

Lublin
Theological
Studies

Krzysztof Kaucha

Ratzinger: Apologetics for (not only) Our Time



Lublin Theological Studies

in connection with
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

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Volume 11

Krzysztof Kaucha

**Ratzinger: Apologetics
for (not only) Our Time**

VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT

The book is a part of the project funded by the Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Poland, "Regional Initiative of Excellence" in 2019-2022, 028/RID/2018/19, the amount of funding: 11 742 500 PLN.

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

© 2024 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany, an imprint of the Brill-Group (Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany, Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
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Translation: Tomasz Palkowski
Language verification: Christopher Thornton
Indexes Editing and Index of Names: Piotr Królikowski
Typesetting: le-tex publishing services, Leipzig
Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISBN 978-3-647-50075-1

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	9
I. Theology, Apologetics and Fundamental Theology in Our Time	15
1. Theology and Its Hour	15
2. Apologetics and Its Painful Problem	20
3. Fundamental Theology and Its “Basic and Model Sense”	23
4. Summary: Synodal Process, Fundamental Theology or Apologetics for Our Time?	28
II. The Christian Axiom: The Foundation of the Whole	31
1. The Point of Departure	32
2. The Christian Axiom	33
3. The Way to Receive and Consolidate the Christian Axiom	37
4. Is Not the Christian Axiom Epistemologically Weak for Non-Christians?	39
5. The Church as the Guarantor of the Christian Axiom	43
6. Summary: Is the Christian Axiom (Itself) an Argument for Christianity?	48
III. Proofs of the Existence of God	49
1. Criticism of Philosophical Proofs of God’s Existence.....	50
2. Ratzinger’s Proof of the Existence of God	53
3. God and Divinity	56
4. Divine Revelation as an Unending Proof of God’s Existence	60
5. Summary: The Alternative Argument	66
IV. The Argument from Definitive Novelty	69
1. The Definitive Novelty of Jesus Christ	71
2. The Definitive Novelty of Christianity	76
3. The Permanent Definitive Novelty of Christianity.....	84
4. Is the Argument from Definitive Novelty Conclusive or Not?	87
5. Summary: The Argument from the Absence of Someone Greater than Jesus	89
V. The Argument from the Truth	91
1. How to Start?	92

2. “What Is Truth?”	94
3. The Truth Is Jesus	95
4. The Christian Existence Is the Truth	98
5. Summary: The Truth Exists, Kindles the Spirit, and Has Demands....	99
VI. The Anthropological Argument.....	103
1. A Fully Closed Anthropology Is Impossible	103
2. Dilemmas of Human Existence	105
3. Jesus Christ Is the Only True Man	109
4. Christian Anthropology-Christology	110
5. The Argument from Forgiveness	116
6. Summary: How to Find Oneself?	119
VII. The Argument “From Reason”	121
1. Limitations of Reason	123
2. Reason by Itself Inclines Towards Christianity	125
3. Reason Is Complemented by the Christian Faith	128
4. The Christian Faith Amends Reason	131
5. Only the Christian Faith Can Free Reason and Restore Its Power and Dignity.....	138
6. Summary: “But Who Is to Say What Is Reason?”	139
VIII. The Argument from Faith	145
1. The Originality and Simplicity of the Christian Faith	146
2. Faith Comes from Without.....	148
3. Faith Is about the Truth of Our Being	150
4. Only Faith Gives Freedom	151
5. The Church Has Faith Firsthand.....	153
6. The Necessary Existence of People of Faith and Trust.....	155
7. Summary: Faith as the Source of Certainty	156
IX. The Experiment of Faith: Ratzinger’s Wager	159
1. Christianity Has No Proof, but No One Does.....	159
2. Man Needs Certainty.....	160
3. Only Faith Opens Being	161
4. Everyone Can Experience a Theophany.....	162
5. Christians Also Have to Make a Leap into Faith	163
6. Analogy to Experimentation in Natural Sciences.....	164
7. The Culmination: Ratzinger’s Wager	165
8. Summary: Ratzinger’s Wager as an Argument	167

X.	Apologetic Responses to Doubts in Faith	171
1.	Why Does Faith Not Protect Us from Problems and Crises?	172
2.	Frailty of the Entirety of Faith and Indifference of the World.....	174
3.	The Problem of God's Hiddenness	176
4.	"Jesus Was Not the Messiah"	178
5.	Why Does Christ's Message Reach Only a Fraction of the World?	180
6.	The Theodicy Problem	182
7.	Did God Doom Us to Him to Play "Hard on Us"? Are We Really Free?	186
8.	Summary: Does Christianity Guarantee Definitive and Unquestionable Certainty?	187
XI.	The Argument from the Whole Truth about Christianity	191
1.	Critical Comments on Christianity: A "Weak" Religion with Insurmountable Dilemmas	192
2.	Explaining Christian Insurmountable Dilemmas.....	198
3.	Summary: Should Christianity Not Start from the Beginning to Become Credible in Our Time?	204
XII.	The Argument from the Whole Truth about the Church.....	207
1.	Very Critical Notes on the Church: Should the Church Resign?	209
2.	Arguments for the Church: "Faith Is Ecclesial, or It Is Not Faith"	217
3.	Summary: Has Ratzinger Cleared up All Doubts about the Church? ..	230
XIII.	Comparative Argument No. 1: Christianity versus (Non-Christian) Religions.....	233
1.	Why a Comparative Approach? Why a Comparative Argument?	233
2.	The "Strong" Christian Theology of Religions	237
3.	Christianity Vis-a-Vis Judaism	244
4.	Christianity Vis-a-Vis Islam.....	249
5.	Christianity Vis-a-Vis Other Religions	251
6.	The Places of Unity and Equality	256
7.	Summary: Christianity and Other Religions versus Salvation: What Is Salvation?	259
XIV.	Comparative Argument No. 2: Christianity versus the (Ever More Secularized) World	263
1.	What Is the World? A World without Man?	264

2. One World or Many Worlds? Does the World Know What It Is and Where It Is Headed? Christianity Knows.....	265
3. Christianity Vis-a-Vis a World “Without God and against God”	270
4. The Points of Unity of Christianity and the (Increasingly) Secularized World	274
5. Summary: The Increasingly Secular World, the COVID-19 Pandemic and the “Hand of God”	276
Conclusion	279
Bibliography	283
Index of Names	293

Introduction

Joseph Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927 and died on the last day of 2022. Soon after he resigned as the bishop of Rome on February 28, 2013, we had a joke circulating in Poland: “Why did Benedict XVI resign and John Paul II never did?” The answer: “Because Poles work hard until they die, Germans work hard until they... retire.”

