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The Religious Experience of the Church and the Experience of National Community in the Writings of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI

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Summary: The main subject covered in this paper is the coexistence of the religious experience of the Church and the experience of national community in the teaching of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI. The starting point is the understanding of experience in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI. In his view, experience manifests itself in three ways: through faith and liturgy, through testimony and through saints. This, in turn, translates to the national experience, which encompasses such areas as culture and academia, religious and universal values, natural law, family and education, and the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity in development and progress. The interdependence between the Church and the national community reflected in the works of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI highlights the need for these two institutions to work together towards the common good of those who constitute the Church and those who constitute the nation, regardless of their religious beliefs or political convictions. Throughout Cardinal Ratzinger's teaching, one can observe that the religious experience of the Church provides a starting point for the national experience that manifests itself in the brotherhood of all people.

Keywords: religious experience, national community, culture, academia, religious values, universal values, natural law, family, education, subsidiarity, solidarity, development, progress, brotherhood

Doświadczenie religijne Kościoła a doświadczenie wspólnoty narodowej w pismach Josepha Ratzingera-Benedykta XVI

Streszczenie: Głównym zagadnieniem artykułu jest współlistnienie doświadczenia religijnego Kościoła i doświadczenia wspólnoty narodowej w nauczaniu Josepha Ratzingera-Benedykta XVI. Punkt wyjścia stanowi rozumienie doświadczenia w pismach Josepha Ratzingera-Benedykta XVI. Doświadczenie to przejawia się w na trzy sposoby wiara i liturgia; świadectwo oraz święci. to z kolei przekłada się na doświadczenie narodowe, które obejmuje następujące zagadnienia: kulturę i uniwersytet; wartości religijne i uniwersalne; prawo naturalne; rodzinę i wychowanie; oraz na zasadę pomocniczości i solidarności w rozwoju i postępie. Współzależność Kościoła jak i wspólnoty narodowej w nauczaniu Josepha Ratzingera-Benedykta XVI kładą nacisk na współpracę tych dwóch instytucji w dziedzinie dobra wspólnego tych, którzy tworzą Kościół oraz tych którzy tworzą naród nie zależnie od wyznawanej religii czy przekonań politycznych. W nauczaniu kard. Ratzingera, papieża Benedykta XVI widać, że doświadczenie religijne Kościoła stanowi punkt wyjścia dla doświadczenia narodowego, które widać we wspólnym braterstwie ludzi.

Słowa kluczowe: doświadczenie religijne, wspólnota narodowa, kultura, uniwersytet, wartości religijne, wartości uniwersalne, prawo naturalne, rodzina, wychowanie, zasada pomocniczości, solidarność, rozwój, postęp, braterstwo

In their respective missions, the Church and the nation have a variety of responsibilities to fulfill in order to serve the entire community: both those who believe in God and those who are part of a group of people living in a given area, share the same language and socioeconomic life, but have a different faith, different system of beliefs or different lifestyle. The idea of religious and community experience has its foundation and starting point in God. The basis here is truth, and it is from truth that religious and universal values are derived and materialized. These values then provide the necessary protection to the family, allowing it to experience help and solidarity from both institutions of the Church and institutions of the State.

1. Religious Experience

When considering the nature of experience, one needs to bear in mind that this concept stems from the Latin verb *experior*, which can be translated as “to attempt,” “to experience” or “to ascertain something.” References similar to the English word *experience* can also be found in other modern languages, such as French (*expérience*) or German (*Erfahrung*). Going further, one could say that experience in its narrow sense is a form of direct knowledge without which it is impossible to embrace knowledge as a whole. And in its broad sense, experience means knowledge that incorporates such aspects as sensory perception (both external and internal), aesthetics and emotional responses evoked by the object or subject being examined.

