

Rainer Bruno Zimmer

THE DEEPER VALUE

A critical, existence-focused response
to the book:

Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict XVI.,
"Jesus of Nazareth" (First Part)

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INTRODUCTION

The Motivation

Why another critique, given that the first part of Ratzinger's Jesus book has already been competently reviewed and valued by various authors?

Ratzinger mentions in his book a potential "deeper value" in human utterances, when words transcend the moment. Even if, in writing this, he may have had in mind a different kind of deeper value: in his book, he himself does indeed produce great "deeper value" in form of existential views and insights. He just does not offer nor even expose this deeper value, and now it is, so to speak, well wrapped lying on the table. Somebody should unwrap it and give it to all people. This critique will unwrap it and, hopefully, make it openly visible. Therefore, obviously, this cannot be just a simple review but requires the presentation of additional substance.

The Basic Position of this Critique

The basic position of this critique could be termed "existentially religious". More simply put, it comprises what a person can herself, and with the help of others, find out about her being as a whole (her "Dasein") and about its extra-worldly rootedness. We are going to present these views in an on-demand manner below, but a limited introduction is required beforehand.

As indicated, we will use Heidegger's term *Dasein* (literally a noun for: "being there") to denote what a person perceives as the totality of her being.

What then does our Dasein consist of? Primarily, it is something like a film shown in front of our senses, but not only our senses, as our thoughts and imaginations do not occur by way of our senses but rather to some kind of "inner eye". Actually, this film has been running before we came to understand something about senses. Also, it is not only a film, because we can act in it. The best analogy that we have today for our real Dasein situation is the virtual reality. It is just that, in the real reality, we do not need screens, speakers, microphones, joysticks, sensor-/actor-dresses and the like: all perception and action is effective without anything intermediate.

Let us explore this analogy a little further: In the playing situation of the virtual reality, we are interacting with a programmed virtual world; in our Dasein with our real world. The player in the virtual reality is clearly outside the virtual world. Equally, in our Dasein situation, we are "playing" from outside our real world. Also, the creator and the projectionist of the virtual world are not within the virtual world and, in the same way, possible creators and presenters of our real world are not of this our real world.

What does actually occur to us in our real world? The general answer is: phenomena. It is just that we always immediately understand them: A phenomenon is occurring to us, and we are not classifying it as an object with certain properties and then deduce what it is, but there is the book before us, directly, conceptually known, undoubtedly. And it is not a nested mental program run that we may synthesize from some details, but we are driving our car to a gas station. Our world is all that we understand in this sense, which means: all that we can live. And *the* world is all, that, in principle, we can understand.

From the last two paragraphs we can extract two fundamental consequences:

Our Dasein has an extra-worldly component.

We cannot understand the Extra-worldly.

The second consequence is analogous to the fact that the characters in a computer game do not have any idea of the possible situations outside their virtual world. Because our understanding is conceptual, the second consequence precisely means that the Extra-worldly is not a concept, and that one cannot make assertions about it, attach attributes to it, relate it to something else, or ascribe an internal structure to it. It is *absolute*. This is also the reason, why the extra-worldly component is put in singular in the first consequence above, in spite of the fact that we have superficially identified at least two already: a "live"-producer and an active viewer of our Dasein film. What can, at best, be two- or severalfold here is various sights of one and the same Extra-worldly.

If the Extra-worldly is not conceptual, can we then verbally address it at all? Yes, but not by conceptual assertions, rather by approximately pointing to, or circumscribing, it. We do not have other than our usual terms and concepts for communication, so we are left to try, using these terms and concepts, to somehow approximately point to what we want to be seen. Approximately pointing tellings always have the implicit prefix: "It is, as if ...", and the addressee must try to get a sight of this "It". That does indeed work. For millennia, people have spoken and written about the Extra-worldly in this way, and other people have been able to see what is meant.

It follows that the deeper value of approximately pointing tellings is something that is not conceptual. Approximately pointing tellings about our Dasein and the Extra-worldly have an inherent effect: in seeing what is meant, our Dasein stance will be optimally adjusted, we become one with our Selves and, in the best case, enter beatitude.

Obviously, instead of "the Extra-worldly" or "the Absolute", we could equally well have written "God". We are not going to avoid this below but, on the other hand, will use other designations in order to emphasize specific aspects, for example, extra-worldliness or absoluteness.

This may suffice as a first sketch of the position of our critique. It should be read as an approximate telling. It is, in principle, refutable by means of a telling that could better show our Dasein situation. Conceptual arguments or refutations would not make sense, because we do not claim any conceptual truth. The only absolute claim in this position is, that God is "by definition" absolute.

THE FOREWORD

Ratzinger commences referring to the Jesus books of his youth, which *"presented him as a man living on earth who, fully human though he was, at the same time brought God to men, the God with whom as Son he was one. Through the man Jesus, then, God was made visible, and hence our eyes were able to behold the perfect man"*.

Due to the advances in historical-critical scholarship, this picture of the man Jesus became increasingly blurred. Various authors stepped into the breach offering different, subjective reconstructions, and that has resulted in a general scepticism about any portrayals of Jesus. Thereby *"the point of reference [for faith] is being placed in doubt: Intimate friendship with Jesus, on which everything depends, is in danger of clutching at thin air"*.

It is this problem, the solution of which Ratzinger wants to progress. His approach is a view of *"Jesus in the light of his communion with the Father, which is the true center of his personality; without it, we cannot understand him at all, and it is from this center that he makes himself present to us still today"*. This view is to be gained by means of the canonical exegesis. According to this method, single texts are not being explained in isolation, but rather a wide-ranging search is made for related explanations of other texts, which will in the end lead to a best possible agreement with the context of the whole bible and its explanations as have been further developed over the centuries. In particular, the said "reconstructions" shall be countered by a more logical, historically reasonable and consistent picture of the personality of Jesus.

Ratzinger then more specifically declares that the view cited above on *"Jesus in the light of his communion with the Father"* is actually a view in light of Jesus Christ, and that he, Ratzinger, is going to apply the *"Christological hermeneutic, which sees Jesus Christ as the key to the whole and learns from him how to understand the bible as a unity"*. According to Ratzinger, a necessary precondition for this view is a decision to believe ("Glaubensentscheid" in the German original), based upon historical reason. Jesus' Crucifixion and his enormous impact – among others, a fully developed Christology as early as 20 years after his death – cannot be explained as historically plausible, *"unless there had been something extraordinary in what happened, unless the person and the words of Jesus radically surpassed the expectations of the time"* and unless *"the greatness came at the beginning, and ... the figure of Jesus really did explode all existing categories and could only be understood in the light of the mystery of God"*.

Ratzinger shares the statements of the early Christology that *"Jesus was equal to God, but emptied himself, became man and humbled himself to die on the Cross, and that to him now belongs the worship of all creation, the adoration that God, through the Prophet Isaiah, said was due to him alone"*.

–

Of course, we are taking Ratzinger's foreword as it is meant by him: as an open and understandable exposition of the goal, the starting position, and the method of his Jesus book(s).

But we also have to record: The latter of the above citations is not accessible by a decision to believe, but rather *void*, with all consequences. We have pointed out above that God is absolute, not conceptually graspable. One cannot put God in relation with anything, particularly not with anything inner-worldly. It is impossible to make assertions about God, in particular, no assertions of the type, that an inner-worldly Jesus was equal to God, that God emptied himself, or that God said something through a prophet. Or – which, too, is an essential point of Christology –, that Jesus was the *one and only* son of God.

We leave it at that for the moment. There will be many occasions to resume this later. A few more remarks on the considerations of the Foreword are still appropriate.

Two millennia of puzzling and struggling for the right exegesis of the Bible could well be due to the exegetic approach of trying to *squeeze* something *out* of the Bible, many contents of which are again results of exegetic work of this type. If one wants to understand a professional article then it is obviously inadequate to equip oneself with nothing but knowledge of the meanings of words, then to look where in the article the words are being used and in which context, and in this manner try to get a meaning out of the text. It cannot work without corresponding professional competence. What is the special competence of Jesus? It is about God, our Selves, the Others, our being in the world. Therefore, the competence required to understand the bible is *existential competence*.

Existential competence is very rare, because it is usually unwanted and triggers hostility. That Jesus was executed, or that his teachings were integrated into Christology, can easily be explained on the base of inner-worldly givens. It is a well-known trait of men to shy away from all matters regarding their existence, and to avoid the open look at it. Not wanting and not being able to look are mutually enforcing each other here. Large religious organizations have to take this into account. They must not confront people directly with God, and they must even safely veil God against inadvertent views. Jesus, in his enthusiasm and sense of duty, did radically contravene this in offering everybody the direct sight of God, and he paid for it with his death, in spite of the fact that there is nothing to fear in this sight and that to the contrary, it is redemptive. If, according to the teachings of Jesus, everybody had entered a direct relation to his personal father God, that would have endangered the existence of the then contemporary religious system.

However, even after his death, Jesus' teachings could not be stopped anymore. The religious world found an extraordinarily skilful strategy to deal with his heritage, that is: to over-glorify Jesus as Christ and to redirect all connections of men to God to become connections to Christ.

Still that does not mean that Jesus' teachings are irretrievably lost. The writers were very skilled, too, and took care that the corresponding "adaptations" of the texts are routinely loaded with irritations and thus attract attention. Thus, everything that has been ascribed to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere is, in spite of the Christological veil, indeed accessible, timelessly valid and an absolutely stable base of faith. Ratzinger is

concerned that the Christian faith would lose its base if the secured knowledge of historical facts about Jesus' personality would somehow turn out as too limited, but this does not do justice to Jesus' teachings, because these are historical too and, as soon as one takes them as teachings about existence, exhibit an impressive and characteristic personal profile.

We have claimed that we would unpack the "deeper value" delivered by Ratzinger. Already the first paragraph of his foreword as cited above carries such deeper value, and we can directly demonstrate how to extract it. We just have to read the citation as an approximate telling:

It is as if Jesus had been man and, at the same time, one with God, and as if he had from this position brought God into the horizon of people and thus adjusted their Dasein stance.

We have already developed above the view that every person has an Extra-worldly component: the active recipient of the Dasein film. To use a better pointing expression: every person has a divine Self, that is: the genuine, absolute, authentic Self. Of course, Jesus as a person, had such an Authentic Self, and his expression "son of God" is a figuratively ingenious and well pointing formulation for it.

That, most of the time, we are not "one with God" like Jesus was, is among others owing to the fact that we avoid God and also tend to lose sight of our Authentic Self, if we do not care about it. But the analogy of the virtual reality carries us further: Like in a computer game we can become completely absorbed in the world, lose ourselves (our Selves) in it, and then we do not recognize anymore that we are doing *inauthentic* things and even things that we intrinsically do not want to do. Jesus has obviously not lost himself (his Self) in this way but maintained and sustained his sight of the Extra-worldly.

This sight of one's own is a prerequisite for showing other people – using more or less skilled approximately pointing language – where to look in order to get a chance to approximately see the Extra-worldly. And the sight of the Extra-worldly makes us *just*, that is: adjusts our Dasein stance.

The deeper value simply consists of these insights and the truth that they pertain *to all of us*. The following method for detecting the deeper value does almost always work: If the word is about Jesus or Christ it is always promising to replace in the text these names by "my own Authentic Self" and consider the meaning of the result: most of the time, it is a precious existential insight. Incidentally, this fully matches the teachings of Jesus: he has invited all of us to follow him, to take over his Dasein stance, to identify ourselves (our Selves) with him, until we see that we have a divine Authentic Self like him, and that both Authentic Selves mean the same Extra-worldly. As we said, we can't speak about more than *one* absolute Extra-worldly.

And this is going to carry us all the way through Ratzinger's Jesus book. He will in all breadth and depth elaborate on, and construct, the plausibilities of Christology and we, the readers, will be able to utilize his insights for our purposes without doing more than stripping off the Christological covering, by taking the void assertion of the "one and only son of God" as an approximately pointing telling that points to our Authentic Self.

INTRODUCTION: AN INITIAL REFLECTION ON THE MYSTERY OF JESUS

In this introduction, Ratzinger first presents Moses as a prophet unique in his historical environment in that he has, if only indirectly, seen God and from this position has shown Israel its way in the Exodus. Jesus, however, brings the decisive progress from the Old to the New Testament, being the first prophet who surpasses Moses in, and due to, his intimacy with God, and who, from this position as the Son of God, leads all his followers through the true "exodus" towards God. –

What is a prophet? In our existential-religious understanding, obviously, somebody who *knows* about the Extra-worldly and the Dasein, and tries to communicate that. Such knowledge can be obtained from an encounter with the Extra-worldly, or by seeking the Extra-worldly and getting an approximate sight of it. One can try to communicate this knowledge using approximately pointing language. Such knowledge includes also the "rules of the game" of the Dasein, and it is obvious that the prophets have to warn people against violating these rules, thereby making themselves unpopular.

Is it possible to compare the greatness of prophets? The knowledge about the Extra-worldly and our being as a whole is not an inner-worldly knowledge, hence neither large nor small in any sense. An encounter with the Extra-worldly is not inner-worldly either, it rather transgresses all that is inner-worldly. The only inner-worldly in this context is the approximate sight of the Extra-worldly – for example, one experiences an inner-worldly redemption and therein senses a trace of absolute redemption –, but the effect is essentially limited to the person having the sight and not considered "great". "Greatness" could only lie in the effect of the approximately pointing tellings of the prophets, if they caused a really *great* number of people to get a sight of the Extra-worldly. However, almost all people want exactly this not to happen, and so the prophet is fighting a losing battle. It is therefore always only after their death that "Greatness" is ascribed to prophets. Moses was "great" because he led Israel out of Egypt and gave them well functioning rules for life. Jesus was "great" because he founded a world religion.

Ratzinger has a different yardstick. For him, Jesus is much greater than Moses. To live as the Son facing God, that is a more direct relation to God than Moses had had, who had only spoken with God like with a friend, and only seen God's back. Jesus lived in the most intimate unity with the Father while this had been true of Moses only in fragmentary form. – Unfortunately, these are void assertions again. Already the idea of ascribing to an *absolute* God different *relations* to something inner-worldly and, on top of that, comparing and valuating them, should actually make one shrink back.

Also, it is not "as if" Jesus has been nearer to God than Moses, because otherwise everybody would have to be able in principle to see that "as if". One or more encounters with God have been ascribed to Moses in the solitude of the Sinai. Intense prayers to God have been ascribed to Jesus in seclusion. But inner-worldly matters, and that is what ascriptions are, namely words in a book, cannot serve as a proof of a Sonship of God. To

invent stories is easy, and to spin tales is a great art of the orient, but competent tellings about the Dasein and the Extra- worldly have been rare at all times and all over the world. For establishing whether Moses and Jesus had religion, that is, a connection to God, one is left primarily with the utterances ascribed to them.

Because Moses is being so lowly valued by Ratzinger, we want to give at least a few hints. The book Genesis is full of utterly ingenious existential insights:

The world is created in that God is *speaking*, that is: the phenomena that we encounter in our Dasein film, are *articulate* such that we can understand them conceptually and directly; and all things understood in this way amounts to our world.

Everything created by God is *good*, except man.

Man is created in God's own image, that is: man has an extra-worldly component, in our words: the Authentic Self.

"Be fruitful and multiply" and "replenish the earth and subdue it" means: Our being in the world is predisposed in such a way that we have to enhance and extend life, to expand our world and to explore and master new world.

With the knowledge of good and bad – what does enhance life and what does not – we are well equipped for our being in the world.

Adam and Eve, that is all men, are predisposed in a way that they avoid God in order to not become confronted with their naked existence before him.

The Paradise is guarded by Cherubims, which means that man is inescapably thrown into the world – his Self does not allow him to return. –

Nobody can invent all this who does not know it. Moses – more correctly, the author(s) of the genesis – did know it, while even today most people are far away from understanding it.

Incidentally, it is easy to demonstrate that the Ten Commandments of Moses have the same structure as Jesus' Commandment of Love, which shows that, in this respect, Moses already had the same existential knowledge as Jesus.

Let us continue to follow Ratzinger's train of deliberations.

He says that the mystery of Jesus is hidden behind his secluded praying, in "*the Son conversing with the Father; Jesus' human consciousness and will, his human soul, is taken up into that exchange, and in this way human 'praying' is able to become a participation in this filial communion with the Father*". And redemption then works as follows: "*He who sees Jesus sees the Father*", and "*The disciple who walks with Jesus is thus caught up with him into communion with God*". This is "*a stepping beyond the limits of human nature, which had been there as a possibility and an expectation in man, God's image and likeness, since the moment of creation*". –

Praying as "the Son conversing with the Father" may pass as a religious expression. But when somebody is talking with his father then he usually understands the situation without further ado and does not need any offerings of explanations. That "human consciousness and will" and the "human soul" are suggested to be "taken up into that exchange" is an alienating reduction to three out of hundreds of factors relevant in the

situation of a father-son interaction, and spoils all clarity of the presentation. In the end, the Son is taken up into the "filial communion with the Father". Such being-taken-up and such filial communion do not exist in life. Therefore nobody is speaking like that, and if somebody would do it in spite, then nobody would understand it. One might argue that the text is about God, and that the dynamics with Him would differ from those with a "normal" father. But then the use of the son picture would be unapt, and a different picture would be required.

Of course, Ratzinger knows all that. He also knows about the technique of morphing a text, by which several seemingly insignificant modifications will be applied step by step to a starting text, until some new content is reached that is completely unrelated but still being presented as a natural consequence. This is starting here with the Son *conversing* with the Father, which apparently involves as a matter of course *consciousness and will*, that is, *the soul*, until a corresponding *intensity* of this involvement causes the Son to become virtually *identified into* the Father. Something like that may be possible, but the conclusion is not stringent. Conversation, even intense conversation, does neither imply identification nor that one participant in the conversation be the son of the other participant.

Note that Jesus is being taken up into "filial communion with the Father" while the common man is caught up into "communion with God". Rather nobody shall be led to consider that a common person could be seen as a *son* of God. Only Jesus is God's Son: that is what the whole Christology depends on. Ratzinger is entering the book with it, and at the end it shall have become plausible. But one thing is obvious: plausibility suffers the more technical efforts are required in writing. Such efforts cannot be concealed, they rather attract particular attention – and that is probably what they are meant to.

The final sentence of this Chapter is a further example of such effort: "*And that is what redemption means: this stepping beyond the limits of human nature, which had been there as a possibility and an expectation in man, God's image and likeness, since the moment of creation*". If the Genesis says: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" then this means: man is an image of God, and being an image of God is a universal, fundamental attribute of man. If that can be transcribed, as if naturally, into a transgression of limits, or into a predisposition of an expectation or possibility of a transgression, how can one expect plausibility to emerge?

We have to record this here because it helps us to get an insight into the "wrapping technique" in the sense of our claim that the deeper value is well wrapped lying on the table. We will later see that noticeable technical tricks can already be found with the Evangelists and are downright characteristic of the artful writing about existential aspects of religion.

Let us return to the deeper value itself. What is the existential-religious value at the bottom of Ratzinger's words about praying as "*the Son conversing with the Father; Jesus' human consciousness and will, his human soul, is taken up into that exchange, and in this way human 'praying' is able to become a participation in this filial communion with the Father*"?

Praying proper is the attempt to move the Self point out of the world, to gain authenticity, to find the Authentic Self, and from there to direct our being in the world. Here "Self

point" refers to our centre of perception. We usually locate it in the middle between and behind our eyes, but we are able to move it elsewhere. Praying above all requires that we get our attention away from the world. Depending on how much we manage to do that, the praying reaches "back" more or less far. It may have an effect upon our unconscious, or we may in a greater distance, for example, when "our world is fallen apart", get a clear sight of our Dasein situation. Then, the Authentic Self will re-determine our stance toward the world.

If we so view our being-an-image-of-God as fulfilled in our having an Authentic Self that is receiving the Dasein film as "live" articulated by God, and like a son is receiving a present, then we can find that in Ratzinger's words. *Consciousness* is an inner-worldly phenomenon but otherwise provides a good approximate expression for the Self point. *Will* is inner-worldly and subject to the laws of the world, that is: to causality and chance. But the Authentic Self is free vis-à-vis the world and can by its stance toward the world make an authentic will effective. The *soul* is an object of our experience, knowledge, and activity in the world, hence a purely inner-worldly structure. What is called "soul" in religious teachings – something like an immortal, extra-worldly component of the soul – is better distinguished from the inner-worldly soul by an expression of its own: the Authentic Self. It is what is divine about man. As we have already derived in the beginning, it is – like the fatherly creator God – one of several sights upon the one and only Extra-worldly. The expressions "filial communion with the Father" and "communion with God" can hardly guide towards this understanding but they are on the right track.

