen and set apart. Preaching is always an ecclesial action. Preaching is an integral element of the work of the Church—the liturgy. This is pointed out by the writer of Acts indicating that Peter and John are on their way to the temple for the liturgy (99). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the message of preaching is not original to the preacher. The preacher’s utterance proceeds from and participates in a permanent and definitive context. It is for this reason that Cameron says the Eucharistic Liturgy provides the most appropriate context for preaching, for in a saving way the liturgy situates the believer within the context of the life of Christ (99).

The Catechism explains that preaching remains intrinsic to the liturgy:

The liturgy of the Word is an integral part of sacramental celebrations. To nourish the faith of believers, the signs which accompany the Word of

God should be emphasized [including] the minister's homily which extends its proclamation. (1154) ... The homily ... is an exhortation to accept this Word as what it truly is, the Word of God, and to put it into practice. (1349)

Although the Catechism acknowledges that every Christian shares in the dynamic of preaching, so august is this privilege of preaching that it stands as the chief priority in the ministry of every bishop and priest. The extension of the preaching office to presbyters (priests) defines the very identity of the priest:

[The priesthood was] instituted to proclaim the Word of God and to restore communion with God by sacrifices and prayer. (1540) ... Priests are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament. (1564)

The entire formation of the priest is ordered to the mission of preaching in its fullest sense.

A careful analysis of the New Testament texts on preaching and the foundations they build for Catholic Homiletics would perhaps be helpful, but it is only necessary for this study to point to their existence. A more thorough review of the biblical literature is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is advantageous to continue this brief history of the *ethos* of Catholic liturgical preaching as it develops and becomes ever more concrete in its nature.

As stated above, the ethos or guiding principles of preaching for Catholic ordained ministers seems shaped by a particular theoretical reticence rather than an outward or vigorous mandate for it as in the Protestant tradition. This subtle reticence still exists today when the overriding objective of Catholic homiletics continues to emphasize the predominance of theological authority in homiletic practice. The importance of the

liturgical preacher and his preaching is secondary in light of this liturgical authority, even as the Church places particular attention in the service of the New Evangelization of Pope John Paul II. Even the role of the homilist as interpreter of texts and culture is subordinated to the church's historically mediated theological wisdom.

Katarina Schuth's study of Catholic seminaries demonstrated that the Church's reticence towards a wholehearted emphasis of preaching in its own right results in negative consequences, in general. Her survey indicates that there is a serious lack of academic credentials of those that teach homiletics even now.<sup>1</sup> Robert Waznak, professor of homiletics at Washington Theological Union and co-editor of New Theology Review, explains that although there are a few homiletic works recently written by Catholics, overall there has been a lack of scholarly homiletic literature in the Roman Catholic tradition (An Introduction to the Homily 93). This reticence to prioritize homiletics within Catholic tradition is intriguing because it prevailed even within the mendicant religious orders of the Church where the custom of preaching was a principal charism. Even within these communities preaching was subordinate and dictated by greater directives guiding the celebration of the Eucharist overall. Liturgical preaching, according to Cameron, aims not at understanding only; rather, the homiletic expression of divine insight makes palpable the riches of the heart of the Father so as to inculcate divine indwelling with God's children (139). That invitation to ultimate communion is in service to and perfected in the Eucharist (139).

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<sup>1</sup> Katarina Schuth, OSF, Reason for the Hope: The Future of Roman Catholic Theologates. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989, 97–106.

## 1.12 Interpretative Engagement: Philosophical Hermeneutics

As a student of communication and rhetoric, I use corresponding time periods that define approaches to hermeneutics, namely, early Biblical hermeneutics, Medieval hermeneutics, Renaissance and Enlightenment, Contemporary hermeneutics. The hermeneutical process of Gadamer for interpreting the works of Benedict provides a theoretical backing for an awareness of the homiletical problem that is considered in this work and leads to contemporary theorists and certain contributions that might support the direction Pope Benedict is taking the Church. Philosopher, theologian, sociologist, and political theorist Simone Weil is the principal contributor of a dialogue between Pope Benedict and contemporary theory.

I further illuminate this backing by arranging a constellation through minor references to the studies of Martin Buber, Immanuel Levinas, Michel Bahktin, and Charles Taylor, particularly their research in dialogue communications and the appearance of “the other” within dialogue.

According to Stratford Caldecott, author of Secret Fire: The Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien, apologist Scott Hahn goes further and deeper than ever before revealing the meaning and power of both the Bible and the liturgy, showing how within the Mass the saving truths of Scripture are not just proclaimed but “actualized” (Hahn 84). Hahn addresses this idea of the sacramentality of the word and traces its roots to the Church’s veneration of the sacred page, which was analogous to that of the Eucharist. The first millennium of Christianity was characterized by a consistently high view of scriptural inspiration and a consistently high sacramentology (*Letter* 84). Hahn cites The Second Vatican Council’s Dei Verbum and shows how the document summarized this tradition

of reverence when it spoke, metaphorically, of the 'table of the word' in addition to the table of the altar (n.51).

Within the fields of liturgy and homiletics alike, there are two elements that stand out pertaining to scripture and preaching in contemporary liturgical thought. First, there is a wide consensus that preaching is rooted in the scriptures. William Skudlarek, the principal writer of the 1982 document published by the United States Catholic Bishops Conference Fulfilled In Your Hearing writes:

Liturgical preaching begins with the scriptures, in particular the scriptural lessons appointed for a certain day of the year. Thus the primary obligation is not to solve people's problems or answer their questions, but to hear the scriptures as God's living word, and then to communicate that word so that others may hear it as well and be drawn to respond to it. (52)

There are differences of opinions as to how closely scripture and preaching are to be associated. Nevertheless, there is virtually unanimous agreement among liturgists and Catholic homiletic scholars that preaching is grounded in scripture.

The twentieth century was a period of Church renewal in many areas. Now this renewal extends into the twenty-first century. This renewal had been evolving since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). When Pope John XXIII opened the Council he stated the purpose of the meeting of the Council Fathers:

In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ. We shall take pains so to present [to the people] of this age God's truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and gladly assent to it. (qtd. in Abbott 3-4)  
I refer to the subsequent conciliar documents and post conciliar statements as a benchmark for understanding homiletics today.

Ever since then, the church has been studying the theology of revelation and the theology of the scriptures, especially their role in preaching and liturgy. As a result of this

type of serious reflection and even before it, a number of important documents on the scriptures have been published. There is a modern tendency to interpret the scriptures individually or personally. This is affirmed by the society and the culture in which we live that are so influenced by individualism and narcissism. We need the directives of the church to help us read the scriptures and interpret them in every age and in every culture. The contemporary church has given us many documents to be made available to everyone, but in a special way to liturgical preachers for our times.

### 1.13 Engagement of Benedict and Weil

It is perhaps useful in this introductory chapter to explain why I bring Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil together. In his pastoral activities, in several of his sermons, and in many of his other written works Pope Benedict warns with dazzling insight, often expressed with both terseness and conviction, that much of the error, suffering and unhappiness of our times stems from forgetting God. Two areas of thought in particular can be found in many of Benedict's efforts regarding this concern. These can be seen as fine threads linking many of his different endeavors or, as in the musical world a leitmotif, to which a composer often returns. The first of these would be Benedict's recognition that many have lost the ability to communicate with others about God (Moynihan 44). We are in need of terminology that can validate what we mean by our doctrines. Weil offers us a great and affecting simplicity by which we can be moved by her deep, radiant thinking about God. Weil positively invites discussion by her untypical boldness and enthusiasm connected with her love of religion, especially Catholicism, and this methodological approach permits one to have an interpretative dialogue. The second area of thought central to Pope Benedict is his desire to restore the gift of attentiveness

that is essential in worship if we are to become what the liturgy intends us to be: contemporaries of the Sacrifice of the Logos. This is a term that I define and explain in chapter three. Weil has much to say about the process towards this kind of state of mind and body that is akin to Benedict's *attention*. For both Benedict and Weil this type of focus arises out of a rootedness in common humanity, in "ordinary" being, far more concrete than imagined.

### 1.14 Benedict

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger, (1927–) elected as Pope Benedict XVI, the 265<sup>th</sup> pope of the Roman Catholic Church on April 19, 2005, has given Christians, particularly members of the Catholic Church, a distinct love affair with truth. John L. Allen, the noted Vatican correspondent, claims this Pope could engineer a cultural change within the Catholic Church that deemphasizes structures in favor of mission, power in favor of love. "With a gentle touch and one of his generation's best minds, he could inspire a reawakening of the Catholic intellectual and artistic tradition, based on his own conviction that 'A theologian who does not love art, poetry, music, and nature can be dangerous. Blindness and deafness toward the beautiful are not incidental; they necessarily are reflected in his theology'" (Allen, Rise of Benedict 248). His ideas on truth and how truth directs and orders liturgical theology are articulated in Benedict's major writings and lectures, particularly in the scholarship to which he devoted himself during his long and productive life within the academy. For Benedict, the first and fundamental of human rights is the right to God. Without this basic right, which is also the right to truth, the other human rights are not enough. Without this fundamental right to truth and to God, man becomes degraded to the level of a mere creature of needs.

Benedict writes about this in his book Behold the Pierced One. “And the deep darkness and alienation of our times is shown in the fact that we have powers and abilities but do not know what they are for; we have so much knowledge that we are no longer able to believe and see truth; we are no longer able to embrace the totality” (126).

In the Preface to his landmark book, The Spirit of the Liturgy, Benedict XVI expresses his desire to assist in the renewal of understanding of the Liturgical Movement of the Church, particularly and in a definitive way, regarding to the inner demands and form of the liturgy as the prayer of the Church. The Pope examines and revisits many of the restorations and reconstructions of the liturgy that follow the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965). The Holy Father proposes that the imperative for today is a new reverence in the way we treat the liturgy, especially the way we treat its message and its reality so that its rediscovery that was an achievement of the Second Vatican Council does not become the first stage of an unintended but nevertheless a sad and irreparable loss (xi). Benedict has fostered renewal of understanding the holy liturgy of the Church is being fostered as a premiere goal for his pontificate. The strong emphasis given to this reform, especially in the addresses, pastoral letters, and theological treatises of the late Pope John Paul II, in the years prior to his death, and in the way it is again being particularly promoted throughout the Catholic world in the beginning of Pope Benedict’s papacy, manifests the strong determination of the Church to revitalize the faithful. This revitalization will occur via understanding the faith through the way the faith is given its central form of expression in the liturgy. It is the intention of this dissertation to present Benedict as first a liturgist, but equally as a preacher of the word of God. I show that Benedict’s writings can serve as faithful and eminent models of inspiration and pedagogy



for present and future liturgical preachers in the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. This assumption is rooted in the belief that the contemporary homilist must be able to proclaim the word by remaining obedient and true to revelation. This term, as defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is the manifestation of God and His plan of salvation to humankind (CCC 74–79). This praxis in preaching will also enable the preacher to inspire the listeners. He will herald the word with clarity in a comprehensible, practical, and passionate manner so that the message communicated by the word itself is actually transforming the listeners in this historical moment. Christ is then present in the preacher’s word, because it is Christ himself who speaks when Sacred Scripture is read in the Church ( Vatican Council II Sacrosanctum Concilium par. 7). This dissertation demonstrates how Benedict XVI indirectly encourages such an influence on Catholic preaching by offering an understanding of the liturgy in the historical context of the liturgy’s questions, hopes, and dangers (Spirit 7–8).

### 1.15 Weil

For the Pope, liturgy presupposes that the heavens have been opened. In fact, Ratzinger insists that only if this is the case is there liturgy at all. If the heavens are not open, then whatever liturgy was is reduced to role-playing and in the end, to a trivial pursuit of congregational self-fulfillment in which nothing really happens (New Song 170). From the abode of God, liturgy and its preaching derive its unity. The Catechism structures its theology of the liturgy with this reality in mind. “The assembly transcends racial, cultural, social—indeed, all human affinities. The assembly should prepare itself to encounter its Lord and to become ‘a people well disposed’” (1097 and 1098).

Weil speaks of this concept of universal love when she refers to the example of love that Christ gave as an illustration of his commandment to love our neighbor. The neighbor is a being about whom nothing is known, lying naked, bleeding, and unconscious on the road. It is a question of complete anonymity, and for that reason, completely universal love (Waiting 50).

Weil's philosophy can be divided between her secular thinking and her spiritual thinking. For this reason she is even more interesting to this work. For Weil, the problem of truth is always a deeply personal one, to be approached through introspection. One writer put it this way, when pressed, Weil's final appeals take a form similar to, "It's based on what is beauty, and if it's beautiful, it must be true. This is not quite a child's naïve clinging to fancy or an absurd extension of the Keatsian axiom. It is expression of how personally Weil took truth. She counted as true not that which she could prove but that upon which she depended, that which she could not be without" (Pétrément 63).

A final selection of her works that this work focuses upon is Weil's understanding of absence. This is a key image for her. She believed that God created by an act of self-delimitation. In other words, God creates only when God withdraws in part. Since this connects to Weil's thinking about the supernatural world it links her to the transcendent world of God.

Leslie Fiedler wrote about Simone Weil: "She has come to seem more and more a special exemplar of sanctity for our time—the Outsider as Saint in an age of alienation, our kind of saint" (Waiting vii). This work determines the benefit Weil's life and works might hold to understanding Benedict's desire to correct Catholic liturgy. This challenge that Benedict charges is a difficult discernment. It requires seeing what in modern culture

assists hearing the gospel and what in the culture refuses transcendence within liturgy. The best way to try to achieve the Pope's corrections of liturgy is to look at it with him from different views. We cannot become sufficiently bewildered nor can we afford to think we have it figured out from the start. A voice can be found in Simone Weil to help measure the humbling degree that even taking some of the unintended directions that were taken after Vatican Council II, we may have a clearer reflection of the life of God opening to us. Simone Weil may be an image of the soul in preparation. She once said that it does not rest with the soul to believe in the reality of God if God does not reveal this reality. One must wait. In fact, contact with God is the true sacrament.

## 1.16 Conclusion

Ever since Kant's *sapere aude*—"dare to use reason for your self"—all of history has been led by the desire for emancipation. The individual wants to break free of the constraints of authority. In every case authority must be subjected to critical examination. What is not rational, that is, able to be readily understood, cannot be obligatory. Of course there are many contradictions within this philosophy. An anarchistic freedom, taken to a radical conclusion, does not redeem man; rather, it makes him a faulty creation, living without meaning. The Eucharistic reality and the authority of the Church as instituted by Christ, of course, rise far above mankind's rational abilities.

In the fundamental prayer of the Church, the Eucharist—the heart of Catholic life—is not merely expressed but is realized day after day. At the most profound level, the Eucharistic liturgy has to do with Christ alone. He prays for us; he puts his prayer on our lips, for only He can say: This is my Body — This is my Blood (Ratzinger, God Is Near Us 119). The aim of this dissertation is to assist preachers to step out of the zone of

what is theirs in human reason to unite them in an act of self-transcendence, of self-abnegation, and thus through their preaching lead others into the Church of all nations, whose authority comes from Christ Himself.

By broadening our vision through the works of Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil that aim to cultivate a contemplative gaze, this dissertation explores new horizons or understandings of Catholic Homiletics that are unfolding in the twenty-first century and post-conciliar church. Pope Benedict and Simone Weil challenge these understandings to stand within the threshold of the insights suggested by the Magisterium regarding the do-able and the context of globalization and interreligious dialogue. Benedict and Weil together call us to reflect on the Word and its effect on our social responsibilities and the implications of authentic worship with an informed regard for the Wholly Other.

# Chapter 2

## The Impact of Vatican Council II Upon Catholic Homiletics

The ideas and actions of all institutions need to meet the demands of a given historical moment from within. This need is why the Catholic Church strives to be an institution that engages interpretative responsiveness to emerging questions that guide its members of the faith in every age. Chapter one described the integral relationship of the preached Word and the Liturgy, providing an analysis and interpretation of what Pope Benedict XVI means by the “reform of the reforms.” Pope Benedict sees the preached Word and the Liturgy as the prayer in which Christ unceasingly becomes contemporary with the Church (New Song 72). He wants to help the members of the Church to rediscover the Liturgy in its time-transcending grandeur so that authentic questions emerge that await the Church’s engagement. From this perspective, this current chapter proposes that preaching the Word of God in this era calls the homilist to proclaim the deposit of faith, or truths which are contained in the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church, in a manner that appeals more broadly and more effectively to contemporary life that must “interpret otherwise” than conventional Western assumptions about the self. (Arnett, Argumentation and Advocacy 39).

The Second Vatican Council is without a doubt the greatest event to influence this development in the history of the Church. The Council has a place in world history. The Council and its teachings frame the larger project of Pope Benedict XVI’s reform of the Liturgy. This chapter traces the immeasurable impact that the Council had upon the

preached Word of God, revealing changes in Roman Catholicism's understanding of preaching at the Second Vatican Council. This chapter examines homiletics in light of the Council.

## 2.1 Introduction

Pope Benedict XVI labeled the Council one of the happiest events in his life, emphasizing what was written in the heart-warming, last sentence of the document, Sacrosanctum Councilium: “to promote the warm and living love for the Scripture” among the faithful (SC 24). The Second Vatican Council breathed fresh life into the biblical movement of the Catholic Church. As Pope Benedict points out, it led to further controversies, not the least of which was how to safeguard an intimate and crucial connection between word and sacrament in the Catholic tradition. These controversies were based on two distinct ways of understanding “doctrine” and can be traced back to the fact that there were two groups within the Council with radically different thought-processes. The members of the first group used an analytical method to arrive at a definition. For those that belonged to this first group, a failure to think in purely conceptual terms meant a departure from the truth. E. Schillebeeckx writes about this in his book The Church of Christ. “During the debates in the Council, I have often noticed how the ‘progressives’ have fought against this way of imprisoning the truth, while the others have believed that the essence of the truth was being called into question” (Schillebeeckx 57). According to Yves Congar, OP, the second group at the Council, however, approached the truth in a more existential synthetic way, along a road that was open to search and research and to new contributions (Stacpoole, Vatican II Revisited 346). This chapter lays the ground work that will help readers understand the

ambivalence that the Holy Father demonstrates towards the Council decree that the Church would “undertake a careful general reform of the liturgy” precisely so that people could more properly “benefit from it spiritually” (SC 21). Much of the ambivalence of the Pope flows from this tension between the two camps—the more conceptual and scholastic group and the more pastoral and ecumenical group (Stacpoole 347). The Pope remains a sharp critic of the modernistic idea of progress that leads to novelty over competence.

This chapter proceeds first by re-examining the origin of proclamation. This dissertation hopes to open a discussion about where Catholic preaching has been, and where it might be headed. With preaching as its common ground, the Catholic Church can learn a great deal from both its history and its homiletic methodology.

Second, this chapter examines the link between Vatican Council II and “the Church vis-à-vis the world.” The Council’s teaching was not shaped in a vacuum; much theological reflection and formal teaching preceded its formation. In a sense, the Second Vatican Council’s impact on preaching rests on the shoulders of all that came before.

Third, the Second Vatican Council was an ecumenical council. The final product of the Council did not merely look to the past; its firm foundations allowed the Fathers of the Council (i.e., the world’s bishops) to look well into the future, and thus orient the Church in directions that were both provincial and cosmopolitan. Pope Benedict was part of the Council and remembers that the Council Fathers did not want to approach the future empty handed without any historical alternatives. Change does not occur in a vacuum.

Fourth, The Vatican Council coordinates section of this chapter distinguishes the Council as an event that attempted to counter the assumption about the primacy of self-willed agency, detailing a phenomenological alternative-responsiveness to the Other. This chapter introduces this concept by engaging the work of Ronald C. Arnett who expands upon the works of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas.

At the moment we may have to stand before the divided project between the scholastic approach to renewal and the pastoral-phenomenological approach, but that does not mean that the Church cannot gather around a unified pulpit. Pope Benedict XVI is challenging our normative ways of preaching by suggesting greater fidelity to the Liturgy in which the Word is preached by placing in question an unreflective reliance upon the self and mankind's reliance on his own reason as authority?.

## 2.2 Re-examining the Origin of Proclamation

It seems providential that the Roman Catholic Church increasingly saw this vision unfolding years before. Church leaders called for an ecumenical council that would be charged with the task of restructuring the Church to reaffirm the place of ethics, aesthetics, and religion as among the highest expressions of our humanity, lending further impetus to the need for interfaith theological exchange in ever increasingly pluralistic societies. The Ecumenical Council would eventually provide direction for the entire Church in being clear that today we do not truly understand someone until we begin to get some understanding of what, most fundamentally, she or he believes. This chapter presents the dialogue among scholars of Catholic Homiletics investigating preaching in this time of change and continuing responsiveness to Christian doctrine and attentiveness to the Other.



The timeliness of this research in Sacred Rhetoric rests with the recent election of Pope Benedict. Like all branches of communication and rhetoric, theological proclamation has been torn apart by modernistic influences and psychological assumptions. Such a study of Homiletics re-examines approaches to apologetics and kerygmatic proclamation enabling us to assess the dangers of preaching focused on entertaining and individualistic creativity. Such questioning moves us to religious speech that can offer something more salutary—a unique rhetorical practice learned through prayerful attention to the Word of God and true to the celebration of the Liturgy. The homilist within this liturgical paradigm is seen in light of postmodernity that questions the ongoing trends toward increasing focus upon the self and on mankind’s reason as authority. This is an idea brought out in an article by Ronald C. Arnett, entitled “A Dialogic Ethic ‘Between’ Buber and Levinas.” Buber and Levinas interpret otherwise than modern psychological assumptions, providing a paradigmatic alternative that enriches the conversation that questions the ongoing historical trends toward increasing focus upon the self (Arnett, *Dialogue* 76). Arnett engages their work, pointing to an alternative understanding of agency—“a responsive I” (76). This concept corresponds to the requirement that there be an affinity between the preacher and the Word. That lived affinity is nothing less than holiness, and it is lived most surely when the priest or deacon are at Liturgy.

More than two thousand years of biblical theology and practice have shaped the Church’s ministry of liturgical preaching. The question for today in this historical moment is what changes are necessary in our homiletic discourse? This study poses an

even more demanding question, “What might homiletics look like that does not begin with a sense of will but rather a ‘responsive I’ as defined in Arnett’s dialogical research?”

In an age when different cultures and civilizations come into more frequent, direct, and intense contact and disagreement, the basic questions of religious traditions acquire a special urgency: How are the best aspects of religious traditions sustained? How are inclusive, open-ended religious traditions created and nurtured? The key to the answers to these questions is to frame them within a non-humanistic view, i.e., grounding them within the Church’s liturgical practices.

On October 11, 1962, the first day of the Council, Pope John XXIII delivered his opening address in Saint Peter’s Basilica. In that address, after placing the Council and its deliberations “under the auspices of the Virgin Mother of God,” he said: “The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the Sacred Deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously. That doctrine embraces the whole of man, composed as he is of body and soul. And, since he is a pilgrim on this earth, it commands him to tend always toward Heaven” (Hobblethwaite 433). The Second Vatican Council had a tremendous impact upon Catholic liturgical preaching as a means to answer these basic questions of religious traditions that surround sustaining the best aspects of religious traditions and how to create and nurture inclusive and open-ended religious traditions. These questions are raised in this age of transition by Catholics in service to the proclamation of the gospel for Catholics themselves as well as for all of humankind. It is commonly understood that the Second Vatican Council had as its first and “greatest concern” a two-pronged objective, one of apologetics (that attempts to

defend the truths of the faith) and the other that is kerygmatic in nature (which deals with proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ).

This chapter outlines the Council's counter-premise concerning the privileged position of the self in Western culture, underscoring major ideas that shape the Council's coordinates. This chapter moves to engage the significance of the Council's major documents that challenge basic modern assumptions with individual agency and willfulness in reliance on mankind's reason rather than on the authority of Christ in His Church.

### 2.3 The Link between Vatican Council II and “the Church vis-à-vis the world”

Earlier on, in 1943 Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* took a large step in the direction of intellectual freedom within the Catholic Church and its approach to homiletics by loosening the prohibition on biblical criticism. Two generations took further steps that paved the way to Vatican II. By the 1960s many Catholic authors were describing preaching as “presenting doctrine but in a manner adapted to the needs of the times. What adapted to the needs of the times means particularly in light of the preaching ministry of the Church is the focus that this chapter addresses.

As stated earlier, the birth of modernity found Catholics undertaking to explain Catholicism to others. This effort accompanied the eventual passage from agrarian surroundings into modern culture, a movement influenced by such luminous Enlightenment figures as the scholar and philosopher Immanuel Kant who made eloquent pleas for religious tolerance and freedom of conscience derived from a consideration of ourselves as pure rational agents (Taylor, *A Secular Age* 554). Other such figures

provided sympathetic and passionate appeals for religious dialogue, calculated to interest a fully modern audience.

At first, even at this very early stage, Roman Catholicism desired to engage the emerging modern idea of moral order. However, the Catholic Church was quick to recognize that secularists and unbelievers while actually scorning the real, sensual, earthly human good for some purely imaginary higher end, were indirectly leveling the exceptional, the heroic. Charles Taylor treats this important development in his book A Secular Age. He calls this movement the modern affirmation of life in which there is nothing higher than the “Will to Power” (373). This new religion of modern life forces the Church to disconnect from the Enlightenment project less it endorse this type of modern life-affirming humanism that breeds pusillanimity (373).

The Catholic Church continues to move forward. It is criticized by some for moving too slowly. Nevertheless, it moves forward, not as an object that can be foregrounded, but an institution that encounters particular things and places. It encounters an echo outside. It serves to preserve historical Christianity and recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean.

Both Jewish and Christian religions promise repeatedly through their divinely inspired Scriptures that all the earth will know God’s name and finally understand the Incarnation. The Judeo-Christian tradition reinforces this universalizing orientation. However, overwhelmingly, the adherents to both religions still believe that given the difficult task of survival, their primary belief is that they best serve the Lord by concentrating the energies of their own community. Today’s climate of tolerance provides an extraordinary religious opportunity to pursue a larger task: to seek out the

faithful of all world religions, to work with them to make God's name one on earth as God is one in heaven. Different Catholics may use different language to describe this plan, yet in its various expressions this is clearly the reason for Catholics to participate in interfaith dialogue. New language would also be needed particularly in Catholic pulpits whereas Pope John XXIII said, "the substance of the ancient doctrine of the faith is one thing, [sic] the way in which it is expressed is another" (Rynne 47). Xavier Rynne writes in Vatican Council II that this statement by the Pope touched on a subject that had been practically taboo in traditionalist Catholic theological circles. Rynne's interpretation of the Pope's words implies that Catholic doctrine remained the same, but the formulation of it varied and was not to be regarded as unalterable ends in themselves (47). Pope John did say that the task of the Council was to find the best formulas for our time, without being too hidebound or showing a too slavish respect for those of a previous age (47). He wanted the Council to shape its structure to serve the Church's mission by developing ways to communicate with the rapidly changing world. New organizations needed to be established within the Church to further the cause of social communication. The homily also was to be expounded from the sacred texts during the liturgical year, allowing it to become intelligible to the people for their help in daily living of the Gospel. This development led to a re-discovery of how the Church managed to keep the homily faithfully rooted in the Scriptures for over 2000 years. "As to the origin of the Scriptures," wrote Geoffrey Wainwright, "much of their material has been judged by contemporary scholarship to have had its Sitz im Leben in the worship of the believing community (Wainwright 140).

More recently, Eugene B. Borowitz published an essay entitled “A Nearness in Difference,” in which he cites that over the past forty years or so this openness to preaching with a dialogical sensitivity embedded within the Sacraments has been given increased emphasis by a shift in the larger intellectual culture. He refers to ideas loosely associated with terms like “deconstruction” or “postmodern” and how biblical scholarship was affected over the last century and a half (19). Borowitz describes what the Council needed to consider: hermeneutical issues, how different approaches relate to each other and how they relate together to questions of over-arching truth (19). In contrast to the confidence shown by proponents of the Enlightenment and their heirs, many thinkers today emphasize the elusive, even illusory nature of objective rational certainty. Borowitz points to Wittgenstein’s investigations of the underpinnings of language, Kuhn’s study of radical change in science, Derrida’s deconstruction of our identification of words with realities; and the assaults of feminists and people of color on the supposed universality of Western thinking as the reasons why so many have realized how much of our lives and thought are not built on self-evident certainty, but rather on what religious people broadly call faith (19). Borowitz was pointing out that the Catholic Church was a pre-Enlightenment institution, preserved from many of the conditioning influences of modern man and his historical and cultural circumstances.

The reason that these insights are so significant is that they call for a kind of “new hearing.” Ultimately, to trace the development of a homiletic method is to see the importance of not only the hearer in the speech/act for Catholics, but a hearer that must be able to discern the place of religious belief in a world where religious belief is only one among many stories striving for acceptance. This becomes even more significant

when one considers that we are a culture of endless choice and pluralism. Do Catholic hearers have the capacity to open to being converted by the Word made visible through preaching in a culture with so many competing voices?

Thus, in one sense the Second Vatican Council wanted to articulate clearly its opposition to the fatalistic approach that modernity would ineluctably lead to the death of religious faith. At the same time the Council wanted to take great care that it did not make the same mistakes of modernity that contributed unnecessarily to the rise of atheistic secularism (Rynne 52). Implicit in the Council's work was a corrective element that sought to initiate dialogue about modernity's foundation of reliance upon the self, or agency (52).

#### 2.4 Vatican Council II: The Ecumenical Council

Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council with great hope and expectation. The Council was to reformulate church teaching in a number of key areas and on important issues. The Council also needed to institute sweeping reforms of Church practices especially within liturgy and the new order of human relations. Over and over the pontiff emphasized throughout the Council the need for total fidelity to the Church's doctrinal heritage. The implication of this historical emphasis is that it provides a colorful way to begin a reflection on the Church's official practice of preaching. This illustration helps to describe the integral relationship of the Council and Catholic homiletics, now more than forty years removed from the most dramatic pastoral event of modern times, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

Catholic theological education before Vatican II was mainly in the hands of the church hierarchy. The education highlighted papal authority. The principal documents

were usually written and even discussed in Latin. These documents were steeped in a heavy concentration of scholastic philosophy. Since the intention of preaching and theology was to transmit officially correct teaching to the faithful, clerics and seminarians received the greatest emphasis. The teaching of theology was carried out almost exclusively in seminaries. In order for a theologian to publish a work, an Episcopal imprimatur would be required. The Church trained its homilists in neoscholastic philosophy and theology. Not much training in the actual art of preaching was provided. The best students were traditionally sent to Rome for their special studies. The rest of the candidates were sent into ministry, often with little pastoral training and even less preaching experience. Bernard Cooke notes that pre-Vatican II priests were to preach in such a way as “to feed the people with salutary words, teaching them what they must know for salvation, telling them clearly and briefly what vices they should avoid and what virtues they should acquire in order to avoid eternal punishment and gain heavenly glory” (Ministry to Word 288). The pedagogy of one generation served as the model for the next even though the faithful had become more educated and amalgamated into the modern society.

Andrew Greeley, a noted American Catholic priest, author, and even more importantly a sociologist, published an article for the Chicago Sun Times in which he analyzes the Second Vatican Council as an occurrence or an event. He asked how we should interpret the Council. Was it an occurrence, a meeting of the bishops of the world who enacted certain reforms and clarified certain doctrines (16)? The second interpretation holds that the Council was a momentous event, indeed one of the most dramatic and important events in the history of Catholicism, a structure-shattering event



which one could almost call a revolution (Cooke 288). This chapter of the dissertation does not intend to answer or even deal with the question of interpretation. Rather, the importance of the Greeley article is the presupposition that in order to estimate and understand the impact the Council had upon the Church, and consequently upon the preaching ministry within the Church's liturgy, one must look to the documents promulgated by the Council. The key documents will be summarized here. This summary is based upon a discussion of the Council documents by Gary Dorrien in his important trilogy Crisis, Irony and Postmodernity: 1950–2005. Dorrien is one of the most rigorous theological historians of our time. An overview of these documents provides insight into the direction the Council intended to take the Church universal. Martin Buber proposes that direction is accomplished as a transaction between a person (or an institution) and an event. The institution must be called out by the moment and then provide its own unique response. (Buber, Between Man and Man 92)

## 2.5 Vatican Documents Summary

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 1963)* called for a more participatory and biblical worship that encouraged the faithful to be “fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it.” C. J. McNaspy, SJ, sees this document leading Catholic preaching to nurturing whatever can contribute to the unity of all who believe in Christ (23). It was intended to enable the faithful to express in their lives the real nature of the true Church.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, 1964) declared that the body of Christ “subsists” in the Roman Catholic Church, but “many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines” and that all Christians

“are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love (n.8).” This document would become one of the most significant means of equipping the faithful to know how to engage the world in this historical moment while remaining true to the values of the Gospel. Father Donald R. Campion, SJ, reminds preachers that Christians must serve others of the modern world with mounting effectiveness by boldly proclaiming that the Church offers the world an option (qtd. In McAvoy 299). At the heart of Christian service is the reality that we must be true to the Church’s divinely instituted nature.

The (“Unitatis Redintegratio,” Decree on Ecumenism 1964) recognized that all baptized believers “have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.” This Decree lifted ecumenical dialogue to a new level by defining that the Holy Spirit is at work in “ecclesial communities” outside the Roman Catholic Church. Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert stresses that the Catholic preacher must realize that ecumenism is essential to renewal and reform (53). Preaching would need to refrain from any former prejudice. For the divisions of Christendom “men of both sides were to blame”. (Rigali, 53)

The “Declaration on the Revelation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (Nostra Aetate, 9) declared that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” and that the death of Jesus must not be blamed on “all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor the Jews today” (24). According to Robert A. Graham, SJ, this document establishes the ministry of preaching as authentically ecumenical by declaring that all peoples of the earth with their various religions form one community. The Church respects the spiritual, moral, and cultural values of all other religions.

The “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (Dei Verbum, 1965) emphasized the dual divine/human character of the scriptural witness, acknowledging that the Old Testament contains “matters imperfect and provisional” and that “due attention must be paid both to the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech, and narrative which prevailed at the age of the sacred writer” (1965). Frederick C. Grant identifies that the greatest value of this document comes from the provision it makes to train the clergy of the Church about the importance of the Bible in such a way that they can make it relevant to the Christian’s whole way of life (158). This document avoids the mistake of some Christian denominations by subordinating interpretation to ecclesiastical authorities.

The “Declaration on Religious Liberty” declared that the right of each person “to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right” (Dignitatis Humanae, 13.33). This document was critiqued by Dr. Franklin H. Littell as being the first document of the Church to address the whole world, but emphatically as a spiritual government. Littell acknowledges that the Church voices an alternative to the non-embedded direction many have taken.

The “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” inaugurated a major shift in the church’s relation to the struggles of oppressed people in third world nations, observing that “there are stirrings for advancement afoot among people eager to share in the benefits of industrialization and urbanization” (Gaudium et Spes, 32). Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, writes that this document intentionally did not begin with a discussion of the structures and government of the Church—but starts with the notion of the Church as a people (63). The language of this document is chosen with the world in

mind. This document is meant to help preachers communicate the meaning and the purpose of the Church to the world at large.

