

THE POPE BENEDICT XVI
READER



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FOREWORD BY
BISHOP ROBERT BARRON



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SOURCES

FOREWORD

by Bishop Robert Barron



Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) is, quite simply, one of the three or four most important Catholics of the last hundred and fifty years. As a theologian, he ranks with the greatest Christian intellects of the age: Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Henri de Lubac. But he was also a churchman of extraordinary influence, serving as Archbishop of Munich and Freising, and then, for twenty-three years, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Pope St. John Paul II, and finally, for eight years as the successor of Peter. In these properly ecclesial roles, he had an almost unparalleled impact on the life of the Church in Europe and around the world. Since he wrote and spoke on such an extraordinary number of topics in the course of a long career—God, Jesus Christ, the Church, liturgy, anthropology, faith and culture, eschatology, etc.—it is perhaps difficult to gain an adequate appreciation of his thought.

This collection of Ratzinger's writings, from across many years and on a range of themes, is meant to give an overview of his thought to those already acquainted with it and an introduction to those unfamiliar with it. If I were to characterize the life and work of Ratzinger, I would propose these four fundamental themes: he was a man of the Scriptures, a man of the Church Fathers, a man of the Second Vatican Council, and a man of the liturgy. I should like to make just a few simple observations about each of these.

Joseph Ratzinger came of age theologically in the forties and fifties of the last century—which is to say, at the high-water mark of the so-called *ressourcement* (return to the sources) movement. Weary of the somewhat tired scholasticism that dominated Catholic education and of

the endless sniping wars between Protestants and Catholics, the leaders of this school of thought, figures such as de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, and Yves Congar, endeavored to recover the great “sources” from which all of Christian theology flows—namely, the writings of the Church Fathers and the Scriptures themselves. Throughout his career, Ratzinger tended away from the rationalism of the scholastics and leaned toward the lyricism of the Bible. This scriptural orientation came to full expression in one of the last works that he produced—namely, the magnificent three-volume study of Jesus of Nazareth that he wrote while pope. To understand his biblical method, I would especially recommend a careful reading of the passage in this collection in which Pope Benedict discusses the limitations of the historical-critical approach to reading the Bible.

The second “source” was no less significant for Ratzinger, for throughout his life, he remained a devotee of the Fathers of the Church, especially of St. Augustine, whom he humbly claimed as his “master.” From this great theologian of the Western tradition, he learned to read history in a consistently God-centered manner, and from Augustine’s patristic colleagues, he learned the deep integration of theological reflection, biblical inspiration, and personal spirituality. Two of the clearest indications of Ratzinger’s patristic formation are his doctoral dissertation on Augustine’s notion of the Church as the “house of God” and his follow-up *Habilitationsschrift* on St. Bonaventure’s theology of history, which was profoundly marked by patristic thought. But the beautifully crafted and deceptively simple reflections on the Fathers that Pope Benedict gave as Wednesday audience talks during his papacy—many of which are featured in this collection—are perhaps the best introduction to his patristic manner of thinking. I had the very special privilege of hearing a number of these talks in person while I was in Rome as a visiting scholar.

Ratzinger was also a man of the Second Vatican Council. Arriving in Rome in the fall of 1962 as a theological advisor to Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, he was, along with Hans Küng, the youngest of the

periti at the council. During the four sessions of Vatican II, Ratzinger was remarkably active and productive, composing speeches for Frings, editing many of the major conciliar texts, dialoguing with theologians across the ideological spectrum, and helping to explain the determinations of the council fathers to the outside world. In the years after the close of Vatican II, Ratzinger continued to celebrate the achievements of the council in regard to liturgy, ecclesiology, the universal call to holiness, the biblical revival, and the role of the Church in the modern world. Along with Balthasar and de Lubac, he strongly resisted what he took to be a liberal attempt to hijack the council and turn it into a vehicle for the radical transformation of the Church. Thus, from 1965 through the years of his papacy, Ratzinger defended what he called a “hermeneutic of continuity,” according to which Vatican II represented indeed a development of doctrine, but not a rupture with the past. At the same time, like John Paul II, he stood against that “traditionalist” interpretation which would see the council as simply a betrayal of the Catholic tradition. He saw his work, both under John Paul II and in his own right as pope, as giving a definitive interpretation to Vatican II, one that would hold off the extremism of both left and right. A number of speeches, interviews, and essays in the present volume vividly present this aspect of Ratzinger’s work.