Definitely not will we be "taken up" by the Extra-worldly (the German original even says: "hineingezogen", that is, "pulled into"). Our life begins in the world, without any knowledge of the Extra-worldly. Without proper guidance, we would hardly get the idea that there are sights upon the Extra-worldly. And without persistent, active searching we would rather not find such sights. What can take us very much forward – if you so want: help pull – are good, approximately pointing tellings from existentially competent fellow human beings. Jesus has excelled in this, and if, following his tellings, we can come clear from the inner-worldly dynamics and gain authenticity, then this is certainly quite some redemption. Each time we are praying we have to newly work for the distance to the world and for proceeding towards the Authentic Self – the world does not readily disengage us. –

Summary:

If we want to understand and approximately describe our Dasein then Moses and Jesus provide rich material. This does not depend on how they may be positioned as prophets and conversational partners of God, as friend or son. Ratzinger rightly says that Jesus has lived as God's son, and that only from this view it is possible to understand him correctly. The Christological attempt to *over-glorify* Jesus as God's son, appears tense rather than clearly convincing, but it still produces some valuable – while, in their exclusivity for Jesus, too narrowly taken – tellings. If we read them as pertaining to all of us, they aptly point to aspects of our Dasein situation, and they show Jesus as a man in the same Dasein situation as ours.

CHAPTER ONE: THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

After reporting on the historical environment, the role of John the Baptist as a herald for Jesus, and the then contemporary understanding of baptism, Ratzinger discusses what in his view distinguishes the Baptism of Jesus.

This starts with the questions, how Jesus could undergo baptism by John rather than vice versa, and wherefrom he should have taken any sins for the confession to precede the baptism. He goes on with explanations in the direction that Jesus *"loaded the burden of all mankind's guilt upon his shoulders"* and *"bore it down into the depths of the Jordan"*, that Jesus' Baptism *"is an acceptance of death for the sins of humanity"* and that the subsequent voice from heaven *"This is my beloved Son"* is *"an anticipatory reference to the Resurrection"*.

Ratzinger ponders whether this *"interpretation and rereading ... has taken us too far away from the bible"* but he finds nothing but confirmations, predominantly in those texts which position Jesus as the *"Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world"*. This word *"interprets Jesus' Baptism, his descent into the abyss of death, as a theology of the Cross"*.

In the scene after Jesus' Baptism when heaven was open over him, when he was proclaimed the Son and the Spirit came over him like a dove, *"the mystery of the Trinitarian God is beginning to emerge"* and an arc is joining this to all baptizing *"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*.

Jesus' Baptism was not a vocational experience: Jesus *"stands above our psychologizing"*. He *"does not appear in the role of a human genius subject to emotional upheavals, who sometimes fails and sometimes succeeds ... an individual who lived long ago and so would ultimately be separated from us by an unbridgeable gulf"*. As the *"beloved Son"* he is the *"Wholly Other, but by the same token he can also become a contemporary of us all, 'more interior' to each one of us 'than we are to ourselves'"*.

For all this, Ratzinger spends sixteen and a half pages and still misses the only aspect of the story about Jesus' Baptism, that is truly relevant to our existence. Let us just identify ourselves with Jesus as offered in the last citation of the preceding paragraph, as interior as we are with ourselves, in the very moment after his baptism: we are becoming informed that we are God's son. In our above diction, this means: Our Dasein is, as if we are beloved children of the creator of our Dasein film, and he would devise and dose all that occurs to us therein in such a way that we are thereby guided, advanced, challenged, and built up. And in the same way we also have to see our fellow men.

To assume and maintain this Dasein stance, to live like a beloved child of God, is not easy. We are labouring, failing, suffering, we recognize that others have an easier and better life, and then we do not feel treated lovingly at all. We need not however believe unchecked that this attitude is in spite correct and functional. We need only overlook our own Dasein to see how small we started and what we – everybody to his own measure – have achieved in terms of knowledge and abilities, what we have overcome, how much we have grown with it, and how our fellow men are all in fundamentally the same situation.

It is this view upon which our beatitude is depending. And what is Ratzinger doing? He keeps himself and his readers busy with correlations of texts and other things.

He projects a Jesus who was free of guilt. But, other than Ratzinger is claiming, that would not have been a human. There are two concepts of sin. One means being remote from God. That is inevitable when being in the world. After all, humans are thrown into the world and challenged to pass this test, and in that they cannot be but remote from God because nobody can concentrate on the world and on God – serve two masters – at the same time, but only alternately. The other concept of sin refers to an action or inaction that constitutes guilt, that is, does not expand life or even impairs life. This too is something that nobody can escape. Whenever one option to expand life is taken, then other options remain unused, and guilt arises correspondingly. Even if Jesus helps one person he does not at the same time help others present, and thus accumulates guilt.

With Guardini's word, that Jesus "stands above our psychologizing", Ratzinger wants to say that an understanding of Jesus' psyche would not disclose him fully, or not what is essential about him. On the other hand one cannot obtain a qualified picture of a personality when masking the psyche. If anything is "standing above" the psyche then it is standing above the world, the Extra-worldly. To reduce Jesus to his extra-worldly Self spoils the claim to expose Jesus as God who became man. A masking of Jesus' psyche would show him as only *part* of a man, which God has become. Let us look at this in a more pragmatic way: It is quite obvious that Jesus has been furious about the Pharisees and scribes, and if one wants to present a *convincing* personality of Jesus and not miss anything therein then one will look into it and resolve it.

The other key points of this Chapter can shortly be dealt with.

The assertion, that Jesus had loaded the burden of all mankind's guilt upon his shoulders and redeemed them by his sacrificial death, does only make sense if there is somebody who maintains a register of guilt. To say it directly and clearly: God is absolute. To ascribe some guilt management to him is an anthropomorphic relativization and void as such.

To submerge in and emerge from the Jordan is not per se a dramatic matter. Therefore, the corresponding associations of death and resurrection are implausible. If Ratzinger finds in the story of Jesus' Baptism connections to the theology of the Cross and to Trinity then that may be consistent with Christology but it does not produce any substantial gain. The New Testament has anyway been designed to establish Christology, and an exegesis based on Christology does not accomplish anything beyond presenting the preconditions as the result.

CHAPTER TWO: THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

Ratzinger's search for Christological significance suitable for enhancing the story of Jesus' Baptism flows over into this Chapter. He starts by writing that the descent of the Spirit on Jesus that ends the Baptism scene "*is to be understood as a kind of formal investiture with the messianic office*", analogous to anointing of a new king. This however cannot be. There is no report in the New Testament of an inner-worldly office of Jesus, and propositions of an extra-worldly office and a formal investiture by God would be categorically void.

The three temptations are proposals of the devil to Jesus, and Jesus rejects each of them:

1. After Jesus has been feasting for 40 days in the desert and is hungry:

Devil: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

Jesus: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

2. On a pinnacle of the temple:

Devil: If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Jesus: It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

3. On an "exceeding" high mountain, looking down on "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them":

Devil: All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Jesus: Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

We shall show in each case that these are highly competent existential-religious texts, and thereafter we discuss how Ratzinger is treating them.

The devil is the fallen angel (fallen off God). Angels are messengers of God and always stand for the Authentic Self. "Falling" is an existential of our Dasein. If we do not counteract it, if we do not act *authentically*, then we automatically "fall" – become addicted – to the world and its attractions and rules. The world is tempting us, and the devil personifies this temptation. The fallen angel is an image of that man who does not have himself held by his own Authentic Self in an attitude vis-à-vis the world, but is "fallen to" the world and has lost himself – his Authentic Self – in the world. We cannot escape this situation other than by a corresponding effort. To find back to the Authentic Self is work that requires concentration and that we have identified above as praying.

We cannot however at the same time seek our Authentic Self *external* to the world and work on enhancing life *within* the world. The best we can do is to acquire a habit to emerge from the world on a regular basis, to return to our Authentic Self, and to check from this

position our Dasein stance and, if required, adjust it. This is basically also the meaning of the Third Commandment. Ratzinger does occasionally touch upon it with his sentence: "*The ... descent 'into hell' ... accompanies him [Jesus] along his entire journey*".

The legend of the three temptations of Jesus presents typical temptations and, in Jesus' responses, the corresponding aspects of our Dasein stance, that renders us immune to them.

Stones and Bread – Living on God's Words

In the world, there is bread and much else that we need to survive and still more that we want to have available for a comfortable life. For all of that, we are striving in the world. This would, on the other hand, be pointless if, all of a sudden we had no ground beneath our feet anymore, or the light in the world came to an end, or the oxygen. Also, our life would already become quite defective if there were no paper anymore, or no glass. However, ground, and light, and oxygen, and paper, and glass do exist in the world, as well as infinitely many other givens that constitute our life. If we look at it more closely then all that all we encounter in our Dasein film constitutes our life. We have above described that, which we encounter, as directly understood phenomena, articulated – "spoken" – by the creator of the Dasein film. In this sense, we are living on every "word" of God. –

Ratzinger, with a view to illustrate the power and tenacity of this temptation, addresses the hunger in the world, not least by using the example of the failed welfare promise of Marxism. He then expands on the theme of "bread", discusses the legend of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, and eventually leads over to "*Jesus' perpetual miracle of bread*" in the Eucharist of the Church. Jesus "*himself has become bread for us*", and, while Ratzinger does not explicitly say so here, he appears to imply that Jesus himself is God's word, and that in "living by God's word" we are living by Jesus. Ratzinger's exegesis closes with the words: "*... we are obliged ... to recognize that we do not live by bread alone, but first and foremost by obedience to God's word. Only when this obedience is put into practice does the attitude develop that is also capable of providing bread for all*".

Thus, Ratzinger does not arrive at the existential sight on temptation and prefers to construct Jesus as a source of life, obedience to whom would immaterially and materially feed us. Also, he does not get away from the view, that there is God's word and that it must be obeyed. In order that we can obey a word, it must be in the world. But a structural relation between the Extra-worldly (God) and something inner-worldly (word) is impossible. Every single assertion about God's word *in the world* is void, independent of the semantics assigned to "word", be it a textual expression or the man Jesus.

On the pinnacle of the temple – God cannot be tested

Our Dasein is arranged in such a way that our conscience tells us that we have to expand life and extend our world. We always have to work for exploring something new, for becoming able to live something – little or great – that we have not been able to live before. To jump from a high building is a suitable example. If we are unable to do it, then we better come up with some idea of how we could make it possible in spite: a jumping sheet, a rescue net, a paraglide, a bungee rope. A plan according to which God would intercept our fall is not a plan but a void conceptual construction: each assertion about God, for example, that God would do something, is void. Not only shall we not test God, but it is a fundamental rule of our Dasein that we cannot.

Ratzinger ends up with a similar result, but emphasizes the aspect of conducting an experiment that is inherent in "testing". There is a requirement being held that God submit to experiment. *"He must submit to the conditions that we say are necessary if we are to reach certainty. ... The arrogance that would make God an object and impose our laboratory conditions upon him is incapable of finding him"*.

Ratzinger knows it then: Making God an object is, in a certain sense, impossible. Although he does not say that it is "void", his verdict is still unambiguous: *"... we deny God as God by placing ourselves above him ... by no longer acknowledging as real anything but what we can experimentally test and grasp. To think like that is to make oneself God. And to do that is to abase not only God, but the world and oneself, too"*.

But Ratzinger does not face up to the consequences. *Every assertion about God* tries to make God an object of this assertion. It just does not work. If, in spite, one puts the word "God" into an assertion then it just cannot refer to the absolute extra-worldly God, but at most to a fictitious object.

One might still claim that God is standing above this law, that he could well make assertions about himself without making himself an object. But this claim, too, is a human, conceptual construction. The assertions, that God was standing above the law, that he could make assertions about himself, that certain assertions made by the prophets were actually made by God, are meta-assertions, that is, assertions about assertions. But meta-assertions, too, are human assertions. If the word "God" occurs therein then again it can only denote a fictitious God-object.

Given all this we still note that, by frequent and systematic repetition of this kind of assertions, the God-object can over the time assume a self-sustaining relevance and a recognizable likeness. Every religious text must therefore be submitted to a check of whether it truly refers to God or to a fictitious God-object. And the first criterion for this is whether the text respects the absoluteness of God, that is, whether it presents assertions about God or, otherwise, attempts an approximately pointing telling.

Of course, this criterion also applies to the texts of the preceding sections of this critique. For example, the text saying that assertions about the absolute God are impossible, looks

like a meta-assertion. But it cannot be an assertion. Either the reader can see, what the text intends to point to, or the text cannot serve well as an approximately pointing telling. –

But Ratzinger's interpretation goes on. He explicates that a leap from the pinnacle of the temple would have tempted God, but Jesus' going into death did not. "... *he did descend into the abyss of death, into the night of abandonment, and into the desolation of the defenceless. He ventured this leap as an act of God's love for men. And so he knew that, ultimately, when he leaped he could only fall into the kindly hands of the Father. ... If you follow the will of God, you know that in spite of all terrible things that happen to you, you will never lose a final refuge. ... Yet this trust ... is something quite different from the reckless defiance of God that would make God our servant*".

We have to mention shortly again that a "God" who can be ascribed a will and whom one can defy and make a servant, is a fictitious object. To factually go into death, because it is the will of "God", and to expect that this would, in an inner-worldly sense, end well or that "God" would even resurrect one thereafter, is not advisable to anybody. In such an undertaking, one cannot hope for more than the support of the fictitious God object.

Nevertheless, Ratzinger's text remains existentially relevant. If we read it as an approximately pointing telling about our Dasein then it describes aspects of the primal trust that is a fundamental given of ours. All our doing has the character of a leap into nothingness. When we act, we hope that, what we have envisaged is going to happen. We do not have any control about what does, after our impulse to act or not to act, really occur to us in our interactive Dasein film. We rely upon the experience that what we have learnt will continue to function, and that we will succeed in what others, with abilities comparable to ours, have successfully tried. We do not attempt undertakings that we have learnt not to end well. With completely new intentions we plan more carefully and for different outcomes, but sometimes we simply depend upon receiving the present of a positive outcome, and sometimes we fail. And then after some time we stand up again and continue with something else. As long as we are living, we are able to live.

The Kingdoms of the World – Free Will is Possible only from the Authentic Self

We can fully engage in the world and spend a lot of energy to secure for ourselves everything pleasurable and magnificent – or even always seek minor advantages – and to exclude everything unpleasant and dangerous. The belief that we could thereby gain sufficient power over everything, gain full control, is an illusion. We cannot destine that which occurs to us in our Dasein film; at best we can predict it. *In* the world, we are subject to its, that is, our laws of causality and chance. To escape them we have to find our Authentic Self by praying, where we will be in a position *vis-à-vis* the world and free in our will. –

After a few side trips, Ratzinger comes up with almost the same view. He first turns to the "mountain" as a topic and, besides the mountain that is looking down on all the kingdoms of the world, reminds of other mountains: on the one hand the mountain on which Jesus

proclaims that "*all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*", and on the other hand the mountain Golgotha on which Jesus was crucified – a presupposition of his *power* in virtue of his Resurrection, as Ratzinger writes. While not mentioned in the story of the third temptation, Jesus is offering a Kingdom different from the kingdoms of the earth. When people are free to choose they opt for the seemingly reasonable decision: for a planned and thoroughly organized world. What sort of action would then be required from a Saviour of the world? To bring an ideal world? What has Jesus brought? Ratzinger's answer is: "*He has brought God, and now we know his [formerly only "gradually" unveiled] face, now we can call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take in this world*". That is not so little. God's cause proves to be the thing that truly endures and saves. "*Jesus has emerged victorious from his battle with Satan*".

If we remember the possibility to replace "Jesus" by "our Authentic Self" and take "Satan" as standing for the temptations that let us fall to the world, then the result is: Our Authentic Self is free vis-à-vis the world (see the end of the penultimate paragraph).

"Brought God" can mean that Jesus has shown us how we can come to face God. The intention to face God is then still left to each of us individually. Ratzinger, however, appears to have an emphasis on Jesus having brought God *into the world*, in the sense that Jesus as God's Son actually *is* God and, by thus coming into the world as God, has shown us his face, that is a face of God that humans can see. – About this we have above said all that is required, both that in terms of assertions it is void, and that referring to humans it means that we have come into the world with an extra-worldly component: our Authentic Self. –

CHAPTER THREE: THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus preaches the Gospel of the Kingdom of God at hand and requests men to repent and believe in the Gospel.

The first thing Ratzinger does is to move into the background the interpretation of the "Gospel" as "Good News". Into the foreground he puts the interpretation as an authoritative, fact setting, "performative" speech of the real Lord of the world – clearly a formal aspect. He keeps up this emphasis on sovereign authority throughout the consideration of the meaning of the Gospel, which boils down to the view that Christ himself is the Kingdom of God. The proximity of the Kingdom of God is then given in the proximity of Christ as God's Son, that is: as God, and in his postulated presence throughout history.

In between, Ratzinger discusses other notions of the Kingdom of God in church history: the Kingdom of God as located in man's inner being and individually accessible; or on the other hand, the church as the Kingdom of God; the proximity of the Kingdom of God as the imminent end of the world; finally the secularized Kingdom of God as an ideal world governed by peace, justice, and the conservation of creation. Contrary to these views, the Kingdom of God should, in his view, be correctly understood as God's "being-Lord" and "lordship". In the Old Testament, this Lordship had been the topic of prophecies, for the New Testament, Ratzinger excludes the temporal interpretation as a Lordship of God to come. The true Lordship of God is complex, hidden, poor, lowly, contested, a treasure for which one gives away everything, exposed to violence.

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What is good and rich in Jesus' proclamation? Why should one repent? – If something is good and rich for our existence then it must be absolutely good and rich, and therefore not to be found in the world. To see it, one has to emerge from the world and return to the Authentic Self, which we have described above as the structure of praying. What we do not have an eye for in the world, will then come into sight: our Dasein film is the absolutely good and rich. And if proximity and imminence are in question: our Dasein film is the inescapable, uncontrollable, absolute articulation, that we encounter so directly that greater proximity and imminence are impossible. But there is nothing to fear about its dominance, it is rather like an overwhelmingly good and rich present.

The same can be expressed about as follows in biblical language: Everything that God is giving us in life is good and rich: *good* as said six times in the Genesis, and *rich* in the sense in which the wealthy father says to his son: "all that I have is thine". There is nothing to fear about God, instead with him is beatitude.

If that is not good news! It is the good news per se. It is the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl for which one will sell everything.

Ratzinger does not deliver this good news. In a chapter on the Gospel it really must not be omitted, and on seventeen pages there should be enough room to give it to people. But he considers as more important, to construct authoritative lordship, and to discuss away other notions of the Kingdom, in order to guide the reader to the result that Jesus proclaimed himself as the Kingdom of God and thereby laid the foundation of Christology. Of course, *that* is meant as good news. Actually, the good news therein is hidden so deeply that nobody can find it – except by existential competence.

Let us, according our recipe above, once again strip off the Christological wrap and generalize the thus uncovered kernel to pertain to all men. Then, what remains of Jesus proclaiming himself as the Kingdom of God, is that every man is governed – like Jesus – by a divine Authentic Self.

This is already fairly good news but still does not carry the gladness of beatitude: the kind of permanent, unfailing euphoria of well-being that results from beatitude being a perfectly adjusted Dasein stance in which our Dasein proves itself as rich and good.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Before turning to the contents of the sermon, Ratzinger once more positions Jesus as the "greater Moses". Already in Matthew's statement that Jesus *sat down*, he recognizes an expression of a plenary authority – in the same scene with Luke "*standing is an expression of Jesus' sovereignty and plenitude of authority*" –, and the mountain on which Jesus sat down is interpreted by Ratzinger as a "*cathedra*". He anticipates his resume that the Sermon on the Mount "*is the new Torah*", that is, an enhancement of the five books of Moses and the commandments and prophesies therein.

In a sense, the Sermon on the Mount is a tough speech. In order to understand it and to turn it into an optimally adjusted Dasein stance, one has to detach oneself from the world, in Ratzinger's words: "*without a 'dying', without the demise of what is simply our own, there is no communion with God and no redemption*".