My book is not about the reasons for Benedict XVI’s resignation. It is neither his biography nor a defence of the nicknames *Panzerkardinal* or “God’s Rottweiler,” which he was unfortunately given.¹ The book does not compare him with popes St. John Paul II or Francis or any other person.

For many Christians, especially Catholics, Joseph Ratzinger² will go down in history not only as one of the not many popes coming from Germany or the first bishop of Rome since the fifteenth century who stepped down from his office. I dare say he will go down in history as one of the most outstanding thinkers of our times, the most eminent and the most forthright Christian theologian of the modern era—one who deserves to be called *Doctor Christianitatis*: a teacher and a doctor (healer) of Christianity. Ratzinger already has a place in history, if only because, as a German, he had the courage to speak of the Teutonic pride characterizing the German nation, who have been part of Christendom for so many centuries (and Christianity, after all, is the cure for pride, isn’t it?). He was bold enough to write that the German nation has not worked through its guilt vis-a-vis other nations and history. What he wrote about all Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, was full of candor: “God is dying in Christendom, so it seems,”³ “in statistical records even Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels were listed as Catholics,”⁴ “It may well be that someone continuously holds Church offices but is not Christian at all.”⁵ He penned thousands of unquestionably true and wise thoughts—quite revolutionary, indeed—and my aim here was to recall and present them creatively.

The story of this book begins in 2015, when I first started reading Ratzinger (so late, I am ashamed to admit). I instantly fell for his theology and thought. I

1 Georg Gänswein and Saverio Gaeta, *Nient'altro che la Verità. La mia vita al fianco di Benedetto XVI* (Milano: Piemme, 2023).

2 There is no need to present his life history in this book. He has done that himself many times, and a great many publications about him and his work have been published in various languages.

3 Joseph Ratzinger, *Fundamental Speeches from Five Decades*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Michael J. Miller, J. R. Foster, and Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012), 138.

4 JROO 8/2, 990 [JRGS 8/2, 1067].

5 JROO 8/2, 1133 [JRGS 8/2, 1223].

found the light I had long been looking for. At long last I found solutions to many problems present in theology, especially fundamental theology, which has been my academic speciality for many years. My intuition (unsubstantiated at first, but then becoming more compelling as I had read more of Ratzinger) was that fundamental theology is drifting away from its purpose (which is defending Christianity)—well, that it even has forgotten its purpose: its defence of Christianity in our time is shy and poor. I came to think that fundamental theology needs something new: not only new content but, first and foremost, a new overall structure and a new point of departure, so that a new fundamental theology must be created in our time—that is, new apologetics.⁶

In 2015, I began to include Ratzinger's thought in my lectures on fundamental theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin as well as in my academic research. I initiated some team research projects intended to explain how Ratzinger envisaged a good and useful fundamental theology. Together with some colleagues dealing with fundamental theology, I organized a national scholarly conference in 2016 under the title "Fundamental Theology in the Work of Joseph Ratzinger."⁷ It was then that a great scholarly adventure began, which continues to this day. I also ran some independent research on Ratzinger's theology, which led me to write and publish a monograph in Polish.⁸ The source and research materials—substantially reworked and supplemented with several important chapters and paragraphs—have been used in this book.⁹ The more I delved into Ratzinger's theology, the more I was convinced that it contains a rather simple yet very powerful apologetics for our time, which offers answers for the toughest problems, doubts and dilemmas afflicting

6 I write more on this (and fundamental theology and apologetics) in the first chapter, titled "Theology, Apologetics and Fundamental Theology in Our Time."

7 Krzysztof Kaucha and Jacenty Mastej, eds., *Teologia fundamentalna w twórczości Josepha Ratzingera* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2017); Krzysztof Kaucha, "Fundamental Theology in Joseph Ratzinger: Polish Theologians' Recent Research," *Gregorianum* 99, no. 4 (2018): 719–38.

8 Krzysztof Kaucha, *Cóż to jest prawda? Argumentacja z prawdy za najwyższą wiarygodnością chrześcijaństwa na kanwie twórczości Josepha Ratzingera* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2020).

9 Four chapters (with some changes) of this book have already been published as articles: chapter VIII ("The Argument from Faith") in Krzysztof Kaucha, "Joseph Ratzinger's Argument for the Epistemological Seriousness of Faith," *Verbum Vitae* 39, no. 4 (2021): 1277–94, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.12960>, chapter XII ("The Argument from the Whole Truth About the Church") in Krzysztof Kaucha, "Joseph Ratzinger's Very Critical Diagnosis and Apology of the Catholic Church," *Verbum Vitae* 41, no. 1 (2023): 141–60, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.14705>, chapter V ("The Argument from the Truth") in Krzysztof Kaucha, "Is It True That There Is No Truth? The Veritative Argument for Christianity in Joseph Ratzinger's Thought," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 70, no. 4 (2023): 21–36, <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt2023.23>, and chapter XIV ["Comparative Argument No. 2: Christianity versus the (Ever More Secularized) World"] in Krzysztof Kaucha, "Life Without God And Against God. Christianity And The (Secularized) World According to Joseph Ratzinger," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* no. 1 (2024).

Christians in (not only) our time. I made an effort to extract this apologetics from the formidable body of the works of Ratzinger. At times I had to construct its elements based on the central ideas of his theology.