Finally, he was a man of the liturgy. Born on Holy Saturday in 1927 and baptized that same day in the Easter water, Ratzinger saw his life as, from the very beginning, marked by the formal worship of the Catholic Church. From the time he was a child, he loved the rituals, gestures, language, and rhythm of the Mass, appreciating that great prayer as the privileged moment of encounter with Jesus Christ. Accordingly, he remained permanently suspicious of any attempt to turn the liturgy into a celebration of subjective experience or of the sanctity of the community. He strenuously resisted the “closed circle” liturgies of the postconciliar period in which priest and people face one another, with little sense of a transcendent point of reference. Properly enacted and fully understood, the Roman liturgy, he felt, is key to the renewal of the

Church and of the wider society. I will never forget the experience of concelebrating Mass in St. Peter's Square with Pope Benedict and sensing in his voice and body language the truths that I garnered through his writings. To grasp the heart of Ratzinger's theology of the liturgy, I would recommend a prayerful reading of the chapter from *The Spirit of the Liturgy* included in our collection.

As I compose these words in the closing days of the year 2020, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is in his ninety-fourth year. I hope that, as this great man comes to the end of his earthly pilgrimage, this book might function not only as a summation of his thought but, more importantly, as a humble tribute to him.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF JOSEPH RATZINGER



- 1927 Joseph Ratzinger is born on April 16 in Marktl am Inn in Bavaria, Germany.
- 1939 Ratzinger enters preparatory seminary in the Archdiocese of Munich.
- 1941 By law, Ratzinger is forced to enroll with the Hitler Youth, but he refuses to attend meetings.
- 1951 On June 29, the same day as his brother Georg, Ratzinger is ordained a priest by Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber of Munich.
- 1953 Ratzinger completes his dissertation on St. Augustine.
- 1957 After completion of his habilitation on St. Bonaventure, Ratzinger is qualified to serve as a university professor in Germany.
- 1958 Ratzinger spends a year teaching at Freising College.
- 1959 Ratzinger becomes a full professor at the University of Bonn.
- 1962–1965 Ratzinger attends the Second Vatican Council as a *peritus* (theological expert) of Cardinal Josef Frings.
- 1963–1977 Continuing his professorial career, Ratzinger holds positions at a number of German universities: Münster (1963–1966), Tübingen (1966–1969), and Regensburg (1969–1977).
- 1972 Along with Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and others, Ratzinger cofounds the theological journal *Communio*.
- 1977 On March 24, Ratzinger becomes the Archbishop of Munich and Freising, and on June 27, he is created a cardinal by Pope Paul VI.
- 1981 Ratzinger is named Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by Pope John Paul II.
- 2002 John Paul II approves Ratzinger's appointment as Dean of the College of Cardinals.
- 2005 Following the death of John Paul II, Ratzinger is elected as the 265th pope on April 19, 2005, and takes the name Benedict XVI.
- 2013 On February 11, Benedict surprises the Church and the world by announcing that he will resign the papacy on February 28.

PART I

LIFE

The excerpts in this part are drawn from Joseph Ratzinger's conversations with Peter Seewald. Seewald is a German journalist who has conducted several interviews with Ratzinger—before, during, and after his papacy—which are published in the following volumes: *Salt of the Earth*, *God and the World*, *Light of the World*, and *The Last Testament*. Seewald's words appear in italics.

CHAPTER I

Early Childhood and Vocation

Joseph Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927, in Marktl am Inn in Upper Bavaria. In this excerpt, Ratzinger discusses the circumstances of his birth, some memories of family life, and his discernment of a priestly vocation.

Your Eminence, what do you think of this idea: We come into this world and what we want to know, we already know, and where we want to be, we already are?

