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IS IT TRUE THAT THERE IS NO TRUTH?
THE VERITATIVE ARGUMENT FOR CHRISTIANITY
IN JOSEPH RATZINGER'S THOUGHT*

A b s t r a c t. The purpose of this article is to formulate a veritative argument (an argument from the truth) for Christianity on the basis of Joseph Ratzinger's thought. He was certain that Christianity is true and in touch with the ultimate Truth. The source material is Ratzinger's entire intellectual output. The analysis aimed first at understanding his concept of truth, and then at extracting the most important premises in his argumentation. The conclusion indicates the most original content in Ratzinger's veritative argument which may be useful for fundamental theology.

Keywords: Joseph Ratzinger; truth; Christianity; relativism; argument (argumentation); fundamental theology

John Paul's encyclical letter *Fides et ratio* (1998) was a strong impulse for fundamental theology (the aim of which is to justify the credibility of Christian Revelation and Christianity) to boldly formulate the so-called veritative argument: an argument for Christianity based on the idea of truth. Some fundamental theologians followed this impulse, seeking to formulate the veritative argument in reference to the main philosophical and theological approaches to truth (past and present).¹ It turned out

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¹ Ignace De La Potterie, “Truth”, in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, English-language edition ed. by René Latourelle (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 1132–1137; Krzysztof Kaucha and Jacek Kędzierski, “Werytatywny argument”, in *Leksykon*

that this argument has a long tradition in the history of Christianity (first apologists, the Church Fathers, St. Augustine, medieval scholars, St. Thomas Aquinas, modern Christian philosophers, and neo-scholastic theologians).²

The crisis of truth—mentioned by the encyclical *Fides et ratio*—continues and is even deepening. In today's world we can observe increasingly widespread doubts about the existence of truth, relativizing the truth, boredom with the truth, and even aversion to it. The claim of truth is suspected of being an enemy of freedom and having links with totalitarian absolutism. This postmodern suspicion, if not an accusation, is also directed at Christianity. Profoundly anti-veritative thinking can be expressed with the following theses:

- We drown in a maze of conflicting opinions and mutually exclusive arguments.
- There are as many viewpoints (truths) as there are people in the world.
- There is no fixed system or reference point (and there will never be).
- Our fate is made by greater or lesser probabilities that we build on numerous (only probable) assumptions.
- Reality seems to be insuperably fluid.
- Absolute truth has totally “dissolved” (if it ever existed).
- Ultimately, each person (as a free individual) has the full right to choose what is true and what is not.

This is a fundamental conviction and “belief” of the world of today, which Joseph Ratzinger (1927–2022) resolutely confronted, treating them as a challenge especially for Christianity. Actually, the fact that he took on this challenge (with all seriousness) informs all of his thought and work. His answer to the crisis of truth may be called the veritative argument. Although Ratzinger did not use this technical term, his thinking strived to demonstrate the presence of a lasting and certain truth in Christianity. Ratzinger knew that contemporary Christians may succumb to the ideological pressure of relativism and, in various ways, depart from the issue of truth (to the point of denying it), which is why he gave so much attention to the truth. The fact that the question of truth was fundamental to him and that it is precisely the Truth accepted by Christianity that speaks most strongly for its veracity is reflected in his words:

I must say that I felt very strongly within myself the crisis of the claim of truth during the decades of my teaching work as a professor. What I feared was that the

Teologii Fundamentalnej, ed. Marian Rusecki et al. (Lublin, Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2002), 1316–1320; Rino Fisichella, *La via della verità. Il mistero dell'uomo nel mistero di Cristo* (Milano: Paoline, 2003).

² Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: Reality and the Good* and *The Truth of All Things* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

way we use the idea of the truth of Christianity was sheer arrogance, yes, and even a lack of respect for others. The question was, how far may we still use it? I have really thoroughly explored this question. In the end I could see that if we abandon the concept of truth, then we abandon our foundations. For it is characteristic of Christianity, from the beginning, that the Christian faith does not primarily transmit practices or observances, as is the case with many other religions, which consist above all in the observance of certain ritual rules. Christianity makes its appearance with the claim to tell us something about God and the world and ourselves—something that is true and that enlightens us. On this basis I came to recognize that, in the crisis of an age in which we have a great mass of communications about truth in natural science, but with respect to the questions essential for man we are sidelined into subjectivism, what we need above all is to seek anew for truth, with a new courage to recognize truth. In that way, this saying handed down from our origins, which I have chosen as my motto [3 Jn 8], defines something of the function of a priest and a theologian, to wit, that he should, in all humility, and knowing his own fallibility, seek to be a co-worker of the truth.³

The purpose of this article is to formulate the veritative argument for Christianity based on key premises pervading Ratzinger's thought. Due to space limitations, the article will not cover the topic exhaustively.⁴ The source material for this article is Ratzinger's intellectual oeuvre which currently is available only in German⁵ and Polish.⁶ Wherever possible, the quotations are taken from Ratzinger's texts published in English.⁷ My analysis aimed first at understanding holistically Ratzinger's concept of truth. A scholarly study of his thought allowed me to capture his polemics with relativism (and subjectivism) and extract the most important premises for the truth in Christianity. In conclusion, I indicate the most original content in Ratzinger's veritative argu-

³ Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Tylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 262–63. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 37–40, 73–98; Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Tylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 113–258.

⁴ For example, the Church's subsistence in the truth and the attitude of non-Christian religions to the truth will be omitted. These issues, however, were important for Ratzinger.

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2009–22).

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012–22).

⁷ Otherwise, quotations have been translated into English by Tomasz Pałkowski from the Polish edition of all works by Ratzinger: Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia*.

ment, which might benefit fundamental theology in view of contemporary crisis of the Christian claim of truth.

1. HOW DID RATZINGER START THE VERITATIVE ARGUMENT?

Ratzinger was an exceptional expert in the field of truth. He had a perfect understanding of the various models and concepts of truth; he wrote about its ontological and epistemological understanding, the classic epistemological conception (truth is the consistency of a judgement with reality), the metaphysical one (*ens et verum convertuntur*⁸), the Platonian, Neo-Platonian and Aristotelian concepts, and that of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, as well as coherentist, historicist, scientific, pragmatic and Marxist interpretations.⁹ He also wrote about the attitude to truth manifested nowadays in relativism, scepticism, agnosticism, and postmodernism.

According to Ratzinger, all various models and concepts of truth contain “grains of truth.” However, his veritative argument starts from recalling the fundamental Christian experience of truth, because this experience is unique and revolutionary in the history of religions and human thinking.¹⁰ The Bavarian theologian argued: “If Platonism provides an *idea* of the truth, Christian belief offers truth as a way, and only by becoming a way has it become *man’s* truth. Truth as mere perception, as mere idea, remains bereft of force; it only becomes man’s truth as a way that makes a claim upon him, that he can and must tread.”¹¹

Ratzinger preferred not to begin with the idea of truth or truth as an abstract idea because an idea, he argued, has no existential force for man. Ideas are grounded in intellect, which is limited and can escape reality. It can withdraw into itself and close off reality. Truth does and must have an impact. Ratzinger makes it very clear that what he has in mind is not the universality of truth in the sense of there being very general sentences, as they are commonplace and say nothing

⁸ Ratzinger introduces this understanding of truth thus: “For the ancient world and the Middle Ages, being itself is true, in other words, apprehensible, because God, pure intellect, made it, and he made it by thinking it.” Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster, 2nd ed., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 33–34. Cf. Gottlieb Söhngen, *Sein und Gegenstand: Das scholastische Axiom “ens et verum convertuntur” als Fundament metaphysischer und theologischer Spekulation* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1930); Pieper, *Living*, 13–105.

⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 30–43.

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Truth*, 15–109.

