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## Augustine and “the Pure in Heart” in Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth*

Augustyn i „czystego serca” w trylogii  
*Jezus z Nazaretu* Benedykta XVI

**ABSTRACT:** This essay examines Benedict XVI’s treatment in his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy of the purification of the heart as leading to a manner of seeing and knowing of God, a treatment which follows an Augustinian interpretation of the beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8). Benedict’s account is much indebted to Augustine’s theological epistemology, the main elements of which he outlines in his early writings. After setting forth the main elements of Ratzinger’s analysis of Augustine’s theological epistemology, the essay examines the three places in *Jesus of Nazareth* where Benedict discusses purification of the heart in Augustinian terms and in relation to Matt 5:8: his interpretations of the “pure in heart” beatitude, the Footwashing, and the Father-Son saying in Matt 11:25–27. With Augustine, Benedict speaks of the purification of the heart as God’s action which he works in people by the gifts of faith and love. Benedict emphasizes the place of the believers’ spiritual communion with Jesus in this graced process of purification.

**KEYWORDS:** Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, Augustine, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Matt 5:8, communion, theological epistemology, purification, heart, the pure in heart, spiritual sight

**ABSTRAKT:** Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje temat oczyszczenia serca w trylogii *Jezus z Nazaretu* Benedykta XVI jako sposobu widzenia i poznawania Boga zgodnie z augu-  
styńską interpretacją jednego z ośmiu błogosławieństw: „Błogosławieni czystego serca, albowiem oni Boga oglądać będą” (Mt 5,8). Objasnienia Benedykta XVI w znacznym stopniu oparte są na teologicznej epistemologii Augustyna, której główne elementy nakreślił w swoich wcześniejszych pismach. W artykule przedstawiono główne elementy analizy teologicznej epistemologii Augustyna dokonanej przez Ratzingera, a następnie omówiono trzy miejsca w trylogii *Jezus z Nazaretu*, w których Benedykt analizuje oczyszczenie serca w świetle nauczania św. Augustyna i w odniesieniu do

Mt 5,8: błogosławieństwo dla tych „czystego serca”, obmycie stóp oraz objawienie Ojca i Syna w Mt 11,25–27. Podobnie jak Augustyn, Benedykt mówi o oczyszczeniu serca jako o Bożym działaniu w ludziach poprzez dary wiary i miłości oraz podkreśla miejsce duchowej komunii wierzących z Jezusem w tym szczególnym procesie oczyszczenia.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, Augustyn, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Mt 5,8, komunია, epistemologia teologiczna, oczyszczenie, serce, czystego serca, wzrok duchowy

Throughout the three volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict XVI often uses the language of purification.<sup>1</sup> He employs this language in different and often overlapping respects. In some cases, Benedict uses this language with respect to the rites and conditions of ritual purity (i.e. the religious state required for one to be near God’s presence) given in the Torah.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, Benedict identifies purification as an effect of Christ’s death, coordinated with atonement and liberation from the powers of evil.<sup>3</sup> Benedict also refers to the correction or refining improvement of concepts as a kind of purifying<sup>4</sup> as well as those experiences which serve people’s spiritual development.<sup>5</sup> Related to these uses are Benedict’s words about the purification of persons which enables them to know God in some respect. It is the purification of persons which enables them to know God that is the focus of this essay.

Some of Benedict’s most substantive remarks about such purification occur in passages where he also appeals to the Matthean beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI uses purification language throughout his other theological writings as well, but the focus for this essay is his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy. English citations of these works will be taken from J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, transl. A.J. Walker, New York 2007; J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week—From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, transl. P.J. Whitmore, San Francisco, CA 2011; J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, transl. P.J. Whitmore, New York 2012. References to the German text will be taken from J. Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth*, vol. 1: *Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2007; J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth*, vol. 2: *Vom Einzug in Jerusalem bis zur Auferstehung*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2011; J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth*, [vol. 3:] *Prolog: Die Kindheitsgeschichten*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 51, 253; vol. 2, pp. 39, 230, 235, 272; vol. 3, pp. 80–81.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 16, 174, 276, 310; vol. 2, p. 231; vol. 3, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 137, 144, 163, 178, 278; vol. 2, p. 120; vol. 3, pp. 23, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 159, 163, 179, 211, 260–262.

heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8).<sup>6</sup> This is not surprising, given the strong influence exercised by St. Augustine on Benedict’s theological thinking.<sup>7</sup> Purification of the soul has a central place in Augustine’s theological epistemology, and he often associates this purification with Matt 5:8.<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger himself treats Augustine’s account of spiritual purification as it relates to theological epistemology in his dissertation, a pertinent section of which was subsequently published as an essay.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in his commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, Ratzinger laments the Council’s overlooking of Augustine’s theological epistemology, with its notion of the heart purified by faith, as a road not taken in its engagement with modern atheism.<sup>10</sup>

In this essay, I examine Benedict’s discussion in *Jesus of Nazareth* of the purification of persons (or the heart) as it relates to knowing God and in light of his debts to Augustine. I will first sketch Ratzinger’s analysis of purification in Augustine’s theological epistemology, given in his essay *Der Weg der religiösen Erkenntnis nach dem heiligen Augustinus*.<sup>11</sup> My concern here is

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural citations are my own translation.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Lam Cong Quy, *Der Einfluss des Augustinus auf die Theologie des Papstes Benedikt XVI*, “Augustiniana” 56 (2006), pp. 411–432.

<sup>8</sup> See M.R. Barnes, *The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine’s Trinitarian Theology of 400*, “Modern Theology” 19 (2003), pp. 329–355; V.J. Bourke, *Wisdom from St. Augustine*, Houston, TX 1984, pp. 63–77; R.E. Cushman, *Faith and Reason*, [in:] *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. R.W. Battenhouse, New York 1955, pp. 287–314; S. MacDonald, *Augustine*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, eds. W.J. Abraham, F.D. Aquino, Oxford 2017, pp. 354–368; D. Simmons, “We shall be life him, for we shall see him”: Augustine’s De Trinitate and the Purification of the Mind, “International Journal of Systematic Theology” 15 (2013), pp. 240–264; R.J. Teske, *Augustine of Hippo on Seeing with the Eyes of the Mind*, [in:] R.J. Teske, *Augustine of Hippo: Philosopher, Exegete, and Theologian: A Second Collection of Essays*, Milwaukee, WI 2009, pp. 77–95; R.J. Teske, *St. Augustine and the Vision of God*, [in:] *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, eds. F. Van Fleteren, J.C. Schnaubelt, J. Reino, New York 1994, pp. 287–308.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg der religiösen Erkenntnis nach dem heiligen Augustinus*, [in:] *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, vol. 2, eds. P. Granfield, J.A. Jungmann, Münster Westfalen 1970, pp. 553–564. When referencing texts written before his election to the papacy, I will refer to the author as Joseph Ratzinger, and when referencing texts written after his papal election, I will refer to him as Benedict XVI.

