

## **Glaube und Institution**

*In der Reihe zum Glaubensjahr haben wir vor allem Beiträge aus der Feder Joseph Ratzingers/Papst Benedikt XVI. zusammengestellt, in denen er den biblischen Glauben in seinen verschiedenen Dimensionen und Wirkungen darstellt. Der in Englisch verfaßte Beitrag von Dr. Mary McCaughey, Dozentin am St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, Irland, hat die Gestalt einer eigenen kleinen Abhandlung und führt in die Sicht ein, die Joseph Ratzinger von der vielgestaltigen Wirklichkeit der Kirche hat: Sie ist nicht nur geistlich, aber auch nicht nur Struktur und Organisation. Institution und persönlicher Glaube stehen einander nicht als Gegensätze gegenüber. Was Struktur ist, soll ihrem Auftrag dienen: dem Menschen den Weg in die Gemeinschaft mit Gott und so auch untereinander zu führen. Freilich weiß der Theologe Ratzinger auch, daß geschichtliche Erfahrungen und ein modernes Lebensgefühl gerade der äußeren Seite der Kirche, besonders ihrer hierarchischen Verfassung, skeptisch gegenüber stehen. Wenn die Theologie von der „marianischen Dimension“ der Kirche spricht, will sie davor bewahren, die Kirche nur noch als karitativ oder ethisch tätigen und so sinnvoll engagierten Dienstleister zu verstehen, sondern als „Glaubenskirche“ wiederzuentdecken, deren Eigenliches nicht der Mensch in die Welt bringen kann, sondern, wenn Gott Glaubende und Horchende findet, sich immer wieder von Gott „im Geist“ gewirkt wird und sich als Wunder ereignet. (AB)*

## **Faith and Institution: a perspective from Joseph Ratzinger**

For many people both inside and outside the Church today, faith and Institution are opposed to each other. The hierarchical institution of the Church is usually perceived as stifling a personal faith relationship with God. However, for Joseph Ratzinger, faith is a relationship with a “Thou;” a personal relationship with God and yet one which is not individualistic but is part of a community. The Institution is not opposed to this personal and communal relationship with God but seeks to foster it. Ratzinger’s ecclesiology however is not centred on its hierarchical structure. For him the Church is most present “not where organising, reforming and governing are going on,” but rather in those who simply receive and live faith. These experience the Church “as hope” and “as home” and manifest its true meaning.<sup>1</sup> Yet Ratzinger is not saying that there is no role for Institution in the Church. There is, but this is not to be separated from the role of the Holy Spirit expressed in charisms and its prophetic dimensions of Church. It is also to be held together with the identity of the Church as it is embodied in Mary: the one who received the Spirit and became *Theotokos*.

### **Institution and Spirit**

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<sup>1</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 266. “Only he who has experienced how, regardless of changes in her ministers and forms, the Church raises men up, give them a home and a hope, a home that is hope—the path to eternal life—only he who has experienced this knows what the Church is, both in days gone by and now” (266).

For Ratzinger the Institution of the Church is not a power-structure divorced from the pneumatological and charismatic dimensions of the Church. While Institution is necessary for any organisation to protect its inner essence, the institution actually arises out of its charismatic dimensions. The sacrament of orders, “arise from “God’s call to this particular person.”<sup>2</sup> The Institution is therefore not simply a faceless power structure but is imbued with the work of the Spirit in order to make present in the world of today, the original Christ event from the Incarnation to the Paschal Mystery.

### **Papacy and the Church**

Ratzinger is realistic in his awareness that there is among people today “an aversion to the primacy” and that this is connected to the “disappearance of the sense of universality of the Church.”<sup>3</sup> This is connected to the fact that for most people the concept of the universal Church is connected only to the Papacy and in people’s awareness it seems to exclude everyone else and the life within the Church as a whole. Hence “the Church as a whole, appears as a scandalous monolith that disturbs the picture of a church reduced to purely local ministries and the neighbourly existence of congregations.”<sup>4</sup> Yet as Ratzinger explains, the concept of Primacy linked to universal Church does not mean that there is no role in the Church for a personal faith that is life-giving and expressed in life-giving communities.

Ratzinger reminds us that the Papacy is also not about power residing in an individual. It is the “foundation of the Church because of a power that does not derive from herself.”<sup>5</sup> Peter witnesses to the reality that in human weakness, there is strength in Christ and that the Church is the home of forgiveness. The Papacy itself witnesses to the reality that the Church is “not a communion of the perfect but a communion of sinners who seek God’s forgiveness.”<sup>6</sup> Also the principle of succession in the Church is related not only to “Word” as in a Protestant understanding, but to “Witness,” and this is connected to Christ and to the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> The Vicar of Christ is one called to the path of martyrdom in imitation of Christ’s self-emptying and the theology of the Cross.<sup>8</sup> His path is a public contradiction to the powers of the world. The Institution of the Church including the vocations of Pope, Bishop and priest arise out of personal calling; of the mercy and forgiveness of God who calls human beings weak though they are to follow him. Those in ministry, like all the baptised, are called to be constantly open to the Spirit which leads them and hence the whole Church to constant renewal.

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<sup>2</sup> Ratzinger, “Ecclesial Movements and their Place in Theology,” *New Outpourings of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ratzinger, “Ecclesial Movements and their Place in Theology,” 52.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999 ), 61.

<sup>6</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger, *The Papal Primacy and the Unity of the People of God,* in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (Slough: St Paul’s Publications, 1983), 43.

