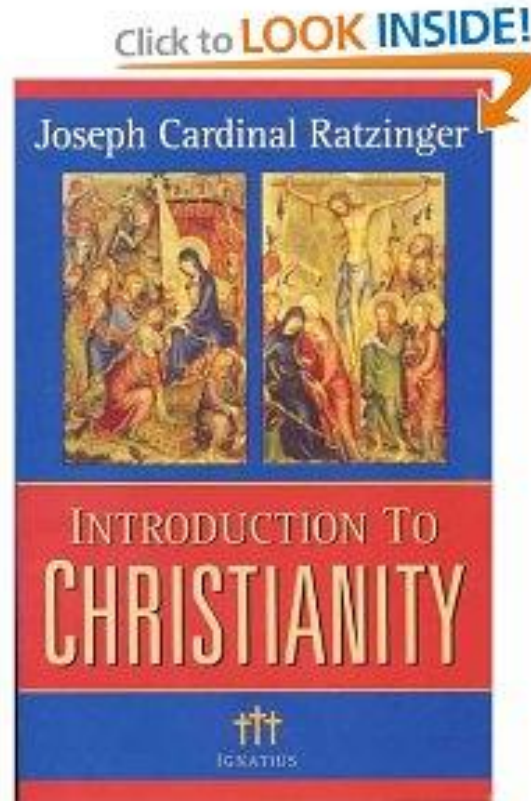


A Summary of *Introduction to Christianity* by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)



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About the Author

Born and baptized on Holy Saturday, April 16, 1927, Joseph Ratzinger moved frequently about Austria as a child due both to his father's job as a policeman and his outspoken opposition to Nazism. He entered minor seminary in 1939 in Traunstein, but was drafted into the German anti-aircraft corps in 1943. After being released from service in September 1944, he was again shortly drafted into the notorious Austrian Legion. He deserted the German army towards the end of the war, but was captured by the Allies and interned at a POW camp, shortly to be released again. He immediately reentered the seminary, and was ordained on June 29, 1951. His early years as a priest were spent in study and teaching. Ratzinger was present during the entire Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965, attached to the cardinal of Cologne, Germany. After much work, he was named Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1972, and elevated to Cardinal of Munich in the same year. In 1981, Pope John Paul II named Ratzinger as the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and he was subsequently the head of a 12-member commission which composed *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. After being elected dean of the College of Cardinals, he oversaw the Papal election of 2005 following the death of Pope John Paul II. Ratzinger himself was elected Pope, and took the name of Benedict XVI.

General Overview

Arising from a series of lectures given at the University of Tübingen in 1967, this book was intended to be a fresh way to look at age-old theology. Ratzinger, seeing a definite trend of filtering truth from Theology, wished to counter this trend with understandable, solid material. He uses the Apostle's Creed as his starting place and broad outline.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Belief in the World Today

1.1 "Doubt and belief—Man's situation before the question of God." No matter how strong a believer's faith may be, one's link to God always seems fragile. Even St. Therese of Lisieux admitted her temptations to atheism. Just as the believer is assailed with unbelief, the unbeliever is equally "tempted" with belief, but the two have difficulty communicating effectively. The avenue of communication therefore ought to be: doubt, which both share.

1.2 "The origin of belief—Provisional attempt at a definition of belief." The Apostle's Creed begins with the words, "I believe." Belief and religion are not always equal, the Old Testament treated itself as law, and the Romans treated religion as ritual customs. The Christian *credo* is intensely personal: it begins with the "I." There is a larger reality that "I" find in belief through conversion and an effort of the will.

1.3 "The dilemma of belief in the world today." Belief seems old-fashioned, and "tradition" has been replaced by "progress," since tradition seems to appear as only that which has already been discarded. This clouds the reality of belief. Jesus has made God known to us, and He is so near that we feel He ceases to be God due to His closeness.