<sup>10</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Part I: The Church and Man’s Calling: Introductory Article and Chapter 1: The Dignity of the Human Person*, [in:] *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, transl. W.J. O’Hara, ed. H. Vorgrimler, New York 1969, p. 155; noted in T. Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Oxford 2008, pp. 4, 175.

<sup>11</sup> English translations of this essay by Ratzinger are my own. I thank Bogdan Bucur for his assistance with matters of German translation. All inaccuracies and infelicities in translation remain my own.

to explicate Ratzinger's interpretation of Augustine—and not to evaluate his interpretation, provide my own reading of Augustine, or venture into debates over the complexities of Augustine's account. I will then examine the three passages in *Jesus of Nazareth* where Benedict associates spiritual purification with knowing God and in light of the “pure in heart” beatitude (Matt 5:8): Benedict's treatments of the “pure in heart” beatitude proper, the Footwashing, and the Father-Son saying in Matt 11:25–27.<sup>12</sup> I will argue that Benedict follows Augustine by identifying purification of the heart by faith and by love as a needed preliminary for knowing God, and he grounds this purification in believers' spiritual communion with Christ.

## Ratzinger on Augustine and the purification of the heart

According to Ratzinger, a fundamental principle of Augustine's theological epistemology is that “knowledge of God always rests on *metanoia*, on a reversal of the naturally given direction of knowledge.”<sup>13</sup> The human being, as a corporeal creature, is naturally inclined to perceive and know things through bodily senses. But since God is not a sensible or material thing, one does not perceive and know God through the bodily senses. Rather, to know God, the human being must turn away from the external realm of sense objects and turn towards the inner realm of spirit. Spatially conceived, this inward turn is simultaneously an upward turn to the realm of spirit above and beyond the corporeal. This inward turn also provides for a surer form of knowing because spiritual realities contain “lasting truth [*bleibende Wahrheit*]” unlike corporeal realities which are subject to change and corruption.<sup>14</sup> The human being does not come to know spiritual realities with the eyes of the body but with the eyes of the mind—or, as Augustine otherwise puts it, the heart.<sup>15</sup>

Ratzinger calls attention to a passage in Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel according to John* where Augustine considers why people can fail to perceive God, who is “a reality of the spirit, visible in itself (the essence of truth is,

<sup>12</sup> These appear respectively in Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 92, 343; vol. 2, pp. 58, 64.

<sup>13</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 554 (“Gotteserkenntnis beruht immer auf »[*metanoia*]«, auf einer Umkehrung der naturhaft vorgegebenen Erkenntnisrichtung”). I here summarize some of Ratzinger's points in *ibid.*, pp. 553–554.

<sup>14</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 554.

<sup>15</sup> See F. Van Fleteren, *Acies mentis*, [in:] *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A.D. Fitzgerald, Grand Rapids, MI 1999, pp. 5–6.

according to Augustine, precisely its visibility).”<sup>16</sup> Augustine argues that the defect in such perception does not lie with God but in the weakness of human spiritual perception, i.e. the eyes of the heart. Augustine writes the following:

just as a blind person, placed in the sun, has the sun present to him, even though he is absent from it, in the same way every fool, every crook, every godless person is blind in heart. Wisdom is present, but while present to a blind person, his eyes are absent from it.<sup>17</sup>

While God is present to all creation, the human being may be unable to perceive him on account of what impedes the vision of the heart.

To perceive God, the eyes of the heart must be purified or cleansed of what clouds or obstructs their vision. Elsewhere, Augustine speaks of the human inclination to material things and the associated tendency to think of God as one would think of material things.<sup>18</sup> But in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.19, Augustine emphasizes that sin is what primarily clouds the vision of the heart and hinders it from seeing:

Suppose someone could not see because he had sore and dirty eyes, with dust or rheum or smoke getting in them; the doctor would say to him, “Purge your eye of whatever is hurting it, so as to be able to see the light of your eyes.” Dust, rheum, smoke, these are sins and wickedness; get rid of all of them, and you will see the wisdom that is present with you, because God is this very wisdom; and it has been said, *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*<sup>19</sup>

According to Augustine, the way to see God is not just intellectual but also moral—it involves both intellectual and moral conversion. As Ratzinger writes, for Augustine, “The concept of *purgatio cordis* is also the central description for the path to the knowledge of God, which is a religious and not a metaphysical path.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 554 (“eine an sich ja sichtbare Wirklichkeit des Geistes [das Wesen der Wahrheit ist nach Augustinus gerade die Sichtbarkeit]”). Ratzinger here (ibid., pp. 554–555) cites Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.19.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.19 (Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, transl. E. Hill, ed. A.D. Fitzgerald, Hyde Park, NY 2009).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Augustine, *Trin.* 1.1.1–4; see Simmons, *Augustine’s De Trinitate*, pp. 243–246.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.19.

<sup>20</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555 (“Der Begriff der *purgatio cordis* ist also die zentrale Beschreibung für den Weg der Gotteserkenntnis, der ein religiöser und nicht ein metaphysischer Weg ist”).

