

UDK 27-36Bonaventura, sanctus
272-732.2Benedictus XVI, papa
2Joachimus Florensis
[27-22+27-175](091)
<https://doi.org/10.53745/bs.92.5.7>
Received: 5. 5. 2022
Accepted: 21. 10. 2022
Original paper

SAINT BONAVENTURE AS THE THEOLOGICAL INSPIRER FOR JOSEPH RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI: REVELATION, HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY

Nedjeljka Valerija KOVAČ

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb
Vlaška 38, p.p. 5, HR – 10 001 Zagreb
valerija.kovac13@gmail.com

Abstract

The article focuses on Ratzinger's interpretation of the theological thought of Saint Bonaventure and explores the latter's impact on Ratzinger's theology. Three thematic circles have been identified within which the German theologian dealt with Bonaventure: the historical understanding of God's Revelation, the theological interpretation of history, and the eschatological fulfilment in the present time. Parallel to that, the article explores how Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI incorporates the insights gained from Bonaventure into his own thought about the current topics of his time. Those twofold observations are presented through the following thematic aspects. Firstly, Ratzinger's historical and personal notion of God's Revelation inspired by Bonaventure and in opposition to neo-scholastic theology, together with his focus on man as the addressee of God's Revelation; proceeding from that, Ratzinger's insistence on the understanding of Revelation within the faith of the Church and his critique of the historical-critical exegesis. Furthermore, Ratzinger's acceptance of Bonaventure's interpretation of Joachim of Fiore as well as his reservation about the earthly eschatological fulfilment and accordingly,, Ratzinger's criticism of the chiliastic endeavours of his time and of the excessive post-conciliar enthusiasm of the Church for this world. Ratzinger contributed significantly to the contemporary deeper understanding of St. Bonaventure and showed his relevance for today's questions of the Church and theology.

Key words: Joseph Ratzinger, Saint Bonaventure, God's Revelation, theology of history, Holy Scripture and tradition, Joachim of Fiore, liberation theology, Church and the world

Introduction

The three catechetical speeches on Saint Bonaventure that Pope Benedict XVI held during his general audiences in March 2010 can be read as a current synthesis of his studies on that great medieval theologian. They show how Pope Benedict XVI stayed connected with his theological teacher after many years, and how he remained convinced of his previous insights gained from Bonaventure's theology, which he then incorporated into his personal theological work. He opened the first catechetical speech on St. Bonaventure with very personal words: »Today I would like to talk about St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. I confide to you that in broaching this subject I feel a certain nostalgia, for I am thinking back to my research as a young scholar on this author who was particularly dear to me. My knowledge of him had quite an impact on my formation.«¹ The research that the pope was referring to was his habilitation thesis, its avant-garde subject and its dramatic defence, which eventually turned into a heated debate between his dissertation supervisor, Gottlieb Söhngen, and the then very prominent medievalist Michael Schmaus, who was not willing to accept young Ratzinger's work. As Ratzinger describes in his autobiography, he had to face considerable difficulties at the time, both in his life and in his academic and theological career.² Despite these complicated beginnings, St. Bonaventure, along with Augustine and other contemporary thinkers (Henri de Lubac, Martin Buber), became one of the great theological teachers of today's Pope Emeritus. Moreover, it seems to us that the medieval theologian left the strongest mark on the life course and theological work of the German theologian and pope.

To start with, it is the biographical parallels with St. Bonaventure that one finds in Ratzinger, more than with any other thinkers. Both of them discontinued their theological work due to their leading administrative roles in service of the Church, but in reality, neither of them ever stopped being involved in theology, because they saw it as their life's calling. Both of them participated in church councils as experts and both received cardinal's honours for their merits. Both were intensely engaged with the challenges of their times and the turmoil within the Church, which they faced bravely and sought solutions.³

¹ BENEDICT XVI, General Audience (3.III.2010), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100303.html (Accessed: 15.VII.2022).

² Cf. Joseph Kardinal RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben. Erinnerungen (1927-1977)*, Munich, 1998, 77-89. English translation: *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, San Francisco, CA, 1998.

³ Cf. Werner DETTLOFF, Bonaventura (um 1217-1274), in: Heinrich FRIES – Georg KRETSCHMAR (eds.), *Klassiker der Theologie*, I, München, 1981, 201.

Theologically, both of them were rooted in the history of Salvation and searched for its actualizations in contemporary history. Both of them followed a middle path between the current forms of utopianism and traditional conservatism.⁴

Our research is conducted on two intertwined levels. We first deal with Ratzinger's interpretation of Bonaventure, focusing mostly on his habilitation thesis, of which he first published the third part under the title *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*.⁵ Ratzinger's research from that time is still considered authoritative today and is an indispensable reference for those who deal with the great Franciscan theologian.⁶ We also explore Ratzinger's later texts, in which he reflects on the events of the time and the results presented in his habilitation thesis. From these sources already we can point out three thematic centres of Ratzinger's study of Bonaventure: the questions of God's Revelation, its actualization in human history, and the eschatological fulfilment in the present time. The second level of our research is intertwined with the previous one. Specifically, Ratzinger / Benedict XVI not only studied and interpreted Bonaventure, but also incorporated the latter's ideas into his own theology. That is why we also study the broader scope of his works in order to demonstrate how Bonaventure's ideas influenced the German theologian, especially his thoughts on some urgent topics of his time.

We present our insights through the following thematic aspects. Firstly, in his opposition to neo-scholastic intellectualism, Ratzinger stands on the background of St. Bonaventure for a historical and personal notion of God's Revelation, which implies God's action in history (chapters 1 and 4) and includes man as the addressee of God's Revelation (chapter 2). Consequently, Ratzinger argues that Revelation is more than the Holy Scripture as such and that it can be authentically understood only in the faith of the Church. That being said, it is understandable why the German theologian criticizes the possibilities and achievements of historical-critical exegesis (chapter 3). Furthermore, Ratzinger accepts St. Bonaventure's interpretation of Joachim of Fiore and shows his

⁴ Cf. Andrea DI MAIO, Il problema della storia in Bonaventura, in: CENTRO STUDI BONAVENTURIANI, *Storia e salvezza: percorsi bonaventuriani: Bagnoregio 29-31 maggio 2015*, Modena, 2015, 66.

⁵ Joseph RATZINGER, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*, München – Zürich, 1959. English translation: *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes, Chicago, IL, 1971. Cf. Joseph Kardinal RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 85.

⁶ Cf. Marianne SCHLOSSER – Peter HEIBL (eds.), *Gegenwart der Offenbarung. Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzingers (RaSt 2)*, Regensburg, 2011; Amaury Begasse DE DHAEM et al. (eds.), *Deus summe cognoscibilis: The current theological relevance of Saint Bonaventure: international congress, Rome, 15 – 17 November, 2017*, Leuven – Paris – Bristol, 2018, 175-216.

reservation about the possibility to attain the fulfilment of eschatological Salvation within earthly limitations (chapter 5). Accordingly, Ratzinger criticizes the chiliastic endeavours of his time, which he sees in some tendencies of the liberation theology and the new political theology, because both rely too much on the possibilities contained in this world and on political action (chapter 6). For the same reasons, Ratzinger finds it impossible to accept the excessive post-conciliar enthusiasm of the Church for this world, which does not sufficiently appreciate the eschatological perspective of its fulfilment (chapter 7). We came to the conclusion that Ratzinger contributed significantly to the contemporary deeper understanding of St. Bonaventure and showed his relevance for today's questions of the Church and theology.

