

The Conversion of Romano Guardini

Since the intellectually fashionable tend nowadays to declare themselves “spiritual” but not “religious,” I’m always on the lookout for experiences that bring the two elements together. To this purpose, I finally tracked Fr. Romano Guardini’s (1885-1968) famous account of his own conversion. Besides being edifying, it arguably represents one of the most important ecclesial events of the 20th Century. As a priest and theologian, Guardini deeply influenced thinkers as diverse as Josef Pieper, Walter Kasper, and Joseph Ratzinger. I might add that the latter, in the *Nature and Mission of Theology*, describes Guardini’s motive for converting to the Church as the spiritual core his own ecclesiology. There Ratzinger attributed to Guardini (at least in part) his own conviction that the “Church is the sole guarantee that the obedience we owe to the Truth is concrete.”

The following passage is set in Guardini’s university days (1905), during a vacation in Staltach, which our author describes as “a little village on Starnberger See.” There he shared an attic apartment with his childhood friend, Karl Neundörfer. By this point, exposure to Kantian Idealism had shattered the simple faith of Guardini’s youth. But ...

Then came a turning point. What had drawn me away from faith had not been real reasons *against* it, but the fact that the *reasons* for it no longer spoke to me. Faith as a conscious act had grown ever weaker and had finally died out. Still, I think that one’s unconscious relation to the reality of Christ is never entirely sundered. It was also important that I held no grudge against the Church or against any ecclesial personality, and that the hardship of a scrupulous conscience, which was then closely bound up with the Church’s education, had never turned into a rebellion. The religious [dimension] was becoming stronger—now from within. And that led me immediately, as it happened, to draw close to the Christian faith. I can no longer say which particular

deliberations had contributed to this; however, an awareness came over me, which shaped and aligned the whole inner event, and which has remained for me ever since the authentic key to faith. I remember like yesterday the hour when this awareness became decision. It was in my little attic room on Gonsenheimer Strasse. Karl Neundörfer and I had just spoken about the questions that exercised us both, and my last word went: “Everything will come down to the statement: ‘Whoever holds on to his soul will it, but whoever gives it away will gain it.’” My interpretation, based in this translation of Mt. 10:39, says what it all came down to for me. It had gradually become clear to me that a law existed, according to which a person—when he “holds on to his soul,” that is, when he remains in himself and accepts as valid only what immediately illumines him—loses his authenticity. If he wants to arrive at the Truth and in the Truth arrive at his true self, then he must let go of himself. This insight had surely had its precursors, though they escape me now. Upon hearing these words Karl Neundörfer retired to the adjacent room, from which a door opened onto a balcony. I sat in front of my table, and the reflection progressed: “To give my soul away—but to whom? Who is in the position to require it from me? So to require it that, in the requiring, it would not again be I who lay hold of it? Not simply ‘God.’ For whenever a person wants to deal only with God, then he says ‘God’ but means himself. There must also be an objective authority [*Instanz*], which can draw out my answer from self-assertion’s every refuge and hide-out. But there is only one such entity: the Catholic Church in her authority and concreteness [*Präzision*]. The question of holding on or letting go is decided ultimately not before God, but before the Church.” It struck me as if I carried everything—literally “everything”, my whole existence—in my hands, in a scale at perfect balance: “I can let it fall to the right or to the left. I can hold on to me soul our give it away...” And then I let the scale sink to the right. The moment was completely calm. There was neither agitation, nor radiance, nor experience of any kind. It was just a completely clear insight: “So it is”—and the imperceptibly gentle movement—“so it should be!” Then I went out to my friend and told him.

The "Liturgical Act" Today

By Romano Guardini

In April of 1964 Romano Guardini wrote an open letter to Johannes Wagner in conjunction with the Third German Liturgical Conference held in Mainz. The fundamental questions raised by the renowned Italian-German theologian a few months after the promulgation of the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy remain vitally relevant nearly forty years later. This translation, reprinted here with acknowledgment, originally appeared in the July 1964 issue of Herder Correspondence. The style of that text is maintained here.