Ratzinger thus summarizes two foundational elements for Augustine's theological epistemology: first, "The 'organ' for the knowledge of God is the *cor* [i.e., the heart]"; second, "In order for the *cor* to be able to see God, it must become free from foreign bodies which impair its capability for vision, it must be 'cleansed'."<sup>21</sup> Augustine sees both foundational principles in the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt 5:8).<sup>22</sup>

So how then does Augustine think that the heart is purified so as to become able to see God? Ratzinger tracks development in Augustine's thought on this matter. A helpful place to begin is with the basic account in Neoplatonism of the soul's purification and ascent to the divine. Not only does Augustine reconfigure elements of this Neoplatonist schema into a Christian register over the course of his career, but in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict also profiles his exposition of the purification of the heart against a Neoplatonist account of the purification of the soul.<sup>23</sup>

A basic Neoplatonist account of the soul's purification integrates ontology, epistemology, and contemplative asceticism. As Ratzinger sketches its core elements, being for the Neoplatonist emanates forth from the One—the diffusive, divine source—and as things emanate away from the One, they tend towards and mix with non-being (e.g. multiplicity and matter).<sup>24</sup> This movement away from the One and into matter is a movement away from intelligibility: "since being is at the same time both being true and being knowable, the loss of the density of being means at the same time a loss of knowability and of one's ability to know even as far as the complete darkness of matter."<sup>25</sup> The soul seeks re-union with the One, and to achieve this re-union, the soul is "to follow the path of the emanations in reverse, i.e. to return anew in an ascending direction."<sup>26</sup> The soul's return to the divine, "consists in purification from the

<sup>21</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555 ("Das »Organ« der Gotteserkenntnis ist das *cor* ... Damit das *cor* sehfähig wird für Gott, muß es frei werden von Fremdkörpern, die seine Sehkraft beeinträchtigen, es muß »gereinigt« werden").

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., pp. 555–556; Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 340; vol. 2, pp. 55, 60. A fuller overview of Plotinus' system is given in A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1967, pp. 236–263.

<sup>24</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555 ("Da nun aber Sein zugleich Wahrsein und Erkennbarsein ist, bedeutet der Verlust an Seinsdichte gleichzeitig einen Verlust an Erkennbarkeit und an eigenem Erkennenkönnen bis hin zur völligen Finsternis der Materie").

<sup>26</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 556 ("seine Aufgabe ist vielmehr, den Weg der Emanationen im umgekehrter, d. h. in aufsteigender Richtung neu zurückzulegen").

material sphere, in a gradual ascent, and in purifications that strip away again what is base and ultimately lead back to the unity of the divine.”<sup>27</sup> On this account, the purification of the soul unto its union with the One is a process of “spiritualization [*Vergeistigung*]” or “dematerialization [*Entmaterialisierung*]” through philosophical contemplation and virtuous practice.<sup>28</sup>

According to Ratzinger, early Augustine regards spiritual purification along these basic Neoplatonist and ascetic lines.<sup>29</sup> But Augustine’s thinking about spiritual purification changes in several respects after he commences his priestly (and later episcopal) ministry. In his more mature writings, Augustine not only gives a more developed account of what (and who) purifies the heart, but also that of which the heart needs to be purified.

Ratzinger observes that Augustine comes to discern much significance in Acts 15:9.<sup>30</sup> In this episode, Peter recounts to the Jerusalem Council what God has done through his ministry to bring Gentiles to faith in Jesus. Peter states, God “did not distinguish between us and them, having purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). For Augustine, this Scriptural text identifies God as the one who purifies the heart and specifies that he does so by faith. Thus, for Augustine “*Purgatio* no longer consists just in the pure return to spirit, but rather in the *humilitas fidei*, in the humility of the obedience of faith.”<sup>31</sup>

The identification of faith as that which purifies the heart entails other shifts. For one, there is a recalibration in what constitutes the human predicament.<sup>32</sup> The human predicament is not that the human being, “standing on a lower level of emanation, is afflicted by matter” (as in Neoplatonism) but rather, “that the image of God in him is buried, buried directly by *superbia*.”<sup>33</sup> It is pride (*superbia*) and the illusion of human “self-sufficiency [*Selbstgenügsamkeit*]” which blind the eyes of the heart to God.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the cleansing remedy

<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...* op. cit., vol. 2, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 556; cf. A.H. Armstrong, *Cambridge History...*, op. cit., pp. 259–260.

<sup>29</sup> Among the works of Augustine that Ratzinger (*Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 556) adduces in this regard are *Ord.* 2.19.50; *Quant. an.* 33; 35.

<sup>30</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., pp. 557–558.

<sup>31</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 557 (“*Purgatio* besteht nun nicht mehr einfach in der reinen Rückkehr zum Geist, sondern in der *humilitas fidei*, in der Demutstat des Glaubensgehorsams”).

<sup>32</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 557.

<sup>33</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 557 (“daß er, auf einer niederen Emanationsstufe stehend, mit Materie behaftet ist, sondern daß das Ebenbild Gottes in ihm zugeschüttet ist, zugeschüttet gerade auch durch die *superbia*”).

<sup>34</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 557.

for such obscuring, sinful pride is the humility and obedience of faith by which one yields to Word of God, presented in the Church. Thus, Ratzinger writes, "In place of the ontological dualism of matter and spirit there is set the ethical-historical dualism of *superbia* and *humilitas*."<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Augustine emphasizes that the purification of the heart is fundamentally the work of God's grace and not the result of human philosophical and ascetical striving. Whereas in Neoplatonism, human beings attempt to ascend to the divine by their own de-materializing efforts, in Christianity, the divine descends, humbles himself by taking on the materiality of flesh in the Incarnation, and purifies the human being.<sup>36</sup> Christ the Word comes to indwell believers spiritually by faith and purifies their hearts. On this account, the inward turn is also a turn in faith to the indwelling Christ. Ratzinger thus cites Augustine's remarks in *Ep.* 147: "lift up the spirit of your mind, 'which is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of him that created him' [Col 3:10], where Christ dwells in you by faith."<sup>37</sup>

Along with faith, Augustine also identifies love, i.e. charity (*caritas*), as cleansing the heart. Ratzinger calls attention to the interpretive combination of John 14:9 and Eph. 3:18–19 in Augustine's *Ep.* 147:33. Here, Augustine continues his commentary on Ambrose's remarks about seeing God in his *Commentary on Luke* 1.24–27. Referencing Ambrose, Augustine writes the following:

'So long a time have I been with you and you have not known me?' [John 14:9] Then, explaining by what sort of men God is seen as He is in that contemplation, [Ambrose] says: 'He who knew "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge," [Eph 3:18–19] saw both Christ and the Father'.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine goes on to interpret Paul's reference in Eph 3:18–19 to the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love with various aspects of the salvation available in him: "by the 'breadth,' all the good works of charity; by the 'length,' perseverance to the end; by the 'height,' hope of heavenly rewards; by the 'depth,'

<sup>35</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 557 ("An die Stelle des ontologischen Dualismus von Materie und Geist ist damit der ethisch-geschichtliche Dualismus von *superbia* und *humilitas* gesetzt").