1. Revelation as God's specific act in history rather than an objective notion

On the one hand, it is understandable why Joseph Ratzinger, after his doctoral dissertation on Augustine's ecclesiology,⁷ dealt with Bonaventure in his habilitation thesis, as the latter is generally considered the most important representative of the Augustinian movement in medieval theology.⁸ On the other hand, Ratzinger's choice of Bonaventure was still surprising in a sense, considering that the research topic was assigned to him by his dissertation supervisor, Gottlieb Söhngen. Based on an author from the past, Ratzinger was supposed to make a contribution to a very current issue in the theology of that time. Söhngen set the young theologian before a specific research task. Ratzinger recalls: »I was to try to discover whether in Bonaventure there was anything corresponding to the concept of Salvation history, and whether this motif – if it should exist – had any relationship with the idea of Revelation.«⁹ The demanding nature of this task becomes obvious if one takes into account the theological circumstances of the time. On the one hand, the prevailing opinion was that Bonaventure's thought was oriented towards the history of Salvation and the Scripture, and therefore it did not correspond to the neo-scholastic notion of the Revelation that was dominant at the time, which implied an intellectualist information

⁷ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche. Dissertationsschrift*, Munich, 1954; St. Ottilien, 2005.

⁸ Cf. Alessandro GHISALBERTI, *La filosofia medievale. Da S. Agostino a S. Tommaso*, Florence, 2002, 158-173; Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, in: Battista MONDIN, *Dizionario dei teologi*, Bologna, 1992, 125-126.

⁹ Cf. Joseph Kardinal RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 78.

of the human mind in accordance with the divine truth.¹⁰ On the other hand, and especially under the influence of Oscar Cullmann's book *Christ and Time* (1946), the history of Salvation was at the centre of theological interest, which could justify research on Bonaventure's theology.¹¹ Retrospectively, in his autobiography, Ratzinger indirectly addresses the problem of neo-scholastic thought prevalent at the time as one of the reasons for Schmaus not accepting his habilitation thesis:

»In my research I had seen that the study of the Middle Ages in Munich, primarily represented by Michael Schmaus, had come to almost a complete halt at its pre-war state. The great new breakthroughs that had been made in the meantime, particularly by those writing in French, had not even been acknowledged. With a forthrightness not advisable in a beginner, I criticized the superseded positions, and this was apparently too much for Schmaus [...].«¹²

Even more significant are the positive results that Ratzinger came to by studying Bonaventure. He determined that there was nothing in him or other 13th century theologians that would correspond to today's term »Revelation«, which denotes the entirety of revealed content:

»Here, 'Revelation' is always a concept denoting an act. The word refers to the act in which God shows himself, not to the objectified result of this act. And because this is so, the receiving subject is always also a part of the concept of 'Revelation'. Where there is no one to perceive 'Revelation', no *Revelation* has occurred, because no *veil* has been removed. By definition, Revelation requires a someone who apprehends it. These insights, gained through my reading of Bonaventure, were later on very important for me at the time of the conciliar discussion on Revelation, Scripture, and tradition.«¹³

Analysing Bonaventure's works, Ratzinger came to the conclusion that the Franciscan theologian did not consider the essence of Revelation in the sense of the fundamental theological treatise *De Revelatione*. Bonaventure does not

¹⁰ Cf. Peter HOFMANN, *Offenbarung und Geschichte. Joseph Ratzingers Kommentar zu Gaudium et spes als angewandte Bonaventura-Rezeption*, in: Marianne SCHLOSSER – Peter HEIBL (eds.), *Gegenwart der Offenbarung*, 74.

¹¹ Cf. BENEDIKT XVI, Vorwort, in: Joseph RATZINGER, *Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras. Habilitationsschrift und Bonaventura-Studien. Joseph Ratzinger Gesammelte Schriften (JRGS)*, II, Herder, Freiburg, 2009, 8.

¹² Joseph Kardinal RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 83.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

speak of »Revelation«, but of »Revelations«. Ratzinger's precise distinctions are significant here:

»Bonaventure knows of and talks about many individual Revelations that happened during the history of theology, but he never asks about the one Revelation that happened in all those Revelations, which modern theology generally does in its Revelation treatises. There are certainly analyses of the Revelation process in Bonaventure, but all these texts deal with individual Revelation processes, which are repeatable and have, in fact, often been repeated by God, by which God addresses the individual bearer of the Revelation; they do not deal with the essence of the unique Revelation in the background of these repeated Revelation processes. Of course, there is also the crucial moment of uniqueness and permanence as it is known to Christianity and expressed in concepts such as 'Christus incarnatus', 'scriptura', 'doctrina', 'fides'. But in Bonaventure there is at least no systematic unification of these two lines of statement.«¹⁴

Ratzinger concludes that Bonaventure's concept of *revelatio* (also *inspiratio*, *manifestatio*, *aperitio*) is not directly equivalent to the similar concepts in modern theology.¹⁵ The contribution of the German theologian was in observing that the term *revelatio* in Bonaventure referred to an individual act of Revelation, not the objectified result of that act. We can actually see that the young theologian Ratzinger, with the help of Bonaventure, connected the two theological currents of his time: he demonstrated that it was possible to overcome the neo-scholastic, abstract understanding of God's Revelation with precisely the kind of understanding that took into account the history of Salvation and the personal level of God's speech to man.

2. God's Revelation and man as its addressee: a two-directional event

The first result of Ratzinger's study of Bonaventure was that the great medieval theologian considered Revelation as an act. However, if Revelation was God's action, it followed that it caused a certain effect in man. Marianne Schlosser has explained this twofold action in Revelation:

»Ratzinger has shown that for Bonaventure, there are two complementary elements in the process of God's Revelation: the external, which can be

¹⁴ Joseph RATZINGER, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*, 59-60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

heard or seen, and the internal. The external can be understood if the inner light of grace comes from God, and this is *revelatio* in the true sense of the word: hearing the revealed word or understanding an event requires Revelation, and that Revelation means that the creature understands it [...].¹⁶

External hearing of the Revelation (*apparitio*) corresponds to internal enlightenment by grace (*revelatio*). This double event of Revelation, external and internal, also includes a two-way dynamics: the Revelation starts from God as its initiator, but also includes man as its recipient. Although Ratzinger does not explicitly say this about Bonaventure, such understanding of the Revelation can be considered as personal and dialogic: the Revelation is not primarily the discovery of some objective reality, but rather the dynamics of speech (Revelation) and response (reception) between two subjects – God and man.

In the historical perspective of the event of Revelation, Ratzinger does not emphasize only God as the revealer, but also the importance of man as the recipient of the Revelation. Consequently, where there is no one to receive the Revelation, it has not actually happened. Although it is God's initiative, the Revelation implies someone who will accept it. In the pre-conciliar times of predominance of the neo-scholastic, objectified concept of the Revelation, such thoughts could cause suspicion of subjectivism. In his retrospective analysis of the drama surrounding his habilitation thesis, Joseph Ratzinger comments that Michael Schmaus, who may have heard rumours about the modernity of his theology from Freising, did not see his hypotheses as a faithful interpretation of Bonaventure, but as a dangerous modernism bound to lead to the subjectivization of the concept of Revelation.¹⁷

In order to better understand the possible objections of modernism, it is useful to refer to Karl Rahner, who in a joint book with Joseph Ratzinger on the Revelation and tradition explains what the modernist understanding of Revelation consisted of. The Revelation was:

»(...) another word for the necessary development of a religious need, immanent to human history, in which this need is objectified in a great variety of forms of religious history and slowly grows to a higher purity

¹⁶ Marianne SCHLOSSER, San Bonaventura: #4 – Bonaventuras Beitrag zu einer Theologie der Offenbarung: Ein Blick auf die Bonaventura-Studien Joseph Ratzingers, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxChKyRt9kE> (Accessed 13.VI.2020). Presented at the international conference »Deus summe cognoscibilis. L'attualità di San Bonaventura,« Rome, 15-17.XI.2017.