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 53.

about existence, contribute nothing to it, and “open” no one.¹² Ratzinger’s thinking about truth leaned towards its ontological, not epistemological understanding. What he had in mind is truth as reality, or the basis of being. No mind, however brilliant, and no language will capture the whole truth about the reality, because it transcends them—it is always “outside” and comes from “outside”¹³; truth is the basis (the ground) for being, existing and thinking. Historical, empirical and scientific truths, those already known and those to be discovered in the future, mathematical truths, rules of common sense or logical thinking are but particles (“grains”) of truth, which call for a common denominator, completeness, a “higher” truth or truth of a “higher (ultimate) order”.

2. AGAINST *DE IURE* RELATIVISM AND SUBJECTIVISM

Ratzinger knew well that a Christian apologist (a fundamental theologian), sooner or later, must come across the modern doubts about the existence of truth: relativism, subjectivism, scepticism, agnosticism, and postmodernism. He was not utterly surprised by them but did not agree with them. He believed they contain “grains of truth”. Their refutation of an absolute truth results from tiredness, a genuine sense of disappointment, and intellectual powerlessness. In Ratzinger’s eyes, modern reason cannot see the fundamental difference between the truths acquired by natural sciences (which only concern the material and quantifiable side of reality) and the truth about the whole of reality: the truth of being. Since scientific truths concern different areas of material reality and are expressed in different languages (and methodologies), the science’s final word on truth is (and must be) relativism. But how, then, is reason supposed to survive in the maze of

¹² “The conviction that Christ died for us forces man to love as long as he is not hardened by his sins. Something like that cannot be said about convictions such as: ‘The diagonal (of a square) is not in equal proportion to the (length of) a side.’” Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia II: Rozumienie objawienia i teologia historii według Bonawentury. Rozprawa habilitacyjna i studia nad Bonawenturą*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Jarosław Merecki (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2014), 196. This was said by St. Bonaventure: “Theses that too obviously want to be timeless are much too easy to slip into banality: if nothing of substance is said, it is easy to be timeless. No one would want such a *philosophia perennis*, whose *perennitas* hinges on the eternity of the banal.” Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia IX/1: Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji. Teologiczna nauka o zasadach*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Jarosław Merecki (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 216–17.

¹³ Paweł Borto, “The Limits of Rational Knowledge of God According to Joseph Ratzinger,” *Verbum Vitae* 41/3 (2023): 741–746.

so many truths or (very often conflicting) standpoints that claim to be true? Ratzinger did not reject relativism or pluralism *de facto*, because they are self-evident, but he assumed a *de iure* perspective, which is a position *a priori*, saying that there is no absolute truth (truth always and everywhere) because it absolutely cannot exist. Ratzinger pointed out the fallacy of prejudging the case *a priori* and the fact that for the sake of the non-absoluteness of truth, *de iure* relativism introduces this other kind of “truth”, but with a manifest inconsistency and self-contradiction: the truth is... there is no truth. Even our language cannot escape this contradiction.

At this point it must be mentioned that Ratzinger, who was a defender of the absoluteness of truth, was accused of having a fundamentalist, exclusivist, and anti-dialogical approach to truth. For truth, he was reminded, cannot be fully possessed by anyone, any religion (including Christianity, obviously). The converse obtains: if truth only exists, it possesses us. Ratzinger’s reply was that this is true and even self-evident. But if this sort of relativism (which maintains that absolutely no one knows the truth) is elevated to the rank of ideology and if, too, theology succumbs to it (and the German theologian believed that this is indeed what often happened), we will be accepting the absurd claim that God is completely powerless and cannot show us the truth or open our eyes. This is Ratzinger’s strongest argument against *de iure* relativism:

Is it not presumptuous to claim that God is unable to give us the gift of truth? That He cannot open our eyes? Do we not disrespect God by saying that we were born blind and that truth is not our concern? Is it not degrading for man and his desire of God to consider himself to be eternally plunged in darkness? This is closely accompanied by real arrogance, which consists in wanting to take the place of God and determine who we are, what we do, and what we would want to do with ourselves and the world.¹⁴

In Ratzinger’s thought we find more important responses to the relativistic attitude to truth. He asked questions: Does truth really possess us, as is commonly claimed? Are modern people really looking for the truth as they seem to declare? For him this was dubious. Granted, truth wants to take possession of us—it is there for our sake. But it always faces walls of human limitations and temporality, selfishness, comfort and laziness, which reject truth. Each day, if not every