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Dear Friend:

I had very much wanted to take part in the Liturgical Congress at Mainz; I should have been glad of the opportunity to raise a point that seems important to me. This is, unfortunately, impossible; I must be content to tell you my thoughts in a letter and hope that you will find a way to pass them on.

ESSENCE OF THE LITURGICAL ACT

Liturgical work, as we all know, has reached an important juncture. The Council has laid the foundations for the future-and the way this came to pass and truth became manifest will remain a classical example of the way the Holy Spirit guides the Church. But now the question arises how we are to set about our task, so that truth may become reality.

A mass of ritual and textual problems will, of course, present themselves-and long experience has shown how much scope there is for a right and a wrong approach. But the central problem seems to me to be something else: the problem of the cult act or, to be more precise, the liturgical act.

As I see it, typical nineteenth-century man was no longer able to perform this act; in fact he was unaware of its existence. Religious conduct was to him an individual inward matter which in the 'liturgy' took on the character of an official, public ceremonial. But the sense of the liturgical action was thereby lost. The faithful did not perform a proper liturgical act at all, it was simply a private and inward act, surrounded by ceremonial and not infrequently accompanied by a feeling that the ceremonial was really a disturbing factor. From that point of view the efforts of those who concerned themselves with the liturgy must have appeared as peculiarities of aesthetes who lacked Christian sincerity.

The intensity of the Council discussions could not fail to bring home to anyone actively interested in the Church that here was a matter of fundamental importance. Anyone who did not become too engrossed in secondary problems-such as the advisability of using the mother tongue-must have found himself wondering what it was about the liturgy that caused such fierce arguments. The conclusion was inescapable that the religious act underlying the liturgy was something singular and important.

Further consideration of the nature of this singularity would lead to the conclusion that the liturgical act was performed by individuals who did, however, in so far as they were a sociological entity, form a corpus: the congregation, or rather the Church present therein.

The act embraced not only a spiritual inwardness, but the whole man, body as well as spirit. Therefore, the external action was in itself a 'prayer', a religious act; the times, places, and things included in the action were not merely external decorations, but elements of the whole act and would have to be practiced as such, and so forth.

The usual discussion generally brings out only the sociological, ethnological aspect: participation by the congregation and the use of the vernacular. There is, of course, far more to it than that: the act as a whole needs to be considered, in fact a whole world of acts which have become atrophied and are now to take on new life. But they must first be noticed and recognized as essential-and the danger is great that everything that is said will be dismissed as artificial and officious, especially by those whose

inclinations are individualistic, rationalistic, and above all, attached to traditions.

The question is whether the wonderful opportunities now open to the liturgy will achieve their full realization; whether we shall be satisfied with just removing anomalies, taking new situations into account, giving better instruction on the meaning of ceremonies and liturgical vessels or whether we shall re-learn a forgotten way of doing things and recapture lost attitudes.

LITURGICAL CRISIS

The question will, of course, arise whether our present liturgy contains parts which cannot mean much to modern man. I remember a conversation with the late Abbot Ildefons Herwegen of Maria Laach, the great champion of liturgical renewal. We had been considering various aspects and I said a sign that the work for the liturgy was really coming to life would be a liturgical crisis, and Abbot Herwegen thoughtfully agreed. As long as liturgical actions are merely 'celebrated' objectively and texts are merely 'got through', everything will go smoothly because there is no question of an integrated religious act. But once serious prayer is joined to the action, the parts that have no living appeal become apparent.

But those whose task it is to teach and educate will have to ask themselves-and this is all-decisive-whether they themselves desire that liturgical act or, to put it plainly, whether they know of its existence and what exactly it consists of and that it is neither a luxury nor an oddity, but a matter of fundamental importance. Or does it, basically, mean the same to them as to the parish priest of the late nineteenth century who said: 'We must organize the procession better; we must see to it that the praying and singing is done better'. He did not realize that he should have asked himself quite a different question: how can the act of walking become a religious act, a retinue for the Lord progressing through his land, so that an 'epiphany' may take place.

PARTICIPATION THROUGH LOOKING

The basic question then is this: of what does the integrated liturgical act consist?