In his article entitled “Faith and Experience”, originally written for *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, Joseph Ratzinger drew upon the Aristotelian axiom expressed by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the formula “*Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*” (“There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses”) to conclude that sensory perception is required for all knowledge¹. In other words, perception is the gateway to the understanding of the nature of things through human senses. Following this line of reasoning, one could argue that human knowledge must, by its very nature, „have a sensory structure; it must have its beginning in experience, in the perception of the senses. [...] Thus it was clear to Thomas that we cannot know God except through the senses and that even our way of thinking about God is dependent on and mediated by sense perception. If this is so, it means that every introduction to the faith—catechesis, catechumenate—must be by way of the senses. Here, too, it is necessary to find the way to faith by means of experiences made possible by the senses”².

This way of thinking belongs to the sphere of human experience and is not entirely alien to it. As Cardinal Ratzinger noted, it follows the internal dynamics of the earthly content: “Reality is self-transcendence, and when man is led to transcend it, he not only comprehends God but, for the first time, also understands reality and enables himself and creation to be what they were meant to be. Only because creation *is* parable can it become the *word* of parable. That is why the material of daily living can always lead beyond itself; that is why a history can take place in it that both transcends it and is profoundly conformable to it”³. Thus, one could further argue that, as Cardinal Ratzinger put it, „the way to faith begins

¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, San Francisco 1987, p. 343.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

in sensory experience, and sensory experience as such is the *sine qua non* of faith and is capable of transcendence”,⁴ and that self-transcendence means stepping beyond what is perceptible to the human eye and looking further, beyond the horizon of human perception, to see the depth of things through experience.

Therefore, the Church as a place of experience becomes an intermediary for a different, new kind of experience that manifests itself in three ways: through faith and liturgy, through testimony and through saints.

1. Faith and liturgy provide support to believers in the form of common beliefs, prayer, celebration, joy and a shared experience of anguish and hardship, creating a community of the faithful in which people can experience living faith and—through it—gain the strength to overcome difficulties in their daily lives. Hence the need for communities in the Church, as it is communities that foster a living, authentic experience of the Church’s faith and a living experience of brotherhood⁵ with the Eucharist as its focal point: a sacrament that embodies the experience of communion, of unity in the one body of the Lord that is expressed in the brotherhood of all Christians. This idea of brotherhood is encapsulated in the formula of “we,” where the “I” creates unity in the “we”: “we” as Christians, “we” as people sharing one faith that has a community dimension.

2. As a result of the communal experience of faith expressed in liturgy, a person becomes more mature, both individually and as part of the community, and thus can act as a point of reference for others to help them towards their own experience of faith. One could argue that, at the initial stage of course, this is a “second-hand” faith that serves as an introduction to “first-hand” faith, the latter consisting in a direct experience of the Lord that opens one to transcendence.

3. The third component of the new experience is the figure of a saint. According to Joseph Ratzinger, saints are living witnesses of “a faith that has been tried and found steadfast, of transcendence that has been experienced and confirmed, are, so to speak, the living spaces into which one can turn, in which faith as experience

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Today, as can be observed, the idea of brotherhood is vanishing. Brotherhood is becoming a fragmentary part of the broader concept of the nation, and it needs to be revived and rekindled in the awareness of those in power first, and only then in the national community. As Rev. Krzysztof Gózdź observed, “today, perhaps like never before, we are [...] witnesses of the collapse of our state, of the structures of Euro-Atlantic democracy and even the structures of the Church, as well as the structures of the primary constituent of the society: the family unit. This begs the question: why is this happening and what is the main cause of this crisis?” Rev. Gózdź went to write: “I believe that the cause is the degeneration of the idea of brotherhood inside ourselves: at home, at work, in our country and in our world... This is why we need to re-establish the idea of brotherhood in our existence. A promoter of this idea is Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI. His original piece on the subject was published in 1964 in the *LThK*.” K. Gózdź, *Logos i Miłość. Teologia Josepha Ratzingera-Benedykta XVI*, Lublin 2018, p. 165. For more thoughts on brotherhood, see J. Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, San Francisco 1993; J. Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, Freiburg 2011.

is simultaneously stored up, anthropologically conditioned, and approximated to our life”⁶. This attitude enables experience in the strict sense of the word, which becomes a “tasting of God” (*cf.* Psalm 34:9; 1 Peter 2:3; Hebrews 6:4). At this point, it is important to emphasize that this “tasting of God” in earthly life is a foretaste of what is yet to happen; it must not be a goal in itself as it may prove to be a passing moment only. If that were the case, according to Joseph Ratzinger, “faith would become self-gratification rather than self-transcendence and would thus betray its own nature. Such moments stand under the sign of the Tabor-experience. They are not places to linger, but are encouragement, strengthening, for going anew into the everyday world to preach the word of Jesus Christ and to understand that the brightness of the divine nearness is present wherever someone is bringing the word of God”⁷, which offers comfort and strength.

