

# “For the Many”: The Vicarious-Representative Heart of Joseph Ratzinger’s Theology

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**Abstract**

The concept of vicarious representation (*Stellvertretung*) is central to Joseph Ratzinger’s thought. He uses it, with its correlative concept of pro-existence, to develop a theology in which “the few” are the starting point from which God saves “the many.” This article examines the concept’s influence on Ratzinger’s soteriology, Christology, and ecclesiology. It concludes by exploring four areas in which his vicarious-representative theology makes a significant contribution: the soteriological role of human freedom, the *pro multis* controversy, the “smaller but purer” criticism of his ecclesiology, and the Church’s mission in a religiously plural world.

**Keywords**

Benedict XVI, Christology, ecclesiology, little flock, the many, pro-existence, *pro multis*, Ratzinger, salvation history, smaller but purer, *Stellvertretung*, vicarious representation

**S***tellvertretung* or vicarious representation (sometimes translated, less adequately, as “representation” or “substitution”) stands at the heart of Joseph Ratzinger’s theology.<sup>1</sup> It is also a concept that has gone largely unnoticed or undeveloped in

1. *Stellvertretung* literally means a representation standing for or in the place of something or someone else; but “representation,” while it conveys the likeness of Jesus to us—i.e., in being fully human himself, he truly represents humanity—does not sufficiently

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most analyses of his thought,<sup>2</sup> which may be surprising, given its importance to his theological vision as a whole and to his Christology and ecclesiology in particular. Ratzinger uses the concept of vicarious representation, for instance, to develop a Christology centered on Christ's pro-existence as the one whose entire being is "for" the service and salvation of the many, and an ecclesiology that sees the Church—in the words of Yves Congar that Ratzinger makes his own—as a "*pars pro toto*" and a "minority in service of a majority."<sup>3</sup> Far from being marginal, the concept of vicarious

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convey the uniqueness of his identity and mission. And "substitution," while it conveys Jesus' uniqueness—i.e., he endures suffering and death in our place—fails to convey sufficiently that Jesus seeks also to involve us in his own paschal mystery. "Vicarious representation" conveys more adequately both dimensions: uniqueness-substitution and participation-representation. In what follows, publications listed without authorial citation are by Joseph Ratzinger.

2. James Corkery is one of the few theologians who mentions the theme: "This notion of Christ the representative (*Stellvertreter*) and of Christians participating in his service (*Dienst*) of representing humanity before God, of 'standing in' for us, is prominent also in Ratzinger's soteriology, deserving much more attention than I can give it here" (Corkery, *Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Ideas: Wise Cautions and Legitimate Hopes* [New York: Paulist, 2009] 154). Corkery's doctoral dissertation attends to both vicarious representation and its correlative theme, pro-existence (see Corkery, "The Relationship between Human Existence and Christian Salvation in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger" (STD dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1991) 171–82, 109–17 (pro-existence). Other theologians who mention but do not expand upon the theme include Johannes Feiner, "Kirche und Heilsgeschichte," in *Gott in Welt: Festgabe für Karl Rahner*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 317–45, at 326–27 (ET: "Particular and Universal Saving History," in *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic: Studies in the Nature and Role of the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Alain Woodrow and Edward Quinn [London: Sheed & Ward, 1968] 163–206, at 177–78); Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 177, 136–41 (pro-existence); Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009) 155–61; Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Continuum, 2005) 153–54, 126–28 (pro-existence); Roberto Tura, "La teologia di J. Ratzinger," *Studia patavina* 21 (1974) 145–82, at 175–76; D. Vincent Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007) 55, 153–54; Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI.: Die Entwicklung seines Denkens* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2007) 10, 48, 74, 139–43 (all pro-existence); Thomas Weiler, *Volk Gottes—Leib Christi: Die Ekklesiologie Joseph Ratzingers und ihr Einfluß auf das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1997) 109–16, 277, 346–48. All page numbers indicated above refer to vicarious representation unless otherwise noted.
3. Yves Congar, "A Small Church in a Large World," in *The Wide World, My Parish: Salvation and Its Problems*, trans. Donald Attwater (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 8–16, at 12. Ratzinger cites this text in various articles. Congar borrows the phrase "a minority in the service of a majority" from Julien Weill, *Le Judaïsme* (Paris: Alcan, 1931) 16; the English translation omits this reference. Throughout this article I usually capitalize "Church" to cohere with Ratzinger's consistent usage in which "Church" refers to the Church as a whole, i.e., what Vatican II calls the "Church of Christ."

representation illumines Ratzinger's thought on the salvific relationship between the "few" and the "many," between Christ and humanity, and between the Church and the world. My aim here is twofold: first, to elucidate this essential, if often overlooked, dimension of Ratzinger's theology, and second, to suggest that such elucidation helps address both contested questions in his thought and their implications for the contemporary Church.

## Vicarious Representation

The theme of vicarious representation is present throughout Ratzinger's corpus, both chronologically and systematically. Kurt Koch notes the "central role" it plays in Ratzinger's theology, and Karl-Heinz Menke has examined at length its place in Ratzinger's thought.<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger himself has noted that the theme of vicarious representation is a

fundamental category of biblical revelation that nevertheless plays only a meager role in theology, most likely because it lacks a corresponding philosophical model. The concept has instead been largely relegated to the literature of edification and spirituality [*die reine Erbauungsliteratur*]. . . . New Testament theology is first and foremost a theology of vicarious representation.<sup>5</sup>

Ratzinger's thought bears witness to his effort to develop this concept in a constructive, properly theological manner.

Chronologically, vicarious representation is addressed most directly in Ratzinger's early thought (ca. 1958–1965): for example, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*;<sup>6</sup> "Die neue Heiden und die Kirche";<sup>7</sup> "Paulinisches Christentum?";<sup>8</sup> "Stellvertretung"; and "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?"<sup>9</sup> In the mid- to late 1960s Ratzinger developed the theme through the lens of pro-existence, most substantially in *Introduction to Christianity*, his major work from this era.<sup>10</sup> This weaving of vicarious representation

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4. Kurt Koch, *Das Geheimnis des Senfkorns: Grundzüge des theologischen Denkens von Papst Benedikt XVI* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2010) 18; Karl-Heinz Menke, *Stellvertretung: Schlüsselbegriff christlichen Lebens und theologische Grundkategorie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1991) 321–39. All translations in this article are mine unless noted otherwise.
  5. Joseph Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation," trans. Jared Wicks, *Letter and Spirit* 7 (2011) 209–20, at 209, 212. The original is "Stellvertretung," in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Heinrich Fries, 2 vols. (München: Kösel, 1962–63) 2:566–75, translation amended.
  6. *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (1960; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993).
  7. This essay was first published in *Hochland* 51 (1958/59) 1–11. I will quote from the version published, with minor changes, in *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969) 325–38.
  8. "Paulinisches Christentum?," *Hochland* 52 (1959/60) 367–75.
  9. "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?," in *Das neue Volk Gottes* 339–61, at 360.
  10. *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004).

and pro-existence continued through the 1970s,<sup>11</sup> 1980s,<sup>12</sup> and 1990s,<sup>13</sup> even as his theological attention often focused on other subjects due to his responsibilities as archbishop of Munich and Freising from 1977 to 1982 and as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1981 to 2005. Vicarious representation finds its most recent and mature expression in the three volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth*, which serve as the capstone to his theological labors. The theme is therefore a significant, long-standing presence in his theology.

