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JOSEPH RATZINGER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE COUNCIL
DECREE *AD GENTES* AND ITS RECEPTION IN HIS THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Ratzinger, a *peritus* of Cardinal Frings of Cologne, played a significant role in the work of the sub-commission established during the last year of the Council (1964) to draw up a theology of mission. Its task was to draft a comprehensive document that would do justice to the importance of the subject. Its prehistory began at the preparatory stage of the Council; it included six failed attempts “strewn with ambushes” over five years¹. The chairman of the sub-commission, Fr. Johann Schütte, S.V.D., Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word, persuaded the *peritus* of Cardinal Frings to undertake the redaction of the final document. During the penultimate day of the Council, the document, known as the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, was approved with the highest number of votes of all the sixteen Council docu-

¹ J. Grootaers, *The Drama Continues between the Acts: The 'Second Preparation' and Its Opponents*, in: G. Alberigo and J. A. Komonchak (eds.), *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2: *Formation of the Council's Identity. First Period and Intersession, October 1962-September 1963*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1997, p. 445.



ments². The fact that it was written in the Council's mature period when other crucial documents had already been promulgated was advantageous. The aim of this study is to delineate Ratzinger's contribution to *Ad gentes* and to trace its reception in his post-conciliar teaching on the missions. It starts with a biographical overview to highlight Ratzinger's academic projection which made him the right person for the task during the critical stage of conciliar work on the Decree.

1. BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Joseph Ratzinger arrived in Rome for the Council with Cardinal Frings on the evening of October 9, 1962. The young, 35-year-old, Professor of Fundamental Theology at the University in Bonn was little known outside Germany, but his lectures since 1959 had been attracting droves of students. This was due to his grasp of literature, a phenomenal memory, and the clarity of his thought. His capacity to internalize everything were extraordinary. He was gifted with an amazing intellectual strength to sift through dense material and make clear distinctions between the different positions³. He was well acquainted with Protestant theology but also with the World Religions. Before the Council opened, his name came to the attention of Pope John XXIII in the aftermath of the lecture, *On the Theology of the Council*, delivered by Cardinal Frings at a meeting of European Cardinals in Genoa on November 20, 1961⁴. The Pope was impressed; the opinions expressed corresponded closely with his own thoughts: "What beautiful harmony of thought"⁵. Later in

² In the final vote on December 7, 1965, only five Council Fathers voted against *Ad gentes* (with 2,394 votes in favour).

³ P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life Volume One: Youth in Nazi Germany to the Second Vatican Council 1927–1965*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC 2023, p. 313.

⁴ The context of the meeting was related to the series of lectures on the forthcoming Council which were given by the leading Cardinals at the Christopher Columbus Centre in the Autumn of 1961. Cardinal Frings gave a lecture on the world-situation facing the Church by comparing it with the situation which she had to face at the time of the First Vatican Council 90 years ago. The main biographer of Cardinal Frings, Norbert Trippen, *Josef Kardinal Frings (1877–1978)*, 2 vols. Paderborn: Schöningh 2005 records that their first encounter occurred at a concert. According to his memoirs, Ratzinger recalled that he began to assist Frings after the Cardinal heard a lecture he gave on the theology of Church Councils at the Catholic Academy of Bensberg. Consequently, Ratzinger's ascent as theologian at the universal level was tied to Cardinal Frings, who engaged the young professor from the University in Bonn as his theological adviser. J. Wicks, *Professor Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Chapter in the Life of Pope Benedict XVI*. The Yamauchi Lectures in Religion Series (Spring 2007), New Orleans: Loyola University 2007, p. 2; J. Ratzinger, *Milestones Memoirs 1927–1977*, San Francisco: Ignatius 1998, p. 120.

⁵ As a member of the Central Preparatory Commission of the Council, Cardinal Frings, after his talk in Genoa, was summoned to an audience with the Pope. John XXIII immediately confided

Rome, the Pope summoned Cardinal Frings to an audience to discuss its contents. When Frings entered, the Pope embraced him and congratulated him on the talk. The Cardinal revealed that the real author was Professor Ratzinger: it was an outline of a renewal path for the Church. He was equipped with valuable theological preparation for the conciliar debates. His dissertation was on Augustine's understanding of the Church and his postdoctoral thesis [*Habilitation*] was on Bonaventure's understanding of Revelation as well as his Christocentric theology of history. In Bonaventure's theology of history, Christ is not only the hermeneutical centre of the Bible, but also the centre of all scholarly disciplines⁶. In the talk at Genua, Ratzinger pointed to the serious limitations of traditional Western culture and stressed the necessity for the Church to open herself to the wider variety of humankind so as to become truly "Catholic" or universal. Catholic worship, he argued, needs to break out of its Latin uniformity and grant the diversity of cultural gifts and outlooks the space they needed to flourish and enrich the Church universal. In addition, the "ghost writer" advocated a less centralized government of the Church; bishops could have a greater say in the government of the local Churches. Modern urbanised, industrialised people, he observed, have little contact with nature and so are less aware of the work of the Creator. He postulated that the Council should focus more on the human person, on "human yearnings," which God alone can truly satisfy. He pointed to two notable movements inspired by the Holy Spirit: devotion to Mary and proposals for a liturgical renewal to deepen Christian spirituality⁷.

Cardinal Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, and Chairman of the Fulda Bishops' Conference since 1945, was, in Ratzinger's view, a God-fearing man and "therefore wise"⁸. The Cardinal found in Ratzinger the assistance he needed at the Council. He appointed him officially as his theological adviser in April 1962. Immediately afterwards, Frings forwarded to him the different schemas for the Council,

with smile: „Last night I read your speech. *Che bella coincidenza del pensiero!* [...] You have said everything that I have thought and wanted to say, but was unable to say myself." P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, p. 361.

⁶ R. Voderholzer, *Joseph Ratzinger und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, in: A. R. Batlogg, C. Brodkorb, P. Pfister (eds.), *Erneuerung in Christus. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil (1962–1965) im Spiegel Münchener Kirchenarchive. Begleitband zur Ausstellung des Erzbischöflichen Archivs München, des Archivs der Deutschen Provinz der Jesuiten und des Karl-Rahner-Archivs München anlässlich des 50. Jahrestags der Konzilseröffnung*, Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner 2012, p. 92.

⁷ Jared Wicks, *Professor Ratzinger at Vatican II*, 4. The lecture „Zur Theologie des Konzils," *Catholica* 15 (1961), pp. 292–304 (In Italian in *Concilio ecumenico Vaticano II*, Genoa: Ed. Del Columbianum 1962).

⁸ P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, p. 451.

which had been drafted in Rome⁹. Professor Ratzinger criticized mainly the dry text-book approach in the drafts and solicited the missing beauty of biblical teaching and the richness of the teaching of the early Church Fathers. He noticed the lack of historical awareness of the theological questions and objected the curial drafts based mainly on the teaching of the popes over the last 70 years¹⁰. Ratzinger's conciliar contribution on mission resulted from his overall role on the Council and respectively needs to be treated holistically.¹¹ Ratzinger attended all four sessions as *peritus* keenly interested in the main topics of conciliar debate on: episcopal collegiality, papal authority, the liturgy, the questions of religious freedom, ecumenism and Church approach both to other religions and to secular culture.¹² As a theologian, he shaped the Council in all its phases. But, from the start, it was almost clear that the central issue of the Council would be the Church herself.

Ratzinger emanated personal charm due to his personality of gentleman, his great simplicity and tactfulness. He let the things come to him. His critical analysis was always coupled with concern for the right balance. He thought with his heart and respectively defended the faith of the simple people against the cold religion of the professors¹³. Peter Seewald argues that Ratzinger had never been progressive or conservative in the usual sense. In view of Hansjürgen Verweyen, the professor of Fundamental Theology in Freiburg, Ratzinger always tried to unite tradition and progress, history and the present out of a mystical awareness of faith¹⁴. An

⁹ E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thought*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2018, p. 146. Ratzinger had the ear of Cardinal Frings who asked him in late summer 1962 to be his theological assistant during the Council and sent him the booklet of seven drafts for evaluation just before the Council. In his critical assessment, Ratzinger recognized only two of the drafts on liturgical renewal and ecumenism as satisfying. Ratzinger was officially appointed as one of the over hundreds *periti* at the Council in November 1962. His close associate, the acknowledged expert of Ecumenical Councils, Fr. Hubert Jedin made efforts to inform well Cardinal Frings on the rules for the Council. He made aware of the importance to choose the right members to the committees of the councils. All is decided there and not in the plenary sessions. E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thought*, 391.

¹⁰ J. Wicks, *Professor Ratzinger at Vatican II*, p. 6.

¹¹ Ratzinger's Council participation falls into three parts: The assistance to Cardinal Frings by preparing his oral comments in the Council meetings; the composing of „alternative” texts as more better bases for discussion than the first official draft texts; and the work in the service of commissions of the Council by entering revisions into draft texts in the preparation for voting and promulgation as final conciliar documents. J. Wicks, *Professor Ratzinger at Vatican II*, p. 1.

¹² J. Wilkins, *Ratzinger at Vatican II. A Pope Who Can & Cannot Change*, „Commonweal Magazine” May 31, 2010. from <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/ratzinger-vatican-ii> [access: 21.05.2023].

¹³ P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, p. 417.

¹⁴ P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, p. 456. He claimed that if there had been a change in Ratzinger, it was not in 1968 but between the third and fourth session of the Council.

aesthete who strived for harmony and liked better to be silent than to speak, able to surprise and always knew to go to the core of the matter. He realized that there are people who do not seek the Truth but modernity.

Ratzinger stood behind Cardinal Frings, his patron called as the *éminence grise* of the Vatican II. The Cardinal of Cologne became the leader and spokesman of the discontent German and European bishops about the way the Council was being prepared¹⁵. He made 17 oral interventions on the Council topics and as a senior cardinal was often among the first to address a subject. The first revolutionary act was the contesting of the pseudo-elections of the members to the ten planned commissions. Ratzinger saw in it a sign that the Council decided to act independently not to be degraded only to the *status* of mere executive organ of the preparatory commissions. Frings was an influential Council Father who as the founder of the German bishops' relief agencies *Misereor* and *Adveniat* gained supporters from the mission countries of South America and beyond.

On the vigil of the opening of the Council significant was Ratzinger's talk to the German speaking bishops at *Collegio S. Maria dell'Anima* on the first text in the booklet of drafts "The Sources of revelation" (Tradition & Scripture) where he questioned the approach focused on human discovery of God. He deemed as essential to follow the Scriptures that start with God; with God's initiative to communicate humanity which precedes human witness to God. Ratzinger's focus was Christ as the mediator and the centre and totality of the revelation. The role of Ratzinger was that of a "constructive agitator" who based on his biblical and Church fathers' approach could offer better integrated and more vibrant vision of Christianity. His positive approach anchored in the Word of God and tradition has more pastoral style, treating scripture as source of Christian vitality¹⁶. As consultant of the preparatory commissions, he was aware how different from Pope's John XXIII was thinking of the Roman Curia. Eventually, the rejection of the prepared schemata was the turning point since "the true must be said openly without concealing." Ratzinger himself knew that the Truth is not determined by a majority vote¹⁷.

Already before the opening of the Council Ratzinger was able to provide a positive vision of the purpose of the Council in the Spirit of the Pope John XXIII. He stressed the yearning for God present in the human heart and directed it towards Jesus Christ who only can bring the inner renewal and reform in the Church. The Council should raise the desire for God.¹⁸ On August 29, 1962 Frings invited Ratzinger to accompany him to Rome and asked him to prepare report on the doctrinal schemas, especially on Divine revelation. In his critical

¹⁵ P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, p. 329.