<sup>36</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 558.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 147:2; cited from Saint Augustine, *Letters*, vol. 3: (131–164), transl. Sister W. Parsons, Series: Fathers of the Church 20, New York 1953; referenced in J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 558.

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *Ep.* 147:33; referenced in J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., pp. 558–559.



the unsearchable judgments of God.”<sup>39</sup> Augustine then applies these four aspects to the four directional points of Jesus’ cross, seeing them all exemplified in it.

According to Ratzinger, this association between Christ’s love and seeing God points to the purifying action of Christian charity:

That purification, which makes man capable of seeing God and is thus an exercising in the knowledge of God, consists essentially in the realization of the *Caritas Christi*, in which man in a special way participates in the Spirit of God, who therefore enables him in a special way for the knowledge of God.<sup>40</sup>

For Augustine, faith and love are deeply interconnected and work together. Ratzinger writes that for Augustine, “one does not come to this *caritas* until one has reached the dimension of the *homo interior* through the path of conversion, until one has gone through a certain dematerialization.”<sup>41</sup> That is, one must first turn spiritually inward to Christ in the humble obedience of faith in order to turn outwards to others in the humility of loving practice. For Augustine, love involves the “turning to the world out of the power of inwardness.”<sup>42</sup> Ratzinger thus characterizes the interplay of faith and love as a kind of “mysticism of service, which wants to find God not only in the purely inner ascent, but also always in loving descent, which knows itself precisely in the descent in following Christ and thus on the path to God.”<sup>43</sup>

On a final note, Ratzinger discerns a relationship between seeing God and presence. In the previously quoted passage from *Tract. Ev. Jo. 1.19*, Augustine speaks of the fallen human being as blinded to God’s Wisdom (i.e. Christ) who is nevertheless present to the human being: “Wisdom is present, but while present to a blind person, his eyes are absent from it—not because wisdom is

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *Ep. 147.34*.

<sup>40</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 559 (“Jene Reinigung, die den Menschen sehend macht für Gott und so Einübung in die Erkenntnis Gottes ist, besteht wesentlich auch in der Verwirklichung der *Caritas Christi*, in der der Mensch in besonderem Maße teilgewinnt am Geist Gottes, die ihn daher auch in besonderem Maß zur Erkenntnis Gottes befähigt”).

<sup>41</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 560 (“Zu dieser *Caritas* kommt man nicht, ehe man nicht die Dimension des *homo interior* durch den Weg der Umkehr gewonnen hat, ehe man nicht eine gewisse Entmaterialisierung durchschritten hat”).

<sup>42</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 560 (“Weltzuwendung aus der Kraft der Innerlichkeit heraus”).

<sup>43</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 560 (“Man könnte von einer Mystik des Dienstes sprechen, die Gott nicht bloß im rein inneren Aufstieg, sondern immer auch im liebenden Abstieg finden will, die sich gerade im Absteigen in Nachfolge Christi und damit auf dem Weg zu Gott weiß ...”).

absent from his eyes, but because they are absent from him.”<sup>44</sup> There is a relationship here between ‘seeing’ a reality and being present to it.<sup>45</sup> Ratzinger thus writes, “If one considers that to have presence is the same as to see, it is thus clear that the knowledge of God comes about by this means, that the relation of presence becomes two-sided, that the human being enters into the already given, spiritual presence of God.”<sup>46</sup> To see God, on this account, is to enter spiritually into the presence of God, who was already present to the human being. God so cleanses the eyes of the heart that the human being can, in some respect, see him and so to enter into his presence.

To summarize: Ratzinger accents several important features regarding purification in Augustine’s theological epistemology. Adapting features from Neoplatonism, Augustine holds that God, as a spiritual reality, is perceived with the spiritual eyes of the heart. Perception of God involves a turning away from the material and a turning inward and upward to the spiritual. The spiritual vision of the heart, however, has been obscured by human pride and sin. The purifying of the eyes of the heart comes about not by philosophical and ascetical effort but by the action of God’s grace in people. The Incarnation reveals the humility of God, who takes flesh and heals the prideful blindness of the heart.<sup>47</sup> God works to purify the eyes of the heart through the related gifts of faith and charity. The purification of the eyes of the heart also involves the believers’ entering into the presence of the omnipresent God. Augustine sees these dynamics scripturally articulated in the beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8).

With this basic sketch in place, I now turn to the three passages in *Jesus of Nazareth* where Benedict, in an Augustinian manner, associates spiritual purification with perceiving God and does so in light of the “pure in heart” beatitude.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.19. One also thinks of Augustine’s famous words in *Conf.* 10.27.38 about his life pre-conversion: “You were with me, and I was not with you.” Cited from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. H. Chadwick, New York 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Ratzinger (*Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555) writes, “The truth is present to the spirit, but the spirit [is not present] to the truth” (“Die Wahrheit ist dem Geist gegenwärtig, nicht aber der Geist der Wahrheit”).

<sup>46</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555 (“Bedenkt man nun, daß Gegenwärtighaben und Sehen dasselbe ist, so dürfte klar sein, daß Gotteserkenntnis dadurch zustandekommt, daß die Gegenwärtigkeitsrelation doppelseitig wird, daß der Mensch in die vorgegebene geistige Gegenwärtigkeit Gottes eintritt”).

<sup>47</sup> See J.C. Cavadini, *Pride*, [in:] *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A.D. Fitzgerald, Grand Rapids, MI 1999, pp. 682–683.