1.4 "The boundary of the modern understanding of reality and the place of belief." Modern man has reduced reality to that which can be measured and grasped. This has happened through two stages in the intellectual revolution: 1) the Descartes/Kant idea that all we can know is what we ourselves have made or done and 2) the Marxian idea that the only truth that concerns us is what is feasible towards changing the world. Thus history has been dethroned, and Theology has had a difficult time catching up to "progress" in order to adequately explain faith to a modern world. If man is locked in either idea, his "I believe" loses its full meaning

1.5 “Faith as standing firm and understanding.” Faith is biblically defined as taking a firm position on the ground of the word of God. Belief and understanding are deeply intertwined. Belief is the entrusting of oneself to that which has not been made by oneself, and thus makes our making possible. But by thinking only of what can be made, man is in danger of forgetting to reflect on himself and what is beyond himself (cf. Bonaventure and Heidegger). The Christian attitude of belief means to understand our being as a response to the *logos*.

1.6 “The intelligence of faith.” The beginning and end of the Creed are closely coupled: both “Credo” and “Amen” are words that are linked to “faith” in their native languages. Belief moves toward truth. Oddly, practical knowledge (e.g., scientific measurements) eventually no longer enquires after truth, but announces success by renouncing the quest for truth and turning to “rightness.” The Christian attitude of belief is expressed by the word “Amen.” Understanding is closer to belief than mere knowledge is.

1.7 “I believe in thee.” The most fundamental feature of Christian belief is its personal aspect. The Creed does not say, “I believe in something,” but “I believe in Thee.” Faith is founded in the person of Jesus Christ, who bridges the gap to God.

Chapter 2: The Ecclesiastical Form of Faith

1.1 “Introductory remarks on the history and structure of the Apostle’s Creed.” The text comes from the city of Rome, from rites involving baptism. The person being baptized used to reply “Credo” to three questions, each preceding an immersion in water: an early tripartite dialogue. Expansion over the centuries culminated in the final adoption of the Creed by Charlemagne, who used the text all over Christendom as a tool of unification. The Creed is heavily Christological and deals with salvation history. The Eastern creeds, on the other hand, tend to be more mystical and metaphysical.

1.2 “Limits and meaning of the text.” The Creed is essentially Christian, and crosses denominational boundaries with simple expressions, though it also expresses the beginning of the schism between East and West as well as the political future of the West. The Creed echoes the faith of the ancient Church, and thus is a true echo of the New Testament Church.

1.3 “Creed and dogma.” Creed and belief are intensely personal, carrying with them the ideas of conversion and personal growth that accompanies Christianity. Dogma is a later development of these ideas, though in rules with stricter boundaries and guidelines.

1.4 “The Creed as expression of the structure of faith.” Faith comes to man from outside, in word (not thought), and can then be pondered. It is not philosophy: it is not thought up by oneself. Faith is then a call to community, and man comes to deal with God by dealing with man (e.g., prophets). Every man holds faith in partial form that shows completeness only in the light of the faith of others. Faith thus demands unity, which shows the Church to be necessary.

PART ONE: GOD

Chapter 1: Prolegomena to the Subject of God

1.1 “The scope of the question.” What is “God”? What reality does the word express? How is it that this theme of “God” has indelibly marked every age and people? Man’s thankfulness, poverty, loneliness, security, beauty, and existence have pointed to a “quite other.” And too, the sinister forces in the world lead one to find a “quite other.” Monotheism, polytheism, and atheism are the three oft-varied forms of the idea of “God.” All are convinced of the unity and oneness of the absolute. They only differ on how one ought to respond to it.

1.2 “The confession of faith in the One God.” The first words of the Creed take up the Jewish faith and continue it. This expression is also a renunciation of the deification of possessions, the worship of power, et cetera. This concept is one of love, with no political aims. It is also an assent. But what is the content of the assent of Christian faith?

Chapter 2: The Biblical Belief in God

2.1 “The problem of the story of the burning bush.” This story establishes the use of the name “Yahweh” (“I Am”) for God in Israel. This image of God oddly coincided with the Greek understanding. The Biblical name for God was identified with the philosophical concept of God, probably by those who originally translated the Old Testament into Greek. The name, however, was first created and molded by Israel. God, in the story, deals with man, as man, personally. Hence the description of God as the “God of our fathers.”

2.2 “The intrinsic assumption of the belief in Yahweh: the God of (Israel’s) fathers.” Israel finds God to be the God not of a place, but of people, of men: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The earlier (extra-Israel) El-personality for God was simply a great power, but then the plural Elohim-personality lay even farther outside the bounds of human reach. Israel accepted this idea, rejecting other personalities like Baal, Moloch, et cetera.