¹⁶ J. Wicks, *Professor Ratzinger at Vatican II*, p. 9.

¹⁷ P. Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, p. 366.

¹⁸ E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI*, p. 148.

stand to the schema on revelation, he stressed an essential point that also applied to the missions, namely that at the origin of revelation is God who in his goodness decided to reveal himself to the men through his incarnate Word. Thus, the very sources of revelation is God himself before its historical formulations in Scriptures and Tradition as he already analysed in his habitation on Bonaventure. The essence is the proclamation of God's saving action to the world regardless of theological schools.¹⁹ The debate on the schemata on revelation showed the new approach from the Pacelli's Church – generally hostile to modernity, to a Church friendly to humanity. Although Ratzinger himself reveal gradual inner shift from the optimistic theology of incarnation towards the theology of the cross. After the first session of the Council, Ratzinger received proposal to take over the chair of dogmatics in Münster, his favorite subject. He accepted the post mainly in the aftermath of the experienced distrust from the members of the faculty in Bonn. At the same time, Ratzinger welcomed the given by Pope Paul VI decisively Christ-centered orientation for the Council²⁰.

Fr. Schütte the member of the Commission *De Ecclesia* knew that co-opting Ratzinger as *peritus* to his Sub-commission entails a great advantage for the drafting of the missionary document. He had a thorough overview of the whole conciliar process since he was involved in drafting of other fundamental conciliar documents²¹. In his comment to the first chapters on the schema *De Ecclesia*, Ratzinger questioned the definition of the Church as “the Church militant” in favour of a “pilgrim Church”. He essentially understood the Church as Eucharistic community (*communio*)²². He emphasized the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist and saw it as fundamental for the nature and mission of the Church. He opposed the visible attempt to merely canonize the dominant Roman neo-scholastic theology at the Council. During the debate on the schema on the Church on the second session of the Council, Ratzinger pointed out its positive

¹⁹ For the debate on the revelation essential was the alternative text proposed by Rahner-Ratzinger in large circulation which led to the rejection of the official text due to the intervention of John XXIII.

²⁰ E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI*, p. 159.

²¹ Ratzinger presents this perspective in the Commentary to *Ad gentes*, where he discusses the presence of the mission idea in the overall teaching of the Ecumenical Council, especially in *Lumen Gentium*, pp. 13–17: J. Ratzinger, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, in: J. Schütte (ed.), *Mission nach dem Konzil*, Mainz: Matthias Grünewald 1967. Ratzinger also wrote and analyzed the content-rich Council reports of the theological debates which appeared in the Bachem publishing house in Cologne and later in American-English translation under title *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*.

²² Ratzinger developed the Eucharistic Ecclesiology in the very early days of his first studies and established the eucharistic communion as the culminating point of ecclesial communion and origin of the mission of the Church. P. Blanco, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger: Nuclear Ideas*, „Theology Today” 68 (2011), no. 2, p. 167.

elements like pastoral orientation and ecumenical sensitivity. However, Ratzinger's main contribution to the theological part related to bishops and to an inadequate eschatological perspective. His main point was that the Church is not self-enclosed institution defined once and for all but rather a journey and represents the history of God with mankind implying the eschatological vision, which makes the Church free from the worldly institutions. In the matter of bishops, he intended to free them from the excessive juridical burden accumulated over the centuries and to restore the original spiritual structure of the Church. He emphasized that the Apostolic College of Twelves who became after the Easter Apostles that is envoys who are sent. Apart from that, this situates the successor of Peter organically in the community of bishops. The primacy conferred Him directly by the Lord is a special mission for keeping his brethren united. Consequently, the responsibility of bishops is not only for their local Church but for the whole Church²³. He advocated the permanent diaconate as good balance between the sacramental table and the table of the word as well as an expression of the dynamism of the Church in missions. Also, the debate on the religious Liberty was related to the mission activity on the fourth session. In Ratzinger's view if the Christian faith vigorously asserts the freedom to conduct mission activity throughout the world, then logically one cannot deny the freedom of belief as a fundamental form of religious practice even in countries having an ancient Christian tradition. Consequently, the idea of mission ends up being at the origin of the concept of religious liberty.

2. JOSEPH RATZINGER THE *PERITUS* ON THE SUB-COMMISSION FOR MISSIONS

The decision of the Council to transform the propositions on the missionary activity of the Church into a complete conciliar Decree on Mission Activity opened a new hope for the mission activity at the Council in which Joseph Ratzinger was to play the primary role. In 1973, Cardinal Frings in his memoir recalled the decisive phase of the debate on the third session in early November 1964: The most interesting were the negotiations on the *Propositions*. The Holy Father himself had been persuaded to come to the conciliar hall and recommend the existing text. He did so. But on the following day, the discussion began and a whole series of speakers from different parts of the world came forward and described the draft as too thin and demanded a new version. I also took part in the discussion and gave a speech against the mission schema which I had worked out with Father Schütte, the General of the Steyler Missionaries. The schema was

²³ E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI*, p. 162.

then reworked in the sense of the criticism presented, with Ratzinger's eager collaboration²⁴. Johann Schütte was named by the chairman Cardinal Agagianian, as vice-chairman of the Commission for the Missions.

A new Sub-commission was established to draft a Mission Decree on November 16, 1964. It was composed of five members under the leadership of Fr. Schütte²⁵. It started immediately its work on a new draft text. The crucial decision of the Sub-commission was to form an appropriate equipe of experts who could face the challenging task. On the wish list of the chairman was the widely recognized theological expert of Cardinal Frings, Joseph Ratzinger²⁶. Norbert Trippen, the Frings's biographer commented: He [Schütte as a close friend of the Cardinal Frings] was not only capable to win Cardinal Frings over to the idea of a separate missionary decree, but also secured the cooperation of his *peritus*, Joseph Ratzinger, who took part in two commission meetings at Lake Nemi near Rome and contributed a draft of the Theological Basis of Mission²⁷.

The presence of Joseph Ratzinger among the *periti* was also questioned²⁸. Antoon Thijssen, Bishop of Larantuka in Indonesia, upon hearing that Fr. Ratzinger was among the experts, doubted whether it was the right choice. In his letter to Superior General Fr. Schütte he argued that Ratzinger represented a defeatist theology of substitution, which saw the future of Catholicism in small, active and

²⁴ N. Trippen, *Josef Kardinal Frings (1887–1978)*, vol. 2: *Sein Wirken für die Weltkirche und seine letzten Bischofsjahre* (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, Reihe B: Forschungen, vol. 104), Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2005, pp. 436–437.

²⁵ In the Sub-commission were four bishops representing four continents. There were in order of the highest number of votes: Jean Zoa, Archbishop of Yaoundé from Cameroon; José Lecuona, Bishop and Superior General of the Spanish Seminary for Foreign Missions in Burgos; Stanislaus Lokuang, Bishop of Tainan from Taiwan and Vitus Riobé, Bishop of Orléans from France. *Nuntius SVD*, vol. VIII, 1964, fasc. 1, p. 75.

²⁶ Fr. Henri de Lubac made a note on Ratzinger as a recognized expert: „We should invite at least Dr. Ratzinger, a theologian as peaceful as he is competent to collaborate with the drafting team of the schema.” H. de Lubac, *Quaderni del Concilio*, Milan: Editoriale Jaca Book 2009, p. 854.

²⁷ R. Voderholzer, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 102. In a letter of July 4, 1963, Fr. Schütte thanked Cardinal Frings for visiting Nemi and invited him again to come. He was grateful for the Cardinal's interest in the Society and its missionary commitment. Cardinal assured him about his personal closeness during difficult time of convalescence after the operation in Los Angeles, March 25, 1964. AG SVD (Archivio Generale SVD, Rome) 25: Corrispondenza Superiori Generali. Later Frings Frings recalled: „I also joined the discussion and gave a speech against the Propositions (October 1964) which I had worked out with Fr. Schütte [...]. The schema was later revised in accordance with the made criticisms and with the zealous collaboration of Professor Ratzinger,” N. Trippen, *Josef Kardinal Frings (1887–1978)*, vol. 2, p. 437.

²⁸ J. B. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology of the Paschal mystery. The historical-doctrinal genesis of Ad gentes I, 2–5*, *Analecta Gregoriana: Series Facultatis Theologiae B - 84*, Rome: Pontificia Univ. Gregoriana 1988, p. 205, note 26.

conscious groups of Catholics. Perhaps a better solution, he suggested, would be Fr. Daniélou²⁹. Fr. Schütte explained that he was wrong about Ratzinger. Schütte claimed that only Karl Rahner was a proponent of substitutionary theology and probably Bp. Thijssen had confused Rahner with Ratzinger³⁰ who had a refined understanding of missions³¹. From the start of the Council, Ratzinger worked together with Rahner on the Divine revelation. Ratzinger soon realized the difference between his liturgical-patristic orientation and the abstract-theoretical orientation of the Jesuit³². Ratzinger lived during the last years of the Council (1964-1965) between Münster and Rome and in the following year he changed university again for Tübingen at Hans Küng's insistence. Both were cordial colleagues and members of the newly established international theological journal of Council theologians *Concilium* but soon they roads diverged³³. The University of Tübingen under the influence of Ernst Bloch underwent transformation full of consequences; the faith «yielded its role as salvific force to politics». The theological faculty became affected by the Marxist messianism and the tense atmosphere – when the professor would be interrupted by students' whistles – disturbed Ratzinger from serene and industrious theological research and induced him to move to the newly opened University in Regensburg in 1969. Later Ratzinger confessed that “Anyone who wanted to remain a progressive in that context had to give up his integrity”³⁴.

²⁹ Bp. Thijssen to General Schütte, St. Augustin, December 9, 1964, AG SVD: 25/10. Jesuit Jean Daniélou (1905–1974) - French theologian, cardinal, and pioneer of the renewal of Catholic theology by returning to biblical sources.

³⁰ Schütte to Thijssena, St. Augustin, January 4, 1965. AG SVD: 25/10.

³¹ The concept of vicarious representation (*Stellvertretung*) is central to Joseph Ratzinger's thought, mainly in the early thought (ca. 1958–1965). He uses it, with its correlative concept of pro-existence, to develop a theology in which „the few” are the starting point from which God saves „the many.” Ch. Ruddy, ‘*For the Many*’: *The Vicarious-Representative Heart of Joseph Ratzinger's Theology*, „Theological studies” 75 (2014), fasc. 3, pp. 564–584.

³² E. Guerriero et al., *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. XXVI: *I cattolici e le chiese cristiane durante il pontificato di Giovanni Paolo II, 1978–2005*, Milano: San Paolo 2006, p. 310.

³³ Ratzinger's understanding of the Church questioned that of Hans Küng who viewed Church as council assembly (*concilium*). This different definition of the relationship between the Church and the Council led to a remarkable consequence after the end of the Council, which had the utmost importance for the reception of the Council. The theologians who were close to the Küng's direction of interpretation gathered around the internationally published journal *Concilium* (founded in 1965), and already expressed with this title that they understood the Church primarily as the continuing permanent Council. Joseph Ratzinger, who initially had contributed to *Concilium* up to 1967, in the following years joined forces with Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac and other like-minded theologians. They started the international Catholic journal with the equally programmatic additional title *Communio* (1972). R. Voderholzer, *Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 97.

³⁴ J. Wilkins, *Ratzinger at Vatican II*, p. 3.