## Communities of Faith and Institution

For Ratzinger local charismatic faith communities and New Ecclesial Movements are linked to the Papacy since they exist for the good of the Universal Church and their task is to spread the apostolic faith. As Ratzinger writes, “there must always be in the Church ministries and missions that do not belong purely to the local Church but serve the task given the whole Church, the task of spreading the gospel. The pope is dependent on these ministries, and they on him, and, in the existence side by side of the two kinds of mission, the symphony of Church life comes to fulfilment...”<sup>9</sup> For Ratzinger, the “sacrament of orders, the sacrament of succession,” ...is surrounded by a multitude of ministries, and here the part taken by women in the Church’s apostolate becomes impossible to overlook.” He also says that, “the primacy of the successor of Peter is there to guarantee the presence of these essential components of ecclesial life and to bring them into an ordered relationship with the structures of the local church.”<sup>10</sup>

Our author, aware of the trends in liberation theology on ecclesiology in the 1980s criticised a socio-cultural type of “base” community which is seen in marked opposition to the Institution of the Church and hence to the universal Church.<sup>11</sup> Instead, “Christian communities as expressions of the Spirit must be accomplished in conjunction with the bishop and thus in conjunction with the universal Church, into which the community must be integrated and which must not replace but only reveal.”<sup>12</sup>

## Apostolic Succession and Prophetic dimensions of Church

For Ratzinger, the cultic and the sacerdotal thread in salvation history associated with Institution cannot be placed in opposition to the prophetic one, nor can it exclude it. He writes: “God has always called prophets to call out the right message from within the ordinary workings of the institution (of the Church).”<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger gives the example of how the monastic movement in history was both pneumatological and yet connected to the institution. Monastic life did not lead to the abolition of the structure of local Churches in the post-apostolic Church and yet does not simply co-incide with it, rather, it works within it as a *stimulating force* and, at the same time, as a reservoir from which may come forth for the local Church truly spiritual clergy, in whom institution and charism are fused

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<sup>9</sup> Ratzinger, “Ecclesial Movements and their Place in Theology,” 53.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*. Translated by Mary Frances McCarthy. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 302-303.

<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 309; TP, 325.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 32.

together.”<sup>14</sup> New Ecclesial Movements too belong to the prophetic dimension of the Church, acting as a stimulating force to the faith of the Church and also forming part of apostolic succession.<sup>15</sup> The charismatic dimension of Church reminds the Institution that its role is to serve the living faith of its members.

Ratzinger discusses apostolic succession and Institution in a way that relates it to a living faith and to the witness of faith which was first made by the Apostles themselves who testified to Christ’s cross. Apostolic succession is not simply a handing on of a historical office without the Spirit. It is, “never the taking over of some official powers that are then at the disposal of the office bearer.”<sup>16</sup> Rather it is a dynamic reality, “a being taken into the service of the word, the office of testifying to something with which one has been entrusted and which stands above its bearer, so that he fades into the background behind the thing he has taken over.”<sup>17</sup> The line of succession means that the “sacramental office is never at our disposal but has to be given by the Spirit, which we can never provide and never institute for ourselves.”<sup>18</sup> The priesthood is not about functional competence but has both Christological elements and pneumatological elements which constantly renew the priestly ministry.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Institution and the Marian dimensions of Church**

For Ratzinger, the Institution of the Church cannot be understood apart from the Marian Principle which upholds the reality of the Church as fostering a relationship of the whole person to Christ, including their heart, mind and soul. As Ratzinger writes, “A purely structural ecclesiology is bound to degrade the Church to the level of a program of action. Only the Marian dimension secures the place of affectivity in faith and thus ensures a fully human correspondence to the reality of the Incarnation Logos.”<sup>20</sup> In his comments on Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, Ratzinger writes, “when the Church is understood only institutionally, only in the form of majority decisions and actions, there is no room for the feminine dimension.”<sup>21</sup> The feminine dimension of the Church is about the

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<sup>14</sup> Ratzinger, “Church Movements and their place in Theology,” in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 194.

<sup>15</sup> Ratzinger, “Ecclesial Movements and their Place in Theology,” 23. The institutional dimensions of the Church arise out the charismatic dimensions of the Church, since they relate to sacrament of orders, and “arise from “God’s call to this particular person.”

<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, “Primacy, Episcopacy and Succession Apostolica,” in *God’s Word: Scripture--Tradition—Office* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ratzinger, “Primacy, Episcopacy and Succession Apostolica,” 23.

<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger, “Church Movements and their place in Theology,” 184.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger, “The Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety,” in Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 27

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger, “The Sign of the Woman,” in Ratzinger and Von Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 55.

motherhood of the Church which brings Christ to birth in individuals again and again.<sup>22</sup> This Marian, relational dimension of ecclesiology is what allows the priesthood and apostolic succession to be truly of the Spirit.

In Mary, “as figure and archetype, the Church finds again her own visage as Mother and cannot degenerate into the complexity of a party, an organisation or a pressure group in the service of human interests, even the noblest.”<sup>23</sup> Hence by constantly looking at Mary, the Institution sees the reality of her motherhood continued in the Church and how the Church is born through the “Spirit.” This is what the Institution seeks to uphold and only in seeking to embody and concretise Mary’s openness to the Spirit can it do so.

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<sup>22</sup> Ratzinger, “The Sign of the Woman,” 56.

<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985 ), 108.