## Purification of the heart in *Jesus of Nazareth*

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”

Benedict treats the “pure in heart” beatitude in his chapter on the Sermon on the Mount in volume 1 of *Jesus of Nazareth*. He begins by stating, “The organ for seeing God is the heart.”<sup>48</sup> From the outset, Benedict introduces Augustinian themes into his interpretation. Ratzinger uses this same description of the heart as the “organ” with which one sees God in his discussions of Augustine’s epistemology: in the previously examined essay on knowledge of God in Augustine as well as in his commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>49</sup> Later in his discussion of the beatitude, Benedict again recalls Augustine by referring “inner eye” which needs to be “purified,” for it can suffer from a “cataract that blurs [the] vision or even blinds it altogether.”<sup>50</sup>

Benedict, however, defines the heart as more than interior perception and intellection. Rather, the heart is “the wholeness of man [*die Ganzheit des Menschen*]” i.e. intellect, will, emotions, and body.<sup>51</sup> “In order for man to become capable of perceiving God,” Benedict states, “the energies of his existence have to work in harmony.”<sup>52</sup> That is, these elements of human existence need to be rightly and harmoniously ordered to each other. This harmonious ordering of the elements of existence requires that the human being recognize his or her own creatureliness. The human being “accepts himself as coming from God, and thereby also acknowledges and lives out the bodiliness of his existence as an enrichment for the spirit.”<sup>53</sup> The heart’s perception, therefore, involves an openness to the transcendent and the proper awareness of material, embodied life as deeply integrated with spiritual realities.

<sup>48</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 92.

<sup>49</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 555. In his commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, Ratzinger (*Human Person*, op. cit., p. 155) writes, “Augustine’s epistemology ... is well aware that the organ by which God can be seen cannot be a non-historical ‘ratio naturalis’ which just does not exist, but only the *ratio pura*, i.e. *purificata* or, as Augustine expresses it echoing the gospel, the *cor purum* (‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’).”

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 93. German text from *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>52</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 93. Benedict’s words about the acceptance of one’s own creatureliness recall his analysis of Gen 3, wherein he identifies the refusal of their creatureliness (i.e. self-exalting, rebellious pride) as ingredient to the sin of Adam and Eve. See J. Ratzinger, “*In the Beginning...*”: *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, transl. B. Ramsey, Grand Rapids, MI 1995 [1986], pp. 70–71.

To explore the ways by which the heart is cleansed so as to see God, Ratzinger appeals to two related Psalms. First, Ratzinger cites Ps 24, the biblical text which Jesus' beatitude most strongly echoes.<sup>54</sup> The most pertinent part of the Psalm reads, "Who may ascend the mountain of YHWH? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who is clean of hand and pure of heart, who does not lift up his spirit to what is vain and does not swear falsely" (Ps 24:3-4). Generically, Ps 24 is "an entrance liturgy," which spells out the requirements for those who would be granted access to the presence of YHWH, the victorious king.<sup>55</sup> Jacques Dupont observes that notion of seeing God, presupposed in the beatitude of Matt 5:8, similarly concerns admission to God's presence: "When one speaks of seeing God, it is not a question attending a spectacle, but of being admitted into the presence of God to serve him."<sup>56</sup>

Benedict recognizes that Ps 24 speaks to the conditions for being granted access to God's presence (i.e. to enter the Jerusalem temple). There are two conditions which he highlights in this text. First, Benedict reads the Psalm as evidencing a person's search for God. The situation envisioned by the Psalm presupposes that people are in fact seeking God and desiring to be in his presence. Accordingly, Benedict writes, "Inquiring after God, seeking his face—that is the first and fundamental condition for the ascent that leads to the encounter with God."<sup>57</sup> Second, Benedict points to the moral requirements which Ps 24 spells out for those who would be admitted into God's presence. In particular, Benedict cites virtues which relate to community life: "honesty, truthfulness, and justice toward one's fellow men and toward the community—what we might call social ethics."<sup>58</sup>

Benedict elaborates by turning to the related entrance rite in Ps 15. Here too, the Psalm opens with a question about those who would be in God's presence: "YHWH, who may reside in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy mountain?" (Ps 15:1). As in Ps 24, Ps 15 answers by identifying certain moral requirements: "The one who walks without fault and does what is right and speaks truth from his heart" (15:2). Benedict sees these and the other

<sup>54</sup> On the pure of heart beatitude in Matthew and its Scriptural associations, see W.D. Davies, D.C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, Series: International Critical Commentary, Edinburgh 1988, pp. 455-456; J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, vol. 3, Paris 1973, pp. 558, 567-576.

<sup>55</sup> R.J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Series: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries, Nashville, TN 2002, pp. 133-137; citation from p. 133.

<sup>56</sup> J. Dupont, *Béatitudes*, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 557 ("Quand on parle de voir Dieu, il ne s'agit pas d'assister à un spectacle, mais d'être admis en présence de Dieu pour le servir"); translation mine.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 94.

<sup>58</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 94.

virtuous practices set forth in Ps 15 as summarizing the two tables of the Ten Commandments. In both texts, admission into God’s presence calls for certain moral dispositions and practices from the suppliant.

Consistent with his principle that later (and Christological) interpretations of Scripture develop something or actualize a potency in the text, Benedict argues that these teachings from the Psalms “acquire new depth” with Jesus.<sup>59</sup> Though he does not label it as such, Benedict begins by appealing to what is effectively Jesus’ enjoyment of the beatific vision during his earthly life. He writes, “For it belongs to [Jesus’] nature that he sees God, that he stands face-to-face with him, in permanent interior discourse—in a relation of Sonship.”<sup>60</sup> As the Son, Jesus is the one who perfectly and continually sees the Father. Connecting this observation to Phil 2 (another key Christological text for Augustine), Benedict then states the following: “We will see God when we enter into the ‘mind of Christ’ (Phil 2:5). Purification of heart occurs as a consequence of following Christ, of becoming one with him.”<sup>61</sup> By entering into spiritual communion with Jesus, the Son who always sees the Father, believers come to see and know God in their own way.<sup>62</sup>

This union with Christ also involves union with his kenotic self-emptying in loving service. For the Son’s kenotic descent in the Incarnation and unto the cross reveals God’s love. It is the love of God, revealed and at work in the Son’s descent, which purifies the heart and so enables the human being to ascend into God’s presence and come to see him. Benedict writes, “The ascent to God occurs precisely in the descent of humble service, in the descent of love, for love is God’s essence, and is thus the power that truly purifies man and enables him to perceive God and to see him.”<sup>63</sup>

Benedict’s interpretation recalls his analysis of Augustine in several additional respects. With Augustine, Benedict speaks of the purifying power of love. Recall that on his reading of Augustine, loving practice, as it is “the

<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 95; cf. *ibid.*, pp. xviii–xix.