Systematically, vicarious representation appears in the various areas of Ratzinger's theological corpus, as in *Eschatology* and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, for instance, but I focus on the three areas in which it is articulated most prominently: (1) salvation history, (2) Christology and soteriology, and (3) ecclesiology.

### Salvation History

Ratzinger argues that salvation history's "fundamental law"<sup>14</sup> is one of vicarious representation, which manifests itself in several dimensions: divine election; the relationship between the "few" and the "many"; and the exchange between Christ and humanity, as well as between the Church and the world. The foundation of Ratzinger's thought on vicarious representation is laid in *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, particularly in its concluding section, "True Universalism." Drawing on Karl Barth's doctrine of election—as presented in *Church Dogmatics* II.2—and Hans Urs von Balthasar's interpretation of that doctrine in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, Ratzinger argues that election must be christologically determined, rather than developed from an abstract, "two unknowns" theory of predestination that "takes place between a terrifying divine absolute on the one side and an isolated creature on the other."<sup>15</sup> A properly Christian understanding of election holds instead that both God and humanity become visible and known in Christ, and that Christ is chosen to take on the burden of

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11. See *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Matthew J. O'Connell (1973; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011) 117; *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, trans. Brian McNeil (1976; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008) 72; *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael Waldstein (1977; Washington: Catholic University of America, 1988) 86–87, 231–33; *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist; The Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor (1978; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003) 33–34.
  12. See *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986 [1984]) 21–22, 41; *Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflections for the Lenten Season*, trans. Mary Groves (New York: Crossroad, 1987 [1985]) 15–16, 55–56; *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, trans. Martha M. Matesich (1989; New York: Crossroad, 1996) 29–32.
  13. See *Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts*, trans. John Rock and Graham Harrison (1997; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006) 86–87; *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (1999; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000) 36–39, 47, 57–61, 98.
  14. Ratzinger, *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 79.
  15. *Ibid.* 76.

humanity's sin and death in exchange for humanity's salvation. Election, then, is always a predestination to happiness, and, following Barth, Ratzinger rejects a double predestination to salvation and to damnation. Such election in Christ, moreover, is always for the sake of service and mission, not of self-aggrandizement: "election is always, at bottom, election for others."<sup>16</sup> Divine election, for Ratzinger, involves solidarity, service, and inclusion. This pro-existence, we will see, stands at the core of his Christology and ecclesiology.

Divine election on behalf of the other(s) establishes a pattern or "fundamental law" of salvation history: "This healing of the whole takes place, according to the will of God, in the dialectical antithesis of the few and the many, in which the few are the starting point from which God seeks to save the many."<sup>17</sup> Ratzinger sees this pattern at work in, for instance, the relationship between pairs of brothers (Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob) that receives its definitive resolution-through-reversal in Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son (or Two Brothers), in which the rejection of one brother becomes the means for the election of both.<sup>18</sup> Scripture as a whole, Ratzinger writes in "Stellvertretung," bears witness to this salvific law.<sup>19</sup> Preeminent in the Old Testament are the figures of Moses in Deuteronomy and of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah; Moses "dies outside the promised land as one struck vicariously by God's wrath and made an outcast," while Second Isaiah—the "culmination" of this theme in the Old Testament—depicts the Suffering Servant as one who also dies as an outcast and, in so doing, "receives 'the many,' that is, humankind itself, as his portion."<sup>20</sup> In the New Testament, vicarious representation is personified in Jesus' offering of himself "for many" (Mark 10:45; 14:24), while the theme reaches its "highpoint" in the Pauline and Johannine writings.<sup>21</sup> Paul's meditation in Romans 9–11 is a "synthesis" on the salvation-historical relationship of Israel and the Church, while his letters collectively develop a theology of the "Two Adams."<sup>22</sup> The Johannine writings, Ratzinger notes, speak of a similar kind of self-sacrificial love and service toward the other.<sup>23</sup>

16. Ibid. 79. Ratzinger has continued to make this point throughout his corpus, recently in *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002) 211–12.

17. Ratzinger, *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 79, 75. See also Ratzinger's comments in *God and the World* 213.

18. Ibid. 78; also Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation" 214.

19. The following examples are taken from Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation" 210–16.

20. Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation" 211. Regarding divine wrath, see Ratzinger's nuanced discussion of Anselm of Canterbury's satisfaction theory in *Introduction to Christianity* 231–34. Ratzinger both affirms the theory's theology of election and pro-existence and questions its "rigid logic" and its separation of Christ's work from his person.

21. Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation" 213.

22. Ibid. 214–15.

23. Ibid. 215–16.

Alongside this debt to Barth and Balthasar, a window into Ratzinger's thought on the relationship of the few and the many is found in a work to which he refers in several articles, Congar's *Vaste monde, ma paroisse* (1959), particularly the chapter, "Petite Église dans la vaste monde" ("A Small Church in a Large World"). Congar begins the chapter with a review of global and ecclesial demographic trends, noting Catholicism's decreasing share of the world's population. This demographic trend raises a theological question: "'A small church in a very large world': that is a fact; what have faith and the Bible to say about it?" The Bible, Congar argues, has "little interest in the quantitative aspect of things,"<sup>24</sup> but emphasizes instead "representative elements" that act dynamically within the whole as "first-fruits":<sup>25</sup> humanity represents the world-creation, Israel represents humanity, the Church as the new Israel represents humanity, and Christ represents "all the Holy People" and indeed all people. Even within a chosen group, a part may exist for the whole, as in the case of a saving remnant within Israel. For Congar, the dynamic of salvation history is that of a "representative inclusion," a "part for a whole," a patriarch—Abraham—who "in his solitude was as it were a seed that was able to fertilize the field of the world, a kind of sacrament of universal faith and salvation."<sup>26</sup> In brief, for Congar the Church is the "dynamic representative minority that is spiritually responsible for the final destiny of all."<sup>27</sup> The parallels between Congar and Ratzinger are evident.