But other than Ratzinger appears to suggest, what is simply our own is every man's *individual world*, with *all* its contents – including any system of religious teachings. And that cannot be changed by declaring certain teachings, all of which are of course inner-worldly matters, as being not "our own" but established by God. Such a use of the word "God" is void.

1 THE BEATITUDES

Among all that can be said about our Dasein, the most important is how to achieve beatitude. The Beatitudes are therefore the most important teachings that Jesus has to offer. A man seeking beatitude should find the entrance here.

Therefore, in the review of this Chapter, we will not look for texts, out of which some existential "deeper value" might be extractable, but rather concentrate on statements in which Ratzinger describes beatitude and discusses access to it.

In that we will miss to expose in this Chapter any hidden existentials that are certainly present here, too. But beatitude is not just "deeper value", it is the *main* value, and it *must* be given to people, openly, directly, and as best one can.

Beatitude as Presented by Ratzinger

Up to the middle of the Chapter only two expressions come into consideration, that deal with the essence and attainment of beatitude: "*boundless joy*" and "*an 'exaltation', an elevation to God's throne on high*", the latter referring exclusively to Jesus. – But these words are no less in need of explanation than the word beatitude itself. Joy: why and over what,

boundless in which dimension: bigness or time? Is beatitude just an emotion? The times when the picture of the throne had been impressing are long gone. What then is meant?

The third Beatitude (of the meek) is seen by Ratzinger as an invitation "to orient our lives towards 'the land of the king of peace'", to an "earth [renewed] through the peace that comes from God". How to orient one's life accordingly, is derived by Ratzinger from the seventh Beatitude (of the peacemakers): it is an invitation to bring and establish peace, and that is possible only for "the man who is reconciled with God and with himself". – Is beatitude really meant to require a preceding, settled conflict? And how does the reconciled situation then look like? Still simply like peace?

In the context of the second Beatitude, the promise of comfort for those who mourn, Ratzinger describes the comfort, and thereby apparently beatitude, as the "Kingdom of God – standing under the protection of God's power, secure in his love". – Protection against what, security against which inconveniences? How does the Kingdom become apparent? Does not all that need to be explained?

The two final Beatitudes (of the persecuted and defamed) are summed up by Ratzinger as follows: "The sufferer is not truly comforted ... until he and the powerless of this world are no longer threatened by murderous violence ..." – Taken quite unemotionally, this would mean that beatitude is utopian, since there have always been and will always be threats posed by fellow men.

In the context of the fourth Beatitude, Ratzinger speaks of the "thirst and hunger [for justice] that is blessed because it leads men to God, to Christ, and therefore opens the world to the Kingdom of God". – Such beatitude would rather not be utopian but the direction of a present pursuit. On the other hand, the correct kind of aspired justice is nowhere defined. Does it really not matter?

Finally, in Ratzinger's interpretation of the sixth Beatitude (of those pure in heart), "man enters God's dwelling place and becomes able to see him. And that is just what it means for him to be 'blessed'". "Seeing" here means figuratively "that man's perceptive powers play in concert"; what is seeing is "man's inner eye". Jesus is seeing God due to his Sonship. – Where do we have to look, and how does beatitude result from just seeing? –

Ratzinger does not show a full understanding of beatitude. He connects it with various other concepts and, exactly for this reason, does not arrive at one definition that, in principle, everybody could follow. If one does not understand beatitude beforehand, then one will, after Ratzinger's explanations, not understand it either.

If however somebody – like Jesus or Matthew – wants to show a path to beatitude or – like in this critique – wants to discuss the teaching of beatitude, he will not succeed without a communicable understanding of his own. Therefore we must, first of all now, fill in the missing description of beatitude.

The Inner-worldly Description of Beatitude

Beatitude is genuine bliss, an exceedingly good Dasein situation. In the world, we can pursue happiness and find happiness. We then see that our affairs have gone well or are standing favourably. This is a transient reflection of beatitude. It is not our good times in the world but rather the incessant change of the world, that is permanent. Beatitude actually views the whole Dasein, including the vicissitude of the world, as a godsend: the world is right, dependable, interesting, rich, beautiful, an oversize present. In this, beatitude is not a naïve world-view that would suppress or euphemize all evil and misfortune in the world. Beatitude is a Dasein stance in which I can live at ease with myself and with the world including all its evil phenomena, live relaxedly, freely and gladly, even when the evil is hitting me.

This right – "justified" – stance towards to the world requires that we take a position "vis-à-vis" the world from where we can see the world as a function of our Dasein. Normally, our sight is bound to the contents of world. We have to leave them behind in order to recognize our Dasein situation, with our Self as an "external player" facing the reality of our world. We can either seek ourselves this sight of our Dasein, drawing from existentially competent people and their experiences, or it may – in the hard way – be forced upon us by fate. Latest when our "world falls apart" we emerge from it, get "thrown back on ourselves" and, driven by the naked need, care about our stance towards the world.

If a world falls apart, if all of a sudden a considerable complex of possibilities that we have so far been able to live, ceases to be available to us, then we recognize afterwards its value for us and possibly also the compound value of our whole world, the totality of all our possibilities of life. With many people, such insight positively changes their attitude to life, and they start making more of their remaining possibilities, and live out new possibilities. This is a step towards beatitude.

If we deliberately manage to get a sight of our Dasein, then we may begin to see, what a great reality it is offering us, better outfitted than any virtual reality, and with better scenarios and rules of the game. It had us start with zero possibilities, zero understanding, and zero abilities, and then grow up to our present capabilities of living – enabled by our original disposition to build our world and to expand life, and triggered by challenges of all magnitudes. From an empty world up to an overly rich, familiar, personal world so large that no man could ever describe all its contents in a lifetime. A game of highest quality such that nobody wants to leave it early and nobody can design a better one. The whole thing for free, without the least contribution of ours to its creation and operation: an absolutely rich and good present. – If we advance towards this view then this will automatically redirect and adjust our Dasein stance and lead to beatitude.

What of all this is addressed by the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount?

Beatitude in the Sense of the Sermon on the Mount: Accesses and Characteristics

Both, the speaker and the text author of the Beatitudes know about the two starting points and access paths to beatitude: the hard one through strikes of fate (they that mourn, hunger and thirst after righteousness, are persecuted), and the other, more amicable one (the meek, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers).

In addition, they emphasize a specific non-access: through intellect (the poor in spirit). The Dasein is not intellectually graspable, because it cannot be conceptualized. Thinking is an inner-worldly activity. Increasing the intensity of inner-worldly activities locks us ever more firmly *within* the world and thus cannot lead us into a position *vis-à-vis* the world. We have to get rid of both, material and intellectual wealth in order to get some sight at all of the Dasein and its extra-worldly rootedness, and thereby have one's Dasein stance adjusted.

Let us now come to beatitude itself: The situation of those blessed is figuratively circumscribed as follows: theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they shall be comforted, inherit the earth, be filled with justice, obtain mercy, see God, be called the children of God, great is [their] reward in heaven. The reference to the "earth", that is: to the world, ensures that beatitude will not simply be misunderstood as extra-worldly. To "see God" relates to the sight of our Dasein situation with God as the creator of our interactive Dasein film. To "be called the children of God" can, on the one hand, relate to the sight of our divine component, the Authentic Self, on the other hand mean that we best behave in the world like children who know that their father does not overburden them but is coaching them towards ever higher life competence. To "obtain mercy" relates to the existential truth that we are forever exculpated from any guilt. To be "comforted" and to be "filled with justice" mean that misery and evil in the world cannot control us. The blessings of those mourning, hungry and thirsting after righteousness, and those persecuted contain as an aspect that these situations cannot impair, but are already overcome in, beatitude. Beatitude is presented as positive even relating to personal evil.

Altogether, this is a fairly accurate and – given its compactness – good outline of beatitude. On the other hand it is still incomplete, because it fails to tell something very important: that beatitude is a Dasein stance, and which one, and because it does not show how beatitude is "functioning", that is, where and how to look in order to see Dasein in such a way as to enter the state of beatitude. –

The text author of the Beatitudes himself withholds a great deal of ultimate clarity. At least, he indicates this voluntarily and noticeably. Ratzinger does not cover this aspect at all and, therefore, we fill in here again.

The Textual Quality of the Beatitudes

Above all, it is conspicuous how obfuscating, even downright badly the Beatitudes are written.

That starts with small "disturbances" of regularity: The first blessing ends with a promise for the present time: "theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven", all others point into the future. What then is meant to be the time for beatitude: present time, or future, or timelessness? The form of the last blessing deviates from all the preceding ones: it changes to second person mode, brings Jesus into play and, after promising the reward in heaven, adds another – weaker – argument involving the Prophets, as if the first promise was not sufficient. Thereby, the Beatitudes are, just at the end, rendered somewhat shaky.

The coarsest oddity is the language construction: "Blessed are the X: for they shall Y". The first part has three alternative semantics: "blessed implies X", or "X implies blessed", or both at the same time. Matthew leaves that open, although a choice could be made clear most easily. "For" does always express a causality relation, in this case: "because Y in the future, therefore the implication between blessed and X", for example: because they shall be comforted in the future, those mourning are blessed and/or those blessed are mourning. That cannot be meant; beatitude cannot be borrowed from the future. But Matthew desists from formulating the relations properly and unambiguously. Should that be carelessness – when it comes to our beatitude and existence, of all matters?

The combinations of the Y-s with the X-s are really arbitrary. Why doesn't the text say "Blessed are the pure in heart: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", or "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be called the children of God"? One group is rewarded with the "kingdom of heaven", the other group with the "earth" – why that? One might say that owning heaven, being comforted, having inherited the earth, having obtained righteousness or mercy, etc. are aspects of beatitude and interchangeable within such a list: if one has achieved beatitude then one owns heaven, is comforted, etc. But why then are these aspects assigned *individually* to the X-s?

And if the Y-s are aspects of beatitude, then aspects of what are the X-s? From our existential knowledge, we can say that the X-s stand for situations in which a possible *access to beatitude* is close-by, because a hard fate forces us into bearing misery or injustice or persecution, or because we are trying on our own to get a sight of the Extra-worldly and, to that end, have to free ourselves from some inner-worldly, material and intellectual ambitions, for example, from power, wealth, and intellectual strength, and rather take a spiritually poor, meek, merciful, peaceful stance.

Therefore, the best approximation to the line of thought of the Beatitudes is the following: access to beatitude is most likely to be found in situations X, and then it is experienced as Y.

However, this falls short far behind the utmost consequence of our description above, according to which, in the Dasein stance of beatitude, we experience as good even the evil that occurs to us. This restraint of Matthew's is possibly understandable. Still he goes as far

as relating beatitude to bad fate at all, but already this is an association that will most likely provoke almost every reader and that is therefore better wrapped and softened and – to be more on the safe side – even distorted and hidden. To this end, the deficiencies of the Beatitudes text, as mentioned above, are well suited: in order to hide something in a text, a sufficient length of the text is required; enumerations of harmless, easily understood contents can well serve the inconspicuous embedding of a problematic content and take the edge off it; making a riddle of the logic renders a hard message less cogent.

Taking this into account, the obfuscating form of the beatitudes may theoretically have four reasons: Jesus did not have an understanding of existential beatitude; Matthew did not have an understanding of existential beatitude; Matthew has written very carelessly; or Matthew had good reasons to express himself very cautiously and has therefore deliberately written in such a manner as to appear unskilled.

Very early in his book, Ratzinger declares that he trusts the Gospels. This now raises the question, in what specifically he is trusting here: in the presentation of Jesus' existential competence, in Matthew's existential competence, in Matthew's straightforwardness, or in the direct, intrinsic truth of the text?

The existential analysis of the full Sermon on the Mount produces an unambiguous result: Matthew is hiding existential knowledge.

And Christology and Ratzinger are doing that, too. If all existential truths of mankind are being projected exclusively on Christ and out of reach otherwise, then they can be kept and progressed in the open, and, at the same time, everybody is spared the confrontation with his personal existence. Ratzinger is not the least irritated by the lack of writing quality of the Beatitudes. Obviously, it does not hinder the broad presentation of additional material. And thus Ratzinger heaps on beatitude a great many of own interpretations, citations, references to the Old Testament, references to church history, criticisms of the world, and thereby circumvents in a safe distance the existential aspect of beatitude, in order that nobody should inadvertently stumble into it.

2 THE TORAH OF THE MESSIAH

The basis of this subchapter of Ratzinger's book is Jesus' declaration that he is not about to abolish but to fulfil "the Law and the Prophets". Spoken by somebody with existential competence such words are nothing special and not to be expected differently: Jesus recognizes and confirms the existential competence in the Old Testament. But he is beyond the old teachings in his skill of approximately pointing tellings, and he has to grapple with the code of practice of the religious law as maintained by the religious elite of his time. In this context, he preaches corrections and assessments of the old laws.

Here Ratzinger ties in: The Torah is from God, and Jesus positions himself on the same exalted level, when he allows himself to act as the Lawgiver – as God. He can do that because as Son of God he has divine authority.

What follows is a lengthy demarcation of this position against the Jewish Religion and then, using the Sabbath and the Fourth Commandment as examples, two demonstrations of how the Christian Religion carries forward and extends the Jewish Religion: first, Jesus as the new source of rest for our souls, which previously had been the role of the Sabbath, too; second, the Church as the new Family of God, that had started with Israel, but is now extended and covers the whole world.

Towards the end, Ratzinger returns to the effect of Jesus on the Law. He is lifting the contents of the Law to a new, higher ethical level: "*The lofty ethics that is expressed here will continue to astonish people of all backgrounds and to impress them as the height of moral greatness*". Ratzinger distinguishes two kinds of "law" in this "code": so-called casuistic law versus apodictic law, in other words: concrete rules for the social order versus divine principles and meta-norms. The key principles are love of God and love of neighbour. The concrete rules have to conform to, and can be criticised on the base of, these principles, and they have to be kept up with the time. Jesus has given a new dynamism to the concrete rules; he has "[removed] them from the immediate purview of the divine and [transferred] responsibility to enlightened reason". –

Ratzinger's view stands or falls with his concept of Law. Though he no longer classifies all precepts of the Holy Scripture as divine laws, he still wants to keep part of them as divine, for instance the overriding, apodictic precepts of love of God and love of neighbour. In contrast we know: no prescriptive text, framed in whichever way, can ever be from God or be inspired by God. Such claims are void, because God is not a concept and cannot therefore be fitted in an assertion. And if claims are upheld nevertheless, that certain words were from God, then this can again only be a fictive, conceptual God but not the one, absolute God that is not from this world.

If Ratzinger would not take the corresponding biblical texts on love of God and love of neighbour as precepts but as approximately pointing tellings about fundamental traits of our Dasein (existentials), then the problem would disappear: Our Dasein is as if it were connected to an Extra-worldly, sights of which can be gained along certain lines of sight, among others, the sight of the Creator, of the own Authentic Self, and of the Authentic Self of the fellow humans. This connection is the existential mode of love, in three dimensions here: the love of God, of Self, and of the neighbour's Self.

It is an error of category to reclassify existentials as precepts, that is, something absolute as something inner-worldly. This error is common in the Old and New Testaments and in the history and presence of the monotheistic religions.

The classic example is found in the Ten Commandments – Ratzinger writes of the "*great imperatives of the Decalogue*". As existentials they are not just great but absolute – inescapable, undisputable, unanswerable –, while as imperatives they are not even great but obviously conceptually unclear ("*take ... in vain [God's name]*", "*keep holy [the Sabbath]*", "*honour [thy father and thy mother]*"), unclear in scope (may we humans add commandments, for example, against workplace bullying or against sending computer viruses?), and unclear regarding the consequences of complying or not complying. Ratzinger attempts to present the imperatives as great.

To suggest that something inner-worldly is exceedingly great, even seemingly absolute, that is the follow-up error. Once the divine has, by an error of category, been relativized, then the religious teaching has to take care to at least present it as great by inner-worldly measures. If God came into the world in the man Jesus, then Jesus must be over-glorified and presented as Christ.

And thus, on grounds of the famous "But I say unto you"-teachings, Ratzinger ascribes to Jesus a lofty ethics, the height of moral greatness. As imperatives these teachings may be more severe than the corresponding Laws in the Old Testament, and therefore of higher value in Ratzinger's view. But with this judgement he is actually downplaying Jesus' teachings and Jesus himself.

The greatness of Jesus' teachings is in the absoluteness of their contents. The greatness of Jesus as a human consists of his extraordinary existential competence, the courage to stand up for it, the skill to spread it and to ensure its survival in the future. These qualities constitute a sufficient base to understand and explain everything about Jesus.

One of the existentials that he is teaching is that the set-up of our Dasein is such that we enhance life, ours and that of our neighbours, and that we become guilty whenever we fail to do so. To make peace with a brother, not to suppress women, not to resist evil, not to hit back, to see and treat the enemy as God's child, to accompany somebody two miles instead of one, to give the overcoat in addition to the coat, are in no way paradoxical, as Ratzinger says, but simple consequences of this existential, because the respective alternative behaviour would impair life or even increase the impairment.

An existential is not something that one must or may obey under the threat of God's punishment. It is not even a sentence but rather something that one can see with the inner eye – but one may also fail to see it. Once one has seen it, then it has the same effect as conscience: one cannot escape it anymore. If one does not see it, then it is like playing a computer game while not knowing the rules: many things do not go well, and one does not notice or does not know why.

Thus the appropriate response to the so-called "Commandments" or "Laws" is not compliance, certainly not for fear or independent of whether one can understand and appreciate them. The "Commandments" or "Laws", as Jesus is seeing them, are – like all existentials – absolute settings, and the right response to them is an "automatic", absolute consequence: the orientation of our stance towards that existential, in the above example: the redirection of our stance towards enhancing life. –

In Matthew's text, only the examples are correct. He avoids making a theme of the existential itself. He does not write that we are to enhance life in all situations, and leaves the respective "right understanding" unexplained throughout, thus misleading the reader to take the examples just as more rigid prescriptions again. Instead of explanations, he offers wild threats but also well-meant supporting arguments. Only the exaggerations consistently embedded in the text – the religious elite will never enter heaven; if I let my brother have anything against me then this is also sort of killing; if need be, I should pluck out my eye or cut off my hand – could cause a seeking reader to think more thoroughly, but with no further helpful hints supplied.

In contrast, Ratzinger's text with his depiction of Jesus as an authorized Lawgiver of astonishing lofty ethical imperatives keeps himself and the reader at a far and safe distance from the existential view.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

Before addressing the text of the prayer, Ratzinger spends quite some effort to re-position the Our Father,

- as a *prayer to the Lord*, in spite of the clause "Our Father" and not "Our Lord";
- as a *we-prayer*, that can effectively reach up to God only if prayed in community, though Jesus' advice a few verses earlier is to retreat into ones room, shut the door, and pray in secret;
- as a *petitionary prayer*, though a few verses earlier and elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments we are repeatedly taught that God knows our needs and anyway supplies us with all we need; and
- as *God's aid for our prayer*, whereas it is again obvious that it is badly written.

This amounts to imposed meaning rather than interpretation.

If existence is the theme then such positioning exercises are totally irrelevant. What then counts is whether we really get a sight what the text wants to point to. It actually comes into sight with Ratzinger. Amidst his positioning argument, he writes:

"The more the depths of our souls are directed toward God, the better will we be able to pray. The more prayer is the foundation that upholds our entire existence, the more we will become men of peace. The more we can bear pain, the more will we be able to understand others and open ourselves to them. This orientation pervasively shaping our whole consciousness, this silent presence of God at the heart of our thinking, our meditating, and our being, is what we mean by 'prayer without ceasing'. This is ultimately what we mean by love of God, which is at the same time the condition and the driving force behind love of neighbor".

One should in this text not rely on the wrongly pointing psychological expressions, for religion is not psychology. The picture of the *inner eye*, that Ratzinger is using elsewhere, would be more suitable here, too. But, otherwise, this is in its compactness a perfectly pointing existential telling that, by the way, belatedly comes close to a description of beatitude. And all that without any mention of Jesus, Christ, God's Son, divine authority!

If that is the case then it remains amazing though, that Ratzinger argues as if it were really relevant for our orientation towards God how the Our Father is positioned. Will I be more peaceful if the Our Father is a petitionary prayer and not simply a circumscription of my existence? Can I better bear pain if I take the Our Father as a present from God than if I simply understand it? What does actually happen here in terms of writing? Ratzinger has knowledge about existence but he is planting it on the reader sort of unnoticeable amongst lengthy discussions. This is the same system that we have previously found in Matthew's writing of the Beatitudes.