<sup>60</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 93. Earlier, Benedict cites Jesus’ continual face-to-face seeing of God as characteristic of his being the promised Prophet-like-Moses and (as we shall later discuss) the Son; see *ibid.*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>61</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 93. Cf. Augustine, *Trin.* 1.3.14; M.R. Barnes, *Visible Christ...*, op. cit., pp. 333–336.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. P.J. McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Eugene, OR 2016, ch. 5. Here, Peter J. McGregor connects Ratzinger/Benedict’s interpretation of the heart to his exposition in J. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, transl. G. Harrison, San Francisco, CA 1986 [1984].

<sup>63</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 95.

realization of *Caritas Christi*,” purifies the heart and enables it to see.<sup>64</sup> This is case in part because “*caritas* keeps the descent and humiliation of faith ever present, which it always requires anew.”<sup>65</sup> Loving action in humility flows from one’s interior, faith relationship with Christ. Similarly, in *Jesus of Nazareth*, Benedict points to union with Christ and imitation of his self-emptying love as that which purifies the heart: “The pure heart is the loving heart that enters into communion of service and obedience with Jesus Christ.”<sup>66</sup>

Relatedly, Benedict’s emphasis on spiritual communion with Christ recalls Augustine’s association between seeing and presence as well as the import of the Psalms. As given in Ps 24, to see God is to be admitted into God’s presence. Similarly, as we have discussed, Augustine associates seeing with being present to that which is seen. Benedict integrates both elements into his exposition of the believer’s spiritual union with Christ. According to Benedict, people see God and so enter into God’s presence by entering into spiritual union with Jesus, who, as the Son, continually sees the Father. Following Augustine, Benedict teaches that love purifies the soul because love is ingredient to and flows from one’s inner union with Christ. As one enters into union with the reality of Jesus and his love becomes increasingly active in and through believer, the various aspects of one’s existence (intellect, will, emotions, body) move towards harmonization and the heart becomes clean.<sup>67</sup> “This,” Benedict concludes, “is how man enters God’s dwelling place and becomes able to see him ... [and so is] ‘blessed.’”<sup>68</sup>

## The Footwashing

The second passage in *Jesus of Nazareth* where Benedict speaks of the purification of the heart with reference to Matt 5:8 is the Footwashing in John 13.<sup>69</sup> Although the epistemological aspect of purification is not prominent here, there are three elements in Benedict’s interpretation that stand out for present purposes.

<sup>64</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 559 (“der Verwirklichung der Caritas Christi”).

<sup>65</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 560 (“die caritas den Abstieg und die Verdemütigung des Glaubens ständig gegenwärtig halt, sie fortwährend von neuem verlangt”).

<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 95.

<sup>67</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 95–96.

<sup>68</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> Benedict references Matt 5:8 on Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 58, 64.

First, there are Benedict’s remarks about Jesus’ return to the Father. In narratorial commentary which introduces the Footwashing, John states, Jesus “knew ... that he came from God and is returning to God” (John 13:3). Benedict contrasts Jesus’ coming from and returning to God the Father with the basic *exitus–reditus* scheme of Neoplatonism. Whereas in Neoplatonism, the *exitus* is a fall from the divine One into matter and the *reditus* is the soul’s reunion with the One through a process of dematerialization, Jesus’ coming forth and returning to the Father is markedly different on several fronts. For one, there is a different valuation of material creation. The Son’s going forth from the Father and becoming incarnate “presupposes that creation is not a fall, but a positive act of God’s will.”<sup>70</sup> The Incarnation (as a kind of descent) is not a fall but “a movement of love” which reveals God’s love.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Jesus’ return to the Father is not a sloughing off of his humanity. Rather, the Son takes on a human nature so as to gather all humanity into union with himself and return to the Father with them.

In John’s Gospel, the Footwashing is a prophetic gesture which primarily symbolizes Jesus’ death and his self-humbling kenosis in love.<sup>72</sup> Benedict comments on the self-humbling love of Jesus, displayed in the Footwashing, by making two strongly Augustinian remarks. Benedict writes, “it is the servant-love of Jesus that draws us out of our pride.”<sup>73</sup> As we have seen, Augustine holds that sinful pride and all that it begets are the deep pathologies afflicting humanity and occluding the vision of the heart. Such pride involves, among other things, the exaltation of the self and effort “to reorder [the universe]” around oneself and according to one’s wishes.<sup>74</sup> Augustine teaches that Christ’s humility and love provide the remedy for sinful human pride, and Benedict speaks of Christ’s love “to the end” in a similar way (John 13:1). Benedict describes the state of fallen humanity as involving self-centered isolation, and he states that Jesus’ love enables “stepping outside the limits of one’s closed individuality” (i.e. Jesus’ love overcomes prideful egotism and self-isolation).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 55.

<sup>71</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> See F. Martin, W.M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, Series: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, pp. 233–235. Benedict (*Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 62), referencing Rudolf Schnackenburg, likewise notes this.

<sup>73</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 57.

<sup>74</sup> J.C. Cavadini, *Pride*, op. cit., p. 680.

<sup>75</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 54–55 (quote from p. 55).

Another Augustinian-themed remark that Benedict makes about Jesus' "servant-love" is that it "makes us fit for God, makes us 'clean'."<sup>76</sup> By speaking of Christ's love as purifying, Benedict recalls his earlier treatment of Matt 5:8, where he previously marshaled this Augustinian motif. Benedict later speaks of Christ's love as purifying at the conclusion of his treatment of the Footwashing. But before resuming this topic, Benedict introduces another Augustinian motif into his interpretation of the Footwashing. When interpreting Jesus' declaration to Peter: "You are clean [*katharoi*]" (John 13:10), he speaks to the purifying power of faith. This is the second component of the Footwashing relevant for present purposes.<sup>77</sup>

Benedict first situates Jesus' words in John 13:10 with respect to Israel's purification rites and their re-focusing by Jesus in Mark 7:1–20. Purification rites in Israel were ordered to making one properly disposed to be near God's presence. Benedict then observes that in Mark 7:17–20, Jesus refocuses the topic of purity onto people's interiority, moral dispositions and conduct, i.e. the heart. When asking how the heart becomes pure, Benedict appeals to Acts 15:5–11, the same text which proved important for Augustine in the maturation of his thought on the matter. At the Jerusalem Council, Peter declares that God "purified [the Gentiles'] hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Like Augustine, Benedict emphasizes that this purification of the heart by faith is something that God does in people: "Faith cleanses the heart. It is the result of God's initiative towards man. It is not simply a choice that men make for themselves."<sup>78</sup> Faith is a gift and work of God in people: "Faith comes about because men are touched deep within by God's Spirit, who opens and purifies their hearts."<sup>79</sup>