There is no single book or article in Ratzinger's thought that would contain his complete and explicit argumentation or formalized arguments for Christianity. However, his thinking is no doubt always guided by a clear conviction that Christianity commands the highest degree of credibility and truthfulness (despite numerous and sometimes spectacular errors Christians have committed). Occasionally, Ratzinger's thinking has the form of a short and concise arguments, accompanied by specific grounds and reasons. It happens that the essence of some kind of argumentation or even its outline is expressed in only several sentences. This is the case with freedom.¹⁰ I have set myself the task of collecting all these premises and outlined ideas and assembling them into arguments that can be useful to anyone who asks Christians in our time to justify their faith, as well as any doubting Christian.

Some philosophers say that strong arguments for the existence or absence of God can be formulated in a few sentences. In philosophical discussions about the existence of God, arguments that can be summarised in a few short sentences present great value (for example, the so-called ways of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm's ontological argument or the so-called argument from the hiddenness of God, formulated by John L. Schellenberg, Stephen Maitzen and Jason Marsh¹¹). First, I am quite certain that all serious arguments for Christianity go (and must go) far beyond only proving the existence of God. Second, it can hardly be imagined that the most fundamental problem of humanity (Does God exist or not? If He does, who is He?) could actually be unravelled in only a few short sentences (if so, why have such short arguments been accompanied by hundreds of comments, each running into thousands of sentences? And there are more to come). However, striving for conciseness of thought is absolutely legitimate, and this was my concern.

In my monograph written in 2020 I supplied five variants (models) of argumentation from truth in favour of Christianity. This book offers over a dozen arguments:

10 Ratzinger wrote: "One would have to demonstrate how it is that the Christian faith can claim to be the true liberation of man; one would have to show how this liberation is manifested concretely in the sacramental structure of the Church. One would have to investigate the meaning of authority and tradition in the Church and their relations to Christian freedom" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, trans. Michael J. Miller et al. [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008], 186). He also shows the essence of freedom: "The Church is concerned with freedom in the deepest sense of the word, with opening up the prospect of participation in divine being" (Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 191).

11 John L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, *Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

the Christian axiom as an argument for Christianity, Ratzinger's proof of the existence of God, Divine Revelation as an unending proof of God's existence, the alternative argument, the argument from definitive novelty, the argument from the absence of someone greater than Jesus, argument from truth, the anthropological argument, the argument from forgiveness, the argument "from reason," the argument from faith, Ratzinger's wager, the argument from the whole truth about Christianity, the argument from the whole truth about the Church, and a comparative argument in two parts (comparative argument no. 1: Christianity versus other religions; comparative argument no. 2: Christianity versus the ever more secularized world).

The source material for this book is Joseph Ratzinger's entire intellectual output. Currently, it is available only in German and Polish. The Polish edition, which I have mainly used,¹² is a translation of the original German edition and edited by Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller.¹³ It contains the latest text versions authorised by Ratzinger. The Polish edition (henceforth abbreviated as JROO) was edited by Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and published by Wydawnictwo KUL.¹⁴ Both editions have 14 consecutive volumes, comprising a total of 23 books and number 16 volumes.

In this monograph, Ratzinger's work is addressed as a homogeneous whole, as his thought. The book does not delve into the evolution of his thought or the evolution of particular views, their sources, inspirations or conditioning. If we dealt with all these issues in depth we would obviously go beyond the main subject and unnecessarily disrupt our line of argumentation. The latter should be condensed and reflect, above all, the thinking of Ratzinger himself. My assumption was to use only Ratzinger's work as the source material, so I did not examine texts written by Pope Benedict XVI, which are entirely different in rank and character.¹⁵ This applies also to the texts that Ratzinger wrote as pope emeritus, published shortly after his death.¹⁶ The biblical quotations that did not appear in Joseph Ratzinger's

12 Wherever possible, the quotations are taken from Ratzinger's texts published in English. Otherwise, quotations have been translated into English by Tomasz Palkowski from the Polish edition of all works by Ratzinger (JROO). In these cases the corresponding pages in the German version (JRGS) are given in square brackets.

13 Gerhard Ludwig Müller, ed., *Joseph Ratzinger Gesammelte Schriften* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2009–2022).

14 Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, ed., *Joseph Ratzinger Opera Omnia* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012–2022).

15 The exception is volume 6 of *Joseph Ratzinger Opera Omnia* (JROO), which was completed when the author was Bishop of Rome.

16 Benedict XVI, *What is Christianity? The Last Writings*, ed. Elio Guerriero and Georg Gänswein, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2023). Missing from this book is a moving letter, a sort of self-apology Benedict XVI, "Letter of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI Regarding the Report

texts were taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Biblica, 2011; revised version).

I have heard many Catholics living in the United States say that Ratzinger's texts are very wise... but very difficult. My intention was to "translate" them into a simpler and more condensed language. This book by no means claims to exhaust Ratzinger's work or the problem it addresses. It is, in fact, the result of my own interpretation of his output. However, I hope that I have managed to capture the essence of Ratzinger's thought in my book, and thanks to that it will be possible to get acquainted with Ratzinger's way of thinking without reading all of his very extensive work. Nonetheless, I thought it essential to include some of Ratzinger's pivotal quotations in the main body of the text, a lot of them in the footnotes, so that readers themselves can connect to Ratzinger.

I extend my thanks to all those who have contributed to this monograph and inspired me to write it. First of all, I thank his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI (for everything). I thank the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland (my beloved homeland). My thanks go to my family and many friends: the scholars of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and university graduates and students. I extend my thanks to my colleagues from Fundamental Theologians in Poland Association and to the scholars of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, and the Riga Institute of Theology, where I went on study visits. My appreciation goes to all those who agreed to evaluate the book and provide their advice, as well as those who did the editorial and technical work. I also thank the publishing house Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Tomasz Pałkowski (translation), Christopher Thornton (language verification), and Piotr Królikowski (editing). Last but not least, let me also thank the Parish Communities and Friends from the Holy Trinity Parish in Lublin, Poland, and Our Lady of Poland Church in Southampton, New York.