Let us look whether and how that shows up in Ratzinger's interpretation of the single verses of the prayer.

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

First of all, existential tellings are put to an end. Ratzinger is manipulating the concept of "father". Beatitude, of which nobody has more than an uncertain idea, he did not define in the context of the Beatitudes; but the idea of the good father, that everybody has for certain and is not likely to give up, he tries to redefine here with a view to narrow it.

In this sense, it were a "great consolation" that *"we are allowed to say 'Father' ... because the Son was our brother and has revealed the Father to us; because, thanks to what Christ has done, we have once more become children of God"*. Being God's children has attained a dynamic quality: *"We are not ready-made children of God from the start, but we are meant to become so increasingly by growing more and more deeply in communion with Jesus"*. Finally: *"Jesus alone was fully entitled to say 'my Father', because he alone is truly God's only-begotten Son, of one substance with the Father. By contrast, the rest of us have to say 'our Father'. Only within the 'we' of the disciples can we call God 'Father', because only through communion with Jesus Christ do we truly become 'children of God'"*. "Mother", in contrast, was not a title, nor a form of address, for God: *"We make our petitions in the way that Jesus, with Holy Scripture in the background, taught us to pray, and not as we happen to think or want. Only thus do we pray properly"*.

Let us first take Ratzinger at his word, formally. Jesus has obviously taught us to see God as our Father. In the Sermon on the Mount alone, he uses – declined case by case – 15 times "your Father" and once "our Father". A father is a father. If somebody is my brother, then my father is his father, too. If I wish to talk to my father, then I simply do it. I do not need an explanation as to what is a father, no permission to say "father", and there are not any restrictions of the type, that I could not speak to my "father" directly but only collectively with others.

What Ratzinger is putting forward here, is not a "father" but a fictitious, incremental, non-standard adoptive father with traits of a bad boss. For this, the word "father" is not available. If Ratzinger happens to think of, or want, a different concept of "father" then he had better use a different word for it and, in addition, declare that he is contradicting Jesus.

Which existential aspect comes into sight here? That our Dasein is being protected, taken care of, and coached like a child is by good parents. That is more than the older picture of the good shepherd is providing. Our Dasein in retrospect shows clearly that we are not only being shepherded, but we are all the time being trained and coached for life. As said above: in the beginning of our life we are rather capable of nothing – with the one exception of growing our life; and now we have so many capabilities in our life that we will never be able to describe them all. It is as if an extra-worldly producer and reality projectionist is continuously shaping our real reality, its situations, and its challenges in such a way that we grow along with them, learn new possibilities of living, and thus extend our world.

This is an existential, and it does apply to everybody. In this sense every human is always and likewise "God's child". Whoever denies a man this stance, fully or partly, impairs life and becomes guilty.

What is Jesus' role in this? He has seen this existential better than the complete religious elite of his time, and he has offered this sight to everybody without exception or restriction. The difference between people does not lie in the measure in which they *are being* God's children, but in the measure and quality in which they *are seeing* themselves and the other humans as God's children.

Ratzinger, occupied with arguments for the exclusive Sonship of Jesus, goes closely and unhesitatingly past this existential, so to speak, without deigning to look at it.

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Ratzinger correctly recognizes the connection between this line and the Second Commandment. However, he again misses an existential, because he is taking the Ten Commandments as imperatives, and, furthermore, uses the weak interpretation "to drag the mystery of God down to an [inappropriate] level" (for "to take the name of ... God in vain"; something like "to dishonour" in the German version).

He discusses various denotations for God, and usage rules for these denotations. He suggests that the benefit of the name is that God puts himself within reach of our invocation; the trade-off is that the name can now be misused and so God himself can be sullied. This line of the Our Father is then a plea to God "*that he himself take charge of the sanctification of his name*". –

Inner-worldly assertions cannot have anything to do with an absolute, extra-worldly God, however "dishonouring" they may be. We have already ascertained that the Extra-worldly is not a concept, and that forming assertions by incorporating terms for the Extra-worldly inevitably produces void assertions. In particular, statements that would, by inner-worldly measures, value God negatively are equally void as are statements that would value God positively.

What remains under these circumstances of the Second Commandment and of this line of the Our Father? The "use in vain" is the exact equivalent of the use of God's name in assertions, and it is not an immoral violation of an authority-based prescription, but an error regarding the Extra-worldly. Nothing can be asserted about God, and therefore one should not try it; otherwise one will end up in a Dasein stance contrary to beatitude.

Thy Kingdom Come

Again Ratzinger reduces the concept of kingdom almost completely to "dominion", and then the point is just to accept God's will as the "*true criterion*" and to discern it with a

"listening heart". Taken in this way, this petition would be little more than an anticipation of the next one, that God's Will Be Done.

But a kingdom does not only consist of a governance structure and, specifically, it has something to do with wealth. If one does not follow this up, one misses the sight of the richness of God's kingdom. Ratzinger at least starts it: "*Where God is absent, nothing can be good. Where God is not seen, man and the world fall to ruin*". This is an accurate telling about a structure of our Dasein. But it is only negative and therefore nearly empty. What is "good" about God, so good, that it catches our sight, even when we are being lost in the world, and that moves us to free ourselves from this being lost?

We have already seen in the critique of Chapter Three on the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and thereafter again in the context of the Beatitudes, that Ratzinger fails to offer this information even at crucial points, whence his Gospel is purely abstract. What can actually be expected, the exuberantly rich, substantial content of the Kingdom of God, does not appear on 350 pages of text.

But the "coming" of the Kingdom of God consists exactly of gaining a sight of this substance. And it is really close: Just look at the world as long as required to see and internalize that and in which way it is good. And whoever can see it shall point it out the others.

Thy Will Be Done on Earth As It Is in Heaven

It is impossible to make an Assertion about a will of God, and thus this petition is void. It stands for an existential, that we are challenged to guess.

Ratzinger contrasts God's will with man's own will, the gravitational pull of which constantly draws us away from God's will and turn us into "*mere 'earth'*". Heaven is where God's will is unswervingly done, and in and through Jesus it is wholly done. He, Jesus, "*accepts us, he draws us up to himself, into himself, and in communion with him we too learn God's will*".

If we replace in this structure Jesus by our Authentic Self then we have exactly the structure of prayer as described in the critique of the Introduction: authentic prayer as the attempt to pull the self-point back from the world towards our Authentic Self and from there direct our being in the world. Inner-worldly, the will is subject to the rules of the world, that is, to causality and chance. In contrast, the Authentic Self is free vis-à-vis the world and can, through its Dasein stance, give its actions an authentically-willed direction.

But this describes only one half of the will structure of Dasein. The other side consists of all that we encounter in the real reality of our world. We see it as given by God, the extra-worldly life-producer, as inescapable and fate-like, as if there is an absolute will behind it.

What we call "God's will" just happens in everything that occurs to us in the world, and in the way we are conceiving ourselves from the position of our Authentic Self. This is absolutely so, and a petition for it is simply a false expression.

Nevertheless, Ratzinger takes the petition as a petition. Still: the sight of this "existential will structure" requires our own effort. The petition for this sight goes to us ourselves. –

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

This petition has already been covered in the critique of the subchapter on the First Temptation of Jesus: God is giving us unasked our life in the form of his "word", that is in the form of the phenomena articulated by him and understood by us, that constitute our respective world – and that is all we need for our life and for enhancing life.

Ratzinger recognizes the connection to the legend of Jesus' temptation, too; occasionally he deals with some other themes regarding "bread"; and finally he directs his considerations towards Jesus as the incarnated word of God and towards his begged-for presence in the Eucharist. –

We are going to pick out here two points and adjust them existentially. Ratzinger warns against the misconception that we could have or gain full control over the acquisition of all necessities of life, and concludes that we have to open ourselves to God: *"Bread is 'the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands', but the earth bears no fruit unless it receives sunlight and rain from above. This coming together of cosmic powers, outside our control, stands opposed to the temptation that comes to us through our pride to give ourselves life purely through our own power. Such pride makes man violent and cold. It ends up destroying the earth. It cannot be otherwise, because it is contrary to the truth that we human beings are oriented towards self-transcendence and that we become great and free and truly ourselves only when we open up to God"*.

This is a small, undifferentiated side-blow at science and technology but it does not measure up to the existential relevance of the questions thus raised. Fact is that we are placed in our Dasein with the only mission to explore our world – which is the same as expanding the possibilities of life and thereby expanding life itself. Exploring our world means to know something that we did not know before, and to be able to do something that we have not been able to do before. That cannot happen without failures, even of well-meant and safely predictable projects, and the gain from such experiences is part of our exploration of the world. According to all experiences, some are proved correct in their hubris, and others fail. That is the way the world is given to us by God, and valuating it negatively is no indication of opening up to God.

The problem of the scientific and technical production of general living conditions is not the occasional hubris but everybody's ignorance about his personal, existential task to enhance life. The scope of this task comprises the life of the fellow humans who are part of our life. "Live and let live", merely tolerating the Others, conceding them human dignity and human rights: that is not enough. By impairing, or by not taking chances to enhance, or to prevent the impairment of, the lives of Others, we are accumulating guilt. What is sporadic hubris of excessive feasibility against the wide-spread failure of man, perpetuated by public opinion, to live up to this universal disposition of Dasein!

Ratzinger very well thinks of the others: "*we pray for our bread – and that means we also pray for bread for others*". That is wise but it does not change *our* mission. It is *us* who are in the world challenged to actively enhance the life of the Others – and in this effort trust that we will receive the present of success. –

The second point that we have picked out here is about retreat from the world. From the petition for bread Ratzinger turns to the poverty of the disciples: "*Anyone who asks for bread for today is poor. This prayer presupposes the poverty of the disciples. It presupposes that there are people who have renounced the world, its riches, and its splendour for the sake of faith and who no longer ask for anything beyond what they need to live ... There must always be people in the Church who leave everything to follow the Lord ...*". This is, in the first instance, a concept of life, but it also contains hidden valuations. Therefore it is necessary to clearly state: To "renounce" the world, that is: everything, is only possible by means of suicide; and partial renunciation amounts to a self-mutilation, by which one gives up possibilities of living as well as chances to enhance life. It is possible to forfeit material riches but hardly all riches. What is possible is to leave (partial) worlds and change into other worlds. The world of material goods is an example of such a partial world, and the world of thought is a further example. It contains riches, too, and beauty and, last not least, possibilities to innovate, to occupy certain domains, and to fight. One can fall to the world of intelligence, and become completely absorbed in it, as one can to the material world. In the mental world one may lose all sight of the Extra-worldly, even while all the time thinking exclusively about God – actually more and above all, if one persistently tries to understand and explain God.

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses as We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us

Ratzinger starts this subchapter as follows: "*The fifth petition of the Our Father presupposes a world in which there is trespass – trespass of men in relation to other men, trespass in relation to God. Every instance of trespass among men involves some kind of injury to truth and love and is thus opposed to God, who is truth and love. How to overcome guilt is a central question for every human life; the history of religions revolves around this question. Guilt calls for retaliation. The result is a chain of trespasses in which the evil of guilt grows ceaselessly and becomes more and more inescapable. With this petition, the Lord is telling us that guilt can be overcome only by forgiveness, not by retaliation. God is a God who forgives, because he loves his creatures; but forgiveness can only penetrate and become effective in one who is himself forgiving*".

Virtually everybody will view all this in rather the same way. It is a good approximately pointing telling about something existential. But the formulations regarding the definition of guilt and the inherence of guilt in the world appear unsure; and the statement that God is a God who forgives is tactically reduced in order to leave room for the teaching of the atonement of all guilt through Jesus' death on the Cross.

Let us look and supplement what is missing. Guilt is denied life. We carry guilt as soon as – opposed to the disposition of our Dasein – we fail to enhance life, or even impair life. In the world, this occurs to us inevitably, already in case we can take only one of two chances to enhance life, but of course also when we fight Others, succeed against Others, live on

cost of Others, do not help Others, and it happens even when we are up to enhance life, because this may go wrong or have unforeseen effects and thus harm Others.

If such harm occurs to us then we feel driven to disable the cause, and this is mostly equivalent to impair the life of the guilty person. That may be difficult, may heavily occupy us for a long time, even control us, and thus impair our own life in addition. And in case we "succeed" we impair life again. If we want to be free of all this, we have to forgive, that is, continue to live in the impaired situation and, starting from there, go on enhancing life.

If we have become guilty ourselves and our conscience signals it to us then the guilt becomes a burden to us – consciously or unconsciously – and we cannot get rid of it as long as we do not understand that and how we are to do better. We have to draw a lesson from our becoming guilty: how we can in the future in a similar situation avoid an impairment of life and better enhance life. And then we must promptly continue to enhance life.

All this follows from our existential disposition to enhance life. The affected person needs to forgive in order to regain capacity to enhance life. The guilty person needs to return to – better – enhancing life and, to this end, needs to see: he is already forgiven.

These three paragraphs are the existential message of the fifth petition of the Our Father.

Above all, Ratzinger cannot give the last and decisive message: Our guilt is forgiven. He has something else in mind: Jesus has carried the burden of all guilt of the world and atoned for it, and this is the reason why we are forgiven, if only we forgive the others. This is not factually verifiable, because again assertions about a guilt management and an extraordinary redemption scheme of God's cannot be but void. But existentially, this thought means that not only Jesus but *we all* have to bear in the world all impairments done to us by other humans. On a lower level: everybody carries the load put on him by the Others. It is the extra-worldly God who makes this occur to us in our real reality as absolutely inescapable.

And Lead Us Not into Temptation

"The way this petition is phrased", Ratzinger begins, "is shocking for many people: God certainly does not lead us into temptation". Of course it cannot be a petition, we would like to call out to him. But it is not an assertion either, because as such it would be equally void.

Existentially true, however, is that we encounter the temptations *in the world* and that all that we encounter in the world is as if provided by God.

Ratzinger insists in the semantics as a petition and proposes as a solution to replace "temptation" by "test". God is then testing us? Anyway we have to master all situations in the world, however we may classify them, and in the end Ratzinger, too, arrives at the result – for him: a petition – that God does not ask too much of us. We add: as long as we live.

Existentially, this petition of the Our Father thus means: We are exposed to the world and its temptations not helpless but, for mastering it, equipped with our intelligence and the ability to discriminate between good and bad.

In order to clarify the sense of the test of man, Ratzinger turns to the book Job. The story that God allows Satan a limited test of Job is a fancy but existentially not particularly well pointing fiction (test versus coaching). The really important point of the book Job is the outcome of the theological discussion of Job with his friends: 34 chapters of theological discourse on the logic of God's actions with special regard to justice, righteousness, and misery, are outweighed by five verses of Job's confession that man cannot grasp God and by attempting to conceptualize God becomes guilty. The book Job is a broad illustration of the Second Commandment.

But Deliver Us from Evil

Ratzinger outlines the evil, of which we want to become delivered, and uses the following examples: historically the total claim of man by political-military-economic power, sometimes even absolute power, coupled with the erosion of ethical principles by a cynical form of scepticism; and – in addition today – the forces of the market, of traffic in weapons, in drugs and in human beings, the ideology of success and of well-being.

The type of evil that *we ourselves* can do and are doing indeed, and that can dominate us, is apparently considered by Ratzinger as covered by the preceding petition. In this subchapter, he writes almost exclusively about the evil that *the world* is doing to us and showing us, about the "*tribulations*" and the excessive power of all variations of evil that occur to us in the world and which we want to be redeemed from, or which cannot harm us as long as God is on our side, respectively.

What is it that delivers us from this evil and makes that evil cannot control us? It is beatitude that we have described above as a Dasein stance in which we can live at ease with ourselves and with the world including all its evil phenomena, live relaxedly, freely and gladly, even when the evil is hitting us personally. Ratzinger comes near to this with his description of the "*certainty*" of the martyrs that "*made them joyful and confident in a world full of affliction, and ... 'delivered' them at the core of their being, freeing them for true freedom*".

What is it that delivers us from wanting and doing evil ourselves? The stance to enhance life, and forgiveness.

How do we get into these stances? Through the sight of the Extra-worldly and the implied redirection and adjustment of our Dasein stance. This, too, is partly approximated by Ratzinger, if only in the last sentence: "... *even on this interpretation of the Our Father petition, the central point is still 'that we be freed from sin', that we recognize 'evil' as the quintessence of 'evils', and that our gaze may never be diverted from the living God*".

Altogether, Ratzinger provides for this subchapter an interpretation that covers the existential content almost completely. Moreover, he again leaves unused the opportunity of reserving this content exclusively for Jesus, in spite of his giving an excellent example

for the sight of God and for the right Dasein stance. Following Jesus, in the sense of adopting his Dasein stance, delivers us from evil.

The Textual Quality of the Our Father

We have claimed above that the Our Father is, in an obvious way, badly written.

This can best be seen in a comparison with its existential substance. In addition to the preceding texts of the Sermon on the Mount, the Our Father brings a plenty of weighty news:

- the primal trust that our Dasein is as if provided by a caring father,
- the insight that the Extra-worldly cannot be conceptualized but is absolute,
- the extra-worldly rootedness of will,
- that guilt is already forgiven,
- the falling to the world and the way back,
- the various "sights" of the Extra-worldly, its dimensions: kingdom, power, glory, eternity (not dealt with by Ratzinger).

As "laws" of Dasein these are all givens. To beg for them is nonsense; they are as they are a priori. The text author does know this. In the verse directly preceding the Our Father, he indirectly qualifies the petitions as pointless, because God knows beforehand what we need. And then he writes wishes and petitions in spite.

And then the text author appends two off-key verses: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses". In these verses, everything is wrong that can be wrong, existentially: "trespasses" are inner-worldly immoral and not the same as existential guilt; it is impossible to assert that God charges and cancels trespasses; and it is pointless to provide reasons for existentials and to present existentials as subject to reasoning, as undertaken in the "For"-sentence.

The only evident signification of these semantic twistings is (1) to draw the attention off the – potentially provoking – existential content and thus ensure that the reader will not inadvertently come across it and take offence, while (2) at the same time signalling that something with the text is amiss and something else – a deeper value – is behind it. Meanwhile we have encountered this style on several occasions, both with Matthew and, in two ways, with Ratzinger. Firstly, Ratzinger is writing a consequently veiling style, and secondly he takes Matthew fully at his word and does nothing to unveil Matthew's writing style. One cannot get past the idea that a veiling style is indeed workmanlike for the communication of existential insights. We will later resume looking into this.

The Omissions

With the petition for delivery from evil, Ratzinger ends his deliberations regarding the Sermon on the Mount. Thus he skips the Our Father clause on the "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" behind which there is the dimensionality of Dasein, and in which the idea of eternity urgently requires explanation.

But Ratzinger also passes over greater parts of the Sermon on the Mount as well. That suggests itself, for he has to pass over many parts of the Gospels anyway, and not everything would contribute to the goal of his book. But as he has the title "The Sermon on the Mount" for the chapter, we certainly want to see how relevant the omissions are and whether there is further, important "deeper value" in the background.

First there are there verses on "salt of the earth" and "light of the world", among others with the request not to "put it under a bushel". They show an open contradiction to the veiling communication of religion as we have encountered several times. Jesus appears to have had a different concept of religious communication, and if one does not discuss this one misses a key trait of his personality. He has indeed openly talked about naked existence.

Furthermore, Ratzinger deals with Jesus' position vis-à-vis the Law only in an overall manner and not with the concrete examples. Thus he passes over the messages on killing, adultery, swearing, not resisting evil, loving of enemies. We have already seen the consequence above: Ratzinger projects a superior ethos on Jesus, but he does not disclose the existential progress that Jesus has brought: the insight that the disposition of our Dasein is not subject to an inner-worldly system of rules but is the enhancement of life. The further consequence is that Ratzinger does not get away from the negative valuation of the inner-worldly and thus misses the existential that we are – positively – put into the world to enhance life and to learn to ever better enhance life.

After the Our Father, the Sermon on the Mount goes on with sections on fasting, collecting of treasures, worrying for tomorrow, judging, being given what one asks for in prayer, doing God's will, founding a house. Jesus takes strong positions in some of them; therefore, they should actually be important for a personality profile of Jesus; in any case, they are existentially important and enlightening

The telling: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [that is: food, drinking, clothing] shall be added unto you" actually says that, with the right Dasein stance, everything *in the world* falls to us – a strong message. The whole section on judging deals with an important aspect of the right Dasein stance, too. How could Jesus have seen all this, how has he lived it?