Ratzinger was directly involved in the preparation of the 10 speeches for the Cardinal Frings on the issue of doctrine. He was included as the theological *peritus* into Sub-commission for the Missions in November 20, 1964³⁵ and formed with Congar the best tandem that guaranteed intense collaboration in favour of the doctrinal foundations of the missionary document. However, the Armenian Cardinal Agagianian, the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide* though accepted Ratzinger as *peritus* had objections against Fr. Congar who was backed by Bishops Riobé and Sartre. He preferred as expert a canonist Fr. Reuter³⁶. There were six *peritus* in the Sub-commission for Mission and from the old Commission for Missions remained only two: Frs. Seumois and Grasso³⁷. The key *periti* Congar and Ratzinger requested time to rewrite *ex novo* the text on the theological foundations of mission which was rejected by the conciliar Fathers in November 1964. Joseph Ratzinger emphasised: "I will have to meditate on this before I can write anything"³⁸.

The Congar's theological group with Mons. Riobé and Seumois met for first time in the working session in Paris on December 13, 1964. Congar submitted to them the outline of the schema *De Missionibus* grounded on thorough study of certain conciliar and other documents. He consulted the missiological experts Xavier Seumois and Josef Glazik and they met again in an enlarged group with the Swiss, Fr. Leonhard Kaufmann of the White Fathers, and the German missiologist Fr. Glazik in Strasbourg on December 19-20³⁹. The plan of the schema on missions was agreed so that Congar completed the doctrinal chapter for the schema on December 29. Whereas Ratzinger sent his proposal of the draft to Fr. Schütte on the last day of the year with the following explanations: Reverend Father General! I am sure you are very disappointed that you had to wait so long for my draft text on the theological foundation of the missions which I had promised for mid-December. But the number of appointments that assailed me one after another in Münster was so high that only now, during the holidays, after my escape from there, I was able to begin to do something reasonable at all. After some deliberations, I have refrained from writing a complete text of the schema but instead I am sending you in Latin only a compilation of the thoughts and viewpoints which, in my opinion, a mission schema should contain. I thought

³⁵ G. Valente, *Ratzinger al Vaticano II*, Milano: San Paolo Edizioni 2013, p. 141.

³⁶ In the end, Riobé took the matter into his own hands and so Congar was admitted as *peritus* with the unanimous decision of the members of the Sub-commission.

³⁷ Among the *periti* were: Yves Congar, Xavier Seumois, Domenico Grasso, Joseph Neuner, Josef Glazik and Joseph Ratzinger.

³⁸ During an interview with Cardinal Ratzinger at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on July 10, 1984 he confirmed that he collaborated with Congar in responding to the *modi* for Chapter I, J. B. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology*, p. 192.

³⁹ Y. Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, Dublin: Liturgical Press 2012, p. 698.

this was a better way, not only because there would not have been enough time for a polished text, but also because, as I believe, this more provisional and open draft would be more helpful at this time. For in it, the reasons that move you and the contexts that you have in mind can perhaps be made more explicit than might happen in a final text; moreover, the whole draft text remains wide-open as a basis for discussion and does not yet commit to anything. So, I hope that you will agree with this alternative solution, especially since I believe that based on this compilation it will be relatively easy to formulate a schema text, if only the viewpoints that have been brought forward have found agreement⁴⁰.

THE SUB-COMMISSION IN SESSION AT NEMI, JANUARY 12-26, 1965

Fr. Schütte offered as the venue for the essential work the beautifully located summer house of the General Administration SVD and Centre of Spiritual Renewal located in a small town Nemi distant 32 km southeast from Rome⁴¹. There took place two decisive meetings, the first of the Sub-commission on January 1965 and then the plenary meeting of the entire Commission for Missions at the end of March, 1965.

Ratzinger absent at the first meeting sent his considerations which impressed as a document of high theological calibre. The remarkably busy German *peritus* delivered text of ca. 5,200 words drafted in a Latin⁴², which referred to the first

⁴⁰ Ratzinger to Schütte, University Münster, December 31, 1964. AG SVD, Nachlass: Johann Schütte. He also clarified the impediments on his way to Nemi: „As far as the meeting in Nemi is concerned, unfortunately, I have only been able to overcome the lesser part of the scheduling difficulties that stand in the way of my arrival. The retreat I am to give in Oelenberg in Alsace from January 1–7, I have only been able to cut back so far that I will leave Oelenberg on January 7, 1965 - early enough to fly from Zürich to Rome, where I will arrive at 2:50 p.m. On the other hand, I have only been able to limit my appointment in Munich to the extent that I must be in Munich on the evening on January 9, 1965. That is why I am forced to leave Rome at 12:55 p.m. on that day. So, unfortunately, I can only be with you all day on January 8, 1965; I hope that this will be enough to discuss the most important theological questions as I have outlined in my draft.” As it turned out, Professor Ratzinger was not able to attend the Sub-commission meeting in Nemi.

⁴¹ It enjoyed a picturesque view of the volcanic lake within the Alban Hills known as the Castelli Romani.

⁴² The original text *Considerations* regarding the theological foundation of the Church's mission was found in the personal Council archive of Fr. Congar by James B. Anderson while working on his dissertation. The Latin version of the text *Considerationes quoad fundamentum theologicum missionis Ecclesiae* as attachment was published by Anderson in his dissertation, *A Vatican II pneumatology of the Paschal mystery*, 301–304. The English translation with explanatory notes appeared, in: J. Wicks, *Six texts by Professor Joseph Ratzinger as peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, „Gregorianum” 89 (2008), no. 2, pp. 285–291. A copy of the typewritten text of five sheets is deposited in ASV, Conc. Vat. II b. 1096, fasc. 5/A, n.n. The full

chapter on the foundations for the mission activity. In the minutes of the drafting Sub-commission *pro novo redigendo textu schematis* of 12 January we read that as for the theological part, the Sub-commission expressed its *placet* for the outline proposed by Father Congar, adding, however, that in it must be recovered and inserted certain ideas of Fr. Ratzinger.

Ratzinger discussed the Church in mission doctrinally, from its basis in God, the work of Christ, the apostolic message, and the life and worship of communities assembled by those who proclaim the Gospel. Ratzinger's short text re-connected the missionary activity of the Church to the mission of the Son into the world, which is continued by the Church. Thus, it became clear that being missionary is part of the very essence of the Church⁴³.

The Sub-commission urgently needed Ratzinger's doctrinal text, counted among his six main contributions for the Vatican II. His text on missions constituted a small gem of theological exposition. The final version of the conciliar text allows to trace some of the elements present in Ratzinger's *Considerationes*, starting with the paradigmatic reference to the mission of the Son as "sent" by the Father⁴⁴. Fr. Congar was very much supported by the clear thinking of Professor Ratzinger. Both shared a consonance of views, which objected to the narrow idea of mission considering true missionary activity in the classical sense, or was blocked by the prospects of the Münster school of missiology, influenced by the thought of mission as the Salvation of Souls or of the Louvain school of *Plantatio Ecclesiae* – the establishment of the visible Church in those regions where it does not yet exist. In their opinion, this approach ended up reducing everything to technical and jurisdictional issues, linked to the management of "mission territories". Instead, it was necessary to start from a theological, or rather Trinitarian, foundation of mission, and then take into consideration the different contexts and circumstances in which the mission is realised⁴⁵.

But as mentioned, there was opposition to the text as well. The drafters of former texts such as A. Seumois and L. Buijs were not satisfied with the text and wanted it to be rejected⁴⁶. However, they were often isolated, by the interventions

version of the Latin text has been republished and commented in an essay by P. Doria, *Il Ruolo del teologo Joseph Ratzinger durante il Concilio nella documentazione dell'Archivio del Concilio Vaticano II*, „CVII-Centro Vaticano II. Studi e Ricerche, Rivista del Centro studi e ricerche sul Concilio Vaticano II,” VI (2012), no. I., pp. 19–34.

⁴³ R. Voderholzer, Joseph Ratzinger, p. 102.

⁴⁴ G. Valente, *Ratzinger al Vaticano II*, p. 146.

⁴⁵ G. Criveller, *La teologia della missione. Dal Concilio Vaticano II (1963–1965) alla 'Redemptoris Missio' (1990)*, Monza, Settembre 18, 2012, p. 1.

⁴⁶ R. Buijs has placed the whole schema and drafted it under the sign of Canon Law and he was in line with Armando Reuter and André Seumois. J. B. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology*, p. 131.

of among others Lokuang, which were quite often counterproductive. It was said that Fr. Schütte as chairman insisted much on the unanimity of the Commission in voting to get major endorsement in presentation to the Council Fathers.

SCHÜTTE-RATZINGER CORRESPONDENCE IN FEBRUARY 1965

Fr. Schütte, the chairmen desired to meet with Ratzinger personally before the plenary session. In a letter to Ratzinger, he wrote on February 3, 1965: The first theological chapter was mainly prepared by Fr. Congar, who partly used your thoughts. Personally, I would be very interested to discuss with you the first chapter before the plenary session of the Commission and possibly work out some improvements. On February 19, I will be present in Aachen for a Meeting of Central Committee on Distribution of Development Aid. If the time is convenient for you, I would come to Münster afterwards or before to discuss the questions with you⁴⁷.

Ratzinger conveyed in response of February 8: "I would like to thank you for your kind express letter of February 3, 1965, which I received at about the same time as the new draft of the mission schema. Due to my absence from a lecturers' conference in Heidelberg, at which I had to give a lecture, I am unfortunately only able to reply today. If it is possible for you, it would be more convenient for me to receive you after February 19, i.e., on February 20 or 21, than before, because I already have several appointments in the days before. Moreover, in the case of a later visit, I would be able to study the text of the scheme more thoroughly. In case the date before 19th should be more convenient for you, I would be still available"⁴⁸.

Afterwards, Ratzinger sent Telegram notifications on March 26: "I arrive on Saturday, March 27: at 3:20 p.m. at Fiumicino airport"⁴⁹. In his historical visit at Nemi Ratzinger as Benedict XVI made a personal reference to Fr. Schütte: "I remember first of all the Superior General at that time, Fr Schütte, who had suffered in China, and had been condemned, then expelled. He was full of missionary dynamism, of the need to give the missionary spirit a new impetus. And he had me invited, a very young theologian of no importance, I do not know why. But it was a great gift for me"⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Schütte to Ratzinger, February 3, 1965; Ratzinger to Schütte, Münster, February 8, 1965. Ratzinger accepted the proposed meeting on February 19 but it could be as well on February 20–21, 1965. Schütte was in Germany February 16–26, 1965 and stayed in Münster on February 19 when the blessing of the Arnold Janssen College took place. AG SVD: 25: Corrispondenza Superiori Generali - Schütte.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger to Schütte, Münster, February 8, 1965. AG SVD: 25.

⁴⁹ AG SVD: 25.

⁵⁰ *The Words of Pope Benedict XVI*, AG SVD: 17th General Chapter, Nemi, June 17 – July 15, 2012, Folder III: Visit the Pope Benedict.

PLENARY MEETING OF WHOLE COMMISSION, MARCH 29-APRIL 3, 1965

During the second plenary meeting of the whole Mission Commission in Nemi at the end of March 1965, Fr. Congar made some caustic remarks on several members of the Commission except for Ratzinger: "He is reasonable, modest, disinterested, a great help"⁵¹. There was a good chemistry between the two top theologians during in the beautiful scenery of the Castelli Romani. After the meeting, the Fr. Heribert Schauf, systematist and canonist noted in his diary on April 4, 1965 that Ratzinger emerged after working session on the scheme *De Missionibus* held in the vicinity of Nemi⁵².

The wholly new schema based on a theological foundation corresponded to the modern mission scholarship and, in that respect, it marked a progress from a backward-looking to a forward-looking document.⁵³ During the debate from 7 to 12 October on the third session of the Council, Cardinal Frings came out for retaining of the old "classical" idea of the mission, whereas the Jesuit new General, Fr. Arrupe harshly criticized the practice of the past. There was no dearth of unresolved problems: the relations of the orders, which till now were the chief agents of missionary work, to the native clergy and to both the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith; financing; and competition with non-Catholic missions.