As can be seen in these summaries, the reformist spirit of Vatican II was inspiring. Most of all its documents sought to define a new Catholic mainstream, not invent Catholic versions of theological liberalism. Pope John XXIII always insisted that his call for a council was an inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## 2.6 The Vatican Council Coordinates

Stephen Hand, the editor of an important Catholic news service, acknowledges that there was, among the documents published by the Council, a desire to understand and speak to modern man. There was the desire to discern and acknowledge the elements of truth in the varied philosophies that had arisen in the wake of the Protestant reformation, the French Revolution, and the decline of the Age of Faith, he explains. There was likewise a desire to strengthen certain elements for kerygmatic purposes (e.g., gentle effectiveness of spiritual praxis and teachings) and the redressing of imbalances, which arguably existed in some places and times, he continues. There was also the recognition that more and more laypeople in the modern age were able to avail themselves of post-secondary school education and that they were asking more penetrating and sophisticated questions than was ever the case in the largely peasant cultures of times past, he adds.

It became apparent that high metaphysical abstractions—even though surely true—needed to incarnate themselves, as it were—make themselves more amenable to—the language of the twentieth century that identified with modern rationality and secularity. The Church had to gain a way to win back the public that had become lost by

specialized language of critical theory, hermeneutics, and religious philosophy that was comprehensible only to “other theologians of similar breeding” (Stout 164). Only when we understand this entirely can we begin to understand the reasons for the Council.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, only if we closely scrutinize the complexities that flowed in the aftermath of the Council can we determine the unhappy developments that led to Pope Benedict’s suggestion for “reform of the reforms”; those abuses that were not in keeping with the intentions of the Fathers of the Council. I want to ask how these developments surrounding the milieu in which the Council was called affected the ethos of preaching in the post-conciliar Church.

Substantial changes have occurred in the theology and practice of preaching as a result of the Second Vatican Council. There was a temptation on the part of some to change the Church into another modern institution. The Catholic is a pre-modern body that was spared the Western practice of beginning with the self. To use a concept from the works of Emmanuel Levinas, who is considered the premiere voice of ethics in the twentieth century, the Church assumed instead the phenomenological a priori of ethics that we discover in the face of the Other. The changes brought about by the conciliar “homiletic revolution,” however, fell into the same pattern as most of the areas of church teachings and practices (164). This is explained by Bede Steven Peay in his extremely helpful dissertation Change in the theology and practice of preaching in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, 1935–1983. Peay substantiates his findings through various surveys on the perception of preaching by the laity. He describes the changes as beginning with strong official approval—often initiated by official teaching, an

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<sup>2</sup> See George A. Kelly, *Catholic and the Practice of the Faith* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of

enthusiastic reception, and then a gradual decline into minimal implementation (164).

Peay is one of the first in my research to imply that the continued gap between theory and practice brought about frustration, on the part of clergy and laity alike, with preaching as it was practiced and how it ought to be practiced. A survey taken by the magazine U.S. Catholic in 1983, listed preaching as one of the three principal reasons individuals left the Church (Brieg 6-18).

Thomas O. Sloane believes it is impossible to discuss *history* without first establishing some terms of reference, since the word is at least as slippery as *rhetoric*. In one of its senses, history means “events that have happened in the past”; in another of its senses, it is equivalent to “historical writing” (for which *historiography* is often a synonym) (337). Sloane says that this overlap of meaning constitutes a helpful reminder that very often we know of events only because they have been written down (33).

One of the keenest ways to gain historical insight into an event is to assist the reader to become spectators of the moment being studied. To accomplish this experience, the rhetorical and hermeneutical devices of *phantasia* (visualization) and *suasoria* (categories or themes) will be used. Peter Berger calls this process as objectivating meanings from one generation to the next. (15) By presenting five key themes of the Second Vatican Council, this chapter will visualize both the historical meaning of the Council and its influence on preaching and homiletics, along with an idea of what will eventually be carried in the person of Pope Benedict XVI and his response to the Council.

An examination of Vatican Council II must contend with the realities that existed in the world at that time in history. The study of a Church Council, like doing

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America Press, 1946.

ecclesiology or theology, means doing history. This study however, cannot be merely a detached, scholarly reconstruction of the event. Nor can it be a futile attempt at what theologian Yves Congar calls “restitution,” that is a return to its original or pure state (D’Ambrosio 45). Vatican II must be approached by a hermeneutical exercise in which the Council itself will be interrogated with the burning questions of homiletics in this age. With such questions that form the foundation of this study I will unlock many of the ideas that may yet be neglected or even resisted.

By the 1960s, society was identified as postindustrial and post-Christian. It was a world highly influenced by demanding technology and reason where faith became submissive and could not be presented without qualification. Although the Council wanted to talk about Jesus Christ—a subject only the Christian faithful would accept—Pope John, at the advice of the Council Fathers, wanted to name the Council ecumenical to prepare the Church for the dialogue with the world that would be mandated in the future. The Council work would be both definitive and prescriptive. It would redefine who Christ is in all the ages and what the Church is in the modern world. It would also decree how the Church would teach, sanctify, and govern in the midst of the social conditions in order to flourish and proclaim the gospel. Consequently, all that is determined by the Council has immediate and long ranging ramifications upon the preaching of the gospel and pastoral proclamation in general. By providing themes or metaphors in the next section, this chapter opens up guideposts and visualize what the Council intended to do. This process enables the reader to glimpse into how the same themes and metaphors when taken beyond their horizons of significance after the Council distorted the historical homiletic practices they sought to empower. The following section

offers five metaphors: 1) *aggiornamento*; 2) *ressourcement*; 3) holiness; 4) dialogue; and 5) ecumenical, as guideposts that lead us to understand the Council:

#### 1. *Aggiornamento*

This Italian word conveys enthusiasm for a fresh beginning. Like the Italian phrase “*La Dolce Vita*,” it speaks about a passion to breathe in fresh, crisp, invigorating air. It connotes an image of opening the windows of a home on a new spring morning, and taking in everything that the *primavera* offers. Time Magazine reported on November 10, 1958, that if anyone expected Angelo Cardinal Roncalli to be a mere caretaker Pope, providing a transition to the next reign, he destroyed the notion within minutes of his election. “He stomped in boldly like the owner of the place, throwing open windows and moving the furniture around” (“I Choose John” 17).

Roncalli was elected to the papacy on October 28, 1958. He was the man that in 1933 declared, “*Il passato non torna piu. Dunque circostanze nuove, provvidenza nuove*” (“The past will never return. New situations require new dispositions”) (17). In an attempted reconciliation between science and faith, the key discipline is history.

(Roncalli 38) “Look at the process as well as the result,” advised Lord Acton. Renowned Vatican Correspondent for The National Catholic Reporter, Peter Hebblethwaite, reviewed Pope John XXIII’s first ninety days in this way: “So Pope John ended 1958, a year like any other year except that in it he chanced to become pope” (305).

Hebblethwaite goes on to describe that Pope John had not yet unveiled how he proposed to carry the universal Church along with him in the process of transformation (305). Pope John was however, already choosing the means for this dream. It would be summoning of an ecumenical council. All along, Pope John had been thinking about the first three



months of his pontificate. “It was the hidden, unspoken agenda, the inner face of his life as he struggled to discern what the Holy Spirit wanted for the Church” (305).

This hidden spirit of Pope John XXIII presents the first key theme that needs to be discussed here. It is the Italian term *aggiornamento*. Pope John confesses that he learned this principal of organization from Bishop Radini Tedeschi, under whom he served in the Diocese of Bergamo (105). Tedeschi was practically everything Roncalli was not. Pope John would write in his biography of Tedeschi, “In the government of his diocese his military spirit was very apparent in his insistence on discipline which was to be maintained in everything, down to the smallest detail” (*My Bishop* 105). Tedeschi was convinced that ‘a strong and vigorous government does less harm than a weak one’ “His fiery apostolic eloquence, his determination, his innumerable projects and extraordinary personal activity may have given many people at first the impression that he intended to make the most radical changes and was inspired only by the desire to introduce innovations” (Tedeschi 48). Pope John XXIII learned from him that it is best not to concentrate on carrying out reforms so much as maintaining the glorious traditions of his diocese, and interpreting them *in harmony with the new conditions and needs of the time* (Hebblethwaite 48). Hebblethwaite traces this same characteristic to Roncalli’s own ambition when he became Pope. The pontiff expressed it in the same language: the revivifying of tradition through *aggiornamento* (a word only inadequately rendered by “adaptation” or “up-dating”) (51).

This spirit of *aggiornamento* immediately begins to characterize the perceptions of the reasons of calling for a council. This notion commands instant attention from many in the Church that had already been advocating changes. Large numbers of priests,

especially American and European clergy were among this segment of enthusiasts. This early idea of *aggiornamento* gave rise to further confusion when the term was released to secular media sources. It became associated erroneously with notion of a “new Pentecost” and the charismatic vagueness this concept conveys. It was at this point that many liturgists and preachers began to interpret that the Council would be more practical than dogmatic, more pastoral than ideological and that it would provide norms for action rather than new definitions. Even while the Council was just starting, this unintended trend began to produce unexpected outcomes. Normally words are slow to change but their meaning can mutate rapidly. *Aggiornamento* quickly was taken out of context and became associated with a post-Tridentine Church. It was commonly used to mean a spirit of change, openness, open-mindedness, and modernity.

Like his predecessor John Paul II, Benedict XVI was present at all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965. Avery Cardinal Dulles observes that all in all, we may say that Ratzinger belonged to the inner circle of theologians whose thinking prevailed at Vatican II (25). During the Council and the first few years after its conclusion, Ratzinger wrote a number of commentaries on the conciliar documents. While making certain criticisms, they express his general agreement with the spirit of *aggiornamento* that intended to bring about renewal of the Church, unity of Christians, and dialogue with the world of today (25). At the same time Benedict expressed concerns about the prevalence outside the Church of a liberal-radical ideology that was individualistic, rationalistic, and hedonistic (26). This force coupled with polemical forces within the Church made Ratzinger very cautious about misinterpretations that

needed to be overcome even before an authentic reception of the true nature of the Council could begin (26).

In a very important article published in the winter 1991 issue of the journal Communio, Marcellino D'Ambrosio clarifies that the correct connotation of *aggiornamento* is Aristotelian in category. He underlines that *aggiornamento* is not just a superficial familiarity with contemporary thought. It is a paradigm of authenticity. It is never mechanical or innovative in character. D'Ambrosio notes that indeed, both before and after the Council, theologians Louis Bouyer, Henri de Lubac, and others warned that certain programs of "adaptation" or *aggiornamento* were afoot which, having cut all moorings to tradition, were rapidly drifting towards "servile adaptation to the world and to its changing idols" (45).

Hans Küng heard from a well-informed source that John XXIII was asked in a private conversation what he intended by having a council. The Pope answered by opening the window and saying: "That—to let some fresh air into the Church!" Küng also asks in his book The Council in Action, "Was it too soon for a Council?" (37) He answers: "No, it was not too soon" (37). Too many forces for good have been awakened. The movements working for renewal have struck their roots too deep. Support for the Council, amongst both clergy and laity, has been too strong (38).

In light of the debate, Pope Benedict XVI expects *patience* from all Catholics and the world at large. The quarrel over Vatican II continues. What did it really mean to say and do? What is the right way of assimilating it into the life of the Church? The *aggiornamento* of Vatican Council II has to feel its way, not only at the technical and organizational way but also in terms of minds and ideas. Benedict breathes in and

internalizes this “fresh air” that has come into the Church and rightfully expects that what is needed most is *prayer*. For Benedict all prayer is important and necessary but liturgical prayer is the most perfect of all. This understanding coupled with a proper sense of *aggiornamento* created a renewal of docility and an equally intense reflective attitude to enter a deeper stage of dialogue; a critical dialogue that will send the Council fathers and eventually all the members of the Church back to the sources with different questions. This is the genuine progressivism proposed to the Church and the world by Pope Benedict XVI. According to Richard John Neuhaus, Pope Benedict does not want the Church to seek to be counter-cultural, but it is unavoidably counter to the modern mindset in proposing that fidelity and continuity, not autonomy and novelty, are the paths toward a more promising future (Rome Diary 11). It is this spirit and charge that grounds the Church in hope and confidence.

## 2. *Ressourcement*

The reappropriation of the tradition and the conversation with the contemporary world that the Council set out to design are not two agendas. As we shall see in chapter three, one is dubbed conservative and the other liberal, but they are two essential dimensions of the renewal for the Church.

What is the context of *ressourcement*? Why is it so important a part of the Second Vatican Council? How does it differ from *aggiornamento* and why are these two terms set in opposition to one another? How does this second theme that helps to describe the Council provide us with a clearer picture of what happened to liturgical preaching during and right after the Council?

The years leading up to the Council marked a particularly intense time of crisis and change as we noted before. It was a period that gave rise to a broad spiritual movement among Catholic intellectuals across Europe. This group came together largely in response to the expansion of secularism that was creating a crisis for the Church. The movement drew inspiration from earlier theologians and philosophers such as Möhler, Newman, Gardeil, Rousselot, and Blondel, as well as from men of letters like Charles Péguy and Paul Claudel.

The two world wars slowed down the pace of these intellectual movements, but immediately upon the close of World War II, in France particularly and the northern European countries gradually, a new theological ferment was discovered in full motion (Rynne 15). Added to the group were people like Emile Mersch, Dom Odo Casel, Romano Guardini, and Karl Adam. Many of the greatest names in twentieth-century Catholic thought became a part of this movement: Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, Louis Boyer, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Most of these intellectuals were of the same school. They believed that the Church's teachings had to speak to the contemporary world. They also held that in order to do this effectively the Church would need to recover its history of the past. So in this way, they were claiming already that in order for the Church to pass the faith to a modern world, the step needed to be what they termed *ressourcement*. They were saying that *ressourcement* preceded *aggiornamento*. The renewal of the Church had to begin with a rediscovery of the riches of the whole Church's tradition. Henri de Lubac, for example, insisted "the renewal of Christian vitality is linked at least partially to a renewed

exploration of the periods and of the works where the Christian tradition is expressed with particular intensity” (15).

Marcellino D’Ambrosio claims that the participants of this movement, derisively labeled “*la nouvelle théologie*” by its opponents, were far from the tightly organized cadre they were often thought to be. On the contrary, they were men from various universities and religious congregations who, though friends and colleagues, nevertheless differed in many respects. D’Ambrosio explained that what united this diverse group were the convictions that 1) theology had to speak to the Church’s present situation and that 2) the key to theology’s relevance to the present lay in the creative recovery of its past (45). In other words, D’Ambrosio goes on, they all saw clearly that there is a first step to what had been known as *aggiornamento*. It was *ressourcement* or a rediscovery of the riches of the Church’s two-thousand-year treasury, a return to the very headwaters of the Christian tradition (Ambrosio 45).

*Ressourcement* in theory indicts the traditional scholastic theology of the Catholic Church for being absent from, not present to, the thought world of the times. In an existential world, neo-Scholasticism remains resolutely essentialist and objectivist, oblivious to human subjectivity (D’Ambrosio 45). In fact this theology is cut off not only from the contemporary thought world, but from the daily life of the people.

D’Ambrosio contends that the *ressourcement* advocated by these thinkers was not ultimately a work of scholarship but rather a work of religious revitalization (45). The ultimate goal of the renewal is not, then, a more accurate historical understanding of Christian origins, but rather, in the words of Yves Congar, “a recentering in the person of Christ and his paschal mystery” (45).

This emergence of the *ressourcement* concept appealed to those that were searching for a way to break out of the neo-Scholastic quagmire. The loss of a sense of God's transcendent mystery had made God an object. The zeal for the transcendence and unfathomable mystery of God will prove to be one of the hallmarks of the theology of *ressourcement*. Such an existential ethos of the mid-twentieth century helps spark a rediscovery of the Church's traditional teaching that God is the Supreme Subject, the Person *par excellence*, whose self-revelation in Scripture is intelligible but never fully comprehensible. Man, in turn, is best understood as a derivative self rather than originative (Arnett, Argumentation and Advocacy 39). Man lives in relationship with God in Christ emerging as a responsive derivative self (39).

Thus the Council is dialectically shaped and formed from the beginning. So much of the Catholic Church evolves so. This means that the character of the Church is truly sacramental. The Church is an icon of redeemed humanity. It is this character of humanity that enables the Church to depend upon and need the Other One who redeemed it. This Church can be heavenly in one moment and as earthly in the next. It is a Church that struggles with every part of human existence and divine as well. It is the Church spiritually and pastorally, dynamic and vital, unified but also struggling with differences while always attempting to maintain a fruitful contact with the great cultural forces of the respective ages. Charles Péquy said it best: "A true revolution is a call from a less tradition to a more perfect tradition, a call from a shallower tradition to a deeper tradition, a backing up of tradition, an overtaking of depth, an investigation into deeper sources; in the literal sense of the word, a 're-source'" (45). This is the way the Church in flesh and spirit proceeds. The question is always a spiritual one and so is the solution. It all comes

into its own again in our souls. We must give our souls back to it (D'Ambrosio 45). It is all about holiness. Holiness is like the Liturgy. It begins with theophany, God's self-revelation, not man's will. Holiness leads to full covenantal communion, the mutual indwelling of God and man (Hahn, *Letter and Spirit* 171).

### 3. Holiness

“Sound theology must derive from an awareness of what wonderful mysteries are taking place during the celebration of the liturgy,” Cardinal William Levada, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said in a homily March 17, 2007, during a Mass at the American College at Louvain. “We do well to remind ourselves that the preaching of the bishop or priest in the liturgical celebration itself was the original context in which theology was defined, refined, and practiced,” the cardinal said. “Academic theology,” he added, “cannot be of service to the church if it does not remain in vital contact with its ecclesial, liturgical foundations.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that the principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus (1391). What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Together, the liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Eucharist form one single act of worship. The Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and of the Body of the Lord.

In the book Holiness, Donna Orsuto refers to the words of Francis Moloney, “The Eucharist is not a prayer wheel that we spin every morning and a little more solemnly on



Sunday. It is the grammar and syntax of Christian life.”<sup>3</sup> (The interview of John Allen with Francis Moloney in the National Catholic Reporter) The Eucharist is the font and the summit of the Christian life. Orsuto writes, “It is the Eucharist where we celebrate the power of the transforming love of God in our lives, in the Church and in the world” (121). The Eucharist tells us most clearly about who we are, what we stand for, and with whom we stand. Christ’s transforming of bread into his body and wine into his blood is the beginning of a series of transformations leading up to the point when “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28) in our lives and in the world. It does not make sense to receive the Eucharist exclusively focused on the Lord without recognizing the bond between Christ and his body the Church (122). Saint Augustine insists on the communal dimension of the Eucharist. Christ is always “we.” We celebrate the Eucharist as a community and this is an invitation to live in ecclesial community (122). In an article in America magazine dated March 13, 2006, Richard Ryscavage, SJ, professor of sociology/international studies and director of the center for faith and the Public Life at Fairfield University in Connecticut, views Pope Benedict placing charitable service on the same plane as celebrating the liturgy and preaching the word of God. Preachers do well to remember this assumption and noting that of the three activities of which holiness is comprised, charitable service is the responsibility of all the members of the Christian community.

This communal transformation is, according to Pope Benedict XVI, like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being—the victory of love over hatred, the victory of life over death:

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the interview of John Allen with Francis Moloney, “The Word from Rome,” October 21, 2005, accessed at <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/word/word102105.htm> (accessed March 4, 2008),

Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world ... This first, fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his body and blood. But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The body and blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the body of Christ, his own flesh and blood (Benedict XVI qtd. in Orsuto 70-71).

Orsuto refers to Pope Benedict's words, "Il dono dell 'amore," from his Apostolic Journey to Cologne on The Occasion Of the XX World Youth Day, Eucharistic Celebration, Homily Of His Holiness Pope Bnedect XVI, in Cologne-Marienfeld, on Sunday August 21, 2005 and available on the Vatican's web site. The Pope is making clear that Christ's dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominate measure of the world.

Consequently, Vatican Council II's emphasis is not the holiness of the bishops, clergy, and women and men religious in consecrated life, but the holiness of the laity that live in the world. Since Vatican II, leaders of the Catholic Church have implored lay men and women to be more active as Catholic in society and to become more involved in the internal affairs of the Church. Pope John Paul II used to refer to the laity as a "sleeping giant" (Glendon 27). Pope Benedict's far-reaching reforms are meeting with great enthusiasm because these reforms attempt to counter the tendency of many Christians to make the Church something more compatible with the spirit of the age. Mary Ann Glendon, a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, published an article in First Things entitled "The Hour of the Laity." In the article Glendon refers to Southern

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where this theme is mentioned in the context of a lecture Maloney gave at the Lay Center at Foyer Unitas

American writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy who saw where some of the warped visions of a church shaped by the fleeting age find itself. In one of O'Connor's novels, the antihero sets himself up as a preacher of the *Church of Christ without Christ* (Glendon 27). Percy's 1971 novel, Love in Ruins, is set in some not-too-distant future when the American Catholic Church has split into three pieces: the patriotic Catholic Church with headquarters in Cicero, Illinois, where "The Star Spangled Banner" is played at the elevation of the Host; the Dutch Reformed Catholic Church founded by several priests and nuns who left to get married; and "the Roman Catholic remnant, a tiny scattered flock with no place to go" (27). While matters happily have not reached that point, it is noteworthy that the two most salient themes of self-appointed lay spokespersons have been in those directions: the desire for a more democratic Church free of hierarchical authority, and the desire for a do-it-yourself magisterium free of hard teachings regarding sex and marriage.

At this point, a person aware that certain Catholics have always attempted to entice the Church to adapt to the spirit of a given age might ask: "What's so urgent about holiness now?" The answer is that a lack of holiness presents a special danger in a society like ours where Catholics have lost most of their old support networks, and where ideas and conflicting values and opinions are relatively advanced. If holiness falls short of secular trends, Christians run into trouble not only defending their beliefs to others outside the faith—but even among themselves.

My purpose in looking at the Council through the lens of holiness has been to probe beneath the questions that the Church Fathers were asking and to ask a different

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on the the Eucharist as Memeory and Sacrifice."

question: why is holiness important in a modern world? This may suggest that, among Catholics, we are asking an even deeper question, the question of our future—holiness *for what purpose?* I propose that this question needs to become a major component of homiletics in the age ahead. Preachers need to be able to teach but also inspire their listeners. They must be able to analyze Christian doctrine with contemporary methods. The Gospel and the teachings of the Church are neither random inventories of truth claims nor a “system” constructed by human ingenuity. Rather, as Pope Benedict instructs the Christian faith is a unified understanding of the human condition that begins in God’s revelation. This is the source of every dogma, all doctrine and the starting point of theology. Hence Catholic liturgical preaching does not perform in a haphazard or independent way, but supports the whole that demands to be engaged in this way. Benedict is convinced that to be truly holy in the way that the Second Vatican Council intended Catholics to be holy, is to offer an alternative to atheistic humanism by proposing a rereading of the contemporary situation in which the modern world’s intense reflection on the human person is revitalized through an encounter with the Word of God in Jesus Christ (Moynihan 169).. It is precisely this way of becoming holy that the Council promotes. The Word of God is central to the human story. Christianity is not a form of religious Idealism existing somewhere outside history. The Council calls us to solidarity *in* history. Understanding preaching in this way raises the hope that we are able to change the course of history. It also produces the hope that we can know the power of truth in history, which is another way of describing the power of God in history. When it comes to the Church’s role for the world at large, Paul Lakeland, author of The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church, said the Church’s task is “to

proclaim the Gospel ... and to call the secular world to its own deepest selfhood as a human community” (77). For this reason, the Council acknowledged the importance of dialogue so that modern men and women rediscover that they are not condemned to live in a world that is completely fragmented. This, the Council states, is the test of true holiness.

#### 4. Dialogue

“There is no more urgent task than putting the church in dialogue with itself at all levels and across all divisions. But a dialogue is of no use to people convinced they have nothing to learn from one another” (14). This quote is taken from an address recently delivered by John Allen Jr., Vatican correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter* newspaper. He was speaking at the sixth annual Catholic Common Ground Initiative Lecture at the Catholic University of America.

The Church Council Fathers were well aware that Catholics were divided very much like the secular society around them. Self-identified conservative Catholics and self-identified progressive Catholics seem to read their own publications, listen to their own speakers, and affiliate only with people that agree with their opinions and think the way they think. The Council attempted to find ways for people from the divisions within the church that were moving down separate paths to recover a shared spiritual framework, based upon good will for a meaningful conversation. Much to the surprise of many, the Council was searching for a way for the universal church, not to be a policeman, but rather a doctor dispensing medicine for sin and its effects. As Cardinal Suenens expressed it in an interview, the problem was not only that “the world does not seem prepared to listen to us, but the fact is that we are not prepared to talk to it” (qtd. In

Rynne 513). The Fathers of the Council were not afraid to dispute issues of the most serious kind. They were unafraid too of disagreement. Above all the Council was to be a model for true dialogue. First, the hierarchy had to prove that they could communicate with one another. They took a giant step in this direction by recognizing that problems existed within the Church and so they attempted to supply some answers. With Vatican II, liberals and conservatives alike agreed. The Church embarked on a remarkable journey, a universal mission intended to make Catholicism more relevant for the modern age—more engaging through the refined processes of dialogue for Catholics and the world at large.

Martin Buber suggested that the hope for this hour depends upon the renewal of dialogical immediacy between men (26). All of contemporary communication is based upon a philosophy of hope. Ronald C. Arnett, in an article, “Dialogic Education: Conversation About Ideas and Between Persons,” writes that dialogue is the hope we need because it is based on a conviction that human beings can be invited into conversations about ideas, values, and relationships, not out of a conviction that one can learn all the answers, but out of a belief that dialogue with others is the foundation of a quality of life for oneself and others (26). Arnett refers to Buber’s belief that dialogue can assist the quality of life and recalls Buber’s own words:

When all choices are gone, hope is abandoned ... Hope rises with the number of trustworthy directions envisioned. Hope is imagining, choosing, and trusting that there is another way. Hope opens the options, hope welcomes the future, and hope sets us free to choose again. Hope offers tomorrow. (26)

The second Vatican Council genuinely wanted to grapple with problems of information, values, and questions about the type of contribution the Church wanted to offer to the

modern world. The questions cannot be answered all the time, but dialogue about such questions can produce significant effects, reminding us of life choices and consistent with theology (Arnett, “Dialogic Education” 26).

The concept of dialogue as defined by the Council would move beyond an individualistic paradigm to a somewhat more pragmatic extension that is called the relational region. This way of perceiving dialogue is similar to the distinction made by M. M. Bakhtin who differentiates dialogue from pure dialectics. Bakhtin cautions against ever removing dialogue from human experience by oversimplifying contradiction (198). This Gadamerian approach to dialogue speaks of hermeneutical conversation. The Council understood that a world of diversity and plurality would require partners to be in conversation that leads to collaboration. Dialogue differs from normal conversation in that dialogue; both people speak and listen to help each other clarify what is being said. The Council wanted to engage the Church with the world in such a way that dialogue would lead not to refutation with the world but to help opposing viewpoints become crystallized and eventually understood. Then true dialogue could begin. This form of dialogue is slow, careful, full of meaning, respectful, and attentive. The Church understands that few develop this approach today. The only way to achieve this ideal is to foster a deep sense of the importance of the human being, each human being. It also demands a belief in collaboratively searching for new solutions that honor each person.

Vatican Council II was called an ecumenical council for a specific reason. This Council desired to enhance communication within a divided church and with a wider and global society as well. It also possessed a heart that wanted to enhance dialogue with all

religions. For this reason it is imperative to understand the Council in light of a proper view of what the Council meant by *ecumenical*.

#### 5. Ecumenical

Many Church historians express how surprised everyone felt when the extraordinary announcement was made that a worldwide council would be held. Roman Catholic theologian Bill Huebsch describes that even Pope John XXIII was surprised when he began to feel a strong intuition that the time for such a council had come. The Pope told this as a story in his opening speech at the Council. Speaking of the origin of the idea itself, he said he wished to record for history his own personal account “of the sudden bringing up in our heart and lips of the simple words, ecumenical council. “It was completely unexpected,” the Pope said. “It was like a flash of heavenly light, shedding sweetness in eyes and hearts. And at the same times it gave rise to a great fervor throughout the world in expectation of the holding of the Council” (Huebsch 52).

The Council was convened without a “Vatican self-study” performed by consultants and processed through endless committees, lugging ring-bound photocopies of plans, budgets, and opinion polls around the Vatican. Rather, it resulted from his own attention to that “flash of heavenly light” which arose in his soul and breast. It resulted from his trust of that urging of the Spirit, which occurred in his own heart. He did not hesitate (53).

Then speaking to seventeen cardinals at the Basilica of Saint Paul-Outside-the-Walls in Rome on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII announced his intention to hold Vatican II as an Ecumenical Council.



The term *ecumenical council* as it is used in reference to Vatican II does not mean the same as ecumenism. Strictly speaking, ecumenism has as its goal nothing less than “the *full communion* of Christians in one apostolic faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship at the service of a truly common witness,” which was an expression of the communion of persons between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John Paul II).

John XXIII stunned the Christian world by declaring the Roman Catholic Church fully committed to ecumenism. There would be many more surprises as this Pope who came to his office with very little ecumenical experience continued to press this cause in unexpected, even radical ways. However, this is not the issue of what ecumenical means in reference to the Council called for by Pope John.

Catholic theologian and historian George Weigel reports that there have been only twenty-one general or “ecumenical” councils in the history of the Catholic Church. These gatherings of all the world’s bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome have been held in Asia Minor, northern Italy, France, Germany, and Rome, lasting as briefly as a few months and as long as eighteen years. Weigel points out “ecumenical councils have defined dogma, written creeds, condemned heresy, laid down guidelines for sacramental practice, deposed emperors, fought schisms, and proposed schemes for the reunification of Christianity” (153).

Because this dissertation introduces the dialectic of provincial and cosmopolitan horizons of Catholic liturgical preaching, it is essential that an attempt be made to define what an ecumenical council means in theological terms. We must ask the question is there even a theology of the ecumenical council? According to theologian Hans Küng the answer is affirmative. Küng qualifies this by explaining that with theology we do not

mean that unscriptural theology which discourses at large, *non*-definitively, on all possible and impossible subjects, and naturally on ecumenical councils as well(43).. Instead, Küng explains a Christian theology which recognizes itself as bound to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and from *that* source is called upon to make *definitive* pronouncements (44). Küng believes it is, then, possible to make theologically definitive, strictly dogmatic, pronouncements about the ecumenical council (44).

Even more pertinent to this study is theologian Küng’s treatise of an ecumenical council as a council convoked by men and as a representation of the Church. Here Küng places an ecumenical council within the context of the mission of the Church in general. “The Holy Spirit is to be poured out upon all (Acts 2). The Gospel is to be preached as a witness to all peoples throughout the whole world, the whole *oikoumene* (Matt. 24:14), and the word of the message has gone forth to the ends of the *oikoumene* (Rom. 10:18) The *ekklesia* [Church] is indeed a *concilium oecumenicu* (46).. For Küng, the Church herself is the ecumenical council, the assembly of the faithful called together from the whole inhabited globe, convoked by God himself through Christ in the Spirit (50). When Pope John XXIII felt moved by the Spirit to call for the Council, he might not have fully realized that the whole *ekklesia*, the great *councilium* of believers, whom God himself desired to summon was already in waiting for this moment through Christ in the Spirit. *All* on earth were summoned to this council, to be gathered in the one Spirit, held together by the bond of love, in the power of the word and the sacraments, under the leadership of the Apostles; “all” as “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28) (Küng 50).

This theological point is extremely important. For what this theology is defining is that quite especially within the liturgy—communion with Christ is made present. This

assembly at Mass is not indeed simply and absolutely *the* Church; the Church is the *whole*. But even the assembly at Mass in certain given places make present, *re-presents*, the Church. In addition, if even this assembly does so, how much more the great assembly, gathered to deliberate or decide on important questions affecting the whole Church, which therefore has behind it not just a few individuals but the whole, the *oikoumene*, the people of God from the whole inhabited world.

Vatican Council II begins to paint a new picture of bringing together the individual churches scattered over the *oikoumene*. These churches were so different among themselves; there were churches of every country and part of the world, of every race, language, and culture. These churches represented every form of state and society. They made present the visible-invisible *unity* of the whole Church as a particular, concrete event. “But precisely because the unity which this assembly makes into a concrete event is a unity of various and mutually different *individual churches*, it is plain that the Council which makes the unity present as an event at the same time makes the world-wide *catholicity* present as an event. Thus we have the ecumenical council convoked by men as the representation of the “*ecclesia una et catholica*” [one and universal Church] (Küng 53). This image potentially can become a new cosmopolitan ethic, one that obligates us to others. This obligation stretches beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kin, or even the more formal ties of a shared faith. However, the Church of the Second Vatican Council is not to be understood in a sociological sense. How this plays out in light of “relativism,” “majority rule,” and the problem of democratic structures remains to be seen.

Stephen Toulmin makes a very interesting observation. He says that social forecasting is notoriously chancy. He refers to a concept that he calls, “horizons of expectation” (2). What he means by the term is that the most we can hope to foresee is the limits within which “available” human futures lie (2). Available futures are not just those that we can passively forecast, but those that we can actively create (2). They are futures that do not simply happen of *themselves*, Toulmin explains, but can be *made* to happen, if we meanwhile adopt wise attitudes and policies. (Toulmin 2)

Pope Benedict has no intention or desire to return to the past. He has no desire to do this. He does, however, acknowledge that the Church must be ready to reflect anew on that which, in the lapse of time, has remained one constant. “To seek it without distraction and to dare to accept, with joyful heart and without diminution, the foolishness of truth, this, I think, is the task for today and for tomorrow” (Ratzinger Church and World 1). By presenting the essentials of the Second Vatican Council here, this work turns to what Pope Benedict is most concerned about regarding the patrimony of the Council. He desires to come to a better understanding of Vatican II and, thus, of the Church herself and, thus, to comprehend more profoundly the things that matter to us all in the end—regardless of our individual ideologies (Ratzinger, Life in the Church Foreword 1).

## 2.7 Conclusion

There is a crisis present in the Catholic Church today. Chapter two defends the idea that the crisis is not the result of the Second Vatican Council. The purpose of the Council was to prepare the Church, particularly in her preaching ministry, to meet the challenges of this impending crisis. Many questions have surfaced in the forty years since

the close of the Council. None of the Council Fathers, including Pope Benedict, could have seen their rising. These include, in the sphere of the ministry of the Word and Catholic Homiletics, the collapse of metaphysics as an acceptable philosophy, the feverish pursuit of hermeneutics, the triumphant emergence of critical methods, and the all-pervasive influence of the human sciences (Stacpoole 351). Along with these questions came a certain need to prune back the excesses and exaggerations in Catholic life and thought that have entered the Church since 1965, and “restoring” perennial, orthodox, faith and practice (Moynihan, *The Spiritual Mission of Pope Benedict XVI* 39). In the early 1980s, it was Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger who dared to raise his voice against the overwhelming liberal consensus that the Second Vatican Council was perceived to have ushered in.