¹⁷ Joseph Kardinal RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 84.

and more comprehensive fullness until it is objectified in Christianity and the Church. This concept was intended as a counter-thesis to the understanding of Revelation – presumably traditional in the Church – according to which it is the event of an intervention of God coming completely ‘from outside,’ addressing people and mediating to them, through prophets and in human words, truths that they could not reach by themselves, and giving orders that they need to follow in the future. The necessity of the inner grace of God for the salvific reception of that Revelation by faith was emphasized by the Church orthodoxy that fought against modernism, but the inner connection between the grace of faith and the historical Revelation was overlooked.«¹⁸

On the background of Rahner’s explanation, we can see more clearly that Ratzinger was far from understanding the Revelation as an immanentist event in the modernist sense, and moreover, that he emphasized the inner importance of grace needed for man’s receiving of the Revelation, more than the theology of the time did. Moreover, in his work on the understanding of tradition, published in the same book written together with Rahner, he referred to the Revelation as God’s intervention, but directed at the recipient. In the context of distinguishing between the Revelation and the Holy Scripture, which will be discussed later on, Ratzinger wrote:

»You can have the Scripture without having the Revelation. Because the Revelation becomes reality always and only where there is faith. [...] Rather, the Revelation reaches its goal only where, apart from the material statements that attest to it, its inner reality has itself become effective in terms of faith. Thus, the Revelation to some extent includes the receiving subject as well, since it does not exist without him. We cannot put the Revelation in our pocket as we can carry a book with us. It is a living reality, which requires a living man as the place of its presence.«¹⁹

Such personal understanding of the Revelation, which he gained from Bonaventure’s theology, was of benefit to Ratzinger as he worked on the conciliar dogmatic constitution *Dei verbum* and its later commentary. In his interpretation of the first chapter of that constitution, the influence of Bonaventure is evident.

¹⁸ Karl RAHNER, Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Offenbarung, in: Karl RAHNER – Joseph RATZINGER, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung*, Freiburg – Basel – Vienna, 1965, 11-12.

¹⁹ Joseph RATZINGER, Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs, in: Karl RAHNER – Joseph RATZINGER, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung*, 35.

The German theologian first emphasizes that the council fathers strove to move away from neo-scholastic intellectualism, which mainly understood the Revelation as a disclosure of supernatural truths.

Contrary to that, it was necessary to re-emphasize the complete character of the Revelation, in which the word and the event are one, and which affects man as a whole, rather than merely challenging his intellect.²⁰ Therefore, Ratzinger's lasting merit was that, together with other theologians of his time, he managed to re-emphasise the importance of the personal dimension of God's Revelation so that it would become a truly living reality in the person who receives it, without falling into the reduction of modernist subjectivism.

3. The ecclesial context of Revelation and the Holy Scripture

Joseph Ratzinger used Bonaventure to clarify another theological misunderstanding of that time. He observed that the understanding of the Revelation implied the entirety of the revealed contents, and it had even become established to refer to the Holy Scripture as »the Revelation«. However, in the High Middle Ages, such identification, according to Ratzinger, was not possible. He noticed that Bonaventure nowhere called the Holy Scripture »Revelation«. This is understandable, because the Revelation, as an act by which God reveals himself, also includes the one who receives it, which means that the Revelation precedes the Scripture and is then deposited in it, hence they are not identical. Revelation is always something greater than what is written down, and thus the Holy Scripture is not »the Revelation«, but only a part of that greater reality.²¹ Ratzinger later incorporated these insights gained from Bonaventure in his aforementioned study on the issue of tradition: the Scripture is the material principle of Revelation, but it is not the Revelation itself. Revelation is superior to the Scripture in a twofold sense: »a) As a reality from God, it always reaches upwards into God's action; b) As a reality mediated to man in faith, it simultaneously reaches the other side above the mediating factum of the Scripture.«²²

Such an interpretation of Revelation and the Scripture has consistently led Ratzinger to a necessary ecclesial contextualization of the Scripture: if Revelation is greater than the Holy Scripture, then the latter must be understood only within the Church, which is the addressee and bearer of the Revelation. Conse-

²⁰ Joseph RATZINGER, Kommentar zum Proemium, I. u II. Kapitel, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Kommentare*, II, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1967, 507.

²¹ Joseph RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 84.

²² Joseph RATZINGER, Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs, 35.

quently, there can be no *sola scriptura*, because the Holy Scripture is understood as the Holy Scripture only in the faith of the Church. In order for it to be the Revelation, it must be interpreted in accordance with the Revelation, which is possible only with the Church. In this issue, Ratzinger defended Bonaventure precisely from what could have been imputed to himself concerning his habilitation thesis: he justified Bonaventure with respect to the possible objection that he had sacrificed the objectivity of Revelation as a given fact in favour of subjectivist actualism. The profound meaning of the Scripture, according to which it is »the Revelation« and the content of faith as such, is not found in the arbitrariness of individuals, but is available in the summary of the Creed and the teachings of the Fathers and objectified in theology. Only the Scripture that is understood in faith is truly the Holy Scripture, and that is realized only in the Church's living understanding of the Scripture. This finally in Ratzinger's view guarantees the objectivity of the demand for interpreting the Scripture (as the Revelation)²³ instead of leaving it to subjective arbitrariness.

In a further step, we can point out that Ratzinger has discovered in Bonaventure the importance of the spiritual understanding of the Scripture, which stems from the faith of the Church – and this thought is also of great importance for Ratzinger's theology. What is to be believed is understood not only by the letter of the Scripture, and also by its spiritual understanding, which in Bonaventure is threefold: allegorical, anagogical, and tropological – in analogy with the infused virtues of faith, hope, and love. The »Revelation« in this context, Ratzinger explains, is equal to the spiritual understanding of the Scripture, which in turn consists of the understanding given by God, not only of objective letters.²⁴ It is not the letter, but the spiritual meaning behind that letter, that Bonaventure holds to be the true and full content of faith. Ratzinger further clarifies that Bonaventure does not refer to the Scripture itself as the »Revelation« but uses that expression to indirectly denote the spiritual understanding of the Scripture. For Bonaventure, the spiritual meaning of the Scripture is related to the eschatological *contemplatio*, which consists in a full understanding of the Scripture. It is important for Ratzinger that Bonaventure gives priority to the spiritual sense, which he associates with wisdom and humility, over the discursive and intellectual interpretation of the Scripture. Understanding the Holy Scripture is not merely an intellectual act but is linked to the entirety of the Revelation and the believer's life.²⁵ And for Ratzinger as

²³ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*, 68-69.

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 63-64.

²⁵ More extensively *Ibid.*, 63-65.

a theologian, the decisive realization has been that the goal of Christian learning is not knowledge, but spiritual knowledge and wisdom, which are not only obtained through study, but also through holiness. In fact, we can take that insight as the hermeneutical key to Ratzinger's entire theology.