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera omnia VI/2: Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2015), 915. Ratzinger’s extensive deliberations on this can be found in: Ratzinger, *Opera omnia VI/2*, 914–16. He also wrote this: “Of course, it is extremely dangerous if people come to believe that they can own truth and use it at will. Yet an even greater danger arises when people think that a communal, final, obligating and unifying expression of truth is not possible.” Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia IX/1*, 296.

moment, presents an opportunity for truth to be accepted, but sometimes it is a hindrance when man strays from it. Truth will take possession of us only upon our death and in the Eschaton, when all illusions cease. So, does truth really possess us, or do we merely say it does? According to Ratzinger, if man indeed allows himself to be possessed by truth and strives for it, he or she must be perfectly aware that *de iure* relativism (relativism as an absolute axiom or principle) cannot be genuine. Being actually possessed by truth must be noticeable in our lives. If we let ourselves be truly possessed by truth we will defend it one way or another or even suffer for it.

According to the Bavarian theologian, it is difficult to find a logical link between the claim that we should allow the truth to possess us and *de iure* relativism, which says that no truth exists: if there is no truth, what takes possession of us? Similarly, there is a contradiction between *de iure* relativism and subjectivism (alarmingly widespread today): how, in the age of ubiquitous relativism, can anyone reasonably claim that only his or her view is the absolute truth that absolutely (*de iure*) cannot meet any criticism? According to Ratzinger, a Christian apologist (fundamental theologian) should not hesitate to pinpoint contradictions in argumentation offered by relativism, subjectivism, scepticism, and agnosticism. They are consumed by contradictions. It must be seen that exposing such contradictions was a part of his veritative argument.

First and foremost, there would be one general contradiction: man is looking for truth (whatever it is) and, at the same time he or she becomes entangled in numerous contradictions. How to untie this Gordian knot? What is truth?

3. "THE TRUTH IS IN JESUS": A VERITATIVE REVOLUTION

On several occasions Ratzinger pondered the essence of truth, starting with Pilate's famous words: "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38).¹⁵ The German theologian was right in noting that instead of Pilate we should mention Socrates in this regard, who asked about truth and that was how science and scholarly thinking began:

For many the question whether something is the truth seems slightly non-scientific because it is not as accurate and demonstrable as physical processes. This is precisely why science makes itself unproductive, or incapable, because it stops at the point where fundamental things originate. So, the question about

¹⁵ See, e.g., Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 191–195.

truth—just like Socrates asked it—gave rise to science at large. It is very important that science regain the courage to ask a question about the truth and endorse the question about the truth as belonging to the sphere of reason. In this way the fear of science, as really existent, can be overcome.¹⁶

So, what is truth, according to Ratzinger? It is hard to say in a few words or by giving a short definition of truth. He inferred an understanding of truth from the fundamental Christian experience of truth and reality—from the Christian faith “axiom”. First of all, the truth is Jesus Christ: “the truth ... is in Jesus” (Eph 4:21). For Christianity, from its beginning, Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). In Jesus Christ is the *absolutum* of truth: the (literally) truth about God, man, being, existence, the whole reality, all criteria, and the measure of truth. In Jesus is the essence of truth: the truth of all things and the fullness of salvation (which determines the understanding of truth). Ratzinger kept reminding that this is what Christianity has in mind when speaking about truth.

How does Ratzinger justify this? For him, the fact that the truth is (in) Jesus Christ, means that “we are liberated from the darkness of our endless questioning, that the light has come, that light without which we can neither see nor move.”¹⁷ For Christianity Jesus Christ is this light and the truth—the living Truth itself.¹⁸ This is how—according to Ratzinger—Christianity understands truth. For Christians God not only exists (in some way), but He speaks (truly) and acts (truly)—always and ever—in Jesus, the incarnated Logos.¹⁹ Therefore, there is “a truth of man”²⁰: the

¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera omnia* XIII/3: *W rozmowie z czasem. Wybrane wywiady*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), 1129.