The work performed by Congar and Ratzinger related to the theological part was appreciated with its emphasised focus on the Church's vocation to spread the Gospel. Many shared the opinion that the announcement of the Gospel would be an adequate antidote to the growing materialism in the world.

The new schema drafted by Yves Congar with vigorous support of Ratzinger and Neuner passed without difficulty in the the Coordinating Commission and was sent to all Council Fathers in the middle of June 1965⁵⁴. On October 7, 1965,

⁵¹ „Fr. A. Seumois really is an ass. He has His set of ideas; he has his answers all prepared [...]. Whatever does not coincide with his idea, his formula, is empty, stupid, useless, to be rejected [...]. Mgr. Yago says nothing and appears to be very bored [...]. Mgr. Perrin scarcely follows what is going on and is no help.” Y. Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, p. 746.

⁵² D. Burkard, J. Bürkle (eds.), *Konzil in der Perspektive. Heribert Schauf und sein Tagebuch zum II. Vatikanum (1960–1965)* Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2022, p. 291. Heribert Schauf (1910–1988) was since 1960 consultant of the „Theological Commission” preparing the Second Vatican Council and from 1962 onwards Council *peritus* of various commissions, represented the „Roman School” at the Council. In his disputes with the theologians Joseph Ratzinger, Hans Küng, Karl Rahner and Walter Kasper, he distinguished himself as a contentious exponent of a clerical-hierarchical ecclesiasticism.

⁵³ G. Adriányi, *The History of the Church*, vol. X: *The Church in the Modern Age*, New York: Crossroad 1981, p. 142.

⁵⁴ A. Melloni, *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II*, vol. 5: *Concilio di transizione. Il quarto periodo e la conclusione del Concilio (1965)*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2001, p. 436.

on the fourth session of the Council started the discussion in aula on the new missionary schema. On the following day⁵⁵, Cardinal Frings praised the new mission schema and thereby indirectly lauded the work of his *peritus* Ratzinger engaged in the revision of the text. Frings underlined the solid theological reasons for mission activity: “the Missions must continue, for the good of the whole human family in which the Church has to show forth its life and worship as saving and dynamically growing”⁵⁶. Cardinal Döpfner observed that even so critical person as Rahner accepted the text enthusiastically.

The editorial group of the Sub-commission with Congar, Lokuang, and Ratzinger convened again at Nemi within October 19-21, 1965. There was still an amount of work to face. Fr. Congar jotted down on October 19, 1965: “Departure at 8:00 for the house of the Divine Word Fathers, from where a car took us to Nemi: a not very powerful car, or very fast. The little group for the revision of Chapter I consisted of: Mgr. Lokuang, Ratzinger, Congar. At Nemi, Italian TV was there for our arrival and the beginning of the meeting [...]. Despite the agreeable character of the group, and cordial hospitality of Fr. Schütte, I had a certain sense of loneliness-and also of lassitude. Once again to take one's bag and go [...]. Once again to take up texts, read the criticism, search for formulations, insertions for the formulas [...] Extremely wearisome”⁵⁷.

Fr. Vincent Twomey SVD one of regular participants of the annual meetings of Ratzinger's *Schülerkreis* (doctoral students) shared Ratzinger's opinion on Fr. Schütte during the meeting at Sankt Peter, Black Forrest in 1993. Ratzinger, then the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said that Fr. Schütte made on him a deep impression as the chairmen of *Ad gentes* Commission in Nemi⁵⁸. Professor Ratzinger worked for third time at Nemi in the Sub-commission for the *expensio modorum* of the *Textus Emandatus* on

⁵⁵ He praised the profound and wide-ranging explanation of the theological foundation of the missionary activity of the Church which lies in the very essence of the Church. This is urgent since today not a few wonder whether missionary activity is still necessary when it is claimed that salvation is possible outside the visible aggregation to the Church. In this crisis of missionary conscience, it is insufficient to repeat only the old formulas. He came forward with two remarks.

⁵⁶ J. Wicks, *Professor Ratzinger at Vatican II*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Y. Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, pp. 816–817.

⁵⁸ Ratzinger remembered how on one occasion during the recreation, Fr. Schütte told the Commission members how he had „written” a theology of mission in the morning and a novel in the afternoon during his „daily work” on dissertation. He spoke also about his solitary confinement in China and how on release from prison, he went straight to the University of Münster to write out and publish his theology of mission. Someone asked: „What about your novel?” To the amusement of the group, Fr. Schütte replied, „I never tried to publish that!” In his address to the SVD 17th General Chapter (2012, in Nemi), Pope Benedict XVI again expressed his great admiration for Fr. Schütte. *The Words of Pope Benedict XVI*, AG SVD: 17th General Chapter, Nemi, 17 June – 15 July, 2012, Folder III: Visit the Pope Benedict.

November 12-13, 1965. The group composed of Bp. Lokuang, Congar and Ratzinger worked on the *modi* for the chapter one. They introduced a very large number of stylistic and textual improvements as suggested in the *modi*. Besides, the group in its proceeding provided a rather detailed answers in response to the *modi*⁵⁹. Ratzinger was appointed at the last moment to check the citations of *Ad gentes* according to the critical editions, though the time was short. He was asked to verify the quotation referring to John Chrysostom of note 19 in section 4 of the textus *Promulgatus* (December 1-7, 1965). He confirmed the correctness of the citation and qualified it as theological progress⁶⁰.

3. RATZINGER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONTENTS OF *AD GENTES*

After the presentation of the events leading to the inclusion of Professor Ratzinger as *peritus* on the Sub-commission for the Mission, this section intends to discuss his contribution to the contents of the Mission Decree starting from his historical awareness of mission problem in the context of global developments.

RATZINGER'S HISTORICAL AWARENESS

Ratzinger reported from the discussions on the friendly acceptance of the new mission schema in October 1965. The schema in six chapters provided missions with a new theological foundation and indicated the newly redefined missionary path to follow. Then, he outlined his understanding of the problem horizon being at the base of the texts and of the debate, namely the sensed crisis of the mission idea because of ever more perceived profound changes in the religious consciousness. He observed how the motives valid for mission activity in the previous centuries – above all that of Christ in the center as the only provider of salvation – which gave rise to compelling mission activity – were in decline and lost their strength and relevance⁶¹. In the meantime, a new concept has become more and more explicit, namely that of God able to save humanity outside the visible borders of the Church though ultimately no without her. Furthermore, there was noticeable an optimistic understanding of the world religions as alternative vehicles of salvation, even if this optimistic view seems to be hardly

⁵⁹ J. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology*, p. 209.

⁶⁰ J. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology*, p. 267. St. John Chrysostom insists on the newness of the Holy Spirit's mission on Pentecost, Homily 10, 1 (PG 62, 75).

⁶¹ J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, Köln: Verlag J. P. Bachem 1966, p. 59.

compatible with biblical evaluation⁶². The turning question emerged whether the mission does not have to wait for its one tides.

The internal crisis of mission has been related to the lacking external rootedness of Christianity in Asian context, where the mission work was practically regarded as export of the Western Christianity reduced there to the fringe zones. At this point, the crisis of the missionary idea made the mission as most urgent. Despite these historical shortcomings, the mission idea had taken roots all over the world⁶³. Ratzinger pointed to the enormous appeal of the Marxist ideas and the stunning conquests of communism. In conclusion, he spotted in this a visible tendency towards the unification of humankind. Religious disunity has become an anachronism, even on the surface. Regardless of the theological question regarding the salvation of the individuals, the simple internal dynamics of history and of the human being – that is ultimately related to the fate and salvation of historically living humanity – seemed to make mission as something necessary. The unification of humanity is inconceivable only in the economic and technical terms. It demands also the unity of the spirit implying the relation to God. Ratzinger based on the modern scientific research highlighted the ascending history of humanity and its openness to the Absolute. The faith points to the purpose of the world assuming the actual union of everything with God, that only God alone can accomplish⁶⁴. The lack of the spiritual unity could result in the self-destruction of the humanity. If such thoughts, which detach Christianity from an individualistically narrow perspective and see it more strongly from the perspective of the historical interconnectedness of humankind, are thought through further, it may well be possible to see anew in an unexpected way how much mission is also necessary for humanity today in a true sense of salvation⁶⁵.

THE *FUNDAMENTUM PRIMUM* OF THE MISSION

Ratzinger's *Considerations quoad fundamentum theologicum missionis Ecclesiae* submitted to the Sub-commission reveal the theological density of doctrinal themes which should find in the Decree on Missionary Activity clear and

⁶² The early exposure of Ratzinger to world religions, his conversation with Paul Hacker, an Indologist at Bonn, interest in comparative studies of religions were a tremendous source of inspiration and help as conciliar peritus. V. Twomey, *Ratzinger on the Anthropological basis for mission*, „Annales Theologici” 30 (2016), p. 103.

⁶³ J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, p. 61.

⁶⁴ The final breakthrough happened in Jesus Christ, who „grants the world what it could never achieve on its own, namely becoming one with God. The history receives its meaning in Christ, who influences history though the ‘representative’ or vicarious nature of His sacrificial act. The task of the Church is to make the Christ event present in history.” V. Twomey, „Ratzinger on the Anthropological Basis for Mission,” p. 104.

⁶⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Die letzte Sitzungsperiode des Konzils*, p. 63.

punctual exposition. He proposed an explicit distinction between *Fundamentum Primum* and *Fundamenta Secundaria* of the mission activity. The center of the first foundation of the mission is Christological emphasis inseparable from Trinitarian since Trinity is the first and deepest source of every mission theology as presented in the Gospel of St. John⁶⁶. This is supremely expressed in the twin missions for our salvation of God's own Son and the Holy Spirit who continues that same mission⁶⁷. Ratzinger explicitly referred to the key concept of *missus* in Johannine Christology "Christ is essentially sent "who depends wholly upon the Father and who represents the Father totally", "the Son can do nothing by himself" (Jn 5:19)⁶⁸. Ratzinger's Christology of mission exposes God as *bonum diffusivum sui* [the good pouring itself forth]. He identified the basis of all missionary activity as the outpouring of God's goodness and love.

THE SECONDARY FOUNDATION OF MISSION

From the Christological-trinitarian level results logically the ecclesiological level. In the *Fundamenta secundaria missionis*, Ratzinger considered the physonomy of the Church in her inherent relation to Christ. As a result, the Church does not go on mission by her own power, but it is Christ himself who received the fullness of charity from the Father and works through the Church and draws men's hearts to himself and to the Father⁶⁹. The mission is primarily a witness to divine love, which has shown itself in Christ. Thus, mission is not a work of conquest but a movement of *caritas* intending to give God's own saving gifts and blessings to others. The mission springs forth as a reflection of the attractiveness of grace and is foremost movement of love "handing itself over" to others. Accordingly, the mission of the Church is not self-producing but the continuation of Son's mission in the Church as the Body of Christ. Church that is silent or preoccupied with promoting and increasing only herself is not the Church of Christ. Therefore, the mission is not an optional activity but the sole *raison d'être* of the Church as the proclamation of Christ in her history. The secondary foundations of the mission is the Church's witness to the divine Truth (*Eritis mihi testes*) against the lies of the prince of this world. The Church holds a universal mission; obedience to the Mission is also to be understood (*intelligenda*) as *signum eschatologicum*, because the recipients of the proclamation are invited

⁶⁶ E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI*, p. 177.

