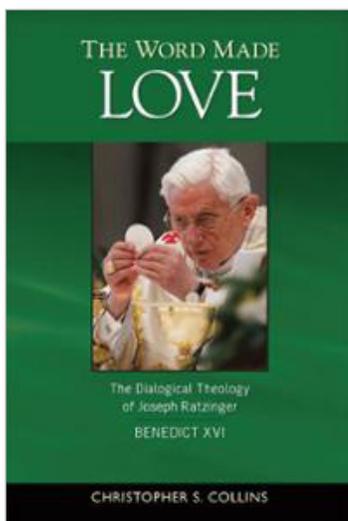


# BOOKS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



**The Word Made Love:  
The Dialogical Theology  
of Joseph Ratzinger/  
Benedict XVI  
by Christopher S. Collins, S.J.**

Collegeville, MN  
The Liturgical Press, 2013

Review by Jessica Keating, M.Div.

I once heard a prominent Catholic commentator suggest that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI will be remembered as one of the great teaching pontiffs in the history of the Church, rivaling perhaps even Gregory the Great. Indeed, many have already taken note of the breathtaking sweep of theological terrain Benedict XVI has covered over some sixty years as academic professor, diocesan bishop, cardinal, and finally as the Bishop of Rome, ranging from biblical hermeneutics to liturgy and preaching to ecclesiology to eschatology. Not only has Benedict XVI commented upon practically the entire breadth of Christian tradition, but he has done so with astounding depth of insight and pastoral sensitivity. For these reasons, finding a way into Benedict XVI's theology can be a daunting task precisely because there are numerous possible points of entry. However, in *The Word Made Love: The*

*Dialogical Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI*, Christopher Collins, S.J. approaches Benedict XVI's theology in much the same way that the former pontiff himself approaches the mystery of faith: taking up and illuminating what is central and essential, namely that the eternal logos of God reveals itself in history as Love, becoming "small enough to fit into a manger" in order to "be grasped by us" (Benedict XVI, "Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord: Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI," St. Peter's Basilica, December 24, 2006" as cited in Collins, 71). Collins persuasively argues that this self-disclosure is structured dialogically, unfolding in history and reaching its apex in person of Jesus Christ, "the perfect dialogue between God and humanity" (19). The whole of Benedict XVI's thought unfolds within this framework of dialogue.

Collins tracks this key feature in Benedict XVI's logos theology in order to demonstrate how "[d]ialogue and encounter with the Logos-made-love in history is at the heart of Ratzinger's theological and pastoral vision" (19-20). Collins begins by sketching out Benedict XVI's philosophical and theological formation and the development of his dialogical vision as it unfolded during the great *Ressourcement* movement prior to the Second Vatican Council. Noting the influence of, among others, Origen, Augustine, Alfred L  pple, Henri De Lubac, and Martin Buber, and his suspicion of the Neo-Scholastic mode of theology with its emphasis on propositions "disengaged from historical reality," Collins explains that Benedict XVI opted in favor of "a way of doing theology... that would draw modern men and women out of their anxiety and isolation into communion with other believers and with the living, Triune God who is, above all, relational and personal" (11, 4). This way of doing theology is above all a theology of the Logos. Rooted in the scriptural witness, this theology begins "with the posture of faith that God has taken the initiative and has indeed spoken in history" (9-10).

From here, Collins transitions into a discussion of dialogical structure of revelation, explaining

that, influenced by Bonaventure's theology of history, Benedict XVI views revelation not as a monologue whereby an idea about God is communicated to the isolated thinker, but as a personal encounter with God "in union with the community of the whole church over the course of salvation history" (25). God discloses himself within the dynamics of history, speaking his eternal Word to a listening humanity. This unfolding dialogue reaches its apex in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh and revealed as love in history. It is no surprise that Collins positions his discussion of the person of Jesus Christ at the center of his analysis of the dialogical contour of Benedict XVI's thought. Indeed, for the former Pope, Christ "is the dialogue, the *encounter itself* between God and humanity in one person" (57). He speaks God to humanity, and speaks humanity's response to God (168). The Cross stands as the culmination of this dialogue-in-one-person. It is here, from the pierced heart of Christ, that "the Logos of God is ultimately communicated...as *caritas*" (121). It is here, in "the 'word' of silent love spoken from the cross, manifested in his pierced side that brings to fulfillment the dialogue between God and humanity" (119). In the pierced flesh of Christ, we find a radical new opening into the life of the Triune God.