That is going too far, to my mind. I don't know now where that statement comes from, but man comes into the world as a questioner. Aristotle even says—and Thomas Aquinas says it too—as a *tabula rasa*. In other words, they contest that men have innate knowledge; for them the mind begins as pure readiness to receive. I would nuance that a bit. But at any rate it is correct that man exists first as a questioner, who, however, is, so to speak, open from within to the answers.

To a certain extent I am a Platonist. I think that a kind of memory, of recollection of God, is, as it were, etched in man, though it needs to be awakened. Man doesn't simply know what he is supposed to know, nor is he simply there, but is a man, a being on the way.

Precisely the biblical religion of the Old and New Testament always strongly accentuated the image of the wandering people of God, which in the case of Israel really was a wandering people. This image exemplifies the nature of human existence as such. That man is a being under way and that his way is not a fiction, but that something really happens to him in this life, and that he can seek, can find, but can also miss the mark.

You often use the word “providence.” What meaning does it have for you?

I am quite firmly convinced that God really sees us and that he leaves us freedom—and nevertheless leads us. I can often see that things which at first seemed irksome, dangerous, unpleasant, somehow at some point come together. Suddenly one realizes that it was good thus, that this was the right way. For me this means in a very practical way that my life is not made up of chance occurrences but that someone foresees and also, so to speak, precedes me, whose thinking precedes mine and who prepares my life. I can refuse this, but I can also accept it, and then I realize that I am really guided by a providential light.

Now this does not mean that man is completely determined but rather that what is preordained calls forth precisely man’s freedom. Just as we hear in the story of the talents. Five are given; and the one who receives them has a definite task, but he can do it in this way or that. At any rate, he has his mission, his particular gift. No one is superfluous, no one is in vain, everyone must try to recognize what his life’s call is and how he can best live up to the call that is waiting for him.

You were born on April 16, 1927, in Marktl am Inn in Upper Bavaria. You were born on a Holy Saturday. Does that suit you?

Yes, I’m pleased to have been born on the vigil of Easter, already on the way to Easter, but not yet there, for it is still veiled. I find that a very good day, which in some sense hints at my conception of history and my own situation: on the threshold of Easter, but not yet through the door.

Your parents were named Mary and Joseph. You were baptized just four hours after your birth, at 8:30 in the morning. They say it was a stormy day.

Needless to say, I have no recollection of that. My brother and sister have told me that there was a lot of snow, that it was very cold, although it was April 16. But that is nothing extraordinary in Bavaria.

Still, it is uncommon to be baptized just four hours after being born.

That is true. But that has to do with the fact—and this is certainly something that I'm pleased by—that it was Holy Saturday. The Easter Vigil was not yet celebrated in those days, so that the Resurrection was celebrated in the morning, with the blessing of water, which then served throughout the whole year as baptismal water. And because the baptismal liturgy was consequently taking place in the Church, my parents said: "Well the boy's already here," so it is natural that he be baptized too at this liturgical point in time, which is the time when the Church baptized. And the coincidence that I was born at the very moment when the Church was preparing her baptismal water, so that I was the first person baptized with the new water, does indeed mean something to me. Because it situates me particularly in the context of Easter and also binds birth and baptism in a very suggestive way.

You grew up in the country as the youngest of three children. Your father was a constable, the family poor rather than well-off. Your mother, you once recounted, even made her own soap.

My parents had married late, and a Bavarian constable of my father's rank—he was a simple commissioner—was modestly paid. We were not poor in the strict sense of the word, because the monthly salary was guaranteed, but we did have to live very frugally and simply, for which I am very grateful. For thereby joys are made possible that one cannot have in wealth. I often think back on how wonderful it was that we could be happy over the smallest things and how we also tried to do things for one another. How this very modest, sometimes financially difficult situation gave rise to an inner solidarity that bound us deeply together.

Our parents naturally had to make tremendous sacrifices so that all three of us could study. We recognized this and tried to respond. In this way, this climate of great simplicity was a source of much joy as well

as love for one another. We realized how much was given to us and how much our parents took upon themselves.