Let me also comment on the words "our time" in the book title. Do they convey something momentous? In all likelihood, every human generation believes that the time and the world in which it lives is special, inimitable. At the same time, every generation may come to the conviction that if all things pass, if we live in a fluid reality, then the very unique and distinctive nature of our time (and the world) have little relevance. Whatever (historical-philosophical) thoughts come to our minds, it is now, surely, that very meaningful signs of the times are visible. In the carefully programmed world, all of a sudden, a global pandemic breaks out (COVID-19), claiming a host of lives and crippling social life. By the way, the human race has

on Abuse in the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising, 08.02.2022," *Summary of Bulletin, Holy See Press Office*, no. 2 (2022), accessed February 13, 2022, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/02/08/220208b.html>.

not been told (in the era of “omnipotent” science and easily accessible mass media) how the pandemic came about, nor whether or not someone is to blame for it. The quite prevalent spirit of relativism, dominating the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, boasting tolerance and peacefulness, is uncompromising and utterly unrelenting (especially towards religion, especially Christianity), when the powerful want to force their ideas upon others. Abortion is no longer a crime, evil or even a moral dilemma but a “human right” and a criterion of freedom. The sign of the times (“foretold” by Ratzinger, anyway) is that the major revolutions, born in the secularized world—liberalism and ecologism—have started to rule each other out and undertaken to fight against each other more and more openly.

Problems that the modern world has promised to eradicate, such as slavery and various kinds of racism and discrimination, keep coming back in new disguises. The most painful thing, however, is that today, almost eighty years after World War II—when it was thought that the drama of all-out war would never be repeated—Putinist Russia has brutally assaulted Ukraine, bringing so much unprovoked suffering and genocide. This pierces the hearts of Christians (and other peoples too). It might be that for those living in other parts of Europe and elsewhere in the world this situation is not of crucial importance, but for central and eastern Europeans it definitely is. If we add to this the fact that the Russian aggression has the “religious” blessing of the Moscow patriarchate, plus the overly restrained attitude of the Churches (including the Holy See as the representative of the Catholic Church) and Christian communities to this blatant evil, we cannot but agree with Ratzinger that the most powerful argument against Christianity is the fact that despite the twenty centuries of its existence, it has not changed anything. Nevertheless, Ratzinger defends Christianity wholeheartedly, sincerely and justly. His defence appeals not only to a contemporary or modern reality but runs much deeper. This is why his apologetics is definitely not only for our time. And this is why I have written this book.

I. Theology, Apologetics and Fundamental Theology in Our Time

When a colleague of mine, a professor of theology, is addressed as “Father Professor,” he responds with a smile: “Please, do not call me that. There is only one Professor and Teacher (Master)—well, maybe two: Jesus Christ and Joseph Ratzinger.” There are theologians who are certain that one day Benedict XVI will be counted among the Doctors of the Church (or even the Great Doctors of the Church).

My colleagues who practice Catholic fundamental theology (not only in Poland) may wish to take my life, or at least chastise me for the title of my book. “How is it,” they will ask, “that all the time we make efforts to develop fundamental theology based on the teaching of our Masters, who, having sharply criticized the pre-conciliar Catholic apologetics, consciously strove to build a new, post-conciliar fundamental theology, which had emerged in western Europe, and now you want to reshape it? It is utter nonsense.”

In this chapter, I would like to explain why the title of my book contains the word “apologetics,” which acquired a specific (mainly pejorative) association in the history of European Catholic theology. In this chapter, I will focus on what is most important in theology, apologetics and fundamental theology. To close, I will attempt to answer the question what Christianity and the Church need most today: the synodal process, fundamental theology or apologetics?

1. Theology and Its Hour

My mind was struck when I read some sincere and bitter observations Ratzinger made about theology and theologians, which I cherish almost like the words of a prophet. For example, this is what he said about his German theologian friends and the Catholic Church in Germany:

At that time [in the 1970s] I had two very negative experiences. First, the academic world [in Germany], which was losing its living faith. In their efforts to adjust to other branches of science, theologians had no longer had the courage to openly profess their faith as the foundation of their theological work; they wanted to be regarded mainly as scientists. In that way, the theological atmosphere became rather chilly. I viewed that with concern – the consequences are now clearly visible. The second negative experience was related to the ever increasing bureaucracy in the Church in my country. Money, which is – so to speak, rather easily available in Germany and can certainly be very useful (for example, in

charity work), can turn into a burden if the Church becomes too dependent on it. Then, bureaucracy proliferates and, as it were, administers itself.¹

Theology is fascinating. In the distant past, it was the queen of all science: the crowning of all knowledge and wisdom. Christian theology is really captivating, especially when practised by its champions, such as Ratzinger. He believes that it has not been dethroned by philosophy, natural sciences, sociology, environmental science, cosmology, computer science, medicine, cognitive science, or any other discipline. Theology will never be dethroned—it is irreplaceable, because the true source from which it draws its knowledge (of God, man, the world, history, future—all reality) has a nature that is completely different from all other (non-theological) sciences.

By reading Ratzinger's works, apart from the theology itself, one can explore its history—epoch by epoch, century by century. His trilogy *Jesus of Nazareth* teaches almost the whole body of Christology, which is the core of Christian theology. His books also teach so-called canonical exegesis (still hardly present in academic Catholic theology). Thanks to his doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine, we can learn the theology of the Church Fathers, and his *Habilitationsschrift* on Bonaventure allows us to gain a solid understanding of medieval theology. His *Introduction to Christianity* is a mine of knowledge about (among other things) the unique aspects of Christianity and Christian theology, as well as the history of philosophy seen from the perspective of Christian faith.