Christology is, then, the hermeneutical key to entirety of Benedict XVI's thought. Indeed, the entire unfolding of revelation and its ongoing appropriation in the body of the Church is understood christologically. From the wounded heart of Christ, the Church comes into existence and always has as its center and source the person of Christ. Benedict XVI's ecclesiology is thus "essentially Christological" (11). This divine-human dialogue continues in a privileged way in the liturgy, and indeed the contours of Benedict XVI's ecclesiological vision are formed by the dialogical dynamics of worship. It here that the Church gathers, not as a group of likeminded individuals "choosing to come together but rather based on their dialogical relationship with Jesus Christ" to receive the Logos of God made love in word and sacrament (114). For Benedict XVI, "What begins with a divine speaking to humanity becomes a divine giving of love, of self, in the flesh" (127-8). Through participation in the liturgy "members of the church enter into the 'I' of Christ" which is nothing less than an entrance "into the dialogical relationship between divinity and humanity" (160).

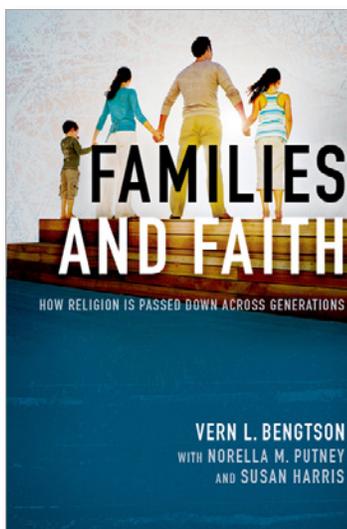
Collins concludes in much the same way he began, with a discussion of the dialogical form of all reality, though now refracted

through a consideration of the dialogical structure of first and last things, addressing with particular acuity the modern fascination with and anxiety over death. Benedict XVI's renewed eschatological vision, like every aspect of his thought, centers on the person of Christ. Because God has not remained distant and incomprehensible, but has addressed himself to us in the dramatic narrative of history, culminating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are able to grasp that this dialogue breaks through the boundary of death. Indeed, it becomes a meeting point of history and eternity, rather than a definitive break, a radical opening into a new horizon.

Throughout *The Word Made Love*, Collins traces the essential dialogical thread woven throughout Benedict XVI's thought, displaying its Christological form. Within the context of this keen study, Collins also demonstrates an often over looked fact, namely Benedict XVI's pastoral sensitivity and his perspicacious analysis of modernity. In its accessibility, thoroughness and depth of insight, *The Word Made Love* is well worth reading.

Reviews by Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D.

Developing awareness relative to the sociological and cultural trends in American religious life is essential for the New Evangelization in the United States. Although most ministers function as amateur sociologists, aware of the cultural trends operative in their parish or school, sociological writing is an impetus for these ministers to refine their assessment of parish life. The publication of two recent sociological studies concerned with the "traditioning" of faith in the United States in the context of families is worth closer attention by those engaged in fostering the New Evangelization.



**Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations**  
by Vern L. Bengtson with Norella M. Putney and Susan Harris

New York  
Oxford University Press, 2013

In his study, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Christian Smith discovered the pivotal role of parents in the transmission of religious faith: "Parents for whom religious faith is quite important are thus likely to be raising teenagers for whom faith is quite important, while parents whose faith is not important are likely to be raising teenagers for whom faith is also not important" (57). *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations* situates this insight of Smith's in the cross-generational transmission of faith over the course of four distinct generations. This book is a result of fifty years of quantitative and qualitative analysis of 3,500 grandparents, parents, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Vern Bengtson's study consists of three parts. In part one, Bengtson raises those specific questions

that the book hopes to address, including why some children follow their parents in religious practice, what circumstances lead to this continuity, how religious socialization takes place, and what makes families “successful” in transmitting religious (or no religious) faith (19). He also contextualizes the inter-generational study of religion, attentive to the various ways that various generations have described faith. Lastly, he attends to the faulty notion that family influence in religion has declined, conceding instead (like Smith) that parent religiosity is a deep influence upon child religiosity.