2.3 “Yahweh, the ‘God of our Fathers’ and the God of Jesus Christ.” But is “Yahweh” really a name at all? By saying “I am what I am,” God really seems to be rebuffing Moses. God cannot give a name like all the other gods, meaning He is quite other than those gods. But yet Moses is given a pseudo-name, almost like a riddle, to convey to his people. Ratzinger leads us through a quick but thorough exegesis of this name. Finally, the name is no longer merely a riddle, but a person: Jesus identifies Himself repeatedly as “I Am,” the “invocability” of God.

2.4 “The idea of the name.” There is a difference between the purpose of a concept and a name. The concept tries to perceive the nature of a thing; the name merely attempts to establish a relationship with it. But when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed as the name of the Living God, the name is given even a larger dimension of fulfillment.

2.5 “The two sides of the biblical concept of God.” One side is the personal, self-bestowing character of the Father, and the other is that this accessibility comes as the free gift of what stands above space and time, bound to nothing and binding everything to itself. The paradox of biblical faith is in the unity of these two sides.

Chapter 3: The God of Faith and the God of the Philosophers

3.1 “The decision of the early Church in favor of philosophy.” The early Church had to make a choice on how to view God, and, in a polytheistic world, took the same route as Israel. The Church decided for the God of the philosophers and against the gods of the various religions. The early Christians rejected the entire world-view of the ancient religions, and meant “Being” itself for God. Christianity brought religion back into a search for the logos, as opposed to wallowing in myth. The ancient world had instead (through a tripartite theology of physical, practical, and mythical theologies) weighed truth against custom.

3.2 “The transformation of the God of the philosophers.” The Christian faith gave a new significance to the God of the philosophers, by elevating Him above mere academics to the realm of love. By thinking of God, we tend to think of Him in a petty and human way, with a limited consciousness like ours. In fact, the original God of the philosophers was essentially self-centered and pure thought. The God of faith includes relationships and love.

3.3 “The reflection of the question in the text of the Creed.” The paradoxical unity of the God of the philosophers and the God of Faith is found already in the Creed in the two titles “Almighty” and “Father.”

Chapter 4: Faith in God Today

4.1 “The primacy of the *logos*.” All man’s thinking is only a re-thinking of what has truly already been thought before. With God, then, there is a transference of being, but yet it is impossible to bring this *logos*-thought into man’s thinking. The world is “objective mind,” which meets our mind as something that can be understood. To say “I believe in God” expresses the conviction that objective mind is the product of subjective mind, since thinking is necessary for understanding. Christian belief in God means that things are the being-thought of a creative consciousness (creative freedom). Creation is to be understood through the prism of the creative mind, then, and not the mind of craft.

4.2 “The personal God.” The *logos* is not an anonymous consciousness but freedom, a creative love, a person. It is, too, a choice for the primacy of the particular over the universal (basis for the individual person’s worth and freedom). Man is more than an individual, man is a person. But then a plurality of persons is worth more, as well. Thus, the Triune God.

Chapter 5: Belief in the Triune God

5.1 “A start at understanding.” We must be aware of our limits in attempting to plumb the depths of the mystery of God. The doctrine of the Trinity does not come from speculation, but is Biblically founded. Early Church strife over definitions was not hair-splitting, but profound struggles over the meaning of truth. The Church believes that God *is* as He *shows* Himself. If Christ is true God and true man, then fine conclusions must be made to maintain monotheism. False conclusions were forwarded by the Monarchians and the Modalists, which were trumped by the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine can be defined negatively, as the only way to explain what no other explanation has accomplished. There is no way to reduce God to the scope of our limited comprehension. Saint Cyran once wrote that faith consists of a series of contradictions held together by grace. Physics provides analogies to understand God. Pascal’s wager gives insight to mortal curiosity.