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 69.

¹⁸ “Christ is the truth, meaning that God, who makes us—ignorant servants—his friends, enables us to know with him. The image of the friendly Christ is dear to us, especially nowadays, but his friendship depends on a relationship of mutual trust between us, and the sphere of trust is truth” (Ratzinger, *Opera omnia* VI/2, 895); “She [the Church] draws her life from the Logos having become flesh, from the truth having become a way. The view of the Church developed from the Bible and the Fathers is more than a ‘paradigm’, more than one era’s view of life and the world. Here we are led out of all the paradigms into contact with the truth itself (see Mk 4:18; Jn 16:25). That in fact is what ‘revelation’ consists of; this is the core of our liberation—being lead out from that cabinet of mirrors of images and historical points of view and into the encounter with the reality that is vouchsafed to us in.” 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: Ignatius Press, 2005), 264–265.

¹⁹ Bogusław Migut, “Logocentrism of the Liturgy as Presented by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI,” *Collectanea Theologica* 93/4 (2023): 232–236.

²⁰ “What Jesus reveals as a basic and central tradition is ultimately, not a multiplicity of tenets, but the simple and ancient credo of Israel: God is. In this sense, Jesus is a radical Jew—it is a

absolute truth of man and for man. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the word and work of God. He is “God in history, ... God as man”²¹; “Christ is clarity, unambiguousness, and truth.”²² In Him, God has built an indestructible bridge across “the gulf between eternal and temporal, between the visible and invisible”²³, between himself and man, between endless doubts and everlasting truth, between appearances and reality, between our limitations (and fears) and freedom, between decay (and death) and undying life.²⁴

Ratzinger fully agreed with Karl Rahner when the latter said: “Nothing fresh is said, not in spite of there being still much to say, but because everything is said, indeed, everything is given, in the Son of love in whom God and the world have become one”.²⁵ Therefore, Jesus Christ is always the Truth, because He is the definitive novelty and certainty forever. He is the passage (Passover) in each boundary that man reaches but cannot overstep. This is why Christianity knows the truth: “the real and the true”.²⁶ From the Christian perspective, the famous

question of God’s existence as God, which is just as indisputable as Jesus’ existence as man, because the latter is wholly dependent on Jesus’ personal relationship with the Father. God is precisely what he appears to be in Jesus because, as a Divine Person, Jesus himself belongs to God. The Resurrection is but the most extreme concretization of this statement: God is. It shows that God is in-deed [*wirklich*], for being is doing and God’s being is the life that overcomes death. That God is in-deed means that there is a truth of man.” Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 99.

²¹ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 31.

²² Joseph Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today. Selected Writings*, ed. Pierlucca Azzaro and Carlos Granados, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 145.

²³ “It is only here that the peculiarity of the specifically *Christian* scandal becomes visible; I refer to what might be termed Christian positivism, the ineradicable positivity of Christianity. What I mean is this: Christian belief is not merely concerned, as one might at first suspect from all the talk of belief or faith, with the eternal, which as the ‘entirely Other’ would remain completely outside the human world and time; on the contrary, it is much more concerned with God in history, with God as man. By thus seeming to bridge the gulf between eternal and temporal, between visible and invisible, by making us meet God as a man, the eternal as the temporal, as one of us, it understands itself as revelation.” Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 31.

²⁴ “The Holy Spirit is the truth. He calls on people to become transparent, to come out of hiding and instead become forthright and open thanks to his truth.” Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera omnia XII: Głosiciele Słowa i służby Waszej radości. Teologia i duchowość sakramentu święceń*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Marzena Górecka, Monika Rodkiewicz, Joachim Kobienia, and Dominik Petruk (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012), 518. Surprisingly this sentence (and the whole paragraph) is missing in English translation of the original text: Joseph Ratzinger, “Eucharist and Pentecost as the Origin of the Church (At the Chrism Mass, 1981),” in: Ratzinger, *Teaching*, 46–54.

²⁵ Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 135. Cf. Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 1 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954), 60.

