



Joseph Ratzinger's contribution to the interpretation of resurrection belief: The Nicholas Copernicus of Catholic theology

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In this contribution, it is argued that Joseph Ratzinger had a profound influence on the Christology and specifically resurrection belief of the Catholic Church. This is evident in the way Ratzinger approached the challenge and relevance of Jesus' question, 'But who do you say that I am?' For Ratzinger, the reality of the incarnatory event means that the Christian faith is about a person, and thus, it is historical as well. In this sense, history for Ratzinger becomes more than just a succession of human events. It also includes God's act in history. Jesus Christ manifested God concretely. In the same light, for Ratzinger, the Church concretely manifested Jesus Christ. Hence, for Ratzinger, thinking with the Church is essential for a proper exegesis or hermeneutics. Because of that, tradition and Scripture are essential to Ratzinger's Christological thought. In the teachings of the Church fathers and the lives of the saints, he finds a concrete manifestation of Jesus' teaching as contained in the New Testament. Thus, his spiritual Christology results from his meditation on the fathers, saints and some contemporary theologians that makes Ratzinger's Christological thought to be both ancient and new. This contribution highlights a Christological approach that values the historical and brings it into conversation with the theological.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This research represents intradisciplinary work within the field of Christian Theology, connecting aspects of Catholic Theology to hermeneutical methodology and what is known as a Christology 'from above'. It connects a historical and theological perspective within systematic theology to highlight the ways in which the Pope and theologian Joseph Ratzinger influenced resurrection belief within the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger; Catholic theology; Christology; Jesus Christ; history; church; hermeneutic; tradition.

Introduction

Nicolas Copernicus (1743–1543) was a Polish astronomer whose theory in astronomy changed the frontiers of the fields of human sciences forever (Weinert 2009:25). His theory of the sun as the fixed point to which the earth and the other planetary bodies orbit around was considered to be a groundbreaking contribution to astronomy. Copernicus also proposed that the earth, besides orbiting annually around the sun, also rotates on its axis once daily (Kossovsky 2020:2–3; see also Kuhn 1985:1, 142, 144). Nicolas Copernicus' theory is called heliocentric: a term that is derived from the Greek word *helios*, which can be translated as 'sun'. Accordingly, heliocentric translates to mean 'sun-centre' against the previously held geocentric understanding of the universe. Hence, it is rightly referred to as either the Copernican revolution or the Copernican shift (Kuhn 1985: 134–135). Copernicus' theory, indeed, did bring a shift from the direction of understanding of the universe that went back as far as Aristotle's 'construct of the two-sphere universe' – the *supralunary* and *sublunary* spheres, respectively. In this arrangement, 'the Earth is a tiny sphere suspended stationary at the geometric centre of the much larger rotating sphere which carries the stars' (Weinert 2009:5–6; see also Kuhn 1985:78–79).

Kuhn (1985:1) referred to the Copernican shift as 'a revolution in ideas' that did not only transform humanity's understanding of the universe but also transformed humanity's relation to the universe. To this effect, Kuhn said something that is equivocally significant to the title of this article. In enunciating how Copernicus work is considered a revolution, Kuhn says that Copernicus' work is more 'a revolution-making [work] rather than a revolutionary text'. According to him, 'the significance of the *De Revolutionibus* lies... less in what it says than in what makes

others to say'. Here is the knack of all of Kuhn's argument with regard to his description of Copernicus work as revolution-making; he says, 'a revolution-making work is at once the culmination of a past tradition and the source of a novel future tradition' (Kuhn 1985:1). In this sense, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI could be said to be the Nicolas Copernicus of Catholic theology. His theology stands steeply within the context of the age-long tradition of the Catholic Church's theological corpus; 'yet within its generally classical framework are to be found' (Kuhn 1985:135) the originality of thoughts or novelties, which are shifting the direction of theological thoughts within the Catholic Church in ways unforeseen by Ratzinger himself.