It is true that Ratzinger is often very critical about the theology of the past and its flaws, the effects of which continue to this day. His candid talk on those issues can also be treated as a lecture on theology. The mistakes that theologians have been committing are not negligible; in Ratzinger's opinion it is a mistake, for example, to separate (and make almost completely independent) soteriology from Christology, as well as ecclesiology from pneumatology. This started many centuries ago and evolved into a theological tradition (the theology of treatises), which theologians of today take as given and even inviolable, but which is not quite right. Similarly, Ratzinger says, sacramentology and liturgics have become so distinct and independent from ecclesiology that the original Christian theology (and practice) of baptism has suffered considerably. He reminds us that in the beginning of the Church the sacrament of baptism was so inseparably tied to the Christian catechumenate and the Church's profession of faith that it played a

1 JROO 8/1, 360 [JRGS 8/1, 393].

fundamental role in creating a new person in Christ, but now it has been reduced almost to a liturgical act associated with the teaching on original sin.²

Ratzinger holds it against the theologians of the past that they almost completely forgot the theology of Christian brotherhood. He blames moral theology and masters of spiritual life for reducing the purpose of Christian life (and Christian existence) to merely individualistic, practically unsocial, cultivation of the purity of one's soul while expecting it to be rewarded in the afterlife, which they also reduced to an individualised experience of the happiness of the soul in being with God. Many other errors of theology and Christianity (and so-called Christian philosophy) will be discussed in later sections of the book.

Ratzinger claims that the Protestant and Catholic theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries manifested many forms of radical rationalism, which subordinated the simplicity of faith to assumptions following from reason, often convoluted and imbued with the hubris of theologians. The simplicity and ecclesiality of faith were losing out to individualism, subjectivism, irrationalism, and the relativity of its truths.³

Ratzinger believes that the response of Catholic theology to ecclesial-centrism and hierarchical-centrism is too feeble.⁴ It even makes the situation worse by proposing the phrase “official [hierarchical] Church,” which is intended to denote bishops.⁵ This theology often misinterprets the term “hierarchy” as “sacred lordship,” or sacred authority. Yet this term means “sacred origin.”⁶

2 JROO 4, 441–61 [JRGS 4, 495–517].

3 Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 2nd ed., trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 74–75; “It is about overcoming the individualistic misunderstanding that plagues Christianity following the abandonment of the title ‘brother’ and losing sight of its meaning. The aim is to recall that the social component lies at the heart of the Gospel and pervades the whole of Christian reality. This should be perceptible in the deepest layers of Christian consciousness. Faith is not only belief in God the Father in general, but in God who is *our* Father, who meets me in my children, and to whom I am not allowed to come if I forget about my brothers. To believe in Christ is to be a believer in a community of all those who say ‘Our Father’ with me” (JROO 1, 596–97 [JRGS 1, 640]).

4 “Yves Congar pointed out that Catholicism today is understood primarily as unity organized around a hierarchy, especially around a pope, while in the past it also meant unity among Churches, mutual unity of communities” (JROO 1, 598 [JRGS 1, 641]); “It is wrong to identify ‘the Church’ only with hierarchy (the pope and bishops); it is even a greater mistake to identify ‘the Church’ with ecclesiastical bureaucracy” (JROO 8/1, 448 [JRGS 8/1, 488–89]).

5 “It is with impatience that we approach the Church, which seems so devoid of the Holy Spirit, so narrow and fearful. It was for bishops that the meaningless word of the official Church was invented, as if they could be their own Church, as if there were many Churches side by side” (JROO 12, 251 [JRGS 12, 269]).

6 “I would certainly dispute the well-known translation that gives ‘sacred lordship’ as the meaning of ‘hierarchy.’ I am persuaded that the word means ‘sacred origin.’ It means that the Church does not spring from any decisions of ours, but only ever anew from the Lord himself, from the sacrament”

We are particularly alarmed by Ratzinger's observation that "God is dying in Christendom, so it seems."⁷ This also applies to Christian theology: God seems to be dying here. What Ratzinger has in mind is that, for example, academic circles have turned Christianity into gnosis, which has abandoned the truths of the Christian faith as obsolete and contrary to critical reason.⁸ This gnosis held so-called historical-critical exegesis to be absolutely true and incontrovertible, and began to despise simple faith.⁹ Gnostic thinking readily accepts relativism and does not admit that Jesus brought definitive truth.¹⁰ It is fascinated by other religions, taking for granted the frequently "exaggerated image of the purity and profundity of those

(Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, EPUB, trans. Henry Taylor [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 2002], 386); "The Church becomes crowded and stuffy when those who hold offices in it fail to remember that a sacrament is not about granting authority but about dispossessing oneself for the One 'in the person of whom' one is supposed to speak and act" (JROO 8/2, 1133 [JRGS 8/2, 1224]).

- 7 Joseph Ratzinger, *Fundamental Speeches from Five Decades*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Michael J. Miller, J. R. Foster, and Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012), 138.
- 8 "Gnosis holds that mere knowledge is life and today there are branches of Christianity that are becoming some kind of gnosis, that content themselves with academic knowledge, but refuse to show obedience" (JROO 6/2, 1058–59 [JRGS 6/2, 1158–59]).
- 9 "All these attempts [at reconstructing the life and figure of Jesus through historical-critical exegesis] have produced a common result: the impression that we have very little certain knowledge of Jesus and that only at a later stage did faith in his divinity shape the image we have of him. This impression has by now penetrated deeply into the minds of the Christian people at large" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008], xii); "Lastly, we should not set up a kind of blase 'enlightened' attitude that regards the zeal of those who have been seized by the Holy Spirit, and their uninhibited belief in the Word of God, as being equivalent to that fundamentalism which is anathema; an attitude that allows only that kind of faith for which 'ifs' and 'buts' become more important than the substance of what is believed itself" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion: Presented by the Association of the Former Students of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in Celebration of His Seventy-fifth Birthday*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, trans. Henry Taylor [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005], 207).
- 10 "Today it seems to be indicative of pride (and irreconcilable with tolerance) to think that we received truth from the Lord. Rather, it seems that in order to be tolerant one must treat all religions and cultures as equal. In this context, faith is an act that is becoming increasingly difficult. In this way we are witnessing a quiet disappearance of faith in large parts of Christendom, without much protest" (JROO 13/3, 1296 [JRGS 13/3, 1428]).

religions.”¹¹ The Bavarian theologian even dares to claim there is an “antitheological theology.”¹²

Apart from that, to Christian theologians and intellectuals, Ratzinger points out that contemporary Christian reflection is out of touch with reality when it assumes that all people are healthy, and for that reason it promotes a “theology of the healthy.”¹³ In doing so it disregards the sick and suffering, forgetting that every human being is afflicted by illness and suffering. The exclusion of the sick and suffering (which occurs in academic theology), as really participating in human existence, causes those who help and serve them to be ignored as well.