⁶⁷ In his opinion the source of every mission theology draws on the Holy Trinity itself by referring to the task entrusted by the Father to the Son for the salvation of the world and consequently to the work of the Holy Spirit who continues the same mission (Jn, 16: 17).

⁶⁸ J. Wicks, *Six texts*, p. 286.

⁶⁹ G. Valente, *Ratzinger al Vaticano II*, p. 143.

to salvation⁷⁰, which is not identified with worldly goods. The salvation of men constitutes therefore the “true foundation” of missionary activity. For Ratzinger *opus missionum* is the execution of the divine economy. The culmination of the Church’s work is the offering of the divine liturgy, in which the Church asks God himself to show his power and glory⁷¹.

THE SYNTHESIS OF MISSIONARY PROCLAMATION

The third point of *Considerationes* developed by Ratzinger dwells on the dynamism of missionary preaching, which has its essential from the words of Jesus announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God in St. Mark’s Gospel (Mk 1:15): “Repent and believe in the Gospel” The mission is foremost the proclamation of the Catholic Faith in its fullness with two essential emphasizes, one on judgment (repentance/*metanoia*) and the other on healing grace (the Kingdom of God at hands/*euaggelion*). These two aspects were also essential in the Twelve Apostles’ mission of repentance and healing All missionary preaching falls under the law of the cross and resurrection (Jn 12: 24f).

In Ratzinger’s view, the natural and supernatural are never strictly separated in this world, but rather penetrate each other. In this sense, all truly human values are marked both by a divine supernatural elevation and by human sin. The mission of the Church has no boundaries or prior exclusions. All have sinned, and therefore all need the manifestation of God’s glory to be saved. However, that does not mean that “people not incorporated into the Church” are lost forever. The magisterium has long recognised the possibility of salvation even outside the visible borders of the Church. What the Church’s faith confesses is that no one can be saved by himself or herself for the simple but profound reason that no human effort and no religion can save a person, since all salvation comes from Christ. The proclamation of human values, the *assumptio hominis* that according to the Church fathers was proclaimed in the world with the incarnation of Christ⁷² always represents the paradigm proper to the missionary proclamation

⁷⁰ Ratzinger highlighted the eschatological finality of mission in Lk 14:16–24 as the hospitality of God who invites everyone to the heavenly banquet, prefigured in the Lord’s supper; he saw the fundamental place of the entire theology of mission in Jn 12:20 ff. where „the pagans come because they want to see Jesus.” In his view, mission allows „the glory and power of God to be manifested in the world; mission allows God to be adored.” This theology of mission is largely present in the Mission Decree (*AG*, 7).

⁷¹ G. Valente, *Ratzinger al Vaticano II*, p. 144.

⁷² „Fundamentum huius assumptionis valorum humanorum in forma crucis et resurrectionis est illa assumptio hominis, quae secundum Patres Ecclesiae in incarnatione verbi facta est.” V. Pfnür (ed.), *Joseph Ratzinger Papst Benedikt XVI., Das Werk. Bibliographisches Hilfsmittel zur*

to the peoples and cultures, according to the resurrection; pagan religion dies in the Christian faith⁷³. “But in the same faith, human religion resurrects and offers the forms in which faith articulates itself in different ways”⁷⁴.

FINIS ACTIVITATIS MISSIONALIS

In the fourth point, Joseph Ratzinger underlined the goals of missionary activity. The missionary activity cannot have as its sole aim and horizon of the *plantatio Ecclesiae*, that is to create new dioceses and to establish own hierarchies (1 Cor. 1:17). Ratzinger pointed to the connection between evangelical preaching and *plantatio Ecclesiae*. The establishment of new Church structures is not an end, but the instrument for the proclamation of Gospel to the peoples. The mission is carried out “in order that the people may hear and by hearing may believe”⁷⁵. Ratzinger's influence is literally in the section 4 prior to the discussion of October 7, 1965, by adaption to the new mission schema his passages on the unifying power of the Holy Spirit, exemplified in the Gospel's account of the Pentecost. The Holy Spirit completes the work, fosters the missionary proclamation, brings about the acceptance of the Gospel, and causes the growth of the Church. The growth of the institutional Church is not her rather objective but the Proclamation of the Word of God⁷⁶. The work of missions is the execution of the divine *oikonomia*, which wishes to gather into one “the sons of God, who had been dispersed” (Jn. 11:52). As “Babel” (Gen. 11:1-9)⁷⁷ is a sign of the world's confusion world, where exclusive love of oneself confuses the languages, disperses men, and arouses people against each other, so Pentecost is the sign of the Church, *which speaks in all languages and through charity understands all languages and embraces all languages in one charity and thus overcomes the dispersion of Babel*. Mission is therefore a sign of unity: As sin disperses men, so one faith gathers them together into one New Man: “Indeed you are all

Erschließung des literarisch-theologischen Werkes von Joseph Ratzinger bis zur Papstwahl, Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag 2002, p. 137.

⁷³ But the biblical place indicated as fundamental is not mentioned either in *Ad gentes* or in the other texts of the Council. Perhaps the Council Fathers see in it a „doxological” narrowing of the view, because the Johannine Jesus also speaks of his sending in Jn 10:10 with a different perspective: the good shepherd came so that we „may have life and have it abundantly.” Here we would rather have a doxology in the perspective of St Irenaeus of Lyons, for whom the which the living man is the glory of God (*Gloria Dei, vivens homo*). M. Delgado, *Das Dekret ‘Über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche Ad gentes’ des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Einige Überlegungen zur Entstehung, zum Inhalt und zur Rezeption*, „Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum“ 43 (2011), no. 1–2.

⁷⁴ J. Wicks, *Six texts*, p. 289.

⁷⁵ J. Wicks, *Six texts*, p. 290.

⁷⁶ E. Guerriero, *Benedict XVI*, p. 170.

⁷⁷ It seems that Ratzinger confused Babylon with Babel as mentioned in Genesis 11.

one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28 according to the Greek text)⁷⁸. "Therefore it is the responsibility of missions to give and to continue the sign of Pentecost, the sign of the gathering together of humanity into one charity embracing all things of God"⁷⁹.

THE WHOLE CHURCH IS THE ACTIVE SUBJECT OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

In the fifth point *Subiectum activitatis missionalis tota Ecclesia est*, the Münster professor concludes that the subject of missionary activity is the entire Church structure "the whole college of bishops, not just the Supreme Pontiff". It cannot but involve all the Churches, united in the communion of the one Catholic Church. He advocated the episcopal conferences to set up secretariats for missions in the spirit of mutual collaboration regarding exchange of information and experiences. A secretariat established in Rome should coordinate all such activities and foster activities arising in different regions⁸⁰.

EPILOGUE: BENEDICT XVI'S REMINISCENCE AFTER 47 YEARS AT NEMI

The relevance of the conciliar work done in Nemi was highlighted, by Joseph Ratzinger himself, when, as Pope Benedict XVI, he paid a special visit to Nemi in 2012, coming from his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo. Benedict XVI took the opportunity to address the Capitulars of the 17th General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word on July 9, 2012⁸¹. In his most memorable recollections over 47 years ago, Benedict XVI described his participation in this event as a very good complement to *Lumen Gentium*. He recalled some of the great theologians drafting the mission document: [...] "Fulton Sheen, who fascinated us in the evenings with his talks, Father Congar, and the great missiologists from Louvain. For me it was a spiritual enrichment, a great gift. It was a decree without great controversy. There was this controversy that I never really understood, between the school of Louvain and the Münster school: is the main purpose of mission *implantatio Ecclesiae* or the proclamation of the Gospel? But all converged into the one dynamism of the

⁷⁸ See Eph. 2:14: „Christ is our peace, who made both one”; 2:17: „Peace to you who were far away, peace to those who are near.”

⁷⁹ As quoted by J. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology*, p. 259.

⁸⁰ J. Anderson, *A Vatican II pneumatology*, p. 291.

⁸¹ His visit marked also the 50th anniversary of the Nemi centre renamed just two years ago as „Ad Gentes Center.”

need to bring the light of the Word of God, the light of God's love to the world and to do so with a new joy"⁸².

Pope Benedict XVI also emphasized the basic point of his contribution, namely the classical idea of *bonum diffusivum sui*. As goodness of its own inner necessity needs to communicate, to give itself, thereby the dynamism of the mission is essentially *communication*, as revealed in the inner life of the Trinitarian mystery of God.

4. CARDINAL RATZINGER AND BENEDIKT XVI AND POST-CONCILIAR RECEPTION OF *AD GENTES*

MISSION AFTER THE COUNCIL

Shortly after the Council, a reliable commentary to Mission Decree *Mission after the Council* edited by Fr. Johann Schütte, was published in several languages⁸³. Among the fifteen authors, Joseph Ratzinger was the second author with his contribution on *The Mission According to the Other Conciliar Texts*⁸⁴. He points to a broader view of the mission question in other conciliar documents, and he also noted that the Trinitarian perspective of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, needs to be considered before Vatican II's missiology can be appreciated⁸⁵. He highlights in particular that the missionary idea emerged in the Council Constitution on the Church at the very moment when catholicity was addressed as the essence of the New People of God. Ratzinger particularly emphasized the truth of the universality of the Church as linked to the salvific will of God, who wishes to gather into one his children scattered throughout the world⁸⁶.

⁸² *The Words of Pope Benedict XVI*, AG SVD: 17th General Chapter, Nemi, June 17–July 15, 2012, Folder III: Visit of Pope Benedict.

⁸³ *Mission nach dem Konzil*: German: Mainz, 1967; French: Paris, 1967; Dutch: Hilversum, 1968; Italian: Brescia, 1969; Spanish: Buenos Aires, 1968; Polish: Płock, 1981.

⁸⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, pp. 21–47. Schütte in this first article familiarized the reader with some of the mission questions raised by the Mission Decree, whereas Ratzinger pointed to various possibilities of resolving these questions as already sketched in other Conciliar statements on mission apart from the decree *Ad Gentes*. Ratzinger discusses the presence of the mission idea in the overall teaching of the Ecumenical Council, especially in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13–17.

⁸⁵ J. Scherer, *The Future of Missiology as an Academic Discipline in Seminary Education: An Attempt at Reinterpretation and Clarification: Report of a Survey of Arts-Related Schools in the United States on the Current Status of the Teaching of Missions*, „The International Review” vol. XIII, Issue. 4, October 1985, pp. 445–460

⁸⁶ „The one God created man and willed humanity as a unity [...]. Mission is the realization of the , fundamental, salvific-historical movement of unification in opposition to the divisions caused

The concern for the proclamation of the Gospel rests not only with the Pope, but also with bishops, priests, and laity, and not only with the Church of Rome, but also with all the Churches. Missions is not just an external activity, but stems from the dynamism of the of the Christian life.

In his new edition of the conciliar texts (and commentary), Peter Hünemann defined the Mission Decree *Ad gentes* as a “crucial event in the history and in the understanding of Catholic mission”⁸⁷. However, the missionary activity of the Church was far from being reinvigorated after Vatican II. It went into sharp decline. In the sixties and the seventies, the missionary activity of the Church faced all the symptoms of the crisis of the Catholic missions together with the discomfort and weight of the baggage of colonialism.

THE FLASHBACK OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Cardinal Frings and his conciliar *peritus* Ratzinger sceptically assessed the post-conciliar developments⁸⁸. They did not criticize the Council itself and its documents but rather their poor reception and, where received, the inadequate interpretation of the texts; above all, they highlighted some problematic aspects of the implementation of the liturgical reform. In a famous interview he gave in 1985, Ratzinger spoke about an “anti-spirit” of the Council by which he implied a misunderstanding of the authority of the last Council as a result of a misinterpretation of its teaching. In his opinion, false views of the Council now prevail because of the superabundance of false interpretations which are not grounded in the reality of the texts themselves⁸⁹. He missed a deepening of the apostolic tradition as a hermeneutical criterion for understanding the letter and spirit of the Council⁹⁰. His personal ongoing concern was to liberate the kernel truth

by sin, and thus the actual execution of the basic thrust of salvation history.” J. Ratzinger, *Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ P. Hünemann, *Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche: Ad gentes*, in: P. Hünemann, B. J. Hilberath (eds.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Freiburg in Br.: Herder 2005, p. 252.