Encountering problems with resurrection belief today

Jesus' question, 'But who do you say that I am?' (Mk 8:29), remains universally relevant today. Over the centuries, it has motivated biblical scholars and theologians throughout the world to acquire an enhanced understanding of the mystery of the Christian faith (Wright 1996:10). According to Ratzinger (1990:439), the two questions of the 265th Pope of the Catholic Church, 'Who is Jesus?' and 'What is God?', are as central to the Christian thought today as it was at the time of the early Christians. The relevance and centrality of these questions are that the God-question means something different to every generation. Every generation will have to ask these questions anew in the light of their own reality and in the light of the same reality seek answers to the question afresh. However, based on their experience, each successful generation builds on whatever answer the previous generation had proffered to these questions. The self-revelation of God happened within the history of humanity. Through the person of Jesus, God has spoken so precisely and persuasively to humanity that Jesus Christ becomes the key to unlocking the understanding of God's revelation in history (González & Perez 2002:36, 38). Tracy (2011:110) argued that the 'theological understanding of God merges with the question of the identity of God'. Accordingly, Tracy stated that the answer to that question for the Christians is manifested in God's self-revelation 'in the ministry and message, the cross and resurrection, of Jesus Christ'. This goes to demonstrate that there is a correlation between the question of the identity of Jesus and that of God. The immediate consequence of this is that how each of these questions is handled determines how either identity of God or that of Jesus really determines the image of understanding of God, and that of Jesus will emerge at the end.

Ratzinger argued that Christian religious tradition and schools of thought employed philosophical insight to answer these fundamental questions. These questions first arose when people began to reflect on their faith (Ratzinger 1990:439). Despite Peter's prompt declaration of faith in response to Jesus' question, the early Christian communities continued to search for a better understanding and interpretation of the mystery of the Christian faith. By reading the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the documents that

came to be known as the Old Testament, the early Christians interpreted the Old Testament in light of the resurrection. The Old Testament, the Tanakh, serves as the early Christian communities' primary authority to be quoted in all consideration. This ensured that the Jewish scriptures were the 'unimpeachable sourcebook of saving doctrine' for the early Church (Kelly 1978:53). These communities began to confess the reality of Jesus by using images that represent the different aspects and perspectives of the mission and the deeds of the Jesus that they had come to refer to as Lord and Saviour (e.g. see Rm 10:13, 6:23¹; cf. O'Collins 1983:14). These various images of the early Christian communities form the content of the New Testament and, in particular, the four Gospels (Bennett 2001:76).

The books of the New Testament are 'the first epoch of record reflection on the personal identity' of the person of Jesus (O'Collins 1983:13). As such, the New Testament's recorded reflections, together with the early church's confessional statements, have initiated a never-ending process or quest to understand the personal identity of Jesus Christ (O'Collins 1983:14). As far as this quest for the comprehension of the person of Jesus is concerned, the Christology of the 1st century was very basic and foundational. This was followed by an era in which the patristic fathers were preoccupied with defining the identity of Jesus and his relationship with God. This process spanned through four ecumenical councils: Nicaea 325, I Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431 and Chalcedon 451. The two subsequent councils basically affirmed the promulgations of these four councils (O'Collins 1983:16–18). During the Middle Ages, philosophical concepts and categories were employed to understand further the person of Jesus (O'Collins 1983:19–20; Rausch 2003:1).

The theoretical dimension is borne from the need to understand what it means to believe or have faith in God. The 'Christian faith', Migliore opined (2004:2), 'prompted enquiry, searches for deeper understanding and dares to raise questions'. Anselm coined it thus, 'faith seeking understanding'. The theoretical dimension is the Christian community seeking to test and rethink its faith and practice 'in the light of its enduring foundation, object and content' (Barth 1964:36; Migliore 2004:2). It is this seeking in order to understand that, according to Barth, gives theology its unique character. Moreover, to achieve this task of theology requires the application of reason, specifically critical reason.

On the other hand, the faith dimension is demonstrated in the expression of ascent by the individual in the existence of God. It is akin to what the author of the book of Hebrews says, 'for whoever would approach [God] must believe that he exists' (Heb 11:6). In this regard, faith in the existence of God is paramount to be a Christian. Jesus said to those who enquired of him about what they should do to please God, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent' (Jn 6:28–29). This translates to mean that faith in

¹All scripture references in this work are quoted according to the English Standard Version (ESV).