We have highlighted several important insights that Ratzinger gained from Bonaventure's interpretation of the relationship between Revelation and the Scripture, and that he incorporated into his theological reflections. First of all, it is the distinction between the Scripture and the Revelation, which opens up room for the Church as a place within which the Scripture can and should be interpreted. Then, it is openness to a progressive interpretation of the Scripture, because with the passing of time, the Scripture is understood in an ever-growing manner. Finally, it is not only the letter of the Scripture that is relevant; the fullness of its understanding is achieved in the spiritual dimension of wisdom and holiness. All these insights we can find further in Ratzinger's confrontation with the limitations of the historical-critical method.

Not neglecting the great contribution of historical-critical exegesis to the authentic understanding of the Holy Scripture, Ratzinger opposes a purely scholarly-historical, positivist reading of the Holy Scripture and repeatedly warns of the shortcomings of that method, if it is taken as the only authoritative way of interpreting the Bible.²⁶ Ratzinger's main objection is that it cannot ensure an exhaustive interpretation of the Scripture: firstly, because it is understood as the one Holy Scripture and because it is considered as inspired by God; and then because new contents are progressively discovered in it to the present day, within the faith of the Church. Against this background, Ratzinger's objection that historical-critical exegesis is limited only to the past is understandable:

»One text, one event, one person rigidly fixed on the past. The aim is to find out what the author of that time said and what he could have said or thought. What is important is the 'historical', the 'former'. That is why the historical-critical method does not mediate the Bible for me today, in my current life. [...] By its very nature, it does not speak about today, or about me, but about yesterday, about others. Therefore, it can never show Christ today, tomorrow, and in eternity, but always, if it remains true to itself, only the Christ of yesterday.«²⁷

²⁶ More extensively in: Nedjeljka Valerija KOVAČ, *Personalno-relacijska paradigma teologije Josepha Ratzingera / Benedikta XVI.* [The Personal-relational paradigm in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI], Zagreb, 2014, 218-243.

²⁷ Joseph RATZINGER, Zur Lage von Glaube und Theologie heute, in: *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 25 (1996) 4, 368.

Given its fragmentary nature and closedness to the present, historical-critical exegesis must transcend itself. The German theologian demands that it should go a step further and open itself to the »hermeneutics of faith«: »it must admit that faith is a kind of sym-path \acute{y} without which the text does not open up. It must recognize that faith as a hermeneutic, a place of understanding, which does not do dogmatic violence to the Bible, but provides the possibility for it to remain what it is.«²⁸ Only in this way can the »real« character of Jesus Christ be revealed – the Christ of faith rather than a merely historical figure.

Distinguishing between »the Revelation« and »the Scripture,« inspired among others by Bonaventure, has led Ratzinger further to the necessity of the faith of the Church filled with the Holy Spirit, which he considers to be the true hermeneutic key for understanding the Scripture. With this, the German theologian has opened up room for another important dimension of the reality of Revelation, which is tradition. For Ratzinger, Revelation, the Scripture, and tradition form a single whole and permeate each other. In the conciliar discussion *Dei verbum*, he therefore advocated rejecting the idea of two sources of the Revelation as well as Geiselmann's hypothesis on the »sufficiency« of the Scripture.²⁹ Ratzinger states that there are three foundations of tradition: the first is in the »excess« of the Revelation in relation to the Scripture; the second is in setting up the confession of faith as the hermeneutic key to reading the Scripture (the priority of *fides* over *scriptura*); and the third is the presence of Christ's event and his Spirit in the Church (the *Urtradition*), whereby the Church has the authority to translate the »Christ of yesterday« into the »Christ of today.«³⁰ Such Ratzinger's understanding of the place of tradition within its relationship to the Scripture and the faith of the Church we can characterize as dialectical. Tradition is necessary for understanding the Scripture, but it is not an independent or competing source in relation to the Scripture. It is bound in a double sense: tradition is an interpretation and is, as such, bound first and foremost to the Scripture, to what was said and took place. Moreover, tradition is implicated in an even wider ecclesial connection: it is an interpretation that

²⁸ Joseph RATZINGER, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit. Zur Frage nach Grundlagen und Weg der Exegese heute*, in: Joseph RATZINGER (ed.), *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, Freiburg – Basel – Vienna, 1989, 43-44.

²⁹ Cf. Peter HOFMANN, *Offenbarung und Geschichte*, 79; Marianne SCHLOSSER, *San Bonaventura: #4 – Bonaventuras Beitrag zu einer Theologie der Offenbarung: Ein Blick auf die Bonaventura-Studien Joseph Ratzingers*.

³⁰ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs*, 44-46.

takes place in the permanent spiritual power of Christ, present in the Church, in its faith, life, and worship.³¹

Inspired by Bonaventure's understanding of the Revelation, we can see that Ratzinger was keen to maintain a comprehensive understanding of the Revelation that would neither be limited to what happened in the past nor reduced to what was written in the Holy Scripture. That is why he ties the understanding of the Revelation to the Church as a living subject of faith, because the Revelation is only interpreted within it in its ever-new actuality and reaches its addressees in an ever-new acceptance.

4. A living God capable of acting in the world and in history

In his study of Bonaventure, as we have seen, Joseph Ratzinger came to the insight that the medieval theologian interpreted God's Revelation in historical dimensions. The dimension of the historical situation of God's relationship to man and the world runs like a red thread through Ratzinger's reflections on the specificity of biblical and Christian faith in God. Thus, already in his commentary on *Dei verbum*, the German theologian showed that the 3rd article of that constitution emphasized the historical character of the Revelation, »which does not come to man as a timeless idea, but as God's historical action in this specific time, which directs man to his connectedness to that history as a place of his Salvation.«³² We can find the statement about God who reveals himself and acts in history in various writings by Ratzinger. He has often pointed out that the peculiarity of the biblical God is his »capacity for history« (German: *Geschichtsfähigkeit*), which distinguishes him from a self-contained, apathetic, metaphysical God as imagined in other concepts.³³ In this, Ratzinger does not see God's weakness, but rather his uniqueness: God does not reveal himself in history because he needs to, but makes himself present in it and enters into relationships with people by his own free decision.³⁴ Both Ratzinger's and Bonaventure's understanding of God's action in history, as we can notice, is derived from biblical inspiration, according to which history is not only the work of man or a product of accidental development, but also the work of God himself, who directs history towards Salvation.

³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

³² Joseph RATZINGER, Kommentar zum Proemium, I. u II. Kapitel, 598.

³³ Cf. Jan-Heiner TÜCK, Editorial, in: *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 35 (2006), 534.

³⁴ Cf. Nedjeljka Valerija KOVAČ, *Personalno-relacijska paradigma teologije Josepha Ratzinger*, 139-214.

Such an understanding of the relationship between God and the world requires a view of faith, and it contradicts the contemporary scientific opinion according to which God is reserved only for the subjective or psychological realm and is absent from the objective world that follows its own laws. Ratzinger defends God as a God who is also capable of working miracles in the world and is not reserved only for the function of subjective consolation. »A God who could not act on matter would be powerless, a weak God«³⁵ is one of Ratzinger's many succinct and clear statements. It is characteristic of biblical faith to refer to history, without which faith would not have its foundation and would pass into gnosis and into the exclusively spiritual realm. The German theologian repeatedly points out apologetically that the Bible speaks of God as active in history and therefore certain historical facts belong to faith, such as Jesus's immaculate conception, his historical life and death, his preaching, institution of the Eucharist, and his bodily resurrection.³⁶ Contrary to many theologians today, Ratzinger emphasizes that faith permeates history, and that matter is not excluded from God's action.