²⁶ “Christianity... in its fundamental statements... has itself always claimed to be the real and the true” (Ratzinger, *Principles*, 328). For questions: What is reality? What is immediately real and

question, “What is truth?”, is extremely important but badly formulated. In the strongest sense, for Ratzinger (and Christianity) truth cannot be “something”. “Something” as an idea, notion, thought, sentence, hypothesis, or even scientific theory has no internal power. This power is only in the Other Someone: God. The correctly formulated question is: Who is the Truth?²⁷

There is no “higher” truth than Jesus Christ, who is the bond between God and man and the world, and who is the Intermediary of God’s immediacy. For Ratzinger, the existence of the truth in Jesus is best highlighted by the fact that when He appeared, a completely new reality came into being and the history of mankind reached a turning point: He was and still is a veritative revolution. This is why Christianity was and still is a veritative revolution, too. Right from the start, Jesus brought the principia and criteria (still in force) of the most important truths: religious, philosophical, anthropological, and moral-ethical truths, thereby making himself known as the Truth and the Source of Truth. Truth which He is has made Him (and only Him) fully credible: Jesus Christ is veritatively fully credible.

But is this Truth completely finished? Does the claim “the truth is in Jesus” exhaust the whole Christian understanding of truth? Are there no other truths?

4. THE TRUTH AS THE WAY AND THE FINAL DESTINATION OF EVERYTHING

Ratzinger replies “no”. The truth, above all else, is represented by Jesus (“the truth is in Jesus”), but truth is also represented by the Christian existence which necessarily extends in time. Truth is also whatever time brings, that is, what really happens and will happen in the future. Finally, the Eschaton is truth and its accomplishment, the last eon of the world, when there will be only truth, light, clarity, transparency, and immediacy.

For our author, Christian existence undoubtedly constitutes truth. Christian existence is for Ratzinger not only the basic Christian understanding of reality but is necessarily also the *praxis*, and as such it is a path of the truth and towards the truth. Truth is represented by living the Christian faith in history. Truth is every honest confession, even if painful, that man makes about his limitations,

true? Ratzinger answered: “Communication with God *is* reality. It is true reality, the really real, more real, even than death itself.” Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 89.

²⁷ Ratzinger adds that this is the essential difference between Christianity and the religions of Asia, which *de iure* reject the possibility that salvation and all truth can be the work of a specific person. Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 244–251.

selfishness, sins, and harm done to others as well as himself: each authentic *confessio*. Some interpreters of Ratzinger's work are very wrong if they think that he takes truth to be absolute because it is "something" already complete, something already spoken (revealed) by Jesus Christ. Truly, Ratzinger believes that what is absolutely fundamental (and decisive) has already been spoken and done by Jesus, but to the Bavarian theologian it is also unquestionably true that time and world history continue. They are not yet complete, and for as long as they are not, the truth that "is in Jesus" will develop. Truth is already with us but at the same time it materializes and presents itself every day. The whole and absolute truth will be there only in the Eschaton: the Omega point of history (its final destination). As the Christian faith and Ratzinger's thought shows, we will remain in the Eschaton in all truth and only in truth. Therefore, the Bavarian theologian sees death as good because it rids man of all untruth and illusions that he/she once believed and puts him/her before God: the "pure" Truth.

Drawing on this argumentation, we can say that for Christians the whole truth is found in Jesus Christ and is already fully revealed in Him, but the beauty of the Christian way lies in Christians turning this truth into *praxis*, a fact, or reality. Christians are called by God to be co-workers of the truth (literally). Their own efforts in living the truth are essential. They form the necessary part of the truth. They make truth not an idea but a reality and part of ongoing human (and world) history. One of Ratzinger's most beautiful thoughts about truth is: "The truth demands not only the moment but all the time and patience of our life."²⁸ And only such an absolute truth (the Truth itself, the Truth of all things) can be so absolutely serious, demanding and... reliable.