The business about the soap needs some explanation. It wasn't due to poverty but to the wartime situation in which one had to find some way to obtain goods that were not available in sufficient quantities. Our mother was by profession a cook and had many talents, and she knew such recipes by heart. With her great imagination and her practical skill she always knew, at the very moment when there was hunger in the land, how to conjure up a good meal out of the simplest and scantest means.

My mother was very warm-hearted and had great inner strength; my father was more markedly rationalistic and deliberate. He was a reflective believer. He always understood clearly at the outset what was going on and always had an astonishingly accurate judgment. When Hitler came to power, he said: There's going to be war, now we need a house.

[. . .]

How did your vocation happen? When did you know what your destiny was? You said once that "I was convinced, I myself don't know how, that God wanted something from me, and it could be attained only by my becoming a priest."

At any rate, there was no lightning-like moment of illumination when I realized I was meant to become a priest. On the contrary, there was a long process of maturation, and the decision had to be thought through and constantly rewon. I couldn't date the decision, either. But the feeling that God had a plan for each person, for me too, became clear for me early on. Gradually it became clear to me that what he had in mind had to do with priesthood.

[. . .]

After you decided to become a priest—didn't certain self-doubts emerge at some time, temptations or seductions?

They did, to be sure. In the six years of theological study one encounters so many human problems and questions. Is celibacy right for me? Is being a parish priest right for me? Those were indeed questions not always easy to deal with. I always had the basic direction before me, but there was no lack of crises.

What crises emerged? Can you give an example?

In the years when I was studying theology in Munich I had to struggle above all with two questions. I was fascinated by academic theology. I found it wonderful to enter into the great world of the history of faith; broad horizons of thought and faith opened up before me, and I was learning to ponder the primordial questions of human existence, the questions of my own life. But it became clearer and clearer that there is more to the priestly vocation than enjoying theology, indeed, that work in the parish can often lead very far away from that and makes completely different demands. In other words, I couldn't study theology in order to become a professor, although this was my secret wish. But the Yes to the priesthood meant that I had to say Yes to the whole task, even in its simplest forms.

Since I was rather diffident and downright unpractical, since I had no talent for sports or administration or organization, I had to ask myself whether I would be able to relate to people—whether, for example, as a chaplain I would be able to lead and inspire Catholic youth, whether I would be capable of giving religious instruction to the little ones, whether I could get along with the old and sick, and so forth. I had to ask myself whether I would be ready to do that my whole life long and whether it was really my vocation.

Bound up with this was naturally the question of whether I would be able to remain celibate, unmarried, my whole life long. Since the university had been destroyed and there was as yet no place for theology

students, we lived for two years in the Fürstenried Castle with its buildings on the edge of the city. There not only professors and students but also male and female students lived at such close quarters that the daily encounter definitely made the question of renunciation and its inner meaning a practical one. I often pondered these questions as I walked in the beautiful park of Fürstenried and naturally in the chapel, until finally at my diaconal ordination in the fall of 1950 I was able to pronounce a convinced Yes.

CHAPTER 2

The Young Professor

Ratzinger was ordained to the priesthood in 1951 (along with his brother, Georg) and continued his preparations for a career in academia. He became a full professor in 1958 at the young age of thirty-one and continued in that role for almost twenty years. In this excerpt, he discusses some of his main influences, noting in particular the importance of the theology of St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure.

You once said, “When I began to study theology I also started getting interested in intellectual problems.” This was because they “unveiled the drama of my life and above all the mystery of truth.” What did you mean by that?

I would say that’s a bit “pompously” expressed. All it means is that when you are studying theology, your intention is not to learn a trade but to understand the faith, and this presupposes, as we said a while ago, using the words of Augustine, that the faith is true, that, in other words, it opens the door to a correct understanding of your own life, of the world, and of men. This study also automatically throws you into the whole intellectual debate of Western history. From the very beginning, the faith is interwoven, on the one hand, with the Jewish heritage and, on the other, with the Latin and Greek heritage. And this obviously applies to its modern history. In that sense, the study of theology was tied to the question: What is really true, what can we know?