God involves believing in Jesus: the one sent by the Father for the salvation of the world. In this regard, faith and reason were not perceived to be incompatible but as complementing each other. By faith, Christians give assent to the existence of the God who also sent his only begotten Son as the redeemer of the world.

By reason, Christians provide a theoretical account/articulation of why they are convinced of the simultaneous human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. The essence of the Christian faith is 'trust in and obedience to the free and gracious God made known in Jesus Christ' (Migliore 2004:3). Nevertheless, that does not mean that the individual should not probe for a deeper understanding of this reality of the Christian faith about which the infinite God became human. Migliore (2004:3) argued that the faith in God that manifested Godself as a human in the person of Jesus Christ sets the enquiry in motion.

The attempts to answer the question, 'Who is Jesus?' have resulted in a multiplicity of images of Jesus as a literary figure. The term literary figure here denotes the images of Jesus that had emerged over the years because of the quest for the historical Jesus, which is a matter that is dealt with in New Testament scholarship. According to Setzer (1995), 'the images of Jesus throughout history are as varied as the people who have embraced him [as] the Son of God'. The problem is not that there are many images of Jesus out there because of the search for the historical Jesus; instead, it is how these images emerge that makes all the difference. In most cases, the image of Jesus that emerges from the critical historical inquiry differs from that contained in the New Testament's gospel traditions. Of course, there are multiple images of Jesus, even in the New Testament. However, these various images of Jesus in the New Testament have one thing in common, faith: A faith that mediates and binds together these multiple images of Jesus as seen in the New Testament.

Rather than distorting or creating a conflicting figure of Jesus apart from the historical Jesus, the multiple images of Jesus in the New Testament transcend themselves and reveal the true face of the historical Jesus. However, the reality is different from the 20th century quest for the Jesus of history. Its major feature is that faith, or what Du Toit (1997:816) calls 'religious tradition', is jettisoned. Moreover, as a result, the images of Jesus emerging from such quest are simply a literary figure of Jesus that are only the reflections of their scholars. Any quest for the historical Jesus that refuses the mediation that faith brings into the search for the Jesus of Nazareth will only result in an image of Jesus wholly disconnected from the Jesus of Nazareth. The goal of any quest for the historical Jesus should be to keep it close to the gospel narratives, which are the primary sources for understanding the person of Jesus. Thus, the combination of faith and history is necessary if the true figure of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels is to be attained.

The multiplicity of the images of Jesus is especially the consequence of recent developments in biblical scholarship in the areas of redaction criticism, narrative-semantic analysis and intertextuality (Weren 2011:3-4). Continual research in biblical scholarship has been conducted to acquire a continuous contextual understanding of the mystery of the Incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ, the 'God whom we encounter in Scripture' (Ratzinger 1990:439). The theological quest of the 'who' question has led to various Christologies, which reflect or illustrate how Jesus has been perceived in successive generations. Ratzinger has asserted that everything in Christianity is dependent on building an 'intimate friendship with Jesus' (Ratzinger 2007:xii; see also Casarella 2009:84; Weigel 2007). However, according to Weigel (2007), currently, people encounter far-reaching problems in their endeavours to establish such an intimate friendship with the Jesus of the Gospels. Ratzinger (2007:xii) believed that the root cause of this difficulty is the widening gap between what is perceived as cognitive and what is perceived as affective. The consequence of this is that the reality of Jesus as the reference point for faith becomes questioned. The 'intimate friendship with Jesus, on which everything depends, is in danger of clutching at thin air' (Ratzinger 2007:xii, see also Weigel 2007).

For the evangelists and the early Church, the act of interpretation was, firstly, aimed at deepening their faith in Jesus, and secondly, it was for the kerygma. From the perspective of faith in Jesus Christ, they re-interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures. In both their writings and kerygma, the evangelists were never really interested in the presentation of Jesus Christ from a purely historical perspective. Instead, they were interested in a faith-based interpretation of the mystery of Jesus Christ. For Ratzinger (2007:xi, xxiii), interpretation is aimed at discovering the face of the historical Jesus that is consistent with the Gospel portraits of Jesus. However, the difficulty lies in that there is not just one portrait of Jesus in the Gospels, but several portraits (O'Collins 2008:xiii). This is one of the reasons that the mystery of Jesus Christ continues to interest theological scholars today and is the foundational motivation for this study.