⁸⁸ N. Trippen, *Kardinal Josef Frings auf dem II. Vatikanischen Konzil*, in: F. X. Bischof (ed.), *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil (1962–1965). Stand und Perspektiven der kirchenhistorischen Forschung im deutschsprachigen Raum* (=Münchener Kirchenhistorische Studien. Neue Folge 1), Stuttgart 2012, p. 103 (footnote 2).

⁸⁹ V. Messori and Benedict XVI, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2018¹⁶, p. 33.

⁹⁰ Ratzinger, in the first alternative draft of *De fontibus* of early October 1962, formulated the same in this way: „The Lord Jesus, [present in the Church] is also the Word of God (cf. Jn 1:1–18; Apoc. 19:13), the Truth that instructs us, the life that reveals life (Jn 14:16). This living Truth is present in the Church; it is the Body of Christ, alive through the Spirit of God. The Church, therefore, does not reveal new truths, but faithfully preserves that one and only Truth which

of the Faith from encrustations that obscure it⁹¹. He remained faithful to his deep convictions about the only Truth which appeared in Jesus Christ and identified the central challenge facing the Christian Faith, namely the dominant philosophy of relativism. On the horizon one could see the brutal reality of progressive secularism and an increasing relegation of Christianity in Europe to marginal positions in social, cultural, and political life. Overall, he saw that the current phenomena of dissolution, at least partly, should not be referred to the Council but to the upheavals within industrial society and in the Third World.

The Extraordinary Synod to mark the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II held in Rome in 1985 was seen by Cardinal Prefect Ratzinger as an opportunity to offer an authentic interpretation of the Council as well as a critical examination of same⁹². At the time he was preoccupied with Lefebvre's criticism of the Council and was anxious to avoid a schism⁹³. He used the opportunity offered by the Synod to impose a check on the dangers and excesses he observed in the post-conciliar years. But above all, he opposed a hermeneutic of discontinuity which claimed that the Second Vatican Council was a "break with the past"⁹⁴. In an interview he gave to Italian Journalist Vittorio Messori published in Italian as *Report on Faith* (1985) and in English

appeared in our Lord Jesus, to which the Apostles and their writings bear witness. The Church is bound to this Truth, from this source she drinks the water that flows over into eternal life (cf. Jn 4:14). The individual revealed truths which can be read in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and which are unfolded in the teaching and preaching of Holy Mother Church, all go back to that one Truth which is Jesus Christ: God and man, in whom the whole human race is called to the heavenly wedding feast, that is, to the most intimate union with God." J. Ratzinger, *De revelationes Dei et hominis in Jesu Christo facta*, 1. Entwurf, Oktober 1962.

⁹¹ P. Seewald, J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church at the End of the Millennium*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1997, p. 79.

⁹² The Synodal document put emphasis on the theology of Cross which in no way excludes the theology of Creation and Incarnation.

⁹³ Although Benedict XVI pledge for the Vatican II Council aroused some puzzlement with his support for the so-called Tridentine Mass and lifting of the excommunication of four schismatic bishops ordained by Abp. Marcel Lefebvre on January 2009. J. W. O'Malley, *A History of the Popes. From Peter to the Present*, Maryland: Sheed & Ward Book 2010, p. 323.

⁹⁴ At the end of the year 2005, Benedict XVI cautioned cardinals against a widespread opinion about the rapture and discontinuity of the Council which divides the Church into that after the Council and different one the pre-conciliar Church. He himself asserted the hermeneutic of continuity, which is not conformity with the immediately preceding, but with what is original. Unfortunately for the Church, the conservative curial school that wanted to dominate the Council dragged the cause of tradition itself into its downfall. He spoke about rebuilding the Church, not despite, but thanks to the true Council. He claimed that the impact of the Vatican II Council will also depend on whether the Church of the twentieth century renews itself in the spirit of Jesus Christ. „The definitive decision on the historical worth of the Second Vatican Council depends on whether people realize in themselves the drama of the testing of chaff and wheat”; „whether at the

edition as *The Ratzinger Report*, Ratzinger defined the post-conciliar period as “confused” and depicted the Church as threatened on all sides by dangers, errors, and crises. He stressed the need for a real catechetical engagement and enrichment with the conciliar texts. In his interview he also rejected the claim of a link between mission work and colonialism as unjust⁹⁵. In this context, he delivered an analysis of the Church which had fallen into a very serious crisis, which is alarming. Overall, many noticed that Ratzinger did change fundamentally.

THE PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION OF FAITH (1982-2005)

In 1977, Pope Paul VI appointed Ratzinger, then the professor of dogmatic theology and of the history of dogma at the University of Regensburg, as the new Archbishop of Munich and Freising. This decision expressed the papal intention to “offer German Catholicism a line of resistance to pastoral and theological developments deemed risky for the German Church”⁹⁶. His pastoral program was summarized in his episcopal motto taken from 3 John: *Co-Workers of the Truth*, a call to all to face the reality of our world today, where the subject of Truth has been almost totally eliminated. Nevertheless, he was not to stay in Munich for any great length of time. The theological expertise of the famous German Theologian was in demand by John Paul II, the first non-Italian Pope in 455 years, who felt a sense of security in his presence and called him to Rome to occupy the post of Prefect of the Congregation of Faith (1981).

THE PRIORITY OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

If theologians, like Ratzinger, begin from a perspective that prioritizes the universal Church over the local; if they emphasise the vast cultural riches of the West and have a Western aesthetic, they will end up at odds with theologians – particularly those from Asia – who work from a conviction of the local Church’s autonomy and cultural validity. Many problems emerged in the relationship between the Church and cultures in India. In Ratzinger’s view, the conciliar

end it will be reckoned among the luminous moments of Church history depends on the people who transfer it into life,” says Ratzinger. G. Adriányi et al., *The History of the Church*, vol. X, p. 151.

⁹⁵ Most of the missionaries mitigated the excesses of colonialism and created the oases of humanity. Speaking of the redeeming light of Christ, he corrected the present myth of serene and innocent paganism without concealing the mysterious presence of the devil, a real person responsible for abyss of atrocities. We have the strength to withstand the Devil when we are united with Christ. Cardinal Ratzinger, (Cont’d), *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Newsletter* 8 (1985), no. 2 March, p. 3.

⁹⁶ M. Guasco et al, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. XXV/2: *La Chiesa del Vaticano II (1958–1978)*, Milano: San Paolo Edizioni 1995, p. 396.

opening to the world went too far but that was also attributable to aggressive and polemical forces and centrifugal drives. He questioned the theological foundations of the influential Bishops' Conferences, whose activities he denounced as harmful⁹⁷. After the Council, Bishop's Conferences have increasingly played a greater role in the post-conciliar Church. He continually downplayed the role of the national Bishop's Conferences and favoured even greater centralization, which in his view is more needed in our times of globalization. Consequently, he was accused of reversing the intention of the Council, which was intended to overcome Roman centralism⁹⁸. In his theological argumentation based on the distinction between universal and local Churches he claimed that the universal Church (embodied in Rome) has priority over the local Churches both ontologically (by its very nature) and historically⁹⁹.

THE FAITH AND CULTURE: INCULTURATION

In 1993, Cardinal Ratzinger held a conference in Hong Kong with the Presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of Asia, where he proposed a new relationship between the Church and culture. He invited his hearers to avoid the use of the term inculturation of faith or the Gospel, and instead favoured the use of the word interculturality because faith itself is ever embodied in a particular culture¹⁰⁰. "There is no such thing as naked faith or pure religion. In concrete terms [...] faith is in itself a community living in a culture, which we call the people of God. [...] Anyone entering the Church must be aware that they are entering a cultural subject with their interculturality that developed in history with multiple manifestations"¹⁰¹.

Professor A. Shorter maintained that Ratzinger's skepticism relating to Third World cultures in general and the African in particular was based on his belief

⁹⁷ M. Guasco et al, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. XXV/2, p. 675.

⁹⁸ His pessimistic judgement in this matter seemed to cast doubt on the very validity of Vatican II. In his *Highlights* during the Council, he was optimistic speaking of the spiritual awaking of the bishops: „The episcopate became more open-minded from year to year.”

⁹⁹ He alluded to the New Testament, where the expression „the Church” meant the Church conceived as a kind of transcendent reality (heavenly Jerusalem, Gal 4:26 or our mother and the assembly of the first-born, Heb 12:22–23), which was distinct from and over the individual local Churches. T. Bokenkotter, *Concise History of the Catholic Church*, New York: Image Books/Doubleday 2005, pp. 514–515.

¹⁰⁰ Ratzinger sees the problem of a superficial understanding of inculturation as adapting to an existing culture or adding a few new elements to the liturgy and changing the language. Inculturation properly understood is a result of an encounter between Christ and a given culture. It is a long-term process of purification that requires understanding of a given culture from inside, recognising the dangers and opportunities that exist within it.

¹⁰¹ E. Guerriero et al., *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. XXVI, p. 289.

that European thought as it evolved in the West has spread to the whole world; he had attributed to it a universal significance. In 1985, the Prefect of Propagation of Faith dismissed African theology as more a project than a reality¹⁰². In this context is well to remember Ratzinger was fearful that inculturation smacks of relativism to the extent that each of the different cultures would seek to create a version of Christianity which is right just for its own situation.

THE PATH OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND THE DECLARATION *DOMINUS IESUS* (2000)

The central priority for the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith was the issue of Truth and with it the rediscovery of conscience – the *sensorium* of Truth which is the anthropological basis for mission¹⁰³. He had a positive evaluation of religious and ethical content of the ancient world religions, which could provide the mission with positive starting points. He reaffirmed the conciliar teaching that, he claimed, was unduly emphasized after the Council and criticized some theologians who maintain that non-Christian religions have value as *ordinary* ways of salvation (whereas Vatican II teaches that they are *extra-ordinary* ways of salvations provided that people sincerely obey their own conscience). He asserted the bond established by New Testament between salvation and the Truth which liberates and consequently saves. He referred to St. Paul: “God our saviour wants all men to be saved and come to know the Truth” which means the knowledge that God is one, and one also is the mediator between God and men, the man Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2: 4-7).

Of particular significance for the mission of the Church is Joseph Ratzinger's main concern, namely the question of the relation between interreligious dialogue and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as universal saviour¹⁰⁴. Ratzinger discusses the priority of the path of dialogue in the search of Truth in the context of secularized Europe. For him, interreligious dialogue is understood mainly as

¹⁰² A. Shorter, *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers 1999, pp. 237, 244.

¹⁰³ The Church's real service of liberation is „to hold aloft the flame of Truth in the world,” her most precious contribution is „to proclaim Truth in the world, to affirm that God is, that God knows us, and that, in Jesus Christ, he has given us the path of life. Only then can there be such a thing as conscience, man's receptivity for Truth, which gives each person direct access to God and makes him greater than every imaginable world system.” J. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1986, pp. 127–128.