Chapter three provides an exposé of Pope Benedict XVI as the chief human agent that begins to frame the outcome of the Second Vatican Council regarding the preaching of the Word of God by providing coherent and realistic horizons of expectation that were actually intended by the Fathers of the Council. As early as his return home after the Council, Pope Benedict XVI admits he became deeply troubled by the change in ecclesial climate that was becoming ever more evident (393). Even as this dissertation is being written, Pope Benedict XVI is showing the members of the Church what intellectual posture we ought to adopt in this time of uncertainty. The paradox is, even as the Pope reveals these concerns, he promotes a spirit of universal concern and respect for legitimate difference.

# Chapter 3

## Pope Benedict XVI, The Word and Catholic Homiletics

Chapter three introduces the metaphor of a reredos. A reredos is an ornamental screen made of wood or marble that commonly covered the back wall above the main altar in Catholic churches. Although many such altarpieces still exist, most reredoses were dismantled after the Second Vatican Council. The reason for this change stemmed from the Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* that called for church décor to aim at noble simplicity rather than at ostentatious magnificence (SC 270). Usually a reredos held several statues in various niches, along with other ornate decorations. Today many lament the removal of the traditional reredos. Perhaps time has proven that although some simplification might have been in order, the total abandonment of the reredos has led to a certain deprivation of the special beauty necessary for the sacred mysteries of the Liturgy. Figurines within the ancient altarpieces of cathedrals and worship sites within Catholicism were always positioned in a way that suggested they are visitors of the Communion of Saints from heaven. They appear at the earthly liturgy where heaven and earth are able to touch through the efficaciousness of the sacramental signs. Catholic Liturgy is considered the threshold of heaven. This is why Catholic liturgical preaching is a threshold of its own, the entranceway to faith that leads to the sacraments. Pope Benedict believes that when Liturgy is carried out properly even the cosmos, time, and space are affected. "The life of the Liturgy does not come from what dawns upon the

minds of individuals and planning groups, but from God's descent upon our world by the presence of the Kingdom of God made visible" (*The Spirit of the Liturgy* 168).

The metaphorical reredos introduced in the opening chapter of this dissertation, revealed key figures that begin to enter into dialogue concerning the post-Conciliar reform of the reforms called for by Pope Benedict XVI. The Pope and Simone Weil ponder the sacred mysteries that are being celebrated as they too await the appearance of the Wholly Other upon the altar. This Wholly Other is the same Christ who becomes visible in Word and Sacrament within the Eucharistic liturgy. It is this image of figures gathered in conversation that guides chapter three.

In this chapter, the writings of Pope Benedict XVI are reviewed in such a way that allows them to be placed eventually in *dialogue* with the Jewish philosopher Simone Weil, an outsider to Catholicism but a woman who grew in love with the mystery of the Catholic Mass. The purpose of this chapter is to present how the writings of Benedict XVI can be best understood and find their value when they are recognized for their dependence on the hermeneutical (philosophical) context in which they are applied. The major section of this chapter addresses the works of Pope Benedict in relationship to the study of liturgical preaching as a sacred conversation but which, like any other conversation and its meaning, is dependent on its embeddedness within this moment of history.

Of course study and dialogue is not enough. Chapter three supports the belief of Pope Benedict XVI that research must be scrupulously respected, but there also comes a point when "dialogue" can become simply a dissenting voice and no more than a device for undermining Catholic character. If the ethos of the Catholic faith is to be maintained,

much relies upon the duties of those that preach within the worship offered by the Church. This concern that Pope Benedict raises is what this dissertation recognizes as the reticence with which the Church has always remained vigilant regarding overly individualistic preaching. This tradition of reticence towards preaching as an art in itself is that which moves the modern Catholic preacher to discern the ancient and suitable question: How shall the thoughts of people be elevated, if the preacher's words never are? The answer to this question calls the preacher to look beyond created things for the origin of the elevated word. He or she will rely upon the words that the Almighty spoke to Moses, who excused himself because of slowness of tongue, "I will be in your mouth: and I will teach you what you shall speak" (Exodus 4:10-12). He will teach holy doctrine with the voice of authority (Mark 1:22) (Duffey, Preaching Well xii). Preaching for the Catholic liturgical preacher is always essentially an ecclesial action (Cameron, Preaching and Poetics 99). Pope Benedict sees a comparison between the dismantling of reredoses in churches and the way the gap and space left behind was filled in where the reredoses once stood. Now the priest becomes the point of reference instead of the entranceway for God to enter (Liturgy 80). People have to see him, to respond to him; to be involved in what he is doing (80). Not surprising is the fact that the more the attention focused on the priest, the fewer number of men responded to the call to the priesthood. The placement of the priest where the reredos once stood has resulted into a self-closed circle. Like the society around it, the Liturgy frequently no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself (80). Therefore, what is called for is preaching, personal, true, and new, "not through tomfoolery and banal experiments with words, but through a



courageous entry into the great reality is always ahead of us and can never quite be overtaken (Liturgy 169).

### 3.1 Pope Benedict XVI: The Early Years

Joseph Alois Ratzinger (Benedictus PP. XVI) was born on April 16, 1927, in Mrktl am Inn, Bavaria, Germany. According to *New York Times* writer and best selling author of numerous books on history and leadership, Stephen Mansfield, “Joseph Ratzinger was born in a manner that presaged much of what he would become. He arrived in the world at 4:15 a.m. on the eve of Easter, Holy Saturday, to parents Joseph and Mary. Young Joseph was baptized with water newly blessed for the Easter celebration; this fact grew in symbolism throughout his life” (His Life and Mission 21).

As Ratzinger later wrote in his autobiography,

To be the first person baptized with the new water was seen as an act of Providence. I have always been filled with thanksgiving for having had my life immersed in this way in the Easter mystery, since this could only be a sign of blessing. To be sure it was not Easter Sunday but Holy Saturday, but, the more I reflect on it, the more this seems to be fitting for the nature of our human life: we are still awaiting Easter; we are not standing in the full light but walking toward it full of trust. (Milestones: Memoirs 8)

From the beginning of his life, Ratzinger seemed to be destined to have a particularly special role to play in the will of God for His Church.

John Allen reported that Ratzinger became a member of the Hitler Youth when he was fourteen years old, as German law mandated this membership (Allen 27). When the Pope was referring in his Milestones: Memoirs to the year 1940, when Hitler won great triumphs in Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, even people that were opposed to National Socialism were experiencing a kind of patriotic satisfaction. Ratzinger wrote this about his father:

My father, however [sic] was one who with unfailing clairvoyance saw that a victory of Hitler's would not be a victory for Germany but rather a victory of the Antichrist that would surely usher in apocalyptic times for all believers, and not only for them. (27)

Ratzinger would be blessed with the same ability to see what others cannot yet see and take appropriate action to safeguard against that which might be undesirable for everyone.

Allen describes the elder Ratzinger as an unenthusiastic member who refused to attend meetings (93). It was well known that Ratzinger's father was a bitter enemy of Nazism (93). Joseph Ratzinger, Sr., was opposed to the Nazi regime because it was in violation of his Catholic principles and beliefs (93). Ratzinger, Jr., was eventually drafted in the Air Force Auxiliary program and then into the German army at Munich (93). His unit was never sent to the front. He was briefly held as a prisoner-of-war in an Allied camp near Ulm while his brother, Georg, was held as a prisoner-of-war at the same time in Italy (93). The brothers were reunited with their family after being repatriated in 1945 (93).

Following the war, the two brothers entered Saint Michael Seminary in Traunstein. Ratzinger was ordained with his brother on June 29, 1951 (91). Journalist David Gibson has a reputation as one of the keenest observers of Roman Catholics and its place among the landscape of the religions of the world. Gibson, who is a convert to Catholicism, points out that Joseph Ratzinger's journey to the priesthood was

“As inevitable as his birth was providential—and nothing like the clamorous transformations of adulthood that so many of his heroes experienced. There was no blinding light like Paul's road to Damascus, no lifelong repentance for a misspent youth like that of Augustine, no terrifying lightning bolt like one that sent Luther into a monastery.” (Gibson 146)

Gibson, however, compares the ordinariness of the man Ratzinger to the extraordinariness of the scholar that Ratzinger would become. Gibson portrays the way that God spoke to Ratzinger as passing through his head in order to reach his heart. Ratzinger would explore the life of the intellect by conquering the complicated systems of theology, one system at a time.

Joseph Ratzinger's dissertation was on Augustine, entitled "The People and the House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church" (180). His dissertation on ecclesiology and what Saint Augustine meant by the term "church" and especially the notion of the "People of God" was visionary. The image of the "People of God" that Ratzinger found in Saint Augustine (though Saint Augustine never used that term; Ratzinger had to employ a highly inventive exegesis of the sort he would later vilify) was not the bodily, priestly incarnation that the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) would later point to as a way of implementing a *congregatio*, a more horizontal church. (Gibson 174) Rather, Ratzinger found another ideal, a spiritual *communio* based on the sacraments down as a divine gift, protected by the hierarchy (159).

German academic process required Ratzinger to complete his Habilitation in order to qualify him for a professorship (161). Ratzinger then wrote on Saint Bonaventure and completed this requirement in 1957 (161). This second dissertation demonstrated Ratzinger's preference of spirituality over theology. His work would also reflect an important movement known by the French word *ressourcement*. This movement was popular throughout the continent but particularly within the Catholic Church. It advocated a recovery of original [Christian] wisdom, a return to original sources. Dominican Aidan Nichols writes about this in his book, Thought of Pope Benedict.

Nichols claims that “Ratzinger’s treatment of Saint Bonaventure’s ‘Theology of History’ is an exceedingly recondite topic that nonetheless is an eminently Augustinian project to make the Church’s present and future intelligible by relation to its past” (161).

Ratzinger’s scholarly approach to the subjects of his graduate works demonstrated intellectual power with a quiet disposition. These qualities are extremely attractive within the ecclesial academy. Even at this early stage of his career, Ratzinger was being watched for advancement in the circle of church leadership.

### 3.2 The Years as Scholar

Ratzinger was appointed a professor at Freising College in 1958 (Weigel 167). Freising plays an extremely important part in the formation of Ratzinger’s thought that will contribute to the project of this dissertation. It is in the seminary of Freising, where Ratzinger also taught, that his analyses resulted in his ascertaining that in Saint Bonaventure and in the language of the High Middle Ages, the conception of “revelation” is always a concept denoting an act (167). Therefore the word “revelation” refers to the act in which God shows himself, not to the objectified result of this act (167). Ratzinger argues that there must always be a receiving subject who is always a part of the concept of “revelation” (167). Where there is no one to perceive “revelation,” no *re-vel*-ation has occurred, because no *veil* has been removed (Milestones: Memoirs 154). Ratzinger was in a sense challenging traditional theology on the matter of revelation. He was defending a thesis in which revelation was defined as requiring a “someone” who apprehends the receiving subject. This was interpreted by the establishment of the seminary faculty as a dangerous modernism that had to lead to the subjectivization of the concept of revelation. Ratzinger would eventually be proven correct. In fact, it would be this insight that later

would become very important to the Conciliar discussion on revelation, scripture, and tradition that would take place at the Second Vatican Council.

The Council's seminal Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [Dei Verbum] took essentially the same view that revelation is to be understood as the act in which God encounters human beings, rather than as merely propositions about God. This way of understanding revelation will serve as a key component in this work. In the same way this work will serve Ratzinger in his reform of the liturgy where the worshipping assembly becomes an essential element of the exchange in worship. It will also base its counterpoint in its application to what must happen in the delivery of a homily within the liturgy when liturgical preaching is understood as preaching embedded in sacrament. Ratzinger establishes that revelation is always something greater than what is merely written down. Ratzinger uses the term *revelation* for the divinely enabled (subjective) penetration of the content of God's self-communication in history, as well as for that (objective) content itself. "Revelation" is, in not the least important of its denotations, the unveiling of the hidden meaning of the Bible (Nichols 59).

George Weigel, one of the world's foremost authorities on the Catholic Church, chronicles the rise of Ratzinger in his invaluable book for anyone seeking to understand Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI, (God's Choice: Pope Benedict XVI and the Future of the Catholic Church). Weigel reflects on Ratzinger's academic career (1951–1977) as well his role as a *peritus*, an official theologian during Vatican II under the cardinal-archbishop of Cologne, Joseph Cardinal Frings (169).

Ratzinger became a professor at the University of Bonn in 1959 (169). In 1963, he moved to the University of Münster, where his lectures proved his ability as a theologian

(170). In 1966, Ratzinger was appointed to a chair in dogmatic theology at the University of Tübingen. During this time of his life in the academy he wrote preliminary studies on religious dialogue, the duty of hearing and respecting differing voices within religious communication, and even downplayed the centrality of the papacy (170). It was also during this tenure at Tübingen that Ratzinger increasingly came to see the Marxist leanings of the student movement and other associated developments as undermining respect for authority, thus causing a departure from traditional Catholic teachings (171).

Ratzinger moved to the newly established University of Regensburg in Bavaria where he would happily remain for the rest of his academic career. The Tübingen experience had been a time of unremitting conflict due to the student protests and uprisings (Milestones: Memoirs 142). Ratzinger was eager to get back to serious intellectual work. Pope Paul VI appointed him to the International Theological Commission in 1969 (142). During its meetings, he deepened his friendship with Henri deLubac, SJ, and made new friends, including the Chilean theologian Jorge Medina and the French convert Louis Bouyer (143). These years also saw a ripening of Ratzinger's collaboration with the great Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, a pyrotechnic genius whose prolific theological, literary, and spiritual writings constituted one of the extraordinary Catholic intellectual achievements of the century (Weigel 174). In 1972, Ratzinger founded the theological journal Communio with Hans von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Walter Kasper, and others (144). Until he was elected as Pope, Ratzinger remained one of the journal's most prolific contributors.

In his Milestones: Memoirs, Ratzinger acknowledges that it was during the Regensburg years that he became convinced that a lack of a renewal of liturgical

awareness had caused a crisis in the Church (149). The disintegration of the liturgy is to a large extent the reason for indifference whether or not God exists and whether or not he speaks to us and hears us. Ratzinger expresses this in the Latin phrase: *etsi Deus non daretur*, raising the question that when the mystery of the living Christ is no longer visible in the liturgy, where else, then, is the Church to become visible in her spiritual essence (149)? The theological concept “unless it is not given by God” will be considered in depth in chapter four of this dissertation.

### 3.3 The Years as Cardinal and Archbishop of Munich

Joseph A. Ratzinger was appointed Archbishop of Munich and Freising in March 1977 (Gibson 175). David Gibson writes that Ratzinger knew he was called to a scholar’s life and never considered anything else (175). However, like his hero Saint Augustine, Joseph Ratzinger’s intellectual idyll was not to be. Pope Paul VI named Ratzinger to the See of Munich despite his hesitations and fears of what the “crushing burden” would do to him. A month later, he received a red cardinal’s biretta from Pope Paul VI (175). Saint Augustine would remain his “great master,” who apart from his theology and his Confessions, was known in his years as a bishop as a relentless battler against the many heresies that abounded in that rough-and-tumble era of the early church (176). Ratzinger’s episcopal motto—which he would retain as Pope—was “Co-workers in the truth.” Defending the truth as he saw it would remain his principal task. Thomas More and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as Christians who died for matters of conscience, became role models for Ratzinger (176).

Gibson also captures a critical insight into the nature of the man Ratzinger that would become Pope. He says that the church has always been battling heresy as long as

there has been a faith to defend, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that heresy is as important to Christianity as orthodoxy. Without heterodoxy (alternate belief), orthodoxy (right belief) would be adrift in its own reflecting pool, with nothing to bump up against and therefore no way to take precise soundings on the truth (179). Orthopraxy—doing right—tends to be the distinguishing mark of other religions (179). For Christians, on the other hand, it is what you believe that makes you Christian—or not. Right belief is more difficult to measure than right practice, so nonbelief or, more precisely, unorthodox belief is that much more useful in helping to separate the wheat from the chaff, in one of Ratzinger’s favorite Gospel citations (179).

In 1980 Pope John Paul II offered Ratzinger the position of head of the Vatican department overseeing Catholic education around the world. Ratzinger felt he had not been in Munich long enough (Fischer 44). A year later he was named as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly known as the Holy Office, the historical Inquisition (144). In the year 2000, the Congregation published a document entitled Dominus Iesus. This document reaffirmed the historic doctrine and mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel. The document addresses the question that one religion is as good as another. The consideration of the theme of syncretism or indifference resulted in the statement (paragraph 22) that followers of other religions can receive divine grace. The statement goes on to teach that it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation. Ratzinger resigned his post at Munich in early 1982. He was promoted within the College of Cardinals to become



Cardinal Bishop of Velletri-Segni in 1993. He was made the College's vice-dean in 1998 and dean in 2002 (Gibson 211).

### 3.4 Election

On April 19, 2005, Cardinal Ratzinger was elected as the successor to Pope John Paul II on the second day of the papal conclave after four ballots. On April 24, he was inaugurated in Saint Peters, formally becoming the 265<sup>th</sup> pope by the official Vatican reckoning.

### 3.5 The Name Benedict

George Weigel acknowledges that Ratzinger's choice of the papal name "Benedict" was interpreted by some as an indication that he intended to foster a smaller purer Church, a Church retreating into enclaves—a saving remnant preserving the truths that had once animated a now-dying European civilization (*God's Choice* 222). Weigel gives the most convincing argument that this presumption is anything but true. According Weigel, Benedict XVI took his name because he wants the Church to do for the twenty-first century what Benedict of Nursia and the Benedictine monks did for another world in transition: preserve what is best of the world's civilizational accomplishment while marrying it to a nobler, truer understanding of who we are—to a humanism that sees in the face of Christ the true meaning of our humanity (216). "The days of the one-way monologue between the Church and the modern world are over. John Paul II created a two-way conversation".(216)

### 3.6 Pope Benedict and the "Reform of the Reforms"

Alcuin Reid, a liturgical scholar whose work earned praise from Cardinal Ratzinger, tells the story that early in the morning of April 20, 2005, the day after

Ratzinger was elected pope, he received an email from a liturgist friend: “I’ve already sent in my request for an indult to be allowed to continue to say the modern Mass during the new pontificate” (Reid 89). Reid laughed heartily, because he said, “The last thing Pope Benedict would ever do would be to use his authority to proscribe a liturgical rite that has nourished the faith and life of at least two generations of Catholics—regardless of his appreciation of the value of the pre-conciliar liturgy, and of his support for the discussion of a possible ‘reform of the [liturgical] reforms’” (89). Pope Benedict is a *reformer* not a reactionary.

By common consent, Pope Benedict ranks as the keenest mind in the Church. As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger was, like Pope John Paul II, extremely bright and a very fast riser. Ratzinger was fifty-four when he was appointed to the Holy Office. Retired Archbishop Weakland eventually felt the strong discipline of the prefect but even then admitted that Ratzinger was fair, not politically motivated. Ratzinger, he explains, shared with his predecessor that appointed him to the most important position in the Vatican next to the papacy itself, John Paul’s “anti-Enlightenment, antirationalist, thinking” (Kwitny 517). Weakland described Ratzinger’s closeness to Pope John Paul II. “The pope defers to Ratzinger. When a meeting is about to close, it is Ratzinger who can add a last word if he wants” (518).

Ratzinger was the foremost youthful peritus of Vatican II (518). Cardinal Oddi said that eventually Ratzinger came to understand that many of the theologians of Vatican Council II were asking too much, so he abandoned them (520). Jonathan Kwitny writes this about Ratzinger in his book Man of the Century. He interviewed Father Karl Becker, the longtime friend and advisor of Ratzinger. Asked by Kwitny about Ratzinger’s

seeming transformation, at least in reputation, since Vatican II, Kwitny quotes Beker as saying, “Not Ratzinger changed but the time changed. Ratzinger, he says, thinks Vatican II lacked ‘profound effect because of the confusion afterward’ ” (409).

This change of time is at the heart of Ratzinger’s concern. He understands the importance of being in touch with the historical moment, even as it rapidly can change from moment to moment in an age of constant flux. Ratzinger approaches this concept of identifying the historical moment as a philosopher and theologian. Because of his philosophical-theological background Ratzinger wants to be in “in dialogue” with this moment in time and the key voices of this age. Living in dialogue with a given era requires listening to the demands of the *current* historical moment. Ignoring the demands of the historical moment can invite cynicism as disappointment from misapplied actions is encountered (Arnett and Arneson, Dialogic Civility 34). Knowing the historical moment in which we are living leads to understanding and reflective action that is appropriate and constructive. This is not to say that it is action without struggle or pain.

Ronald C. Arnett, philosopher of rhetoric and communications, proposes that this knowing most often occurs when we encounter a crisis or disruptions from the norm (35). In other words, when things are going along as usual or as expected, we can take the moment for granted. A crisis or disrupted practice allows us to open our eyes; it gives us the power to see things differently and, most importantly, recognize the historical moment (37). Philosophy is either appropriate or inappropriate for a given moment. This can be true about theology and especially ecclesiology too. The Church is a living Body. It must change in certain ways that are changeable. This being the case, certain things about the Church cannot be changed, because they spring from her historical origin. They

happened once and for all, so that they are constitutive elements of the Church (Ryan Handing on the Faith 91). One way to appropriately change what can be changed is to understand the historical moment. To do this one must work from theory-informed action (Schrag 57).

Ratzinger's greatest concern about this time in the Church is in the place of liturgical development. He claims that after the Council, authority imposed reforms that were "fabricated" —to use his term—by experts (Gamber introduction ix). The Pope believes one cannot manufacture a liturgical movement but one can help contribute to its development by striving to re-assimilate the spirit of the liturgy and by defending publicly what one has received (ix).

To meet the need of this current moment in time, Benedict XVI intends to continue to raise the profile of the "question of the liturgy." He wants to re-visit original horizons of the Council and in particular to analyze theoretically with where or when these horizons were smeared over. In many of his writings he has made it clear that he holds that the true celebration of the sacred liturgy is the center of any renewal of the Church whatever. Liturgy, for Benedict XVI is the source and summit of all of Christian life. Liturgy and liturgical preaching are of the utmost importance. This is why the Apostolic Exhortation that was expected to follow the Synod on the Eucharist that was held in Rome in 2005 was so slow in coming. The Exhortation was finally given on February 22, 2007, on the Feast of the Chair of Peter (*Sacramentum Caritas*). The Pope did not commission these directives in hostility to the Second Vatican Council. Benedict XVI's concerns are seeking critically to revisit what happened in the years that followed the council.

Over forty years have passed since the Council. Pope Benedict has pastoral questions that he wishes to face in respect of the new liturgy. He recognizes that revision and appropriate change is often a result from someone seeing what actually is, understanding why the current conditions and practices have emerged, and beginning the demanding task of addressing what conditions or abuses are in place.

Many in the Church consider the basic directions of The Apostolic Exhortation old. They criticize the Pope as a reactionary traditionalist. This criticism or suspicion is widely made by those that consider themselves specialists or experts. Sometimes a specialist is well-intended, but as Marshall McLuhan declared, a specialist can frequently be one who never makes small mistakes while moving toward the grand fallacy (41). We should not be surprised by a specialist mentality in our age. Benedict XVI calls the members of the Church to move beyond a specialized view. This is not to say that the Church can do without its experts and specialists in the pursuit of the truth. Indeed, Benedict respects their place. He wishes to re-establish a commitment to the community of the Church. His writings are an invitation to reflect on the reality of faith that is shared with others in Christ, not centered on one's self or one's own opinion within one's scope of competence. He also advocates listening to those outside the Church in order to foster a deeper love for the truth.

A survey of his writings will be presented here, so that this work might illustrate his intentions to be those of a vigilant shepherd that guards his flock, led by the Spirit. His desire is that every member of the Church can have their place and take their part effectively for the well being of the Church but never in discord with the Good Shepherd, who is Christ.

### 3.7 The Writings of Pope Benedict XVI: Prefatory Remarks

A man's writings are more than the thoughts that he is able to author. The brief biography and the description of happenings as was necessary in the introductory chapter, and studying the more immediate legacy of the Pope's mission does not tell very much about how Benedict XVI decided from his principles and convictions to face the world. This information does not provide us with the insight of how the Pope decided what he could do to help, and perhaps reform or reshape, the Church's liturgy. As it was, Benedict as a young priest was open and receptive to knowledge, eager to learn in the many opportunities given to him, happy in the surroundings that were provided for him (Milestones: Memoirs 101). A university environment was ideal for his inquiring intellect. Ratzinger read and reflected constantly. He was also, as can be observed from his memoirs, deeply religious and looked to God to use him according to divine providence for the good of the Church.

Benedict's writings are wide-ranging. His works span across such fields as theology, philosophy, art, aesthetics, sociology, and politics. Therefore, Pope Benedict is not easy to summarize or even systematize. The purpose here will be to organize a portion of Pope Benedict's work in a systemized fashion according to themes that relate to his call for liturgical reform and make these readily accessible for the reader who is unfamiliar with the Pope. By approaching this material by way of themes or headings that follow, I might run the risk of presenting the writings so they appear to have disconnectedness upon their initial reading. There occasionally will be parenthetical notes to "see below," to alert the reader that further development of a theme will occur in one of the related and subsequent chapters. The very fact that Pope Benedict was only

recently elected Pope, as well as the lack of any major work that exists in the concentration of this particular project within the field of homiletics and communication studies, necessitates that a number of what I call “loose ends” be left along the way, until the whole picture be presented. This is consistent with the reredos metaphor that I explained earlier with several seemingly unrelated parts of the altarpiece being carved at the same time, which eventually come together into a single backdrop. These “loose ends” do not in any way suggest that the Pope’s thought is inconclusive or that his thought is overly complex. This work understands Pope Benedict in light of the implications for liturgical preaching, while the project is constantly on the move, chronically unfolding and developing even at this time.

### *3.8 Il Rapporto*

A decision needed to be made: where does one begin in this examination of the Pope’s writings in order to formulate basic themes by which to interpret his call for reforms? I wish to present that the turning point in this drama occurred in 1985. Pope John Paul II convened an Extraordinary Synod to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Vatican Council II while Ratzinger was Prefect. The Second Vatican Council had challenged the Catholic Church to shift from an authoritarian religious institution to an authoritative religious *community*. This was not a revisionist corporate adaptation by the Church. It was totally new ground that was being covered. In the several months that it took to prepare for the Synod, John Paul II believed that Vatican II had this shift in mind. The new ground was visioning the Church engaging modernity in such a way that would adopt the possibility that humanity was in fact greater than modernity itself recognized. “Modern men and women, for all their experience of choice,

could still know what was true and good, and could choose truth and goodness” (Weigel 490).

Weigel gives one of the best accounts of this critical turning point in the life of Pope Benedict. Earlier in 1985 Ratzinger agreed to an interview with the Italian journalist Vittorio Messori that eventually was published under the title *The Ratzinger Report*. This book opened discussion that eventually played an extremely important part of the agenda of the 1985 Synod. Two essential questions Weigel explained, emerged from the interview Ratzinger gave. Had there been serious misinterpretations of the Council? Were those misinterpretations impeding the Church’s reception of Vatican II’s teaching, especially on the Church’s distinctive nature as a “communion” (503)? By putting these questions openly on the table, *Il Rapporto* was a major factor in setting the intellectual framework in which the Synod’s deliberation were conducted and its recommendations framed (503).

Ratzinger and Pope John Paul II both believed that the Church’s engagement with the modern world had to be distinctively ecclesial, or the Church would betray Christ’s great commission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). That and nothing less than that was what the Church was *for*. It was through Christ that the Church was an agent of liberation. The “Church in the modern world” had to be the Church *engaging* modernity (503).

This turning point did not occur to Ratzinger or even to Pope John Paul II in isolation or in a vacuum. By the time of The Ratzinger Report, a postmodern worldview was deeply rooted. In various analyses, other writers were recognizing related themes and



advocating the same trend of engagement to deal with these conditions rather than avoiding them or retreating into passive conclaves as attempts of survival. These writers are as different as Robert Bellah (Habits of the Heart), Alasdair MacIntyre (After Virtue) Stanley Hauerwas (The Peaceable Kingdom), Charles Taylor (Sources of the Self), and David Tracy (*On Naming the Present*), to name a few. Modernism was leading to new forms of totalitarianism, emptying of all time while breeding cynicism, banality, and removal of all differences and otherness. What they held in common was their conviction that institutions did not need to give in to pessimism in a Weberian way. They were not arguing for an all out rejection with the Enlightenment and modernity.

Consistent in the principle thought of these writers and others like them was the awareness that we were living in an age that called for historical subjects in conversation and certain degrees of solidarity. The contribution of Ratzinger in the midst of these voices was his ability to foster a critical and prophetic project toward modernity, one that did not necessarily confront it as much as advocating a Church that could welcome a spring time of faith rooted in a troubled but hope-filled present. The Ratzinger Report and the turning point it symbolized for Ratzinger, extended the horizon of the new ground that the Council spoke about. Ratzinger was the pioneer toward the creation of this frontier with his erudition and profound holiness. He begins to weave together theory, concern, and a deep sense of interpretation of the current situation. In a sense he was laying the foundation of how Christians should *do* Christianity in a modern society and world. Ratzinger was saying that none of the models of the self that resulted from modernity thus far could suffice any longer.

David Tracy depicts these models in his book On Naming the Present. The purely autonomous self of the Enlightenment, the expressionist self of the Romantics, the anxious self of the existentialists, the transcendental self of the transcendental philosophies and theologies of consciousness are all inadequate (11). Ratzinger was calling for a new theological understanding of both self and the present historical moment. He was determined to defend his belief that now was the time for the Church to provide formation for the development of members with memory, hope, and if called upon as a last resort, with resistance. The Church had been tempted to adapt to the dangerous conditions that surround the Church. Ratzinger's breaking point is rooted deeply in two fundamental theses summarized by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Ratzinger explains these theses in his book Truth and Tolerance. He said that the church had begun to reason as if religious statements were the same as a statement of natural science (215). Wittgenstein noted that it was imperative that religion be interpreted, but not in the same way as some claim to truth. (215) Pope Benedict sees this as excluding the fact that religious faith may be compared to a person's being in love. "Truth and love are identical. This concept of God attains its climax in the Johannine declaration: 'God is love' (I Jn 4:8). This sentence—if the whole of its demand is understood—is the surest guarantee of tolerance; of an association with truth, whose only weapon is itself and, thereby, love" (Truth and Tolerance 231). To overlook or eliminate this element from the equation would be to live in exile. Like the words of Martin Buber, "The real exile of Israel in Egypt was that they had learned to endure it" (Buber, Tales of the Hasidim 315). According to Ratzinger, this tragedy must not happen again.

Weigel's account of the Extraordinary Synod's Final Report claims that, with varying degrees of conviction and enthusiasm, the Synod members were persuaded by Ratzinger that there had been misinterpretations of the Council and that it was necessary to reread Vatican II.<sup>4</sup> How this would unfold would become a major challenge for both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. To paraphrase Richard Bernstein: We live in an odd historical moment, where the philosophical and the pragmatic crisscross (49).

The Ratzinger Report sparked indignation that culminated in the accusation that it was a pessimistic book. Pope Benedict elaborates on this reaction in his book The Yes of Jesus Christ, "The molders of public opinion placed it on the index of forbidden books; the new inquisition let its strength be felt" (43). This reaction by the opposition shows that there is no worse sin against the spirit of the modern age than to show oneself lacking in optimism. Christopher Lasch treats this same concern in several of his works, most notably The True and Only Heaven. In this book Lasch calls the "forbidden topic" of modern scholarship, *limits* (22). The word *limits* reminds us of our humanism (Arnett and Arneson Dialogic Civility 26). Benedict laments that he was not aware of anyone taking the time to investigate such old-fashioned questions, such as, whether what was claimed was true or false, whether the diagnosis was correct or not. The criterion was quite simple: "Is it optimistic or not" (Ratzinger, The Yes of Jesus Christ 44)? It completely failed the litmus test.

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<sup>4</sup> Orsuto refers to Benedict XVI, "Il dono dell'amore," pp.70-1. Pope Benedict's quote is from his "Apostolic Journey to Cologne of the XX World Youth Day, Eucharistic Celebration, Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Cologne-Marienfeld, Sunday, August 21, 2005, found on Vatican's Web site, <http://www.vatican.va> (accessed March 4, 2008).

### 3.9 Modernity

In a book entitled Without Roots, which Pope Benedict co-authored with Marcello Pera, Ratzinger pointed out that a “dictatorship of opinion” was growing (1997). The Pope was referring to the situation that people are marginalized and excluded if they do not go along with the reigning opinions. In his book Salt of the Earth the Pope states that “even good people no longer dare to stand by such nonconformists” (153). The danger of this is that Christians become so intimidated that they either give up their “controversial” beliefs or they remain silent about these beliefs that contradict the reigning opinions. Christians must learn how to dialogue with the modern world. Dialogue must be a two way street, according to Pope Benedict. The Church must be true to itself. It must meet the challenge to offer modernity an alternative to the stifling secularism that dominates high culture in the West (Ratzinger, Milestones: Memoirs 144–145). The Church must recover the ability and the courage to inspire its members. People, especially young people want to have a life worth dying for, not just living for.

This need for moving out of fear into dialogue with others is suggested in The Good Society by Robert Bellah. Here the author argues for democracy to be pure or true, there needs to be a system in which all the voices within that free society attend to what is significant. Moral discourse is essential in the family; it is also essential in the world (Bellah et al 275–276). It is equally essential for the Church. Pope Benedict defends that the Church is a *communio* that distinguishes it from a society. In an article by theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, the writer defines “church” in light of Ratzinger’s definition that flows from the New Testament: the church is “from above,” not from a humanly fabricated “above” but from the real “above” about which Christ says, “You belong to

what is below, I belong to what is above” (Jn 8:23). Ratzinger rejects and desires to correct the false ecclesiology “from below” which is widespread today. This idea presupposes that one regards the Church as a purely sociological quantity and that Christ as an acting subject has no real significance (Ratzinger Communio: A Program 77). 1992).<sup>5</sup>

The freedom that is prized in the modern world also has its Christian meaning. Charles Taylor is studying this recognition among others. Taylor acknowledges that modernity has actually enabled the church to live the gospel in a purer way, free of the continual and often bloody forcing of conscience, which was the sin, and blight of all those “Christian” centuries (Sources of Self 18-19). Does acknowledging our mistakes mean we must fall silent? According to Taylor, this is not the case at all. The very fact that freedom has been well served by a situation in which no view is in charge (modernity) has forced Christianity to discern again. This moment is seen by Taylor and Benedict XVI alike, as a time to reintroduce the transcendental outlook that human life flourishes when it sees a valid aim beyond itself (18–19).