Finally, Ratzinger expresses this "few-many" relationship of election and vicarious representation through the concept of exchange. These exchanges of rejection and acceptance—for example, Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Israel and the Gentiles—run throughout salvation history, culminating in Jesus Christ, in whom God takes on humanity's sin and death—"the *whole* of damnation"<sup>28</sup>—while humanity receives salvation and life. But this vicariousness and exchange are not magical, merely passive, or substitutionary in an exclusionary sense; rather, they call forth and make possible free human response. Ratzinger's conception of vicarious representation is inclusive, rather than exclusive, of human agency.<sup>29</sup> His conception involves a "whole system of vicarious relationships,"<sup>30</sup> extending throughout all salvation history, in which persons and communities love and suffer for the sake of others.

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24. Congar, *Wide World, My Parish* 9.

25. *Ibid.* 11.

26. *Ibid.* 13, 14 (translation amended).

27. *Ibid.* 12.

28. Ratzinger, *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 76.

29. See, for instance, Ratzinger, "Vicarious Representation" 211–12, 219. Ratzinger's thought here indicates a preference for what Karl-Heinz Menke has called Balthasar's "inclusive" conception of *Stellvertretung* over Barth's "exclusive" one. See Menke, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn: Denkformen und Brennpunkte der Christologie*, 2nd rev. ed. (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011) 377–405.

30. Ratzinger, *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 79.

### Christology and Soteriology

This being-for-others opens onto the second major area in which Ratzinger develops his thought on vicarious representation: Christology and soteriology. His Christology and soteriology can be summed up in one word: pro-existence. Jesus' entire life is one of vicarious representation, of existence for the other(s), from his incarnation and baptism to his resurrection and ascension; he lives always on behalf of, and in solidarity with, sinners. Ratzinger programmatically expresses this theme in the second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*:

Recent theology has rightly underlined the use of the word "for" in all four accounts [of the words of institution], a word that may be considered the key not only to the Last Supper accounts, but to the figure of Jesus overall. His entire being is expressed by the word "pro-existence"—he is there, not for himself, but for others. This is not merely a dimension of his existence, but its innermost essence and entirety. His very being is a "being-for." If we are able to grasp this, then we have truly come close to the mystery of Jesus, and we have understood what discipleship is.<sup>31</sup>

And, although the term "pro-existence" is not prominent in *Introduction to Christianity*, published over 40 years earlier in 1968, that book covers similar territory in its development of a vicarious-representative Christology centered on the words "person" and "for." Accordingly, despite differences in vocabulary, Ratzinger's thought manifests a thematic continuity. Here I would like to focus on three dimensions of this pro-existence Christology and soteriology: personhood as relation, "being-for" as the ground of mission and service, and Jesus' self-sacrifice in the Cross and the Eucharist. This christological and soteriological analysis will illumine our subsequent consideration of Ratzinger's vicarious-representative ecclesiology.

Ratzinger's pro-existence Christology originates from a thoroughly relational conception of personhood. His 1966 essay "Zum Personverständnis in der Dogmatik" represents an initial effort to articulate a genuinely Christian understanding of "person" as relation, particularly in a trinitarian framework:

In God, person means relation. Relation, relatedness, is not something added on to the Person, but, rather *is* the Person himself; here the Person exists by his very nature only *as* relation. To put it even more concretely: the first Person begets, not as though the act of begetting a Son was something added on to the complete Person, but rather he *is* the act of begetting, of surrendering himself, of pouring himself out. The Person is identical with this act of self-giving.<sup>32</sup>

*Introduction to Christianity* reiterates much of the substance of "Zum Personverständnis in der Dogmatik," but gives it a fuller Christological exposition. In

31. Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011) 134.

32. Joseph Ratzinger, "On the Understanding of 'Person' in Theology" 186.

this work, Ratzinger presents Jesus as the Son who is perfect relation and openness to the Father and to humanity; Jesus' personhood is pro-existence. Drawing particularly on John's Gospel, Ratzinger writes,

The concept "Son" is a concept of relation. By calling the Lord "Son," John gives him a name that always points away from him and beyond him; he thus employs a term that denotes essentially a relatedness. He thereby puts his whole Christology into the context of the idea of relation.<sup>33</sup>

His unique personal identity is found paradoxically in relation and openness rather than in autonomy and egoism, in a self that is held back or walled off from another.<sup>34</sup> Jesus' personhood, Ratzinger writes, may also be understood as a being "for" and "from" the other; it is pure relatedness.<sup>35</sup>

Second, this trinitarian-christological understanding of personhood generates an understanding of Jesus' identity and mission—or, better, of the inseparability and perfect identity of Jesus' person and mission—in which "the orientation of Jesus' existence, his very essence, is characterized by the little word 'for.'"<sup>36</sup> His personhood is mission, pro-existence. Jesus *is* the one who is sent from the Father and for all humanity; he is this at-once twofold and unitary mission: "The 'servant' aspect is no longer explained as a deed, behind which the person of Jesus remains aloof; it is made to embrace the whole existence of Jesus, so that his *being* itself is service. And precisely because this being, as a totality, is nothing but service, it is sonship."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, his mission is one of representation. He is elected, chosen by the Father not for privilege, but for salvific service, supremely on the cross, wherein this "complete failure"—and, through him and with him, all humanity—is affirmed as son.<sup>38</sup> Jesus is the one who offers his life as a ransom for the many (Mark 10:45).<sup>39</sup> As mentioned earlier, in his saving pro-existence Jesus takes up the burden of human sin and death in exchange for the gift of salvation and divine life.<sup>40</sup> His missionary pro-existence

33. *Introduction to Christianity* 185. Also, *Behold the Pierced One* 21, 26. See also Ratzinger's account of Jesus' filial identity in *Jesus of Nazareth, Part I*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007) xiv, 6–8, 283, 335–45.

34. E.g., *Introduction to Christianity* 186–87, 210. Also, Ratzinger, "Kirche—Zeichen unter den Völkern," in *Wahrheit und Zeugnis: Aktuelle Themen der Gegenwart in theologischer Sicht*, ed. Michael Schmaus and Alfred Läpple (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1964) 456–66, at 465; and *What It Means to Be a Christian*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006) 58.

35. See, e.g., *Introduction to Christianity* 187, 189.

36. "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?" 358. See also "Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets," in *Das neue Volk Gottes* 376–403, at 386–87; and *Introduction to Christianity* 251.

37. *Introduction to Christianity* 226. See also *ibid.* 188, 203, 226; *Jesus of Nazareth, Part I* 319; and *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II* 87, 97.

38. *Introduction to Christianity* 219–20.