Joseph Ratzinger: Pope and (systematic) theologian

Joseph Ratzinger was already known within his home country of Germany 'as a brilliant theologian' (Wilkins 2010), but it was his participation at the Second Vatican Council as a *peritus*, or theological adviser, to the Cardinal Joseph Frings, that exposes him to the world. Cardinal Joseph Frings, who at the time was the archbishop of Cologne, was 'one of the leading modernisers' at the Second Vatican Council (BBC News 2013). Cardinal Frings nominating the young Ratzinger as his *peritus* at the Vatican II council says a lot about how much he was already being regarded back home in Germany. A few years later, in 1982, Pope John XXIII would appoint him as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, a body within the Vatican responsible for regulating and enforcing orthodoxy in the Catholic Church. He would

go ahead to remain in that position till he was elected as Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. During his time as the Prefect of Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Ratzinger used his influence as the Prefect and as a theologian to stir the Catholic Church's theological perspective to a new dimension. It is a perspective that promoted a method of theology that is both old and new. It is a method of doing theology that seeks continuation or affiliation with tradition and incorporates the modern perspective concerning God. In this sense, Ratzinger is modern in his theological perspective while at the same time remaining steep in tradition. His election in 2005 as Pope Benedict confirmed his influence and importance as a theologian within the Catholic Church. Speaking on the influence of and the rapid rise to power of Ratzinger within the Catholic Church, Dallh says (2009), 'In a matter of years, he has almost single-handedly become the official voice of Catholic theology'. As the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, according to Dallh, fate of many theologians depended on Ratzinger. Even more so, he added, that he was elected as Pope. Because of that, Rowland (2009) concluded by insisting that Ratzinger's 'theology and faith matter within and without the circles of Catholic theologians'.

Faith plays a significant role in the entire Ratzinger's theological thought and that features prominently in all his works. It is not just about the Church's faith, even though that is equally important to him. He is more concerned with faith on a personal level. It is crucial for Ratzinger that all his thoughts as a theologian should be consistently aligned with that of the Church in general. However, he also insisted that his theological thought should reflect his faith. In terms of faith in general, Ratzinger speaks about thinking 'in communion with the faith of the Church' (Ratzinger 1997:66). For Ratzinger, faith and theological hermeneutics are intertwined. He was consistent about this throughout when he was the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (1978–2005). He consistently insisted that exegetes and theologians alike should make their work to be aligned and consistent with not only their faith but also the faith of the Church, which is 'thinking in communion with the great thinkers of the faith', the Church Fathers (Ratzinger 1997: 65–66). In this, when it comes to the issue of faith, the Church, becomes for Ratzinger, the centre on which the individual faith of the members, including exegetes and theologians, revolves. Ratzinger's perspective on faith is connected to his perspective on history.

Because God acted concretely in the physical process of history, it means history is not merely the succession of time and events. Instead, it has become both the means that the meaning of God's self-manifestation in history is perceived and deciphered through the ages. In this way, history is neither alien to faith nor is it a purely spiritual realism that has no bearing on the processes of human history. Rather, according to Ratzinger, because faith tells people how they should live and begin to be human, therefore, he says, it means 'faith is itself culture'. This means, continued Ratzinger, that 'faith is its own subject, a living and cultural

community' called the people of God. Ratzinger distinguishes faith as a cultural subject, 'People of God', from the classical understanding of culture that is limited in perspective. Instead, faith as a cultural subject, People of God, is universal by nature and embraces people of every nation and race (Ratzinger 1993). The reality of the Christian faith is such that it can point to history for the source of its origin and existence. For Ratzinger, if God is not able to act in human history, then God becomes only the product of psychology and wishful thinking (Fletcher 2014:96). The relevance of this to the debate concerning the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus has to do with the idea of it being an act of God. God snatches Jesus' body out of the grave, thereby preventing it from experiencing decay. This act, in Ratzinger's estimation, is an issue in the debate about the historicity of the resurrection. In this regard, the idea that God would have intervened at all in history has become uncomfortable to bear for those with the desire to paint a picture of a purely historical Jesus (Fletcher 2014:95).