In our seminary in Freising there was a very vibrant atmosphere in those days. People had come back from the war, some from six-year-long participation in the war, and they were now filled with a real intellectual and literary hunger. With questions, too, of course, questions posed by what they had just lived through. People were reading Gertrud von le Fort, Ernst Wiechert and Dostoevski, Elisabeth Langgässer, everything that was around in the way of literature at the time. Those who studied

in Munich had made the acquaintance of Heidegger and Jaspers via Steinbüchel, who taught moral theology at the time. There was a great intellectual élan, and one got swept up with it.

Which intellectual current interested and fascinated you in particular?

Heidegger and Jaspers interested me a great deal, along with personalism as a whole. Steinbüchel wrote a book entitled *The Revolution of Thought* [*Der Umbruch des Denkens*], in which he recounted with great verve the revolutionary shift from the dominance of neo-Kantianism to the personalistic phase. That was a key book for me. But then from the beginning Saint Augustine interested me very much—precisely also insofar as he was, so to speak, a counterweight to Thomas Aquinas.

He says: “Reprimand troublemakers, comfort the fainthearted, refute opponents.” That’s how he defines his office.

He was a real bishop. He wrote huge tomes, too, so that one wonders how he managed to accomplish that next to all the odds and ends he had to do. But as a bishop he had above all to deal constantly with all the quarrels of the state and with the needs of the little people, and he tried to keep this structure together. It was an unsettled time, the barbarian invasions were beginning. In that sense, he was a man who was by no means floating in the clouds. In the organization of the empire at that time, the bishop was also a sort of justice of the peace. He held a certain level of jurisdiction and had to decide routine civil litigations. So he lived amid all that day by day and in doing so tried to mediate to men the peace of Christ, the gospel. In this sense, he is also an exemplar, because although he had such a great yearning for meditation, for intellectual work, he gave himself up to the small details of everyday life and wanted to be there for people.

What moved me then, however, was not so much his office as shepherd, which I was not familiar with in that way, but the freshness and vitality of his thought. Scholasticism has its greatness, but everything is very impersonal. You need some time to enter in and recognize

the inner tension. With Augustine, however, the passionate, suffering, questioning man is always right there, and you can identify with him.

You finally became interested in Bonaventure's theology of history. How did that happen?

It was actually by chance. Since my dissertation had dealt with the ancient Church, my teacher, Professor Söhngen, remarked that my post-doctoral work should treat the Middle Ages or the modern period. In any case, I was supposed to do research of some kind on Bonaventure's concept of revelation. Söhngen knew that the Augustinian school appealed to me more than the Thomistic, so he set me to work on Bonaventure, whom he himself knew quite well and venerated.

Fundamental theology has to do with "revelation." What is revelation, actually? Can there be such a thing? And questions like that. After I started and worked through the texts, I discovered that for Bonaventure revelation was inseparable from the Franciscan adventure, and that in turn this adventure was connected with Joachim of Fiore, who foresaw a third age, the Age of the Holy Spirit, as a new period of revelation. Joachim had also calculated the time when this was to begin. And this chronology coincides, strangely enough, with the life of Saint Francis, who really did introduce a quite new phase in the history of the Church. So the Franciscans, at least a significant current of them, soon had the feeling that Joachim had predicted what they in fact were. Here was the new Age of the Holy Spirit; here is the simple, new, poor people of God that doesn't need any worldly structures.

The result was that the concept of revelation wasn't simply put somewhere at the beginning, in some far-off place, but revelation was now bound up with history. It was a process that progressed in history and had now entered into a new phase. So for Bonaventure revelation was no longer an abstract subject but was bound up with the interpretation of his own Franciscan history.

What did that open up for you?