5. CONCLUSION: ORIGINALITY AND USEFULNESS OF RATZINGER'S VERITATIVE ARGUMENT

If we consider the whole Ratzinger's thought as a conscious defence of the Christian faith and Christianity, as fundamental theology (which seems to be in crisis today²⁹), then he occupies a unique place in it. He did not intend to defend Christianity by adapting it to contemporary expectations and the main trends of current mentality such as relativism, subjectivism, individualism, agnosticism and

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Teaching*, 148.

²⁹ Lluís Oviedo, "Fundamental Theology at the Crossroads: Challenges and Alternatives after a Long Maturation," *Scientia et Fides* 10/1 (2022): 49–71.

neo-scientism. His veritative argument is a good example. In increasingly anti-veritative times, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI reminded us of the decisive importance of truth for every person and all of humanity, at all times. He seemed to ask a fundamental question: Can it be true that after many thousands of years of searching for truth and discovering many truths, modern humanity has finally come to believe that truth does not exist?

The veritative argument in Ratzinger's thought posits that truth exists and has the power to liberate and to carry through life. Christianity and only Christianity gives truth to people and opens their eyes to it. Christianity "possesses" the centre of the truth (rather: the centre of the truth possesses Christianity) which does not change but is able to change man. Christianity offers truth as a fascinating gift from God (as God himself and the communication with God) and a path to walk. This truth is absolute, because the existence of the world is embedded in it and everyone can rest their life on it with complete peace of mind.³⁰ Christianity, from its beginning, knows not only truth, but also the Guarantor of Truth (Eph 4:21; Jn 14:6), and hence it is absolutely certain about truth. Ratzinger's veritative argument Christocentrism includes him in a circle of distinguished Christian writers, such as, for example Irenaeus, Tertullian, Lactantius, Arnobius and Gregory the Great.³¹ However, Ratzinger's veritative argument is more robust than theirs, because they did not have to defend the absoluteness of the Christian truth in a time of prevailing relativism and secularization.

According to Ratzinger, Christian apologetics (fundamental theology) should start the veritative argument from the original concept of truth in Christianity: truth is neither an abstract idea nor an abstract concept. If a Christian apologist (fundamental theologian) resolves to start the veritative argument from the theoretical concept or idea of truth, it would get him or her cornered by the proponents of relativism, agnosticism, or scepticism. An abstract concept of truth necessarily implies the problem of the criteria of truth, which must satisfy the preconditions of their own truthfulness (their own criteria). Discussing the theoretical concept of truth could get increasingly complicated and go on forever, because there are many theoretical conceptions of truth (and their criteria).

The most original feature of Ratzinger's veritative argument is his consistent biblical approach to truth. Here is the explanation he offers to fundamental theologians who feel disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of veritative (and

³⁰ "We Christians have another mode of being; we are standing upon another foundation that can never be pulled out from under us—not even by death." Joseph Ratzinger, "On Hope," *Communio* 35 [Summer 2008]: 308.

³¹ Potterie, "Truth", 1134–1135.

other) arguments for Christianity. To understand the truth and experience it, we need to be faithful to truth, choose truth honestly, follow the path of truth, shed insincerity and hypocrisy, and stand trials and hardships for the sake of truth.³² Whoever does not subject their thinking to the primacy of truth, God, reality, and factuality, and whoever shuns the truth about themselves—they are far from truth.³³

In Ratzinger's view, not only belief and unbelief clash today but so do truth and untruth, being possessed by the truth and flights from the truth (he also seemed to ask, rather rhetorically: Has this ever been any different?). The originality of Ratzinger's veritative biblical method consisted in always thinking truthfully and searching only for the truth, no matter where it originates or how painful or uncomfortable it may be. By following the biblical notion of truth Ratzinger was able to expose all apparent "truths" and cases of truth manipulation (past and today). Appearance is neither truth nor freedom. In biblical language, appearance, illusion, truth manipulation and lies take man's freedom away—all being man's enslavement.³⁴ God responds to this enslavement, very often self-imposed, with the gift of truth and its deep desire that man cannot get rid of.