Ratzinger understands the difficulty of the challenges faced by theology in the recent centuries. He also writes about the many signs of its revival. Yet his remarks about it, typically leading to generalizations, are often very critical: “I find it almost uncanny that theology is so often engaged in banal and egotistic frictions today when the waters have risen to humanity’s very neck and the death knell of theology may actually have sounded.”¹⁴ He argues that theology does not make use of its “hour”: “it concentrates happily on itself and its own erudition,” and it “offers stones instead of bread, its own talk instead of the Word of God.”¹⁵ Theology is

11 “A world which is forced to admit that not only individual Christians are failing but also Christianity as such and as a whole, a world which sees the political and spiritual defeat of the Christian West as indisputable—while noticing with more clarity the ethical and religious values of other nations and other religions (sometimes, of course, in light of embellished narratives depicting a greatly exaggerated picture of purity and profundity of those religions)—can no longer believe in the absoluteness of Christianity or in an absolute religion at large. It ‘believes’ in ‘decent man’ who is the alpha and omega of his *credo*, seeing dogmatics as rather an obstacle to this decency” (JROO 9/2, 757–58 [JRGS 9/2, 859]).

12 “There is a form of antitheological theology in which the prominent issue of hermeneutics is turned into a method of interpreting the whole Christian message by reducing it to words divested of content, which are then shown to mean quite the opposite of what their sense would normally imply. This theology, in essence, purports to make it clear to people that the thinking of the past is no longer what is thought now, that in principle nothing has any significance, that it is possible to extract from everything that originally appeared so stimulating and inspiring one to believe—if proper hermeneutics is applied—nothing but innocuous and intelligible existential propositions which will not insult anyone for they are so general that they might be considered commonplace, had they not been inferred with a great deal of erudition from texts that carry an entirely different meaning as dictated by common sense” (JROO 8/2, 1112–13 [JRGS 8/2, 1201]).

13 “It became apparent that we will not grasp the real depth of humanity as long as we are concerned only with the theology of the healthy” (JROO 8/2, 645 [JRGS 8/2, 699]).

14 Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 101.

15 “Theology is not measuring up to its task when it concentrates happily on itself and its own erudition; it is failing even more radically when it invents ‘doctrines to its own taste’ (2 Tim 4:3) and thus offers stones instead of bread, its own talk instead of the Word of God” (Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 125).

fragmented, it does not afford a view of the whole, nor does it defend the whole of the Christian faith.¹⁶ Be that as it may, Ratzinger puts it bluntly: “the world expects from us not further improvements of the [theological and ecclesiastical] system, but the response of faith in the hour of unbelief.”¹⁷ This point of this chapter is aptly summed up by these words:

The systematics of Catholic theology, outlined by Thomism and developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, fell apart almost immediately after the Second Vatican Council. Its metaphysics seemed untenable, its rationality did not appear adequate enough to match the modern form of reason. The radical departure from humanities, which appeared to inherit from metaphysics, turned out to be a blind alley since its underpinnings lie in philosophical intuitions, which must be revealed and verified—for the honesty of thinking, not because such conclusions were often incompatible with the essential precepts of the Christian faith. This being the case, we still lack theology as a vision that justifies the whole and imparts coherence to it. This is why theology is fragmented today. It is hard to see a uniform discipline in it. Rather, it appears to be a collection of individual, loosely interlinked disciplines, which as a whole do not provide answers to the basic questions about the identifiable rationality of faith with current relevance.¹⁸

2. Apologetics and Its Painful Problem

Many methodologists and historians of Catholic theology tried to frame it with some typology and systematics—simply put, order it. Ratzinger aligns with many of them when he offers the following typologization of contemporary Catholic theology:

As a result of complex development, Catholic theology is today divided into historical, systematic and practical theology... Systematic theology still appears to be the proper center of all theology. Starting from the modern era, the former has been divided into dogmatics and moral theology. Systematic theology is preceded by fundamental theology that evolved from apologetics as a kind of basic theological discipline, which is supposed to justify the validity of knowledge that takes into account faith, especially the validity of

16 “We still lack theology as a vision that justifies the whole and imparts coherence to it. This is why theology is fragmented today. It is hard to see a uniform discipline in it. Rather, it appears to be a collection of individual, loosely interlinked disciplines, which as a whole do not provide answers to the basic questions about the identifiable rationality of faith with current relevance” (JROO 9/1, 242–43 [JRGS 9/1, 274]).

17 JROO 7/1, 155 [JRGS 7/1, 174].

18 JROO 9/1, 242–43 [JRGS 9/1, 273–74].

the method used in dogmatics. The fact that this discipline of the foundations is called theology demonstrates that it is not a rational construal of faith that matters but rather a demonstration of its congruence with reason.¹⁹

“Systematic theology [i. e., the proper center of all theology] is preceded by fundamental theology,” says Ratzinger. Fundamental theology is discussed at greater length later on in this chapter. The Bavarian theologian observes correctly that fundamental theology evolved out of so-called apologetics. In Catholic theology (and its history), the term “apologetics” carries a rather specific meaning and Ratzinger is perfectly aware of this. It is accepted in the milieu of contemporary fundamental theologians that apologetics is a scientific discipline that engages in proving the rationality, and therefore the credibility, of Christian Revelation and the Christian faith, in other words, demonstrating the rationality and credibility of Christianity as a supernatural religion, coming directly from God.²⁰

According to Avery Dulles, apologetics emerged earlier, in the mid-fourteenth century; from the very beginning of Christianity, it was defended by means of apologia, as practiced by so-called apologists.²¹ Catholic theologians today are in agreement about the critical appraisal of apologetics. It became overly rationalistic, anti-dialogic, and anti-ecumenical, and due to its reliance on scholastic and neo-scholastic systems it showed no interest in the reality of human existence and history.²² Increasingly, it departed from biblical thinking and the theology

19 JROO 9/1, 223–24 [JRGS 9/1, 252]. The above is a fragment of the article “Katholische Theologie,” written by Ratzinger and included in the third edition of the lexicon *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.