39. See *Jesus of Nazareth, Part I* 331; *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II* 136, 240.

40. See "Vicarious Representation" 215.



begins in one sense with the incarnation, but later receives a baptismal and eucharistic shape into which humanity is called to participate salvifically.<sup>41</sup> “Christians,” Ratzinger writes, “live first of all and totally from the Lord’s service of representation and at the same time they receive it as the basic law of their own being and action.”<sup>42</sup>

This passage leads to a third dimension of Ratzinger’s vicarious-representative Christology and soteriology: Jesus’ self-sacrifice, above all in the Cross and the Eucharist. Ratzinger’s central claim here is the contrast between biblical and ancient-“magical” understandings of vicarious representation. In the ancient cultures and religions surrounding Israel, he argues, vicarious representation took the form of an “other”—a substitute king or other image—offered to appease divine wrath; such “havoc” is thus discharged against the proxy rather than the living person or community it represents.<sup>43</sup> In the biblical conception, by contrast, a person (e.g., Abraham pleading on behalf of Sodom//Christ) or a community (Israel//the Church) stands in solidarity with the “other” and sacrifices him-/her-/itself, representing the other before God.<sup>44</sup> Where the ancient-magical practice seeks to save the person or the community by offering up an “other,” in the biblical worldview the person or the community seeks to lose him-/her-/itself for the sake of the other. One might say that in revelation the direction or flow of sacrifice is completely reversed: sacrifice is not first humanity’s offering to God, but God’s offering to humanity. A scriptural view of vicarious representation, Ratzinger argues, presents the exact opposite of its ancient-magical counterpart: self-involvement rather than proxy-involvement, divine rather than human initiative, and liberation by the other rather than self-liberation. The salvation that the ancient rites of vicarious representation sought but could not deliver is now freely and fully given by God’s own self in Jesus:

The one man, Jesus, dies for the nation: the mystery of vicarious atonement [*Stellvertretung*] shines forth, and it is this that constitutes the most profound content of Jesus’ mission. . . . The whole of his living and dying is concealed within the word “for”; as Heinz Schürmann in particular has emphasized, it is “pro-existence.”<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the divine initiative and action manifested in the Cross and the Eucharist are not effected magically or unilaterally, but rather call for human response and conversion.<sup>46</sup> Jesus both “stand[s] in for us” and “take[s] us up with him”:<sup>47</sup> his vicarious representation embodies both the “for” of substitution and the “with” of representation. Vicarious representation, then, discloses the mystery of the *totus Christus*:

41. Ibid. 212–13.

42. Ibid. 213.

43. Ibid. 210. See also *Jesus of Nazareth: Part II* 172–73.

44. “Vicarious Representation” 210. See also *Jesus of Nazareth: Part II* 173–74.

45. *Jesus of Nazareth: Part II* 172, 174.

46. “Vicarious Representation” 211–12, 219; see also *God Is Near Us* 36–38.

47. *Jesus of Nazareth: Part II* 173.

The vocation of the Church is to enter into this vicarious-representative ministry [*Stellvertretungsdienst*] of Christ, the Christ who wanted to act—as Augustine put it beautifully—as the “whole Christ, head and members.” In still other terms, in the salvation of each person, according to Christian faith, Christ is at work. But where Christ is, there too is the Church, because he refused to remain alone, but wanted as it were to lavish himself upon us twice in involving us in his ministry [*sondern gleichsam die doppelte Verschwendung geschieht, daß er uns mitbeteilt an seinem Dienst*]. Christ is never a mere individual standing before all humanity: that Jesus of Nazareth is the “Christ,” means precisely that he did not wish to remain alone, that he created a “body.” To speak of the “body of Christ” is to say that men and women participate in the ministry of Christ, so that they become as it were his “agents” and that he can no longer be thought of without them. *Solus Christus numquam solus*, one would say here: Christ alone saves, certainly, but this Christ who alone saves is never alone, and it is characteristic of his saving action that he does not make others into mere passive recipients of a self-contained [*abgeschlossenen*] gift, but introduces them into his own activity: the human person is saved in cooperating in the salvation of others. We can thus say saved for others and in this sense also by others.<sup>48</sup>

### Ecclesiology

The preceding passage, highlighting the sharing of believers in Christ's own saving ministry, leads to the third major area in which Ratzinger develops his thought on vicarious representation: ecclesiology. One might say that, for him, ecclesiology is Christology writ communal or plural; the Church's identity and mission flow directly from Jesus' identity and mission. The Church is the *totus Christus*, whose head and members are inseparable. The Church, like Jesus, is chosen for the sake of a saving mission. The Church's deepest vocation, like Jesus', is pro-existence; it is called to exist for others, and so its nature and mission—like Jesus'—are identical (even if the Church, unlike its Lord, is not sinless). Ratzinger often views the Church as a little flock, a mustard seed chosen by God to live for the sake of others; called to be always other-oriented and never self-centered, it exists to serve and save others through its participation in Jesus' own vicarious representation.

It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive overview of Ratzinger's ecclesiology,<sup>49</sup> so I leave aside several important topics (e.g., the relationship of primacy and collegiality, ecumenism, the Church and the political order) in order to emphasize those dimensions most pertinent to my focus on vicarious representation: the identity of nature and mission in the Church's election and pro-existence; the “little flock” as a sacrament of salvation for the “many,” particularly

48. “Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?” 358; also *God Is Near Us* 50.

49. See Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology; Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007); and Thomas Weiler, *Volk Gottes—Leib Christi*. See also James Massa, “The Communion Theme in the Writings of Joseph Ratzinger: Unity in the Church and in the World through Sacramental Encounter” (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1996).

in its threefold service of mission, agape, and suffering to the “‘other’ brother”;<sup>50</sup> and the Church as a mustard seed.

Election and pro-existence overlap in Ratzinger’s ecclesiology. Divine election, I have shown, is always election for others and for mission, while pro-existence is literally “being-for” the other. In the Church’s vicarious representation, identity and mission coincide:

Jesus saw the essence of [the Church’s] mission in vicarious-representative service for the many (Mk 10:45, 14:24). The deepest essence of the Church is to be together, with Christ, the *totus Christus*, head and members. If the essence of Christ’s mission is vicarious representation, then [the Church] has no other essence itself. Its essence is simply this “standing-for.” . . . Because the Church is essentially not-for-itself, but is instead for-the-others; because its essence is never closed-off against the other, but is an open entity [*eine offene Größe*], it must therefore burst forth [*treiben*] in mission. Mission is the visible manifestation of that “for,” which belongs to the essence of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

The Church’s election further involves a sharing in Christ’s own “marvelous exchange,” by which he takes on all of humanity’s sin and death and gives to humanity salvation and life.

This great mystery of vicarious representation [of Christ, the One, for humanity, the Many], from which all history lives, continues in a whole abundance of vicarious representations, which has its crown and its unification in the correlation [*Zueinander*] of the Church and what is not-Church, of believers and “pagans.”<sup>52</sup>

Both election and pro-existence, then, rule out self-sufficiency, self-absorption, and a triumphalistic self-satisfaction.<sup>53</sup> The Church’s nature and mission, by contrast, compel it to be truly catholic in its openness to others, its missionary vocation, and its humble self-awareness as the unmerited fruit of Christ’s own “wonderful exchange.” The Church, even—perhaps especially—in its awareness of its divine election, must recall that it exists only from what it receives from God and from humanity as a whole.<sup>54</sup>

50. *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 81.