This becomes clearest when it is a matter of 'doing', for instance, the offertory procession, where this is customary. It makes all the difference whether the faithful look on this procession as a mere means to an end which could have been achieved equally well with someone coming round with the collection-plate, or whether they know that the act of bringing their gifts is a 'prayer' in itself, a readiness towards God.

The act of 'doing' can also incorporate a thing, in this case a coin; or holy water for the sign of the cross; and the celebrant has the bread and the chalice with the wine. There is no need for words to give the 'meaning', for it is realized in the act itself. The same is true of localities and special places, times, days and hours.

The liturgical act can be realized by looking. This does not merely mean that the sense of vision takes note of what is going on in front, but it is in itself a living participation in the act. I once experienced this in Palermo Cathedral when I could sense the attention with which the people were following the blessings on Holy Saturday for hours on end without books or any words of 'explanation'. Much of this was, of course, an external 'gazing', but basically it was far more. The looking by the people was an act in itself; by looking they participated in the various actions. However, cinema, radio and television-not to forget the flood of tourists-will have destroyed this remainder of old contemplative forces.

Only if regarded in this way can the liturgical-symbolical action be properly understood: for instance, the washing of hands by the celebrant, but also liturgical gestures like the stretching out of hands over the chalice. It should not be necessary to have to add in words of thought, 'this means such and such', but the symbol should be 'done' by the celebrant as a religious act and the faithful should 'read' it by an analogous act; they should see the inner sense in the outward sign. Without this everything would be a waste of time and energy and it

would be better simply to 'say' what was meant. But the 'symbol' is in itself something corporal-spiritual, an expression of the inward through the outward, and must as such be co-performed through the act of looking.

THE COMMUNAL ACT

Of particular importance for the liturgical act is the active and full participation of the congregation as a body. The act is done by every individual, not as an isolated individual, but as a member of a body in which the Church is present. It is this body which is the 'we' of the prayers. Its structure is different from that of any other collection of people meeting for a common purpose. It is that of a corpus, an objective whole. In the liturgical act the celebrating individual becomes part of this body and he incorporates the circumstances in his self-expression. This is not so simple if it is to be genuine and honest. Much that divides men must be overcome: dislikes, indifference towards the many who are 'no concern of mine', but who are really members of the same body; lethargy, etc. In the act the individual becomes conscious of the meaning of the words 'congregation' and 'Church'

LEARNING THE LITURGICAL ACT

If the intentions of the Council are to be realized, proper instruction will be needed, but real education will be needed too; practice will be necessary in order to learn the act. The active presence of the people of Palermo was based on the fact that they did not merely look up in the book what the various actions 'meant', but they actually 'read' them by simply looking-an after-effect of antique influences, probably paid for by a lack of primary education. Our problem is to rise above reading and writing and learn really to look with understanding.

This is the present task of liturgical education. If it is not taken in hand, reforms of rites and texts will not help much. It may even happen that people with a genuine concern for real piety come to feel that a misfortune is happening-like the venerable old parish priest who said:

'Before they started all this business with the liturgy my people were able to pray. Now there is a lot of talking and running around'.

A great deal of thought and experiment will, of course, be needed to get modern man to 'perform' the act without being theatrical and fussy. Nor must we forget that many who should be teachers and leaders are quite inexperienced in this field themselves; some even resist because they are inclined towards an individualistic way of devotion, regard these new demands as unreasonable and think in their hearts that it is just a question of waiting for the 'fashion' to pass-'no doubt in the end everything will remain as it has always been'.

PHASES OF THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT

The liturgical movement has passed through various phases. It would be useful and interesting to trace them not only in their chronological order, but also in their progressively changing inner sense. If I may make a very summary sketch, I would describe the first phase, which started at Solesmes, as restorative and in some ways politically restorative. (It was connected with efforts to overcome Gallicanism and sought closer ties with Rome.) The second originated in Belgian Benedictine monasteries and was of a strongly academic nature. The third, which was centred on the Austrian monastery of Klosterneuberg and various centres of the German Catholic youth movements, had a practical, realistic character: it tried to reach and interest the congregation as it was and thus came up primarily against the problem of the vernacular.