In order to reach deeper into the full meaning of the above statement that God has the power to act in history, it is necessary to see what Ratzinger means by the term »history«. Primarily, history includes the past, but it is also more than that. Applied to the events of the history of Salvation, it means for the German theologian that they have their own historicity, yet they must not be understood too narrowly, so that they are confined only to the past: »(...) first of all, it should be visible that this historical action of God constantly concerns the Church and the individual believer as present realities.«³⁷ We see, therefore, that »history« for Ratzinger essentially includes the present, which is actually decisive for the Church as well as the believer, who is called to recognize God's presence and action in it. In an even broader scope of Ratzinger's theology, one can observe that for him »history« also includes the future, which opens already in the present, however is at the same time awaiting its eschatological end. We can conclude that »history« for Ratzinger implies a whole of all three temporal determinations, in which God himself acts alongside man. We can further observe that such a theological understanding of history does not lead Ratzinger, or his teacher Bonaventure, towards a utopian interpretation of history, but rather strengthens him in the prophetic discernment of historical processes.

³⁵ Joseph RATZINGER / BENEDIKT XVI, *Skandalöser Realismus? Gott handelt in der Geschichte*, Bad Tölz, 2008, 13.

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9-12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

5. Joachim of Fiore's theology of history, the centrality of Christ, and the Christocentric progress of history

By confronting the Franciscan General Superior Bonaventure with Joachim of Fiore's theology of history, Ratzinger learned that the thought about the presence of God's Revelation in contemporary history can also have extreme interpretations. The Cistercian abbot »predicted« the third stage of time as a new phase of Revelation in history – the age of the Holy Spirit, which follows the time of the Father (Old Testament) and that of the Son (New Testament). As Joachim's symbolic calculations of time coincided with the appearance of Saint Francis of Assisi, one current of the Franciscan order, the spiritualist one, took over his ideas and started to endorse a form of Christian chiliasm, which created tensions with the »realists« in the Franciscan order, headed by Bonaventure. The »Spirituals« recognized in Saint Francis the beginning of that new age of the Holy Spirit, inspired by Joachim's idea that the new era would see the emergence of a new, poor people of God without secular structures. Joseph Ratzinger retrospectively commented that Bonaventure did not perceive this issue only as an academic challenge, but also had to deal with such interpretations of Franciscan history as the Order's General.³⁸ In his habilitation thesis, Ratzinger was the first to show that Bonaventure systematically confronted the ideas of Joachim of Fiore in his unfinished work *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. And as a man of the middle path, Bonaventure sought to take over from him what was useful and incorporate it into the ecclesiastical order.³⁹

Primarily, Ratzinger observes that Bonaventure rejected the Trinitarian rhythm of history as envisioned by Joachim of Fiore, because the biblical God cannot be divided into three deities and because one God acts in all of history. He also maintains that there is only one history, even when it is understood as a path of progress.⁴⁰ Accordingly, Bonaventure rejected the existence of another, new Gospel, distinct from the biblical writings. He also rejected the idea of another Church, different from this one, sacramentally constituted.

Ratzinger sees the main reason for Bonaventure's disagreement with Joachim's theology of history in the different understandings of the place of Jesus Christ in human history, found especially clearly in the *Collationes in*

³⁸ Joseph RATZINGER/BENEDIKT XVI, *Salz der Erde. Christentum und Katholische Kirche im neuen Jahrtausend. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald*, ©2005, 65-66. English translation: *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium. An Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker, San Francisco, CA, 1996.

³⁹ Cf. Joseph Kardinal RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 86.

⁴⁰ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, General Audience (3.III.2010).

Hexaemeron, which are essentially structured around the centrality of Christ.⁴¹ It is important to point out that Ratzinger's insight is also confirmed by later scholars of St. Bonaventure.⁴² Bonaventure did not see the end of history in Jesus Christ, but its centre. Because Jesus Christ is the last Word of God, passed on in the Church as a living tradition. In him, God said everything and gave Himself. God cannot say or give more than that.⁴³

The centrality of Christ in history is the reason why Bonaventure offers a new interpretation of the old term *plenitudo temporis*: the »fullness of time« is at the same time the »middle of time«. Ratzinger explains:

»[...] it is the very figure of Jesus Christ, who is the middle person of the Trinity, who is the mediator and middle between God and man, that increasingly became the gathering point for all that Bonaventure considered expressed with the term 'middle'; he became the centre in the most excellent sense and [...] 'the centre of times'.«⁴⁴

Bonaventure did not accept Joachim's claim about the new age of the Holy Spirit, because it abolished the central place of Jesus Christ. While for Joachim Christ is only one of the dividing points in the history of Salvation, for Bonaventure he is the true centre, the backbone of world events and the turning point of history, behind which there is no new era.⁴⁵ From this followed a different understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit: He is the one who interprets Christ in each individual time and shows that His word has something new to say in every age. He does not extrapolate some new, future age: instead, the age of Christ is actually the age of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

If no new era comes after Christ, it does not mean that after Christ there is no growth or progress in history. The young theologian Ratzinger correctly observes that Bonaventure did not completely reject Joachim's idea, but rather modified it: a new era does begin with Christ, however it will not bring a new Gospel or a new Church; instead, it will cause the Gospel to bring new lights throughout history, such as Saint Francis and his order, by which the Church

⁴¹ Cf. Vincenzo Cherubino BIGI, *La teologia della storia in san Bonaventura*, in: *Divus Thomas* 101 (1998) 2, 83.

⁴² Cf. Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*, II, Einsiedeln, 1969, 289; Werner DETTLOFF, *Bonaventura (um 1217-1274)*, 210; Vicenco Cherubino BIGI, *La teologia della storia in san Bonaventura*, 90.

⁴³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, General Audience (3.III.2010).

⁴⁴ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*, 112-113.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁶ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER/BENEDIKT XVI, *Salz der Erde*, 66.

of Jesus Christ is renewed again and again.⁴⁷ Francis is thus a new appearance in the Church, but not as the beginning of a new Church, rather as one who renews the Church in her connection with Christ as the centre. Ratzinger considers Bonaventure's statement »Opera Christi non deficiunt, sed proficiunt« as crucial in this respect. The works of Christ do not diminish, but progress. The German theologian believes that Bonaventure formulated the idea of progress in this way, which was a novelty compared to the Church fathers and a large part of his contemporaries. History does not end with Christ; instead, it progresses with him.⁴⁸ We can see that Ratzinger has also used a Christocentric argument to support what he found in Bonaventure with regard to the relationship between the Revelation and history: The Revelation has its fullness in Jesus Christ and is historically completed, but with the power of the Holy Spirit it is revealed and understood ever more deeply within the history of the Church.