Benedict elaborates on the purifying power of faith by appealing to two other Johannine texts.<sup>80</sup> First, Benedict cites John 15:3, a section of Jesus' teaching on the Vine and the Branches where he tells his disciples, "You are already pruned [lit. cleansed; Greek: *kathairei*] because of the word which I have spoken to you." Jesus' word is his revelation, and it has the power to purify and transform those who take it in by faith.<sup>81</sup> As Benedict puts it, Jesus' word "penetrates them, transforms their intellect, their will, their 'heart', and opens it up in such a way

<sup>76</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 57.

<sup>77</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 57–61.

<sup>78</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 58–59.

<sup>79</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 59.

<sup>80</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 59.

<sup>81</sup> See W.M. Wright IV, *Lectio Divina and the Powerful Presence of God's Word: Insights from the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1–8)*, [in:] *Lectio Divina: Assimilating the Holy Word in Seminary Formation*, ed. J. Keating, Omaha, NE 2023, pp. 5–24; W.M. Wright IV,



that it becomes a seeing heart.”<sup>82</sup> The second text is from Jesus’ prayer in John 17, where he petitions the Father with respect to his disciples: “Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth” (John 17:17). Benedict again mentions that the language of sanctification picks up Israel’s cultic practices to make a priest fit to enter God’s presence and there offer worship. In John 17, Jesus associates sanctification with the truth that is the Word of God. So understood, Benedict remarks, the disciples “must be immersed in [the Word of God] in order to be freed from the impurity that separates them from God.”<sup>83</sup> As John’s Gospel teaches, the Word of God (i.e. the truth) is Jesus’ himself (cf. John 1:1; 14:6), and thus, it is Jesus, whom believers take in by faith, who purifies the heart and makes people able to enter into God’s presence.

Benedict concludes his treatment of John 13:10 by revisiting the contrast with Neoplatonist ascent.<sup>84</sup> Whereas in Neoplatonism, purification unto reunion with the divine One is fundamentally a human action and process of dematerializing, in Christianity, by contrast, purification is fundamentally a divine action, the work of “the incarnate God who makes us truly pure and draws creation into unity with God.”<sup>85</sup> Having taken on a human nature, the Son draws people into union with God by drawing them into communion with himself. Purification is God’s action in people, which he works in them through the gifts of faith and love. Both of these gifts presuppose the spiritual communion with Christ himself, who indwells people by faith and whose love comes to be realized in people through transformed conduct.

Benedict develops these themes in a third component of the Footwashing episode: the love command which is described in John 13:34 as “new.”<sup>86</sup> After reiterating that purification is God’s work in people, Benedict then considers the place of human action when Jesus commands his disciples “to wash one another’s feet” (13:14). He opens up the relation between God’s gift and human action by employing the patristic (and notably Augustinian) categories of *sacramentum* and *exemplum*. Benedict defines *sacramentum* as “the entire mystery of Christ—his life and death—in which he draws close to us, enters us through his Spirit, and transforms us.”<sup>87</sup> Put differently, the *sacramentum* is

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F. Martin, *Encountering the Living God in Scripture: Theological and Philosophical Principles for Interpretation*, Grand Rapids, MI 2019, pp. 24–35, 61–77, 232–236.

<sup>82</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 59.

<sup>83</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 59.

<sup>84</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 60–61.

<sup>85</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 60.

<sup>86</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 61–65.

<sup>87</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 62.

the indwelling reality of the risen Jesus, who “cleanses’ us, renewing us from within, [and] ... unleashes a dynamic of new life.”<sup>88</sup> So understood, the gift that is the indwelling *sacramentum* effects communion between Christ and the Christian such that “he now acts in us and our action becomes one with his.”<sup>89</sup> Christ’s love comes to operate within and through the loving conduct of those spiritually united to him. This is why, according to Benedict, the love command is called “new.”<sup>90</sup> It is not new in the sense of being a higher or more intense moral requirement. Rather, it is new in that it rests upon a “new foundation of being that is given to us,” i.e. the indwelling Christ.<sup>91</sup>

Benedict mentions that Augustine developed his thinking on this matter over the course of his *Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount*.<sup>92</sup> He moved from regarding the sermon as a more rigorous moral teaching to a greater emphasis on God’s mercy and his action to purify the heart as indicated in Matt 5:8. For Augustine, Benedict writes, “only by letting ourselves be repeatedly cleansed, ‘made pure’, by the Lord himself can we learn to act as he did, in union with him.”<sup>93</sup> As one yields to Christ’s action to cleanse the heart, the more one’s communion with him grows and produces loving conduct.

This basic structure—the indwelling presence of Christ issuing forth in believers’ loving practice—recalls Ratzinger’s analysis of the relationship of faith and love in Augustine. For Augustine, Ratzinger states, love issues forth from faith by which Christ dwells within the believer; it is the “turning to the world out of the power of inwardness.”<sup>94</sup> He characterizes love on Augustine’s account as “the extension of the foundational decision of faith, of the decision for descent into daily life.”<sup>95</sup> Benedict’s analysis of the love command in terms of *sacramentum* and *exemplum* unfolds along these lines. Believers enter into spiritual union with Christ, who indwells them by faith (i.e. *sacramentum*). The indwelling reality of Christ grounds a new basis of life, cleanses the heart, and issues forth in the believer’s transformed life of Christian charity (i.e. *exemplum*).<sup>96</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 62.

<sup>89</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 63–64.

<sup>91</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 64.

<sup>92</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 64–65.

<sup>93</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 64.

<sup>94</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 560 (“Weltzuwendung aus der Kraft der Innerlichkeit heraus”).

<sup>95</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Der Weg...*, op. cit., p. 560 (“Insofern ist die caritas einfach die Verlängerung der Grundentscheidung des Glaubens, der Entscheidung zum Absteigen in den Alltag hinein”).

<sup>96</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 65.