In order to understand the theme of Modernity as the Pope discerns it, we need to place the concept at the heart of why it is so important to this Pope. As a spiritual leader of the Catholic Church, the Pope espouses not only ideological thought but also far more relevant religious foundations. As referenced earlier in this work, Pope Benedict models his beliefs about modernity after Romano Guardini, the great German theologian. Guardini had written extensively about the Church, “after modernity.” Guardini believed

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<sup>5</sup> God communicated himself to humanity by becoming man. His humanity in Christ opened up through the Holy Spirit in such a way that it embraces all of us as if we could be united in a single body, in a single

that Catholic Church was going to run out of gas if it did not renew itself spiritually (28). Benedict XVI's analysis of modernity is connected to the Church's spiritual beliefs about salvation. Where his mentor saw the Church running out of gas, Benedict prefers to heed his teacher's warning to lead the Church to a renewed holiness.

However, the Pope cleverly turns the table and suggests that it is the steam engine of the Enlightenment that is worn-out. After two centuries of profitable, trouble-free labor the Enlightenment has come to a standstill before our eyes and with our cooperation. (Thorton and Varenne 352–354). The Pope does not say that the whole inheritance of the Enlightenment as such is worn-out, nor does he want this to be the case. What he wants is a course of correction. Where the Enlightenment denied God, freedom is not built up, but freedom is robbed of its foundation and thus distorted. The Pope is not denying that some religious traditions in the past suffered from the pathology of religion. This pathology of religion is the most dangerous sickness of the human mind. But the Pope insists that this same pathology can exist where religion is rejected (353). Pope Benedict wants to dialogue with the atheistic systems of modernity. He fears that these systems are the most terrifying examples of religious passion alienated from nature, creating a life threatening sickness of the human mind (353). Consequently, he wants to call the Church to authenticity. This is a call to holiness. Only by a holy life can the Christian dialogue about the idea of God. Where there is no discussion about God, there is no truth about man. Man has no freedom. Only truth can set man free.

In the second of a series of sermons that the Pope delivered in the Cathedral at Münster to a congregation from the Catholic Student Chaplaincy, December 13–15,

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common flesh. Trinitarian faith and faith in the Incarnation guide the idea of communication with God

1964, Benedict gave a lengthy treatise of the questions at hand for all Christians in the modern world. The Pope said at that time, that if Christians are honest we will admit that the major question we have to face is not that of whether other people can be saved and how. He said, “We are convinced that God is able to do this with or without our theories, with or without our perspicacity, and that we do not need to help him do it with our cogitations” (What It Means To Be a Christian 46). Benedict declared that the question that really troubles us is not in the least concerned with whether and how God manages to save *others* (46). “The pastors should hunger, not for the comfort of the world’s pastures, but, like the Lamb-Shepherd Himself, for the salvation of the souls of the flock alone” (Undet 170). The question that torments Christians, according to Benedict, is much rather, that of why it is still necessary for *us* to carry out the whole ministry of the Christian faith—why, if there are so many other ways to heaven and to salvation, should it still be demanded of us that we bear, day by day, the whole burden of ecclesiastical dogma and ecclesiastical ethics?

It is this consideration that uncovers the core of why modernity not only intrigues the Holy Father in an inquisitive and scholarly way; modernity also raises the very essence of life in Christ, the mediator of salvation and Redeemer of the human race. Modernity has forced Christians to face directly what the Christian reality actually is. The Pope raises an alternative to the individualism and autonomy of modernity. He is restoring confidence in the belief that it is important to listen to things that are not healthy in order to know how we minister to it. This option identifies that this is a pastoral instinct. Modernity has pressed the issue that the real substance of Christianity goes far

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away from the realm of philosophical concepts and locate it in the historical reality of our lives.

beyond mere moralizing. This is another way someone else looks at the condition of the world. The Pope recognizes that both sides are really trying to make the world better. The Pope wants to raise the minds of all Christians to where our hearts must be. He allows the challenge of modernity to let its question resound: “Christian, what is that special thing in Christianity that not only justifies but compels you to live as Christians?” (What It Means To Be a Christian 47). This question assents to the hiddenness of God.

Thus his Holiness is approaching this age from a hermeneutical standpoint. He is clarifying that for too long people have been asking a lesser question. He is not ridiculing our questions, for he is the first to affirm that all sincere questions that search for truth are valid questions. It is just that some questions do not produce the answer that is most relevant for the circumstances of life in this given moment.

In a sense Benedict aligns his questioning in the same way that many of the modern liberation movements do. He tries to get to heuristic criteria and embedded historical presuppositions of the contemporary world of experience. He builds upon the developments caused by varied experiences that fundamentally have changed our understanding to humanity, society, the cosmos, and even God. So, he poses a different question. He tells us that the question cannot be that of how God is able to save “others”. This is God’s business, not ours. It does not negate that God could also refuse salvation. God can. This is also God’s business, not ours. The Pope opens the possibility of God’s activity to enable us to discover a better question for our time. The Pope suggests that even modernity has longed to hear man’s thoughts on the question of this age. The Pope is not presenting a completely new proposal.



Other major theological figures of the twentieth century discovered this critical supposition. For example, Albert Schweitzer, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Yves Congar, Hermann Häring, and others contributed to the epochal break toward theological correction that Benedict is speaking about. Consequently Benedict XVI formulates his question: “What is that special thing in Christianity that does not only justify but compels us to be and live as Christians?” (What It Means To Be a Christian 47).

For Pope Benedict XVI, the answer to this question has everything to do with meaningfulness. Man searches for meaning. This constructive engagement is analyzed by Hans Küng in Theology for the Third Millennium (161–165). The modern criticism of religion which discovered the always possible misuse of religion for the stabilization of unjust social structures (Marx), for the moral degradation of man (Nietzsche), and for infantile regression (Freud) has changed (Küng 163). Modernity has opened the way for us to think again why becoming a Christian simply means giving our assent to the great movement of the cosmos being drawn into the process of deification, into a return to the state from which it originated and putting ourselves at its service.

Becoming a Christian is not taking out an individual insurance policy; it is not the private booking of an entry ticket into heaven, so that we can look across at the others and say, “I’ve got something the others haven’t got; I’ve got salvation arranged for me that they don’t possess.” Becoming a Christian is not at all something given to us so that we, each individual for himself, can pocket it and keep our distance from those others who are going off empty-handed. No: in a sense, one does not become a Christian for oneself at all; rather. One does so for the sake of the whole, for others, for everyone. (56)

The Pope wants Catholics to testify to their baptism for the rest of their lives that we believe in its meaning. By baptism, we mean that we are ready to engage in a particular service that God requires from us in history.

We cannot of course always think through in detail why this service has to be done by me, now, in this way. That would contradict the mystery of history, which is woven together from the inscrutability of man's freedom and God's freedom. It should be enough for us to know in faith that we, by becoming Christians, are making ourselves available for a service to the whole world. (55)

Modernity and its confusion calls the Christian to move out of any selfishness which like all the rest of modernity only knows itself and only refers to itself. The joy and hope of Christianity, for the Pope, is the core of the Christian faith, namely, the gospel reality of passing into the new form of existence of someone who lives for others.

Pope Benedict XVI points to the 1960s when he became increasingly concerned about the crisis in the Church. It was during this time that the Pope started to realize that the matter of crisis was more than a matter of isolated problems. It was Pope Paul VI who began to address the foundational character of the crisis as a crisis of theology. Pope John Paul II set up structures for restoration. Meanwhile, many Catholic theologians began to feel they were being put on the defensive.

One way to understand these developing differences is to see the conflict through the lens of a new paradigm. According to church theologian Hans Küng, the theorist Thomas S. Kuhn, helps us to see the crisis that Benedict wishes to deal with. Kuhn's theory is called "Paradigm Change." This reliance on Kuhn's concept of paradigm change is not to justify his conclusions in the scientific and historical fields. Basically, what Kuhn's hypothesis generates is that new discoveries arise through a highly complex and usually long, drawn out process of replacement. A new paradigm replaces a previous one. Communication scholars will understand Kuhn's concept of paradigm in his comprehensive definition: "an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community" (175).

Stephen Toumlin finds that institutions and movements within society demonstrate their rationality, not by ordering their concepts and beliefs in tidy formal structures, but by their preparedness to respond to novel situations with open minds—acknowledging the shortcomings of their former procedures and moving beyond them (vii–viii). Both the theories of Kuhn and Toumlin support the fact that Pope Benedict is correct. “An entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on” is needed to be prudently understood in this time (Ratzinger, What It Means To Be a Christian 46). This recognition illustrates Pope Benedict’s hermeneutical approach to discussion about legitimate methods and principles for solving problems during this time of crisis in the Church and in the world. Precisely in the situation of a new paradigm, Benedict stresses the need for attention. There is a desperate need for further reflection now. This hermeneutical discussion of theory and practice is highlighted in the works of contemporary scholars, e.g., Jurgen Habermas, Richard Bernstein, and David Tracy.

Benedict desires to cultivate the tradition of paying *attention* in the method of theologians throughout the history of the Church. By analyzing the convictions of their times, the Pope is attempting to preserve or restore their models of understanding with appropriate, fresh embellishments. Benedict looks to theologians like Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Athanasius. The Pope wants us to return to the saints like Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, but also Abelard, Scotus, and Ockham who were partially different, sometimes irreconcilable; still they form a constellation in a given moment of time that helps us to understand our own time. This method of gaining insight from being attentive is propagating a dialectical understanding of history and the Church within the lived experience of a community of faith. Benedict’s

hermeneutical approach to *attention* brings hope that we will find enlightenment and certainty with its concentration on our advancements and decline, progress and lapses in memory, continuity and disruption—ultimately leading to transcendence in our age with the emphasis on community.

Arnett emphasizes the role of embeddedness within the history of the human community. Arnett traces this emphasis to Maurice Friedman to a contrast with Tillich's courage to be.

We need the courage to address and the courage to respond. I use the terms in conscious contrast to Tillich's "courage to be"; for we are not directly concerned with our being, and we cannot aim at it, or even at being a 'centered self,' in Tillich's phrase. The real courage that is asked of us—a greater and more terrifying courage—is the courage to respond, the courage to go out to meet the reality in this moment, whatever its form.<sup>6</sup> (Civility 245).

This is not to suggest that the Pope is trustful of innovation. Pope Benedict's writings are some times very direct and critical of the carelessness of novelty. His *attention* is to connectedness. For Benedict, one must pay close attention to horizons of understanding. Attention has a hermeneutical dimension. Students of the humanities understand this in the context of Hans Gadamer.

These horizons of understanding, or as Gadamer names them "horizons of interpretations" supply the tool for opening up the possibility of recapturing lost attitudes, attitudes toward God, toward those around us, and toward ourselves (Truth and Method 171).. Some things die out; some are forgotten only to return later in a new way, but development always means participation in a beginning that is open to what lays head

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<sup>6</sup> Ronald C. Arnett provides a full treatise of this concept in a pertinent article: "Toward a Phenomenological Dialogue," Published in the *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 45 (Summer 1981), 201-212 and footnote 62ff.

(Ratzinger, New Song 150). Nowhere is this concept more important for Pope Benedict than when he applies it to the liturgy. Benedict resounds the question asked by his teacher, Guardini, are we even capable at this time to offer a genuine liturgical act? (Krieg 75) Here is where Benedict translates “attention” from philosophical language into a state of mind required for liturgy. For Benedict, worship of God is meant to be an encounter. It is a communicative act of the highest degree. For man to interpret what God is communicating, we need to bring our own horizon of experiences and ideas to the worship. In short, the more attentive we are in a phenomenological sense, the richer the potentialities available for divine service. No one is its one and only creator. For each of us it is participation in something greater that transcends us all, yet just in this way each of us is also an agent precisely because each is a recipient.

To approach every liturgy with an awareness of both what we are doing and with whom we are doing it is the beginning of the liturgical act or, more accurately, the beginning of a whole world of acts that constitute our service of God, our liturgy (Krieg 74). Everything we do—our entering, our being present, our kneeling, sitting and standing, our listening, seeing and speaking, our processing, our reception of the body and blood of Christ, our leaving to love and serve the Lord—all of this is divine service. But “this is so only when all we do ‘overflows’ from the awareness of a collected heart and the mind’s attentiveness.” (Krieg 74)

Pope Benedict calls Christians to the teachings of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council when they said that there is a universal call to sanctity that is ‘a fundamental requirement arising from the mystery of the Church.’” (Lumen Gentium, no.

42) John Saward addresses this in his book The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty:

She [the Church] is the chosen Vine whose branches lives and grows with the very sap of Christ, the Mystical Body whose limbs receive supernatural life from the head, Bride of Jesus, who gave Himself up on the Cross for her sanctification. What the Church is corporately, her members must personally be. Those who in her Sacraments are given the Christ-life of Grace must actually live it. Christians are called to become what they are by their baptism: children of the Father, members of the Son, temples of the Holy Spirit, and partakers of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Benedict finds a parallel between attention and beauty by identifying what it is that one beholds. For the Pope what becomes even more beautiful is when one pays attention and beholds not some thing but someone, particularly the Wholly Other One who is God.

### 3.10 Responsive Obedience

Peter Seewald, in an interview included in Ratzinger's book God and the World, commented to the Pope that Guardini once wrote that anyone who keeps company with the Church will, at first, experience a certain irritation and impatience with the way she always puts him in opposition to what other people want. Seewald goes on to quote Guardini:

But once the blindfold has been taken away from his eyes, then he will recognize how the Church always liberates those who live in her company from the power of the contemporary world and puts them in touch with enduring standards; the strange thing is, no one is more skeptical, no one has more inward independence, over against "what everyone says," than the person who truly lives with the Church. (360)

The Pope responds in a delightful fashion. He inspires the members of the Church to our roots. Christians must become bold again. They need to ask again the ancient questions

and concern themselves with what the roots are that need to be protected and cultivated. The Pope talks about many Christian communities that have grown tired. He even mentions Church history recording how frequently bishops can become weak. Seewald replies: “Even bishops give us the feeling that the Holy Spirit left them long ago!” (360). Then the Pope remarks that Guardini suffered great doubts concerning his faith, himself. These doubts occurred when he was still a student in Catholic theology. “One of his teachers at Tübingen, he was called Koch, was very much influenced by the heritage of liberalism” (360). Naturally, Guardini, in his youth, was on the side of his teacher. But the Holy Father enjoys pointing out that it was during this time of doubt, that Guardini finally came face-to-face with the real Church, in the liturgy (360).

This conversion is described in chapter two of Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in the Modern World edited by Robert A. Krieg, CSC. Krieg portrays Guardini in a spirit of despondency over his studies as well as experiencing that many of his university peers had abandoned their Christian faith (18). Krieg notes that at first amid his confusion, Guardini discovers one continual source of delight and intellectual excitement: Munich’s concerts, theatres, and museums (18).

Krieg’s account of Guardini’s crisis of faith attributes the change towards religion again beginning at the end of the 1904–1905 academic year when he returns to his family home on Gonsenheimer Strass in Mainz. After numerous discussions with his childhood friend Karl Neundörfer, Guardini underwent a moving experience, which he later compared to Augustine’s conversion (18). Krieg recounts this renewal in this way: “One afternoon in his attic room, he discovered the truth of Matthew 10:39: ‘Those who find

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<sup>7</sup> John Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty: An Art, Sanctity and the Turth of*

their life will lose it; those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” For the remainder of his life, Guardini frequently spoke on the leap of faith that is required for the Christian life (19). What touches Pope Benedict most about Guardini’s return to the faith was the influence he received by his visits to the nearby Abbey of Beuron and how Guardini was immediately drawn to the liturgical celebrations of the Benedictine monks, who were in the frontline of the liturgical renewal of that period (19).

It was shortly after that Guardini would become engaged in further theological studies and also enters into discussions and correspondence with the Jewish philosopher and mystic Martin Buber, the phenomenologist Max Scheler, and the art historian Paul Clemen (21). Buber and Scheler in particular would also have an impact upon the thought of Pope Benedict by their emphasis on the phenomenological meaning of the human being and the belief that to be fully human one desires to know the Other (21).

Premier to Benedict’s admiration and respect for Guardini and the part he would play in Pope Benedict’s own life is that Guardini is among the first pioneers who got rid of the liberal trend in theology (Seewald 359). This courage is for Benedict, not a result of infantile dependence. “It is the courage to contradict and the freedom to go against prevailing opinions, the freedom that offers us a firm footing and which the Church has not invented for herself”.(360)

To begin to understand the theme of obedience and what this concept means to the development of Benedict’s liturgical reforms, we need to return to his work contained in his book God is Near Us. Here Pope Benedict relies on an earlier work by Josef Pieper entitled Joyful Wisdom. Pope Benedict refers to John’s Gospel where John shows us that

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*Catholicism*, (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 1997, 26.



even where God sets no limits, man can sometimes do so. Benedict demonstrates two such instances. He shows how this is apparent in the figure of Judas. There is the “No” stemming from greed and lust, from vainglory, which refuses to be obedient to God and accept God. Benedict quotes Nietzsche: “Sooner remain in debt than pay with a coin that does not bear our own portrait—that is what our sovereignty demands”. (30) This is the “No” given to the Other because we want to make the world for ourselves and are not ready to accept it as a gift from God. This is crucial in the understanding that Benedict will hold for all of life but especially for liturgy and holiness. This refusal, which arises from the greed and the pride of man, is always a danger. “The camel will not go through the eye of the needle; it sticks its proud hump up, so to speak, and is thus unable to get through the gate of merciful kindness”. (31) This vainglory is represented by Peter: the false humility that does not want anything so great as God bending down to us; the false humility in which pride is concealed, which dislikes forgiveness and would rather achieve its own purity; the false pride and the false modesty; rather, he desires that humility which allows itself to be cleansed and thus becomes pure (32). This is the manner in which he gives himself to us (32).

It is from this interpretation that Benedict poses for the members of the Church, spirituality, if we can say, of true obedience. Obedience is an enigma for this age. It is difficult to understand consent when freedom is misunderstood. Today, emancipation is considered the essence of redemption and freedom is presented as the right to do everything I want to do and nothing I don't want to do. The Pope is aware that the very concept of obedience has, so to speak, been anathematized. Obedience has been eliminated not only from our vocabulary but also from our thinking. To comprehend what

Ratzinger infers by the virtue of obedience we must take a look at it in the context of his theology of the Church. Pope Benedict is speaking of responsive obedience, namely obedience that is exercised and responds in relationship to the historical moment. Pope Benedict's document The Ministry and Life of Priests attempts to establish a rightly understood obedience that must be rehabilitated and assume once more its true value at the center of Christian life. This compels us to go back to the idea of Church that he proposes in the peak of the crisis he identified in the Ratzinger Report. No doubts exist in Cardinal Ratzinger's mind at the time that the crisis focuses before all else on the crisis of the understanding of the church, on ecclesiology. "Herein lies the cause of a good part of the misunderstandings or real errors that endanger theology and common Catholic opinion alike". (Ratzinger and Messori 55) Ratzinger explains that it is his impression that the authentically Catholic meaning of the reality "church" is tacitly disappearing, without being expressly rejected (55).

Many no longer believe that what is at issue is a reality willed by the Lord himself. Ratzinger compares this mentality to the model of certain North American "free churches," in which in the past believers took refuge from the oppressive model of the "state church" produced by the Reformation. Ratzinger defends this analogy by recalling that those refugees no longer believed in an institutional church willed by Christ and wanted at the same time to escape the state church, so they created their *own* church, an organization structured according to their own needs.

It is this modern forgetfulness or rejection of the Catholic concept of church that certainly involves for Ratzinger the gravest consequences in relation to obedience. The Pope sees this as the origin of the decline of the authentic concept of "obedience." He

surmises that according to some, obedience is no longer even a Christian virtue but a heritage of an authoritarian, dogmatic past, hence, one to be overcome (55). Ratzinger admonishes that if the church is permitted to in fact become *our* church, if *we alone* are the church, if Christ does not will her structures, then it is no longer possible to conceive of the existence of a hierarchy as a service to the baptized established by the Lord himself (55). It is in the text of the Ratzinger Report that we find the Pope's fundamental concern for the current crisis. It is a crisis of rejection of the concept of an authority willed by God, an authority therefore that has its legitimation in God and not—as happens in political structures—in the consensus of the majority of the members of an organization. Ratzinger teaches that the church's deep and permanent structure is not *democratic* but sacramental (55). Consequently, this indispensable condition is *hierarchical*. This authority is based on the authority of Christ himself, which according to Ratzinger and Church magisterium, Christ willed to pass on to men who were to be his representatives until his definitive return. As Ratzinger states in the Report: “Only if this perspective is acquired anew will it be possible to rediscover the necessity and fruitfulness of obedience.”(55)

Pope Benedict further expounds upon this theme of obedience in a treatise for priests entitled: The Ministry and Life of Priests.<sup>2</sup> This document addresses the ultimate goal of every human being. This goal is to become happy, but Pope Benedict reminds his readers that happiness is found only in opening of self to the divine—that is, in divinization. He writes in “The Ministry and Life of Priests” that the council says, with Augustine, that the goal of history is for humanity to become love, and that means

adoration, living worship, the City of God (Civitas Dei); thus the deepest longing of Creation will be realized: “That God may be all in all” (The Ministry of the Life of Priests 23) The Pope declares that only in this broad sense can we really understand what worship is or what the sacraments are.

This perspective leads us back to the very concrete matter of obedience. Pope Benedict sees the Christian faith as never purely spiritual and interior. For Pope Benedict, the Christian faith is never a purely subjective or private-personal relationship to Christ and his Word. Rather, as this important document proves, it is a concrete, ecclesial reality. This writing is where Pope Benedict builds his case for ecclesial obedience which the prerequisite for the entrance into the divine mysteries of the liturgy. It is all related for Benedict, to the Christological obedience, which reverses Adam’s disobedience. This great Christological obedience is concretized in ecclesial obedience. The Ministry and Life of Priests acknowledges that the council could have insisted more strongly that there must first be a common obedience of all to the Word of God and his example, as presented in the living tradition of the church (23). Benedict confirms that the common bond of obedience is also common freedom: it offers protection against arbitrariness and guarantees the authentically Christological character of ecclesial obedience (23).

“Ecclesial obedience is not positivistic; it is paid not to merely formal authority but rather to someone who obeys on his own part, too, and personifies the obedient Christ” (24).

This theology of obedience does not depend on the virtue and holiness of the officeholder. It refers precisely to the objectivity of faith. It is a gift from our Lord that transcends all subjectivity. In this sense, Pope Benedict, clarifies that obedience always transcends the local church: it is a truly Catholic obedience. The bishop, for example, is

obeyed because he represents the universal church in this specific place. In addition, Pope Benedict says such obedience also points beyond the current moment, since it is directed to the totality of the history of the faith. It is based on all that has grown to maturity in the *communio sanctorum*, and thus opens itself up to the future, in which God will be all in all and we will all be one (24). In Pope Benedict's point of view, the demand of obedience makes a very serious demand on the one who holds authority.

To be certain, Pope Benedict's profound concern with the true meaning of obedience does not any way imply a desire to control the truth. One need only look at his Episcopal motto that he selected from the Third Letter of John, "Co-worker of the Truth." He explains the reason behind the selection of this phrase in his Milestones: Memoirs: "Despite all the differences in modality, what is involved was and remains the same: to follow the truth, to be at its service" (153). In today's world the theme of truth has all but disappeared, because truth appears to be too great for man, and yet everything falls apart if there is no truth. For these reasons, Pope Benedict's motto also seemed timely in the sense that this is an age that yearns to hear the truth proclaimed but in a way that recognizes the diversity of our times.

Pope Benedict understands that the Church cannot afford to be preoccupied with the past and turn her back on the future. The reforms that he intends to make recognize that the age of absolute sovereignty is past. Like Stephen Toulmin, the Pope knows that the only serious questions are, "How can we best respond to this past? Are we ready to take advantage of the novel opportunities it provides? Or shall we go on acting as though nothing had happened" (Toulmin 208)? In order to answer these questions, the times require that we enter into networks of companions that enable us to serve human needs

more effectively. These networks that must include *outsiders* can also provide the Church an adaptability that will enhance her means to influence in the playing fields of life.

Chapter four will introduce one such *outsider*: Simone Weil.

# Chapter 4

## Simone Weil and the Word

It is clear from chapter three that Pope Benedict would consider it very important that the applause that has become very common in Saint Peter's Square following each of his liturgical homilies did not mask the fact that the Gospel, not he, was the source of his stirring talks. Pope Benedict approaches preaching as an act that can be heard in such a way that the listeners face not the homilist but God and thus are moved and inspired to act upon the Word.

This chapter introduces Simone Weil, a Jewish philosopher and mystic, as a means of focusing on her philosophical works and applying what we can learn from them to help us see that liturgical preaching must speak to us about everything we do every day. Simone Weil represents someone standing on the outside, since she was attracted to the Catholic Church but never officially joined the Church. Her works are dialectically contrasted with those of Pope Benedict XVI presented earlier, in order to provide a clearer image of what contemporary homiletics might look like when it is imperative that the Church's preaching reach diverse listeners.

This chapter begins by establishing the validity of an outsider's perspective. Simone Weil challenges the Church by first loving the Church, deeply and sincerely committing to the vision of Catholicism, and at the same time still choosing to remain outside. Simone Weil writes beautifully, but because of the novelty of her vision, she is not easy to understand. Therefore this chapter delves into exactly who Simone Weil is so that we may see what in her development in spirituality allows her to be a light that

illuminates what Catholics think and do, sometimes in a non-reflective way. Only after understanding her life, can one actually see her marching as a companion with the Word of God. It becomes evident that what she searched for all of her life had already come down and found her and lifted her up to the status of companion of God.

#### 4.1 A New Saintliness

There are many contemporary writers in theology or philosophy that are better known and would serve as extremely interesting conversationalist with Pope Benedict XVI on the subject of the Word of God and preaching the Word. Hans Küng was a colleague of the Pope. For example, Küng and Ratzinger would make for a stimulating discussion on the topic of ecclesiology. Placing Hans Dombois, the Protestant ecumenist in conversation with Pope Benedict would lead to a contentious but constructive debate about the modern papacy. Protestant theologian and Catholic convert Friedrich Heiler could provide a deep and scholarly consideration of history and theology. However, Simone Weil, a Jewish philosopher, unintended spiritual mystic, political sociologist, and Frenchwoman who is considered by many as an “outsider Saint,” introduces a voice of uncommon love for Jesus, the Gospel, and Roman Catholicism in a way that cuts across religious boundaries and reaches the roots of all that is truly meaningful. This is the story about the particular note of conviction that arises from the feeling that her role as a mystic was so *unintended*, one for which she had not in any sense prepared. In the words of Leslie A. Fiedler: “An undertone of incredulity persists beneath her honesty. Quite suddenly God had taken her, radical, agnostic, contemptuous of religious life and practice as she had observed it!” (Introduction viii)



Simone Weil is considered by many a saint of the present moment. Those that love her and cherish the meaning of her brief life on earth call her a new kind of saint. This saintliness must possess a special “genius,” capable of blending Christianity and Stoicism, the love of God and “filial piety for the city of the world” (viii). To those who knew her personally, Simone Weil, they tell us, felt that she could be only a forerunner and foreteller of such a saint; for her, humility forbade her thinking of herself as one capable of a “new revelation of the universe and human destiny ... the unveiling of a large portion of truth and beauty hitherto hidden” (xi). However, I agree with them. She is precisely the saint she prophesied.

André Gide, the famous French, Surrealist author, is apparently the first to use this description in reference to Weil. T.S. Eliot touches upon this “outsider” stance when he writes the Introduction for her work The Need for Roots, that was translated into English in 1925, as written by one who was “more truly a lover of order and hierarchy than most of those who call themselves Conservative and more truly a lover of the people than most of those who call themselves Socialist. No one could possibly call Simone either Conservative or Socialist. She can be imagined to stand at the entrance way of both. It is my hope that by my introducing Simone Weil this chapter might be able to expand the grounds to search within the Catholic Church’s preaching practices to see if the Church wants to be an ongoing alternative to this age or to join the bandwagon of decline. Simone Weil helps us gain a clearer picture of the preached Word on the inside by someone who stands on the outside but very close to the entranceway of the Church.

## 4.2 Remaining On the Threshold

Pope Benedict's "reform of the reforms," which are bound to make a significant impact of the liturgical preaching of ordained ministers in the Catholic Church he leads, point to basic elements through which we can interpret his understanding of preaching the Word of God. From whatever angle we look at Pope Benedict XVI—from the intellectual, the religious, the social—Pope Benedict remains a man of the Church. He speaks to us about institution and membership, a certain philosophical school, a definite model of church, a framework that is entirely Catholic. Benedict is a Catholic in the Roman sense of according magisterial authority to the official tradition of the institutional church.

As we shall see, Simone Weil respectfully brings a second way of thinking on how to be catholic. At the first glimpse of her, we could be tempted to place her in the category with those that recognize what we might call the ministerial authority of the consensus tradition of the global church, but we shall quickly learn that she offers us much more than even this. Although it can be possible for Catholicity to become the antidote to tribalism and parochialism, Simone Weil is more about the new Pentecost that the recent Popes have been addressing. Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes about this thought in his essay "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way. Vanhoozer says: "Pentecost is especially important for understanding catholicity: the Spirit did not create church unity by creating a common tongue but ministered the Word of God to the assemble crowd in such a way that each person heard it in his or her own native language (62; Acts 2:8)." Simone Weil might say that perhaps there is not one language of heaven but many.

It is precisely this notion that moved me to think about her as I studied the project of contemporary homiletics because she was capable of experiencing so much of what every Catholic yearns to know, and yet remained on the threshold of our beautiful religion. What does she say to us that are rooted in the context of our Catholic faith? What can her remaining outside “without moving, quite still ... indefinitely ...” teach us about our preaching that would enable us to “act as a neutral medium,” like water? (Vahoozer 62) How would this fully implicit universality empower us to be a mouthpiece for God in a new kind of preaching? To what does she bear witness?

#### 4.3 The Turn to the Other

With the ushering in of the postmodern era, a new interpretative appropriation of the world unfolds. Gianni Vattimo claims that on the one hand is the return of religion in our common culture, in the form of a renewed attention to the teaching of the Church, of a need for ultimate truth, and of a desire to recover one’s own identity, especially with reference to transcendence (Vattimo 87). On the other hand is the collapse of the philosophical principles of atheism, to which philosophy has not yet paid attention but with which it should begin to come to terms (87).

I want to place Simone Weil as another figure into the reredos that I am imagining in this dissertation, so that I may eventually introduce Pope Benedict XVI, the pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, and Simone Weil, a Jewish socio-political philosopher and mystic, into conversation with each other. The purpose for positioning the two is to demonstrate that the vitality of preaching the Word of God and the liturgy in which it is embedded goes beyond a phenomenon of cultural backwardness. By grasping the basic principles for appraising the outcome of the effects of Catholic liturgy and preaching

upon both parties (religious and philosophical), we can recognize that it is the same process that promotes the end result for both, thus clarifying further what the answer is to the fundamental question of this dissertation: “Why the reticence towards preaching on behalf of the Catholic Church might be a wise practice to continue in this moment of time?”

The major changes and upheavals of the twentieth century have moved our world from the more stable cultural conditions into the transitional postmodern dynamics of our contemporary situation. The previous achieved *sense of place or home* has been uprooted by a search for what Ronald C. Arnett calls a *philosophical sense of home* (Dialogic Civility 296). Arnett contends that the historical problematic before religion and faith results from living in postmodernity while attempting to use pre-modern metaphors as guides (296). Arnett establishes the case that in a postmodern era in which metanarrative structures are no longer in place and we are long past a provincial perspective, we need to replace the exhausted metaphor of the therapeutic self (296). In the case of preaching, the new place must become the “humble narrative” or as Arnett relates a philosophical sense of home (Communication and Community 44–45). Simone Weil supplies a way to look at all of this in the wake of an age whose rhetoric is void of transcendence. She offers a life and a voice in contrast to the modern mood of skepticism.

#### 4.4 Simone Weil and Personal Reticence: Sometimes Playfully, Often Times Painfully

According to Patricia J. Crockett MGL, in an article “Good News in and for Our World Today: Catholic Faith and Culture in Western Postmodern Societies”: “This process [of transition] has precipitated an acceleration of the disengagement of the inter-relationships of cultural and religious institutions already underway” (5). The Catholic

Church, no longer adversarial, or in conquest mode, desires to embrace a new stance of being *in* the world.

Marie-Magdeleine Davy has written a work about Simone Weil's fidelity to the Word of God in the New Testament and her mysticism and describes her in this way: "Essentially paradoxical, even contradictory, Weil nevertheless presented in herself a perfect unity. Whether one looks at her interpretations of philosophy, her immense understanding of different religions, her commentaries on Buddhist or Taoist texts, or on the Upanishads or the Paternoster, she is magnificently one" (Davy, 16). What interests me most about Simone Weil are her writings in which she expressed herself so directly that what she wrote presents a form of personal dialogue about God's Word and Presence from which I could not pull back. Davy writes about Weil speaking above most ordinary octaves. Weil admits that most of us expect to hear dialogue on our own scale. Davy recognizes in Weil's writings that she was always a little cross purpose with existence; she was a living challenge to the mechanical, to the slumber in which men are wrapped (14). It is this quality of the keenness of her attention that intrigues me about Simone Weil. This special attribute of Simone Weil is derived from the alertness of her consciousness. It is this very intensity of her alertness that connects her to Pope Benedict. Both figures understand that truth is not taught; it is felt. Towards the end of her life, the mystic vision came to her almost daily, and she did not have to wonder (in such matters, she liked to say, one does not believe or disbelieve; one *knows* or does not know) (Waiting xxv). Both Simone Weil and Pope Benedict call us to receive God's Word by profound attention but also an additional quality: a total immobility. This immobility was one of Simone Weil's great possessions. It is this second quality that enables me to

introduce Simone Weil as a representative beyond the classification of groups or categories. To place someone in a school, a religion, a nation is reassuring to us. It gives us a feeling that it is by incorporation that one experiences what we do, thus validating our own homogenous company. An entire new world awakens and comes into vision when someone *outside* of our alliance is able to apply the same label. Thus, Simone Weil and her writings provide the value of a revelation for my work in analyzing the study of Homiletics and its needs for today's world. What is remarkable is that this ability to pay attention and the discipline to tolerate immobility is the key to what distinguishes Pope Benedict and Simone Weil and unlock for them the way to *obedience*.

Earlier we surveyed modernity and suggested that globalization has resulted in a collapse of geographical boundaries as cultural identity makers. Traditional boundaries have become blurred and porous. Bert Hoedemaker recommends that the opportunity for new configurations of religion, rationality, and faith are to be found in the new contexts resulting from the now global tension between life world and rational systems experienced by both individuals and societies (Hoedemaker 2).