5.2 “Positive significance.” Three theses attempt to make the chapter meaningful. Thesis one: “The paradox of one Being in three persons is subordinate to the question of the original meaning of unity and plurality.” In ancient thought, unity was divine and plurality was secondary. But the Trinity is the only way to explain the fullness of plurality. The authentic unity is the unity created by love. Thesis two: “The paradox is a function of the person and is to be understood as an intrinsic implication of the concept of person.” The paradox declares that the personality of God infinitely exceeds human personality, so that even the concept of a person seems to be inadequate. Thesis three: “The paradox is subordinate to the problem of absolute and relative and emphasizes the absoluteness of the relative, of relativity.” This confusing paradox is the result of the necessity of expressing oneness, three-ness, and the conjunction of both under the dominating influence of oneness. On the other hand, the paradox is more than just a desperate attempt to string words together, but to express personhood. The Trinitarian God expresses the reciprocal exchange of word and love, taking names in relation to each other: Father to Son. These concepts are not the result of speculation, but have been arrived at by Biblical means! St. John’s Gospel: “The Son can do nothing of His own accord.” But the Son is not powerless, but rather there is a term of relation being used here. Unity is present in Biblical prayer, for “they may be one, even as we are one.” To St. John, being a Christian means being like the Son, becoming a son, in relation with brothers and sisters and Father. This is highly ecumenical. Jesus, the ambassador of God, gives the concept “*logos*” a new dimension. These ideas do not make the Trinity unmysteriously comprehensible, but they attempt to open up a new understanding of reality, of what man is and what God is.

PART TWO: JESUS CHRIST

Chapter 1: “I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only-Begotten Son, Our Lord”

I THE PROBLEM OF FAITH IN JESUS TODAY.

It seems foolish to assert that a solitary man who was executed thousands of years ago in forgotten time is the authoritative center of all history. Did all Being become flesh and enter history? A second paradox emerges: flesh and word. Historical methods only take us so far, and faith only takes us so far. The full truth of history always eludes documentation.

II JESUS THE CHRIST: THE BASIC FORM OF THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONFSSION OF FAITH

1.2.1 “The dilemma of modern theology: Jesus or Christ?” Historical science tends to separate faith and history. Some modern Christology is focused only on the historical aspect, or to what can be merely demonstrated (and no longer purely historicity). A third attempt is to leave the historical behind altogether. Altogether, modern theology swerves between the two. Harnack wrote that the preaching Jesus (who made men brothers) was transformed after death into the preached Jesus (who demanded faith and dogma). Bultmann wrote that faith only rests on the verbal truth of Gospel; Jesus did exist, but that all other historicity is meaningless (but this makes its authenticity dubious). Today’s “Death of God” theology tells us that although God no longer exists, Jesus the man remains a symbol of trust (but how uncritical must one be!). All this theological schizophrenia points to this: Jesus cannot exist without Christ. One is always bound to be pushed to the other because Jesus only subsists as the Christ and the Christ only subsists in the shape of Jesus.

1.2.2 “The Creed’s image of Christ.” “Christ” is not just a title, but a definition of Jesus. With Jesus, it is not possible to separate the person from the office. Jesus can never be “off duty” from His messianic mission. Similarly, He *is* the word He utters: He is His own teaching.

1.2.3 “The point of departure of faith in Jesus: the Cross.” Who gave Jesus the title “Christ”? Why, Pontius Pilate, of course, on the execution tablet. His coronation and kingship began at the Cross. The Gospel of John well weaves all this together: Jesus is seen from the perspective of His words; His words are seen from the perspective of person, all through the Cross.

1.2.4 “Jesus the Christ.” One who recognizes Christ as Jesus and Jesus as Christ has totally combined faith with love. Then faith which is not love is not really Christian faith: like Luther’s posit of justification through faith.

III JESUS CHRIST—TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

1.3.1 “The formulation of the question.” The early Church was shaken with controversies on exactly how identical Jesus was with God, and eventually came up with theses on Jesus as true God and true Man, as expounded in the Creed. The question is whether these ideas are Biblically based. Modern theologies say “no,” Ratzinger says one can and must answer “yes.”

1.3.2 “A modern stock idea of the ‘historical Jesus.’” A vapid modern idea is that Jesus was a preacher who taught in an overly eschatological time, but was unfortunately condemned to death and died a failure. Afterwards, the belief in a resurrection arose to an extent that Jesus was expected to return. Then history was revised to make it seem as though Jesus Himself predicted a return. He was portrayed as a miracle worker, and a myth of a virginal birth gave him veracity.