The warning "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" is to some extent in conflict with the telling of the candle under the bushel. Was Jesus unsteady here, or is Matthew only trying to justify his veiling writing style?

Fiercely is Jesus criticizing the false prophets: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". – Such dissociation certainly says much about Jesus. Can one really abstain from discussing it when portraying Jesus' personality? Whom does he mean? Only the religious charlatans?

And finally there are the closing sentences of the Sermon on the Mount: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes". Ratzinger mentions it, too, in the translation "alarmed" instead of "astonished" but he re-interprets the being alarmed not as caused by the *content* of the teachings but by the "*way of teaching*". In Ratzinger's text, there is indeed no doctrine about which people might be alarmed. Is his interpretation in conflict with Jesus' teachings? Or why are people alarmed? There is no way to get past these closing sentences. If they are not thoroughly explained, they put everything in question.

CHAPTER SIX: THE DISCIPLES

In Ratzinger's diction Jesus, by his proclamation and action, gathers a "new family" and "calls an inner core of people specially chosen by him, who are to carry on his mission and give this family order and shape. That was why Jesus formed the group of the Twelve".

Ratzinger emphasizes that one cannot make oneself a disciple, but that the disciples are elected by God: "*The calling of the disciples is a prayer event; it is as if they were begotten in prayer, in intimacy with the Father. The calling of the Twelve, far from being purely functional, takes on a deeply theological meaning. Their calling emerges from the Son's dialogue with the Father and is anchored there*".

On grounds of their communion with Jesus, the disciples are the patriarchs of the newly reborn People of God, and their mission is priestly. They are sent to preach Jesus' message and thus Jesus himself, and they are given "*authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity*".

Ratzinger interprets the casting-out of unclean spirits as the liberation of the world from the fear of demons and from the magic healing fuss, and he calls it "*the great exorcism that purifies the world*". For our current world outlook this means that without God the world only *appears* to be more rational while *in reality* man is confronted with irresolvable "*obscurities*" and the limits of rationality. "*Faith in the one God is the only thing that truly liberates the world and makes it 'rational'*", with a rationality "*that emerges from eternal reason*". After pointing out some key threats to individual human beings and to communities of human beings, Ratzinger formulates the said liberation as follows: "*the Lord's gift of faith restores the pure breath of life: the breath of the Creator, the breath of the Holy Spirit, which alone can give health to the world*".

Ratzinger mentions the heterogeneity of the group of the disciples and concludes that it must have been difficult to prepare them for their role. He refers to some particularities in the reports of Luke, where, for example, Jesus has a further group of 70 disciples. The symbolic of this number signifies "*the universal character of the Gospel, which is meant for all the peoples of the world*". Luke also reports that Jesus was accompanied by women "*who provided for them [Jesus and the Twelve] out of their [the women's] means*". Ratzinger concludes: "*The difference between the discipleship of the Twelve and the discipleship of the women is obvious; the tasks assigned to each group are quite different*". In the end, besides his sensitivity to the significance of women, Luke also shows a particular understanding for the Jews. We "*have good reason to be convinced that precisely these specific aspects of the Lukan tradition preserve essential features of the original figure of Jesus for us*".

And this ends Ratzinger's Chapter. –

In short, the disciples are to preach the same as Jesus, with an authority similar to Jesus'. This is actually nothing special, for every founder of a religion is routinely sending out disciples. And it does not help to attach – say, based on a decision to believe – to Jesus and

his selection and sending of disciples the attribute "exclusively truly divine", because what is visible of it in the world remains nothing special, nevertheless.

But what causes Jesus' sleepless night before the calling of the disciples? We have to look closer at Jesus himself, put ourselves in his place and feel the situation, if we want to understand the exceptionality of his situation. If somebody has full insight into the human existence, then he will also understand how somebody else fares who has such insight. Such a person will certainly not have a sleepless night because a few disciples are to be nominated on the next day.

Jesus sees what it is about God, Dasein, heaven, world, men, beatitude, and he knows of the existential value of these sights for every man. He therefore tries to communicate these highly valuable sights to people – and that with great skills – but he recognizes that the people around him have difficulties to follow him, that they misunderstand his tellings, that they even are alarmed, do not want to listen any longer, fight him. He recognizes that he has to contradict the organized religion of his country, thus antagonizes it, but cannot win against them. He recognizes that he has superior existential competence that would help people, but also that he does not have a chance to pass it over to them.

Nevertheless, he accepts his duty and responsibility: he has to enhance life. He cannot give up his preaching because he would otherwise hold back chances for people's salvation. And he must save his insights for later generations of people. To write them down and perhaps secure a number of copies might be a possibility, but it would also leave uncertain the dissemination of the contents. Jesus needed people to spread his insights.

What does he have at his disposal? A group of people around him who can follow his tellings with varying difficulty, rather simple folks and from fringe groups, not unqualified to absorb something for which intellect is rather an obstacle, but no grand figure to represent and defend it publicly.

In a situation like this, one can easily despair. At least there is not much left other than selecting a circle of the relatively most capable companions, instructing them in all important insights, and coach them to in turn instruct a second line in the greater circle of companions. In this way, it is possible to check whether the dissemination concept is workable and to mend it if required. And then one must still warn them about what is ahead of them in the world with this kind of messages: a life like "as sheep in the midst of wolves", and to commit them to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves". Jesus' execution was then a final, blatant warning.

The dissemination of the contents has been effective. Jesus must have done excellent work on his companions, as decades after his death there were still sufficiently many well instructed bearers of his insights to provide the Evangelists with the materials for their relatively comprehensive and coherent presentations of Jesus' tellings. –

All these are not, of course, divinely authoritative aspects of a calling of disciples; but in this way, by looking with existential empathy, essential and unique aspects of the human figure of Jesus become visible. Who, if anybody, comes into the situation of having full insight into the human existence and then faces, and meets with such determination, his duty to communicate them!

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLES

1 THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

Ratzinger considers the parables as "*the heart of Jesus' preaching*" and in the beginning discusses the most important approaches to their interpretation. In doing so, he rehabilitates to some extent the view of the parables as allegoric tellings.

Actually, "allegoric telling" and "approximately pointing telling" are largely synonymous, and we have already established that the latter are crucial for the communication about existence. Accordingly, in this section, Ratzinger presents some crucial considerations regarding the communication about existence. This is very substantial and therefore we need to cite him here more than elsewhere.

As a second subject matter, he addresses the problem of understanding the parables. Jesus is ascribed to have made some explicit statement on this, and Ratzinger cites the version of Mark: "*To you [that is, to the circle of disciples] has God given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are without, everything is obscure, in order that they (as it is written) may 'see and yet not see, may hear and yet not understand, unless they turn and God will forgive them'*". This word should be seen as based on a word of Isaiah: "*Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed*". With these words, Isaiah is documenting his failure. Ratzinger points to the parallel to Jesus' fate on the Cross: "*But that very Cross is the source of great fruitfulness*", and he furthermore refers to a corresponding citation of Jesus by John: "*I have said this to you in parables [i.e., in veiled discourse]; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in parables but tell you plainly of the Father*". In this sense, the parables should ultimately be seen as tellings of Jesus about himself, "*stations on the way to the Cross*".

But Ratzinger also discusses the understanding of the parables in principle, independent of citations from the bible: "*By using an example, he [the educator or teacher, respectively] draws to their [the listeners'] attention a reality that until now has lain outside their field of vision. He wants to show how something they have hitherto not perceived can be glimpsed via a reality that does fall within their range of experience*". In this process, "*the parable brings distant realities close to the listeners as they reflect upon it. On the other hand, the listeners themselves are led onto a journey ... the parable demands the collaboration of the learner*". The problem of parables is the following: "*people are sometimes unable to discover the dynamic and let themselves be guided by it. Especially in the case of parables that affect and transform their lives, people can be unwilling to be drawn into the required movement*", to the light "*that our eyes cannot bear and that we therefore try to escape*".

The excuse for this refusal is that "*the parable lacks the necessary proof ... we have developed a concept of reality that excludes reality's translucence to God. The only thing that counts as real is what can be experimentally proven*".

Two more citations from Ratzinger's final section: "*This means ... that the parables are ultimately an expression of God's hiddenness in this world*" and "*... in this world, marked by sin, the gravitational pull of our lives is weighted by the chains of the 'I' and the 'self'. These chains must be broken to free us for a new love [of God] that places us in another gravitational field where we can enter new life*". –

All this means: Ratzinger knows that the parables are approximately pointing tellings. He knows everything about existential tellings and their dynamic in the world. He knows that existential tellings are pointing to something, and that listeners, instead of shying away, are required to make efforts to get a sight of what it is pointing to. He knows that this existential seeing is a quite binary matter. For somebody who has practiced it and thus gained existential competence, it is easy and natural. For somebody who approaches it with his concepts of understanding the world, it will remain inaccessible. If somebody is fallen to the world, it will never occur to him that he might wish to see existentially, and he will rather systematically avoid it.

Ratzinger does not, however, mention something very interesting: between the Sermon on the Mount and the parables, Jesus has changed the format of his existential tellings:

- in the Sermon on the Mount, a set of commandments, or instructions for praying, that directly and personally confront people with existential truths, that leave people alarmed, and that Matthew therefore veils so densely that even today rather nobody is able to fully explain them, including Ratzinger as we have seen above,
- in the parables, the existential truth, nicely and interestingly wrapped by Jesus himself, free of any confrontation; non-binding offerings of insights, that everybody may freely choose to accept or not accept; stories that can anytime, and without hesitation, be given to school children.

This phenomenon should not be suppressed when it comes to the presentation of Jesus personality and personality development. As seen in the preceding chapter, Jesus has intensely and with great realism taken care to ensure the future survival of his existential insights. This comprises his method of intensive verbal dissemination across circles of disciples and, equally well, the choice of the best format for the contents. He knew about the universal trait of humans to refuse dealing with matters of existence, and consequently, for this dissemination, the benign parables were his format of choice.

2 THREE MAJOR PARABLES FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Good Samaritan

Almost everybody understands this parable halfway. We are to help others who are in trouble, irrespective of the person, and not only because it is an obligation based on a divine commandment. We have to take the stance of a "neighbour", in which we value all people like ourselves as God's children, and in this stance we help on grounds of our own decision.

As expected, Ratzinger offers this sight, and he also offers the second, less common aspect: He points to the robbed and plundered peoples of our times and from there goes on to the subject of the battered individual. The question is then close by: Who or what helps the human unable to help himself in the world anymore? The parable answers: the qualification as a teacher of religion does not help, nor does the religious precept-complier, but the decision of an arbitrary person to intervene does. Ratzinger actually does not arrive at this very question but directly at his interpretation that the Samaritan can only picture Christ, and that God has in Christ become the neighbour of the alienated and helpless individual.

The latter means in the purely existential sight, with the Christological wrapping removed, that our Authentic Self does not let us give up, not even in existential trouble, when our inner-worldly ego cannot help any longer and has already given up.

In summary, Ratzinger touches on all existential substance present in this parable.

The Parable of the Two Brothers (the Prodigal Son and the Son Who Remained at Home) and the Good Father

In this parable, too, there is little to be misinterpreted. Everybody will likely get the message that we must not condemn the man who screws up his life, because God does receive him as his beloved son. Most readers will also extract that, even if we fail in the world, we need not fear God but will be welcome to him as his child.

Most people will regard the father as unjust, because he rewards the good-for-nothing but not the faithful son. Ratzinger asks: "*Can a father, may a father act like this?*", and he answers on the base of texts of Hosea: "*God's heart transforms wrath and turns punishment into forgiveness*". Taken as approximately pointing tellings, these texts are nonsensical, like if one would ascribe fate a psychic structure. And as assertions about God they are void from the beginning and irrespective of the content.

Less common is the finding, that the person of the other son who remained at home has an equally important role. Ratzinger already indicates this in the title of the chapter. He writes that this son's obedience has made him inwardly bitter, which shows up in the way

he complains to his father. Actually, this does not contribute very much to the outcome of the parable, but Ratzinger then properly emphasizes the final point: The father replies, "*Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours*".

Here, Ratzinger breaks off the interpretation of the parable and changes to the explanation of Jesus' tactical intention. As preceding the parable of the Good Samaritan, he is put to a test by the Pharisees and scribes and legitimates to them his "*goodness to sinners*".

Ratzinger then discusses older interpretations that map the two brothers on the Jews and the Gentiles in general, and here comes back on the idea of the bitterness of obedience: The bitter ones "*have not gone through the pilgrimage that purified the younger brother and made him realize what it means to be free and what it means to be a son. They actually carry their freedom as if it were slavery and they have not matured to real sonship. They, too, are still in need of a path; they can find it if they simply admit that God is right and accept his feast as their own. In this parable, then, the Father through Christ is addressing us, the ones who never left home, encouraging us too to convert truly and find joy in our faith*".

This is at the end a commendable reminder to the believers. But it is noticeable that Ratzinger sticks to the interim idea and does not interpret the closure and culmination of the parable. What actually is the "all" that is the father's and that is suggested to be "thine", that is every human's? In which sense do we take it with bitterness? How can we take it appropriately? About what – as a content – are we advised to admit that God is right? What are we to look at in order to become free of any bitterness of our faith?

Ratzinger did not answer this before, in the chapter on the Kingdom of God and in the subchapter on the Beatitudes, and he leaves it unanswered again here.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

The parable tells of a rich man, and a poor sick man at his door, whom the rich man does not help. After his death, the poor man ends up in "Abraham's bosom" and the rich man in a kind of hell. Ratzinger emphasizes that it is the Hades, that is, a temporary place and not hell proper, but he also says that "*this story already describes the definite end of both protagonists*". The rich man complains that his fate has not been made clearer to him during his life, and he asks Abraham to at least send somebody to his five brothers to warn them. The response is negative: he and his brothers did already have Moses and the Prophets, and if they did not believe them then they would not believe either if somebody rose from the dead.

This parable does not have much substance. The rich man misses the urgent chance to enhance the life of the poor man at his door and, for his excuse, makes a case that extra-worldly consequences cannot be foreseen in the world.

And the rich man is right, absolutely. In the world, it is impossible to know any facts about the Extra-worldly. One may come to see that the Dasein is as if affected by an Extra-worldly that offers different sights. But it is first necessary to acquire and reproduce these sights, and it is difficult to gain the required distance from the world. Actually, it is rather

impossible to blame anybody for not "waking up" and not recognizing that behind the Prophets' unrealistic tellings, and even more behind their threats with things of which they apparently cannot know, there should nevertheless be something important and verifiable.

In the parable at hand, too, everything said about the Extra-worldly is mere fiction. Assertions of the kind, that the Extra-worldly has a structure with a heaven and a hell, are void. And if a prophet claims things like this, then he disqualifies himself – certainly for raising himself over his obdurate listeners and wishing them to hell. At least, Ratzinger remarks that *"we must not [stress] this part of the text. Jesus adopts existing images, without formally incorporating them into his teaching about the next life"*.

Beyond that, Ratzinger does not further put the parable into question. However, the views of the Extra-worldly are not in line with the existential competence encountered with Jesus elsewhere, nor with his pedagogical skills to create insights through easily comprehensible images. In the context of a personality profile, it would be necessary to explain the cause of this discrepancy, whether the parable is wrongly ascribed to Jesus, whether Jesus made concessions to the views of the audience in order to place another important message, or whether, out of a frustration about the notorious lack of understanding that he had to face, he gave in to his emotions at one single point, or whether the text author – here: Luke – has, writing tactically, constructed a dramatic picture, in order to carry unnoticed an important statement of Jesus.

Ratzinger's interpretation finally places the *"demand for signs, the demand for more evidence of Revelation"* in the foreground: *"God's sign for men is the Son of Man; is Jesus himself. And at the deepest level, he is this sign in his Paschal Mystery, in the mystery of his death and Resurrection. He himself is the 'sign of Jonah.' He, crucified and risen, is the true Lazarus. The parable is inviting us to believe and follow him, God's great sign. But it is more than a parable. It speaks of reality, of the most decisive reality in all history"*. –

Jesus does not occur in the parable itself. He is the one who is telling it. But it contains important information about how Jesus is positioning himself. In the last sentence, as a final word, he says: *"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead"*. Ratzinger own words are: *"Abraham's answer – like Jesus' answer to his contemporaries – is clear: If people do not believe the word of the scripture, then they will not believe someone coming from the next world either"*.

If Jesus has seen it in this way, if he has so unambiguously held that men would not believe somebody risen from the dead, i.e. that the positioning of the teacher as risen is ineffective and thus pointless, then he will not have positioned himself as rising from the dead in the future. Certainly, *Luke's* opinion was that the positioning of Jesus as risen from the dead is pointless. Ratzinger, conforming to the Christological texts in the Gospels, does nevertheless position Jesus in this way, as God's sign, visible in his resurrection.

That is existentially misguiding. Nothing can be said about actions of God in the world, for example, God's signs. Men have at all times reported certain experiences that have struck them in an indescribable way, blinding all senses, unlike any inner-worldly experience, and that has opened their eyes for their Dasein. Such experiences may be

understood as personal experiences of the Absolute. They may leave strong impressions and images but every concrete description, every definite formulation would prove that it was not an absolute experience.

With a certain distance from the world, it is also easy to see that our being-in-the-world is as if extra-worldly created and conducted, as if an Extra-worldly were making us encounter the phenomena that constitute our world. The regularities that we recognize in the phenomena, the "laws" of the world are our constructs. This does not mean that we could control the phenomena but, in our primal trust, we rely upon the permanent validity of the laws. Still, we have to be aware that the phenomena may occasionally turn out differing from what our laws predict. A "miracle" is a lack of validity of the laws that we have constructed and thus rather not astonishing. It cannot therefore serve as a sign for anything but, at most, remind us that our "laws" have been induced from limited sets of occurring phenomena and can only have limited predictive power.

In the existential view, the occurrence of the improbable or unnatural is nothing special. If Jesus rose from the dead, then this is not a sign for whatever, and it cannot be seen more as a work of God than any other phenomenon that we encounter in the world. –

One further sentence of Ratzinger's in this section shall yet be picked out here: "*The highest truths cannot be forced into the type of empirical evidence that only applies to material reality*".

This is a quite perfectly pointing, existentially valuable telling about our sight on the Extra-worldly and the world, and we certainly do not know only from this telling that Ratzinger has existential truths at his command. But in spite of this disclosure, he tries less one and a half pages later to force a sign of God onto the empirical evidence of a resurrection.

How then does Ratzinger want to be understood? Is the positioning as resurrected pointless for Jesus, or does everything depend on it? Is empirical evidence for God's working impossible, or is Jesus' resurrection a sign from God?

Let us remember the interpretation of the Our Father: Matthew has Jesus saying that God knows and is giving beforehand what we need, with the consequence that petitions to God are actually pointless, and then he writes petitions in spite. That is the same structure as Ratzinger is offering here. There is a preceding qualification, a kind of hint to the opinion of the author about the subsequent text, and then he can freely write whichever view that may appear opportune to him – or which he has chosen beforehand in a decision to believe. Ratzinger's whole book is in this way subject to the initial commitment to the Christological hermeneutic, but not every subsequent sentence is consistent with it.

On the Selection of the Parables

Within the scope of his book, Ratzinger confines himself to three of Jesus' parables with strong messages and, as the number of such parables is large, his selection can hardly be criticized. Nevertheless the Parable of the Talents may rightly be missed here. It ingeniously illustrates the existential signification of our Dasein: we have to enhance life,

precisely *all* life, not least the life of the Others but also our own life – as if at the beginning we are given our life and at the end have to show a balance of enhanced minus impaired life. It is a clarification of the mandates from the Old Testament, to be fruitful and multiply and to replenish and subdue the earth. It can replace the whole second table of the Ten Commandments and everything that one might ever add to it.

Already in the considerations on "The Torah of the Messiah" Ratzinger notes the lofty ethics in Jesus' orders and the love of the neighbour as the underlying divine meta-norm, but he does not see the fundamental existential disposition of our life: to enhance life.

It is exactly this existential that Ratzinger misses again in skipping the Parable of the Talents.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PRINCIPAL IMAGES OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

1 INTRODUCTION: THE JOHANNINE QUESTION

This question, according to Ratzinger, consists of two questions: Who is the author of this Gospel? How reliable is it historically?

The answers are: The content traces its origins back to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, and the editorial work to a kind of Johannine school in Ephesus that carried on the heritage of John. The degree of historical reliability results from the personal memories of John and the common traditions of this and other then contemporary apostle schools and Church communities.