Institutions always have difficulty remaining faithful to their founding principles. Diogenes Allen in a brilliant book, entitled Three Outsiders, believes if institutions are to be purified, they need to be purified. They need to be challenged by those who are deeply and sincerely committed to their vision. (12) Simone Weil does not seek to be destructive in her criticism of institutional Christianity. Whether outside the Church or on its fringes, she is there because she wanted Christianity to be free of all that obstructs its witness to God (12).

#### 4.5 Questioning the Question of Outsider

If an artist were designing the reredos referred to earlier in this work, the artist would carve the sculpture of Simone Weil in such a way that Weil would depict a woman in deep dialogue with Pope Benedict XVI. The sculpture of Pope Benedict would stand within a traditional, elevated panel. He would be situated in the reredos panel while he held the scriptures or perhaps the ancient Petrine symbol of the keys of the Kingdom of God, a symbol of his ecclesiastical authority. Perhaps a miniature Bavarian Bear from his Episcopal coat of arms would sit at his feet but the predominant symbols decorating the image of Pope Benedict would be those directly associated with the Catholic faith. Benedict would have an expression upon his face of saintly piety or perhaps even an officious aura that artists craft when they want to honor the benevolence of a revered leader of a trusted institution. While facing the sculpture of Simone, his eyes would be looking attentively at her, but in some way the artist would also need to supply at least a tilt of the Pope's head as if it were just beginning to notice and turn in the direction of the appearance of another visitor at the area of the main altar below where the priest celebrant would be offering the sacred mysteries.

Meanwhile the sculpture of Simone Weil would stand within an opening in the reredos not an enclosed panel. The open archway would suggest that she was peering in from the outside through a *threshold*. Simone would be thoroughly engaged in the conversation with Pope Benedict. This image that is being created is partially founded on a theory that emerges in the book Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman by Hannah Arendt. Arendt summarizes Varnhagen by writing, "She wished to stand outside reality, to merely take pleasure in the real, to provide the soil for the history and the

destinies of many people without having any ground of her own to stand on” (145).

Simone Weil does not fall into the parvenu category that Arendt paints of her subject Rahel Varnhagen. Simone Weil’s life can be understood by Arendt’s description that implies someone that waits for history to unfold, discovering what she could be.

In light of this type of destiny, Simone Weil’s facial expression within this reredos niche would need to convey she was quietly enjoying a well-engaged discourse; perhaps her eyes would be slightly closed to connote how intensely she was paying attention. The artist would want to position Simone’s body in such a way that it would appear ethereal, as if she were entering not only human discourse, but also a celestial or mystical communion. Simone’s sculpture could include one of her fingers pointing inside to the altar beneath her place in the reredos where Mass was being offered inside. She would be gazing into the sacred mysteries from her place within the threshold. Her body would also be slightly turning towards the same visitor she was beginning to behold even as she conversed with Benedict. Her entire demeanor would be of lively conversation and captivated attention even while she was waiting for the Wholly Other about whom she and the Pope were speaking to appear. If the artist could manage these two figurines within the same reredos, one an insider and the other an outsider, the artist would have created not only a master altarpiece but also a treatise of the theology of Catholic preaching as experienced at one and the same time by a man of the Church and an outsider “saint” of the Church universal. For this is who Simone Weil is: an outsider but truly a saint.

To understand the gaze that both Pope Benedict and Simone Weil experience as depicted by these sculptures in this imaginary reredos, this work defines what Simone



Weil means when she said that the world need saints that do not love beings and things in God, but *from the abode of God* (50). Weil writes that being close to God (the soul) views all beings and things from there, and its gaze is merged in the gaze upon God (Waiting 50). This is what Simone Weil means by the gaze of God and how her comprehension of the gaze upon God compares to the similar appearance of God in the Liturgy as Pope Benedict experiences it. Hidden but nevertheless revealed somewhere in appearance is the goal of Catholic Homiletics. The preaching that makes renewal of the faith possible is preaching that presents itself anew in our culture by abandoning the project of grounding beliefs upon natural essences that are taken as norms, observing instead the freedom of dialogic mediation.

#### 4.6 A Different Sense of Hope between Persons

Sometimes we meet people for the first time head on. An age that reeks of excessive individualism is all too familiar with this type of abrupt introduction. There are other times when we experience a better approach to come to know someone. This encounter might be a result of connect to a person through the lens of peripheral vision. We learn all about the person with whom we are conversing, not only by our exchange of words but by the context of their lives. We experience their real problems, their joys, their beliefs, and even their dreams. This wider vision defines the ground on which Simone Weil and Pope Benedict stand—looking for emergent lines of trust in an hour of hope. It is this sphere for dialogue that allows for distance and attentiveness to the other. It is this rootedness in the other within a spiritual framework that is the goal of both Pope Benedict and Simone Weil’s sense of call to holiness. Both ask questions by the witness of their lives that provide us with a sense of rootedness: “Every human being needs to

have multiple roots. He needs to receive practically the whole of his moral, intellectual and spiritual life through the intermediary of that milieu in which he naturally participates” (Weil, The Need for Roots 43).

Just as food is required for human life, so are friends and companions. In fact, the word *companions* comes from two Latin words: *com*, meaning “with,” and *panis*, meaning “bread.” Companions enrich and nourish our lives. They are like sunshine and water, restoring life where life has been drained. They strengthen us in heart, mind, soul, and body. No one delights us more than a companion with whom we can share bread.

The Judeo-Christian tradition is full of touching stories about companions on a journey. The opening chapters of Genesis recount the journeymen that mysteriously visit Abraham and Sarah and bless Father Abraham for his hospitality and breaking of bread with them. The Patriarch Joseph, son of Jacob, won the favor and the confidence of Pharaoh and became the overseer of the granaries of Egypt. When famine ravaged the lands of neighboring peoples and they came to Pharaoh to beg wheat in order to stay alive, he said to them: “Go to Joseph; and what he says to you, do” (Gen. 37: 5-10). When the whole of those regions were famished, Joseph, opened all the storehouses, and sold to all comers from Egypt’s empire. More over all the earth’s companions came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth (Gen. 41: 55). And of course there is the story of Moses and the manna in the desert when all the companions on the journey were fed with the food come down from heaven (Ex. 16: 2-4, 12-15).

The New Testament records companions gathered at meals as well. There is the last Supper, the wedding feasts at Cana, the sharing of loaves and fishes, and Jesus’

breaking of bread with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to name a few. One of the most moving stories is told about the moment when Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Olives. He craved the companionship of the Apostles. They let him down, yet, God sent the Spirit to inflame the hearts of the Apostles, and they became faithful companions to Jesus and to each other.

Although both the New Testament and the Old Testament recall companions that journey together in the bond of the covenant, there are stories of those that are known for their role as outsiders, those not of the actual covenant. These stories are told in their memory because although they are *outsiders*, they are recognized as companions in the history of salvation. They are respected and honored for their virtuous life and the common values they shared with the People of God.

One example is the Pharaoh's daughter. It is intentional that Scripture does not mention her by name in the Exodus account indicating that she lives outside the covenant. It is her compassion and protection of Moses that is recalled with great affection. Nevertheless, the story of the great Law Giver can never be told without remembering her who remains nameless for all ages.

Another outsider is the centurion of the New Testament. He is not an Israelite. He is a general in the Roman Imperial Army. Few members of society would be considered more than an outsider than this man. This centurion had a servant he held in high regard, who was at the point of death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to the Lord, asking him to come and save the life of his servant. Upon approaching Jesus they petitioned him earnestly. They told Jesus, "He deserves this favor from you because

he loves our people, and even built our synagogue for us. Jesus set out at once” (Lk. 7:2–6b, NAB).

Although there are many accounts of outsiders contributing to the advancement of the preaching mission and salvific act of Christ, one final example will suffice here for this study. In Luke 9:49–50, the disciples of Jesus complain that they saw a man driving out demons in the name of Jesus. They want to stop the man because he was not of the same company as the followers of Jesus. The Lord replied, “Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you is for you” (The New Interpreter’s Bible 212-213). translation). Scripture confirms, “Jesus conferred no special privileges on his hometown, his family, or his disciples. All that matters was faithfulness to God’s plan for saving sinners, showing mercy, establishing peace and justice, vanquishing the rich and lifting up the poor. It matters not whether that work is done by insiders or outsiders” (30).

It is this outsider role that attracts me to Simone Weil. The Catholic religion and saints that went before her inspired her in the spiritual life, and she too inspires holy people. Many people of different religions take her as a companion on their spiritual journey. Simone Weil offers this study a voice that does not seek to confront other traditions; rather her voice seeks to serve the solution to conflicts.

André Gide called her the saint of all outsiders and Weil wrote:

I should betray the truth, that is to say the aspect of truth that I see, if I left the point, where I have been since my birth, at the intersection of Christianity and everything that is not Christianity, I have always remained at this exact point, on the threshold of the Church, without moving, quite still *en hypomene* (it is so much more beautiful a word than *patientia*). (An Anthology 6)

The idea of Simone living at the threshold is an idea that will be developed in depth in the next chapter.

Simone Weil also provides a kindred voice to that of Pope Benedict XVI. In one of his early autobiographical writings from long before he was elected to the Chair of Peter, he wrote these words:

The decision that comes from Christ is a “yes” of love, because this alone, precisely with its risk of suffering and losing the self, brings man to himself and makes him what he should be.

It should not surprise anyone that Pope Benedict’s first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love; 1 John 4:8, 16), is dedicated to the theological virtue of love. The encyclical states: “It is to the theme of love that I wanted to dedicate my first encyclical, which was published today; this happy coincidence with the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity invites us to consider ... the entire ecumenical journey in the light of God’s love, of the Love that is God” Simone Weil echoes this “yes” of love by Christ in her own words and expands them beyond Christianity into all true religious sensitivity: “Our neighbor, our friends, religious ceremonies, and the beauty of the world do not fall to the level of unrealities after the soul has had direct contact with God. On the contrary, it is only then that these things become real” (Waiting for God 168).

#### 4.7 Simone Weil: Her life

Margery Williams’ The Velveteen Rabbit includes a dialogue between the Rabbit and the Skin Horse. The rabbit asks: “What is real? Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?” “Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you”. (18)

To attempt to place Simone Weil in a position to conduct a conversation with Pope Benedict, this work looks at her life as she lived it. She did not become Simone

Weil all at once. It took her, her entire life, as brief as it was. It is in this light that a summary of her live experience is presented here.

Simone Weil (pronounced Vey) was born on February 3, 1909, in Paris in her parents' apartment at 19 Boulevard de Strasbourg (Petrement 7). She was born early, a month before term, but was a fine infant, who developed well until the age of six months (7). Weil would tell the story of how her mother became ill at that time from an attack of appendicitis. Her mother was forced to stay in bed, but she nevertheless continued to nurse her baby (7). From that time on Simone did not fare so well and her progress was slow and painful (7). Years later she used to joke about this precocious decline, apparently due to her mother's milk having been affected by her illness. "With a smile, she would complain that she had been poisoned in infancy. 'That's why,' she would say, 'I am such a failure'" (7). Sickness would affect her entire life.

Biographer Gabriella Fiori remembers that Simone was little interested in the amusements and conversation of other girls of her own age. Simone's nurse, Ebba Olsen, claimed that Simone never played with dolls. Simone's hands were small, compared with the rest of her body, and not adroit. With the cold they would swell and become red with chilblains. For this reason she wrote very slowly as a child, and when her parents decided reluctantly to enroll her in the second grade of public school, in October 1917, Simone could not keep up with her comrades (17).

These early childhood misfortunes, as well as numerous tragic circumstances throughout her life caused her parents, to whom she was deeply attached, to be kept in an agony of anxiety. They surrounded her with constant care, which certainly put off the inevitable

outcome of an existence so free from anything tending to keep it captive in the flesh (Weil, Gravity and Grace xvi).

Despite Simone's poor health, what was most striking was her desire to be like everyone else. Her health continued to be poor, but for that she has a sovereign disregard. Jacques Cabaud writes about the determined efforts she made to overcome her illnesses. He reports that one cold day in 1930 as Simone returned from a game of rugby, she was prostrated by an agonizing headache, far worse than those she had grown accustomed to suffering. "It was the first attack of sinusitis not properly diagnosed until 1939, which was to torment her to the end of her life" (33).

Fiori tells the story that when Simone Weil was ten years old she told her middle-class parents she had become a Bolshevik and would be reading the communist party newspaper from now on (52). Even as a child, Simone Weil seems to have troubled her parents, to whom being comfortable was an end of life and who refused to or could not understand her mission. By the time she entered college, however, she was writing incisive critiques of Marxist thought. Gustave Thibon, the French Catholic author, in the Introduction to his remarkable compendium of Simone Weil's writings entitled Gravity and Grace, explains: "I want to stress the fact that it would be harmful to her memory were the eternal and transcendent part of her message to be interpreted in the light of present-day politics and confused with party quarrels" (Weil xvii). Thibon stresses the point that throughout her life, Weil avoids the possibility of any faction or social ideology being able to claim her: "Her love of the people and her hatred of all oppression are not enough to place her among the leftists any more than her denial of progress and her cult

for tradition authorize us to class her on the right” (xvii). From her early childhood she knew that the social field is above all the abode of what is relative and evil.

According to Simone Pétrement, this impulse to join any specific party must have welled up at a moment of indignation, only to sink back again very quickly. “I find it impossible for her to have accepted any limitation on her liberty of thinking, speaking and acting” (24–25).

Simone’s father was a well-to-do physician. Jillian Becker writes about Simone Weil’s parents in The New Criterion. Becker describes them belonging to that large international class of cultivated, bourgeois Jews who were left wing in their politics and considered themselves heirs of the Enlightenment rather than of Mosaic Law, or survivors of the Inquisition and the ghetto (“Simone Weil: A Saint for Our Time?” 14). The only thing Jewish about Simone upbringing was the intellectual climate. She was always working, studying, and thinking. Already, says her nurse Ebba Olsen, of Simone at eleven years of age: “She thought a good deal and this took up a good bit of her time” (Petrement 22).

Consistent in all of the biographies written about Simone was the fact that her parents expected of Simone and her brother André that if at all possible they both become a genius. André was a genius and his intellectual giftedness made Simone envious early on. She actually fell into despair over this at the age of fourteen. Hope re-enchanted within her when the thought came to her that was another way to qualify for the status of genius. She writes:

At fourteen I fell into one of those fits of bottomless despair that comes with adolescence, and I seriously thought of dying because of the mediocrity of my natural faculties. The exceptional gifts of my brother, who had a childhood and youth comparable to those of Pascal,



brought my own inferiority home to me. I did not mind having no visible successes, but what did grieve me was the idea of being excluded from that transcendent kingdom to which only the truly great have access and wherein truth abides. I preferred to die rather than live without that truth. After months of inward darkness, I suddenly had the everlasting conviction that any human being, even though practically devoid of natural faculties, can penetrate to the kingdom of truth reserved for genius, if only he longs for truth and perpetually concentrates all his attention upon its attainment. He thus becomes a genius too, even though for lack of talent his genius cannot be visible from outside. (Waiting for God 23)

This desire for genius but also for the transcendent life would remain with her for the rest of her life.

Gabriella Fiori writes about a school friend of Simone (Jacqueline Cazamian) recalling how Simone had “a sort of archangelic character: a transcendence of intellect which admitted no compromise of a physical or emotional order. Never has a more splendid soul appeared to me to be less embodied”. (27)

Disembodied is not a quality that is admirable in modern society. People rather prefer to be completely embodied. This suggests that they are well integrated, acknowledging their conquering of self-reliance and personal sufficiency. However, this is not always the case. It is unfortunate for people to dismiss the spiritual simply because we are afraid of it or suspicious of it. Simone’s proficiency in spiritual matters was exceptional. This is especially odd because she actually had no childhood religious formation. Neither did she intentionally seek the spiritual life. It seems completely the possibility that her predisposition for the supernatural was innate. She confesses that the first time she ever recited a prayer was during a visit to Assisi in Italy in 1937 (27). This idea is supported by the way that Jacques Cabaud’s book Simone Weil: A Fellowship In Love carefully points out her unique demeanor earlier in her life as a small child. Simone had a sharp, restless glance. In contrast with a certain vivacity of facial expression, her

speech emerged with a controlled and purposeful slowness, and her delivery was staccato and monotone (32). Her friends said she sounded like a woman preaching for the Salvation Army (32). In 1915, when she was only six years old, as an act of charity and compassion, she refused sugar in solidarity with the French troops entrenched along the Western Front (32).

This reference to Simone's glance recounted by Cabaud, contributes to my theory about the gaze of Simone that is foundational to the mystical experiences she would encounter and the change that would occur within her writings from that point on. In one of Simone's own works Ecrit Londres, that is referred to in Richard H. Bell's book Simone Weil: The Way of Justice As Compassion, Bell quotes Weil: "the first duty of a school is to develop the power of attention in children, by school exercises to be sure, but by reminding them ceaselessly that they must learn to be attentive in order to be able, later on, to be just" (Bell 147). Years later, Bell explains, Weil would write in an essay that when we force ourselves to fix the gaze, not only of our eyes but also of our souls, upon a school exercise in which we have failed through sheer stupidity, a sense of our mediocrity is borne in upon with irresistible, evidence (147). No knowledge is more to be desired. If we can arrive at knowing this truth with all our souls we shall be well established as the right foundation (147). In order really to pay attention, it is necessary to know how to set about it. Simone Weil gave great value to *experiencing* something in order to learn its truth.

Marie-Magdeleine Davy registers that this authenticity can only be explained by deeply underlying sources of Simone's activity, the seriousness of her research and the

keenness of her attention, and also the perfect consistency of even the smallest acts in her life (Davy 15). Truth is not taught in any sphere; it is felt (15).

As stated previously, even though Simone Weil was born a Jew, she was unacquainted with Jewish thought. As she was growing up, she had very little instruction about the great Hebrew writings. This study wants to pay particular respect to the Jewish faith and considers seriously the controversy that surrounds Weil's lack of intellectual depth regarding the Hebrews scriptures. This lack of profundity in the basic understanding of Judaism of religions confounds this study because Simone Weil was acquainted, and very well acquainted, with a number and philosophic systems. It is important then, to understand why she adopted such an attitude, particularly since she pronounced many harsh judgments, which without being exactly anti-Semitic, at least not with intention, were so profoundly unjust as to be almost intolerable (18). From her childhood, Simone Weil was an academic (5). While she was still very young she challenged authority, never in a reactionary way but always with an overriding sensitivity towards those that suffered (5). This dissertation desires in no way to contradict many revered Jewish writers and philosophers that raise objections to Simone's weaknesses in understanding what it means to be a Jew. For example, Emmanuel Levinas, one of the most respected philosophers of our time says that Simone Weil never understood her Jewishness because "she never understood anything about the Torah" (qtd. in Bell 180). Levinas, in fact, says Simone ignored Judaism in a royal way (Levinas 134).

This idea is addressed by Leslie A. Fiedler, a scholar in the writings of Simone Weil. Fiedler wrote the Introduction in the English translation of Weil's book Waiting for God. Fiedler also wrote a Jewish writer's survey of Jewish writers entitled To the

Gentiles. In this book, Fiedler relates that although Simone Weil's ancestors had been Jewish, the faith had quite disappeared in her immediate family, and where it flourished still among remoter relatives, it had become something cold, oppressive, and meaninglessly legalistic to a degree that made Simone Weil all of her life incapable of judging fairly the merits of Judaism.(xi)<sup>8</sup>

This writer wants to clarify that if there are any of Simone's writings touched upon here that are offensive to Jewish readers, the same can be applied to Catholic readers. This is a strong point made by Davy when she writes that Simone Weil's violence is not directed against Jews but also against Catholics. It was while she was denouncing the inadequacies of the Roman Catholic Church the most harshly, that she felt the nearest to joining it (19). Although her family childhood home was warm and pleasant (Cabaud 30), she preferred to preserve her solitude (Waiting xi)! She felt she inherited this quality as a little girl from her agnostic parents and the circumstances of her life (xi). She considered this origin a special providence, a clue to a special mission (xi). She felt privileged to speak the truth, even the brutal truth. "I should betray the truth" she would protest, "that is to say the aspect of truth that I see, if I left the point [of objectivity], where I have been since my birth, at the intersection of Christianity, and everything that is not Christianity" (Waiting 49). Simone would say that the children of God should not have any other country here below but the universe itself, with the totality of all the reasoning creatures it ever contained, contains, or ever will contain. That is the native city to which we owe our love (49).

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<sup>8</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler also relates that there seems to be no sense of alienation on the part of Simone Weil from the general community with her Jewishness, but grew up with a feeling of belonging quite firmly to a

This independence must have been at play when Simone Weil selected where she would study on the university level. Presented at the same time as Simone de Beauvoir, she and de Beauvoir chose the École Normale that had only opened to girls very recently (Cabaud 3). Before then, girls attended the École de Sèvres, in the suburbs of Paris, where standards were not so high (3). Simone Weil came in first of those testing for the entrance exams; de Beauvoir was the runner up (3). These two remarkable young women were at the top of a list of thirty men (31).

Her years at the École Normale are characterized by her propensity to become an anarchist, agnostic, and practically Marxist professor all in the same person. In fact, as it is stated in Miklos Vetö's book, The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil: The underlying reason for the inability of most critics and readers to conceive that there is no break between the first and last works of Simone Weil is that they can or will not accept that this young political theorist is the same person who was later "captured by Christ" (Vetö 69) who thinks that "God alone, and absolutely nothing else, is worthy of our attention" and who asks, "How can a being whose essence is to love God and who is located in space and time have any vocation other than the Cross?" (Vetö 8)

At the École Normale, where she studied from 1928 to 1931, finally attaining her *agregée de philosophie* at the age of 22, she was a student of the philosopher Alain (Fiedler 15). It was a time of radicals—those utterly bleak years at the pit of a world-wide depression. (15). The École Normale was renowned for the independence of spirit of its students (Miles 7). This was a natural setting for Simone, although while she studied there she acquired a reputation for eccentricity. Siân Miles distinguishes, however, that

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world whose values were simply French, that is to say, a combination of Greek and secularized Christian

“hers was not the cultivated originality typical of both youth in general and of that decade in particular. It was a genuine nonconformity with contemporary social standards that required courage to maintain and which must have made her miserable (7).

After graduating second in her class, she began her teaching career (7). Simone Weil was always loved by her students (7). Accounts of her teaching show how deep was this affection and respect in which she was held by her students. In each of her teaching assignments, at Saint-Etienne, Le Puy, Auxerre, and Roanne, she participated in social activism on behalf of the local working class (7). There were times when she would leave her teaching post to take up manual work among the workers, sometimes in the most deplorable working conditions (7). By entering the manual workforce, she wished to examine for herself the meaning of the phrase “workers’ control of productio” (7). Miles attests that this is the pivot upon which both her social and philosophical concerns rest: “The free person is he or she whose every action proceeds from a preliminary judgment concerning the end which he or she has set and the sequence of means suitable for attaining this end” (11). Being capable of thought, human beings may choose between responding like robots to stimuli that act upon them from outside or adapting to an inner representation of that necessity which is formed idiosyncratically. That choice determines whether they are free or not (11). Similar experiences in the work force allowed Simone Weil to gain an overriding impression of the pliability of human beings and the speed with which all feelings of anger or revolt against inhumane conditions was changed to total submission (11). She was shocked to discover that even she was subject to such a human course of submission (11). The last thing she expected was that she herself would

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elements. ([Waiting for God](#))

resign to the docility of a beast of burden (11). This confession is one that she never was proud about. She describes in a letter to her friend Albertine Thévenon. In this same letter, she writes: “And in the midst of it all [the suffering of the worker that no one talks about] a smile, a word of kindness, a moment of human contact, have more value than most devoted friendships among the privileged both great and small” (15).

This sentiment reveals Simone Weil’s extraordinary capacity to understand what human brotherhood and sisterhood is all about. It also conveys her phenomenological approach to interpret life in general. Simone Weil believes that one must experience truth in order to know it (Fiedler 19). This understanding about her approach to knowledge helps us to comprehend the events that will provide her spirit with a new certainty and her private writing with a new language. According to Leslie A. Fiedler, Simone’s decisive event in her spiritual education had been, she always felt, her work in the factory (19). She had not known what she was seeking at the machine of the worker, but she had found it nonetheless: branded with the red mark of the slave (19). Actually she was being conditioned to become incapable of resisting “the religion of slaves.” This phenomenon will be developed in more depth in chapter five. In one sense however, Simone Weil insisted afterward she had not needed to be converted; she had always been *implicitly*, in “secret” even from her lower self, a Christian; but she had never knelt, she had never prayed, she had never entered a church, she had never even posed to herself the question of God’s existence (19).

Two spiritual incidents occurred after the factory event that deepened this change that began within Simone Weil. In the spring of 1937 Simone traveled to Italy. The first contact with Catholicism occurred in this way. Simone Pétrement explains it best:

“Did you notice that the chapel where he [Saint Francis] prayed, in Santa Maria degli Angeli (the abominable great church built around it), is a little marvel of architecture, as superior to the works of the majority of famous architects and as a popular song is to those of the majority of famous musicians?”

It was in this small chapel that Simone had an experience that she later remembered as having truly meant something to her. She does not mention what happened there either in her letters to her parents or the letter to Posternak, but she was to speak of it in 1942 to Father Perrin: “In 1937 I had two marvelous days at Assisi. There, alone in the little twelfth-century Romanesque chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, an incomparable marvel of purity where Saint Francis often used to pray, something stronger than I compelled me for the first time to go down on my knees.” (Petrement 307)

Simone had never prayed before. She was afraid of the power of suggestion that is in prayer. She wrote later in her letters to her spiritual director: “Until last September I had never once prayed in all my life, at least not in the literal sense of the word. I had never said any words to God, either out loud or mentally” (Waiting 29).

Her parents took her to Portugal in 1938. While in Solesmes, she listened to a Gregorian chant while she was experiencing a severe migraine headache. During this painful attack, the chant allowed Simone to feel the joy and bitterness of Christ’s passion as a real event, though she told her parents later that she could not attach any name to it at the time “in a moment of intense physical suffering, she tells us, “when I was forcing myself to feel love, but without desiring to give a name to that love, I felt, without being in any way prepared for it (for I had never read the mystical writers) a presence more personal, more certain, more real than that of a human being, though inaccessible to the senses and the imagination” (27).

Simone would have one further profoundly mystical experience. While she meditated with so focused a concentration on the Lord’s Prayer, Christ himself



“descended and took her” (xxiv). It is this remarkable freedom from her actual shamefastness before the normal procedures of Christian worship that Leslie A. Fiedler believes lends a special authority to Simone Weil’s testimony. Fiedler acknowledges that nothing comes to Simone Weil as a convention or a platitude; it is as if she is driven to reinvent everything from the beginning: ““God has mercifully prevented me from reading the mystics, so that it would be clear to me that I had not fabricated an absolutely unexpected encounter’ ” (21). Fiedler further states that surely no mystic has ever been so scrupulously his own skeptical examiner (21). Simone Weil’ has experienced the state of a soul which could not possibly be produced by human effort or industry.

These beautiful religious experiences moved Simone Weil to also experience a terrible loneliness and a human vulnerability. For anyone with even an elementary background in mystical theology, these results are further indication of the authenticity and validity of Simone’s encounter with the Wholly Other. As *The Catholic Encyclopedia* defines: The contents of mystical theology are doctrinal as well as experimental, as it not only records the experiences of souls mystically favored, but also lays down rules for their guidance, which are based on the authority of the Scriptures, on the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, and on the explanations of theologians, many of them eminent as mystics. At the same time, the Catholic Church’s long tradition of mysticism recognizes the importance of following proven rules and precepts that are usually framed for the special use of those who have the occasion to direct souls in the ways of mysticism, so as to preserve them from error while facilitating their advancement. Like other proven true mystics in the Catholic religion, God provided her with a circle of friends to support her and to assist in mitigating the loneliness that she

felt and reassuring her that these spiritual blessings were not promptings of her own self-seeking. God also guided her to a wonderful priest, spiritual director, and friend. His name was Father Perrin. He was a man of sincere faith and knew the principles of spiritual direction, so he knew that their friendship was a gift from God even though in the material order. He respected Simone Weil in a way that honored the unique individual she was. He knew how to spare her of any further vulnerability. She wrote about him in this way: “I believe that, except for you [Father Perrin], all human beings to whom I have ever given, through my friendship, the power to harm easily, have sometimes amused themselves by doing so, frequently or rarely, consciously or unconsciously, but all of them at one time or another ...” (Waiting 46-47).

This way of seeing Simone Weil and understanding her spirit is captured by Fiedler in this manner. Fiedler recalls Simone reflecting on her vulnerability and comparing it to the wounded hen that prompts all the other animals in the chicken yard to fall upon it (xxi). The figure of the wounded hen is one Simone Weil returns to elsewhere. This image explains in a vivid way the immense sensitivity beneath her inflexible surface. She used one more heart-rending figure to describe herself. She likened herself to the color of dead leaves, like certain unnoticed insects (xxi). Then, once again, as pointed out by Fiedler, after she studied personal notes and phrases from Simone’s journal that recur, “never friendship, never permit oneself to dream of friendship ... friendship is a miracle!” (xxi)

On August 24 in 1943, Simone Weil died in Ashford, Kent, England (Petrement537). The coroner’s report said that ‘the deceased did kill and slay herself by refusing to eat whilst the balance of her mind was disturbed.’” (537). Other reports do not

suggest the term Anorexia Nervosa. She most likely ate less, as she refused food in solidarity with those in the world that go hungry every day.

Richard Bell wrote in his book Simone Weil: The Way of Justice and Compassion: “In the end Simone did not wish so much to be something other than a Jew as much as she wanted to be regarded simply as a human being—as ‘her’ in an ‘impersonal’ way—not as a Jew or a Christian, and to regard others in the same way” (176). It is this quality of being “human” even more than anything else that gives the possibility of her serving as a companion that transcends any particular religion, a perfect candidate free from any specific collective.

#### 4.8 Simone Weil’s Relation to the Word of God: Companion *En Marche*

Simone Weil was a woman of the twentieth century, influenced by the times in which she lived. During her brief lifetime, she saw the devastation of two world wars, the presence of conflict in nature through Darwin, conflict in society through Hitler and Marx, and conflict within ourselves through Freud (Allen 97). On the religious front, the twentieth century commonly experienced a secular mentality, sterile intellectualism, bourgeois reformism, and pale idealism (Dorrien 2). Religions were seeking ways to dialogue with science, and also attempting to develop theologies of world religions and models of interreligious dialogue. As a philosopher, Simone Weil would not live in a vacuum but fully immersed in the times. Like many others she would have desired to build bridges between where war and political ideologies created persistent divisions. It was a time of “rethinking traditions” (Allen 97). Because she lived in the twentieth century and nevertheless experienced what I believe were authentic mystical experiences through her relationship with the Catholic Church, I find her even more interesting. She

shares with our times the awareness of the pain created by conflict and the renewed search for the spiritual that many in the world hope might provide meaning to our existence.

My intention here to analyze the writings of Simone Weil is not an easy project to manage in light of the description of the times in which she lived. It is difficult to organize her writing into clear categories; i.e. philosophical and religious, secular and sacred. There is overlapping in all the bodies of her writing. Simone Weil was many things to many people.. My method seeks to view her writings as they associate to the understanding of the Word in Sacred Scripture. This correlates to some degree with her association with the Catholic Church and after her introduction to the Catholic Church. It must be remembered that the Catholic Church was the only Christian Church with which she was well acquainted. She also felt that the Catholic Church was not sufficiently “catholic” or universal because it did not explicitly endorse what she believed to be genuine spiritual truths in some of the non-Christian religions which she studied (Allen 98).

These writings from this first period explore contemporary problems from revolutionary-political standpoints. At the early age of fourteen, Simone Weil fell into what she subsequently described as a bottomless despair at being excluded from the “transcendent realm only truly great men enter and where truth resides” (Miles 7). In these early writings nothing stands out as important to Simone as the concept “attention.” Her use of “attention” is crucial to understanding her thought. Miles interprets Simone’s employment of the term “attention” not to mean the kind of concentrated mental effort normally suggested by the expression “paying attention,” nor is it any particularly careful

kind of scrutiny. It is rather a form of stepping back from all roles, including that of observer. "It is a distancing of one's self not only from the thing observed, but from one's own faculties of observation". (8).

Simone admonishes others for the mistakes in geometry problems and faulty connections of ideas and accuses these absurdities to the lack of attention. The cause is always that men have wanted to be too active. Simone advises that above all, our thoughts should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it (Letter 11). Therefore, despite what she believed to be the mediocrity of her talent, this conviction carried with it hope for inclusion in the realm of truth not only for herself, but for all, including the least endowed and most unfortunate, with whom she quickly aligned herself (Miles 9).

She visited Germany in 1932 (Cabaud 64). It was upon her return from there and after witnessing Hitler's arrest of the most influential communists as well the burning of the Reichstag that she wrote one of her most passionate political articles. This work was entitled "Towards the Proletarian Revolution?" She wrote that true democracy is, by definition, nothing other than the subordination of society to the individual and this was the true definition of socialism (64). She had seen society as a force of nature as blind as well as all other natural forces and no less dangerous to people unless they could achieve mastery over it (64).

Simone Pétrement expressed that Simone Weil during this period wanted very much to prepare a philosophical treatise dealing with the relationship between modern technology, the basis of large-scale industry, and the essential aspects of our civilization, our social organization and on the culture in which we live.

Between the years of 1933–1936, on and off she worked in factories along side the factory workers (Miles 8). Although she was not in the best of health, she wanted to experience what they suffered in the deplorable conditions of that time in industrial Europe (8). Simone kept a diary that was later published in which she wrote how she became strongly aware of two things. First she no longer felt as though she had any rights, and second she found the idea of time was unbearable (8). Her perception of time was going to play a major part in her experience of liturgical time and the Catholic notion of what liturgy and time means. At the time of her journal entries, however, time merely meant the painful experience of the workers living in fear of what was to come. “Human beings crave warmth and fellow feeling at work. In the factory what they experience is ‘icy pandemonium’”. (28). It was in these writings that Simone Weil came to the conclusion that not religion, but revolution was the opium of the people.

During this time period, Simone Weil also explores the thought of the hiddenness of God. By her writings on this subject, even though she approaches this concept on a purely philosophical plain, we gain a glimpse of her comprehension of the Bible and how she interpreted the Word. For Simone Weil, God remains hidden even in revelation. For Weil God is hidden by his very creation of the universe. When God creates, God renounces his status as the only reality or power. He creates other realities and, in order for them to exist and to be themselves, God must pull himself back, so to speak, in order to give them room (Waiting 61). Thus creation occurred only when God withdrew in part. Absence is the key image for her metaphysics, cosmology and theodicy. Weil believed that God created by an act of self-delimitation. God is conceived as a kind of fullness, a perfect being; therefore, no creature could exist where God was not (61).