The most intriguing insights of the text are offered in part two. Bengtson writes,

...what is really interesting is that, for religious transmission, having a close bond with one's *father* matters even more than a close relationship with the mother. Clearly the quality of the child's relationship with his or her father is important for the internalization of the parent's religious tradition, beliefs, and practices. Emotional closeness with mothers remains important for religious inheritance but not to the same degree as it is for fathers (76).

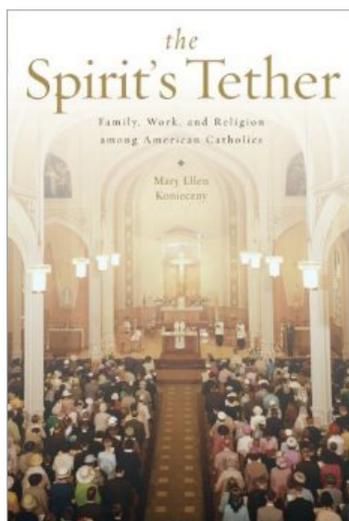
Religious traditions are thus most effectively passed on when the father shares the same religious background with his child, practicing this tradition openly, at the same time that he demonstrates warmth and affection in his style of parenting (80). In addition to this claim about the central nature of fatherhood in the religious transmission of faith, Bengtson also discerns a distinct role for grandparents, who often function as a source of religious stabilization in difficult home environments where religious practice is absent among parents (112). Lastly, he discovers “...that parents in a same-faith marriage are most likely to perpetuate religious continuity across generations. This is especially likely if there is high religious commitment, the partners regularly attend religious services together, and religion is highly salient in the lives of both partners” (127). Here then, one discovers an ideal for religious socialization: parents (especially fathers), who actively practice their faith, who are warm with their children, and who have some contact with other generations, who also practice faith.

Part three considers those who no longer practice faith. Specifically pertinent for readers of this journal is the realization that “nones” are religiously socialized in precisely the same way as those who engage in a religious tradition. Parental

warmth and engagement in larger humanistic ideals serve to effectively “tradition” non-religious affiliation across generations. And religious transmission often goes awry when children are reacting against a religious strictness at home, one in which such practice is devoid of personal warmth and affection (188).

*Families and Faith* is a must-read for those ministering in catechesis and religious education whether lay or ordained. Though much effort is often invested in robust programs for religious education in such parishes, Bengtson offers a rationale for focusing more closely upon the religious formation of parents as a whole. The astute reader begins to wonder how, for example, one may form fathers in their role as catechists for their children; catechists, who do not simply enforce a series of doctrinal rules or regulations but come to embody the Gospel in their very lives with their children. That is, the Church must begin to find ways to support the religious formation of children not simply in classrooms but in the embodied, domestic church, one filled with parental and filial affection. Likewise, this book raises awareness among readers of the need to consider religious formation as a responsibility shared across generations. Grandparents, for example, are often pivotal in the religious formation of their

children—and parishes must discover ways to involve these grandparents in sacramental preparation of grandchildren.



**The Spirit's Tether: Family, Work, and Religion Among American Catholics**  
by Mary Ellen Konieczny

New York  
Oxford University Press, 2013

Mary Ellen Konieczny's *The Spirit's Tether* focuses on the role of religion in shaping understandings of family life among American Catholics. Unlike *Families and Faith*, Konieczny's work attends to a close analysis of two parishes. Her own concern is not necessarily with religious socialization (although such themes are very present in the book). Instead:

The central claim of this book is that, while

public political attitudes are indicative of moral polarization and elites play important roles in shaping and constraining debates about the family, polarization is also constituted among Catholics through local-level social processes. Two parish-level processes—one involving the expression of congregational metaphors and the other involving religious identity construction—have contributed to the constitution of different cultures and structures of family life among Catholics in ways that foster moral polarization (8).