Accordingly, the claim of the Gospel of John is *"that it has correctly rendered the substance of the discourses, of Jesus' self-attestation in the great Jerusalem disputes, so that the readers really do encounter the decisive content of this message and, therein, the authentic figure of Jesus"*. It shows that *"Jesus' discourses ... contain the whole dynamic of salvation history and, at the same time, they are rooted in creation. They are ultimately pointers to the One who can simply say of himself: 'I am'"*. –

From the latter, one rather cannot infer existential relevance because Ratzinger does not at all want to imply that every human could say: "I am". Ratzinger does not even question the existential competence of John and his school. This competence appears rather questionable in the Gospel of John, because it is quite fixated on testimonials of Jesus' as the only Son of God, and on miracles, that is, on inner-worldly phenomena that cannot have anything to do with God and beatitude. But it is not the business of this critique to analyze John's Gospel in this respect. We stick to our intention to disclose any existential "deeper value" in Ratzinger's considerations. And we know: the negation of an existential telling is pointing almost equally well as the positive form. It is, so to speak, just one bit away.

2 THE PRINCIPAL JOHANNINE IMAGES

Ratzinger deals, in a larger section each, with the images: "water", "vine and wine", "bread", "the shepherd".

If we encounter a really great image [this refers to the German original that rather speaks of *great* or *grand* images] then our mouth stands open, we are speechless, we cannot say why it is great, and we do not want to think about this question anyway but only absorb the impression as long as the effect will last.

The Johannine images are far from this. Who actually is interested to picture himself as a sheep or a vine – if he has ever seen one at all –, who is able to see water or bread as

analogies for something spiritual! Also, explanations do not make the images more telling, just the opposite. Instead of inducing a resonance they remain strange, and one may ask himself whether there are not any other, more suitable images that are as intuitive and striking as the images in question may have been at their best times.

For Ratzinger the images are suitable for something else. He collects texts from the Bible and recent interpretations that refer to the images, relates them to each other, and therein finds lines of development that can be converged on Jesus as God's Son. With a little tuning this approach is successful again and again, and so Ratzinger wallows in the old, strange images.

But even a most skilled discussion of images cannot help towards transcending them. The images are meant to look "great" because they guide the view to something great: Jesus as the Son of God; Jesus is giving himself; through him we have life in plenty. However these tellings are not great per se, but – as already explained – only if relativized. Ratzinger presents the target points of his lines always in final assertions, but practically never as absolute.

And thus a systematic search for deeper value in the individual sections of this chapter is unnecessary. We will only illustrate by a small number of examples the extent to which the existential view is being neglected here.

Following the scene on the cross when a soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and blood and water are flowing out of the wound, Ratzinger associates this with Eucharist and Baptism. He emphasizes the importance of the blood in this context and then writes of a *"form of Christianity that, so to speak, wants only the word, but not flesh and blood. Jesus' body and his death ultimately play no role. So all that is left of Christianity is mere "water" – without Jesus' bodiliness the word loses its power. Christianity becomes mere doctrine, mere moralism, an intellectual affair, but it lacks any flesh and blood. The redemptive character of Jesus' blood is no longer accepted. It disturbs the intellectual harmony"*. – As if that which the Catholic Church has to say about flesh and blood and Christ's Body, were not mere doctrine either, existentially void and without relevance. And as if our existence would, in whatever way, depend upon the poor images that actually deflect our sight from our existence.

Let us look more closely at the tellings about the flesh! In the world, we encounter our body, from "outside" as an object that we can perceive, like other objects, with our senses; and from "inside" as a complex of sensory perceptions and objects that we can control by our will. This is the world of our body. Is one among many other worlds that we are familiar with: the world of our motives, inhibitions and controls, the world of our thoughts, the world of our family, the world of our profession, the world of our neighbourhood and community, the world of food and drinks, the world of health, the world of finance, the world of education, the world of music, the world of literature, the world of knowledge, and many more. These our worlds are each determined by the extent to which we understand them and can understandingly act in them. Many of them we understand more than our body. Altogether they constitute our respective individual world. It is all that we have been, are being, and can be, and thus it constitutes our inner-worldly identity. With our death, this our personal world ends.

Jesus has, as God's Son, become such an inner-worldly person, and such a world is it that Jesus has given up with his death. What a puny image for this is "the flesh"! What an insufficient sight of our Dasein is Christianity supposed to depend upon! How thoughtless is the telling of the resurrection of the flesh when the resurrection of our whole personal world is in question! What good should it be to permanently call up a small part of Jesus' body world in to the present, while the much grander, even today still towering part of his factually redeeming world of thought is presently available anyway!

The spirit can see our vast personal world as a rich present of God. What can the concept of "water" contribute to this, other than catastrophically watering it down! How can the concept of "bread" sensibly embrace that of which we are living; whereas in reality the whole personal world that God is creating for us "live", constitutes our life!

What is not "accepted", is unworldly language – not because it could disturb intellectual harmony, but because it is talking past everybody. What would be seriously disturbing is the confrontation with the torture and brutal execution of Jesus that would existentially touch people. But exactly that is safely avoided by a liturgy with Eucharist offerings that are emotionally and sensory far remote from flesh and blood. –

Towards the end of the subchapter on water, Ratzinger discusses the biblical expression: "*Out of his body shall flow rivers of living water*" and, in particular, the question: "*Out of whose body?*" Of course, he answers: out of Christ's body and from him through the ages of history since. A little later, he revises this answer: "*The application of this passage primarily to Christ ... does not have to exclude a secondary interpretation referring to the believer*". He first underpins this with a citation of Jesus from the Gospel of Thomas: "*Whoever drinks from my mouth shall become as I am*" – and then partly revokes it: "*... ultimately, Christ himself is always the well-spring ...*".

Let us just skip any question about the concepts used. Thomas says "shall become as I am", and if ultimately Christ is "himself the well-spring", then the person who has become "as I am" – who is as Christ is – is also "himself the well-spring". Existential competence is always that rare that everybody who has some of it as his disposal will feel obliged to pass it on, independent of his source. –

In the subchapter on The Shepherd, Ratzinger mentions a word from the Old Testament, that Jesus takes up in the Gospel of Matthew: "*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered*". Later Ratzinger adds "*In the writings of the later Prophets [of Israel] we see the figure ... of the Shepherd who becomes the lamb*" and discusses further occurrences of the lamb picture.

Especially the Gospel of John reports again and again that the authorities of the Jews tried to arrest Jesus, and that he escaped and fled to other parts of the country. So quite unsuspectingly and trustfully like a lamb will he therefore not have subjected himself to his execution. We have already started above to discuss, how Jesus might have planned the dissemination of his existential competence to as many people as possible, and the word of the scattered flock raises the question, to which extent he has calculated, and possibly planned to exploit, his death and its consequences.

He had apparently resolved to stand up for his teachings and accept the consequences even if that would cost his life. Did he then aim for a martyr effect to ensure greater attention and better reception for his teachings? He has seen that his disciples would have to take flight in case he would become executed, and that in this way his teachings would be spread more widely from the beginning. Has he just put up with this, or did he actively go for it and prepare his disciples accordingly? – Any answers to these questions would be interesting as they could tell how an existentially competent person may move in a monocultural society. For a personality profile of Jesus, as announced by Ratzinger in the beginning, such answers should actually be considered indispensable.

CHAPTER NINE: TWO MILESTONES ON JESUS' WAY: PETER'S CONFESSION AND THE TRANSFIGURATION

1 PETER'S CONFESSION

Jesus asks the disciples what the people think he is and who he is in their, the disciples' view. The people believe he is John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other Prophet returned from the dead, specifically Jeremiah. For the disciples, Peter answers, varying among the Evangelists, that Jesus is the Messiah [Christ], the Christ [the anointed one] of God, the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God, the Holy One of God.

Ratzinger views the then contemporary opinions about Jesus as determined by Israel's expectations and the various projections of their hope. These opinions are not necessarily wrong but rather incomplete approximations to Jesus' newness. In the same way Ratzinger judges the present perceptions of Jesus, for example, *"similar opinions ... clearly held by the 'people' who have somehow or other come to know Christ, who have perhaps even made a scholarly study of him, but have not encountered Jesus himself in his uniqueness and otherness"*, furthermore the reduction of Jesus to the level of Socrates, Buddha, and Confucius, and finally the common rating of Jesus as one of the great religious founders whom were granted a profound experience of God. *"They can thus speak of God to other people who have been denied this 'religious disposition', as it were, drawing them into their own experience of God. However, we are still dealing here with a human experience of God that reflects his infinite reality in the finitude and limitation of a human spirit: It can therefore never amount to more than a partial, not to mention time- and space-bound, translation of the divine"*.

A few things are directly wrong in this. Nothing can be a "translation of the Divine". The Extra-worldly is not conceptual, it is impossible to say that it has a structure, and therefore there is nothing to translate. Anyway, one cannot encounter the Extra-worldly *in* the world, one cannot in this sense "experience" it. The human "spirit" is not quite as limited as Ratzinger suggests, rather we are existentially disposed in such a way, and therefore owe it to life, that we understand something tomorrow that we do not yet understand today. Still this always discloses world only, and nothing Extra-worldly.

That does not exclude that humans may perceive effects that they then recognize as absolute, not from within the world. There are reports of the like, not many but credible ones again and again. Such effects are without equal and therefore indescribable, but they can make the life of the concerned persons so transparent and change it so much to the good, that they feel pressed to explain them to other people though there are no words for them. The temptation is then immense not to talk about indescribable effects but to preach some resulting, clearly describable views of, and recipes for life, and these are really "time- and space-bound". Obviously there is nothing divine about such views and recipes, and there is nothing to replace one's own, personal perceptions of the divine.

That religious communities are classifying "perceptions of the divine" in their own domain as the genuine ones, and in the domains of the others as false translations, that cannot be differently expected. And it is not expectable either that they would provide objective criteria for these classifications. But there is an absolute criterion: if a conceptual description is given then this does always prove that it is not, or was not, a perception of the Divine.

We furthermore only note here that a striking perception of the Divine is not required for communicating competently about the Extra-worldly. One "only" has to look at one's own Dasein. –

According to Ratzinger, the confession of the disciples, verbalized by Peter, goes back to some key experiences with Jesus. In the story of the overflowing catch of fish, Peter, after this catch, falls at Jesus' feet in the posture of adoration, because Peter "*recognizes the power of God working through Jesus' words, and this direct encounter with the living God in Jesus shakes him to the core of his being*". In the story of Jesus walking upon the waters, after the wind subsides, the disciples in the boat fall down before Jesus "*in an expression at once of terror and adoration, and they confess: 'Truly you are the Son of God' ... These and other experiences, found throughout the Gospels, lay a clear foundation for Peter's confession ... In various ways, the disciples were repeatedly able to sense in Jesus the presence of the living God himself*".

Ratzinger has covered – may be rightly from his perspective but unfortunately in the context at hand – only images from the Gospel of John while he has not, for example, dealt with the many quite noticeable passages in which Jesus reproaches the people with coming to him and believing him only for the miracles while not understanding his tellings which are meant to show them the path to beatitude.

We are not fencing here with quotations from the Bible, but Ratzinger should at least explain why he unhesitatingly accepts Peter's confession as based on miracles, while Jesus considers the same as misdirected. Be that as it may, we have to repeat here in our critique that, from an existential point of view, miracles are not special and even less divine. Every doctrine that tries to derive importance from miracles renders itself a priori non-credible. –

Following Peter's answer, that the disciples hold Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, further interesting things happen that Ratzinger briefly addresses: Jesus forbids the disciples to communicate their confession to the people. He announces that he is going to be tortured, sentenced by the high priest, crucified, and that he will resurrect on the third day. Peter protests and Jesus thereupon calls him "Satan" because Peter's thinking was merely human but not divine.

We have already above asked about Jesus' tactics towards his process, the consequences of which he certainly could foresee. Ratzinger explains that "*Jesus ... forbids the disciples to speak openly of this [Peter's] confession, given that it would undoubtedly have been misinterpreted in the public climate of Israel and would necessarily have lead on one hand to false hopes in him and on the other hand to political action against him*".

Both, the ban on spreading the confession, and the rebuke to Peter show that Jesus has forcefully managed to keep control about his entering into the process. And this in turn

shows that he has been planning precisely and firmly, even on cost of getting his disciples into trouble. He has foreseen that the group of his disciples would be "scattered".

Peter now recognizes that Jesus' plan will expose him and the other disciples to persecution. He must feel betrayed. The structure of Jesus' response to this is: "Are you the devil? Just before, you have said that I am God. If you now oppose my plan then you should see yourself as Satan. I am facing my fate on the cross, so you should be able to face your persecution. Otherwise you are not a follower of mine". If Jesus was in control of himself during this polemic-cynical answer then it is a calculated test of Peter's hardness. In any case, it contains two massive existential errors: An inner-worldly object like a plan cannot be divine, and therefore everybody is free to oppose it. Also, while it is human to shy away from existential questions and not to think "divinely" from the position of the Authentic Self, it is not evil and does not deserve a condemnation. Finally, Jesus must have seen that he would, in carrying out his plan, cause impairments of the lives of his disciples und thus load guilt upon himself. That he has seen it, becomes visible also in that he promises to send them a "Comforter" – which however will again "only" help to see the still impaired life as positive.

Ratzinger does not write anything of this although it could singularly characterize the man Jesus in a critical situation. One need not share the interpretation of the interaction as proposed here and may well present a different one, but if one is only set to show that and how God is speaking here, implying that thereby all is said, then traits of a personality can never become visible.

Jesus found himself in the typical dilemma of an existentially competent man. He met a lot of hostility and he knew that he would expose all people, whom he might successfully lead to existential competence, to the same hostility. He then had the choice to either hold himself back and leave to God the salvation of those who would not understand him anyway, or to struggle for the dissemination of his existential insights with all available means up to risking his life and to leave to God for all times the inner-worldly protection of his disciples and followers. He has chosen the second option, the execution of which required utmost motivation and unemotional calculation.

2 THE TRANSFIGURATION

The legend under consideration here is quickly told. Jesus leads three disciples up onto a high mountain in order to pray. On the top, "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light". Moses and Elijah appear and talk with the transfigured Jesus about his departure [his exodus] which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. The disciples are quite stunned of all this but Peter speaks nevertheless and offers to erect tents for Jesus and his interlocutors. But there comes a cloud and overshadows them, and a voice comes out of the cloud: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him ". During their descent, the disciples ask Jesus for the return of Elijah as foretold by the scribes, and Jesus answers: "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he

should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him".

This is now all full of symbolisms and references which Ratzinger explains in detail. First he follows the temporal correspondences with the Jewish festival calendar. Accordingly, Peter's confession took place on the Yom-ha-Kippurim, a great feast of atonement on which for the one time in the year, the high priest solemnly pronounced the name JHWH in the Temple's Holy of Holies. Jesus' Transfiguration happened a few days later on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the huts of which were understood as a prefiguration of the eternal tabernacles in which the righteous were to dwell in the messianic times. So, with this timing, the Transfiguration marks the fact that the messianic times have come.

With the high mountain, Ratzinger immediately associates many other biblical mountains that come to mind, from Sinai, Horeb and Morija up to the mountain of Jesus' agony, the mountain of the Cross, and the mountain of the Risen Lord.

Ratzinger himself amplifies the transfiguration as follows: "*The Transfiguration is a prayer event; it displays visibly what happens when Jesus talks with his Father: the profound interpenetration of his being with God, which then becomes pure light. In his oneness with the Father, Jesus is himself 'light from light'. The reality that he is in the deepest core of his being, which Peter tried to express in his confession – that reality becomes perceptible to the senses at this moment: Jesus' being in the light of God, his own being-light as Son*". Because there is a similar legend of Moses, Ratzinger emphasizes the difference: "'As he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God' Because Moses has been talking with God, God's light streams upon him and makes him radiant. But the light that causes him to shine comes to him from the outside, so to speak. Jesus, however, shines from within; he does not simply receive light, but he himself is light from light".

When Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus about his crucifixion, then Ratzinger detects therein a reference to the Exodus: "*Jesus' Cross is an Exodus: a departure from his life, a passage through the 'Red Sea' of the Passion, and a transition into glory – a glory, however, that forever bears the marks of Jesus' wounds ... Moses and Elijah are themselves figures of the Passion and witnesses of the Passion. ... by speaking of these things with Jesus during his Transfiguration they make it apparent that his Passion brings salvation; that it is filled with the glory of God; that the Passion is transformed into light, into freedom and joy*".

From Jesus' answer to the question of the disciples about Elijah's return, Ratzinger derives, that Jesus has tacitly identified the returning Elijah with John the Baptist. In the working of the Baptist, the return of Elijah has been fulfilled.

And then the scene with the cloud: "*The holy cloud, the shekinah, is the sign of the presence of God himself. The cloud hovering over the Tent of Meeting indicated that God was present. Jesus is the holy tent above whom the cloud of God's presence now stands and spreads out to 'overshadow' the others as well. The scene repeats that of Jesus' Baptism, in which the Father himself, speaking out of the cloud, had proclaimed Jesus as Son: 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased' ... The solemn proclamation of Sonship, however, is now followed by the command 'Listen to him'*".

The last sentence hits hard. Ratzinger, however, steadily continues to explain: "*On the mountain, Moses received the Torah, God's teaching word. ... 'Jesus himself is the Torah'". He deals with an "obscure" statement of Jesus' that Mark has inserted between Peter's confession and the account of the Transfiguration: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the dominion of God come with power". In the scene of the Transfiguration, they have this sight of the Kingdom of God. But they also see the relation to the crucifixion: "This 'power' (dynamis) of the coming Kingdom appears to them in the in the transfigured Jesus, who speaks with the witnesses of the Old Covenant about the necessity of his Passion as the way to glory. ... They personally experience the anticipation of the Parousia, and that is how they are slowly initiated into the full depth of the mystery of Jesus". –*

What are we told to do? Listen to *Jesus*, that is, not to: Moses, Prophets, testimonials, testimonials of testimonials, descriptions, ascriptions, fathers of the church, leaders of and in the church, theologians, exegeses, at least not as long as they present their own and not Jesus' authentic messages. And we shall *listen*, not look: not on Jesus' outward appearance, his behaviour, his curriculum vitae, not on events, secrets, key experiences, miracles, appearances with light and clouds, festival calendars, mountains, finely spun networks of bible passages, grand images.

We have already above seen that the author of Matthew's Gospel has been a quite wily writer. But this is coming on strong. He writes a transfiguration scene with all due gloriousness and then, in the last sentence, he pulls the rug from under it, but in a manner such that one easily reads over it. The gloriousness does not count. What counts is what Jesus says.

Apparently, Matthew has to write for an audience full of expectations but, in a sense, narrow-minded, about which already Jesus had complained, and so Matthew writes a supernal scene that glorifies Jesus. He does that skilfully but he also manages to place, so to speak: as the last word, a devastating sentence that, at the same time, reveals what matters in his view and remains harmonious and thus inconspicuous for the audience.

For Ratzinger, too, the last sentence is correct: Jesus is the new Torah, the God's new law for man. That law is what we have to listen to and obey. But this, of course, does not reflect what Jesus said, but merely trims him to match a certain view.

Listen to him! That means: what really counts is: authentic pronouncements of Jesus. This insight does not need a divine authorization. We have above demonstrated that, with a little prior knowledge about the Dasein, it is possible to come in sync with Jesus' tellings and will then unavoidably recognize that he probably possessed higher existential competence than all other teachers of Dasein ever jointly had.

There is a man who knows from A to Z how our Dasein is set up and how we can achieve beatitude. But within a few decades, his insights become mitigated, adapted, and modified, and the result is then maintained, extended, and decorated over millennia. And had there not been a few astute Evangelists who skilfully placed – unsuspecting for the preoccupied audience – hints to the manipulations, then one would today be forced to believe that we had before us Jesus' original religion in its purest form.

Accordingly, it may be difficult today to recognize and regain what is authentic from Jesus, and to discriminate it from the inauthentic. But it is not impossible, and there are two tools to remove the spoil on a large scale: The Second Commandment helps to separate out the many *assertions* about the Extra-worldly and their derived assertions. And the goal of listening to Jesus allows disregarding what is not documented as a pronouncement of Jesus.

And then the requirements still remain: to want and to be able to listen.