This is for Weil, an original kenosis preceding the corrective kenosis of Christ's incarnation. For Weil the necessity of evil in the world does not mean that we are simply, originally, and continually doomed; on the contrary, Weil tells us that "Evil is the form which God's mercy takes in this world" (64). Weil believed that evil, and its consequence, affliction, served the role of driving us out of ourselves and towards God: "The extreme affliction which overtakes human beings does not create human misery, it merely reveals it". (Waiting xxxiii).

According to Richard H. Bell, Simone Weil's thought—her central moral and political view which runs consistently through her thought from the earliest essays to her last writings— her devotion to the Other, to the anonymity of each individual without losing sight of their particularity as human being (170). From her writings we can see that Simone Weil was far from being a humanist. She is far too conservative to be found in a liberal humanist tradition. To be sure, she never grieved over the collapse of the world's humanistic, enlightened age. As Bell refers to when he quotes Simone Weil, her ideal was far more radically centered in the notion of divine incarnation as the motive for all good action in the world: " 'Compassion is natural, but it is stifled by the instinct of self-preservation. It is only the possession of the entire soul by supernatural love that revives the activity of compassion' " (Bell 170).

This sketchy analysis of Simone Weil's writings serves the purpose of presenting a hermeneutical scheme for her understanding of God's Word and divine inspiration contained in the Old Testament and New Testament. As indicated by Richard Bell, Simone did draw some personal inspiration from the Old Testament, but at the same time she surely is abusive and ignorant in her reading of what she calls the more historic

books, the “impure” parts of the Old Testament. Emmanuel Levinas has real trouble with Simone Weil’s selective hermeneutic, with her taking only what she says are the “digestible” parts for her purposes (174). He bristles at the idea that she thought the digestible parts are “exceptions” and was shaped by “foreign influences.”<sup>8</sup>

Simone Weil is clearly a spiritual woman. As she states in her essay, “*What is a Jew,*”: “If there is any religious tradition which I regard as my patrimony, it is the Catholic tradition” (212). This is said in the same essay in which she denies being a Jew, but her reasons for saying that she is a Catholic no more make her a Christian than her denials release her from being a Jew (Bell 176). Bell puts it in frank but accurate language: In the end, Simone Weil did not wish so much to be something other than a Jew as much as she wanted to be regarded simply as a human being—as “her” in an “impersonal way”—not as a Jew or a Christian, and to regard others in the same way (177). In her sense of “impersonal” she is neither Jew nor Greek, Christian nor Buddhist, Platonist nor Cathar. (177). She provides this study with the true experience that there is a love which is not of this world but from above. She seeks to help us find this love with certainty.

The “Gospel maxim” to love another as you would love yourself is a value conceived outside of time. Once again, Bell sheds light of how Simone Weil interprets the meaning of such a maxim. This awakening in Simone Weil takes on a completely different perspective from her philosophical sphere: “The course she takes is to sink to a point of total despair—a ‘dark night of the soul’; to be ‘visited’ or ‘graced’ by a power

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<sup>8</sup> Richard H. Bell provides scholarship on varied polemics and interpretations of Simone Weil’s writings, particularly regarding her Jewishness. See [Simone Weil’s Philosophy of Culture and Simone Weil: The](#)



outside time and space—a supernatural power and to be given ‘new eyes to see and ears to hear’ aspects of the human condition not fully recognized before (26).

In the Gospel of Matthew 12:46–50, the evangelist recalls the scene in the life of Christ when the Lord is teaching his disciples in the home of Peter. Some people interrupt his conversation to inform Jesus that his mother and brothers are outside asking to see him. Jesus responds with a question: Who is my mother and who are my brothers? In this account Jesus answers his own question: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, this is my mother, my brother, and my sister.” This is a short and difficult passage to assess. Its aim is not to deny natural family ties but takes kinship to a new and higher level of faith and community by being more inclusive. It may include Gentiles as well as Jews. Like Andrei Rublev’s icon it invites more people into the open ended circle that can always embrace one more.

Simone Weil’s conversion caused her to declare that the world needs a different kind of saint. In our present situation, she wrote, “universality has to be fully explicit” (Waiting 51). As Leslie Fiedler explains, that explicit universality Simone felt must find a mouthpiece in a new kind of saint, for “ ‘today it is not nearly enough merely to be a saint, but we must have the saintliness demanded by the present moment, a new saintliness, itself without precedent’ ” (51). The new kind of saint must possess a special “genius,” capable of blending Christianity and Stoicism, the love of God and “filial piety for the city of the world”; a passive sort of “genius” that would enable him to act as a “neutral medium,” like water, “indifferent to all ideas without exception, even atheism and materialism. (Weil Waiting xi)

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Way of Justice as Compassion. See also Emmanuel Levinas, “Simone Weil against the Bible.” In Difficult

This chapter argues that the rendition of family alluded to in the Matthean passage quoted above transcends normal ties, honored traditions, roles, customs, and respectability. Through the introduction of Simone Weil, an “outsider saint,” this rendition of family offers new possibilities of discipleship, ministry, work, community, church structures, and most especially a new turning in preaching.

By analyzing the thought and religious experiences of Simone Weil, paying particular attention to her concept of “roots,” it becomes even more evident that what she had been looking for finally finds her. Chapter five proposes a conversation between the voices of Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil as they turn to engage the mystery of transcending the boundaries of times and places that is anticipated in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. Both of these parties in conversation, believe that man’s “free will” consists in nothing but the ability to turn, or refuse to turn, his or her eyes toward what God holds up before them. “We cannot take a single step toward heaven. If however we look heavenward for a long time, God comes down and takes us up” (*Waiting for God* xxxii). Pope Benedict and Simone Weil are companions in dialogue on a celebratory walk that witness by their lives that a change in the direction of their gaze led them to carry the Word upon the ground. It is this dare to change direction that empowers them to speak to contemporary preachers about a way to disrupt man’s self-deceits and de-create our egos.

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Freedom: Essays on Judaism, trans. by Seán Hand. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990.

# Chapter 5

## Voices of the Provincial Implications— Defrocking Individualism

### 5.1 An Invitation to “Faith-ful” Dialogue

This study proposes that there is potential common ground between Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil, especially in their love for God, Christ, and the Catholic faith that can shed light on what the study of homiletics might look like in an age of diversity. To discern whether or not this commonality between Pope Benedict and Simone Weil actually exists is the subject matter of this chapter, and it requires arranging for an imagined dialogue between these two great figures. Pope Benedict and Simone Weil become voices emerging from radically different backgrounds calling for a different form of preaching. This treatise of what their voices hold points to preaching that can carry Christ’s word into churches, chapels, and shrines, but at the same time into places polluted with shame, misery, crime, and affliction, which is what preaching must accomplish in today’s society.

This chapter traces how both Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil recognize the existential temptation of modernity, namely, to hear the call of individualism. The second part of this chapter demonstrates how they provide a foundation to counter this existential temptation. Pope Benedict and Simone Weil both point to rhetoric of alterity which can hold implications for a homiletical method conducive for the Postmodern Era. Chapter five proceeds by historically identifying the nature of individualism, its recent influence on liturgical preaching within the institution of the Catholic Church in spite of official

reticence, and concludes by showing how Pope Benedict and Simone Weil advocate an alternative methodology of preaching rooted in Otherness, thus defrocking individualism, particularly among Roman Catholic liturgical preachers.

## 5.2 The Nature of Individualism

While remaining sound symbols of philosophical provincialism and cosmopolitanism respectively, both Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil hold in common a rejection of the individualism characteristically associated with the Age of the Enlightenment. Understanding the goal of a limitless individualism as promised by the Enlightenment is the first key to unlocking the true reality of what provincialism can and ought to mean. The idea of unbridled or limitless individualism can be traced back through philosophical thought introduced by Immanuel Kant and the thought typical of the other Enlightenment philosophers. The Enlightenment brought the disregarding of certain ideas, such as obedience, hierarchy, and authority and replaced them with a steadfast devotion to individualism. Enlightenment individualism assumes that the individual is the starting point, that each individual has a right to freedom and basic liberties, and that reason is the vehicle that will propel humanity away from submission and servitude toward a perfect and limitless freedom. With this rise of unbridled individualism came a smearing over of the public and private elements of society. Thomas Bokenkotter, in *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, writes that the thinker who participated in the Enlightenment movement covered the whole field of knowledge that was heretofore considered the exclusive province of the Church and offered a different cosmos, the nature of man, of society, of history, of morals, and of religion (267). Their principles were no longer drawn from the Bible or Church authority

within historical contexts but were arrived at independently by facts recently discovered by reason and social experience (267). Enlightenment philosophers such as the Marquis de Condorcet and Jean-Jacques Rousseau assume that the new religion of humanity as the utopian ideal is in the future (267).

This optimistic, future-oriented approach to history comes as a stark contrast to classical and biblical thought that both Pope Benedict and Simone Weil advocate. For example, Simone Weil believes that it is important for a “workman who bears the anguish of unemployment deep in the very marrow of his bones to understand the feelings of Philocletus when his bow is taken away from him, and the despair with which he stares at his powerless hands. He would also understand that Electra is hungry” (Need for Roots 70). Meaning is found by interpreting life through these ancient classics. She made several practical efforts to confirm her beliefs about the tie between Greek literature, the classical worldview, and the practicalities of modern life (Bell, 161).

Classical thought assumed that the ideal age was that of the heroes about which Homer and the epic poets wrote, and biblical thought assumes that the utopian ideal was the Garden of Eden or the Glorification of Christ. During the Enlightenment, for perhaps for the first time in human history, the entire world was looking forward toward the future rather than the past. It is no coincidence that the scientific and industrial revolutions followed closely after the Enlightenment.

One reason for the optimism that was characteristic of the Age of the Enlightenment was the verifiable material progress registered by many. Connected to this new confidence was a devotion to religious freedom and personal autonomy. This meant that a person should accept as true only what seemed true to him on the basis of intrinsic

evidence, never on the basis of authority alone, whether of Scripture, the Church, or some other external agency (Bokenkotter 271).

### 5.3 Dechristianization of France

According to Bokenkotter, in many ways the French Revolution was the climax of the Enlightenment. The revolutionists wanted to replace the *ancien régime* by a society based on the political and economic ideas of the Enlightenment (268). This meant a canonization of individualism and a doing away with all privileges due to birth, giving the middle class political power, and putting an end to arbitrary government.

As an integral part of the old order, the Catholic Church was bound to be intimately affected by its overthrow (287). This dissertation cannot attempt to cover all the significant events that shaped the Church and the world during this period of history. What it wishes to provide is a survey of the dynamics that have shaped what in modern times has been at the core of the foundations for the reticence of the Catholic Church towards preaching. This reticence opens the age of modernity by the seal of the blood of the martyred priests at the time of the French Revolution that follows the Enlightenment, the self-defrocking of certain other priests that embrace the gains from the fruits of the individualism of that time, and the “counter” defrocking of *priestly individualism* that leads to the unpredictable revival of the Catholic Church and her recovered tradition of reconciling the faith with modern culture insofar as that was possible.

At first there was no conflict between the revolution and the Church (288). But the leaders of the Revolution soon blundered into a quarrel with the Church—provoking a schism between the Church and the Revolution that retarded for over a century the reconciliation of the Church and liberalism (288).

Bokenkotter traces the conflict with the Church that began when the Assembly took up reform of the Church by democratizing the French Church, attempting to eliminate all control of the Pope over its internal affairs (288). Then they [the National Assembly] took the fatal step—the capital error—that was to force the clergy to accept this radical reform of the Church by imposing on all Church office-holders an oath of compliance that they could not refuse without forfeiting their office (288).

The clergy were left with only one alternative: to appeal to the Pope to authorize them to accept. On March 10, 1791, Pope Pius VI issued a condemnation and forbade the clergy to take the oath (289).

Bokenkotter recounts the story of the French Revolution as it affected religion. He explains, as history remembers, a savage decree was passed on May 26, 1792. Some thirty thousand to forty thousand priests were deported. Later on March 18, 1793, the death penalty was imposed on those deportees who dared to return. At the height of the Reign of Terror a good number of nonjurors heroically remained and exercised their ministry in cellars and garrets, offering Mass or giving absolution to the victims of the guillotine (289).

While the slaughter of non-constitutional priests occurred, he continues, things went well at first for the loyal constitutional clergy. But these happy times for them did not last. Political factors may have had something to do with this: the clergy as a rule were still royalist and many of them were linked with the Federalist movement (289).

Actually, more fundamental reasons were responsible. The Revolution, as Bokenkotter adds began to take on the character of a religion in itself. It was the religion of the Glorification of Individualism. It was only one step from this to the effort to uproot

Christianity from France all together. The cathedrals and parish churches of most towns and villages were turned into “Temples of Reason” (293). Many priests and even bishops abandoned their ministry—some of them taking wives as a proof of their break with orthodox Catholicism (293).

Bokenkotter reveals that a number of renegade priests willingly defrocked themselves and even took a lead in the dechristianization of society (294): “Some of them embraced the social egalitarian ideas of the extreme left; others succumbed to the fashionable sexual romanticism spawned by writers like Rousseau. The total number of priests who defrocked by putting aside their cloth would, it seems, number around 20,000. In attempts to destroy Catholicism, the dechristianizers did not intend to leave a religious vacuum. They still shared the *ancient régime*’s principle that no state could survive without a public religion”. (294) This new public religion would not have the ability to bring about greater solidarity among its members. It would introduce and eventually govern by the totalitarianism of “individualism.”

The final piece to this section that covers the self-defrocking of once validly ordained priests deals with the impact their leaving had upon the liturgy they devised to replace the institutional Catholic Church. According to Bokenkotter, the liturgy followed at first the example of the secular city of Paris, whose festival of Reason featured the enthronement of a young girl as goddess of Reason (288). Other young girls portrayed Reason or Liberty or Nature, leading processions through the towns to altars erected to the new religion (288). Robespierre found the worship of reason too close to atheism for comfort and preferred something a little closer to Christianity—his cult of the Supreme



Being. Robespierre envisaged his cult as a cosmopolitan religion that would gather Catholics and Protestants around the same altar (295-296).<sup>9</sup>

The novelty of these liturgies was nothing more than curious imitations of Catholic practice. They were too vague and abstract to catch the imagination of a largely illiterate population (295). The new religions were never abolished; they just faded away (295).

When in the course of the Enlightenment secular thought and the processes governed by reason and science are liberated from narratives of religion, the structure of preaching in general is turned on its head. Ultimate knowledge becomes knowledge of fact and the content of preaching.

Roy A. Rappaport makes a strong argument that facts breed facts, and as the knowledge of facts burgeons the domains into which they are organized, they become severed into yet smaller pieces as individuals and their knowledge become specialized, resulting in the loss of the sense of the world's wholeness (Rappaport, Ritual and Religion 450.)

When facts become sovereign, what is the fate of that which had been ultimate knowledge? In the realm of fact nothing is sacred except, perhaps, the maxim "Nothing is sacred," and knowledge that has been ultimately sacred is no longer knowledge at all. It is "mere belief" (450). Values sanctified by the ultimately sacred are degraded to the status of tastes or preferences. Truth becomes relativized and the individual becomes

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<sup>9</sup> The liturgy of Robespierre is described in detail in Bokenkotter's account. His liturgy was inaugurated on a beautiful day in June 1794, with himself as high priest: Dressed in a sky-blue coat, his hair carefully powdered, he led a procession from the Tuileries bearing a bouquet of berries, grain, and flowers. The people sang republican hymns, and after a sermon, Robespierre ignited an artfully made cardboard figure labeled Atheism; it crumpled, and then out of its ashes stepped another figure representing Wisdom. This

sovereign but delusory. Thus, the subject matter of preaching becomes solely the domain and decision of the agent that preaches.

#### 5.4 Defrocking Priestly Individualism

In one of her *Letters to Father Perrin*, Simone Weil writes:

I am well aware that the Church must inevitably be a social structure; otherwise it would not exist. But in so far as it is a social structure, it belongs to the Prince of this World. It is because it is an organ for the preservation and transmission of truth that there is an extreme danger for those who, like me, are excessively open to social influence ... It is not that I am of a very individualistic temperament. I am afraid for the opposite reason. My natural disposition is to be very easily influenced, too, much influenced, and above all by anything collective (*Waiting for God* 12).

It is this type of sensibility that prompts the Catholic Church to safeguard its members and others from the individualistic preaching that crept into France at the time of the French Revolution and into the history of homiletics over and over again through the centuries.

The individualism that Simone Weil alludes to in the quote above taken from Letter II to Father Perrin is the individualism that was glorified in the Enlightenment. Recall that Simone Weil is a true cosmopolitan and still recognizes the dangers of unbridled individualism and excessive cosmopolitanism.

Robert N. Bellah writes a French visitor to the United States, Alex DeTocqueville, and how over 170 years ago he wrote about this individualism that he saw everywhere as he traveled through our land. Bellah states that De Tocqueville was referring to the rugged individualism of Americans. He recognized the individualism that describes religion as a personal choice best kept hidden in the private lives of individuals

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historical account claims that Robespierre crumpled shortly afterward, and with his cult of the Supreme

(180). This individualism applauds people that can think for themselves; who do not depend on clergy or politicians to tell them what and how to think.

Simone Weil and Pope Benedict XVI do not applaud this type of individualism per se. They would agree with the brilliant convert to Catholicism, John Henry Newman. Newman singled out the individualism of the Enlightenment as the fundamental problem facing Christians in the modern world. Newman called this movement or way of thinking “liberalism” (An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine 357-358). In his words, liberalism teaches that truth and falsehood and religion are matters of opinion; that one doctrine is as good as another, that the Governor of the world does not intend that we should gain the truth; that there is no truth; that we are not more acceptable to God by believing this than by believing that; that no one is answerable for his opinions; that they are a matter of necessity or accident; that it is enough if we sincerely hold that we profess; that our merit lies in seeking, not in possessing (357-358). Newman took the slippery word “liberalism” to mean the view that no real knowledge is possible in the area of theology, that the assertions of religious people are, at best, expressions of feelings and subjective conviction or, at worst, the distillate of irresponsible thinking (357-358).

In 1879 Newman delivered his famous speech that became known as the *Biglietto* speech. During that speech Newman admitted that his entire intellectual life could be characterized as a battle against individualism as it is espoused in liberalism’s matters of religion.

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Being. See Bokenkotter 295–296 for additional details.

When the self-defrocked priests of the French Revolution took to their pulpits with their vague and abstract rituals and liturgies, their newfound individualism caused them to preach by surrendering their prophetic roles. Unlike Isaiah, who spoke with a well-trained tongue, these former Catholic priests tried to justify their theology in terms of some antecedent philosophical or scientific system. History has proven this has resulted in compromising the Gospel message and consequently hands over the authority of theology's properly dominant position and contribution.

To be fair to those that fell for this temptation, we might take a look around and see how easily this same error is committed today, hundreds of years later. Just as surely, the judgment being developed here does not boast of some intellectual bravado but simply logical conclusion. Precisely because religion speaks of God as Creator who is responsible in a sustaining way for the whole of creation, the Scriptures must remain a part of every other form of human inquiry. This retrieval of the place of theology and religious rhetoric is the subject of a remarkable book by John Milbank: Theology and Social Theology that reminds one rather vividly of the "positioning" relationship that theological dialogue ought to have with the other intellectual disciplines. In the modern form, theology devolves into "the oracular voice of some finite idol, such as historical, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy," becoming the limited case or furthest expression of those studies (207).

So what does this do when we apply this point of the positioning of theology to the field of homiletics? Again, I wish to turn to Newman whom I cited earlier. He argues that not only does theology belong in the conversation between disciplines, but it actually belongs in the center, precisely because it articulates the truth about a Creator God. God

is the primordial reality that is responsible for the to-be of whatever else exists and which, therefore, impinges upon all finite things. This insight is considered at length in an article published in the Newman Studies Journal written by Robert Barron, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of St. Mary of the Lake—Mundelein Seminary. The article is entitled “John Henry Newman among the Postmoderns.” Barron quotes Newman in this way:

To say that God is creator is to imply that he is one, who is sovereign over, operative amidst, independent of, the appointments which he has made; One in whose hands are all things who has a purpose in every event, and a standard for every deed, and thus has relations of his own towards the subject matter of each particular science which the book of knowledge unfolds; who has with an adorable, never-ceasing energy implicated Himself in all the history of creation, the constitution of nature, the course of the world.... and who thereby necessarily becomes the subject-matter of a science, far wider and more noble than any of those which are included in the circle of secular education (Newman, The Idea of a University qtd. in Barron, Newman Studies Journal, vol. 2 no. 1, 22. spring Pittsburgh, Pa. 2005).

To remove the prominence of the position of the Word of God that enlightens all the sciences was indirectly to give rise a more individualistic and in a certain sense “subjective” appropriation of the Christian faith (T.A. Campbell, The Religion of the Heart 177, qtd. in Gueric DeBona, Fulfilled in Our Hearing, 15). The homiletical attention moved away from the traditional waiting for the sacramental appearance of the Wholly Other who is God, and also away from the listeners of the Word that assembled in faith, and turned in the direction of the preacher, who although he confesses to be no different than the people, usurped the power to seal a circle enclosed upon itself, blocking out from view face of God.

Gueric DeBona, OSB, writes that if this style had a unique feature it was its emphasis on *ethos*, the second principal quality that Aristotle named as part of the

speech-act. (15). The emphasis is placed upon the preacher as an agent of communication, a good and virtuous man. The weakness in the emphasis upon the agent is that the authority rests totally in the preacher or the orator. The reason for this is that only ethos projected in this way is artistic (Kennedy, 68). In the long run, what evolves is a type of “priestly individualism.” The task was to preach passionately in order to elicit religious fervor (Wilson, P.,136–37). What becomes imagined as the topics of sermons are pastoral, practical, personal encounters that delight but do not necessarily “turn” the congregational listeners to the transcendence of the sacramental encounter that ought to follow but ends with the personality of the preacher (136). In fact, the former ritual-dependent sacramental liturgical encounters become disregarded as superstitious and superfluous to the goal of the sermons that are determined through autonomous interpretation (136). Concerning the sermons of this period in the history of homiletics, Paul Hitz has written that the mission’s “central vision is far too much man and what man does, not primarily and simultaneously God’s action to save us in Christ” (Hitz 169)

In order to counter the religious individualism of the Age, the Catholic Church takes measures to defrock priestly individualism and restore what people needed to know to be saved. In Session V (June 17, 1546), the Council of Trent’s Decree Concerning Reform said,

All who in any manner have charge of parochial or other churches ... shall at least on Sundays and solemn festivals, either personally or, if they are lawfully impeded, through others who are competent, feed the people committed to them with wholesome words in proportion to their own and their people’s mental capacity, by teaching them those things that are necessary for all to know in order to be saved, and by impressing upon them with briefness and plainness of speech the vices that they must avoid and the virtues that they must cultivate, in order that they may escape eternal punishment and obtain the glory of heaven (ch. 2).

The Council of Trent reformed the practice of preaching simultaneously with the Catechismus as well.

The term used in this section of chapter five, namely, “*defrocking priestly individualism*” came about as a result of numerous conversations regarding the driving question of this study. As I asked more and more about why the Catholic Church practiced a reticence towards preaching, it became apparent that the Church understands preaching as normally embedded within sacred rites and symbols that we refer to as liturgy. It is this fact that moved the Council of Trent to act protectively and defensively. Certainly one reason for this was the polemical climate of the times. The authorities could not afford to admit that the Protestants could be right about anything, but far more important was the Church’s belief that in particular the divine authority of Christ established the Mass. Scholars at the time had not yet uncovered the complex history of liturgical evolution and the slow formation of the main liturgical families (Bokenkotter 252). Common opinion at the time believed that St. Peter had instituted the Catholic way of saying Mass.

Liturgical preaching in the Catholic Church is embedded in the Eucharist; therefore, it must be delivered in service to mystery, a sense of the sacred, a respect of doctrinal content, resulting in a liturgy that is holy, a faithful echo of the angelic choirs and the divine worship which the saints have never ceased to raise up to heaven for two thousand years. The Eucharist is the memorial of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. For the liturgy on earth is but a reflection and an anticipation of the eternal Liturgy, founded on the sacrifice of our salvation by the only begotten Son. By maintaining the insistence that preaching is in service to the “Eucharist,” the Church’s

reticence to preaching safeguards becoming a slave to the Age, becoming caught up in the present. Taking the stance of reticence, if it does not infringe upon freedom, can break the “dictatorship” of the “priestly individualism” once again too common in pulpits today. It can warn against forgetting or repressing what needs to be remembered, the Word for us to appreciate today that will open for us the future with hope and confidence. For the real purpose of the Mass is to bring the eternal into our temporal world. “Priestly individualism” as defined in this chapter, is more about man and his world of the here and now than it is about encountering the Real Presence of Christ. The world of God and his angels and saints is only of peripheral interest and carries little meaning (Gamber 146). Preaching under the stole of “priestly individualism” is preaching at best, with an interest in the Person of Jesus simply as a human being, and in selected excerpts from His Gospel. The Catholic Church has never denied that we see the image of God in the human being. We can indeed see it, but only with the new seeing of faith. We can see it, just as we can see goodness in a man, his honesty, interior truth, humility, and love—everything in fact, that gives him a certain likeness to God. However, if we are to do this, we must learn a new kind of seeing, and that is what the Eucharistic Liturgy is for (Ratzinger, Spirit of the Liturgy 83).

It is with this background and understanding of liturgy that we can now turn to Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil in dialogue. What do they have to say to each other about the essence of the Mass and the preaching that is embedded within it? What do they have to say to us in this historical moment of time about these ancient components of liturgy: *On Beauty, On Love, On the Soul?*



By placing Pope Benedict and Simone Weil in conversation with one another through their respective writings, this chapter highlights their key concepts that can help illuminate what it means to them to be “Catholic,” with a capital “C,” in the provincial, institutional sense of the word and what it means to be “catholic” in the universal sense. This imaginary dialogue intends to reach some conclusions that might shed light on how Catholic preachers can be effective when their listeners have embraced a number of philosophical and religious traditions in their continual quest for the truth.

For years Pope Benedict XVI served as the Prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Defense of the Faith. As was seen earlier in this work, he was a controversial figure, characterized as a personification of everything that is perplexing by the term provincialism, the defender of the faith during these tense, volatile times in church theological and political debate.

To place the writings of such a churchman as Pope Benedict XVI in dialogue with the philosophical and spiritual writings of Simone Weil might at first seem disconcerting, even scandalous. After all, Simone Weil was a highly respected Communist. She chose to remain an “outsider” of the Church, refusing the gift of Baptism, even though she accepted the gift of believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and God. She had an ardent desire to take Holy Communion (Pétrément 452). Simone Weil always preferred standing outside of institutional religion, although she completely recognized the necessity for religion (453). She preferred unfamiliar settings to the well-trodden ways of proceeding and felt attracted to the points of divergence more interesting than harmonious agreements (453). Simone Pétrément recalls Simone Weil’s ability to merge with almost any milieu, in order to know the people in it and love them for what they are (452). “There is a Catholic

circle ready to give an eager welcome to whoever enters it. Well, I don't want to be adopted into a circle ... In saying I don't want this, I am expressing myself badly, for I should like it much; I should find it all delightful. But I feel that it is not permissible for me. I feel that it is necessary and ordained that I should be alone, a stranger and an exile in relation to every human circle without exception ....” (qtd. in Petrement, 452).

This imaginary meeting in religious dialogue between Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil also challenges all the rules of theological “correctness.” In the words of Tiemo Rainer Peters, one of the editors of a book written about another and similar discussion in which Pope Benedict participated: “There is a pathos about this meeting, if you will, a naïveté in our concept: the notion, that is, that theology is possible, and that it must not immediately obey this or that worldview, strategy, or even ecclesial politics” (Tiemo 3). I believe the same applies in the case of *religious dialogue*, even though it might seem that two parties as different as Pope Benedict and Simone Weil might find some of their ideas repulsive to each other.

## 5.5 Dialogue as Opening up the Space

In an age that celebrates pluralism and diversity, the notion of the provincial can still be necessary and helpful to communications. In this case, at hand, particularly sacred rhetoric might find something beneficial about the provincial. The chief distinction of provincialism that can be productive; however, it must be understood by the way we use its opposite term, *cosmopolitan*. One of the fundamental sources of the confusion that surrounds the two terms is that in non-philosophical language, the word *provincial* is often used interchangeably with the word *narrow-mindedness* and the word *cosmopolitan* is used to mean *open to change or progress*. This chapter and its subsequent chapter will

show how a proper understanding of provincialism and cosmopolitanism within the fullness of their respective, historical traditions can lead towards the overall good of communities and how a preacher that is aware of this can tap into the reality of each that lies beneath their appearances.

A dialogue surrounding these concepts ought to get involved at the place where their subject matter—God, human beings, and the society we create—is under threat today. Both Pope Benedict XVI and Simone Weil have never valued or exercised beliefs that fit in with what is particularly modern about this given moment. In this sense they both teach us to be uncomfortable about these times, in the Church, the world, and among ourselves.

## 5.6 A Mark of Tacit Respect for the Unfathomable

Josef Pieper, a well-known German philosopher, published an illuminating and stimulating interpretation of Plato's famous dialogue, the Phaedrus. In the opening paragraph of his book, Pieper writes:

The first line of the dialogue names the 'cast of characters,' the *dramatis personae*. We must not merely glance at this first line, and pass on, for Plato's habit is to speak through the living personalities of the participants in his dialogues. Indeed, these characters themselves express his ideas almost more insistently than his theses and propositions (3).

Pieper points out that the first line of the dialogue contains only two names: Socrates and Phaedrus.

Pieper also relates that in the dialogue Phaedrus is Socrates' sole interlocutor, but he emerges from a group of characters after a walk outside the walls, after a long morning's sitting there. Then Phaedrus tells Socrates, "On the instructions of our common friend Acumenus I take my walks on the open roads; he tells me that is more

invigorating than walking in the colonnades” (227, a 1). Schleiermacher held that the real subject of the Phaedrus’ walk with Socrates is “the art of untrammelled thinking and of creative communication, or *dialectics*” (46). Such a walk tends not to be about intellectual quests. It is the experience that counts (Morinis 21). Could this walk be a celebratory walk in the open spaces created by religious dialogue?

The reader, Pieper tells us, may be inclined to regard the mentioning of the names of Phaedrus and Socrates as a mere introduction to the real subject matter of the dialogue, and a rather lame and unoriginal introduction at that. In actuality it is already part and parcel of the real subject, according to Pieper (6). However, only when one knows the personalities concealed behind the names of the partners in the dialogue, can the real subject become apparent. To bring together two people that clearly represent the contradicting issues of provincialism and cosmopolitanism is not a sign of an absence of a coherent dialogue. It is, as Pieper suggests, when one listens to other great thinkers, such as Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas—a mark of tacit respect for the unfathomability of the universe emerges (xvi).

### 5.7 Provincialism’s Possibilities for Liberating Discourse

Pope Benedict XVI is a man of the Church as an institution. He is a church leader that recognizes the role of the contemporary pastor in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. This is the model the Council had in mind when it said that the pastor must balance diplomacy and the spiritual care of souls. “The true churchman of the contemporary age must be inspired by the love ‘that rises wonderfully to high things when it is compassionately drawn to the low things of neighbors; and the more kindly it

descends to the weak things of this world, the more vigorously it recurs to the things on high” (Lumen Gentium 10:3).

In his book Without Roots, Pope Benedict XVI confronted the godlessness of the Enlightenment. Drew Christiansen, SJ, editor in chief of America, wrote about this book in the July 16, 2007, edition of his magazine. He recalls Pope Benedict’s Christmas letter of 2006 in which the Pope encouraged Christians “ ‘to continue along the paths of trust with acts of friendship and good will [towards all people of faith] in both the simple daily deeds you have practiced in your region by so many good and humble people who have always treated others with consideration and also those deeds considered heroic, inspired by authentic respect for human dignity and the desire to find solutions of grave hostility’ ” (36).

The Pope’s book, Without Roots, which was a collection of essays, was intended to reach out to all people of faith. In one particular exchange contained in the book, he dialogued with Professor Marcello Pera about the theme of common projects facing all religions. Pope Benedict expressed sympathy with Islam directly because he felt Christians and Muslims both must adopt the virtues of the Enlightenment as Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council did, for example in the field of human rights and religious freedom, and correct its excesses and deficiencies, like its materialism and moral relativism (75). Above all, the Pope argued in the book that both Christians and Muslims must address the positivist notion of reason that “excludes God from the life of the community” (9). In the essays of his book Without Roots, the Pope conveys not an abstract respect for Marcello Pera, but rather a sense of spiritual solidarity with people of faith in the face of unbridled secularism.

Pope Benedict has long spoken of the “dialogue of daily life.” By this term, he refers to the many social interactions in which people of different religions interact and routinely engage one another.

Political sociologist Simone Weil is a mystic and an “Outsider saint.” As an outsider to the Catholic Church, Simone Weil challenged the ways she believes the Catholic Church misused provincialism during certain periods of the past and within modern history. At the same time as we have seen, Simone Weil loves Catholicism itself.

At the time of the first extraordinary religious formative event of her life in 1937, she met a young Englishman who introduced her to the work of the sixteenth-century metaphysical poet George Herbert. In an article published in the Journal of Religion and written by Claire Wolfeich of Boston University, Wolfeich reports that Simone Weil wrote in her book that she listened to the Englishman recite Herbert’s poem “Love bade me welcome,” and then felt Christ “came down and took possession” of her (68). It was from this same young man that she gained her “first idea of the supernatural power of the Sacraments because of the truly angelic radiance with which she seemed to be clothed after going to Communion” (69). Claire Wolfeich’s article “Attention or Destruction: Simone Weil and the Paradox of the Eucharist,” paints Simone Weil as someone who poised herself exactly as Weil herself stated in her *memoirs* Waiting for God, “at the intersection of Christianity and everything that is not Christianity” (Weil 50-51). However, although Simone Weil was deeply attracted to the Catholic Church, she found the institutional church problematic.

In the same way that Plato depicts Phaedrus’ discourse as if he were “poking his nose deep into that atmosphere spiced by so many and various essences” (Pieper 4), this

work illustrated Simone Weil as an inquirer into Catholicism, sometimes a woman of religious enthusiasms but specious perceptions as compared to the maturity of faith in Pope Benedict. There is more to be told—for example that Simone Weil was capable of writing about the love of God on the same par as the Pope’s first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est. Thus, lies the suitability of these two great contemporary figures, one deceased, one still living, but both able to contribute to the dialogue of this chapter through their esteemed and relevant writings.

In the first lines of the *Phaedrus*, Plato establishes the atmosphere in which his casts of Athenian intellectuals live. Pieper puts it in this way:

Theirs is a world of sophisticated irreverence and detachment, of enlightened health doctrines and simultaneous depravity. And in the midst of these poisonous fumes, strangely untouched but gravely imperiled, we find Phaedrus! Coming straight from such company, he meets Socrates, who at once ask him what his friends had talked about ... Phaedrus says, the subject was something which especially concerns Socrates: ‘The topic is appropriate for your ears, Socrates.’ For Lysias’ new literary work is a *logos erotikos*, a speech about love (9).