Finally, Ratzinger has discovered that Bonaventure, in accordance with his theological position, also modified those elements of Joachim's teaching that concerned the Franciscan order and the eschatological fulfilment in history. Bonaventura first agreed with Joachim that the new and last order would have the dimension of *contemplatio*. That *contemplatio* is a new insight into the Holy Scripture, which would only then be fully opened, hence one can speak of a new and comprehensive »Revelation« that actually consists in a new understanding of the old Scripture.⁴⁹ However, Ratzinger believes that Bonaventure did not claim that Francis was the real founder of that new order and that his »empirical order« was already the »eschatological order« of the seventh day. Yet based on the moment in history, the historical beginning of that new order was indeed given with Francis in some form.⁵⁰ For Bonaventure, Francis is the apocalyptic angel of the seal from Chapter 7 of the *Book of Revelation*, from whom the final people of God consisting of the 144,000 sealed should originate. Nevertheless Ratzinger specifies that Bonaventure did not consider this new people of God as identical with the current Franciscan order, although it may be labelled as Franciscan. Francis's order was probably intended for this, to be the immediate beginning of the new people of God, but its members are guilty of having missed that immediate beginning. Currently, the Franciscan and Dominican orders stand together on the threshold of a new time, which they are prepar-

⁴⁷ Cf. Kurt KOCH, *Das Geheimnis des Senfkorns. Grundzüge des theologischen Denkens von Papst Benedikt XVI.*, Regensburg, 2010, 48-49.

⁴⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, General Audience (3.III.2010).

⁴⁹ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*, 44.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 47-48.

ing, but cannot bring about. When that time comes, then it will be the time of *contemplatio*, the time of full understanding of the Holy Scripture and the time of the Holy Spirit, who introduces Jesus Christ into all truth.⁵¹

As a young researcher, Joseph Ratzinger was able to discover that the great theologian Bonaventure did not develop only an intellectual theology, but also connected it through the appearance of Joachim of Fiore and his spiritualist brethren to the specific difficulties of Church life and opened it to a contemplative dimension in which it found its true (eschatological) goal. We can also observe such determinants of Bonaventure's theological approach in Ratzinger's theology, both in its overall direction and in several individual issues, which we shall come back to later on.

6. The problem of the contemporary chiliasm in its political perspective

Bonaventure's confrontation with the question of a possible eschatological fulfilment within this world against the background of Joachim of Fiore and the Franciscan spirituals benefited the theologian Joseph Ratzinger and Pope Benedict XVI generally, for a clear separation of politics and Salvation, and in his critique of various worldly attempts at the political realization of the eschatological fulfilment of human history.⁵² Specifically, it was useful to him as the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in his critique of the new forms of Christian chiliasm in the post-conciliar Church, above all some tendencies of the liberation theology and political theology.

Ratzinger directly relates Bonaventure's confrontation with the ideas of Joachim of Fiore to the contemporary situation of the Church and inquires whether it is possible for a Christian at all to think of a kind of eschatological fulfilment within this world and thus assume a realistic synthesis of Christian eschatology and historical-philosophical utopia. The German theologian explains why such thinking is inherently appealing:

»It's hard for man to hope only for the beyond, or for a new world after the destruction of the present one. He wants a promise in history. Joachim concretely formulated such a promise and so prepared the way for Hegel, as Father de Lubac showed. Hegel, in turn, furnished the intellectual model for Marx. Bonaventure objected to the kind of Utopia that deceives man.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 55-56; Ilia DELIO, From Prophecy to Mysticism: Bonaventure's Eschatology in the Light of Joachim da Fiore, in: *Traditio*, 52 (1997), 165-166.

⁵² Cf. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Saved in Hope – Spe salvi*, 2008, San Francisco, 2009, No. 16-31.

He also opposed an enthusiastic, spiritual-anarchical concept of the Franciscan movement and prevailed with a sober and realistic concept [...].⁵³

Such behaviour of Bonaventure was criticized by many, but Ratzinger believes that the answer to the question of utopia lies precisely in those non-utopian communities that are nonetheless driven by the fervour of faith: »They don't work for a world beyond tomorrow; they work instead so that there may be something of the light of paradise present in this world today. They live in a 'utopian' fashion, as far as possible [...].⁵⁴

With the issue of the relationship between eschatology and history in the background, Joseph Ratzinger writes about two fundamental phenomena that threaten Christianity: the »de-temporalization« (German: *Entzeitlichung*) and »temporalization« (German: *Verzeitlichung*) of eschatology. We have to agree with Karl-Heinz Menke's observation that Ratzinger sees the »temporalization« of eschatology as a greater temptation for Christianity than its »de-temporalization«. ⁵⁵ As a political-utopian variant of eschatology, »de-temporalization« is more dangerous because it concerns exclusively the future of this world. Ratzinger, however, believes that Christian hope does not imply an internal fulfilment of history; instead, it is convinced of the impossibility of its fulfilment from within. Christian hope starts from the belief that the world will be fulfilled »not by the planning intellect, but by the indestructibility of love, which won in the resurrected Christ,« which means a Christian »no« to chiliasm.⁵⁶

In order to show how dangerous especially the Marxist utopia seems to Ratzinger, we should acknowledge his personal dramatic experience during his professorship at the Catholic Faculty in Tübingen. It was the time when the worldview paradigm had suddenly changed and even theology enthusiastically accepted Marxist utopian ideas and showed enthusiasm for Bloch, Moltmann, and Metz. Ratzinger has retrospectively concluded that the most radical consequence of such rapture was the destruction of theology itself as a consequence of its politicization in the sense of Marxist messianism – all the worse because this messianism was based on biblical hope and twisted it by excluding God and replacing Him with human political activity.⁵⁷ Ratzinger's critique touches the core of faith as such: »Hope remains, but the party takes

⁵³ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER / BENEDIKT XVI, *Salz der Erde*, 66-67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁵ Cf. Karl-Heinz MENKE, *Der Leitgedanke Joseph Ratzingers. Die Verschränkung von vertikaler und horizontaler Inkarnation*, Paderborn, 2008, 63.

⁵⁶ Joseph RATZINGER, *Eschatologie – Tod und ewiges Leben*, Regensburg, 1977, 174-175.

⁵⁷ Joseph RATZINGER, *Aus meinem Leben*, 139, 150.

the place of God, and, along with the party, a totalitarianism that practices an atheistic sort of adoration ready to sacrifice all humanness to its false god.⁵⁸ That event, let us call it the »Tübingen shock,« remained deeply embedded in Ratzinger's memory and continued to influence his sceptical monitoring of the post-conciliar development of the Church and her attitude towards the world.

Along the same line, he directed a sharp critique against the implementation of Marxist ideology in Latin American liberation theology, some forms of which he, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, officially declared incompatible with Christian eschatology.⁵⁹ He proclaimed the liberation theology to be a chiliastic form of theology, which started from the presumption that God's goal of fulfilling the world could be achieved within this world, moreover by political action. Ratzinger objected that the liberation theology aimed to make eschatology a practical and partially rational statement. In such a form of theology, however, one could not speak of a synthesis between hope and faith and the rationality of political action, but only of an addition that essentially corrupted both sides:

»On sober reflection, it should be recognized that the only contribution of theology here is in connecting irrational goals and reasons with political argumentation in such a way that it results in a precisely planned, but on the whole profoundly irrational political action. There is no real connection between the promise and its means; thus, even though individual meaningful projects may occasionally arise, the whole will have to be labelled as misleading.«⁶⁰

In contrast, eschatological expectation, according to Ratzinger, does not include any idea of internal fulfilment of history, but shows that it is impossible. The German theologian considers this impossibility to be rationally acceptable, because eschatological expectation takes into account the openness of human freedom to failure. In contrast, chiliastic forms do not link Salvation in history to the moral dignity of man but consist of mechanisms that twist the values that

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁹ Cf. KONGREGATION FÜR DIE GLAUBENSLEHRE, Instruktion »Libertatis nuntius« über einige Aspekte der »Theologie der Befreiung« (6.VIII.1984); KONGREGATION FÜR DIE GLAUBENSLEHRE, Instruktion »Libertatis conscientia« über die christliche Freiheit und Befreiung (22.III.1986). Cf. also: Joseph RATZINGER, Freiheit und Befreiung. Die anthropologische Vision der Instruktion der »Libertatis Conscientia,« in: *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 15 (1986), 409-424.