Now, as a result of the impulse given by the Council, a fourth phase must begin, one infusing new life into the liturgy. It will be raising a number of questions: What is the nature of the genuine liturgical action, as opposed to other religious actions, such as individual devotions or the loose communal act of popular devotions? How is the basic liturgical act constituted? What forms can it take? What might go wrong with it? How are its demands related to the make-up of modern man? What must be done so that he can really and truly learn it?

There are plenty of problems and tasks ahead. But perhaps one should, for the sake of clarification, put a preliminary question: Is not the liturgical act and, with it, all that goes under the name of 'liturgy' so bound up with the historical background-antique or medieval or baroque-that it would be more honest to give it up altogether? Would it not be better to admit that man in this industrial and scientific age, with its new sociological structure, is no longer capable of a liturgical act? And instead of talking of renewal ought we not to consider how best to celebrate the sacred mysteries so that modern man can grasp their meaning through his own approach to truth?

This seems a hard saying. But there are quite a number of people who think this way. We cannot simply dismiss them as people standing aloof, but we must ask how-if liturgy is indeed fundamental-we can best approach them.

There are indeed some promising and related developments. It is, for instance, no accident that the latest phase of the liturgical movement coincides with an awakening of a greater interest in the Church. At the same time the educational trend has been to present a far truer picture of man as a being whose body and spirit, outward and inner personality, form an integrated whole. The work for liturgical renewal has a lot to learn from these related developments. Some wise educationists have pointed out that modern man needs more than mere talk, intellectual explanations and formal organizing. The faculties of looking, doing and shaping must be fostered and included in the formative act; the musical element is more than merely decorative; the communal body of the congregation is more than a mere sitting together, but rather a solidarity of existence, and so forth.

There is a great deal to be said on this subject, but perhaps I had better close, or else my letter will turn into an epistle. Anyway, with my letter I send my very best wishes for the work of the Congress.

The Intellectual Relationship between Joseph Ratzinger and Romano Guardini—Silvano Zucal

The Intellectual Relationship Between the Future Pope and the Great Italian-German Thinker

From liturgical theology to concrete-living of the faith in Jesus Christ

Romano Guardini, the great Italian-German thinker, died on 1 October 1968 in Munich. This year is the 40th anniversary of his death. Symposia, seminars and congresses seeking to reinterpret his extraordinary contribution to philosophical and theological thought — the contribution of the man whom his biographer, Hanna-Barbara Gerl, likes to describe as the "father of the 20th-century Church" — will be dedicated to him in Italy and Germany as well as in other European countries.

In this essay we shall be focusing attention on his relationship with Joseph Alois Ratzinger, today Pope Benedict XVI. The Pope described Guardini as a "great figure, a Christian interpreter of the world and of his own time" (cf. *Perché siamo ancor nella Chiesa*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2008, p. 186) and he often turns to Guardini in almost all of his writings.

In reality, Ratzinger considers that Guardini's voice is still relevant although it must be made audible once again. The Italian-German thinker, in fact, not only wrote many books, translated into many languages, but in his time succeeded in shaping an entire generation, the generation to which the Pontiff himself feels that he belongs. Indeed, this is proof of the lasting fruit of Guardini's teaching.

Before we fully venture into Guardini hermeneutics proposed by the current Pontiff, let us first of all pause to look at the surprising connections between these two figures' biographies.

A specific aspect, indeed a unique "encounter", came to light during Pope Benedict XVI's Visit to Verona on 19 October 2006. It should be remembered that Verona is the city where Guardini was born on 17 February 1885, and the Holy Father was deeply moved on receiving the gift, precisely in Verona, of a copy of the baptismal record of Guardini, who was baptized in the Church of San Nicolò all'Arena.

In this regard it might be said that there was a singular convergence of destinies between Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger.

Guardini left Italy in his early childhood to become "German" in terms of his intellectual and spiritual formation. After his years teaching in Berlin (1923-39), in the post-World War II period and after three years teaching in Tübingen, from 1945 to 1948, he was to teach the "Christian world-view" (*christliche Weltanschauung*) in Munich permanently. Thus Guardini's chosen city, was Munich, where, in fact, he died in 1968.