1.3.3 “The claim of Christological dogma.” The Hellenic idea of the “divine man” is found nowhere in the New Testament, nor is the title “Son of God” ever identified with this notion. There is a difference between “the Son of God” and “the Son” as titles of Jesus. “Son of God” originated in the “king” theology of the Old Testament, which meant in the Davidic kingdom that God had chosen (not begotten) his king as his heir and son. Jesus thus exhibits the new kingship, and the true meaning of what it is to be a king. The title identifies

Jesus as heir of the universe. “The Son,” however, has a completely different etymology and refers exclusively to His near relationship to the Father (whom Jesus calls “Abba” in prayer). John’s Gospel in particular explores the richness and meaning in this term: more than a title, it is an ontological description.

IV THE DIFFERENT PATHS TAKEN BY CHRISTOLOGY

1.4.1 “Theology of the incarnation and Theology of the Cross.” Two divergent lines of contemplation: the Theology of the incarnation came from Greek thought, and the Theology of the Cross came from St. Paul (and led to certain conclusions of the Reformers). The first speaks of “being” and ontology, but the latter speaks of the event and activity. The former tends to be optimistic and looks beyond sin; the latter tends to be anti-world and topical

1.4.2 “Christology and the doctrine of redemption.” Christology became the doctrine of the being of Jesus, and soteriology became the Theology of the redemption (i.e. what Jesus had really done and how it affects man). Problems arose when the two parted company. St. Anselm of Canterbury’s solution: the redemption takes place entirely through grace and at the same time entirely as restoration of the right.

1.4.3 “Christ, ‘the last man.’” Jesus is the exemplary man, but only because He oversteps the bounds of humanity. Since this is so, God could not have intended Him to be an “anomaly,” but rather the example for the rest of humanity. Jesus is the man in whom humanity comes into contact with its future, in that through Him it makes contact with God Himself. Faith in Christ is a movement in which dismembered humanity is gathered together into one body. In John’s Gospel, the incident of Christ’s piercing by the lance reechoes the story of Adam’s rib: the open side symbolizes the beginning of a new community (baptized in blood and water).

EXCURSUS: CHRISTIAN STRUCTURES.

Broad questions such as “What is it to be a Christian?” are apt to get watered down in the translation. This section attempts to wrench Theology away from concentrating upon it. First, it irritates us that God has to be passed on through outward signs like the Church or the Gospels. God speaks to us from within but also from institutions. There is much exposition on the points of the individual and the whole, and the interaction and proper role of each. Second, the basic law of Christian existence is expressed in the preposition “For.” This is why Christ’s mission was to die on the Cross. There is much exposition on this idea. Third, since God is “quite other,” He has to disguise or conceal Himself to be understood. There is much exposition on this idea within Christian Theology. Fourth, there is a New Testament tension between grace and ethos, total forgiveness and total demand. The holiest persons still recognize that they are constantly in a state of starting over again in grace. Fifth, hope is the result of the entwining of the future in Christ with the perfect present in the Incarnational graces. Humanity cannot go beyond Jesus (in this He is the end), but it must enter into Him (in this He is the real beginning). Sixth, man comes to himself not in what he does but in what he accepts: love can only be received as a gift, and must be waited for. If man declines this gift, he destroys himself. To conclude, these six principles are the blueprint of the Christian existence and at the same time its spirit. Behind them lies the single principle of love (which, of course, includes faith).

Chapter 2: The Development of Faith in Christ in the Christological Articles of the Creed

2.1 “Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.” The origin of Jesus is shrouded in mystery. He descended from the Father: somehow the Word became flesh. The mystery only becomes more mysterious with the Gospel expositions. The virgin birth defies rationalization, though it is found in religious commentary all over the world. But Mary’s virgin birth differs dramatically from these other pagan resources, and shows no homage to them. Jesus’ Sonship is not a biological but an ontological fact. The Old Testament is full of

miraculous births: Isaac, Samuel, and Samson (even John the Baptist in the New Testament). A true Mariology, on the other hand, must not become a mini-Christology, but she is the image of the Church (who can only come to salvation through grace).

2.2 “Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.” The Cross holds a central place in Christianity. Many think of the cross as atonement, many of restored right. Actually, it is expiation. Accordingly, in the New Testament, the Cross appears primarily as a movement from above to below: it is God’s approach to us. We glorify God by allowing him to give to us, and thus recognize Him as the only Lord. The Cross is a sacrifice, but not of a material gift of blood and flesh, but a sacrifice of love. Christian worship imitates this sacrifice of love. There is a modern tendency to reduce Christianity to “brotherly love,” but this can be a temptation to extreme egoism of self-sufficiency. The pointlessness of simple adoration is humanity’s highest possibility. We also learn the nature of man from the Cross: men cannot abide the “just man.”