51. Ratzinger, “Kirche,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd rev. ed., 10 vols., ed. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (Freiburg: Herder, 1957–65) 6:172–83, at 180.

52. “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche,” in *Das neue Volk Gottes* 335.

53. Roberto Tura notes that Ratzinger’s emphasis on the Church’s sacramental visibility intends to rule out such triumphalism: “When speaking of the Church’s visibility, [Ratzinger] does not mean it as a self-contained greatness; it involves the ‘visibility of a window,’ whose essence consists in referring beyond itself. The Church in its visibility stands in the order of means, offering a preparatory service, which cannot be identified simply with Christ and his Reign” (Tura, “La teologia di J. Ratzinger” 164).

54. See *Introduction to Christianity* 254. See similar remarks in Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* no. 7.

The Church lives out this vicarious-representative election and pro-existence as a sacrament of salvation, chiefly through its service of the “‘other’ brother.” Ratzinger’s concern for the Church’s role in the salvation of non-Christians emerged early on in his scholarly work—“The New Pagans and the Church,” for instance, was published in 1958. His thought on the topic begins with the recognition among contemporary Christians that non-Christians can be saved and that the long-standing teaching on salvation by an implicit desire for ecclesial membership is inadequate. He notes, not without a hint of reservation:

We can no longer believe that the person next to us—and who is splendid, helpful, and kind—will go to Hell because he is not a practicing Catholic. The idea that all “good” people will be saved, is as obvious today, for the average Christian, as its opposite was in the past.<sup>55</sup>

Ratzinger’s more nuanced position on the salvation of non-Christians seeks to affirm several truths: God’s universal salvific will, the absolute character of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions, Christ’s unique and universal mediation of salvation, the Church’s sacramental mediation of that salvation, and the gratuity and the necessity of grace for salvation. Affirming that God wills (and so makes possible) the salvation of non-Christians, Ratzinger also rejects any form of *apokatastasis* (which compromises human free-will) or semi-Pelagianism (which compromises the necessity of grace).<sup>56</sup>

Within this framework, the Church participates sacramentally in the salvation of the many by representing humanity before God and participating in Christ’s own aforementioned “unequal exchange” of destinies. In that “unequal exchange,” the Church as a little flock acts as a kind of “Archimedean point”<sup>57</sup> by which the “few” save the “many.” The relationship of the “few” and the “many,” however, is not unilateral but mutual; both parties stand equally under Christ’s vicarious representation.<sup>58</sup> Because of this “common subordination” of the “few” and the “many,” Ratzinger rejects a static or “juxtaposed” view of their relationship, arguing instead for a dynamic relationship of mutuality, in which both groups are inseparably ordered to each other. God, he writes, can elect “directly” or indirectly “through his seeming rejection.”<sup>59</sup> Ratzinger’s argument for the little flock’s sacramental role in salvation seeks, therefore, to hold together both the distinction between the “few” and the “many”—“a subdividing which unceasingly recurs in Scripture”<sup>60</sup>—and God’s comprehensive election of both groups:

For the Church to be the means of salvation for all, it does not have to extend itself visibly to all, but has instead its essential role in following Christ, he who is uniquely “the one,” and

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55. “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche” 333.

56. “Vicarious Representation” 219.

57. “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche” 334.

58. See *ibid.* 335.

59. *Ibid.* 334.

60. *Ibid.*

therein the church is the little flock, through which God however intends to save “the many.” The Church’s service is not carried out *by* all human beings, but is indeed carried out *for* all of them.<sup>61</sup>

The Church carries out its sacramental service of the salvation of the “many” not least in its “concrete, day-to-day manner of Christian service toward the ‘other’ brother.”<sup>62</sup> This service takes three primary forms. The first is missionary activity, which unfolds in a dialectic of open proclamation and “holy reserve”; the Church must speak of Christ to the world so that all can hear of him, but it also “must not try to catch men with the word unawares, as it were, without their knowing it. She has no right to draw the word out of a hat, like a conjuror.”<sup>63</sup> The second form of service is *agape*, which, while practiced first within the Church and aiming at making it “an attractive and exemplary force . . . a ‘city set on a hill’ (Mt 5:14),” must not be content simply with caring for fellow Christians alone: “Everyone who needs their help is, by virtue of that, and independently of his own belief, a brother of the Lord—in fact, a manifestation of the Lord himself (Mt 25: 31–46). A true parousia of Christ takes place wherever a man recognizes and affirms the claim on his love that comes from a fellow man in need.”<sup>64</sup> The third and “highest mission” of Christians toward others is to suffer for them vicariously and representatively. The Church shares—as *Gaudium et spes* would later put it—not only in the “joys and hopes” but also the “grief and anguish” of all humanity. When all its activities and initiatives founder, the Church can still offer its suffering for the salvation of the many: “It is when she is called to suffer for others that she achieves her highest mission: the exchange of fate with the wayward brother and thus his secret restoration to full sonship and full brotherhood.”<sup>65</sup> Such is the Church’s highest mission, precisely because it is here that the Church participates most deeply in the pro-existence and exchange of destinies that is Jesus’ own identity and mission. In suffering the Church is lovingly emptied of self for the sake of others and so makes possible their salvation. Bearing the burdens of the other, the Church shares in Christ’s redeeming work. However small and weak the community of disciples may be, it can and must be entirely open and diaconal.

A final characteristic of Ratzinger’s vicarious-representative ecclesiology—alongside its emphases on election, pro-existence, and the sacramental service of the “many”—is what one might call that ecclesiology’s form or “style”: the Church as a mustard seed. The image of the “little flock” conveys the few–many relationship, but that of the mustard seed adds to it a dynamic, future-oriented vision. This little flock should not glory in, nor be defensive about, its minority status, but can trust in Jesus’ promise that the smallest of seeds can become the biggest of trees, wildly out of proportion to its present size. One can view this disproportion from two perspectives:

61. “Vicarious Representation” 218. See also “Die neue Heiden und die Kirche” 337.

62. *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 81.

63. *Ibid.* 82. See Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* no. 31.

64. *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 82, 83.