As is often the case with the tension that arises between the advocates of provincialism and cosmopolitanism, Phaedrus believes something incredibly subtle has been brought to light (9). It is something entirely new and original, on this age-old and inexhaustible theme. This exposition of the avant-garde, symbolic of any given age, seems to be the perfect entrance to a dialogue between Pope Benedict and Simone Weil, not about timely and modern things necessarily but what about them that is pertinent to this study of reform in Catholic liturgical preaching and its capacity to achieve rightness for this moment.

## 5.8 Beauty

Recalling that Plato's famous dialogue, the Phaedrus, was variously subtitled; it was concerned mainly with the art of rhetoric, of thought and communication. Pope Benedict writes in The Spirit of the Liturgy that Christ has given us the Eucharist essentially for communicating with us, "that entry into the process of communication, without which the external reception of the Sacrament becomes more ritual and therefore unfruitful (210). It is very interesting to note that the Pope writes on the subject of "worship as communication" as he considers the need for silence within the liturgy (211). "We are realizing more and more clearly that silence is part of the liturgy. We respond, by singing and praying, to the God who addresses us, but the greater mystery, surpassing all words, summons us to silence" (209). The Pope teaches that this silence is not just an absence of speech and action. We should expect the liturgy to give us a positive stillness that will restore us. Such stillness will not be just a pause, in which a thousand thoughts and desires assault us, but a time of recollection, giving us an inward peace, allowing us to draw breath and rediscover the one thing necessary, which we have forgotten (211). One of our deepest human needs is making its presence felt, that is the need to behold the Beautiful One.

The Pope calls this the real gift in the "Word-centered sacrifice." (211). It occurs through our sharing in Jesus Christ's act of self-offering to the Father. The silence that leads to this is not just a period of waiting, something eternal. We are disposing ourselves, preparing the way, placing ourselves before the Lord, asking him to make us ready for transformation. This recollection in shared prayer, shared action is the celebratory walk out of everyday life toward the Lord, toward merging our time with his



own (211). The Pope identifies that one key place within the Liturgy for this manner of silence is after the homily (211). In recognizing this place to prepare for the arrival of the Lord, Pope Benedict is suggesting that the homily is basically a threshold for this encounter (211). The truly beautiful moment in the Liturgy is yet to be revealed.

The moment when the Lord comes down and transforms the bread and wine to become his Body and Blood cannot fail to stun, to the very core of their being, those who participate in the Eucharist by faith and prayer (212). The Pope instructs that the Consecration is the moment of God's great *action* in the world for Catholics. It draws our eyes and hearts on high. For a moment the world is silent, everything is silent, and in that silence we touch the eternal—for one beat of the heart we step out of times into God's being-with-us. "The premiere task of the priest within the Liturgy is to preside over an encounter with the true and living God and as a person is who is on his way to God" (213).

Simone Weil comments on this same gift of contemplative silence when she writes in her Essay on the Forms on the Implicit love of God that the implicit love of God can have only three immediate objects, the only three things in which God is really secretly present. These are religious ceremonies, the beauty of the world, and our neighbor (Waiting 83). Weil speaks of the words of the Liturgy that are marvelously beautiful; and the words of the prayer issued for us from the very lips of Christ are perfect above all. Here Weil is referring to the Consecration. She says, "It is a fact that the purity of religious things is almost everywhere to be seen in the form of beauty, when faith and love do not fail" (120). At the very center, however, there is something utterly stripped of beauty, where there is no outward evidence of purity, something depending

wholly on convention. It cannot be otherwise (121). Architecture, singing, language, even if the words are chosen by Christ himself, all those things are in sense distinct from absolute purity. Absolute purity, present here below to our earthly senses, as a particular thing, such can only be a convention, which is a convention and nothing else (121). This convention, placed at the center, is the Eucharist (121). Thus, the conventional character of the divine presence is evident. For this very reason he can be perfectly present in it. God can only be present in secret here below. His presence in the Eucharist is truly secret since no part of our thought can reach the secret. Thus it is total (122). This is why the Host is really the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world.

In her last letter to Maurice Schumann, a devout Catholic, she enclosed a text, “The Theory of the Sacraments,” which according to Jacques Cabaud, has the ring of a personal statement. She starts by affirming that the desire of the soul cannot be divorced from the fulfillment of what it desires as beauty (qtd. in Cabaud 324). Since the acquisition of goodness and beauty depends on a desire for good, the body must play its part in the improvement of the soul (324). Simone Weil goes on to say that what is supernatural is beyond reach; the flesh is thwarted, for it cannot reach it. Such is the consecrated host (324). God’s covenant and man’s desire have made this the point at which, in the communion, the soul and God meet. The miracle of faith is that it produces reality in response to desire for beauty (Cabaud 324).

Pope Benedict shares this way of thinking when he considers the Liturgy. The Pope denies that he is a mystic, but he is drawn by the beauty of the Catholic Liturgy, “always penetrated by the Holy Spirit and by the Lord ... Inserting myself into this great divine fabric, I would say, becomes naturally also a profound spiritual contact of the soul

with God, to feel oneself in the living presence, even a new opening of the interior eyes, to see what one could see, and to let oneself be guided by the Lord” (Moynihan 72).

## 5.9 Love

Pope Benedict is a man of curious contrasts. New York Times Magazine reporter, Russell Shorto describes him in this way: people who know him say that he is meek, shy, courtly, modest, and indeed, seeing him in person—his eyes wide, his gaze soft and searching, as if for something he lost—you get the impression less of a holy warrior than of a kindly grandfather (72).

In the few years that he has been Pope, the world has quickly discovered this gentler side of Pope Benedict XVI. Although he remains awkward standing before the press and large crowds, his loving disposition shines through his ability to be pastor and father. He is not afraid to love.

To further understand what Benedict means by love, it is crucial to understand what he means by being a Christian in the world today. Obviously his definition of a Christian is rooted in his Trinitarian understanding of God. God is about relationship. Thus Christ taught his disciples to live in ‘*communio*’ with him, our neighbor, and with all others.

Furthermore the Pope believes that all mankind is in relationship. We are one before God’s face (What it Means To be a Christian 36). All mankind stands in darkness; but on the other hand, all mankind is illuminated by God’s light (36). For all of us God is the origin from which we come and yet still also the future toward which we are going. (36). In a sense, Benedict is the absolute cosmopolitan, always facing in the direction of the future coming of the Lord. This means, that for all of us God cannot be found except

by going to meet him as One who is waiting for us to make a start and demanding that we do so (36). For Pope Benedict, love is about knowing that we cannot find it except in the exodus, in going out from the coziness of our present situation into what is hidden: the brightness of meeting God that is coming (36). The Pope looks to the history of God's People to learn about their faith in the Presence of God in His hiddenness. All of salvation history confirms that the People of God recognize God is not to be found in the comprehensible systems of this world but can only be found at times when we grow beyond them. Pope Benedict XVI writes in a homily delivered in Advent, 1964, "A single motion of love is infinitely greater than the entire order of 'mind,' because only that represents what is truly creative, life-giving, and saving power" (39). The Pope follows this statement by clarifying the fact that God's incognito is intended to lead us onward into this "nothing" of truth and love, which is nevertheless in reality the true, single, and all-embracing absolute. This is why God is the hidden One and cannot be found anywhere else but in hiddenness (40).

While preaching about what it means to be a Christian and the importance of salvation only in Christ, which sounds like a fairly provincial point of view, the Pope in a homily given at Münster, Germany, told the congregation that becoming a Christian is not at all something given to us so that we, each individual for himself, can pocket it and keep our distance from those who are going off empty-handed (54). The Pope preached that by becoming Christian we are making ourselves available for a service to the whole of humanity (54). Thus, becoming a Christian does not mean grabbing something for oneself alone; on the contrary, it means moving out of selfishness which only knows

about itself and only refers to itself and passing into the new form of existence of someone who lives for others. This is the Pope's vision of what love is all about.

It is in the mystery of the Mass that the Pope sees love to its fullest. The Eucharist, in which Christ is still constantly the One who is truly and entirely there for us, challenges us to enter day by day into this law of living for others, which, in the final analysis, is merely the expression of the essence of true loving (58). Fundamentally, the Pope teaches, love cannot mean anything but this: that we allow ourselves to be parted from the narrow view directed toward our own ego and that we begin to move out from our own self, in order to be there for others (58). Ultimately, the basic movement of Christianity is simply the basic movement of love, through which we share in the creative love of God himself.

We are in the position to ask the question, but why must God be the hidden One and why cannot be found except in hiddenness? This is a question to be answered not, as we expect, by a theologian but by a philosopher. Our times require a philosophical interpretation and so we turn to Simone Weil to hear what she has to say about the hiddenness of God. Perhaps the easiest way to present Weil's thoughts on loving God is to begin with her understanding of this hiddenness that we have been considering.

It is because God wishes our relationship to Him to be one of love that He hides Himself. That is, He creates and orders the universe and disposes of human affairs in such a way that we may freely come to love Him, and to find in Him rather than in the creation, our highest good (Outsiders 102). According to Weil, our love for God is actually the result of God's presence in us. The seed is his Spirit, or his love, in us. Our only involvement is the recognition that the universe is indifferent and is unable to give

us fulfillment, but Weil warns that this momentary recognition, however, is not enough (102). We must allow this recognition to become a permanent part of our lookout and to affect our entire personality (102).

How does one sustain this type of recognition? Both Simone Weil and Pope Benedict XVI once again agree on the answer. Both point to ritual and Liturgy to provide an on-going encounter with God through Jesus Christ. This is the essence of Liturgy. “Active participation” in this encounter implies participation in the whole of the ritual event to such an extent that one is joined to Jesus, Christ, dead and risen, and so to the priestly work of Christ, who stands before the throne of grace interceding on behalf of the whole world. We must ask ourselves, are we capable of this? Can we relearn a forgotten way of doing things? The answer to these questions was given many years ago in the works of Romano Guardini. He was presented in this study in chapter one as very influential to the way Pope Benedict thinks about love and the Liturgy. Guardini worked on the way we must approach the Liturgy and engage its sights and sound, its words and gestures.

Guardini returns to stillness as the tranquility of the inner life:

The soul must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn to waste time for the sake of God, and to be prepared for the sacred game with sayings and thoughts and gestures, without always immediately asking ‘why?’ and ‘wherefore?’ It must learn not to be continually yearning to do something useful, but to play the divinely ordained game of the liturgy in liberty and beauty and holy joy before God (106).

Guardini cautioned that the minister of the Liturgy must not manipulate the celebration by using words dripping with feeling, exciting imagery, moving dialogue and the like. Such is antithetical to the nature of liturgical act.<sup>5</sup>

So what is this attention within Liturgy look like? How does one acquire it in a way that leads to the genuine encounter with God through Christ that is the essence of the Liturgy? What becomes the role or the significance of the homily in light of such recognition? Simone Weil sees this answer in the virtue of waiting Pope Benedict sees it in contemplation. First, we shall examine what these participants in dialogue have to say about the idea of the soul.

## 5.10 The Soul

Thus far, the dialogue that has been conducted has been religious in nature. Now it would require divine speech itself to say what the idea of the soul is. In fact, Plato says this in this way:

For in this case as in all others only he who knows the *idea* that is to say, the design of the reality, fully knows this reality; only he who knows the *idea* of a thing knows this thing as intensively as it can possibly be known at all; he alone ‘comprehends’ the thing in the strict sense of the word for ‘to comprehend’ means to know something as intensively as it is possible to know it (qtd. in Aquinas).

In the words of Josef Pieper: “But such knowledge is not possible for the human mind. Only God, then, knows the human spirit” (76). Pieper also notes in Enthusiasm and Divine Madness that we are not able to speak of matters such as soul, spirit, and deity, with any claim to direct description (77). He refers again to Plato on the subject of the

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of liturgy as play, even child’s play is taken up in the opening lines of Pope Benedict’s work The Spirit of the Liturgy. This work is based on Romano Guardini’s earlier, landmark book by the same

soul. Plato employs many analogies, to explain the soul, as he is wont to do. The implication is that a matter is difficult or impossible to grasp by direct, non-metaphorical statement, and that no metaphor is in itself completely adequate, none more fully accurate.

Simone Weil was a Platonist. This is why she explains an idea by aspects of its existence. The metaphor Simone Weil uses to define soul is what the soul does that is most expressive of its existence. For Simone the soul is never more the soul than when it yearns or recollects. Both yearning and recollecting express the soul's origin. What does the soul yearn and recollect? The soul's "yearning" and "recollection" point back toward the original state of beginning, which concurrently appears as the true end and aim of life. Therefore Simone Weil attests to the reality of the soul as love reaching its apogee and attains its own potentialities only by awakening recollection, or rather, when in itself is recollected of something that exceeds any possibility of gratification in the finite realm.<sup>10</sup>

Pope Benedict informs us that the basic reason that man can speak with God is because God himself is speech, word. The Pope writes about this in his essay On the Theological Basis of Prayer and Liturgy. The Pope says that it is the nature of God to speak, to hear, to reply, as we see particularly in Johannine theology, where Son and Spirit are described in terms of pure "hearing"; they speak in response to what they have first heard (162). Only because there is already speech, "Logos," in God can there be speech, "Logos," to God. The Pope puts it philosophically when he says it like this: "the Logos in God is the ontological foundation of prayer." (Thornton and Varenne 162)

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title. Both authors propose sacred liturgy as anticipation of life, a rehearsal for later life, without its burden and gravity.



To understand how Benedict treats the idea of the human soul and what happens in relationship to man in regards to the Liturgy, we must examine what the Pope sees in this divine communicating. The prologue of John's Gospel speaks of this connection in its very first sentences: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in communication with God" (1:1)—as a more precise translation of the Greek *pros* suggests, rather than usual "with God." It expresses the act of turning to God, of relationship (162). Pope Benedict believes it is the soul that yearns and recollects for relationship. Since there is relationship within God himself, there can also be a participation in this relationship. Thus we can relate to God in a way that does not contradict His nature (163).

This is the fundamental turning in dialogue between man and God. Through the Spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of God, we can share in the human nature of Jesus Christ; and in sharing in his dialogue with God, we can share in the dialogue that God is. This is prayer, which becomes a real exchange between God and man (163).

In another of his writings, the Holy Father expands this relationship of man's soul to God and to others. "In the Liturgy of the New Testament every liturgical action, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, is an encounter between Christ and the Church. The liturgical assembly derived its unity from the 'community of the Holy Spirit,' who gather the children of God into the one Body of Christ. This assembly transcends racial, culture, social, indeed all affinities ... The assembly should prepare to encounter its Lord and to become a "people well disposed" (Catechism of the Catholic

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<sup>10</sup> This experience of encountering God is further defined in Josef Pieper's work cited elsewhere in this dissertation. The theory of Pieper has been applied to interpret Simone Weil's concept of the soul. See p. 80– 83 of Pieper's Enthusiasm & Divine Madness, St. Augustine Press, IN

Church 1097). Here the Pope is not speaking about the “hypostasizing” of the congregation that is so widely bandied about today. “As the Catechism quite rightly says, those assembled become a unity only on the strength of the communion of the Holy Spirit: of themselves, as a sociologically closed group, they are not a unity. And when they are united in a fellowship that comes from the Spirit, then that is always an openhanded unity whose transcending of national, cultural, and social boundaries expresses itself in concrete openness for those who do belong to its core group” (Thornton 173). As a result of contemplating the *mysterium* of such a cosmic Liturgy (which is a Logos-liturgy) all that happens in the liturgy was to lead the faithful into the glorification of God, into the sober intoxication of the faith (173). Such a liturgy and all that serves towards this goal, does not mean exclusion of anything new, but rather means pointing out the direction that leads into the open spaces (175). Here, progress into new territory is made possible precisely because the right path has been found.

However, before we can move on to the practical application of the cosmopolitan dimension of Logos-liturgy that reaches beyond the limits of human reason, we do well to look one more time to Simone Weil who has something very essential to say about this.

In an essay, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,” Simone Weil writes that the highest part of attention only makes contact with God, when prayer is intense and pure enough for such contact to be established; but the whole attention is turned to God (Waiting for God 61).. In the same essay she goes on to write, “If there is a real desire, if the thing desired is really light, the desire for light produces it. There is real desire when there is an effort of attention Even if our efforts of

attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day a light that is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul. In order to really pay attention, it is necessary to know how to set about it. For the desire directed toward God is the only power capable of raising the soul. Or rather, it is God alone who comes down and possesses the soul, but desire alone draws God down. He only comes to those who ask him to come; and he cannot refuse to come to those who implore him long, often, and ardently. It is all about watching, waiting, and paying attention (59).

### 5.11 Carrying the Word Upon the Ground

After examining modernistic individualism, this study suggests there are many expressions of such individualism that have crept into the Catholic Church in recent years. By contrasting the provincial voice of Pope Benedict XVI with the cosmopolitan voice of Simone Weil, both faith-filled persons, this chapter has given evidence that only from within a story-based religious subculture can modernity be seen for what it is: dehumanizing. This study desires to explore the claim—made by Pope Benedict XVI, when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger—that, in order to resolve the dilemma of modernity, we have to reconsider the starting point of the modern path to freedom. Pope Benedict sees a perspective of modernity as regarding modernity as a kind of “yearning for the infinite.” Chapter six concludes this work by describing a homiletical turn that might assist the Church’s duty to preach the Good News in a shadow image of the Christian quest for God.

# Chapter 6

## Provinciality and the Other— Homiletics from the Threshold

This chapter rests as a dialectical companion to the emphasis of provinciality. Chapter six does not conclude the story. It adds to and provides texture to the story of reaching out to the “Other.” Human life cannot be realized by itself. This chapter continues through the threshold into the world where faith stands, recognizing that every doorway has two sides. The one is provincial. The other is cosmopolitan engagement of a much wider and larger world. This chapter presents a method for homiletics in light of this threshold image that is based upon the premise that the Church cannot walk into cosmopolitanism alone. Nor can the Church walk into provinciality alone. The faith story of the Catholic Church holds that the Church is a guest in God’s created world. Therefore the Church is always on the threshold, always engaged in the dialectic. The scheme that serves as a broad guide to the remaining elements of chapter six proceeds as follows: 1. The influence of Vatican’s II’s documents upon Pope Benedict’s views on preaching; 2 Standing on the Threshold; 3. Analyzing Pope Benedict’s message of hope or pessimism for the future of the world; 4. Rhetorical Style in Pope Benedict’s preaching; 5. Five principles for preaching as proposed by this treatise.

In this chapter, the major metaphor of how Pope Benedict helps us understand Catholic homiletics is learning to preach on the threshold. Catholic homiletics is understood as always being on the threshold. Such homiletics honors God. Homilies focus on connecting God to the people. It is interesting where homiletics, seen in this way, places the deacon or priest. The homilist is always on the threshold. Homilies delivered by the principles set forth

in this methodology are homilies that are preached on the threshold between provinciality and cosmopolitanism. They contend that a religion's power and effectiveness is when that religion is seen as a guest. Chapter six will help us situate the home for homiletics within the wider field of rhetoric as influenced by the vision of Pope Benedict, who is proposing a series of steps, which historians, looking back, may well call "The Benedictine Reform." This vision welcomes preaching home to the threshold.

Chapter six suggests an understanding of liturgical preaching informed by Pope Benedict XVI and founded upon principles that can be discerned through his mandate for the "reform of the reforms" that followed the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict had been on the right track, and even prefigured in many ways what theologians, philosophers, and other scholars would only later say about the course taken by history after modernity and finally even by the Church after the Second Vatican Council.

Further support for this thesis can now be drawn from material not yet addressed, which however has a bearing on the theme of contemporary Catholic homiletics or to state it more poetically, carrying the Word upon the ground and to the threshold. This material adds support and helps to round out the picture of Pope Benedict XVI by showing that his liturgical style has an influence on his total achievement as an author, a Catholic Churchman, and a distinguished world leader in the academy and in government as well.

## 6.1 A Review

Chapter five described how Simone Weil remained at the threshold of the Catholic Church but did not enter it. Some contend that Weil's hesitancy was a critique of the Church's lack of modernity, a "problem" that the Second Vatican Council "solve.."

However, this reading of Weil's life and witness is inaccurate. If anything, Weil's concerns about the Church actually flowed in the opposite direction. For Weil, the currents of modernity had interpenetrated the Church, severing it from the roots that made it intelligible and nutritive for human life.

For Pope Benedict, the threshold opened by the Second Vatican Council's approach to the Word mirrors the celestial threshold that is constantly opened through the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy in general. Consequently, our understanding of the Liturgy illuminates our understanding of the Second Vatican Council, and our understanding of the Second Vatican Council illuminates our understanding of the Liturgy and of the homiletic act.

A threshold is a starting point of an experience or undertaking. It is the point or line crossed on entry into another region or state. It can also mean a process by which contrasts are distinguished, as in images that appear when shades of light and darkness become more refined and more clearly discerned. Thus we stand at the threshold of preaching, taking one last look at Pope Benedict XVI and the vision he brings to homiletics in the Church today. Pope Benedict's vision is of a spiritual and doctrinal renewal to help end the confusion of the period since the Second Vatican Council (Moynihan, Inside the Vatican 10). It has been a purpose of this dissertation to outline how his life and work can aid in proposing a homiletic method for Catholic preaching that transforms more recent practices in the field by illuminating the significance of a unified praxis. This dissertation supports the argument that Liturgy and rhetoric are methodologically complementary enterprises (10). This dissertation has referred throughout to this vision as Pope Benedict's "reform of the reforms." This collaboration enables an alignment of religious belief and argumentative features of

discourse that can help the Catholic Church keep conversation going with the postmodern world at large.

Pope Benedict calls the Church toward a homiletic endeavor that is consciously grounded in the Church yet constantly invitational. In arriving at the threshold, the homiletic act is not an individualistic act, the act of a heroic rhetor broadcasting the Gospel into the world, but is an act of liturgical humility. Preaching in this way seeks to invite and sustain the grounding that Weil so urgently desired. Upon approaching the threshold, it artfully and dialectically engages those who have remained outside to enter into further dialogue grounded in the Word.

## 6.2 The Influence of Vatican II's Documents Upon Pope Benedict's Views of Preaching

In further review of this work, the previous chapters outlined the scholarly work of Pope Benedict. Thus far, we have seen in this dissertation that the changes brought on after the Second Vatican Council were unsettling and even confusing, especially to the laity in the Church. We have also been able to see that actually the Council did not call for radical changes. The desire of the Council Fathers was to equip the Church to influence the culture by greater engagement. Unfortunately, many in the Church interpreted “the spirit of the Second Vatican Council” as a calling to change the Church. Pope Benedict XVI stated in a December 2005 address to the Roman Curia that the teachings of the Council can only be understood properly if they are read in the context of a constant, organic Catholic tradition—as natural developments in a stream of thought that had followed the same basic course for two thousand years (Lawler 68).

Pope Benedict, like his predecessor Pope John Paul II does not wish the Catholic Church to be against modernity, but desires to advance a distinctively modern appraisal of modernity. The preaching style of this pontiff confirms that the Pope offers both affirmation and critique when considering modernity. He calls for a fidelity to the Gospel and the ancient teachings of the Church while exhorting openness to the modern world but also claims this openness ought to be complemented by a challenge to modernity to open its windows to the world of transcendent truth and love (Weigel, Against the Grain 4).

### 6.3 Standing on the Threshold

This chapter presents turning to a threshold that appears within the Eucharistic liturgy when the preacher of the Word of God ascends the steps of the pulpit and begins the homily. This particular threshold is real. However, it can only be recognized in the light that for Roman Catholics, the Word of God, although divinely inspired, is not itself divine; rather, it reveals the divine. As a matter of tradition, Catholics have not worshipped the pages of scripture, but rather the one to whom they point that becomes present and visible in the Eucharist.

The Church indeed reveres Scripture. One need only attend a Sunday Mass to see this in action. One would witness the treatment of the Book of the Gospels during the Liturgy of the Word. The book is carried in a ceremonial procession as part of the entrance rite. Then the book is enthroned on the altar, incensed at the moment of enthronement, and again incensed before the Gospel is proclaimed. The Word is kissed by the principal celebrant after the proclamation. If a bishop is present, the bishop elevates the book after kissing it and then blesses the congregation three times by moving the book in the sign of the Cross over the people.



The Catechism of the Catholic Church refers to the passage in Luke 24:45 to illustrate the correct interpretation and worship of God through Scripture. Luke recalls the second appearance of the risen Christ in this passage. He depicts how the risen Lord Jesus joined his disciples in a village outside of Jerusalem and there “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #108). Catholics note that Luke is emphasizing that the disciples only recognize the Lord Jesus when He breaks bread with them. It was “in the breaking of the bread that they see Christ” (Luke 24:35). Scripture and Eucharist thus join to reveal Jesus’ magnificent and awesome presence among God’s people.

Elsewhere in the Bible, in Matthew’s Gospel precisely, Jesus is not “God with” his disciples individually, but rather in the context of the community of the Church. In Matthew 18, Jesus explains why decisions of the Church, when made properly, are binding decisions: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). Matthew is teaching through revelation that Jesus remains present and incarnate in the Church that He has called into existence.

Now if Pope Benedict has been called the “watchdog,” “God’s Rottweiler,” and “reformer of the Council,” it is because he simply stands at the threshold and recognizes that dangers exist on both sides. He is interested and guided not by personal preference but by roots of tradition. Hannah Arendt images this type of roots by employing the metaphor of “pearls.” The only way to recover pearls from the sea is to be willing to participate in deep sea diving. One must dive deep into a tradition, like a diver for pearls dives into the depths of the sea. The discovery of the pearls of respective traditions is not only for the rewards and wealth of the retrieved treasures, but it results in the ability to comprehend the fullness of the

tradition and communicate that tradition to others outside the tradition in a way that informs and unites (Arendt Between Past and Future ).

To understand Pope Benedict's views of preaching, this segment of the dissertation aptly looks to what the Council, and some subsequent documents, had to say specifically about preaching, and then reflect on the praxis of some of Pope Benedict's preaching events exercised in his papacy thus far. Actually, the focus throughout this dissertation has been on his approach to the Word of God, how he reads it, interprets it, and positions it in relationship to the Liturgy. The aim of this work has been to come at this approach from many angles: his life, his studies, the church events that shaped his episcopacy and duties as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but also just his plain, consistent ministry as a priest. It is our hope that this has been accomplished by this study.

Our main concern here is the art of preaching. As we can see from the following brief quotations from additional councilor documents, preaching in itself is vital to the overarching mission of the Catholic Church. It is the chief means of evangelization. This Pope sees evangelization as a way to enter into dialogue. The word dialogue is used frequently throughout his writings and speeches. It even appeared in such groundbreaking events such as his recent letter to Chinese Catholics last May.

Because we now know this man, Joseph Ratzinger, the Holy Father of the Roman Catholic Church, the following quotes should enable us to believe they directly apply to what the Pope considers the preaching ministry to be:

‘(The Church)’ makes the words of the apostles her own, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1 Cor. 9:16), and accordingly never ceases to send heralds of the Gospel until each time as the infant Churches are fully established, and can themselves continue the work of evangelization. (Lumen Gentium 17)

Pope Benedict believes human life is an open question, an incomplete project. To preach is to teach the art of living. This quote is important to an understanding of Pope Benedict because it commissions the preacher to herald the Gospel as a means of answering the fundamental question of human existence.

Now, what was once preached by the Lord, or fulfilled in him for the salvation of mankind, must be proclaimed and spread to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), starting from Jerusalem (cf. Lk. 24:27), so that what was accomplished for the salvation of all men may, in the course of time, achieve its universal effect. (Ad Gentes 3)

Pope Benedict believes that if the art of living remains vague or unknown, nothing else in life works. The keyword for Pope Benedict is proclamation. God's Word is infinite.

Preaching on the threshold seeks to proclaim God's Word to the ends of the earth.

The principal instrument in the work of implanting the Church is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was to announce this Gospel that the Lord sent his disciples into the whole world, that men, having been reborn by the word of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23), might through baptism, be joined to the Church which, as the Body of the Word Incarnate, lives and is nourished by the word of God and the Eucharist. (cf., Acts 4:23) (Ad Gentes 6)

This conciliar excerpt guides the approach of Pope Benedict as he relates to the Word.

Pope Benedict challenges the members of the Church today to see conversion as more than moralism. He wants to follow the mindset set down in the above quote. Conversion means coming out of self-sufficiency, to discover our poverty and the poverty of the other. Pope Benedict recognizes in this lesson that unconverted life leads to self-justification. Baptism in Christ leads to entrusting oneself to the love of the Other.

Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion. 'How can they call upon him in whom they have not

believed? And how are they to believe in him in whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are men to preach unless they be sent? (Romans 10:14–15). To believers also the Church must ever preach faith and penance; she must prepare them for the sacraments, teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium 9)

Preaching offers a community of life. Pope Benedict appeals, as Sacramentum Concilium appeals to a new space. He wants preaching that opens the “I” itself once again to the “you” in all its depths. Pope Benedict sees preaching on the threshold as the space where a new “We” is born. The people of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God, which is quite rightly sought from the mouth of priests for since nobody can be saved who has not first believed, it is the first tasks of priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel of God to all men. (Presbyterorum Ordinis, 4)

Here Pope Benedict demonstrates his fundamental belief that today’s lifestyles have depersonalized the human being. Priests cannot preach with words alone. The Gospel itself creates communities of progress. The preacher, according to Pope Benedict, is more than an agent. Priests are called to understand that preaching is more than a personal act. Mere words have no consistency. Preachers must avoid empty religiosity. They must be able to preach *about* and *with* God.

Naturally there are many other passages in the documents of the Second Vatican Council on preaching that do not need to be quoted here. There are some that have to do with the office of bishop where preaching is central to their functions. There are also passages for

all the baptized. The Council restores the teaching that the laity share in the prophetic office of the Church.

These quotations just cited above, however, give us a glimpse of the formation Pope Benedict recommends for an ordained minister of the Word, a liturgical preacher empowered and authorized by the sacrament of Holy Orders. We can safely deduct that Pope Benedict takes the challenge of preaching seriously. We can learn from the witness of his heralding of the Good News that he definitely raises the quality of Catholic preaching according to these documents and what they require ministers of the Word to do. Even before becoming the Pope, he realized that many Catholics were being denied the fullness of the Bible's message, especially the lessons of the Apostolic Church that in recent times were being neglected. Pope Benedict was one of the first to identify that many homilists after the Council were ignoring the instructions of the past four centuries since the Counter-Reformation, as if they never existed. He recognized that Catholic preaching had taken a turn for the worse, not only in its lack of clear catechesis, but in its presentations that were overly creative and irresponsibly lacking in pastoral care for the Word, as well as the listeners. Pope Benedict joined his predecessors to set out to renew preaching even while the Council was being conducted.

Pope Benedict published many works that challenged some of the abuses in preaching of that era immediately before the Council and especially right after the Council. These works were extremely popular, at least among serious liturgists and homiletic scholars. People in those days were able to read these publications without all the distractions of modern Church history and political developments. The polarization of the society was still unheard of. Pope Benedict was writing what many leaders in the Church wanted to learn at

that time. He shared delight in the tenor of Pope John XXIII's rhetoric that opened the Council. As Aidan Nichols includes in his book, Pope Benedict supported that the aim of the Council would not be of doctrinal refinement of particular aspects of the deposit of faith, but the "fundamental renewal of the whole"— and that in a living exchange with today's world and its needs (Nichols, The Thought of Benedict 77). This was in 1963. In 1969 Pope Benedict was teaching as the chair in dogmatic theology at the University of Tübingen (Weigel God's Choice 174). The wave of student uprisings driven in part by Marxist ideologies and the rejection of traditional religion upset Father Ratzinger (174). He began to discern how liberals have started already at that early time to distort the true intentions of the Council (174). He left Tübingen and returned to Bavaria to teach at the University of Regensburg. In 1972 he founded, together with Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and other renowned Catholic theologians, the quarterly journal of Catholic theology Communio (175). His writings were considered to be prophetic. He remained popular among Catholics and non-Catholics. These writings of that period are especially popular today, not only because he is the Pope, but because of the need of our time for the Church and the world to be reminded of the great dignity of man by articulating the relationship between faith and reason, between truth and love.

Pope Benedict is held in high esteem among the intelligentsia and also among leaders of other religions is his ability to craft homilies and addresses that deal with very difficult concepts or topics that can become politically charged. People have been mostly deprived of good, direct but non-confrontational discourse for some time now. This is usually avoided out of the pretense of striving to be politically correct or at least to be mannerly and polite. Pope Benedict saw that this hesitation to deal with complicated issues had a side effect that

was even more devastating than that debate or argument. It was the wholesale destruction of nearly all things religious or spiritual. It was certainly destroying the voice of what is truly Catholic. The Pope rejected the teachings of those who were in fact creating and building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's ego and desires. Leslie Rice writes about this in an article published in Columbia welcoming Pope Benedict XVI to the United States and reflecting on his ministry and message (Vol. 88, No. 4). Rice summarizes the Pope's trenchant observation to the College of Cardinals before the conclave of April 2005 caught the world's attention and foreshadowed what would become a central task of his pontificate (14).

In the same year at Christmastime is his address to the Roman Curia—an annual opportunity for the Pope to review the events of the preceding year—Pope Benedict offered his own answer to the conundrum of the relationship between the Church and the world. In this micro-image we can see a format for Benedict's view of preaching. Again referring to the article by Rice, the Pope noted that this “perennial problem” of the encounter between faith and reason marked the earliest years of Christianity just as much as it does our own time (14). The Holy Father goes to the Word of God to enlighten the meaning of the modern experience. He shed light upon the human experience of today, by opening the Scripture in Peter's admonition as expressed in the First Letter of Peter: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason [*logos*] for your hope” (Peter 3:15).

And again in an exhortation given in a speech at the University of Regensburg in 2006, the Pope reframes the human condition by enlightening its meaning with the Word of God. He calls to mind the first words of the Gospel of John, which echoes the opening lines of Genesis referring to the *logos*.

In these short sentences, the Pope shows how St. John unites the biblical notion of God's creation of the world with the Greek philosophical concept *logos* (word, reason, and rationality). Writing late in the first century, John was working with a notion of reason much different from the one that is predominant today. The Pope is philosophically deep sea diving for precious communicative pearl. He is modeling sacred rhetoric or at least disclosing what he proposes all ecclesial rhetors to do. What is implied in this process of bringing to light the full meaning of contemporary man's lived events is that our capacity for perceiving the world's order brings us into contact with the world's Creator. In this sense the human dynamic of the exercise of reason—which includes observation, discovery, and invention—finds its ultimate purpose in the search for the source of the world's order.