¹⁰⁴ S. Bevans, *Church Teaching on Mission: d Gentes, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, 2009, https://www.cppsmissionaries.org/download/mission/Church_Teaching_On_MissionBevans.pdf, [access: 17.05.2023].

a listening to the *Logos*, a listening which demands mutual respect and a critical readiness to seek for the Truth behind alien appearances¹⁰⁵; it presupposes also an acceptance of criticism about one's own religion. The proclamation of the Gospel must be a process of dialogical exchange and the proclaimer should also be ready to receive. He saw the challenge posed especially by pluralist theologies of religion which tend to equate mission with dialogue. Dialogue is no substitute for mission as both are not opposites but should influence each other reciprocally¹⁰⁶. His understanding of ecumenical dialogue is a long-term one based on reconciliation and mutual respect.

In the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, for the Jubilee Year 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger underlined the uniqueness and universality of the saving mission of Christ and of the Church. Christ is the only Redeemer of all and His love enables us to respect the dignity of each person. Ultimate happiness is possible only in Christ so that we Christians cannot accept anything that savors of syncretism or religious relativism¹⁰⁷. "In our time the mission to non-Christians is undermined by a relativism (everything is relative and changes with the times), that erases the uniqueness of salvation in Jesus Christ, offering many 'saviours', or reducing proclamation to being a mere proposal of Christian 'values'"¹⁰⁸. In Ratzinger's diagnosis Relativism is the central problem today¹⁰⁹. Ratzinger's strong opposition to postmodern relativism and Enlightenment individualism went

¹⁰⁵ Ratzinger's preferred modern authors were outstanding theologians: John Henry Newman and Romano Guardini. He was especially attracted by their passion for the Truth. P. Blanco, *The Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Many Religions. One Convent. Israel, the Church and the World*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1999, pp. 110–112.

¹⁰⁷ In our time the central challenge facing the Faith is the dominant philosophy of relativism with serious consequences for the mission. Benedict XVI coined the expression „dictatorship of relativism” just before his election to papacy in April 2005. During the Mass *pro eligendo romano Pontifice* on April 18, 2005, he said: “How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking [...]. The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves – flung from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism [...]. Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,’ seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.”

¹⁰⁸ P. Gheddo, *Benedict XVI, the fight against relativism and the mission ad gentes*, „AsiaNews” October 25, 2012. Mindful of the missionary mandate to preach the Gospel to all nations and despite mutual respect and understanding, Christians recognize the good and the true in other religions of the world but cannot accept extant errors and superstitious practices.

¹⁰⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Relativism. The Central Problem of Faith Today*, „Origins” 26 (1996), no. 20, pp. 309–317.

together with his vision for the future of the Church as minority¹¹⁰, firmly opposed the spirit of the world. Cardinal Ratzinger pointed to the permanent validity of the command of Christ: the Great Commission (Mt 28: 18-20). This is a proclamation of God's saving action for all humanity in the mystery of the Trinitarian God and the Incarnation of the Son (No. 1). He rejected any talk about a dual plan of salvation one: for people outside the Church, and another for Christians. The Holy Spirit and his impact are inseparable from the redemptive mission of Jesus.

THE APPRAISAL OF GEOGRAPHIC CATHOLICISM

In an interview granted to Seewald at Monte Cassino in 2000, he addressed the geographical peculiarities of Catholicism on the threshold of the New Millennium. He referred to the leading, very dynamic, and vital American Catholicism with its great sphere of secular experiences but characterized by tensions, often too rationalistic, or insufficiently saturated with faith. He accentuated the very polycentric character of Catholicism, e.g., in Latin America with the fringe theology of liberation; the more important encounter with the native cultures and inculturation making new breakthroughs in exegesis and so overcoming the one-sidedness of the historical, critical method by so called canonical exegesis¹¹¹. In Europe, the Catholicism has still theological potential but is threatened by a new kind of rationalism (obligatory in academic circles). Such rationalism that does not originate in faith is unfruitful and it questions its own base. Benedict explained it in his second encyclical about the theological virtue of hope *Spe salvi* (2007) in this way: "Science can contribute greatly to making the world and mankind more human. Yet it can also destroy mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it. On the other hand, we must also acknowledge that modern Christianity, faced with the successes of science in progressively structuring the world, has to a large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. In so doing it has limited the horizon of its hope and has failed to recognize sufficiently the greatness of its task – even if it has continued to achieve great things in the formation of man and in care for the weak and the suffering. It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love"¹¹².

¹¹⁰ Cardinal Ratzinger envisions the Church as minoritarian in the form of a mustard seed, small groups with strong identity. In his address to the Italian Senators in 2004 on „The Spiritual Roots of Europe,” he used the term „creative minority” to identify the role of Christians in the renewal of post-Christian European society.

¹¹¹ It focuses on the text of the biblical canon itself as a finished product and it recognizes the intertextual connections between the various parts of the Bible.

¹¹² Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Spe salvi*, nos. 25–26.

In Asia, India is setting the tone due to exemplary contributions to shape the debate with the world of other religions, and, finally, Africa which nowadays stands for the fundamental and enduring traditional values¹¹³.

Cardinal Ratzinger also addressed the question of Christian unity which commits us to be genuine partners, who, in the first place, recognize the working of God. As Catholics, we are persuaded that the basic shape of this one Church is given to us in the Catholic Church but unity cannot be restored by human constructions undertaken by the World Council of Churches or by the Pope who serves the obedience of Faith. It is a living process of marching onward in faith and trust under the leadership of the Lord – who knows the way. We can only humbly seek to consolidate our faith¹¹⁴.

AS POPE BENEDICT XVI

At the start of his Pontificate, Benedict XVI committed himself to take the Second Vatican Council as the compass to guide the Church in the vast ocean of the third millennium. He was, however, largely misinterpreted, due not least to the poor image he cut as a result of his focus on what is essential and his care to avoid making any media splash.¹¹⁵ Benedict's public image in the world of the media was generally low and lagged behind his more charismatic predecessor¹¹⁶. Benedict XVI's main concern was what was happening in Europe. Just before his election to the Chair of Peter, he spoke in very harsh words about Europe at the Subiaco conference on April 1, 2005: "Europe has developed a culture that most

¹¹³ See: J. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2004.

¹¹⁴ J. Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: a Conversation with Peter Seewald*, pp. 445–453. The German journalist interviewed the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith over three full days in the setting of silence, prayer, and the hospitality of the Benedictine monks at Monte Cassino in 2000.

¹¹⁵ Ratzinger's friend Cardinal Schönborn elucidated: „He always looks at what is behind the apparent and the emotional for something deeper.” J. Thavis, *The Vatican Diaries: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Power, Personalities and Politics at the Heart of the Catholic Church*, New York: Viking 2013, p. 281. In one interview given in 2002, he used the Guardian's word „essentializing” to focus on the fundamental, what is truly lasting and fundamental in our faith without projecting imaginative constructions. Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2002, p. 446.

¹¹⁶ For example, J. Thavis's *Vatican Diaries* pp. 281–282, convey an image of a conservative Benedict XVI who depersonalized the papacy. From early on the „best friends were his books,” deprived of a substantial pastoral experience, Thavis claimed, he seemed to shy away from the world as a dangerous place, „untouched by the surrounding social and political and economic reality.” In his view, he failed to define himself. In his generous assessment, Thavis sees Benedict as an almost tragic figure, whose accomplishments and good intentions are overshadowed by gaffes and missteps.

radically contradicts, not only Christianity, but the religious and moral traditions of humanity as well”¹¹⁷. The priority of living out of the Faith meant for him to be open to the surprises brought by historical development. He highlighted the greatness of the Liturgy, God’s action which requires reverence and so must be treasured¹¹⁸. In the footsteps of his predecessor, Benedict XVI committed himself from the start to the re-evangelization of Europe, a New Evangelization that also involved the mission *Ad gentes*¹¹⁹. In the apostolic letter, *Ubicumque et semper* (2010) which established the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, he stressed that the variety of different situations demands careful discernment; to speak of a “new evangelization” does not mean in fact, that a single formula should be developed and applied equally to all circumstances. During the World Youth Day in Cologne in August 2005, Pope Benedict XVI called for renewed commitment to evangelization.

RE-AFFIRMATION OF THE *MISSIO AD GENTES*

Benedict XVI addressed the “a growing confusion” about the Church’s missionary mandate to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ¹²⁰. On December 3, 2007, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, in which it diagnosed with a great deal of realism the missionary *anaemia* experienced by the Church regardless of expanding Catholicism in Africa and Asia faster than ever: [...] “It is enough, so they say, to help people to become more human or more faithful to their own religion, it is enough to build communities which strive for justice, freedom, peace, and solidarity. Furthermore, some maintain that Christ should not be proclaimed to

¹¹⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Europe and the Crisis of Cultures*, „Communio” 32 (Summer 2005), p. 348.

¹¹⁸ Ratzinger’s preferred theme was the liturgy and he highlighted its missionary importance. He composed a new study, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1999), on the essence and form of the Liturgy and the role of art.

¹¹⁹ S. Bevans, *Pope Francis’s Missiology of Attraction*, „International Bulletin of Mission Research” 43 (2019), pp. 20–28.

¹²⁰ „Many a one began to wonder, 'Why should we disturb non-Christians, urging them to accept baptism and faith in Christ, if their religion is their way to salvation in their culture, in their part of the world?' Thus, people surrendered, among other things, the connection which the New Testament creates between salvation and Truth, for as Jesus explicitly affirms, it is knowledge of the Truth that liberates and hence saves. Or as St. Paul says: 'God Our Savior [. . .] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth.' And this Truth, the Apostle goes on, consists in the knowledge that 'there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all' (1 Tim 2:4–7). This is what we must proclaim to the modern world, with humility but also with power, in response to the challenging example of the generations who have gone before us in faith.” J. Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 197.

those who do not know him, nor should joining the Church be promoted, since it would also be possible to be saved without” (No. 3).

The document emphasized that the missionary mandate belongs the very nature of the Church. Humans have the capacity to know the Truth: “Human beings are given intellect and will by God that they might come to know and love what is true and good” (No. 4). Furthermore, “Every Person has the right to hear the Good News which implies the corresponding duty to evangelize and to share the gift of Faith in Jesus Christ.” The Congregation called to mind that the proclamation of and witness to the Gospel is the first service that Christians can render to every person and the entire human race. “They are called to communicate to all God’s love – fully manifested in Jesus Christ, the one Redeemer of the world” (No. 14)¹²¹. But evangelization proceeds by respectful dialogue of charity and Truth, not proselytism (No. 13)¹²². During the first visit in his homeland, Benedict XVI said in the homily at the Mass in the outdoor site of the Neue Messe in Munich on September 10, 2006: “We impose our faith on no one. Such proselytism is contrary to Christianity. Faith can develop only in freedom. But we do appeal to the freedom of men and women to open their hearts to God, to seek him, to hear his voice”.

Pope Benedict XVI held fast to his understanding of mission as the vocation proper to the People of God out of obedience to Christ’s command (Mt 28: 18-20). However, he saw the necessity of an extended area of mission *Ad gentes* beyond the geographical and juridical considerations so as to engage in critical dialogue with the anthropological, cultural, social, and religious contexts. He shared this view on the fortieth anniversary of the Conciliar Decree *Ad gentes* in 2006: “From the outset, the Christian People has been clearly aware of the importance of sharing the riches of this love with those who do not yet know Christ through constant missionary activity. The need to reaffirm this commitment has been felt even more forcefully in recent years, because in the modern epoch, as my beloved predecessor [John Paul II] observed, the *missio ad gentes* has sometimes seemed to be slowing down because of difficulties due to changes in humanity’s anthropological, cultural, social, and religious contexts. Today, the Church is called to embrace new challenges and be ready to enter into dialogue with different cultures and religions,

¹²¹ As Pope Benedict XVI expressed it in his homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate (April 24, 2005): “There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him”.