65. *Ibid.* 84.

from large to small, and from small to large. The first perspective is what Ratzinger calls the “law of disguise.” In *Introduction to Christianity*, he writes of several basic principles or laws of Christian existence—for example, the primacy of receiving over doing, the “principle of ‘for.’” One of these is the “law of disguise,” according to which God manifests himself not only in glory and greatness, but still more fully in hiddenness and littleness. Such concealment reveals God more fully: “One could cite in this connection the series Earth–Israel–Nazareth–Cross–Church, in which God seems to keep disappearing more and more and, precisely in this way, becomes more and more manifest as himself.”<sup>66</sup>

Alongside this “law of disguise,” Ratzinger speaks of the mustard seed. In this context two of his works are particularly relevant: “The New Evangelization,” a lecture he delivered on the occasion of the Jubilee Year 2000, and *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II*.<sup>67</sup> His lecture begins with a concern that the Church’s missionary mandate, its conviction that the gospel is intended for all peoples, can have a shadow-side: “the temptation of impatience, the temptation of immediately finding . . . great success, in finding large numbers.” The new evangelization “cannot mean: immediately attracting by using new and more refined means the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church.” Such impatience runs counter to Jesus’ parable likening the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. Ratzinger then refers to Teilhard de Chardin’s insight on the “whiteness of origins”: every beginning is invisible, too small to be seen. God, Ratzinger writes, began the work of humanity’s redemption by choosing the Israelites, a “little flock” compared to much more powerful peoples: “God does not count in large numbers; exterior power is not the sign of His presence.” A seed takes time to grow, and Ratzinger notes that too often Jesus’ disciples sought proofs and great signs of his power; they wanted visible success. The logic of the mustard seed, though, points in an opposite direction. The evangelizer and the believer

must surrender to the mystery of the grain of mustard seed and not be so pretentious as to believe we can immediately produce a large tree. We either live too much in the security of the already existing large tree or in the impatience of having a greater, more vital tree. Instead we must accept the mystery that the Church is at the same time a large tree and a very small grain. In the history of salvation it is always Good Friday and Easter Sunday at the same time. [URL in n. 67, translation amended.]

Ratzinger’s use of the parable of the mustard seed culminates in *Jesus of Nazareth*’s treatment of the resurrection: “In terms of world history, Jesus’ resurrection is improbable [*unscheinbar*]; it is the smallest mustard seed of history. This

66. *Introduction to Christianity* 256.

67. “The New Evangelization” is available in English (and other languages) at the website of the Vatican’s Congregation for Clergy: <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2001-01/30-999999/10IN.html>. A German version can be found in Joseph Ratzinger, *Zeichen unter den Völkern: Kirche—Schriften zur Ekklesiologie und Ökumene, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8/2 (Freiburg: Herder, 2010) 1231–42.

reversal of proportions is one of God's mysteries. The great—the mighty—is ultimately the small."<sup>68</sup> Ratzinger concludes the chapter on the Resurrection—the climactic chapter of his theological last will and testament—with a meditation that sums up his vicarious-representative, “mustard seed” view of salvation history, Christology, and ecclesiology:

To conclude, all of us are constantly inclined to ask the question that Saint Jude Thaddeus put to Jesus during the Last Supper: “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” (Jn 14:22). Why, indeed, did you not forcefully resist your enemies who brought you to the Cross?—we might well ask. Why did you not show them with incontrovertible power that you are the living one, the Lord of life and death? Why did you reveal yourself only to a small flock of disciples, upon whose testimony we must now rely?

The question applies not only to the Resurrection, but to the whole manner of God's revelation in the world. Why only to Abraham and not to the mighty of the world? Why only to Israel and not irrefutably to all the peoples of the earth?

It is part of the mystery of God that he acts so gently, that he only gradually builds up *his* history within the great history of mankind; that he becomes man and so can be overlooked by his contemporaries and by the decisive forces within history; that he suffers and dies and that, having risen again, he chooses to come to mankind only through the faith of the disciples to whom he reveals himself; that he continues to knock gently at the doors of our hearts and slowly opens our eyes if we open our doors to him.<sup>69</sup>

As this passage indicates, Ratzinger's use of the concept of vicarious representation is far-ranging, and so to conclude this analysis of his thought I offer five summary theses:

- (1) Vicarious representation stands—explicitly and implicitly—at the heart of Joseph Ratzinger's theology. Theology cannot be understood adequately apart from it.
- (2) Salvation history, characterized by divine election-for-others and the exchange of destinies, has as its “fundamental law”<sup>70</sup> vicarious representation.
- (3) Jesus Christ, as the one whose saving mission and very person is pro-existence for the many, embodies, generates, and recapitulates vicarious representation. All of salvation history culminates in and flows from him.
- (4) The Church, participating in Christ's own vicarious-representative life and ministry, exists for the salvific, sacramental service of the “many.” Its identity and mission coincide in this pro-existence.

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68. *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II* 247. See also Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012) 21, 67.

69. *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II* 276.

70. *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 79.

- (5) The Church, precisely as a community that lives wholly from and for vicarious representation, must therefore reject sectarianism and self-referentiality in favor of openness, mission, and service.

## Implications of Ratzinger's Thought

Fifty years ago, Ratzinger noted that the concept of vicarious representation stood at the sadly ironic intersection of centrality and marginality: it is a “fundamental category of biblical revelation, which however . . . plays only a meager role in theology.”<sup>71</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to explore why this was the case in 1963 and whether that situation has changed in subsequent decades. It is possible and necessary, though, to inquire about the contribution of Ratzinger's thought on vicarious representation to contemporary theology and ecclesial life. In one sense, his thought merits examination, simply given his significance as an influential *peritus* at Vatican II, a prominent theologian, and a still-more prominent Church leader; understanding his theology may help one understand better, for instance, his conciliar labors or his curial and papal ministry in the Church. I will raise four specific areas in which Ratzinger's thought on vicarious representation may make a significant contribution: the relationship of divine and human freedom-agency; the debate over the liturgical translation of *pro multis*; the implications of his “little flock” ecclesiology; and the mission of the Church, not least vis-à-vis the salvation of members of other religions and of those without religious affiliation.

In the first place, Ratzinger's articulation of the concept of vicarious representation clarifies and affirms the role of human freedom in the work of salvation. As I have argued, Ratzinger conceives of vicarious representation in a manner that includes rather than excludes human agency. An exclusive understanding—largely the domain of Protestant theology, according to Karl-Heinz Menke<sup>72</sup>—seeks to uphold divine initiative and gratuitousness by eliminating what exclusivists perceive as human attempts at self-justification. Other theologians have the opposite concern: vicarious representation may eviscerate human responsibility and agency; Karl Rahner voiced this concern when he questioned whether understanding Jesus as the representative of humanity was “opposed to the correct understanding of self-redemption.”<sup>73</sup>

71. “Vicarious Representation” 209.

72. Menke's *Stellvertretung* contrasts Catholic approaches to vicarious representation that exemplify the *analogia entis* to Protestant approaches that to varying degrees reject the *analogia entis* in favor of the *analogia fidei*.

73. Rahner explains: “If . . . self-redemption means that a man can achieve his fulfillment without God, then any form of self-redemption is foreign to Christian teaching. Christian salvation can only be understood as self-redemption in the sense that a man does not merely receive his salvation in a passive manner but rather realises it with total, and not just partial, freedom” (“The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, trans. David Morland [New York: Seabury, 1979] 199–224, at 208, 207).