Ratzinger's hermeneutical method's important factor is derived from his perceived idea of the place of faith within theology. Because of this, Ratzinger was critical of any method that undermines or impedes the role of faith, ensuring that God's acts within human history are upheld and acknowledged. Hence, in his books, *The Introduction to Christianity* and *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy, Ratzinger engages with the New Testament scholarship and the fundamental methodological questions related to the historical criticism. He spoke extensively about this at the 1998 Erasmus Lecture, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis* (Ratzinger 2008). These books stand at the threshold of Ratzinger's theological thought and personal faith. They offer insights into the basis of his theological hermeneutics in general and Christological hermeneutics in particular. He expressed that faith in the open profession of his belief or trust in the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus Christ. He refers to the Jesus of the Gospel as the real historical Jesus. It is this that forms the basis for Ratzinger's perception of Scripture.

Ratzinger's influence on resurrection belief: An instance of Ratzinger's Copernican shift

In his book, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger, speaking on Christology in relation to the idea of Jesus' descent into hell, says, 'Christology reaches out past the cross, the moment of the tangibility of God's love, into death, into the silence and obscuring [*verdunklung*] of God' (Ratzinger 2004:296–297). In this same thought, 'Through [Jesus'] risen bodylines, matter has been elevated to a final, transformed state that goes far beyond the bodylines we presently experienced in this world' (Ratzinger 2012:74–75). Although this thought of Joseph Ratzinger, as quoted here, is with regard to his perspective on the understanding of Jesus' descent into hell as it is contained in the creed of the Church. Nevertheless, it still has a connection with his idea of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is a connection that connotes the linear movement that is intrinsic to Ratzinger's thought on the

nature of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. For Ratzinger, although by its very nature transempirical, the event of the resurrection is never disconnected from the events of the crucifixion that he refers to as 'the moment of the tangibility of God's love' for humanity.

There is no break in Ratzinger's thoughts with regard to the resurrection and the cross. They both belong to and constitute the one reality of the Christ event. Accordingly, from Ratzinger's perspective, the empirical nature of the Christ event flows seamlessly to the cross. It did not just stop there, or rather it did not connote, for him, the end of the historicity of the person of Jesus as Meier's work *The Marginal Jew* suggests. Instead, the empirical history of Jesus continues into death. It follows through death to the obscurity of the transempirical reality of the event of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is an event that is only known to God and Jesus, who at this instant is the one whose human body that God acted upon in the act of the resurrection. In relation to the event of the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross, for Ratzinger, the resurrection is an event that is real; it is not a myth or a psychological experience, but a real event not in the sense of the scientific understanding of history. The nature of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, from Ratzinger's perspective, is an event that involves the empirical history but again transcends empirical experience of human history. As it is an event that steeply belongs to history, it opens up human history to a new dimension of meaning and purpose. As a result of Jesus' resurrection, the meaning of human history is no longer limited to only empirical events or experiences. It now embraces and includes those events or experiences that are metaphysical. Thus, to Ratzinger, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead constitutes and opens up a new dimension of life, an entirely new way of living, thereby giving an entirely new understanding to reality and history.

This novelty of Ratzinger's idea of the continuity or the connection of the resurrection event with that of the cross enables the entire Christ event to be perceived as a single reality of the life of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. The taking apart or dividing the reality of the life of Jesus of Nazareth as distinctive events from each other, for Ratzinger, only leads to a lack of a holistic understanding of the true meaning of the Christ event. Consequently, it would lead to, using Ratzinger's words, the 'danger of clutching at thin air' (Ratzinger 2007:xii) as far as the grasping of the relevance of the entire Christ event not only to the Christian faith alone but also to the entire meaning of it for the salvation of the world. The second relevance of Ratzinger's idea of perceiving the cross and resurrection as a single reality of the historical Jesus is that it shifted the boundary of what can be perceived as history or historical. By this understanding, history is no longer just about those events, like the cross of Christ, that could be perceived or witnessed empirically. Instead, the meaning of history is opened up to embrace even those events, like the resurrection, that was previously perceived as being outside the realm of history. Hence, history becomes one continuum of the events that began at creation and leads back to God as its ultimate source and goal. Thus, by this

understanding of the entire Christ event as a single event of the life of the historical Jesus, the boundary or the limitation of human history has, indeed, been shattered. Thus, by this understanding, history is not devoid of God; rather, God becomes an integral part of history as God is actively involved in it.