Ratzinger would make the same journey, but in reverse. After teaching dogmatic and fundamental theology at the high school in Freising, he was to continue his teaching activity in Bonn (1959-69), the city where Guardini was educated and began his career, in Münster (43-66) and lastly for three years (1966-69) at Tübingen then where Guardini had also taught.

However, from 1969 Ratzinger taught dogmatic theology and the history of dogma at the University of Regensburg, until he was appointed Archbishop of Munich and Freising, on 25 March 1977, by Pope Paul VI.

Just as it had been for Guardini before him, Munich also seemed to be Ratzinger's final destination. On the contrary, their ways parted. The Veronese philosopher was called definitively to the north, to the city of

Munich, to which he was so deeply attached, feeling that it was a sort of city synthesis in which his Italian soul could also feel at home.

The German theologian, on the other hand, was to see his future in the south. Moreover, he would not return home again, not even when his desire to return to his Bavaria was compelling and seemed possible to satisfy. Rome and Italy would become his definitive spiritual "homeland".

Apart from their paths that crossed and travelled in opposite directions, these two extraordinary figures were able to meet personally.

Ratzinger was not only one of Guardini's readers but also on certain occasions a "listener", as the great theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar had been in Berlin.

In the years between 1946 and 1951, the very same years in which Ratzinger was studying at the School for Advanced Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Freising, on the outskirts of the Bavarian capital, and then at the University of Munich, in the same city, in that University and in that local Church of Munich, Guardini assumed the role of intellectual and spiritual leadership.

For Ratzinger, then only 20 years old, a figure like Guardini was indisputably fascinating and was to make a strong impression on his intellectual outlook.

When, in 1952, he began his teaching activity at the School in Freising where he had been a student, the echo of Guardini's lectures resounded very clearly in the small town which basked in the atmosphere of all the cultural and intellectual events that took place in the nearby Bavarian capital. Moreover, the intellectual relationship between the future Pope and "Maestro" Guardini was extraordinarily intense.

In fact, many elements are common to these two thinkers who were later to become crucial figures of the 20th-century Church. If the one would become Cardinal, and then Pope, Guardini would also be offered a cardinalate although he was to refuse it.

Both were concerned with finding the essence of Christianity, seeking to respond to Feuerbach's provocation. On this topic, Guardini was to write in 1938 the splendid book entitled *The Essence of Christianity*, while Ratzinger would dedicate his *Introduction to Christianity* to the subject, which he wrote in 1968, undoubtedly his most famous work and, in all likelihood, his most important.

They shared an equal concern for the Church, her meaning and her destiny. If Guardini foretold in 1921 that "a very important process has begun: the Church is awakening in consciences" then Ratzinger would present the ecclesiological problem more dramatically, yet with the same radicalism, based on what he considered the overturning of the Guardinian thesis which today, in his opinion, would sound like this:

"In fact, a very important process is under way — the Church is being extinguished in souls and is disintegrating in communities" (cf. *ibid.*).

In this regard it suffices to think of the vast impact made by the somber discourse Ratzinger delivered on 4 June 1970 to the Bavarian Catholic Academy of Munich to 1,000 people on the theme: *Why am I still in the Church today?*

He then declared: "I am in the Church for the same reasons that I am Christian: because one cannot believe on one's own.... One can only be Christian in the Church, not beside her" (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 153-154).

They also had the same concern for the future of Europe that was tending to reject its past. It suffices to remember Guardini's lectures on Europe and of the interventions, even recent, of the future Pontiff who even as Pope has recalled the meaning of Europe and of its roots, maintaining that Europe is "a binding heritage for Christians" (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 163-83).

A crucial point of convergence between the present Pope and Guardini is undoubtedly the liturgy. They are united by their common passion for the liturgy. Ratzinger's debt to Guardini is reflected in the title of his book *Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy*, published on the Feast of St.