There are two main issues. One could be expressed as follows. If the Christian faith is tied to a revelation that was concluded long ago, isn't it condemned to look backward and to chain man to a past time? Can it then keep pace with the continuing march of history? Does it still have anything at all to say to history? Mustn't it gradually grow old and end up being simply unrealistic? Bonaventure's answer to these questions was to underscore forcefully the connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit according to the Gospel of John. The word revealed in history is definitive, but it is inexhaustible, and it unceasingly discloses new depths. In this sense, the Holy Spirit, as the interpreter of Christ, speaks with his word to every age and shows it that this word always has something new to say. Unlike Joachim of Fiore, Bonaventure doesn't project the Holy Spirit into a future period, but it's always the age of the Holy Spirit. The age of Christ is the age of the Holy Spirit.

This brings up the second question on the agenda, the question of eschatology and utopia. It's hard for man to hope only for the beyond, or for a new world after the destruction of the present one. He wants a promise in history. Joachim concretely formulated such a promise and so prepared the way for Hegel, as Father de Lubac showed. Hegel, in turn, furnished the intellectual model for Marx. Bonaventure objected to the kind of utopia that deceives man. He also opposed an enthusiastic, spiritual-anarchical concept of the Franciscan movement and prevailed with a sober and realistic concept, something that offended many, and still does. But he saw the answer to the question of utopia precisely in such non-utopian communities that were nonetheless driven by the passion of faith. They don't work for a world beyond tomorrow; they work instead so that there may be something of the light of paradise present in this world today. They live in "utopian" fashion, as far as possible, by renouncing possessions, self-determination, and eros and its fulfillment. So a breath of fresh air comes into the world, breaking through its constraints and bringing God very close, right into the midst of this world.

CHAPTER 3

A *Peritus* at Vatican II

In 1962, Ratzinger was invited by Cardinal Josef Frings to accompany him as a *peritus* (theological expert) at the Second Vatican Council. In this conversation from 2016, Benedict XVI looks back on some of the highlights of his time in Rome, laments the misinterpretations that followed the council, and affirms the council's continued importance for the Church today.

When the Council was announced—do you remember now how you heard of it, and where you were?

Not exactly, no. I'm certain I heard about it on the radio. Then, of course, we spoke about it among the professors. It was a profound moment. The announcement of the Council had already provoked questions—How will it go? How can it all be carried out correctly?—but also great hopes.

Were you there from the first to the last day, in all four sittings?

Completely, yes. I was formally put on leave as a professor by the ministerial authorities in Germany.

You probably didn't see any of the sights of the city during the Council.

Very little time, one was very much made use of. Of course I took my walk every day, but that stayed within the vicinity of the Anima, where there is indeed much to be seen. The French national church, St. Luigi, the Pantheon, St. Eustace, the Sapienza and so forth, Palazzo Madama, but I could not see much otherwise.

The Council involved an unbelievable amount of work?

I don't want to exaggerate. So, it didn't break my back. But there was certainly lots to do, especially because of all the meetings.

Were you still able to get any sleep?

Yes, yes, that is non-negotiable for me. [Laughs] I'll never let that be infringed upon.

How did you actually communicate? You could only speak a little Italian.

A little, yes. Well, I functioned with it, somehow. I had reasonable Latin. Although I must say I had never studied theology in Latin, never spoke Latin like the Germanikers (German-speaking theology students that study at the Collegium Germanicum in Rome, founded in 1552 by Pope Julius III). We did everything in German. So for me to speak in Latin was something quite new. Therefore the possibilities for contributing that were at my disposal were limited. I could speak *Français* reasonably well, of course.

You hadn't yet gone on an Italian course?

No. [Laughs] I had no time, there was so much to do.

Did you take a dictionary with you?

Certainly, yes.

So you practiced "learning by doing"?

Precisely.

And which experience do you remember most fondly?

We travelled to Capri with the cardinal on All Saints' Day. We looked around Naples beforehand, the various churches and so on. To make the journey to Capri was very adventurous back then. We took a boat, which swayed from side to side in an alarming way. We all vomited, even the cardinal. I had always been able to master it until then. But then Capri was really lovely. It was a real sigh of relief.

Which camp did you belong to at that time: the progressives?