⁶⁰ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, Eschatologie und Utopie, in: *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 6 (1977) 1, 102.

carry the world. Ultimately, they dangerously reduce eschatological religious content to an instrument for achieving political goals.⁶¹ God's Kingdom, however, is not a political concept nor can it be achieved through immediate political practice. Ratzinger asserts that if one attempts to achieve it through a political process, it falsifies both theology and politics, by creating wrong mechanisms that become totalitarianisms.⁶² In addition to his emphasized moral argumentation, the ultimate reason why the German theologian opposes all utopian hopes is Christological, and we can not overlook the influence of St. Bonaventure: utopias lack not only the moral dimension of human fallibility, but also the very centre of Christian soteriology, which is Jesus Christ. He is not only a stage in history, but rather, as the one who has already redeemed humanity, the centre of all history. Jesus Christ is the Kingdom of God in person, and it is through Him that it is already present in history.⁶³

The Christocentric argument is also an important element of Ratzinger's critique of the new political theology of Johann Baptist Metz, whom he considers the ideological inspirer of Latin American liberation theology. In its desire to overcome the gnostic elements of contemporary theology and its forgetfulness of history, recent political theology reveals suffering in the world and causes dissatisfaction with historical reality, to which theology should respond in the form of a cry to God. Ratzinger objects that in such theology, Christianity is reduced only to the memory of suffering, to dissatisfaction and a cry to God, while the memory of Christ's resurrection is neglected.⁶⁴

Based on the given examples we can observe that for Joseph Ratzinger, in his theological thought and decisive personal action, Saint Bonaventure has been a significant inspiration, as he charted the path of sober realism and spiritual wisdom for his Order. Thus, the German theologian, consistent with the responsibility of his Church ministry, has not allowed himself to be swayed by clear theological positions and shrewd analyses in his criticism of the contemporary enthusiasms concerning Christian advocacy for a better world. But then again, one could get the impression that Ratzinger, due to his very clearly stated critique, leans towards the other extreme: a clear separation of the Church from the world and a certain pessimism with respect to the moral and spiritual possibilities of man's action in the world, which can further lead

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶² Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Eschatologie – Tod und ewiges Leben*, 59.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ivica RAGUŽ, Papa Benedikt XVI. o Crkvi, državi i politici [Pope Benedict XVI on the Church, state, and politics], in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 77 (2007) 2, 423-424.

to a passive Christian attitude in striving to achieve a better world. It seems to us that Ratzinger followed what he observed in Bonaventure – being a man of the middle path. Both were faced with very convincing forms of Christian public enthusiasm, and both rejected the radical options: one spiritualistic and the other utopian-Marxist, ideas of earthly realization of eschatological fulfilment. Both were acutely aware of human sinfulness and therefore advocated a more sober realism in relation to human abilities. Ultimately, both of them placed much greater hope in the power of God's accomplished Salvation in Jesus Christ, which by the Holy Spirit already pervades all earthly time, than in the success of human progress.

7. The hidden utopianism in the post-conciliar excessive enthusiasm of the Church for the world

Within this framework of resolving the issue of the relationship between eschatological Salvation and history using the examples of Joachim of Fiore and the Franciscan spirituals, as well as liberation theology and political theology, we can also place Ratzinger's overt opposition to some tendencies of the post-conciliar interpretation of the relationship between the Church and the world, that is, the Church's excessive enthusiasm for the world. They also hide the »old« problem of identifying utopia and eschatology, politics and Salvation.

In some post-conciliar aspirations, Ratzinger sees an obvious identification of the Church with the world. For example, in his review of the ten-year effect of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* and some of the events of that time in the Netherlands, the German theologian wrote:

»The feeling that, in fact, there should no longer be any walls between the Church and the world, and that every 'dualism' is evil – body-soul, Church-world, grace-nature, and even God-world – this feeling was increasingly becoming a force that gave direction to everything. In such rejection of all 'dualism', the optimistic mood, which seemed almost canonized in the words of the document *Gaudium et spes*, grew into a conviction that complete unity with the modern world was possible, leading to enthusiastic adjustment that was sooner or later bound to end in disillusionment.«⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Joseph RATZINGER, Kirche und Welt. Zur Frage nach der Rezeption des II. Vatikanischen Konzils, in: Joseph RATZINGER, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine für eine Fundamentaltheologie*, Munich, 2005, 401.

In his search for the reasons behind the difficulties surrounding the reception of the Second Vatican Council in the Church, a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Church and the world played a significant role for Ratzinger. One of his criticisms runs noticeably through his entire theology and ecclesiology, which could be summarized as follows: in her mission, the Church has largely separated herself from her theological and spiritual foundation, reducing herself too much to a social and political reality. Thereby it can only experience failure in the world. The mistaken optimism of the post-conciliar Church towards the world, based on Christian faith and hope, can easily be replaced by the optimism of progress in time. Such an attitude, as the German theologian believes, leads the Church to lose her identity and become one with the world. And that, ultimately, makes the Church redundant in the world.⁶⁶

For Ratzinger, the consequences of the Church's mistaken enthusiasm for the world are also harmful for the Church from within, where new divisions arose. In contrast to the »old« dualisms, as the council expert notes, a new form of dualism has appeared in the post-conciliar era, which divides the Church before from the one after the Council, as the latter is essentially all oriented towards the modern world. Ratzinger regrets this, because it leads to the loss of the great connection between the living history and the faith of the Church. Parallels with Bonaventure are also noticeable here. In the Church of today, Pope Benedict XVI criticizes all utopian tendencies and seeks a kind of middle path. He rejects any internal break in the Church or division between the times before and after the Council, and advocates continuity, which in turn should be open to new promptings of the Spirit. First of all, the German pope does not accept some opinions concerning the constant decline of the Church in the second millennium, and in his response, he again actualizes Bonaventure's thought: »*Opera Christi non deficiunt, sed proficiunt.*« Then, he accuses some post-conciliar currents of a »spiritualistic utopianism« that sees the Second Vatican Council as the end of the previous Church and the beginning of a new one, in which everything will be new and different under the charismatic sign of the Holy Spirit. Pope Benedict XVI condemns such ideas as »anarchic utopianism« and praises Paul VI and John Paul II for simultaneously defending the newness of the Council and the unity and continuity of the Church, in the awareness that it is always a place for sinners and a place of God's grace.⁶⁷ For Benedict XVI, the terms »pre-conciliar« and »post-conciliar« Church can only be used in a temporal sense,

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*; Kurt KOCH, *Das Geheimnis des Senfkorns*, 53-54.

⁶⁷ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, General Audience (3.III.2010).

and not to denote two qualitatively different Churches between which there is no longer any connection. From what has been said, it is understandable why the German pope rejects the progressist »hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture« concerning the authentic acceptance of the Second Vatican Council. He demands a »hermeneutics of reform« that should respect the »hermeneutics of continuity,« because it is about the restoration of the one Church that the Lord left us: »She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.«⁶⁸ It is precisely in the interplay of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the nature of true reform is found, because anything else would mean an unacceptable and self-destructive break within the Church herself.