In other words, Konieczny seeks to discern how specific religious practices, homiletic styles, approaches to ecclesial architecture and worship, and emphases in parish catechesis contribute to a form of polarization within American religion as a whole.

Konieczny's study unfolds in two parts. In the first, she considers the styles of worship, as well as notions of identity formation through community, operative in two parishes in Chicago (given the names of Our Lady of the Assumption Church and Saint Brigitta). Our Lady of the

Assumption Church develops in its worship an approach to liturgical practice which enshrines familial social relations in the office of the priesthood, who becomes a father to his flock. Likewise, the identity of those members of Our Lady of Assumption is founded upon a specific form of narrating one's identity as a post-Vatican II Church. Konieczny writes:

Not only does worship constitute the church as family but also the way it is practiced and the social relations that underlie it are symbolic of the substance of religious beliefs...These stories...make a strong connection between 'right worship' and a church that promotes knowledge of Catholic teachings about humanity sexuality and church authority. This Catholicism is represented by the very practices that were not only de-emphasized with reform but also, before Vatican II, considered most distinctively Catholic in the American context: devotional practices such as novenas, Marian devotion, and Eucharistic adoration; a ritual style that communicates transcendence and demands reverence; and religious education

that depends on and is codified in a catechism... In these characteristics... retraditionalized Catholic identities constitute a basis for moral positions at one pole of cultural conflicts surrounding the family (81).

The formative nature of practices of worship and stories relative to identity are also true at St. Brigitta where informal liturgical practices, often conducted against the ritual roles of Catholicism, “produce an immanent sense of the sacred where worship and everyday life are intertwined and reflect one another and which embodies authority relations that emphasize individual autonomy and charismatic leadership and resist forms of hierarchical social organizations” (57). The narratives told at St. Brigitta about their own religious identity reflect an appreciation of a pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Catholicism, a religious identity that is embedded in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The fruit of the first part of the book is gathered in the second as Konieczny discerns how these religious practices and narratives of identity play out in conceptions of family life, articulations of sexuality, of abortion, of the nature of childhood, the understanding of the role of parents in forming

their children as either weary of or open to culture, the function of women in family life and work, and the “religious meaning” of work in the world. Here, one discerns as Konieczny concludes, that religious identity at both Assumption and St. Brigitta are not a matter of “cafeteria Catholicism”:

At Assumption and Saint Brigitta, religious choice does not occur as in a cafeteria. Neither group just picks and chooses from Catholicism’s beliefs and practices. Instead, those they emphasize and those they avoid or reject emerge from particular sets of *interwoven* beliefs and practices that have their own internal consistency (244).

And it is here that the book offers its particular gem for the work of the New Evangelization. Magazines like *America* have recently begun to avoid using the terms “liberal” and “conservative” to move beyond that endemic polarization that has affected American Catholicism (a decision which is a gift to the Church). Yet, this polarization is not simply the result of intellectual arguments. Rather, it is embodied in specific practices and discourse, metaphors and images, which are essential to constructing a coherent identity. Parishes throughout the United States perform this

religious polarization in the way that they worship, in the forms of catechesis they allow and disallow, in reducing Catholicism to a coherent albeit attenuated tradition. Catholic parishes would best contribute to reducing such polarization by expanding the diversity of Catholic practice and the forms of catechesis permissible within its bounds. Theologically, it is incoherent to present a vision of Catholic identity in which social justice and transcendent Eucharistic worship, in which human experience and the particulars of Catholic doctrine, in which the holiness of work and family life, are rendered as polarities on some imaginary political spectrum.

Mary Ellen Konieczny’s *The Spirit’s Tether* serves as an imaginative way of reconstructing the vision of parish life as a way of healing the culture wars within the United States. I recommend it especially for those involved in renewing parish life, including pastors and diocesan level staff working in the area of religious education or as directors of the New Evangelization.