Ratzinger, however, holds that Jesus' vicarious representation of humanity does not violate human freedom but fosters it. A Thomistic understanding of causality is, of course, one way of understanding this synergistic affirmation of human freedom: God bestows on human creatures the dignity of causality, not out of any defect in God's power but out of the abundance of God's goodness;<sup>74</sup> divine-primary causality and human-secondary causality do not engage in a tug-of-war or a zero-sum game; rather, the former gives rise to the latter.<sup>75</sup> Ratzinger develops this synergy in a complementary, explicitly ecclesial, way through his use of the *totus Christus*: Christ the head alone saves, but he freely involves the members of his body in the work of redemption: "the human person is saved in cooperating in the salvation of others."<sup>76</sup> Ratzinger likewise sees prayers for the dead as a manifestation of a "self-substituting love" (*stellvertretende Liebe*) that can further the salvation of others.<sup>77</sup> His conception of vicarious representation therefore makes possible a soteriology and an anthropology that affirm the uniqueness of each person precisely in his or her relatedness to others, and in which both the "few" and the "many" may contribute to the salvation of each other.<sup>78</sup> Ratzinger thus rejects what Kathryn Tanner has called a "simple contrastive" view of divine and human agency in favor of a "non-contrastive" one.<sup>79</sup> This non-contrastive, inclusive conception of vicarious representation, which integrates substitution and representation, helps one avoid extremes of human passivity and of a merely exemplaristic Jesus shorn of his uniqueness. It also rules out, we have seen, the extremes of *apocatastasis* and Pelagianism.

74. *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 22, a. 3.

75. Jared Wicks writes, "The key is not to think that a Yes to Christ means simply and solely a No to his members, dialectically, but to admit as well that Christ's influence extends to give others a mode of participation, on their level, in what he is and does" ("A Commentary on *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*," [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20050516\\_commentary-wicks\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20050516_commentary-wicks_en.html)). Wicks's commentary highlights the possible ecumenical fruitfulness of such a participatory view.

76. "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?" 358.

77. *Eschatology* 232; also *Images of Hope* 86–87.

78. *Eschatology* 232: "Yet the being of man is not, in fact, that of a closed monad. It is related to others by love or hate, and, in these ways, has its colonies within them. My own being is present in others as guilt or as grace. We are not just ourselves; or, more correctly, we are ourselves only as being in others, with others, and through others. Whether others curse us or bless us, forgive us and turn our guilt into love—this is part of our own destiny." In *Spe salvi* no. 48 Benedict XVI writes, "We should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do, and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse."

79. Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (New York: Blackwell, 1988) 36–80.

Second, Ratzinger's affirmation of human freedom in the work of salvation frames his discussion of the proper translation of *pro multis* as "for many" or "for all" in the Roman Rite's Eucharistic Prayers. His argument is threefold.<sup>80</sup> First, God desires the salvation of all people, and Jesus died for all humanity (and not simply part of it). Second, God "never . . . forces anyone to be saved,"<sup>81</sup> and so each human person can freely reject God's offer of salvation. Third, both "for all" and "for many" are found in Scripture and tradition, and each translation highlights one side of the same coin: "for all" emphasizes God's universal salvific will, "for many" the freedom of human response to that divine offer of salvation. Ratzinger concludes, "Neither of the two formulae can express the whole of this; each needs correct interpretation, which sets it in the context of the Christian gospel as a whole."<sup>82</sup> If "for all" ought not be understood in an indiscriminate, apocatastic manner, neither should "for many" be understood in a restrictive, Jansenistic manner whereby some are excluded from Christ's redemptive death.

Ratzinger's preference of "for many," then, respects the interdependence of "for all" and "for many." Referring in *Jesus of Nazareth* to a classic vicarious-representative text, Mark 10:45, he notes that in Jesus the missions of the Suffering Servant and the Son of Man coincide; the particularity of the Suffering Servant as representative of Israel opens out into the universality of the Son of Man.<sup>83</sup> The "few," the "many," and the "all" hold together in Jesus the vicarious representative of humanity. Ratzinger's position in this matter seeks to uphold both divine liberality and human freedom-responsibility, and it does so precisely from the perspective of vicarious representation: "if Isaiah used the word 'many' to refer essentially to the totality of Israel, then as the Church responds in faith to Jesus' new use of the word, it becomes increasingly clear that he did indeed die for all."<sup>84</sup>

Third, Ratzinger's emphasis on the Church as a little flock or mustard seed has given rise to the criticism that he seeks a "smaller but purer" Church that would be sectarian in its rigorism and defensive in its posture toward the world.<sup>85</sup> For over 50 years Ratzinger has commented on the likely quantitative diminishment of Christianity

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80. See *God Is Near Us* 34–38. This passage was first published in *Eucharistie—Mitte der Kirche* (Munich: Erich Wewel, 1978).

81. *God Is Near Us* 36.

82. *Ibid.* 37.

83. *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II* 136–37.

84. *Ibid.* 138.

85. A representative critique comes from Gerard Mannion, who writes, "Ratzinger has frequently spoken of the possible need for the Church to become smaller, but purer"; again later in the same work Mannion refers to Ratzinger's "oft-stated belief that the Church needs to become smaller but purer" (*The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion [New York: Continuum, 2010] 85, 154). No references to Ratzinger's writings are provided in support of these claims. I address these issues in "'Smaller but Purer'?: Joseph Ratzinger on the 'Little Flock' and Vicarious Representation," *Nova et Vetera*, forthcoming.

in Europe and North America and its consequent shift—in the erosion of cultural supports—from a “popular” religion to a “Christianity of personal decision.”<sup>86</sup> More recently, he has written of “creative minorities” that can offer a joyful, persuasive witness to Christianity as a way of life.<sup>87</sup>

Ratzinger’s little-flock ecclesiology has two interrelated foundations. The first is its rejection—following Congar—of a quantitative approach to religious vitality in favor of a qualitative one. Size in itself is not of primary ecclesial importance.<sup>88</sup> A smaller Church can be healthy and open, while a larger Church can be sick and closed. Ratzinger, moreover, is not alone in this stance. In the Germanophone theological community, for instance, Hans Küng,<sup>89</sup> Karl Rahner,<sup>90</sup> and, more recently, Walter Kasper<sup>91</sup> have made similar arguments. Second, Ratzinger—again following Congar—roots this qualitative argument in his vicarious-representative theology. Salvation history’s “fundamental law” is that “the few are the starting point from which God seeks to save the many.”<sup>92</sup> These “few” are elected not for privilege but for the service of all people. Ratzinger’s vicarious-representative conception of the Church therefore envisions a humble, diaconal, and other-centered community. The Church of the future may be smaller demographically in several regions, but Ratzinger insists that it must always be open to all if it is to be faithful to Christ’s own pro-existence and vicarious-representative service.