Augustine in 1999 and which met with extraordinary success (four editions in a single year) which recalls Guardini's famous book published in 1918: *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

Ratzinger himself wrote in the preface to his own work: "One of the first books I read when I began studying theology at the beginning of 1946 was Romano Guardini's first work, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, a small book published at Easter in 1918 as the volume inaugurating the series '*Ecclesia orans*', edited by Abbot Herwegen and reprinted several times until 1957.

"This work can rightly be considered the "beginning of the liturgical movement in Germany. It made a crucial contribution to ensuring that the liturgy, with its beauty, hidden riches and grandeur that crosses time, was rediscovered as the vital centre of the Church and of Christian life. It made its contribution to having the liturgy celebrated in an 'essential' (a term very dear to Guardini) manner.

"What he desired was an understanding of the liturgy based on its nature and inner form as an inspired prayer and guided by the, Holy Spirit himself, in which Christ continues to become our contemporary and come into our lives".

And the comparison continues. Ratzinger compared his own intention with Guardini's and considered that it perfectly coincided in spirit, even in a radically different historical context:

"I would like to hazard a comparison, which like all comparisons is largely inadequate but is helpful in order to understand. One might say that some aspects of the liturgy then — in 1918 — could be compared to a fresco that had been preserved intact, but had been almost completely covered by a subsequent layer of plasters: in the missal, that the priest used to celebrate it, its form was fully present, just as it had developed from its origins. But for believers much of it was hidden beneath instructions and forms of prayer of a private kind. Thanks to the liturgical movement and — definitively — thanks to the Second Vatican Council, the fresco was brought back to light and we were for an instant fascinated by the beauty of its colours and its figures".

For Ratzinger today, however, after the cleaning of the fresco, the problem of the "spirit of the liturgy" has come up again. Continuing with the metaphor, for the current Pope various and mistaken attempts at restoration and reconstruction and disturbance caused by the throngs of visitors have caused the fresco to be seriously endangered and it will be threatened by ruin unless the necessary measures are taken to put an end to these harmful influences.

For Ratzinger it is not a question of returning to the past, and indeed he says: "of course one must not go back to replastering the surface but a new understanding of the liturgical message and its reality is necessary so that having brought it back to light will not become the first step to its definitive ruin. This book intends, precisely, to make a contribution to this renewed understanding".

"Its intentions thus substantially coincide with what Guardini had set out to do in his time. For this reason", Ratzinger concludes, "I deliberately chose a title that expressly refers to that classic title of liturgical theology".

Furthermore, in the course of the text, especially in the first chapter, he addresses Guardini's theses and especially his famous definition of the liturgy being like a "game".

On the other hand, in the commemorative address of 1985, Ratzinger reflected on the historical and philosophical foundation of the liturgical renewal proposed by Guardini.

In his work *Liturgical Formation* of 1923, the philosopher hailed with relief the end of the modern epoch since it represented the disintegration of the human being and, more generally, of the world: a schizophrenic split between a disembodied and deceitful spirituality and a brutalized materialism that, is merely an instrument in the hands of man and his objectives.

People aspired to the "pure spirit", and ran up against abstraction: the world of ideas, of formulas, of apparatus, mechanisms and organizations.

Ratzinger stressed that Guardini's self-distancing from modernity coincided with his enthusiasm for the medieval paradigm, which was well illustrated by the martyr of Nazism, Paul Ludwig Landsberg in his book *The Mediaeval and Us*, published in 1923.

For Guardini this did not mean abandoning himself to a romantic view of the Middle Ages but, rather, to draw from it a permanent lesson. The Christian's true self-fulfilment lies in the liturgical celebration. Thus in the struggle over symbolism and the liturgy what is at stake, Ratzinger points out in the wake of Guardini's lesson, is the development of man's essential dimension.

The future Pope was then to reflect on Guardini's last affirmations concerning the liturgical question expressed in the famous letter he addressed in 1964 to the participants in the third Liturgical Congress, taking place in Mainz, and which contained the famous question:

"Is liturgical action, and above all what is referred to as 'liturgy' historically bound to the ancient and medieval world which, for the sake of honesty, ought now to be completely abandoned?"