20 René Latourelle, who was one of the “founding fathers” of the post-conciliar, Catholic fundamental theology, defines apologetics thus: “If we look at apologetics from the viewpoint of *revelation*, we may say that it is the science of the credibility of revelation. It seeks to establish in a *methodological* way (in accordance with the demands of science) that the Christian religion is worthy of faith, since its origin is divine... If we consider apologetics from the viewpoint of *faith*, we may say that it is concerned to ‘demonstrate, in terms of a discourse of value to the unbeliever, what the believer considers to be the rational bases of the decision of faith’ (H. Bouillard)” (René Latourelle, “Apologetics, II: Nature and Tasks” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella [New York: Crossroad, 2000], 37).

21 Avery Dulles, “Apologetics, I: History,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 28–35; Elena Bosetti, “Apologia,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 39–41; Elena Bosetti, “Apologists,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 41–44; Filippo Santi Cucinotta, “Apologists, Lay,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 44–48.

22 René Latourelle, “Fundamental Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 324–26.

of the Church Fathers, developing—independently of them—their own concepts, divisions, hypotheses, theories and systems.

Ratzinger's writings contain considerable critique of apologetics. According to him, in the interwar period Catholic ecclesiology lost its holistic perspective of the Church as a mysterious reality, introducing a division into so-called *corpus-ecclesiology*, which was incorporated into dogmatics and a study of the external aspect of the Church (the so-called ecclesiastical system or structure), which became part of apologetics and later fundamental theology. Ratzinger is very critical of modern apologetics, pointing out that the patristic doctrine of ecclesiastical office was closely associated with eucharistic ecclesiology; their separation, on the other hand, “took place in apologetic treatises of the modern era, where the doctrine of office drew more on Aristotle's *Politics* than Scripture and in which it would sometimes be hard to find a connection with the fundamental mystery of the Church.”²³

In contradistinction to many Catholic theologians and apologists, Ratzinger's perception of the painful problem of every kind of apologetics is very plain and accurate. He admits that the aim of theology (especially apologetics) is very difficult to attain. On one hand, “there is a truth by which we can and are allowed to guarantee,”²⁴ that Christianity is legitimized “nowhere else but in faith in the revealed truth,”²⁵ while “a Church that cannot assume responsibility for the content of her faith has no right to teach.”²⁶ On the other hand, however, Ratzinger thinks that Christianity does not possess scientific proof of its faith and truth (in the sense of proof used in natural science).²⁷ Well, it does have “the internal obviousness of faith,” but at the same time it has always had a profound problem:

23 JROO 1, 616 [JRGS 1, 662].

24 “And if the true ‘Yes’ exists, if there is the truth, the ‘Yes’ of Jesus Christ, then there is a truth by which we can and are allowed to guarantee” (JROO 12, 591 [JRGS 12, 629]). The quotation comes from the homily “Living on Christ's ‘Yes,’” given during diaconal ordination on February 18, 1979 in Munich.

25 “We should add without hesitation that this shift will surely not lead us to the core of the New Testament, that is to what generally justifies the existence of Christianity. The justification lies nowhere else but in faith in the revealed truth” (JROO 8/2, 770 [JRGS 8/2, 832]).

26 Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 234.

27 “Neither does the Church cling to a speculative system in the sense that she believes that now she can or must simply provide to everyone a justification of her faith as rationally as in a mathematical problem—and here the Church would no doubt overestimate her abilities. However, what she can and even must do, especially if she wants to reach out to new cultures, new generations, a new era, and to aspire to find faith there too, is show and above all build an appropriate degree of internal obviousness of faith. This does not mean that man should aspire to single-handedly fulfil the entire task of faith, but that he is called upon firmly by the degree of clarity and obviousness, a call which can induce him to cooperate with the Lord's grace by means of faith” (JROO 13/3, 1162 [JRGS 13/3, 1282]). This is an excerpt from an interview with Ratzinger published by *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on March 8, 2000.

Painful to this day is the problem that each kind of apologetics has, always facing a seemingly impossible task: to justify the faith to a person who is asking but who, after all, carries this justification in himself and as a result becomes capable of such a justification only when he or she has already responded to faith, which in turn seems to presuppose a justification.²⁸

Let me add that this problem is painful not only to apologetics but to every Christian believer (and every fundamental theologian) who wants to show his certainty of the faith to a non-believer but is unable to because the certainty of faith comes... with faith. But the believer knows he must try because the certainty and beauty of faith are too strong and too clear to be forgotten or kept only to himself. But how can this be done? Can one, somehow, overcome the painful problem (almost contradiction) of every kind of apologetics, every (fundamental) theology and every proclamation of the Christian faith?

3. Fundamental Theology and Its “Basic and Model Sense”

A careful reading of Ratzinger’s writings may lead one to conclude that it is possible to handle the painful problem of every kind of apologetics, every theology and every proclamation of the Christian faith. This is what this entire book is about. It was written precisely for this purpose: to distil from Master Ratzinger’s theological work the solutions to this aching problem. Before they are presented in the successive chapters of this monograph, some attention should be devoted to fundamental theology, which has characterised Catholic theology for over half a century. The fact that fundamental theology came into being and superseded the commonly criticized (and discredited) apologetics was expected, by itself, to quickly eliminate all problems inherent in the communication of the Christian faith and its foundations (its rationale) to the world, and that the painful problem of every kind of apologetics and theology will go away too. Did that happen?