Yes, indeed, I would say so. At that time progressive did not mean that you were breaking out of the faith, but that you wanted to understand it better, and more accurately, how it lives from its origins. I was of the opinion then that that was what we all wanted. Famous progressives like de Lubac, Daniélou, etc. thought likewise. The change of mood was indeed already noticeable by the second year of the Council, but it only began to loom clearly with the passing of the years.

Recent research shows that your contribution on the part of Cardinal Frings was even greater than you have revealed yourself. We've already mentioned the Genoa Speech. In addition there was a first lecture for the German-speaking bishops in the Anima, just before the opening of the Council, a kind of briefing. In accordance with Frings's instructions, a plan was made to torpedo the election of ten Council commissioners on October 13, to oust the favored candidates the Roman Curia had put forward.

Well, that was on his own initiative. I haven't interfered with business, technical, or political matters. That genuinely was his idea; he first had to get to know the people there at Council, in order for him to select committee members from his own ranks.

How did that actually come about? Frings was certainly not known to be a revolutionary.

No, absolutely not. He was known to be very conservative and strict. Everyone was surprised and astounded that he now took on a leading role. He even saw it that way himself; we spoke about it. He explained that, when exercising governance in the diocese, a bishop is responsible for the local church before the Pope and before the Lord. But it is something different if we are called to a Council to exercise shared governance with the Pope. A bishop then assumes his own responsibility, which no longer consists simply in obedience to the papal teaching office but rather in asking what needs to be taught today, and how that teaching is to proceed. He was very aware of this. He distinguished

between the normal situation of a Catholic bishop and the special situation of a Council Father, in which one is fully involved in shared decision-making.

Did he come to Rome with precise ideas already?

I wouldn't say so, no. He had sent all the *schemata*, which I had by no means judged as negatively as they were judged subsequently. I sent him many corrections, but I had not laid hands on the substance of the whole, except in the case of the decree on revelation. That could have been improved. We agreed that the basic orientation was there, but on the other hand there was much to improve. Primarily, that it be less dominated by the current Magisterium, and had to give greater voice to the Scriptures and the Fathers.

You were awarded a leading role in the "coup meeting" in the German priests' college, the Anima, on October 15, 1962. A new text, an alternative to the Roman draft edition, was brought to the table and then reproduced in 3,000 copies and distributed to the Council Fathers.

To call it a "coup meeting" is too strong. But we were of the opinion that something different had to be said precisely about the theme of revelation, different from what was taking shape in that first edition. The draft still maintained a neo-scholastic style, and didn't take enough account of our findings. For me, "revelation" was of course a predetermined topic, because of my post-doctoral work. So I'd already worked with it but everything was contributed by invitation of his Eminence, and within his sights. Afterwards I was accused of deceiving the cardinal or some such. I really must repudiate that. We were both convinced in unison that we had to serve the cause of the faith and the Church. Also, in order to address this cause in a new terminology, in a new way, we wanted to clarify the proper relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium, so that this relationship could really be understood and justified. That was then picked up.

How many people were involved at this meeting?

I can remember there was a discussion among cardinals only, and another with professors, but I cannot say exactly now.

It must have been dominated by an enormous tension.

No, actually we weren't really aware that we were doing anything stupendous. We didn't make any decisions there, but developed ideas. How it then got spread about the whole Council, I do not know. Of course we were awash with polemics: that we produced a typically freemasonic text and such things.

You were charged with that?

[Laughs] Yes, yes, although I really shouldn't be held in suspicion of being a freemason.

It was your arguments, it was your text, which Cardinal Frings presented to those assembled in the Council chamber erected in St. Peter's Basilica on November 14, 1962, and brought everything to a tipping point. The original draft was on the table, and everyone had blocked it. Unrestrained dispute could now begin.

The question being put to the vote was very complicated. Those who wanted new things had to vote no. And those who wanted old things, had to vote yes. Anyway, it was a very close vote. Those who won were those who wanted to stay with the original *schema*. So from a legal perspective there was a very slight majority in favor of maintaining the first draft of the text. But then Papa Giovanni saw that the majority was too thin to be viable, and decided that the vote should be reopened.

It is said that there was thunderous applause for Cardinal Frings in the Council chamber.

I wasn't inside then. I also don't believe it.