Pope Benedict's views of preaching as obtained from the documents of the Second Vatican Council reflect the flavor and precise style preferred by scholars and plain folk alike. As Kwame Anthony Appiah instructs in his book Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers even the cleverest people are not easily shifted by reason alone—and that can be true in the most cerebral of realms (84). In fact, in the larger world, outside the academy, people do not always care whether they *seem* reasonable. It is conversation that leads to agreement about what to think and feel. Pope Benedict demonstrates a way to preach between the boundaries of cosmopolitanism and provinciality. Like Appiah's book deals with conversation, Pope Benedict deals with the reality that preaching—whether national, religious, or something else—can begin with some sort of imaginative engagement that speaks to you from some place other than your own (85). For Pope Benedict that place is an encounter with God. Conversation does not have to lead to consensus about anything,



especially not values; what is important in this moment is that it helps people get used to one another. This encounter is valuable to the Pope in itself.

#### 6.4 Analyzing Pope Benedict's Message as Hope or Pessimism for the Future of the World

Periodically in the huge number of articles written about Pope Benedict and his homilies or speeches, critics will accuse the Pope's style, personality, and message as pessimistic. Commenting on this subject, Brennan Pursell, author of Benedict of Bavaria: An Intimate Portrait of the Pope and His Homeland, calls this attitude toward the Pope an unfortunate misunderstanding. Pursell attributes the source of this misconception to the Pope's deep philosophical mind as well as the general lack of knowledge that people in the media have of the culture that has been decisive in the Pontiff's youth and formation (156). Pursell says that illustrating German rootedness, a sense of place and of heritage, can give rise to the perception that he is less positive, less loving, or not even as out-going as Pope John Paul II (156).

Pursell describes Bavaria, which he claims needs to be understood, if one is to know the real Joseph Ratzinger. In the book, Pursell notes the very Catholic surroundings of Bavaria: "Crucifixes and miniature chapels dot the country side, and you can expect to find a large cross on every mountaintop" (35). It is a beautiful country; it is openly Catholic, yet the general disposition of the people there is that they complain about everything from the economy to politics. Consequently, Pursell argues, it is hard to appreciate the genius of Benedict XVI in just two dimensions, such as seeing him waving on television. "He doesn't wave very much. You need to listen to him and read his writings. If you do not, you can miss

his brilliance and be tempted to hear only the negative” (114) Pursell is pointing out that Pope Benedict is a very humble, loving, very simple man.

Are Pope Benedict’s writings, including his homilies pessimistic? Some compare Pope Benedict’s intellect and demeanor to that of Cardinal John Henry Newman. Newman was often criticized for being too gloomy in his messages. Newman, like Pope Benedict, was famous for preaching the great privileges of the Gospel, although calling his hearers to acknowledge the claims of obedience to the law of God. It should, however, be realized that when one has written as much as Pope Benedict and Newman have, it is easy to find selections that convey various aspects of the entire body of Catholic doctrine. Like any other accomplished preacher, Pope Benedict must sometimes over emphasize one point to move an audience to consider what he wants to convey, especially if he longs to persuade them to make an alternative choice about how to live the Catholic spiritual life or put the values of the Gospel into practice. Pope Benedict absolutely calls his listeners to consider the more severe side of Christian discipleship. He encourages youth and adults alike to practice mortification and penance in order to overcome the decadence of parts of society today. Nevertheless, young people continue to flock to hear him teach. Young, impressionable undergraduates and young seminarians want to hear him. Many youth at the time of this writing are planning to travel this summer to be with the Pope in the far off land of Australia for the 2008 World Youth Day. They will come, not necessarily with the same exuberance that Pope John Paul II solicited from these rallies, but they will be there with keen reflection, which seems to be just as tantalizing for teenagers and young adults. The youth that have seen Pope Benedict and heard him speak at earlier World Youth Days say that his teachings are masterful, demanding, and hard to forget. To characterize all of Pope Benedict’s

addresses as pessimistic seems to miss the mark. Cardinal Newman once said: “Gloom is not a Christian sentiment. That repentance is not real which has not love in it. That self-chastisement is not acceptable which is not sweetened by faith and cheerfulness. We must live in sunshine, even when we sorrow. We must live in God’s presence. We must not shut ourselves up in our own hearts, even when we are reckoning up our past sins.”<sup>7</sup>

Pope John Paul echoed Newman in many ways too. As Pope John Paul II famously said at the United Nations in 1995, he came not as a political leader or even as a spiritual leader seeking privileges, but as a “witness of hope”(Weigel 776).

Pope Benedict XVI continues this theme of hope in his second encyclical, Spe Salvi, which is translated in English as “Saved by Hope.” The Pope says in this encyclical that, “Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope” (Ratzinger 422).

Delia Gallagher compares the energy of Pope John Paul II, a trademark of the naturally charismatic pope with the no frill ways of communicating by Pope Benedict. Gallagher writes about this contrast in a special edition of Our Sunday Visitor anticipating the April 2008 visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States. The comparison helps to recognize the tremendous power of this Pope to engage audiences through clear, incisive words. Gallagher reminds readers that this is the Pope that called those priests guilty of sex abuses the “filth” of the Church (10). He challenged Muslim fundamentalists to question whether they believe in an irrational God (10).

Pope Benedict is not a pessimist. He is a realist. His hope is definitely tempered by limitations. He discusses weaknesses, only for the sake of making life better by what we learn when we humbly admit them and learn from them what weaknesses have to teach us about being human. His is a quiet presence, no less powerful than the energy set off by his predecessor, just not given to the same exuberant displays of enthusiasm.

What does it mean when we say that we are saved by hope in Christ? As Pope Benedict wrote in Spe Salvi, “man needs God; otherwise he remains without hope” (Ratzinger Origins 428). Pope Benedict tells us that we cannot be saved “simply from outside.” (428) Science or government cannot save us. We are saved only by unconditional love, absolute love. The encyclical goes on to say, “Man’s great, true hope that holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us and who continues to love us “to the end,” until all “is accomplished”” (23–31 and 428).

This section on Pope Benedict’s message of hope or pessimism includes another comparison, that with John Henry Newman, the great British orator and Churchman. Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI admit being influenced by Newman’s writings. Let this section on Benedict’s message close with a passage from Newman that could apply to Pope Benedict XVI himself. It comes from the last sermon of Newman’s first volume of sermons as a Roman Catholic. While discussing the reason for the fitness of the glories of Mary, and of her grace and holiness, Newman writes:

Consider then, that it has been the ordinary rule of God’s dealings with us, that personal sanctity should be attendant upon high spiritual dignity of place or work. The angels, who as the word imports, are God’s messengers, are also perfect in holiness; ‘without sanctity, no one shall see God;’ no defiled thing can enter the courts of heaven; and the higher its

inhabitants are advanced in their ministry about the throne, the holier are they, and the more absorbed in their contemplation of that Holiness upon which they wait. The Seraphim, who immediately surround the Divine Glory, cry day and night, 'Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts'. So is it also on earth; the prophets have ordinarily not only gifts but graces; they are not only inspired to know and to teach God's will, but inwardly converted to obey it. For surely those only can preach the truth duly who feel it personally; *those only transmit it fully from God to man, who have in the transmission made it their own* (Parochial and Plain Sermon, VII 1529). (Emphasis added).

Pope Benedict reminds the people of the twenty-first century that Jesus did not redeem the world with beautiful words alone. He redeemed humanity with his suffering and his death. His suffering gave power to his words. Redemption was not the fruit of great rhetorical art; the fruitfulness was tied to suffering. The contemporary preacher on the threshold will not be able to convince others to give up their lives for the sake of the Kingdom of God without giving up their own.

The preacher is not the center of the homiletical act. This is the premise of Pope Benedict's modeling of a rhetorical style that emphasize that the preacher does not speak by himself or for himself. It is a style rooted in the Passion of Jesus; a style rooted in preaching *in persona Christi*—in the Person of Christ.

## 6.5 Rhetorical Style in Pope Benedict's Preaching.

Rhetorical studies have a long and fascinating history. Sacred rhetorical studies have an almost equally interesting formation. It is not the intention of this chapter to fully define or even give the outlines of these histories, nor can this chapter attempt to situate Pope Benedict in any particular tradition. Style is not relevant to preaching alone. Personal style is found in every form of literature or composition. All orators, rhetors, speakers must eventually cultivate their own style.

Kenneth Burke connects style to two other key components of rhetoric. Dramatism is a method of classifying and analyzing interrelationships. Burke says that the term “dramatism” is used when one considers the matter of motives and consequently treats language and thought primarily as modes of action (Burke, xxii).

Pope Benedict’s style can be seen more clearly by employing the lens of Burke’s concept of dramatism. As noted above, dramatism attempts to measure motive. What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it (xv)? Burke’s theory can be used to enable the effort to answer the question. Pope Benedict understands preaching that relies upon liturgy. Liturgy and preaching are crafted for Pope Benedict from the same cloth. Burke writes: The term “dramatism” is used because this approach raises the central relationship between Liturgy and preaching (233). Pope Benedict’s style conveys that at the same time a conversation is being actively engaged between the homilist and the worshipping community; a similar drama is unfolding between the homilist and the Word, Christ himself. This is why preaching in this context is at the service of the action that follows, namely the Eucharist prayer and the reception of Holy Communion.

Here it becomes clear that the Pope is directing preaching to a particular liturgical reconciliation. Pope Benedict aspires to help preachers understand that great reality of the Liturgy. He is opposed to *chaos*, to any fragmentation of the Liturgy. For the Pope, chaos is a result of disconnecting the liturgy from historicality. “The Liturgy came about via an organic process throughout the centuries; it bears the fruit of the experience of faith of all the generations” (Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers). The motive of preaching is of the same essence of the Liturgy in which it is embedded; the reaching out towards the Lord

who is coming (Reid, 30). Preaching always brings us to hear Christ's reply yet again and to experience its truth: "Yes, I am coming soon" (Apoc. 22:17, 20).

The second concept seen in Burke's theory of the pentad is the attitude of the agent. Attitude is of such importance that Burke himself questioned whether attitude should be added to the pentad as a sixth category, thus making it a hexad (Foss, et al 169). Burke asks where attitude falls within the pattern of a speech. Often it is the preparation for an act, which would make it a kind of symbolic or incipient act, but in its character as a state of mind ... it is quite clearly to be classed under the head of agent (20). Attitude conveys a "how" the act is delivered. Burke uses this illustration to distinguish attitude from agency. "To build something with a hammer would involve an instrument, or 'agency'; to build with diligence would involve an 'attitude, a 'how'" (443).

Pope Benedict, from a dramatic and attitudinal perspective, can be best understood when we acknowledge that the Liturgy communicates both verbally and non-verbally. A scene, for example, can be as rhetorical as an act of speech. Burke gives an example of this: "There seems to be something about judicial robes that not only hypnotizes the beholder but transforms the wearer (82). Even the simple act of how one dresses, has rhetorical power. Much of the Liturgy is non-verbal; in fact Pope Benedict calls for more silence in the Liturgy so that participants can get in touch with the mystical presence of God coming into the midst of the assembly. Other elements within the Liturgy can speak loudly and persuasively too. Some of these are architecture, atmosphere, and arrangement of furnishings, dress, movement, posture, gesture, and vestments. One is reminded of the adage, "Actions speak louder than words." This fact underlies what the Pope is teaching us about the Liturgy and preaching. Theology of the Liturgy means that God acts through Christ in the Liturgy. We

cannot act but through Him and with Him. The Liturgy derives its greatness from what it is, not from what we make of it (30).

Pope Benedict's style of preaching is consistently directed towards unity. He points us to where Liturgy always moves us: the unity of humanity with one another, the unity of humanity with creation, and the unity of creation and humanity with God. This is what is central to both Catholic Liturgy and Catholic preaching.

This is why the Liturgy is a pure example of what true cosmopolitanism is. The attempt to bring the Word of God to the ever-increasing number of people in many lands and cultures is the mandate of the Gospel. It is the ongoing process identified with the mission of the Church. In every age chosen teachers or practitioners of homiletics strive to prepare the new generation of priests and deacons for the task of handing on the Word of God. The final section of this chapter deals with a methodology that depends upon a background foundation found in the example of Pope Benedict XVI. His style makes him a very acceptable teacher, especially to students of homiletics that want to return to the sources upon which all of Liturgy must draw, situated in theology, philosophy, and history.

## 6.6 Five Principles for Preaching

At a preliminary meeting of a special task force commissioned to design a strategy for the expansion of the work carried out by the Pope Benedict XVI Chair of Biblical Theology and Liturgical Proclamation at Saint Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, on April 15, 2008, a conversation ensued around homiletics and seminary formation. A preparatory statement was distributed at the meeting and incurred that most would agree that this is a



time of great hunger for God, for inspiration, for personal meaning, and for community. It is to this hunger that the homily responds.

The United States Bishops' document on homiletic preaching, Fulfilled in Your Hearing: the Homily in the Sunday Assembly, in article 29 summarizes homiletic preaching as "a scriptural interpretation of human existence which enables a community to recognize God's active presence, to respond to that presence in faith through liturgical word and gesture, and beyond the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the Gospel" (20).

The homily is intended to bring the Word alive in community. Through the preached Word, the worshipping community stands in transformational encounter with Jesus Christ himself in the Liturgy in Word and Sacrament, and lives out the encounter in the world. The importance of quality homiletic formation cannot be overestimated; good preaching is crucial for the life of the Church, just as preaching is central to the ministry of the priest (Presbyterorum Ordinis 4).

The Pope Benedict XVI Chair preparatory statement also included the following reference from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document on priestly formation:

Seminary formation, with its emphasis on the four pillars of Spiritual Formation, Human Formation, Intellectual Formation, and Pastoral Formation, is a clear locus for not only the integral development of the student himself, but of his development as a pastor who can facilitate and enable authentic unity in diversity in Church communities. Homiletics has the potential to be a vehicle of integration within the Seminary curricula that both encompasses all four pillars of formation and works with the students toward the kind of integration that they need to be both healthy ministers and to proclaim Scripture and Tradition effectively in the Church. Homiletics should occupy a prominent place in the core

curriculum and be integrated into the entire course of studies. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 215)

Both the current state of the discipline of homiletics and the polarized ecclesial context points to the importance of developing a homiletic pedagogy.

The need for a new homiletics methodology is growing in seminary curriculums. As a result, a renewed interest in rhetoric is also emerging. In a postmodern world, we recognize that there is no one homiletic method.

It must be remembered that much of the Western World has advanced beyond the modern era. Catholic philosophers and theologians, sociologists, and anthropologists have already analyzed features of the modern world such as the impact of the information age, the contributions of science and technology as well as their failure to advance the development of the progress they promised, the mobility of social classes and capital, the emergence of the modern state and hand in hand with this emergence the overshadowing of individual states by globalization, the rise of individualism and pluralism and the alienation and cynicism typical of this age that has experienced such rapid change in the way people live. From a Christian point of view, Stanley J. Grenz, in a book cited in this work earlier, provides one of the most comprehensible and all embracing descriptions of what has been called a postmodern society, or a complete secularization of that society. There is no doubt that these conditions are having their impact on Christians today. Pope Benedict offers challenging insights into the need of inculturation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is this that he consistently asks his listeners to reflect upon, as has been shown in the writings, addresses, and homilies with which this dissertation has been concerned.

Indeed, Pope Benedict has much to say not only to philosophers and others in the academic world, but especially to priests, deacons, and seminarians studying to be ordained. These men are called in a particular way to search for abiding truth in their own personal lives. Pope Benedict relies on the ordained ministers in the Church to preach to all others in a way that carries the Word to their hearts and through them into their homes, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods. Only from there can it branch out to effect a change in the culture that surrounds them.

As stated at the start of this final chapter, ever since the Early Church Fathers formed a homiletic method by studying Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics, preaching and rhetoric have been interrelated. "Names we read in church history, are often, as well known in rhetoric—Augustine, (De doctrina Christiana) Boethius, the Venerable Bede, Alcuin, and others" (Buttrick 464).

This work suggests that it is classical wisdom that joins these church teachers and contemporary preachers. At the same time, many contemporary studies in the fields of rhetoric and homiletics have displayed bearing on homiletic theory and practice. Names such as I. A. Richards, E. Grassi, Richard Weaver, and Kenneth Burke have had great impact on shaping homiletics. The field of homiletics is ready to burst open to an exciting time of religious rhetoric in a meaningful way that invites rather than excludes.

The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians provides us with a perfect illustration of how direct preaching with regard for rhetoric saved the day. This epistle is deeply rhetorical, but in plain style rather than sophistic, which dominated the rhetorical-philosophical landscape at the time. In a pagan world notoriously tolerant of sexual license, Corinth had a reputation for debauchery and licentiousness. This epistle gives us Saint Paul's method of

preaching: we believe because God calls us. In Christ, crucified and raised, God reveals to the call his wisdom and his saving acts. Paul moves away from his earlier preaching while he was still preaching as a philosopher. At Corinth we notice a change, a transformation; Paul preaches the Gospel with all its shocking realism with plain style rhetoric. By this we mean that Paul's rhetorical eloquence and philosophical reasoning were humbly placed at the service of the message conveyed. This new consciousness of the Christian message clarified any confusion of that time between material and efficient cause. The success that met Paul's preaching at Corinth was obviously due to the Holy Spirit.

Although this subject cannot be exhausted in a chapter of this length, it already makes a significant contribution by way of praxis relieving the tensions between thought and action. It also open the way to suggest the five principles that offer an alteration in homily design that conform to the thinking of Pope Benedict's reforms.

## 6.7 First Principle: Preaching with Humility

“Humility forbids me to think of myself as one capable of a ‘new revelation of the universe and human destiny ... the unveiling of a large portion of truth and beauty hitherto hidden’” (Weil, Waiting for God xi).

We live in an era where many people believe they can do more than they actually are capable of achieving. We have focused on ourselves for so long that too often we deceive ourselves and think we do not need anyone else to help us or show us how to do what we claim we can do even better than we are doing. We also live in an age of entitlement when we feel we have a right to have an opinion on every topic under the sun. What we need in preaching today are homilists who are humble. We need preachers that acknowledge their

limitations and without judging others, realizing that they do not always have the requisite data or reflection to draw definitive conclusions. This is not to suggest that preachers give in to relativism. If reason shows us something is true by way of revealed truth of Scripture or tradition we should ascend to such truth, but even in these cases there might be steps to such a conclusion that we have not taken or remain missing. Preachers need to be humble enough to wait until the truth is revealed. Their participation is, of course, necessary, but as a means of inserting themselves humbly into the spirit of the Liturgy. A humble preacher is one that serves Him Who is the true subject of the Liturgy: Jesus Christ (Reid, *Looking Again* 30) .

Dialogue is one way to accomplish this success in the virtue of humility. Homilists must remain humble enough to be in dialogue with God in their prayer life. They must also humbly dialogue with the written text of Scripture upon which they will preach. Foremost, they must be humble enough to enter into dialogue with their listeners so they can hear where it is the Spirit of God wishes to meet the people, the passageway into the hearts of God's People. This entrance way can be discerned only by God for whom the preacher serves as a mediator. Humility is an essential element in the process and journey of preparation of a homily and its actual delivery. Humility opens the minister of the Word to be authentically shaped by the process of sacred dialogue in communion with God and others. Pope Benedict said in an address to the priests of Rome: "Humility doesn't clip the wings of our desires, but rather helps us understand the need to have recourse to God to make them come true" (*Homily, Chrism Mass, 2007*).

Humility teaches a homilist that we do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. Man cannot discover them by his own powers, and if he sets out to seek for them he will find in their place counterfeits of which he will be unable

to discern their falsity (Weil, Waiting for God, 62). Humility as a prerequisite to effective preaching admits that every little fragment of particular truth is a pure image on the unique, eternal, and living Truth (62). Humility embraces the very Truth that once in a human voice declared: “I am the Truth.”

Preaching with humility is proclamation. It is telling the Gospel message through a dialogical process. The homilist who practices homiletics in this way is not telling the other person something that is entirely unknown to him; rather, he is opening up the hidden depth of something with which, in his own experience, he is already in touch (Ratzinger, *Many Religions* 112).

Preaching with humility also acknowledges that the one who proclaims is not the only giver; he is also the receiver. “The dialogue ... should become more and more a listening to the Logos, who is pointing out to us, in the midst of our separation and our contradictory affirmation, the unity we already share” (113).

Pope Benedict tells preachers to learn from nature and the beginning of a new species. At first the beginning is invisible and cannot be found by scientific research. The sources are hidden—they are too small. In other words, the Pope is exhorting preachers to preach on the threshold by remembering that large realities begin in humility.

## 6.8 Second Principle: Preaching With Groundedness in the Church

We learn from Pope Benedict that we are in need of creating a common language that all the members of the church can understand again. To do this, preachers must re-discover a way to communicate the Gospel message that tells the story of the Church in its entirety and not just in bits and pieces. Alasdair MacIntyre says that we are living in a time of fragmented

traditions (240). As a result, large segments of society enter into shouting matches where people end up speaking at one another or not communicating at all. This is not the first time the church has experienced this condition. The Catholic Church has had a long history of dealing with controversy and disagreements. Preachers today need to look into the past and see once more how the church dealt with these painful circumstances. The humanities have much to offer us in this endeavor. Homiletics departments and their programs need to introduce the humanities into our study of homiletics so we become well-rounded practitioners who know how to avoid the polarization and politicizing that is currently occurring in society and the Church.

It has been brought to light that one of the reasons the American media has so much trouble understanding or figuring out Vatican documents is because their documents assume a classical Aristotelian-Thomistic cultural tradition. It is virtually impossible to adapt these documents to a democratic, liberal background without creating a major problem.

Preaching with groundedness in the Church is what Pope Benedict treats in his magnificent book [A Turning Point for Europe](#). This work wishes to apply the Pope's thoughts to the homiletical project.

Preaching with groundedness in the Church places a total dependence upon Jesus' *logion*: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all the rest will be given you" (Mt. 6:33). The Pope refers to Horkheimer and Adorno, with their clear sight as outsiders, when they denounce the attempt by theologians to sneak past the core of the faith, removing the provocative character of the Trinity and life beyond death as well as of the biblical narratives by reducing these to the level of symbols. "They [Horkheimer and Adorno] tell us that when theologians bracket off dogma, what they say has no validity; they

bow to that ‘fear of the truth’ in which the spiritual and intellectual decline of the present day has its roots” (Turning Point 178). Preaching with groundedness in the Church fulfills preaching in which the preacher’s identity is based: to make God known and to proclaim his Kingdom. Precisely this, and only this, constitutes the soul of a Catholic homilist: to convince, for it is only by convincing that he opens up space for what has been entrusted to him. For this groundedness, the priest and the deacon must be willing to suffer.

Preaching with groundedness prepares space for the divine, not through creativity or by being the doer of the Word, but through spirit, not even through institutional strength but through witness, through the Church’s love, life, and suffering. Preaching with groundedness helps the people of the Church, and those far beyond the circle of those who believe, to find their moral identity.

Pope Benedict does not want preachers to preach for the sake of spreading our own institutions but to stand between provincialism and the rest of the world. He wishes homilists to preach for the good of the people and humanity giving room to Him who is Life.

### 6.9 Third Principle: Preaching with Patience

“We should weigh these thoughts of Cardinal Y. Congar: ‘Impatient men, with too little awareness of Tradition, putting their pet notion before all else, are liable to turn any reform into a sectarian movement’” (Reid, Looking Again, 105). Pope Benedict calls the Church to get back to the sacred.

Catholic homilists learn the rudiments of Catholic spiritual formation long before they are delegated to preach. Evidence of a sound spiritual life is premiere to the reception of Holy Orders in the Church. All formative spirituality insists on acquiring patience.



There is no greater way to inspire others than when they believe they have first been perfectly heard and perfectly understood. Patience takes time. Many of the problems in the history of the Church took over four hundred years to emerge and took over that same amount of years before they were resolved. Take for example the sad divisions caused by the separation of Christians. Only in recent times are we beginning to fully lament what actually has happened that is more tragic than the grievances that caused the disruptions. Today we are able to prioritize the time and the energy that it will take to begin the dialogues that heal these wounds among the baptized. Patience requires us to remember not everything we do deserves the same attention. Patience helps us to reflect on the difficulty we experience from quandary and lets us see what it is that is really important to the community as a whole.

Patience in homiletic pedagogy teaches the student to resist entrenchment. Ideas are like relationships. They evolve, as does understanding. Pope Benedict informed the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers in May of 2006 that they should “cultivate” an “open dialogue on religious problems” (O’Connor, Columbia 33). The Pope was not mandating the denial of strongly held convictions. He was asking for patience that opens our arms and hearts to everyone, conveying what Christ would have all of us do.

Patience empowers the homilist to take the time to find a good, persuasive, and moving form for his words, if what is going to be said is to be realized. Everything Catholic sacramental theology has to say about the efficacy of the actual event of preaching cannot replace the homilist’s efforts or render them unimportant (Sammelroth, The Preaching Word: On the Theology of Proclamation 201). The preacher who is by nature too impatient or who cannot place his preparation of the Sunday homily above other pressing tasks may be tempted to put his trust too heavily in the idea “that the simple reading of the Gospel works

like a sacrament, and that his efforts over his homily are therefore not particularly necessary” (202). Patience perseveres and renders the homiletic act dependent upon both the sacrament’s mediation of grace and the assertion of the disposing power of the word which is preached.

Pope Benedict XVI states in his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Sacramentum Caritatis, that ordained ministers must prepare the homily carefully, based on an adequate knowledge of Sacred Scripture (46). It is the Living Word alone that comes down and possesses the soul, but desire alone draws God down. He comes to those who ask Him to come; and He cannot refuse to come to those who implore Him long, often, and ardently (Weil, Waiting 61). Preaching with patience requires overcoming the violent repugnance against having to wait, not seeking anything else but the kairos moment in which the Word comes to us with amazing tenderness. Simone Weil used the image of the slave to describe this condition by which God visits the homilist in his preparation of the homily. Elsewhere in this dissertation, we clarified that she used the term, “slave,” not in any unhealthy way. She was referring to the servanthood that is required to remain empty, waiting, seeking nothing, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it. The homilist must not seize the idea too hastily, and being made thus prematurely blocked, not open to the truth. Simone Weil says that it is this too active an advance, that causes one to lose a great treasure (64). The preacher must practice patience in order to empty himself of all his own contents so he can receive the being he is waiting for, just as he is, in all his truth.

Only one who is capable of preparing with patience is capable of preaching with patience. Only one who is capable of preaching with patience can inspire others to desire to do the same.

This is the reason Pope Benedict encourages preachers to foster the spiritual devotion of Adoration of the Eucharist. He writes about this in *God Is Near Us*, a book in which he describes the Eucharist as the heart of the Church. He says, “A person cannot communicate with another person without knowing him. He must be open for him, see him, and hear him. Love of friendship always carries within it an impulse of reverence, of adoration. Communicating with Christ therefore demands that we gaze on him, allow him to gaze on us, listen to him, and get to know him. Adoration is simply the personal aspect of Communion (97).

Preaching with patience, takes to heart the first step in this process, the saying of Jesus in the book of Revelation: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (3:20). True Communion can happen only if we hear the voice of the Lord, if we patiently wait and then answer and open the door.

#### 6.10 Fourth Principle: Preaching from the Threshold

This dissertation has clarified that the use of the term “cosmopolitan” is not to be confused with the connotation that sometimes is associated with it. It does not mean in this context that we are implying elitism as when the term is used to describe the modern “jet set,” *nouveau riche*, or “I” generation. This term does not refer to the shallow, quasi-sophisticated implication that to be cosmopolitan one holds no national attachments or prejudices whatsoever. Cosmopolitan, as defined in this work, maintains that the universality and catholicity of the Catholic Church holds the Church to a serious responsibility. If we insist that the Church is truly catholic, then homilies that are preached are called to an accountability that is fully explicit.

The cosmopolitan voice of the Church must find its way into the homilies of today by the homilist becoming a mouthpiece that is able to challenge the blindness of our own members to the faults of our Church, while at the same time uproot oneself for the sake of others in an already alienated world (Weil, Waiting for God x). Today's homilies must learn from the preaching ministry of Christ, who is really the only one who can claim completely to be "a citizen of the world." To preach with the cosmopolitan voice that postmodern man yearns to hear is to learn from Christ why His Father lives only in secret. This is why, as Simone Weil said, "Christ went to bring his presence into those places most polluted with shame, misery, crime, and affliction, into prisons and law courts, into workplaces and shelters for the wretched and the outcasts" (130). Homilies written and delivered in the cosmopolitan voice are always accompanied by modesty because love never desires to occupy too large and visible a place in one's soul. The cosmopolitan voice flows from true faith that implies great discretion. It is a secret between God and the homilist in which the priest or deacon understands he has scarcely any part.

Dr. Scott Hahn, in the foreword to Pope Benedict's book Many Religions—One Covenant, identifies the Pope as a true master bridge maker, yet, even as a man that longs to build bridges that bring people together, he admits unification is hardly possible, especially in our historical time. He even questions whether this is truly desirable. Perhaps there is a better way to exist on earth than even the dream of unification (Ratzinger, Many Religions 109). So what is it that distinguishes the cosmopolitan voice for Pope Benedict? It is not by renouncing our convictions. This would only hand the world over to calculations of utility and rob man of his greatness. Cosmopolitanism is most pure when we respect the beliefs of others and stand ready to look for the truth in what strikes as strange or foreign. It will be this

stance that can correct our fractured condition and lead us further along the path. What we need is the willingness to look behind the alien appearances and look for the deeper truth hidden there.

Preaching by embracing such a cosmopolitan voice allows the narrow understanding of the homilist to be broken down. This preacher learns his own truth better by his openness to understand the other person and allow himself to be moved along the road to God who is ever greater. He is always a learner, on pilgrimage toward God and Truth, on a path that never ends.

#### 6.11 Fifth Principle: Preaching by Being Attentive to Revelation— Life on the Threshold

“There is no more urgent task than putting the Church in dialogue with itself at all levels and across all divisions. But a dialogue program is of no use to people convinced that they have nothing to learn from one another.” This quote was taken from an address delivered by John Allen, Jr., Vatican correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter newspaper. He was speaking at the sixth annual Catholic Common Ground Initiative Lecture at the Catholic University of America on June 25, 2004.

Today, things are still as polarized within the Church as they were then. Self-identified conservative Catholics and self-identified progressive Catholics seem to read their own publications, listen to their own speakers, attend their own meetings and conferences, and think their own thoughts. Allen claimed in his talk in 2004, what has become even more critical to the well-being of the Catholic Church—that Catholics ourselves need to be brought to see how our blinders and prejudices, far from safeguarding the faith, actually impede full Catholicity.

Martin Buber suggested that the hope for this hour depends upon the renewal of dialogical immediacy between men. Contemporary communication is based upon a philosophy of hope (Buber, The Way of Response 57). Hope that concern for values, information, and people can still make a difference. Ronald C. Arnett, in his book, Dialogic Education: Conversations about Ideas and Between Persons (1992) writes that dialogue is the hope we need because it is based on a conviction that human beings can be invited into conversations about ideas, values, and relationships, not out of a conviction that one can learn all the answers, but out of a belief that dialogue with others is the foundation of a quality of life for oneself and others. Arnett refers to David Augsburger's belief that dialogue can assist the quality of life. Augsburger expresses it in this way: "When all choices are gone, hope is abandoned ... Hope rises with the number of trustworthy directions envisioned; Hope is imagining, choosing, trusting that there is another way; Hope opens the options, hope welcomes the future, hope sets us free to choose again; Hope offers tomorrow" (Augsburger, 165).

In other words, a person's vision is the great fact about that person. It has been the contention of this dissertation that in order for the art of preaching to move forward and reflect the reforms of the Liturgy that are being enacted by Pope Benedict XVI, the homilist must arrive at a window-like threshold through which a wider vision than his own is heralded. This threshold is where, or at least when, the preacher is able to converse about Someone Other with his listeners and because he preaches with sensibility to truth and beauty, which are the hallmarks of true Liturgy, the holy one becomes visible and engages in a celebratory walking in dialogue as real as the Emmaus walk recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of the of Gospel of Luke. The vision or way alluded to here is captured in the ancient

Benedictine axiom or principle: *lex orandi*, how we pray governs what we come to believe. Preaching must lead listeners to the threshold of theophany (Hahn, Letter and Spirit 168).

This threshold that comes into vision is exactly where every homily must take its listeners. Vision does not always need to suggest a mystic attempt to foretell the future (Arnett and Arneson, Dialogic Civility, 58). Vision is a picture of might be; a future powerful and significant enough to capture the imagination and commitment. A vision is a picture of possibilities that shape and guide collective action, played out in the praxis of daily living (58). It is indeed the place that opens up to a totally new region or state. It necessitates a certain formation of the intelligence in order to contemplate it. It is the place or the passageway from the Liturgy of the Word into the Eucharist. It is something totally outside our experience, something of which we only know, as Simone Weil, a Platonist tells us, that it truly exists and that nothing else can ever be desired except in error. Preaching must be directed to this threshold. All of preaching and all of Liturgy is oriented to this communion. It is a “holy” communion because it partakes of the divine nature (Hahn 170).

Both Pope Benedict and Simone Weil tell us that close by this entrance way is a trap. Weil puts it in this fashion. She tells us to beware of the social error. Everywhere, always, in everything, the social feeling produces a perfect imitation of this encounter. It is perfectly deceptive. In her Essay on Religious Practices, Weil warns against this social misconception; to avoid it one must be willing to risk standing out from the crowd (129). How many priests and deacons delegated by the Church with the authority of the magisterium will be courageous enough to do so? If they are to preach at the threshold, communicating the Word within a Church that is itself divided, while preaching to those outside the Church, living in alienation with the world, Catholic homilist must reject the falsity that everyone is in

agreement (129). The soul is at peace, for Christ said that he did not come to bring peace; he brought a sword, the sword which severs in two (129).

For the homilist to reach this profound encounter, he must remember that at the center of the Catholic religion a little formless matter is found, a little piece of bread. It is not the human person of Christ such as we picture Him; it is not the divine person of the Father, likewise subject to all errors of our imagination; it is outwardly only a fragment of matter, yet it is at the center of the Catholic religion. Herein lies the great scandal and yet the most wonderful virtue of the Catholic religion (131). It is the reason that the Church will always remain reticent towards preaching in every age. Otherwise, the love it preaches is only an imaginary love.

## 6.12 Conclusion

The destiny of preaching on the threshold relies of being attentive to God and God's people. This pastoral approach to preaching focuses on the parishioners that stand with our homilists and those not yet with us. Preaching in this way affirms the validity of others, affirms local home and institutions, while affirming and making the voice of the Lord accessible and comprehensible to homes afar. Preaching on the threshold and in light of Pope Benedict XVI's reforms, finds the Church standing with the eagerness of the Word and the reality of the Eucharist.

This dissertation proposes that everyone needs to hear the Good News preached on the threshold. This preaching is destined to all and not only a specific circle that can too easily become enclosed. When such a circle becomes enclosed, preachers are only speaking



to their own or to themselves. This is why we are obliged to look for new ways of bringing the Good News to all.

Preaching on the threshold is not merely a way of speaking, but a form of living. It is listening and giving voice to the Father to all who gather at the threshold with us. This is the preacher who in the words of Christ “He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak” (John 16:13). He will carry the Word upon the ground in a celebratory walk in dialogue.

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