In 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul speaks of Christ crucified as being 'a stumbling block to the Jews'. The idea of Christ being crucified as constituting a stumbling block for the Jews is not due to the idea of crucifixion itself, as many had been crucified before Jesus and many more were crucified after Jesus. It is the life and person of Christ that constitutes a scandal in this regard. The only reason why Jesus' crucifixion constitutes a scandal or stumbling block to the Jews is that they cannot bring themselves to accept Christ as the Son of God. Hence, the idea of Jesus as the Son of God, consequently as God, is the sole reason why the idea of Christ crucified constituted for the Jews as a stumbling block. There is a correlation between the quest for a purely historical Jesus and the Jews inability to perceive in the person of Jesus the Yahweh they worship. The quest for the purely historical Jesus is characterised by the denial of God's acting in history. Fletcher (2014:96) used the word 'scandalous' as he analyses Ratzinger's argument against the quest for a historical Jesus. Fletcher says, 'Ratzinger's argument is that God acts in ways that are scandalous to our modern sensibility'. Because according to him, God has not only acted on matter but he has also intervened in bodily and biological world. For Ratzinger to deny this would be tantamount to relegating faith to the realm of pure spirituality or the metaphysical, emptying faith of its concrete historical relevance (Fletcher 2014:96).

As God acted concretely in the physical process of history, it means history is not merely the succession of time and events. Instead, it has become both the means that the meaning of God's self-manifestation in history is perceived and deciphered through the ages. In this way, history is not alien to faith; neither is faith a purely spiritual realism that has no bearing on the processes of human history. Rather, according to Ratzinger, because faith tells people how they should live and begin to be human. That, therefore, says Ratzinger makes 'faith is itself culture'. This means, continued Ratzinger, that 'faith is its own subject, a living and cultural community' called the people of God. Ratzinger distinguishes faith as a cultural subject, 'People of God', from the classical understanding of culture that is limited in perspective. Instead, faith as a cultural subject, People of God, is universal by nature and embraces people of every nation and race (Ratzinger 1993). The reality of the Christian faith is such that it can point to history for the source of its origin and existence. For Ratzinger, if God is not able to act in human history, then God becomes only the product of psychology and wishful thinking (Fletcher 2014:96). The relevance of this to the debate concerning the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus has to do with the idea of it being an act of God. God snatches Jesus' body out of the grave, thereby preventing it from experiencing decay. This, in Ratzinger's estimation, is that which is at issue in the debate about the

historicity of the resurrection. In this regard, the idea that God would have intervened at all in history has become uncomfortable to bear for those with the desire to paint a picture of a purely historical Jesus (Fletcher 2014:95).

The significance of Ratzinger's perspective is that it bridges the gap in the debate concerning Jesus' resurrection. Rather than deciding whether the resurrection of Jesus is historical or not, Ratzinger simply builds a bridge that connects the two opinions. In terms of the relevance of history to the Christian faith, Ratzinger (2007:xv) speaks about 'facticity' as 'an essential dimension of the Christian faith'. The facticity of the Christian faith is derived from the humanity of Jesus. In his person, Jesus merges the realms of empirical realism with that of transempirical realism. The two becomes one single reality of the person of Jesus Christ. The reality of the event of Jesus' resurrection cannot be disassociated from the single reality of the person of Jesus Christ. It is an integral aspect of it all and stands deep within the threshold of human history. This demonstrates, for Ratzinger, that if the event of the resurrection of Jesus is excluded from the reality of the person of Jesus Christ, the 'Christian faith becomes futile and pitiful' (Fletcher 2014:96–97). This fusion of the results of the dimensions of history and faith regarding the resurrection takes away the confusion that has 'penetrated deep into the minds of the Christian people at large' as a result of the scientific idea of modern understanding of history that is void of faith. Ratzinger's views of the resurrection make it possible to integrate the empirical reality of the cross and the transempirical reality of the resurrection. These are not two aspects of two different Jesuses, but they constitute the two sides of a single reality of the entire Christ event. The Jesus that was crucified and laid in the grave after he died on the cross is the same one raised by God from the grave.