There was no phone booth in front of St. Peter's, let alone mobile phones in those days. How did you learn of these things back then?

Well after the Council sitting, the cardinal came over. I can't remember now if he told us about it himself. We were all very excited about what the Pope would do. And very happy that he said that even if a purely legal perspective would permit the first draft to stay in force, we would begin afresh.

Seven days later, on November 21, the withdrawal of the schema on the "Sources of Revelation" took place, a text you had heavily criticized. The text was, they wrote at the time, "defined by the anti-modernist mentality." It was said to have a tone which was "frosty, almost shockingly so." You yourself saw this withdrawal as the real turning point of the Council.

[The Pope laughs] Now I'm surprised that I spoke in such an audacious manner back then. It is correct that this was a real turn, insofar as the submitted text was put to one side and there was a completely new beginning to the discussion.

How was it meeting Karl Rahner? You initially worked on a few texts together. He was much older than you, thirty years.

Just twenty-three I believe; he was born in 1904 and I was in 1927.

Of course, you're right. Were things complicated with him?

I wouldn't say so. He was someone who consciously wanted to be responsive to young people, to young theologians. That then facilitates someone like me working with him. At that time we had a very good relationship. When we worked on that text, I soon noticed, however, that we belonged to two different worlds of thought. He had completely come out of scholasticism, which was a great advantage for him, because he could engage in the accustomed style of discussion more intensely thereby. While I came from just the Bible and the Fathers.

[...]

Your attitude towards the Council had gradually changed. In your book published in 1965, Ergebnisse und Probleme der 3. Konzilsperiode, it states "The Council, and the Church with it, is on the way. There is no reason for skepticism and resignation. We have every reason to have hope, good spirits, patience." But by June 18 this same year, you declare before a Catholic student community in Münster that one is beginning "to wonder, if things were not always better under the rule of the so-called conservatives, than they are able to be under the dominance of progressivism." A year later, in 1966 at the Bamberg Katholikentag, you strike a balance which expresses skepticism and disillusionment. And with a lecture in Tübingen in 1967 you point out that the Christian faith is by now surrounded "with a fog of uncertainty" as had "hardly been seen before at any point in history." Is the new internal split, then beginning within the Church, and basically enduring to this day, to be considered as part of the tragic nature of the Council?

I would say so, yes. The bishops wanted to renew the faith, to deepen it. However, other forces were working with increasing strength, particularly journalists, who interpreted many things in a completely new way. Eventually people asked, yes, if the bishops are able to change everything, why can't we all do that? The liturgy began to crumble, and slip into personal preferences. In this respect one could soon see that what was originally desired was being driven in a different direction. Since 1965 I have felt it to be a mission to make clear what we genuinely wanted and what we did not want.

Did you have pangs of conscience, as a participant, one who shares responsibility?

One certainly asks oneself whether or not one did things rightly. Particularly when the whole thing unraveled, that was definitely a question one posed. Cardinal Frings later had intense pangs of conscience. But he always had an awareness that what we actually said and put forward was right, and also had to happen. We handled things correctly, even if we certainly did not correctly assess the political consequences

and the actual repercussions. One thought too much of theological matters then, and did not reflect on how these things would come across.

Was it a mistake to convoke the Council at all?

No, it was right for sure. One can ask whether it was necessary or not, OK. And from the outset there were people who were against it. But in itself it was a moment in the Church when you were simply waiting on something new, on a renewal, a renewal of the whole. This was not to be something coming only from Rome, but a new encounter with the worldwide Church. In that respect the time was simply nigh.

The objective of the Council was, among other things, that a Pope, as you formulated it at the time, “not only verifies texts from above, but rather helps to shape them from the inside.” A new physiognomy of the primacy was to make way for a new style of “togetherness” between Pope and bishops, in turning back to “that spirit of simplicity, which is the seal of their origin.” It seems connected, right here fifty years later, as you tried to implement your interpretation of the texts of the Council, in ecclesiastical office, in style, in word, in deed, including even the appearance of the Pope. Correct?

Absolutely, yes.