One may ask, is there no truth beyond Christianity? Ratzinger thought there is, but the truth provided by sciences, human experience or traditions is not the centre of the truth.³⁵ Such a "truth" is lifeless. It can be written down and

³² "The Greek *alētheia* is 'truth', 'fidelity', 'honest conduct', 'freedom from hypocrisy, hidden thoughts and deeds'; *alēthēs* means 'true', 'sincere', 'proper', 'loyal', 'trustworthy', 'authentic', 'truthful'; *alēthinos* stands for 'authentic', 'real', 'genuine', 'such as should be', 'veracious', 'important, trustworthy'; *alēthōs*—'admittedly', 'forsooth', 'indeed', 'in fact'; and *alētheuō* means 'speak the truth.'" Piotr Łabuda, "Cóż to jest prawda?" (J 18,38). Uwagi terminologiczne," in *Prawda was wyzwoli*, Scripturae Lumen 4, ed. Antoni Paciorek, Antoni Tronina and Piotr Łabuda (Tarnów: Biblos, 2012), 139. This quote was translated by Tomasz Pałkowski. Cf. Potterie, "Truth", 1133–1134.

³³ The same principle also applies to the argument based on benevolence (cf. Jacenty Mastaj, "The Credibility of the Church Based on Benevolence in the Light of the Works of Marian Rusecki," *Verbum Vitae* 41/2 [2023]: 363–367) and other axiological arguments in fundamental theology.

³⁴ "Illusion weighs down being. Illusion becomes an all-powerful criterion. Man lives for illusion, so his life becomes illusory. The Bible rightly sees in it the height of enslavement and lack of freedom... The openness of the apostle consists in telling the truth to the world weighed down under the burden of illusion and he does that despite having to 'struggle' (1 Thes 2:2)." Joseph Ratzinger, *Opera omnia* VIII/1: *Kościół—znak wśród narodów. Pisma eklezjologiczne i ekumeniczne*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź and Marzena Górecka, trans. Wiesław Szymona (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 406–7.

³⁵ "The concept of truth obviously has great depth. When we say: 'Only faith is true' this is not to say that we are surrounded by a whole lot of lies, but that, at its core, it is truly an echo of the sound of the eternal Word by coming from Jesus, and in this respect it is trustworthy; it shows us where we are going and how we can live." Ratzinger, *Opera omnia* XIII/3, 1177.

memorized. It is a human product, it is of this world and, naturally, cannot transcend its boundaries. Jesus Christ is the very centre of the truth because as God He always transcends all boundaries (of any and all immanence). Christianity makes the corresponding notion of truth complete, which is not only a correspondence between thinking and reality but also between life (*praxis*) and reality. Both truth and Jesus are a way to follow, a path of life that leads to the fullness of life. Therefore, for Ratzinger, truth is also Christian existence. If you are a Christian, you know the whole truth, although you do not have all knowledge of everything. The truth, despite being unequivocal (Eph 4:21), is never finite. The truth persists and keeps developing, so it comes anew forever. By living Christian lives, in communion with God and with Jesus, Christians infuse world history with truth. One day, at the end of the eon of this world, the Truth will come in its fullness.

Translated by Tomasz Pałkowski

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CZY JEST PRAWDA, ŻE NIE MA PRAWDY?
ARGUMENT WERYTATYWNY NA RZECZ CHRZEŚCIJAŃSTWA
W MYŚLI JOSEPHA RATZINGERA

Streszczenie

Celem tego artykułu jest sformułowanie argumentu werytatywnego (argumentu z prawdy) za chrześcijaństwem na podstawie myśli Josepha Ratzingera. Był on pewny, że chrześcijaństwo jest prawdziwe i zna ostateczną Prawdę. Materiałem źródłowym jest cały dorobek naukowy Ratzingera. Praca badawcza zmierzała najpierw do zrozumienia jego koncepcji prawdy, a potem do wydobywania najważniejszych przesłanek w jego argumentacji. W podsumowaniu zostały wskazane najbardziej oryginalne treści w argumentacie werytatywnym Ratzingera, które mogą być użyteczne w teologii fundamentalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Joseph Ratzinger; prawda; chrześcijaństwo; relatywizm; argument (argumentacja); teologia fundamentalna