¹²² In Aparecida, Benedict XVI reaffirmed: „The Church does not engage in proselytism. Instead, she grows by ‘attraction’: just as Christ ‘draws all to himself’ by the power of his love, culminating in the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Church fulfils her mission to the extent that, in union with Christ, she accomplishes every one of her works in spiritual and practical imitation of the love of her Lord.” Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean*, May 13, 2007.

seeking with every person of goodwill to build peaceful coexistence between peoples. Thus, the area of the *missio ad gentes* appears to have been considerably extended and cannot be defined solely on the basis of geographical or juridical considerations; indeed, the missionary activity of the People of God is not only intended for non-Christian peoples and distant lands, but above all for social and cultural contexts and hearts”¹²³.

Benedict's XVI's special concern remained the intrinsic relationship between the Eucharistic Liturgy and mission. Historically, the power of liturgy was essential for the spread of Christianity. But liturgy has nothing in common with missionary persuasiveness; it is the action of God himself, a mystery at heart of faith with its gaze is primarily directed towards God. It nourishes the faith and demonstrates the power of the Truth transcending the arguments of reason¹²⁴.

In his message for World Mission Day 2009, Pope Benedict reminded the entire Pilgrim Church of her duty to, and the priority of, the *missio ad gentes* until the sovereignty of Christ is fully accomplished. The missionary zeal has been always a sign of the vitality of our Churches (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, 2). In the introductory words of his message, he encouraged the Church to be aware of Christ's missionary mandate to make disciples of all people. He defined the goal of the Church's mission, namely, “to illumine all peoples with the light of the Gospel as they journey through history towards God, so that in Him they may reach their full potential and fulfilment. We should have a longing and a passion to illumine all peoples with the light of Christ that shines on the face of the Church, so that all may be gathered into the one human family, under God's loving fatherhood”.

The mission of the Church is to call all people to the salvation accomplished by God through his incarnate Son. “It is therefore necessary to renew our commitment to proclaiming the Gospel which is a leaven of freedom and progress, brotherhood, unity and peace” (cf. *Ad gentes*, 8). The Apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010: 95) confirmed the necessity of the *missio ad gentes*. Missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized: [...] “a danger of doubting the possibility of getting to know the truth, of having an inaccurate understanding of religious freedom, and an excessive recognition of the non-Christian. Further, there is a danger caused by a loss of the truth concerning the universalism of the Church, as well as the weakness of faith evident in today's Christians [...]. He notices the problem of a superficial understanding of the process of inculturation and the

¹²³ Benedict XVI, *Address on the Anniversary of Ad gentes*, Rome, March 11, 2006.

¹²⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Eucharist and Mission*, in: J. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith. The Church as communion*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2005, pp. 90–94.

dangers lurking behind the replacement of the proclamation of the Gospel with social and political activity”¹²⁵.

Benedict XVI in his messages for World Mission Day regularly affirmed the urgency of the mission *Ad gentes* rooted in the Trinitarian life of God as movement of interpersonal love among the Divine Persons poured out on humanity. In his message for World Mission Day 2012, he wrote: “[...] the missionary mandate, which Christ entrusted to his disciples and which must be a commitment of all the People of God, Bishops, priests, deacons, men, and women religious and lay people”. Today too the mission *Ad gentes* must be the constant horizon and paradigm of every ecclesial endeavour, because the identity of the Church herself is constituted by faith in the Mystery of God who revealed himself in Christ to bring us salvation, and by the mission of witnessing and proclaiming him to the world until he comes. It is still surprising to note that many notable publications dedicated to the evaluation of Vatican II pay very little attention to *Ad gentes*, in particular to the eminent role played by Josef Ratzinger in its drafting and its reception.

THE CONCLUSION

In Joseph Ratzinger’s view the true intention of the Second Vatican Council was to endow Christianity once more with the power to shape history. At the Council, the *peritus* of Cardinal Frings delivered compelling Christological contribution to, and an eschatological orientation for, the missions, which endowed missionary activity with a new theological and spiritual depth as well as a symphonic breath. For him, Christ is the standard, “the Alpha and Omega” of every renewal. Because of his large theological views, with his strong emphasize on a return to the biblical and patristic sources of Christianity, Ratzinger was uniquely equipped to engage as a theological expert in the drafting of the Mission Decree. He thought in terms of creative continuity, and he was a proponent of a more pastoral reformulation of perennial truths and the doctrine of the Church – applying the teachings of early Church Fathers to the contemporary world.

The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church gave a new impetus to the Catholic missions and made the Church aware of her innate missionary vocation to communicate continually the Divine Love through the vivifying action of the Holy Spirit. The *Ad gentes* equipped missionaries with an updated motivation for their missionary involvement at a time of a predominantly revolutionary culture, and of crossing boundaries and reaching out to the world. On

¹²⁵ G. Bachanek, *Teologiczne problemy współczesnego kryzysu misji w ujęciu J. Ratzingera (Benedykta XVI)*, „Lumen Gentium: Zeszyty Misjologiczne” 36 (2016), no. 1, pp. 118–119.

the other hand, his commitment to the Truth set him also on a collision course with, e.g., the prevalent “praxis” – oriented Marxist theology of liberation, which does not presuppose Truth. Though Pope Benedict XVI is not counted to the great mission popes of our times – such as the forceful Pius XI or charismatic pilgrim and evangelizer John Paul II – the profound of his thoughts clearly highlighted the missionary nature of the Church. He always kept a cheerful impartiality matched with a calming personality, and he was deeply aware of participating in the mission of God and pursuing the harmony out of God’s grace. “Every pastoral initiative, every mission, every religious undertaking, even the Conclave can be Babel or Pentecost. And Babel if one seeks his own affirmation there, to make a name for oneself; and Pentecost if one seeks the glory of God and the coming of His Kingdom”¹²⁶.

WKŁAD JOSEPHA RATZINGERA W DEKRET SOBOROWY *AD GENTES* I JEGO RECEPCJA W JEGO TEOLOGII

Abstrakt

Studium przedstawia całościowy rozwój myśli misyjnej Josepha Ratzingera jako teologa – eksperta na Soborze Watykańskim II, Prefekta Kongregacji Nauki Wiary i Papieża Benedykta XVI. W trzech etapach autor nakreśla aspekt biograficzny, praktyczny i teologiczny udziału i wkładu Ratzingera w ostateczną redakcję dekretu misyjnego *Ad gentes*. Jego praca redakcyjna w Podkomisji Misyjnej pod umiejętnym kierownictwem o. Johanna Schütte, Przełożonego Generalnego werbistów zaowocowała przyjęciem dokumentu misyjnego *Ad gentes* z największą liczbą głosów zatwierdzających spośród wszystkich szesnastu dokumentów soborowych w przedostatni dzień Soboru Ekumenicznego. Ratzinger był obok Yvesa Congara, OP najbardziej znaczącym współtwórcą teologii misyjnej dekretu *Ad gentes*. Studium analizuje jego teologiczny wkład w kontekście kryzysu idei misyjnej spowodowanego głęboką zmianą świadomości – wynikającą z przemian nowoczesności. Wreszcie, ostatnia część studium koncentruje się na posoborowej recepcji dekretu misyjnego i dalszej refleksji teologicznej kard. Ratzingera i Papieża Benedykta XVI na temat misji w kontekście postępującej sekularyzacji w Europie, rozkwitu teologii wyzwolenia w Ameryce Łacińskiej i rosnącego znaczenia dialogu międzyreligijnego w Azji. Zasadniczo Joseph Ratzinger potwierdza teologiczną linię *Ad gentes* rozwijając nowe aspekty, np. chrystologiczny i eschatologiczny w teologii misji.

Słowa kluczowe: Joseph Ratzinger, Podkomisja Misyjna, Johann Schütte, *Ad gentes*, *Considerationes*, Recepcja *Ad gentes*.

¹²⁶ G. Gänswein, S. Gaeta, *Nient'altro che la verità. La mia vita al fianco di Benedetto XVI*, Milan: Piemme 2023, p. 66.

JOSEPH RATZINGER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE COUNCIL DECREE *AD GENTES*
AND ITS RECEPTION IN HIS THEOLOGY

Abstract

The study aims to trace the overall development of the missionary thought of Joseph Ratzinger as a theologian – and as Cardinal Frings' *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council – , as the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and as Pope Benedict XVI. The core of this study defines in three steps the biographical context of his participation in, and theological contribution he made to, the final text of the Decree on Mission Activity *Ad gentes*. His work in the redactional Sub-commission on Mission under the skillful guidance of Superior General Fr. Johann Schütte, SVD, resulted in the successful drafting of *Ad gentes*. During the penultimate day of the Ecumenical Council, the Mission Decree received the most votes of approval of all the sixteen Council documents. Next to Yves Congar, Ratzinger was the most significant contributor to the mission theology of the Decree. This study analyzes his theological contribution and does so in the context of the crisis of the missionary idea caused by a profound change of consciousness – arising from the spirit of modernity. Finally, the last part of the study focuses on the post-conciliar reception of *Ad gentes*, and further theological considerations on mission by Ratzinger as Prefect and as Pope. He writes against the background of the increasing secularization of Europe, the boom of the Liberation Theology in Latin America, and the growing importance of interreligious dialogue in Asia. In essence, Joseph Ratzinger reaffirms the theological line of *Ad gentes* while developing new aspects of that theology, e.g., the Christological, and eschatological dimensions of the theology of mission.

Key words: Joseph Ratzinger, Sub-commission on Missions, Johann Schütte, *Ad gentes*, *Considerationes*, Reception of *Ad gentes*.

JOSEPH RATZINGERS BEITRAG ZUM KONZILSDEKRET *AD GENTES*
UND SEINE REZEPTION IN SEINER THEOLOGIE

Abstrakt

Die Studie stellt die Gesamtentwicklung des Missionsgedankens von Joseph Ratzinger als Theologe und Experte des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, Präfekt der Glaubenskongregation und Papst Benedikt XVI. dar. In drei Schritten skizziert der Autor die biographischen, praktischen und theologischen Aspekte von Ratzingers Beteiligung und Beitrag zur Endredaktion des Missionsdekrets *Ad gentes*. Seine redaktionelle Arbeit in der Missionsausschuss unter der geschickten Leitung von P. Johann Schütte, Generaloberer der Steiler Missionare, führte dazu, dass das Missionsdokument *Ad gentes* am vorletzten Tag des Ökumenischen Konzils mit der höchsten Stimmenzahl aller sechzehn Konzilsdokumente angenommen wurde. Ratzinger war neben Yves Congar OP, der bedeutendste Mitverfasser der missionarischen Theologie des *Ad gentes*-Dekrets. Die

Studie analysiert seinen theologischen Beitrag im Kontext einer Krise des Missionsgedankens, die durch einen tiefgreifenden Bewusstseinswandel – bedingt durch die Transformationen der Moderne – verursacht wurde. Schließlich konzentriert sich der letzte Teil der Studie auf der nachkonziliaren Rezeption des Missionsdekrets und der weiteren theologischen Reflexion von Kardinal Ratzinger und Papst Benedikt XVI. über die Mission im Kontext der zunehmenden Säkularisierung in Europa, der Blüte der Befreiungstheologie in Lateinamerika und der wachsenden Bedeutung des interreligiösen Dialogs in Asien. Im Wesentlichen bekräftigt Joseph Ratzinger die theologische Linie von *Ad gentes*, indem er neue Aspekte, z.B. christologische und eschatologische in der Theologie der Mission, entwickelt.

Schlüsselwörter: Joseph Ratzinger, *Ad gentes*, Missionarische Unterkommission, Johann Schütte, *Considerationes*, Rezeption von *Ad gentes*, Papst Benedikt XVI, Dominus Iesus.

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