This makes the idea of Jesus' resurrection from the dead paradoxical. It is paradoxical not in a negative sense of that word but a rather positive sense of it. In Ratzinger's estimation, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a real event. Nevertheless, it is an event whose meaning cannot be grasped by the scientific understanding of history alone. It is like saying that it is historical, but from another perspective, it is not historical. These two seemingly contradictory elements arose because of the nature of the resurrection. Ratzinger acknowledged the difficulty there is in trying to explain the nature of Jesus' resurrection. He said that it was difficult even for the disciples, who witnessed the event first-hand. They too grappled to explain the reality of the event that they had witnessed on folded right in front of their eyes. It is only by faith that the reality and the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead becomes meaningful. This does not in any way indicate that Ratzinger is arguing against the place of history in the debate, instead, he acknowledges it and advocated that the quest for historical should be integrated with faith. As such, both faith and history become necessary if the genuine historical insight of the resurrection is to be grasped. Ratzinger sites as the requirement for arriving at such genuine historical insight of

Jesus' resurrection from the dead in 'Jesus' relatedness to God and his closeness to God' (Schnackenburg 1995:322; see also Ratzinger 2007:xiii–xiv). In anchoring the reality of the person of Jesus, together with the event of the resurrection, in God, the genuine insight is gained into the historical Jesus. Ratzinger argues that unless this is done, 'the person of Jesus remains shadowy, unreal, and unexplainable' (Schnackenburg 1995:322; see also Ratzinger 2007:xiv).

Thus, for Ratzinger (2011:273), Jesus' resurrection 'is a historical event that nevertheless burst open the dimensions of history and transcends it'. As such, in terms of its effect on the understanding of history, Jesus' resurrection becomes, according to Ratzinger, 'a radical "evolutionary" leap'. It is evolution, in this regard, because it has brought a new interpretation and a new understanding of the meaning of history that was not there before. In the light of Jesus' resurrection, the old boundary of what constitutes as being historical has been burst asunder and 'a dimension of life emerges, a new dimension of human existence' (Ratzinger 2011:274). Accordingly, all these, for Ratzinger, are made possible because of the dimension of faith. Not faith alone, but the fusion of faith dimension with that of history. The dimension of faith alone without the dimension of history, and vice versa, is not sufficient in itself to capture the complete insight into the historicity of the resurrection as Ratzinger perceived of it. His perspective of the nature of the resurrection of Jesus necessarily requires the integration of the two dimensions of faith and history to gain a genuine historical insight into the person of Jesus, especially an insight that is congruent with that of the gospels. The benefit of this to the faith of the ordinary Christian person is that it takes away the fear that her or his faith in the resurrection is not compatible with the requirement of history. Instead, it makes it easy for the individual Christian to explain their belief in the resurrection of Jesus, drawing from both the empirical and transempirical provisions. Because, according to Ratzinger, the resurrection breaks out of history and transcends history, it nevertheless has its origin within history and, up to a certain point, still belongs there. Thus, he concludes by saying that as an event that points beyond history, Jesus' resurrection could be described as 'a footprint within history' (Ratzinger 2011:275).

In a nutshell, the contribution of Ratzinger to the resurrection belief, particularly within the Catholic Church, is in the understanding of Jesus' resurrection from the dead as an entirely new understanding and a new kind of experience too. Those who witnessed and experienced the risen Jesus, according to Ratzinger, did not have a mystical experience. However, it is a historical event as it is an encounter with a real person, 'a living person' (Ratzinger 2011:273). The experiences of those who encounter the risen Jesus were historical because they are experiences that emanated from the encounter with a real, living person. The resurrected Jesus is neither a ghost nor is he a person. The risen Jesus has not returned from the dead to a former way of life with the possibility of dying again at some point in his life. Instead, he

is the same Jesus who is now transformed in his body. The transformed body is different from the one laid in the grave; it is the same body but now transformed with a new form of life and existence. This new body still feels concrete as it has both bones and flesh. It is touchable, yet it is not bound by the physical laws of space and time. Hence, the resurrection of Jesus becomes a historical event whose meaning can only be grasped by integrating the dimensions of faith and history.