2.3 “Descended into hell.” Modern theology often evades or obscures the reality of hell. This article can be compared with the modern “descent of God into muteness,” or even more so with the Emmaus story. God’s speech, but also His silence, is part of the Christian revelation. Christ’s cry on the Cross, which quotes Psalm 22 (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”), is like a prayer from hell, not for survival, but for the Father. Hell is not so much unbearable pain as unbearable loneliness, or eternity without the Father. It is easy to see why the Old Testament had only one word for both death and hell: *sheol*, which means that death is absolute loneliness. By Jesus’ descent into hell, He destroyed that loneliness, which means that death no longer is hell. Now only deliberate self-enclosure is hell, or “the second death.”

2.4 “Rose again from the dead.” “Love is strong as death,” claims the Song of Songs. If man refuses to recognize his own limits and tries to be completely self-sufficient (i.e. lives without love), he delivers himself up to death. Two ways have been devised to defeat death: to live on through one’s children, or to live on through fame, both of which are completely inadequate. Thus, only the *One* could give lasting stability. Love is stronger than death when it is valued higher. God is absolute permanence, as opposed to everything transitory. Immortality thus proceeds from love alone. The life of him who has risen from the dead is a new type of life, definitive, beyond history. Christ did not return to His former life (as did Lazarus and the young man of Naim). Returning to the Emmaus story, Jesus can only be grasped through faith, and not through the eye. He is thus able to be met through the liturgy.

2.5 “Ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty.” This article brings to mind a three-story idea of reality: above, here, and below. These are not cosmological destinations, but dimensions of human nature. Heaven is the opposite spectrum end from hell, though heaven can only be received, whereas hell can only be made oneself. Heaven is always more than a private, individual destiny.

2.6 “From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.” Should men not think that Jesus will come again, or shall the world go on interminably as in the past two thousand years? The New Testament is clear that the resurrection of Jesus was *the* eschatological happening. The belief in the Second Coming could be explained as the conviction that our history is advancing to a point at which it will become finally clear that the element of stability which seems to us the supporting ground of reality is not unconscious matter, but the mind, which receives subsistence from above. Over the judgment, glows the dawn of hope.

PART THREE: THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Chapter 1: The Intrinsic Unity of the Last Statements in the Creed.

In the original Greek, the article was “I believe in Holy Spirit,” without the “the,” thus referring (specifically) not to the Trinity but to the history of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the power through which the risen Lord remains present in the history of the world. Teaching about the Church must take its departure from teaching

about the Holy Spirit and His gifts. The remaining statements in the third section of the Creed are more than just developments of the first article. Communion of saints and forgiveness of sins are concrete, sacramental ways in which the Holy Spirit works. Resurrection of the flesh and life everlasting are the unfolding faith in the Holy Ghost's transforming power.

Chapter 2: Two Major Questions Posed by the Articles on the Spirit and the Church

2.1 "The holy, Catholic Church." We are tempted to think of the Church as neither holy nor catholic, but sinful. But the holiness is not of persons, but of the divine gift which bestows holiness amid unholiness. The Church is the continuation of God's deliberate plunge into human wretchedness. For would not one be bound to despair if the Church were so spotlessly holy that it set a mark too high to reach? "Catholic" refers to local unity, and the unity of the combination formed by many local churches. It expresses the episcopal structure of the Church and the necessity of the unity of bishops. But unity is more than mere organization.

2.2 "The Resurrection of the body." This idea appears in the New Testament as the basic form of the biblical hope of immortality, but in a very personal way. It is also communal, in that on the "Last Day" all will rise together. Man's immortality is based on his dialogic relationship with God, whose love alone bestows eternity. Is there really such a thing as the resurrected body, or is this simply a state of mind? Paul teaches not the resurrection of physical bodies but the resurrection of persons, and this not in the return of the biological structure but in the different form of the life of the resurrection. A salvation of the world does exist—that is the confidence which supports the Christian and which still makes it rewarding even today to be a Christian.