CHAPTER TEN: JESUS DECLARES HIS IDENTITY

In this chapter, Ratzinger listens to Jesus. He deals with how Jesus is speaking of himself, and the question of authenticity is put onto the table, too.

In contrast to the sovereign titles "Christ (Messiah)", "Kyrios (Lord)", and "Son of God" that Jesus has been given by others, Jesus himself used almost only the names "Son of Man" and "Son". At a few places, John's Gospel puts the name "Son of God" into Jesus' mouth. Jesus never used "Messiah" and prohibited the disciples to use it.

1 THE SON OF MAN

Ratzinger directly turns to the controversy about Jesus' Son-of-Man-words. There is a classification into three groups: words about the coming Son of Man, words about the works of the Son of Man on earth – for example about the power to forgive sins –, and words about the death and Resurrection of the Son of Man.

Ratzinger resents that the exegetes predominantly tend to accept at most the first group as authentic. In his view, this means that the exegetes do not dare to attribute to Jesus real claims to authority or predictions of the Passion. But, to provoke his handing over to the Romans, Jesus must have said and done something dramatic that cannot have been ascribed to him after the fact: *"The anonymous community [of the nascent Church] is credited with an astonishing level of theological genius – who were the great figures responsible for inventing all this? No, the greatness, the dramatic newness, comes directly from Jesus; within the faith and life of the community it is further developed, but not created. In fact, the 'community' would not even have emerged and survived at all unless some extraordinary reality had preceded it"*.

Already in the Foreword, Ratzinger has been arguing in this sense, and we have already there pointed out that Jesus tellings alone were sufficient to totally mobilize the Temple aristocracy against him.

As far as the theological genius is concerned, Ratzinger himself proves throughout his book, with every parallel between a word or act of Jesus and a corresponding archetype from the Old Testament, that plenty of materials about the expected God-king of the Jews had been available and could easily be adapted and arranged to fit Jesus. And that the Evangelists were up to every trick: that we have noted several times in this critique.

How the community may have become functional, we have been able to infer from Jesus' dialogues with the disciples. Jesus, concerned to sustain and disseminate his insights, has taken measures, starting with a kernel team, to recruit many disciples and followers as carriers of these insights and to coach them as effective multipliers. He has anticipated that these multipliers would be "scattered" and has advised them to be cautious and clever; he

has committed Peter to ensure the connections between the scattered ("Feed my sheep"); and through his death like a prophet, he has furnished the whole group with a great religious credibility.

With these arguments, we do not want to participate in the authenticity debate; rather we are criticizing the position that there were no alternatives to the authority-dominated interpretation of Jesus' personality and acts. Ratzinger does not consider the possibility, nor follow up the evidence presented by himself, that Jesus may just have realistically and successfully managed the dissemination of his insights.

The authenticity of Jesus' words and tellings can be measured by their efficiency to guide our sights towards the Dasein and the Extra-worldly. For texts deficient in this respect, Jesus drops out as a possible originator. In the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parables we have found so many clear indications of his existential competence that we cannot assume that he could yet have made any mistakes here. What we, from the position of this critique, actually do not dare to attribute to Jesus is existential incompetence. The seemingly mysterious from Jesus always needs to be checked as to whether it becomes existentially relevant if taken as an approximate telling. After all, mystery is the form of appearance of all existential tellings, as long as the sights of the Dasein and the Extra-worldly are alien to us.

With the phrases "Son of Man", "Son", and "I am", Jesus has chosen superficially innocuous names and wordings for himself that could not be turned against him should they become public. That he has, nevertheless, always considered himself as "Son of God" does not cause any authenticity problem at all. Ratzinger however reads the corresponding tellings differently from the sense in which Jesus has obviously meant them.

Again, we follow his considerations. First, Ratzinger quotes Jesus' statement from his trial before the Sanhedrin: "*You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven*". Ratzinger explains that the Christology of the New Testament writers, including the Evangelists, have taken over the contents of such Son-of-Man words but have replaced the title "Son of Man" with other titles already circulating during Jesus' life time: Messiah (Christus), Kyrios (Lord), Son of God. His point is, however, that the divine authority has not been later ascribed to Jesus with the Christological titles but already claimed by Jesus himself.

But that is not how Jesus has been. We have above shown several times that he wanted to teach men that, for all of them, God is like a good father and not like a potentate. That, in the way Jesus explained and gave an example of, they all should take a Dasein stance of son (or daughter) vis-à-vis this father and his creation. In short: that they all were sons and daughters of God. And why did he want to teach them that? Because he himself felt in this Dasein stance "on the clouds of heaven", privileged by God, and because he saw that this is open to everybody, not only to him alone.

It follows that the contents of the Son-of-Man words have rather not been taken over but, at best, misunderstood by the Christologians, may be, because their contemporary view of the world view and expectations were fixated on a single Son of God with divine authority and nobody could think of common people as sons and daughters of God.

The wording "*seated at the right hand of power*" has, according to Ratzinger himself, again been taken from the Old Testament, Psalm 110. There are then two possibilities: Either Jesus has before the Sanhedrin produced himself as the prophesized One, in order to ensure that the case against him remains religious. Then the word does not necessarily stand as a teaching for everybody. Or the Evangelists have related Jesus to the old prophecy in order to substantiate his glorification. The same ambiguity is apparent in the other quotations used by Ratzinger, in which Jesus is talking of the coming Son of Man. There, too, Jesus has possibly adapted his words to expectations in order to better connect to people, and the Evangelists have then presented these words as claims of divine power.

What Jesus himself has had in mind, can be seen in the parable about the Last Judgement, with the Son of Man judging people by the good they have done for their needy fellow humans. Ratzinger himself calls it a parable. So, the listener or reader must first disregard the inner-worldly objects of the text and then try to see which aspects of his life it is addressing and lighting up. One can, therefore, immediately forget the point of time, the throne, the glory, the peoples, the sheep and rams, right and left.

Ratzinger largely does that and emphasizes that "*the Son of Man, in the role of judge, identifies himself with those who hunger and thirst, with the strangers, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned – with all those who suffer in this world – and he describes behaviour toward them as behaviour toward himself. This is no mere fiction about the judge of the world, invented after the Resurrection. In becoming incarnate, he accomplished this identification with the utmost literalism. He is the man without property or home who has no place to lay his head (). He is the prisoner, the accused, and he dies naked on the Cross. This identification of the Son of Man who judges the world with those who suffer in every way presupposes the judge's identity with the earthly Jesus and reveals the inner unity of Cross and glory, of earthly existence in lowliness and future authority to judge the world. The Son of Man is one person alone, and that person is Jesus. This identity shows us the way, shows us the criterion according to which our lives will one day be judged*".

We should not however mislead ourselves: Independent of Jesus, our life is *permanently* being "judged" against this criterion, in that we are *permanently* bearing the consequences. The only future aspect in this is that we may now lack insight into the "status of our judgement" and have to leave it to an uncertain future whether and when we may gain that insight.

The parable very vividly addresses our "behaviour" toward the needy fellow humans, and tells the same examples four times to really make the last person understand what is at stake for us. In contrast, Ratzinger is mostly concerned with the relations between identification and identity: If the judging Son of Man were not identical with Jesus then he would not be able to identify himself with those suffering in the world. As if suffering were a precondition for judging, and as if only the severely suffering could possibly identify himself with other sufferers. How then could a wealthy person be expected to do the same? And if he would do it: how would he come from identifying with the sufferer to helping the sufferer? Help is not a *logical* consequence of identification. After achieving the identification, somebody could well conclude that suffering was no good for him and turn away from the sufferer. And why should the Son of Man first identify himself at all rather than just help directly? What is the substance of this identification, what its "scope": the

bodies, the souls, the individual worlds? Ratzinger does not solve these problems of his interpretation. He wants to deduce that Jesus is the Son of Man, but the proof is not watertight.

So we take over and clarify: The Extra-worldly, in whichever dimension, cannot be identical with anything inner-worldly, and trying to identify the one with the other does not make any sense. Existentially the best synonym for "Son of Man" is the divine component of man – actually: of Dasein –. This "component" cannot "come" into the world like an object, but it is, so to speak, "identically" there with every human and can at best come into view.

If in this sense the "Son of Man comes" then this means that we get a sight of the divine, extra-worldly component of our Dasein, in the particular dimension of our Authentic Self. And then we see the same divine component in our neighbours, and that they are in the same Dasein situation as we are. That still does not imply *logically* that we should or must help them. But when, with a view to their divine component, we do something to them, then we do it with a view to God, because we cannot ascribe a structure to the Extra-worldly, and because therefore all individual sights of the Son of Man [Authentic Selves] connect to one and the same Extra-worldly.

Implicitly, the parable tells that we shall help the needy, and it demonstrates that by showing us how we are *authentically* judging our behaviour against them, from the position of our Authentic Self that comes to view also in the call of our conscience. We know authentically that good is to enhance life, and bad is not to enhance life. To the extent that we fail to enhance life – and the needy are always offering opportunities – we accumulate guilt. This existential guilt burdens our life and steals from us possibilities of being, and this is usually more serious than we are aware of. Of course, if we are lost in the world, we cannot know anything of this, including how we can get rid of this burden. This is the "eternal", that is, existential punishment.

On the other hand, as soon as the Son of Man comes, that is, our divine component comes to sight, the parable promises the "kingdom prepared for [us] from the foundation of the world". Then the Extra-worldly comes into view also by way of its other sights, for example as the Creator and the Authentic Self of the Others, and we recognize the rich possibilities that the world is offering us to enhance life, ours and that of the Others.

How little would it help a man here, if he possessed the proof that Jesus was the one and only Son of God and that his words in the Gospels were authentic! He would then still not know what the words were designed to convey. Without the knowledge that the words cannot be conceptually understood and that he rather must seek at the foundations of his Dasein for similar "patterns", he still comes to nothing – and misses or avoids God.

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With regard to Jesus' words about the works of the Son of Man on earth, we can make it short here. Ratzinger discusses the citation "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath", and two further citations from the legend of the paralytic: "My son, your sins are forgiven" and "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins". A final citation he just

mentions: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head".

The latter is due to the circumstance that the Authentic Self is extra-worldly. The more obvious explanation is, however, the inner-worldly one: Jesus is on the run from the religious authorities.

The first citation is trivial, too, because from the position of his Authentic Self man is always free in his will and decisions, in this case, free vis-à-vis the situation that other men establish rules, for example, regarding religious holidays and request to abide by these rules – nevertheless, the Third Commandment is existentially significant.

The authority to tell somebody that his guilt is forgiven – "sins" is somewhat imprecise here – is an "authority" owned by everybody who understands existence and is able to live from the position of his Authentic Self. We have shown this already in the context of the Our Father. Moreover, the citation at hand does not say: "I forgive your sins" but "your sins are forgiven", and that is existentially correct.

The healing of the paralytic is presented in such a way that Jesus proves the authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins by successfully carrying out the ostensibly more difficult task of healing. But, according to the preceding paragraph, a proof is superfluous; and this proof is none: What is shown is a coincidence between Jesus' request and the rising of the paralytic. If Jesus should have "accomplished" this, which means that Jesus' request was *causal* for the paralytic's ability to rise, then a theory is required in the world, not necessarily strict but in principle acceptable and verifiable for everybody, about how that could have worked. "God has done it" or "Jesus has done it through God's power" are not theories but void assertions. With a view to existence, not only Jesus' experiences but *everything* that occurs to man in the world is to be seen as given by God – and not as an inner-worldly accomplishment.

In spite of this, Ratzinger sums up that we have here words of divine authority before us because nothing else could have led into Jesus' Passion. However, that is not imperative. In an environment where only God can dispose of the Sabbath and forgive sins, Jesus' statements were scandalizing anyway. Divine authority *of the speaker* was not necessary for the scandal; existential knowledge was sufficient to touch the sovereignty of interpretation of divine authority claimed *by the clerics*.

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Finally, Ratzinger listens to the third class of Jesus' Son-of-Man words: the predictions of his Passion, for example, to the telling: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". Ratzinger relates this to the notion of the Suffering Servant from the Old Testament, connects it with the notion of the Judge of the World, and so produces the result "*Service is the true form of rule*".

Let us for a moment stay with the text! Jesus' word appear in a situation in which he has just announced to his disciples his coming sufferings and Resurrection whereafter two of them, so to speak, apply for the best position in his coming Kingdom. Jesus tells them that he does not have such positions on offer and that, even in the world, greatness is not measured – as shining through in their wish – by positions but is showing up in service.

After all that we have already learnt about Jesus' strategy – including his plan to enter a religious process and accept death – it is plausible that he determines that the service demanded of *him* is to secure his redeeming insights for the following generations. Still, a *ransom* to God, his own father, is – in whichever approximate sense – totally incompatible with Jesus' thinking.

Ratzinger finds many more bible texts and other citations that have to do with, or may be related to, Jesus' sufferings and Resurrection, so from the book Daniel, from the Psalms 40 and 110, from Weish, Hampel, and Schnackenburg, from Isaiah, Paul, and John's Gospel. And thus the listening to Jesus himself already comes to an end here.

At the end of the Son-of-Man subchapter Ratzinger writes: "*The title 'Son of Man' continued to be applied exclusively to Jesus, but the new vision of the oneness of God and man that it expresses is found throughout the entire New Testament and shapes it. The new humanity that comes from God is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about*".

Ratzinger actively writes "deeper value"! We can almost hear Jesus talk himself as if saying: Being a Son of Man is unique. Follow me, work towards getting a sight of God, as I have shown you in my parables; adopt my attitude to God, as I have described in my Commandment of Love and in the Sermon on the Mount; and by the time you will see: you and your fellow humans are equally unique. I show you what a unique Son of God you are. And you tell it to all the others!

Ratzinger may not be in a position to write exactly and explicitly this. But he can obviously write something that can be interpreted in this way, provided that it can be attributed to him only as unambiguously Christological – which he has to some extent ensured with his early hint to the presupposed prior decision to believe.

The existentially most problematic word in Ratzinger's closing sentences above is *oneness*. In the next subchapter, we will come back to it at length.

2 THE SON

Ratzinger spends almost half of this subchapter to show where the name "Son of God" came from, how it developed up to Jesus' time, and which associations have been accompanying this name when used for Jesus. In contrast, the name "Son" without an add-on occurs only in pronouncements of Jesus himself, above all in John's Gospel and in texts conditioned by it.

The first quotation dealt with ends as follows: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one whom the Son wills to reveal him". Ratzinger follows this up with a little philosophy of "knowing": "*Knowing always involves some sort of equality. 'If the eye were not sunlike, it could never see the sun', as Goethe once said, alluding to an idea of Plotinus. Every process of coming to know something includes in one form or another a process of assimilation, a sort of inner unification of the knower with the known. This process differs according to the respective level of being on which the knowing subject and the known object exist. Truly to know God presupposes communion with him, it*

presupposes oneness of being with him. ... it also becomes clear what 'the Son' is and what this term means: perfect communion in knowledge, which is at the same time communion in being. Unity in knowing is possible only because it is unity in being".

Likeness of eye and sun is rather not what Goethe may have meant, even less: equality, communion in being, or unity in being. Goethe continues: "if we did not carry within us the very power of the god, how could the divine delight us?" That means: the understanding of God's creation is part of man's God-given existential set-up. In contrast, nobody will think of sunlike nuclear fusions in his eye-sockets; and nobody will be like the neighbour's car because of knowing it. Admittedly, on the level of God's being, that might be different: if one knows / comes to know God, then one is like God. This telling has a deeper existential value, however surely not on the base of a false concept of likeness.

Ratzinger is untiringly shifting the terms. With Goethe, the eye would, according to Ratzinger, see the sun because of being sunlike. That is now being shifted towards *equality*, as if Goethe had said "*equal to the sun*", and then further toward *assimilation*, as if the eye would become like, or equal to, the sun only in the process of seeing it. But *assimilation* is not the same as *equality*, and *equality* is not the same as *likeness*. Ratzinger continues shifting: *assimilation* becomes *inner unification*, on God's level of being *unification* becomes *communion* (with God) and furthermore *unity in being*. Again, *unification* is not the same as *assimilation*, *communion* is not the same as *assimilation*, and neither is *unity in being* the same as *assimilation* nor as any one of the other concepts before. If one starts with an assertion – false at that ("knowing requires equality") – and therein replaces, step by step, the terms by new, different terms, then one cannot pretend that the resulting assertion ("unity in knowing requires unity in being") must now obviously be true.

But the end is still not yet reached: "*The will of the Son is one with the will of the Father*", and "*together with him, the Son, we may unite our wills with the Father's will, thus becoming sons [Ratzinger's small starting 's'] in our turn, in union of will that become union of knowledge*".

We just note again: (the German original uses) two different terms (Wille, Wollen) for the "wills" of the Son and of the Father, which are not the same and not "one"; *oneness* is not the same as *unity*; *knowledge* is not the same as *coming to know* but its result; assenting (here translated as *uniting of wills*) is not the same as *union of will*, because in assenting one gives up one's own will.

And all this is still only criticizing the quality of the wording, not the deeper semantics. But how good and plausible can the concepts of being, coming to know, will and their interrelations be, behind such a façade of terms! And above all: how accessible. Ratzinger cites Jesus' enthusiasm that God has "*hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes [to little ones]*", and he emphasizes this again twice: the Father wills the *simple*; the *little ones* are opened up for the knowledge of God.

But accessibility for the simple is certainly not what Ratzinger is delivering. Every simple person knows what it is to be a father or a son, and what a good relation is between a father and a son. Ratzinger is in need of modifying the definitions of all these concepts in order to fit them to his exegetic purposes. Thereafter, they are not any longer intuitive as Jesus' words are but, at best, formally accessible – or not, like for example his

considerations regarding oneness. Do we really have to say it?: Father and son may occasionally be one heart one soul, but will never be *one*, rather always be two.

Ratzinger writes immediately following: "... *these words reflect Jesus' actual experience: It is not the Scripture experts, those who are professionally concerned with God, who recognize him; they are too caught up in the intricacies of their detailed knowledge. Their great learning distracts them from simply gazing upon the whole, upon the reality of God as he reveals himself – for people who know so much about the complexity of the issues, it seems it cannot be so simple*". But he obviously does not see himself in the category of Scripture experts. He just proceeds to the way of becoming a fool, "*through which we are opened up for the will, and so for the knowledge of God*". The key to this he finds in the Beatitudes, in the blessing of the pure in heart, and so he finally demands "*giving up the autonomy that is closed in upon itself*" and becoming like children as meant by Jesus. And then Ratzinger is already closing the subchapter. With two quotations from John's Gospel, that talk about the "*only-begotten Son*" and the "*only Son, who is God*", and with a passage from the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus appeals to God as "Abba", he proves the "*'unicity' of the 'Son'*", and thus the subchapter is at the end culminating in the following statements: "*We have to reckon with the originality of Jesus. Only he is 'the Son'*".

What is going on here?

Let us first look at the question of intricacy. Ratzinger wants to demonstrate by way of canonical exegesis, that the decision to believe, as presupposed by the Christological hermeneutics, carries historical reason in it. He believes that by means of his view upon Jesus' exclusive divinity he can and must show the path out of the thicket of detailed theological knowledge. To this end, he considers and discusses for every single detailed result all relevant texts from the Bible and their most relevant interpretations, and relates them to each other, and that, by its very nature, cannot always be shaped into a simple presentation. Therefore the book really comes as a virtually endless thicket of details. The "simple" person would never enter it and never find out of it, and for this person Ratzinger does not write. He sees himself started with the simple and – after the exhausting path through the thicket – arrived at the simple.

A few facts should make Ratzinger re-view:

After all he is a Scripture expert, and his above statement about the Scripture experts, like Jesus' original, does not make an exception for Scripture experts that have taken, in a decision to believe, a personal decision for a simple truth.

A decision, including by a decision to believe, is not compatible with the "simple gaze". If one is seeing something, then a decision is not needed about whether one is really seeing that which is showing itself, *as* it is showing itself; one is just seeing it. If one takes a decision for a view then it is certainly not a simple view.

Jesus' critique of the Scripture experts is reaching much farther than the partial aspect that Ratzinger has picked up here. There is a long tirade of Jesus in Jerusalem against the Pharisees and Scripture experts, that contains the statement: "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye *shut up* the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, *neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in*".

That is emotional and exaggerated, because clearly no human can block another human's path into heaven. Whoever wants it, will find his way in. The core of the statement appears to be, that somebody who should guide others into heaven, actually misguides them, because he does not know the path himself. That would be somebody who is distracted "*from simply gazing upon the whole, upon the reality of God as he reveals himself*" – who does not have the sight, that adjusts the Dasein stance of man and gives him beatitude – and therefore cannot show it and pass it on to others, but still pretends that he can and does.