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86. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times; A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010) 162. He raised this issue as early as 1958 in his article “Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche.”

87. Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, trans. Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 2006) 120–21.

88. See Maryanne Confoy’s comment about contemporary religious life: “Christianity has never been a numbers game. Actuarial studies will never do justice to the past, present, or future of religious life. . . . Those who attempt to predict the future through numbers alone have missed the story” (“Religious Life in the Vatican II Era: ‘State of Perfection’ or Living Charism?,” *Theological Studies* 74 [2013] 321–46, at 345).

89. Hans Küng, *Christenheit als Minderheit: Die Kirche unter den Weltreligionen* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1965).

90. Karl Rahner, “Perspectives for the Future of the Church,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1974) 202–17; *The Shape of the Church to Come*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Seabury, 1974).

91. Walter Kasper, “Kirche als qualitative und kreative Minderheit,” in *Katholische Kirche: Wesen–Wirklichkeit–Sendung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011) 65–66. Kasper notes that the end of the Constantinian era and the rise of a diaspora or minority situation should not lead to a Spenglerian narrative of ecclesial decline, but can allow for the emergence of creative minorities with relevance and a reach of influence [*Ausstrahlung*]: “One thinks simply of the importance of Judaism for modern Western culture. Therefore we should not lament decreasing numbers. We must choose not quantity, but quality and, with it, identity” (66).

92. *Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* 79, 75.

Finally, the pro-existent openness of Ratzinger's vicarious-representative ecclesiology helps one understand better the role of the Church's salvific mission, particularly given a growing awareness of religious pluralism and of Vatican II's teaching on the salvation of persons who are not Christian. The real question, as Ratzinger proposed in 1965, is no longer whether non-Christians may be saved, but, he asks:

Why should I believe, then? Why should I not also choose a seemingly easier [*bequemeren*] way, that is to say, instead of being one who bears the name of Christian and assumes its corresponding obligation, and become an "anonymous Christian" who leaves to others the difficulties that this name brings?<sup>93</sup>

Ratzinger responds by affirming that mission begins in God's mercy and hospitality.<sup>94</sup> An appreciation of this gratuity should move the Christian away from the grim moralism of the "envious older brother and of the workers of the first hour" and toward a "generosity and large-heartedness" with which one takes up "the holy burden of serving humanity as a whole."<sup>95</sup> The believer will then share in Christ's own vicarious-representative, pro-existent "for."<sup>96</sup> Ratzinger, we have seen, views mission as the "visible manifestation of that 'for,'" and the Church's essence as "simply this 'standing-for.'"<sup>97</sup>

Several consequences flow from this vicarious-representative conception of mission. Its framework of divine generosity and joyful human service should free the Christian from the fear and discouragement that can arise from a merely quantitative view of the Church's mission throughout history. No longer, Ratzinger writes, will believers worry about the brevity of the "Christian era" or about the "fraction of humanity" that the gospel has reached.<sup>98</sup> The Church's essential role is to follow Christ, and its service "is not carried out *by* all human beings, but is indeed carried out *for* all of them."<sup>99</sup> Thus freed from the burden of visible success, believers and the Church as a whole can then both trust in God's gentle, gradual action in history and commit more fully to the Church's "very necessary mission," the full scope of which will be revealed only at the end of time.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, an awareness of the disparity between God's plan and human-ecclesial response will lead the Church to undertake its saving mission in a spirit of "self-purification," which, Ratzinger comments, "can

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93. "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?" 352–53.

94. "Das Problem der Absolutheit des christlichen Heilsweges," in *Das neue Volk Gottes* 362–75, at 372; "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?" 361; and Jared Wicks, "Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *Peritus* before and during Vatican Council II," *Gregorianum* 89 (2008) 233–11, at 287.

95. "Vicarious Representation" 218.

96. "Kein Heil außerhalb der Kirche?" 358.

97. "Kirche" 180.

98. "Vicarious Representation" 218.

99. *Ibid.*

100. "Die neuen Heiden und die Kirche" 336; also, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II* 276.

be fulfilled only in the encounter [*Begegnen*] with the [non-Christian] other.”<sup>101</sup> Finally, this encounter with the other will make an indispensable contribution to the very goal of the Church’s (and Christ’s) vicarious-representative mission: the unity of all, Jew and Gentile, Christian and non-Christian, in Jesus Christ to the glory of God. Mission, Ratzinger concludes, culminates in adoration, which is at once the “highest duty and greatest privilege” of every human person.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

Ratzinger’s theology of vicarious representation is therefore a substantial, integral dimension of his thought, weaving together salvation history, Christology, and ecclesiology. Its importance can be grasped in its decisive role in what Ratzinger knew would be his final theological project, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Given its significance to his theology, one hopes that it will receive greater attention in coming years, particularly in the English-speaking theological community. Some questions that might be pursued are the following: In which ways does Ratzinger’s understanding of pro-existence allow for genuine mutuality between the “few” and the “many”? Does it result in a unidirectional or even oppositional posture vis-à-vis the broader world and the “other brother”? How does Ratzinger’s use of vicarious representation contribute to, or counter, what has been called the “neo-exclusivism” of his thought? How might his little-flock ecclesiology foster or frustrate a neo-Donatist “smaller but purer” vision of the Church and its mission to the “many”? How do the various answers to these questions affect our understanding of his theology as a whole, as well as of his curial and papal ministry? These are weighty concerns, touching on human salvation, the mission of the Church in the world, and the state of the contemporary Church. It is difficult to be indifferent to them or to him who raised them, and I suspect that the answers offered to such questions might well say as much about the theologian giving them as they do about Joseph Ratzinger.

## Author biography

Christopher Ruddy received his PhD from the University of Notre Dame and is currently associate professor of historical and systematic theology at the Catholic University of America. His areas of special competence include ecclesiology, Vatican II, and the *Nouvelle théologie* and *ressourcement* movements. He has recently published “‘In My End Is My Beginning’: *Lumen gentium* and the Priority of Doxology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 79 (May 2014); “Yves Congar and Hans Küng at Vatican II: Differing Paths of Church Reform,” *Ecclesiology* 10 (May 2014); and “‘Ressourcement’ and the Enduring Legacy of Post-Tridentine Theology,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (2012). Forthcoming is “The Ignatian Matrix of Henri de Lubac’s Thought on Temptation, Asceticism, and the *Homo Ecclesiasticus*,” *Heythrop Journal*. In progress are articles on Ratzinger’s theology of ecclesial reform and on the ecclesiological intersections of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and *Lumen gentium*.

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101. “Das Problem der Absolutheit des christlichen Heilsweges” 374–75. See also “Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets” 403.
102. “Konzilsaussagen über die Mission außerhalb des Missionsdekrets” 403. See also *ibid.* 388; and Wicks, “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger” 287.