## The Father and the Son

The third place where Benedict references Matt 5:8 with respect to an Augustinian notion of purification is his discussion of the Father-Son saying in Matt 11:25–27 (cf. Luke 10:21–22).

Essential for Benedict’s interpretation of this passage is the closing verse: “no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal [him]” (Matt 11:27). Benedict begins his explication by stating two important principles: first, “Only the Son truly ‘knows’ the Father”; second, with a subtle allusion to the Greek philosophical principle that like is known by like, “Knowing always involves some sort of equality [or sameness; *Gleichheit*].”<sup>97</sup> Developing this second principle, Benedict writes, “Every process of coming to know something includes in one form or another a process of assimilation, a sort of inner unification of the knower with the known.”<sup>98</sup> Benedict integrates these two principles and brings them to bear on the identity of Jesus as the Son: “Truly to know God presupposes communion with him, it presupposes oneness of being with him. ... [And this is] what ‘the Son’ is and what the term means: perfect communion in knowledge, which is at the same time communion in being.”<sup>99</sup> Knowing God follows upon one’s being in communion with God in some manner. As the Son, Jesus’ knowledge of the Father is perfect on account of his complete union in being with the Father. Since Jesus has this perfect communion with the Father in being and knowledge, he can freely share it with others. The implication of this association, according to Benedict, is that “all real knowledge of the Father is a participation in the Son’s filial knowledge of him, a revelation that he grants.”<sup>100</sup>

In addition to the union of being and knowing between the Father and the Son, Benedict also treats the union of their wills.<sup>101</sup> To support this point, Benedict cites Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, where Jesus unites his human will with the divine will.<sup>102</sup> Benedict sees the same dynamic at work in the Will

<sup>97</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 340; German text from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 391. For discussion of the principle that ‘like is known by like,’ see Aristotle, *De an.* I.2 (403b–404b); III.3 (427a).

<sup>98</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 340. He also acknowledges that this union of knower and known will differ according to the particular modality of each’s being.

<sup>99</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 340.

<sup>100</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 341.

<sup>101</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 341.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 157–161.

Petition of the Lord's Prayer.<sup>103</sup> When he previously discussed this petition, Benedict wrote of Jesus: "his oneness with the Father's will is the foundation of his life. The unity of his will with the Father's will is the core of his very being."<sup>104</sup> That is, Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father's will marks his identity as the Son.<sup>105</sup> By instructing his disciples to pray the Will Petition, Jesus teaches his disciples to similarly conform their wills to God's will—and so live as sons of the Father. Benedict writes, "together with him, the Son, we may unite our wills with the Father's will, thus becoming sons in our turn, in union of will that becomes union of knowledge."<sup>106</sup> As Jesus invites people to participate in his knowing of the Father, so does he invite them to unite their wills, along with him, to the Father's will. This is how Jesus' disciples live their identity as the Father's adopted sons.

Benedict connects believers' identity as the Father's adopted sons with their designation as "little ones" (Matt 11:25). "The little ones" are believers, whom the Father wills to receive Jesus' revelation. Benedict develops this category by way Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians about the weak and foolish. In 1 Cor 1:18–29, Paul teaches that God chose the weak and foolish in the world to shame the strong and wise. Later in 1 Cor 3:18, Paul writes, "If anyone among you thinks that he is a wise person in this age, let him become a fool so that he may become wise."

As Benedict interprets these passages together, he asks, "What ... is meant by 'becoming a fool' by being 'a little one', through which we are opened up for the will, and so for the knowledge, of God?"<sup>107</sup> The answer, Benedict suggests, lies in the pure in heart beatitude in Matt 5:8.

The pure of heart beatitude spells out "the path of conversion that opens us up to being drawn into the Son's filial knowledge."<sup>108</sup> Taken in light of his interpretation of Matt 11:25, purity of heart involves incorporation into the Son's own being and thus coming to share in his knowledge of the Father. Moreover, in light of the foregoing comments about becoming "little ones," sons of the Father, purity of heart involves receptivity and obedience to the Father's will. Benedict writes the following: "Purity of heart is what enables us to see. Therein consists

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 147–150.

<sup>104</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 149.

<sup>105</sup> See also W.M. Wright IV, *The Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6 and Luke 11 for the Life of the Church*, Series: Touchstone Texts, Grand Rapids, MI 2023, pp. 41–43, 51–56, 157–160.

<sup>106</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 341.

<sup>107</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 342.

<sup>108</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 343.

the ultimate simplicity that opens up our life to Jesus’ will to reveal. We might also say that our will has to become a filial will. When it does, then we can see.”<sup>109</sup>

Benedict closes this discussion by stating, “to be a son is to be in relation ... [and] it involves giving up the autonomy that is closed in upon itself.”<sup>110</sup> Put differently and in more explicitly Augustinian terms, self-enclosed autonomy is characteristic of pride, and the remedy for such pride is the humility of becoming a little one. For becoming a little one means entering into communion with Jesus the Son in humility, faith, and love. In humility, a person receives the Son’s revelation, his very self, and so comes to participate in his filial knowledge of the Father by faith. Furthermore, this acceptance of the Son’s revelation in faith further involves the uniting of one’s will to that of Jesus and thus of the Father, i.e. love. On Benedict’s reading, faith, love, and spiritual communion with Jesus the Son are all interconnected, and they all work the purification of the heart.

## Conclusion

Benedict’s references to purification of the heart in his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy are much informed by Augustine’s theological epistemology and his interpretation of the “pure of heart” beatitude (Matt 5:8). Following Augustine, Benedict speaks of the heart as the “organ” by which the human being comes to see and know God. The heart, however, must be purified because its vision has been obscured by sin. The purification or cleansing of the heart is worked by God in people through their communion with Jesus in faith and love. By entering into communion with Jesus, one’s heart is cleansed by faith as one comes to share in his knowledge of the Father. Moreover, communion with Jesus founds the purification of the heart worked by his humility and love, which become operative and transformative of one’s conduct as one’s will becomes aligned with God’s will. With Augustine, Benedict understands the purification of the heart to be a graced process of intellectual and moral conversion, grounded in the believer’s communion with Christ, which begins in this life and culminates in heaven where the saints enter fully into the presence of God and see him.

<sup>109</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 343.

<sup>110</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus...*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 343.

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