And he does not have the sight, because it is distracted by his "*great learning*". Every inner-worldly system does that; to be able to act understandingly in it or on front of it, requires a corresponding, usually very "*great learning*" about its structures, functions, and usages. The same is true for religious systems. Every religious system of teachings, rules, and forms has an edifice of knowledge, that, for all who are dealing with *it*, and as long as they are dealing with *it*, binds their attention and thus blocks their sight of God. One cannot at the same time serve God and knowledge or mammon or any other inner-worldly ambition.

For Jesus, the scandal is that the Jewish religious elite of his time did with their religious system block their own and the believers' sight of God and thereby their access into heaven. Jesus calls them hypocrites, and in the Gospel of Thomas even the following is ascribed to him: "Damn the Pharisees! They are like a dog sleeping in the cattle manger: the dog neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat". In that Jesus has, on the one hand, knowingly taken on the religious elite, but it also shows his enragement about the existential incompetence of the religious leadership and their proud management of the existential incompetence of the people.

Nobody can say that this were better today. The religious systems are bigger and more complex than at those times and are obstructing the sight more completely and consequently. Notably Christology has blocked the sight of God by the mask of Jesus. Ratzinger, too, is openly backing the depriving character of this doctrine. Twice in this subchapter he writes that only Jesus is the "Son" though this message denies all humans their being sons and daughters of God as preached by Jesus. This actually cries for heaven. Jesus has been fuming at his time, and today he would be fuming again.

But he has also been strongly biased against the religious leaders – understandably, as they were out to kill him. From an existential point of view the inner-worldly masking of existence is depriving because it hides the entrance to redemption and beatitude. But inner-worldly, it just serves the common demand for avoidance of God. To withhold from somebody something that he, by his very nature, strongly wishes not too have, is not depriving. Jesus must have known the story of Adam and Eve who hide from God in order to avoid being exposed before him in their existential nakedness. They did not want to face God. But Jesus has for a long time only complained that people did not understand him, while he could have seen that they did not want to understand him because humans are existentially disposed in this way.

Thus Jesus has, through his curse against the religious leadership, actually taken position against an existential. He wanted to show men, against their existential trait, the path to

beatitude, but apparently the threat against his life has changed his dutiful intention into a kind of wild and not very circumspective determination – by the way, another not negligible aspect of his personality.

What does this analysis mean with regard to Ratzinger's text? Yes, Ratzinger does block the simple view, as does Christology. But one cannot, on this base, call him, nor Christology, nor organized religion "depriving". Only after recognizing the obstruction of the direct sight of God as a survival factor of organized religion, one may ask how much and how good organized religion can, on top of that, still transport existentially deeper value and actually does so.

3 "I AM"

This final subchapter of the first volume first deals with Jesus' words of the type "I am (he)", or "that I am (he)", for example, the sequence from a dispute: "I am not of this world. ... if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins". Existentially, this is almost a tautology. If one does not see that man has an extra-worldly Authentic Self then one ends up without a relation to the Extra-worldly.

Ratzinger traces the meaning back to the self-definition of God in the scene of Moses with the burning bush: "I am who I am" and also to a citation from Deutero-Isaiah: "that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he ... I am YHWH", and explains what these words meant at their time: "*This God simply is. ... he is presenting himself precisely as the one who is, in his utter oneness. ... this is a way of setting him apart from the many divinities of the time. ... its primary meaning was ... the manifestation of his indescribable oneness and singularity*".

In this way, Ratzinger just disregards the normal meaning of the words. Everybody simply *is*, and sees: "I am". Therein is nothing unique or singular. The really singular is that the authors of the Old Testament are using the wording "I am" that is true for every human, for an identification of God. Everybody knows from himself the being of man. But these authors are adding something very special: God is the "I am", the being of man. Conversely, that means: the being of man is not only in the world, as everybody knows it, but beyond that, it is possible to see the Extra-worldly of man. At least the authors must have seen it somehow; otherwise they could not have reached beyond the inner-worldly view of being a human.

As we may already expect now, Ratzinger limits this universal structure of the being of man exclusively to Jesus: "*Because he is the Son, he has every right to utter with his own lips the Father's self-designation*".

On top of that, Ratzinger claims "*that Jesus is wholly 'relational', that his whole being is nothing other than relation to the Father. This relationality is the key to understanding the use Jesus makes of the formulae of the burning bush and Isaiah*". As it appears, Ratzinger does not consider his preceding circumscriptions of *oneness* as exhaustive and therefore is supplementing them here by *relationality*. We are, however, predominantly interested in the claim that Jesus

were "*nothing other than relation to the Father*". Actually, man finds himself situated in the world and, as long as he is living, cannot cut off his connection to the world and then only be his connection to God. Man cannot at the same time concentrate on God and on the world but can only, as implied by the Third Commandment, occasionally pray and thereby temporarily separate from the world, refresh his connection to God, and then again get involved with the world. The claim that Jesus had been nothing but relation to God would therefore mean: Jesus has not been in the world, and thus not been a man. But, certainly, that does not appear what Ratzinger wants to say. –

The next self-identification of Jesus treated by Ratzinger is the telling: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he".

Existentially this points to the insight that, man will see the divine about Jesus, as soon as he will see the divine about himself.

Ratzinger reads "lifted up" as "crucified": "*The Cross is the true 'height' ... On the Cross, Jesus is exalted to the very 'height' of the God who is love. It is there that he can be 'known', that the 'I am he' can be recognized*". That is, in the first place, nothing more than a play on words, and out-of-time, at that, for nowadays one may hardly hope to bring God into focus by using the word "height". With the height of the Cross, Ratzinger does not mean a "few meters above ground" but a height in a different, figurative sense, that he does not however explain, and the explanation of which we cannot supply either in his place.

Anyway the next play on words follows directly: "*The burning bush is the Cross. The highest claim of revelation, the 'I am he', and the Cross of Jesus are inseparably one. What we find here is not metaphysical speculation, but the self-revelation of God's reality in the midst of history for us*". – Just because two authors are associating two different imaginations to the same telling "I am he", these imaginations will not become the same; and one cannot see what would be gained if they were the same.

If it comes to seeing that, in Moses' scene of the burning bush and in Jesus' crucifixion, God and his love are revealed, then interesting questions are following, and Ratzinger has answers: In which situations is God revealing himself? – "*repeatedly throughout history*" and "*in the fullest sense at the end of history*". How is it when God is revealing himself? – one is "*cut to the heart*". What is the content of such revelation? – one can see that Jesus is God and recognizes his love. Why may one revelation be more final than the other? – Jesus alone is one with God.

But why then those writing glitches of the Cross on the height of God, and of the burning bush as the Cross? At least, they provoke the reader to look closer and make further remarkable findings: Ratzinger does not write "revelation" but "*claim of revelation*". Does he want to suggest that the fulfilment of the claim is open, and that he, Ratzinger, has nothing to do with it? And the concept of "*God's reality in the midst of history*": does Ratzinger view God as not "metaphysical", that is, extra-worldly, and isn't it speculation too, that the Extra-worldly would give some lines of reality a special treatment? Taking a decision to believe does neither make speculation become reality, nor Extra-worldly become inner-worldly.

Here, as well as in other places, Ratzinger occasionally uses to write from an almost journalistic distance, as if he were just noting the facts and his own position would not matter. We have found this most noticeable already in the Foreword, where he is presenting several personal views but writes impersonally of the decision to believe that is key to his book: that it is a precondition for the Christological hermeneutic. As if he would only report the precondition.

With the third pure "I am"-word, that Ratzinger attends to, Jesus channels the Jewish position of tracing their origin back to Abraham into his own origin from God: "Before Abraham came into existence, I am". In line with our critique position, this means that the divine component of our Dasein is outside time. Ratzinger – using texts of Schnackenburg and Barrett – formulates a structurally similarly view: "... *what is involved here is not just a temporal category, but 'a fundamental distinction of nature.'* We have here a clear statement of 'Jesus' claim to a totally unique mode of being which transcends human categories". Ratzinger writes that Schnackenburg and Barrett write that the school of John makes a clear statement of what John the Evangelist has thought that Jesus has claimed. One can hardly keep oneself more out of a matter. And the word "unique" is always open to many interpretations, even negative ones. Here it can mean: (1) that Jesus alone claimed this mode of being, (2) that he claimed it only for himself, (3) that, among the modes of being which transcend human categories, one or more is/are somehow unique, and that Jesus has claimed one of these for himself, (4) that there is only one mode of being which transcends human categories: the one originating from the extra-worldly God. – If this mode of writing is intentional then only in the sense that the reader may feel free in his interpretation but may not commit the author to it. –

Last not least, Ratzinger interprets Jesus' word that he said during the storm when coming over the waters to the boating disciples: "*Take heart, it is I [I am he]; have no fear!*" The most obvious interpretation, that Jesus, because of the bad sight and the improbable situation, just for practical convenience discloses his identity, does not add up in Ratzinger's view. For as soon as Jesus enters the boat, the wind ceases. The disciples are – like Peter after the overflowing catch of fish – overcome by a "*divine terror*" (Ratzinger's quotation marks): "*For walking on the waters is a divine prerogative*" and "*The calming of the storm is likewise an act that exceeds the limits of man's abilities and indicates the power of God at work*". And thus, Ratzinger leads toward the result that "I am he" here means "I am the Son of God": "*At any rate, there is no doubt that the whole event is ... an encounter with the mystery of Jesus' divinity*".

Note that for this, Ratzinger does not need to hold that walking on the waters or calming a storm were "divine prerogatives". He writes all this as if it was from the perspective of the disciples, and, in particular, he does not write who has, or had, no doubt.

No doubt should certainly exist about the following: Walking over water or calming a storm are no more or less divine prerogatives than all other phenomena that we encounter in the world. Walking over water is, however, above all a characteristic of our being in the world: we always trust that the next step will carry us. That something factual exceeds the limits of man's abilities, does at best indicate the limits of human exploration of the world. Assertions that link objects and facts with God are always merely void.

And we note that there actually cannot be something like a true divine terror. Man fears God from the distance. But the first thing that Jesus and the angels, that is: the Authentic Self, tell man in all cases of God's presence is: "Fear not!" – not as superficially pacifying but because fear of the Extra-worldly is void, too.

Finally, Ratzinger turns to the Jesus-words in which the assertion "I am" is extended by some image: "I am the Bread of Life", "I am the Light of the World", and more. These image words are all variations of the theme "abundance of life", which Ratzinger views as summed up in the second petition of the Our Father: Thy Kingdom come. Ratzinger writes:

"The 'Kingdom of God' is life in abundance – precisely because it is not just private 'happiness', not individual joy, but the world having attained its rightful form, the unity of God and the world. In the end, man needs just one thing, in which everything else is included; but he must first delve beyond his superficial wishes and longings in order to recognize what it is that he truly needs and wants. He needs God. And so we now realize what ultimately lies behind all the Johannine images: Jesus gives us 'life' because he gives us God. He can give us God, because he himself is one with God, because he is the Son. He himself is the gift – he is 'life'".

We leave this text uncommented here, as an existentially quite well pointing closing message.

However, Ratzinger's book does not yet close with it. Of course, he has to summarize the current chapter about Jesus' self-references: All three expressions: *Son of Man*, *Son*, and *I am he* are deeply rooted in the Old Testament, but receive their full meaning only in Jesus. All three are possible only on his lips and could therefore not be adopted as a confessional statement by the forming church that instead spoke of the *Son of God*, "consubstantial" with God. "In the Nicene Creed, the Church joins Peter in confessing to Jesus ever anew: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'".

Thus the book ends, with a short report. In the illuminating power of the preceding existential telling about the abundance of life, it goes almost unnoticed.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Yield of "Deeper Value"

We have searched Ratzinger's book for "deeper value" beyond human utterances, that is, for all sights of the extra-worldly rootedness – the "re-lig-ion" – of our Dasein, that the human utterances in Ratzinger's book may, beyond their meaning as assertions, help us to see. And in spite of the fact that Ratzinger decidedly keeps himself in the world of assertions, we have found deeper value in many places.

At the very beginning, at the very end, and in between about every 50 pages, he has "knotless" texts that are between well and perfectly pointing to extra-worldly aspects of Dasein, for example,

- that following Jesus brings about a kind of oneness of God and man,
- that Jesus has brought man the sight of God,
- that this gives man the right orientation,
- that this orientation puts man at peace with the world and gives him life in abundance.
- Even Ratzinger himself states, that one cannot find God while trying to conceive him as an object.

Moreover, we have found a good deal of christologically veiled deeper value, passages restricted to Jesus that can be generalized to all humans:

- in praying we come to see that our Authentic Self is divine,
- we are bearing the burden of all guilt in our world,
- we are having the primal trust that, with every step toward something new, we can only fall into the kindly hands of the Father,
- our Authentic Self opens to us the Kingdom of God,
- our Authentic Self is to us like the Good Samaritan,
- our Authentic Self is not just a sign of God but the Son-aspect of God,
- all humans are in possession of the divine "I am",
- our Authentic Self is "Son of Man" and Judge of the World.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, we declare once more: the preceding enumerations are approximately pointing tellings. They are presenting views that Ratzinger has not necessarily fed into his assertions, but they (these views) can neither contradict his assertions nor misuse them. Not assertions are up for debate here, but the existential deeper value that the combinations of words in the assertions, taken as approximately pointing tellings, may bring before the inner eye. This is image-like material, and it is

allowed to transform a negative into a positive in order to better recognize the content; and one may react to an assertions that the gold were not hidden between the two trees behind the house, by tentatively pursuing the opposite assertion. One can therefore righteously say that Ratzinger's assertions are transporting the highly valuable sights above. And they are a good number.

One cannot, on the other hand say, that a complete picture of our Dasein becomes visible behind these sights. In this respect, Ratzinger's book misses too many essential aspects, and that in directions where his texts and arguments are actually leading him:

- all of the existential relevance of the Genesis, the full being-God's-image of man, and the human I-am of God,
- that our Dasein is existentially disposed towards enhancing life,
- that the Ten Commandments are circumscribing our Dasein rather than merely representing a list of imperatives,
- that the Sermon on the Mount does not preach ethics but a Dasein stance.
- He does not see the dimensionality of Dasein (not detailed in this critique),
- he does not see, how God's word is constituting our life,
- he does not see how God is coaching us,
- he shows only a rudimentary understanding of beatitude,
- he cannot explain the richness of the Kingdom of God, and
- he does not see that our guilt is always already forgiven.

On top of that, Ratzinger's book contains genuine existential errors:

- It makes assertions about the Extra-worldly, and about its actions, from formal investiture with an office up to authorization, from guilt accounting and atonement systems up to the performance of miracles, and about its reality in history.
- The Extra-worldly is given attributes: great, high, deep; and structures: God has a single son and is maintaining a kind of Hades.
- The uniqueness is relativized as a discrimination against polytheism, though this is nothing but positioning against many fictive Gods one single God on the same level.
- The striving in the world is being denounced as generally misdirected.

These latter errors are not exceptional, given the universally and at all times prevailing, violations of the Second Commandment. The respective contents are void and thus unsuitable as bases for any argumentative deductions.

In summary, much is missing relative to a proper and comprehensive sight of Dasein. The reason is predominantly in the fixation to assertions.

The more remarkable is it, as shown above, that in this context still a relatively large number of spot-on sights of Dasein comes to light. They are given to Ratzinger, and due to his extremely free position as a writer he can actually offer them.

The Two Faces of Christology

The above profile of spot-on, negated, missed and false sights of our existence is the result of a christologically prejudiced interpretation of the, in turn, christologically pervaded Gospels. Insofar it can be considered as Christology-typical.

The texts of the Gospels do not just masterly present coherent material, they rather show discontinuities and disruptions. They disqualify and question their own content, inconspicuously as it seems, but appearing quite peculiar to the existentially knowing reader, and always in such a way that the existentially misconceived is being corrected or attenuated. Ratzinger's book contains sufficient information for the diagnosis: Jesus was an extraordinary competent source of existential insights, and the Evangelists understood him and thus faced the same problem as Jesus himself: to contain his obviously difficult to communicate and politically fatal teachings within inoffensive, "survivable" texts. This they have accomplished with great skills.

To this end, Christology has been the best suited concept for addressing a large, average audience: one can smoothly present all truths about the Dasein of man by posthumously ascribing them exclusively to one single, idealized, unmatched, divine figure. This concept has in fact carried important parts of Jesus' existence teachings through the struggles of two millennia, if only that effectively camouflaged that hardly anybody will, behind the camouflage, find access to these teachings if he does not already have the corresponding knowledge beforehand.

Thereby, Christology deprives people of Jesus' existence teachings, not in principle but in effect, and thus contributes its part to the fact that people cannot, and do not want to, find their way to God. The greater contribution is however on the part of mankind's inherent God avoidance culture, wherein demand for such religion is predominant that offers safety from facing God.

Jesus' mission was a different one: to bring mankind the existential truth and to free them from their fear of it. As we have seen in the profile above, Christology achieves that to a certain extent, but only as a difficult to handle by-product. Jesus' idea was a culture of God-relatedness, wherein people help each other to get sights of God.

Christology spoils all claims for such a culture of God-relatedness, for Christology builds on void assertions about God and produces equally void assertions. The worst consequences are that the key existential sights are not even being offered to people: the sight of their being images of God, the sight of their lives' meaning – to enhance life –, and the sight of beatitude.

Jesus' Personality Profile

One further consequence of Christology shall be touched here: For the sake of glorification, Ratzinger wants to present Jesus in such a way that through him God is made visible, and hence our eyes are able to behold the perfect man. What Ratzinger then offers is oneness with God and, as consequences, sovereignty, authorization, sinless-ness, claims of revelation, and more. Included are also lofty ethics including lowliness, identification with the needy, service, love – still "*beyond our psychologies*". In that, Ratzinger misses everything that characterizes a really God-related man – and only such a man –, a man having a comprehensive existential insight: the knowledge about his obligation to pass on his insights to all men; the expectation that the content were self-explanatory; the lack of understanding on the part of the audience, reaching up to angst and enmity; the deliberations of how that could be overcome and how it might be possible to secure the insights against all antagonisms for future generations; the dedication and risk of his life for this; the problem of endangering his followers; the problem of keeping control of the course of events; the enragement about official religion; the hope to be able to change people. Ratzinger himself presents all corresponding pieces of evidence but does not follow them up.

Ratzinger's Writing Position

Other than the writing positions of the Evangelists, Ratzinger's writing position is comfortable. He does not base his work on Jesus' alarming teachings but on the disarmed presentations of the Evangelists; he does not find himself under the existential pressure of religious officials out to kill him; he can keep his considerations formally out of reach of any official judgement of the church; the lack of understanding for *his* insights on the part of the world need not give him more of a sleepless night than any other scientific specialist would have; he has a high reputation and can be sure that his work will be appreciated by the theologians.

And thus he can write much more freely than all Evangelists together. He can perform a wild shifting of semantics: from *coming to know over likeness and unity in being* up to *union of will*, and he can suggest that all of these are downright the same. – He can present Jesus as God's sign for the world and equally well claim that highest truths cannot be forced into empirical evidence. – He can claim that we must not treat God like an object, and then do that throughout the whole book. – He can, without hesitation, accept Peter's confession as motivated by miracles, knowing that Jesus complains about the like as misdirected. – He can claim that identification is a precondition of helping. – He can from a neutral distance write about Jesus' claim and leave the fulfilment open by not mentioning it. – He can from a quasi scientific distance write that the Christological hermeneutic presupposes a decision to believe, as if this said that he, Ratzinger, had performed this decision to believe, and that everybody must now take the rest of the book as perfectly Christological. And then he can write texts that can be understood as correct in both senses, christologically and

existentially, for example, statements about the simple unblocked gazing upon God, with Jesus not mentioned, and he can still reckon that everybody will take these statements as expressing his Christological opinion. –

If Ratzinger can do all this then, ultimately, he can write whatever and however he likes. Which liberty he is actually taking for which passage, is then something that only he himself will know. The readers are equally free to understand as they like. For somebody who wants to be enthused about Ratzinger's writing, who wants to scientifically criticise him, or who wants to be irritated and offended, Ratzinger is offering plenty of material. But whoever wants to uncover its deeper value of existential insights, must have these insights beforehand.

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