Conclusion

The highlight of the entire Ratzinger's Christological insights has 'been arrived at along a personal path of rediscovery, of a gradual deepening' (Messori 1985:105) in the form of a full gestation of the entire mystery of the Christ event over a long period. He made a reference to this in the first instalment of his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy; according to him, it 'has undergone a long gestation' (Ratzinger 2007:xxiv). Furthermore, it has enabled him to engage more deeply with the modern cultural realities in his Christology than most theologians. He does that without drifting away from the fixed centre of the gospel portrait of the person of Jesus Christ. He always tried to keep the reader focused on the person of Jesus Christ, the one in and through whom God has finally revealed Godself concretely to humanity. For Ratzinger, Jesus is not just a theophany of God here on earth; instead, he is God himself (Messori 1985:105). From this perspective, he speaks about God and Jesus Christ in such a way that will make it easier for the reader of his works to both comprehend and have an encounter with the 'God who has come to pitch his tent with us' concretely in the person of Jesus Christ. He tried to avoid being abstract as he developed his ideas about the mystery of the Christ event. Nevertheless, there is, however, this depth, balance and humane warmth that characterises Ratzinger's Christology. Even though Ratzinger strives for his audience or reader to encounter the real historical Jesus of the gospel through his writings, he does not neglect the need for a deep reflection and meditation on the mystery of the Christ event that is needed to both bring out and make it relevant for the modern person.

The testimony of Scripture and the witness of the saints are the platforms from which Ratzinger launches his Christological meditations and reflections. Scripture provides the historical and theological basis for his reflection on the Christ event. But in the saints, especially the way they lived their lives, Ratzinger finds the concrete demonstration or manifestation of Scripture in the life of a Christian. The life of the saints is Scripture concretised in real life of the ordinary people of a given epoch. He draws from the examples of these men and women (or 'the great cloud of witnesses' as the author of the letter to the Heb [12:1] refers to them) as he seeks to make the New Testament's proclamation concerning the hope, that is available to humanity in Jesus Christ, comes to bear concretely on the life of his audience. From Ratzinger's perspective that is necessitated because 'the person and the words of Jesus radically surpassed the hopes and expectations of the time' of

his existence in the land of Judea (Ratzinger 2007:xxii). On the one hand, it liberates the hopes of the old people; it gives them a new perspective into their relationship with God. However, on the other hand, it bursts open the dimensions of history and continues to liberate people of every age. The reality of the hope manifested in the person and the words of Jesus Christ is all-encompassing and opened up to people of all ages and generations. It is not limited to only an epoch; instead, it impacted humanity of all time and place.

Ratzinger published three encyclicals throughout his pontificate. The first one was on love (*Deus Caritas Est* 2006) and the second on hope (*Spe Salvi* 2007) and the third on love in truth (*Caritas in Veritate* 2009). The three encyclicals are similar in the sense that they are Christocentric. The central theme of these encyclicals by Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) is the hope and truth that is made concretely present to humanity in history through love in Jesus Christ. Hence, in the light of that, the Christian hope is not an empty mirage; instead, it is a hope that comes from the presence of the 'God [that] has entered history and that people can actually touch him'. It is a hope that is borne from the perspective of the expectation of the things to come 'from the perspective of a present that is already given' (Boersma 2017:26). It comes from looking forward in hope in the presence of Christ, who is God personified in history. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Ratzinger argued that this hope is realised concretely through the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Christ manifested his presence as love, which is the basis of our hope in him. However, in *Spe Salvi*, he demonstrated that the Christian hope is realised concretely in the life of those whom Christ has touched in the Eucharist. He did not mention the Eucharist in *Spe Salvi*; rather, he tells the stories of saints whose lives are testaments of what it means to be touched by Christ. In this way, Ratzinger argues that the lives of the saints are 'a real presence' of the Christian hope manifested concretely within the historical realities of their time (*Deus Caritas Est*, #8; see also Boersma 2017:26–27). From the lives of the saints, Ratzinger opines that there is the presence of 'the certitude of that true, great hope', which provides guidance for others to follow as they make their choices daily, knowing that that is the way to live life to the full (*Spe Salvi*, #39).

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