This question, in fact, concealed a dramatic query: would the man of the future still be able to carry out the liturgical action which requires a sense of religious symbolism, now threatened by extinction in addition to the mere obedience of faith?

No longer with the optimistic pathos of his younger days, Guardini glimpsed the face of post-modern man with features very different from those he had previously hoped for. The invasion of the technological civilization, gave him a true and proper spiritual shock, as his *Letters from Lake Como* of 1923 already testified.

For this reason, Ratzinger stated, "something of the difficulty of recent times is to be found, despite his joy at the liturgical reform of the Council that resulted from his work, in his letter of 1964.... Guardini urged the liturgists gathered in Mainz to take seriously the extraneousness of those who view the liturgy as no longer practicable and to reflect on 'how it is

possible, if the liturgy is essential, to bring them closer to it'" (*Perché siamo ancora nella Chiesa*, p. 246).

Guardini, Ratzinger recalls, found himself in the thick of the drama of the modernist crisis. How could he emerge from it? Faithful to the lesson of Wilhelm Koch, the theologian of Tübingen and his first teacher, but also attentive to the limitations and risks of that perspective, he sought a new foundation and found it with his conversion.

"The brief scene", the future Pope emphasizes, "of how Guardini, together with his friend, Karl Neundörfer, however, each one for himself, after losing the faith could penetrate it anew, has something great and exciting about it, precisely in the modesty and simplicity with which Guardini describes the process.

"Guardini's experience in the attic and on the balcony of his parents' house shows a truly astounding similarity with the scene in the garden in which Augustine and Alipius saw their lives unfold before them. In both cases the innermost part of a man is revealed by looking within to what is most personal and most concealed, in listening to a person's heartbeat, one suddenly perceives the greatest stroke of history, because: it is the hour of truth, because a man has encountered the truth" (*ibid.*, pp. 249-50).

This was no longer an encounter with God in the universal sense but with "God in the concrete". At that moment Guardini, Ratzinger stresses, knew that he held everything in his hands, his whole life, that he had it at his disposal and indeed, had to make use of it.

He chose to give his life to the Church and from this stems his fundamental theological option: "Guardini was convinced that only thinking in harmony with the Church leads to freedom and especially, makes theology possible... A programme that is once again topical today and should be taken into consideration in the deepest possible way, as required by modern theology" (*ibid.*, p. 290-91).

In Guardini's opinion a constructive theological knowledge can never be achieved as long as the Church and dogmas appear merely "as limitations and restriction".

Hence his motto, provocative from the theological viewpoint: "we were decidedly not liberals", which alludes to the fact that for him, the future Pope notes, Revelation presented itself as the ultimate criterion, an "originating fact" of theological knowledge and the Church was "its messenger".

Dogma thus became the fruitful ordering of theological thought. An effective basis of Guardini's theology was, which, for him, was the overcoming of the modern spirit and, especially, its subjectivist post-Kantian drift. Thus, for our thinker, "it is not reflection that comes first but rather experience. All that is later presented as content, was developed on the basis of that original experience" (*ibid.*, p. 252).

In describing the fundamental structure of Guardini's thought, the future Pope reflected on what, to his mind, constitute the principal categories within the unity of liturgy, Christology and philosophy. First of all the "relationship between thought and being".

This relationship implies attention to the truth itself, the search for being behind doing. It suffices to think of the words Guardini spoke at his trial lecture in Bonn: "Thought seems inclined to turn reverently again to being".

In the footsteps of Nicolai Hartmann, Edmund Husserl and, especially, Max Scheler, Guardini's approach, according to Ratzinger, expressed "optimism over the fact that philosophy was starting out again as a questioning of the events themselves, a beginning that single-handedly guided it in the direction of the great syntheses of the Middle Ages and of the Catholic thought they had formed" (*ibid.*, p. 253). For Guardini, the future Pope underlines, the truth about man is essentiality, conformity to being, or better still, "obedience to being" which *in primis* is the obedience of our being before the being of God. Only in this way can one achieve the force of truth, that orientation and key primacy of the

logos over the *ethos* on which Guardini always insisted. What he wanted, Ratzinger explained, was always "a further advance towards being itself, the demand for the essential that is found in the truth" (*ibid.*, p. 256).