The context described above, which points to the three aspects of man’s openness to God and the community of believers, can be further explained through the experience of national community. This is because national community is shaped by religious experience, which, in turn, is relational and personal. Here, particular attention should be paid to the spheres of culture and academia, religious and universal values, the relevance of natural law to positive law, the context of education in the family, and the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

As has been discussed above, the context of the Church as a place of experience is also relevant to the relationships that exist in a society or a nation. This is possible thanks to the common involvement that occurs in the “we” and aims to develop appropriate skills in the “I” as a subject of the Church and the “I” as a subject of the State: an individual. In the “we” of the community, in acting for the benefit of the “we,” appropriate characteristics of the “I” become specialized. Only through the efforts of the “I” for the “we” does it become possible to build a society founded on values accessible by way of faith and reason, working together in unison for the benefit of the society as a whole.

2. Culture and Academia

The first area that needs to be examined in terms of the experience of the Church and the experience of national community is the mutual interaction between culture and academia. Analyzing the contemporary nature of academicism, Cardinal Ratzinger made the following observations: “The word ‘academic’ arouses conflicting feelings today. It immediately connotes something out of date, a theory which has installed

⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth. Meditations for Every Day of the Year*, San Francisco 1992, p. 35.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 35-36.

itself comfortably in a world of its own, where it can reflect without having to face the demands of reality. [...] In *one* sphere only has the luster of the word ‘academic’ remained untarnished, or even increased: where ‘academic freedom’ is at issue. In a society which on the whole is shaped by the cry for freedom, but which, at the same time, is hedged round by constraints quite unimaginable in a pretechnological world, it has become vitally important that the mind have a haven of freedom which observes none but its own rules and is not subject to any set of norms issued by an outside authority. Talk of ‘academic freedom’ is meant to erect a dam against the all-encompassing power of the bureaucracies as well as against the pressure emanating from the dictatorship of needs”⁸.

This is why there is a need to rebuild the humanistic culture and place it on par with disciplines that focus on production. Benedict XVI has addressed this issue in his many speeches to the academic community, including the address to the students and faculty of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart on May 21, 2011, where he noted that the major, rapid changes occurring in our times also affect the academic sphere. In that sphere, as the Pope observed, there is a decline of humanistic culture and an emphasis on disciplines which could be described as “productive.” The Pope pointed to the fact that technological and economic studies had come to the forefront in the world of academia, degrading humans by reducing their horizon to what is measurable, eliminating the fundamental questions of meaning, purpose and destiny in the world⁹.

To Benedict XVI, the influence of faith remains an important aspect of the proper functioning of culture in the world¹⁰. The Pope noted: “Indeed, taking on a closed or detached attitude in the face of a perspective of faith means forgetting that throughout history it has been, and still is, a leaven of culture and light for intelligence, stimulus to develop all positive potentials for the authentic good of human beings. As the Second Vatican Council stated, faith is able to give light to existence, affirming: ‘For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 11)”¹¹. Therefore, the first sphere in which

⁸ J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology. Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, San Francisco 1995, p. 31.

⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Board of Directors, Professors and Students of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110521_sacro-cuore.html [10.04.2019].

¹⁰ In his address to the Doctrinal Commissions in Asia, Cardinal Ratzinger noted that “there is no such thing as naked faith or mere religion. Simply stated, insofar as faith tells man who he is and how he should begin being human, faith creates culture; faith is itself culture.” *Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures: Meeting with the Doctrinal Commissions in Asia*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/incontri/rc_con_cfaith_19930303_hong-kong-ratzinger_en.html [05.04.2019].