We may assume that such hopes were entertained by the “founding fathers” of Catholic fundamental theology, as well their students and followers. One of the most eminent “founding fathers” of fundamental theology, René Latourelle, writes that it was born in three stages: pre-conciliar (in the 1950s, shortly after World War II), conciliar, and post-conciliar.²⁹ In the opinion of Avery Dulles, a pioneer of fundamental theology, its heyday and expansion throughout the Catholic world

²⁸ JROO 1, 85 [JRGS 1, 90].

²⁹ René Latourelle, “Fundamental Theology,” 324–28.

took place in the 1980s³⁰ (although it should be added that the name “fundamental theology” and its first designs had been formed in the Protestant world several centuries earlier). To this day, the scholarly identity of Catholic fundamental theology is mapped out by René Latourelle:

It [fundamental theology] is, therefore, not a form of theodicy nor a simple introduction to theology nor a mere function of theology. As a *specific* discipline, it has its own proper material and formal object, namely, the *self*-manifestation and *self*-giving of God in Jesus Christ, and the *intrinsic* credibility of this manifestation that he is by his presence in the world. The subject matter and center of unity of fundamental theology are the unprecedented intervention of God in history in the flesh and language of Jesus Christ: this is the fundamental mystery, the fundamental event, the fundamental reality that is the basis for all theological discourse. Dogmatic theology breaks this reality down into particular mysteries and studies these one by one, fundamental theology considers this mystery as a *whole* and as an inviolable *unity*.³¹

Fundamental theology, thanks to the many “founding fathers” (and also its official recognition in the Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, 1979) flourished in western Europe (Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Austria) as well as the United States, chiefly owing to the work of Avery Dulles. Robust scholarly centres of fundamental theology started to appear—scientific schools and handbooks. Conferences and congresses were organized. The first international congress of fundamental theology took place in Rome in 1995 at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Fundamental theology began to penetrate the countries of central and eastern Europe, which were slowly breaking free from Marxist-atheist communism and the political-economic diktat of the Soviet Union. One of the first countries in this part of Europe where fundamental theology took root was Poland. Initially, it found fertile ground at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. Fundamental theology has been present here since the university’s inception in 1918, when Poland regained independence after 123 years of absence from the map of Europe (as it had been partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary, which, incidentally, purported to be... Christian monarchies). The first lecturer on fundamental theology (since 1918) in Lublin was Piotr Kremer (1878–1951), who was one of the founders of Lublin’s Catholic university (besides Idzi Radziszewski), and the first dean of the university’s faculty of theology. Before coming to Lublin in 1918, he lectured in a Catholic academy in Saint Petersburg. Although the subject he taught was called

30 Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, 2nd ed., Modern Apologetics Library (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 325–45.

31 René Latourelle, “Fundamental Theology,” 328.

fundamental theology, he taught traditional, Catholic apologetics, which had the character of a polemics with positivism and the Orthodox Church’s doctrine.

In the 1970s, when Poland was in the Eastern Bloc behind the so-called Iron Curtain, post-conciliar fundamental theology started to be increasingly noticeable at the Catholic University of Lublin. Over time, it became an academic school: the so-called Lublin School of Fundamental Theology.³² Its pioneer was Edward Kopeć (1918–99), who was supported by his colleague Stanisław Nagy (1921–2013), a member of the International Theological Commission (1986–97) and a cardinal from 2003. The greatest contribution to the formation and development of this theological school came from E. Kopeć’s disciple Marian Rusecki (1942–2012), a member of the Pontifical Theological Academy in the Vatican and the director of the Institute of Fundamental Theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin for many years. He finally reshaped the traditional and mostly intellectualistic apologetics into post-conciliar and modern fundamental theology built on new methodology.³³ Rusecki was the originator and the main host of the Second International Congress of Fundamental Theology “The Christianity of Tomorrow,” organised in Lublin on September 18–21, 2001.³⁴ I had the honour of being one of his collaborators and co-organizers of that event.³⁵ Shortly before Marian Rusecki’s

32 Krzysztof Kaucha, “The Lublin School of Fundamental Theology and Its Achievements,” *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65, no. 9 (2018): 11–25, <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt.2018.65.9-2en>; Krzysztof Kaucha and Jacenty Mastej, “Institute of Fundamental Theology,” in *One Hundred Years of Theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin*, ed. Sławomir Nowosad and Jacenty Mastej (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2019), 69–88.

33 Marian Rusecki, Jacenty Mastej, and Krzysztof Kaucha, *Metodologia teologii fundamentalnej, Źródła i Monografie*. Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II 483 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2019). The main part of this book is the second, revised edition of Marian Rusecki’s handbook on fundamental theology, *Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa*, vol. 1: *Z teorii teologii fundamentalnej*, Prace Wydziału Teologicznego. Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 106 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1994).

34 Marian Rusecki et al., eds., *Chrześcijaństwo jutra. Materiały II Międzynarodowego Kongresu Teologii Fundamentalnej, Lublin 18–21 września 2001*, Źródła i Monografie. Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 213 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2001). This book has 823 pages and contains all papers delivered in two language versions: Polish and one of the congress languages.

35 The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger, was invited to participate. He wrote a letter in which he wished fruitful deliberations and apologised for not being able to come. The U.S. was to have been represented by Avery Dulles, but his participation was thwarted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Speakers at the congress were, among others, Karel Skalický, Kurt Appel, Johannes van der Ven, Peter Neuner, Monika K. Hellwig, Karl H. Neufeld, Hans Waldenfels, Marian Rusecki, Salvador Pié-Ninot, Bruno Forte, Wolfgang Beinert, Walbert Bühlmann, Elmar Klinger, Henryk Zimoń, Jacques Dupuis, and Czesław S. Bartnik. See Krzysztof Kaucha, “«Il cristianesimo di domani»: Il Congresso Internazionale di Teologia Fondamentale