We can observe that Joseph Ratzinger, in his theological-historical position, advocates a dynamic image of the Church, which is anchored in her tradition yet open to new incentives at the same time, which should be discerned by the power of the Spirit of God in every particular age. Thus, he applies the same hermeneutics of continuity and actualization that he was using in his theology to the post-conciliar practice of the Church. He was theologically inspired by great theologians such as Augustine or Bonaventure, and with the actualized reading of their work, he contributed to solving contemporary theological and ecclesiastical challenges. He demanded a similar approach from the post-conciliar Church, which in her reforms was not to neglect her rich tradition of faith and life, from which she lives to this day.

Conclusion and perspectives

Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI has significantly contributed to the contemporary understanding of the theological thought of St. Bonaventure, so that his interpretations remain indispensable for those who study this great medieval theologian. In addition, Ratzinger has convincingly shown that a theologian from the distant history of the Church, which at first glance is very different from our advanced times, can be relevant for the current situation of the Church and theology. We have identified two ways in which he did this: firstly, by looking to Bonaventure for direct solutions to the burning questions in the theology of his own time – the relationship between the Revelation and the history of Salvation, and the necessary hermeneutic framework for a comprehensive

⁶⁸ Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering them his Christmas Greetings (22.XII.2005), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html (Accessed: 21.III.2022).

understanding of the Revelation; and secondly, by discovering a theological key in Bonaventure that he incorporated into his own theology, as well as his life and the way he faced the Church's current challenges. We would explain these observations under several aspects:

Firstly, we would argue that St. Bonaventure is woven into the very life of Joseph Ratzinger / Benedict XVI more than his other great teachers. Essentially, it is because of the dramatic experience related to the defence of Ratzinger's habilitation thesis, which left a deep mark on the young German theologian and which he has often referred to. Then, it is because of the later parallelism of their life paths, from professors of theology to the Church administrators with great responsibilities, where they had to face the challenges of their times. Finally, it is because Bonaventure fits into the type of theology that Ratzinger was more comfortable with – a theology whose hermeneutic framework was woven from personal and living dimensions. In line with what has been said, it seems to us that Ratzinger refers to Bonaventure more than anyone else of his theological teachers in connection with his life as well as his theological and ecclesiastical activities. We can thus consider St. Bonaventure as the »life companion« of the German theologian and pope in a spiritual and exemplary sense.

As the second aspect, we would highlight a fundamental connection between Ratzinger's and Bonaventure's theologies. By connecting the common theological topics discussed above and reducing them to their internal features, we can observe that the orientation of theology and Christian life towards the spiritual dimension dominates in both. For Ratzinger as well as for Bonaventure, to practice theology is not only an intellectual-cognitive understanding of God's Revelation but is essentially directed towards wisdom – which goes beyond merely rational cognition and towards a spiritual contemplation in which the true meaning of God's message to man is revealed. Nevertheless, such a spiritually oriented theology does not separate them from the world and everyday life but roots them more deeply in God. Some have objected that Ratzinger's theology is too idealistic and that it may be difficult to apply in specific ecclesiastical and social circumstances. However, we have seen that Ratzinger strongly emphasizes the situation of faith in the earthly context and the Christian obligation to strive for a better world. It is just that he assumes an indispensable premise of faith and theology as a precondition for those demands: all Christian life and Church activities cannot rest on human activity alone, nor are human history and society built only through scientific and economic progress. For Ratzinger, neither can be achieved without God's grace and the spiritual growth of the individual and the community. And again, even then

it is impossible to establish a spiritually perfect reality on earth. In this, he is completely in the footsteps of St. Bonaventure, who did not allow himself to be seduced even by spiritual utopianism, but, in the awareness of human fallibility, advocated sober realism for his order and the Church of his time, yet with an open sense of the eschatological reality that was already showing in different forms in the present.

The above insight leads us to the third thought, in which we intend to show how Bonaventure's and Ratzinger's theologies, with their emphasis on the spiritual dimension, could still be relevant for our time: we especially see this in connection with the kind of modern Chiliastic expectations and, in a broader sense, with the increasing challenges related to spreading spirituality in the secular world. In Ratzinger's early days, Christian political advocacy for the purpose of spreading God's kingdom on earth was quite current. Today, it seems to us that Christian forms of chiliasm are going in different directions. In view of the pressing crises and impending disasters, instead of hope for a better world, it is the opposite, pessimistic and apocalyptic notions of its end that are beginning to prevail. At the same time, there are increasingly powerful spiritual movements in which the Salvation of the world is seen in the spiritual dimension, and which could lead believers to withdraw from it. Quite often, apocalyptic and spiritualist currents are connected or encourage each other. We can learn from Ratzinger and Bonaventure that a middle way is more appropriate: a sort of realism that could help us to evade the contemporary polarizations. Realism that is aware of the ambivalence of this world, but also firmly rooted in the hope of God's Salvation. In a broader sense, we see another possible link in the increasingly present turn from religion to spirituality, which is happening in the secular context and poses a great challenge to the Christian or ecclesiastical form of faith. Ratzinger's and Bonaventure's high appreciation of the spiritual dimension, always in the ecclesiastical context, could help to clarify these new manifestations of spirituality and their possible connection with the current forms of faith and life.

Sažetak

**SVETI BONAVENTURA KAO TEOLOŠKI NADAHNITELJ
JOSEPHA RATZINGERA / BENEDIKTA XVI.: OBJAVA, POVIJEST I
ESHATOLOGIJA**

Nedjeljka Valerija KOVAČ

Katolički bogoslovni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
Vlaška 38, p.p. 5, HR – 10 001 Zagreb
valerija.kovac13@gmail.com

U članku se proučava Ratzingerova interpretacija teološke misli svetoga Bonaventura i njegov kasniji utjecaj na Ratzingerovu teologiju. Uočavaju se tri tematska kruga unutar kojih se Ratzinger bavio Bonaventurom: povijesno razumijevanje Božje objave, teološko tumačenje povijesti i eshatološko dovršenje u sadašnjem vremenu. Paralelno s time, istražuje se kako je Joseph Ratzinger / Benedikt XVI. uvide stečene kod Bonaventura ugradio u vlastita razmišljanja o aktualnim temama svoga vremena. U članku se ti dvostruki uvidi prezentiraju u sljedećim tematskim aspektima: najprije, Ratzingerovo povijesno i personalno poimanje Božje objave nadahnuo Bonaventurom i u suprotnosti s neoskolastičkom teologijom, zajedno s njegovim usredotočenjem na čovjeka kao adresata Božje objave; s tim povezano, Ratzingerovo naglašavanje razumijevanja objave unutar vjere Crkve i njegova kritika historijsko-kritičke egzegeze; zatim, Ratzingerovo prihvaćanje Bonaventurine interpretacije Joakima iz Fioera kao i njegova rezerviranost glede zemaljskog eshatološkog dovršenja; sukladno tome, Ratzingerova kritika hilija-stičkih nastojanja njegova vremena i pretjeranoga poslijekoncilskog oduševljenja Crkve svijetom. Ratzinger je značajno doprinio suvremenom dubljem razumijevanju svetoga Bonaventura i pokazao njegovu važnost za današnja pitanja Crkve i teologije.

Ključne riječi: Joseph Ratzinger, sveti Bonaventura, Božja objava, teologija povijesti, Sveto pismo i tradicija, Joakim iz Fiore, teologija oslobođenja, Crkva i svijet