With the fundamental phenomenological category of the obedience of thought to being — to what shows itself and is — arose many other categories from Guardini's thought which the future Pope was to sum up:

"Essentiality, which Guardini countered to a merely subjective veracity; obedience that results from man's relationship with the truth and expresses his way of becoming free and of being one with his own essence; lastly, the priority of *logos* over *ethos*, of being over doing" (*ibid.*).

Another two categories that emerge from Guardini's methodological writings should be added to these. The "concrete-living" and "polar opposition". The "concrete-living", in addition to being a general category of Guardini's thought, also, in Ratzinger's opinion assumes a Christological value: "Man is open to the truth, but the truth is not in some place but rather in the concrete-living, in the figure of Jesus Christ. This concrete-living demonstrates as truth precisely through the fact that it is the unity of what are apparent opposites, since the *logos* and the *a-logon* are united in it. The truth is found only in the whole" (*ibid.*, p. 261).

The "apparent opposites" are alluded to in the other fundamental methodological category, that of the "polar opposition" of opposites which, while they contend they also refer to each other: silence-word, individual-community. Only those who are able to keep them together can abandon every form of dangerous exclusivism and all harmful dogmatism.

On 14 March 1978, the Catholic Academy of Bavaria awarded Alfons Goppel, the President of the Land of Bavaria, the "Romano Guardini Award", and, as was the practice, Joseph Ratzinger was called upon to deliver the *Laudatio* in his capacity as President of the Bavarian Bishops' Conference.

It was an extraordinarily full text, in which he reviewed the various dimensions of the "political": politics as art, the grounding of politics in a territory, responsibility to the State, the relationship between truth and conscience in the political sphere. In the latter passage Ratzinger once again takes up Guardini's lesson: "In Germany we have experienced the kind of tyranny that sentences to death, bans and confiscates.... The unscrupulous use of words is a particular kind of tyranny, which in its own way likewise sentences to death, bans and confiscates.

"Today there are certainly sufficient reasons to express similar warnings and to recall the forces that can prevent this kind of tyranny that is increasing before our eyes.

"The experience of Hider's bloody tyranny and Romano Guardini's vigilance before new threats caused him in his last years, almost contrary to his temperament to issue dramatic warnings about the destruction of politics through the annihilation of consciences'. It drove him to call for a just, not merely theoretical interpretation of the world, but indeed one that was real and effective, in accordance with the person whose political action is based on faith" (*ibid.*, p. 236).

Guardini proposed these important themes to the German academic world from Berlin to Tübingen, and to Munich. The relationship of the thinker, according to the future Pope, with the German Universities was controversial: from the times of his Berlin professorship which made him suffer "because of the impression that he was outside of the methodological canon of the University and, likewise, that he was not recognized by it.

"He consoled himself with the thought that, with his struggle to understand, judge and give form, he was able to be the precursor of a University that did not yet exist" (*ibid.*, p. 263).

And with a remark that reminds one of recent polemics in Italy concerning the Pope's cancelled Visit to La Sapienza, "It is to the credit of the German University that Guardini was able to find room in it, with

all his experience and was always able to feel it was the home of his own specific vocation" (*ibid.*).

Nazism only temporarily removed his Chair from him, and remembering that tragic event, after the War, the future Pope stressed, "Guardini, in an intense academic discourse on the Jewish question defended the University passionately as the place where the truth was investigated, where human affairs and human events were measured according to the criteria of the great past and without the onslaught of the present, where the responsibility for the community should be more alert".

The Third Reich would not have triumphed, the future Pope recalls with Guardini's words, if the German University had not met its "downfall" due to the removal of the question of the truth by the prevalent academic models:

"At the time Guardini stated his position with a heartfelt appeal that seemed quite foreign to him, against the politicization of the University and its infiltration by party leadership, political chatter, street rumours, and shouted to his listeners: 'Ladies and Gentlemen: Do not let it happen! It is a matter that concerns us all, our future history'" (*ibid.*, p. 264).

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Opera omnia (Morcelliana)