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Board of Directors, Professors and*

a rational approach to culture can be applied is the working together of faith and reason, and the primary venue for that is academia as a place in which one can search for, discover and develop a passion for truth. And it is truth that points people to the core universal and religious values that need to be passed on to the society.

3. Religious and Universal Values

The second sphere common to the Church and the nation is that of religious and universal values founded on truth¹². Hence, a relationship can be identified between culture and academia on the one part and values on the other: academia and culture are the places where values are discovered and where truth becomes their source. The role of academia is to unravel these values by communing with truth, and the role of culture is to promote them in the world, aided by institutions intended to act as guardians of these values. The first such institution is the Church, followed by institutions of the State, including the European Union as a national community.

For example, during his meeting with participants in the congress organized by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, Benedict XVI made the following observation: "From all this it clearly emerges that an authentic European "common home" cannot be built without considering the identity of the people of this Continent of ours. It is a question of a historical, cultural, and moral identity before being a geographic, economic, or political one; an identity comprised of a set of universal values that Christianity helped forge, thus giving Christianity not only a historical but a foundational role vis-à-vis Europe. These values, which make up the soul of the Continent, must remain in the Europe of the third millennium as a 'ferment' of civilization. If these values were to disappear, how could the 'old' Continent continue to function as a 'leaven' for the entire world?"¹³.

Students of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110521_sacro-cuore.html [10.04.2019].

¹² In his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI argued that truth is dialogic by nature, revealing the basic principle that truth can be reached through dialog in communication and communion. Hence, the main role of dialog is, in Pope Benedict XVI's view, to move beyond subjective opinions and perceive the nature of things or issues objectively. This makes it possible to rise above cultural and historical limitations and arrive at the substance of things. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html [11.04.2019]; J. J. Woźniak, *Niezbywalność prawdy a cnota tolerancji w dialogu międzykulturowym i międzyreligijnym w pismach Josepha Ratzingera–Benedykta XVI*, "Studia Gdańskie" 42 (2018), p. 177.

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Convention Organized by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070324_comece.html [11.04.2019].

In his addresses delivered during the visit to Portugal in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI noted, among other things, that the truth that is present in the nation should become a core value for the world. The Pope warned that “indeed, a people no longer conscious of its own truth ends up by being lost in the maze of time and history, deprived of clearly defined values and lacking great and clearly formulated goals”¹⁴. Furthermore, the Pope emphasized that “the Church takes her place in the world, helping society to understand that the proclamation of truth is a service which she offers to society, and opening new horizons for the future, horizons of grandeur and dignity. The Church, in effect, has ‘a mission of truth to accomplish, in every time and circumstance, for a society that is attuned to man, to his dignity, to his vocation. [...] Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom (cf. John 8:32) and of the possibility of integral human development. For this reason the Church searches for truth, proclaims it tirelessly and recognizes it wherever it is manifested. This mission of truth is something that the Church can never renounce’ (*Caritas in Veritate*, 9)”¹⁵.

In light of the above, when religious and universal values are not associated with truth and do not serve the nation, they have no reason to exist, and are only a shadow of the values inscribed in the eternal law of nature which the State or the nation should rescue from oblivion and restore to their rightful place in the world. This is what the modern world also demands, a world which has replaced religious and universal values with those of its own, often devised to support a specific world view that prevails in the nation.

4. Natural Law

Religious experience and national experience touch upon the question of positive law, which is founded on natural law. For example, during an evening event organized on January 19, 2004 by the Catholic Academy of Bavaria in Munich, Professor Jürgen Habermas and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger presented a vision of the moral foundations of the state. The latter noted that today, “the natural law has remained (especially in the Catholic Church) the key issue in dialogues with the secular society and with other communities of faith in order to appeal to the reason we share in common and to seek the basis for a consensus about the ethical principles of law in a secular, pluralistic society. [...] The idea of the natural law

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Meeting with the World of Culture: Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100512_incontro-cultura.html [12.04.2019].

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

presupposed a concept of nature in which nature and reason overlap, since nature itself is rational. With the victory of the theory of evolution, this view of nature has capsized: nowadays, we think that nature as such is not rational, even if there is rational behavior in nature. This is the diagnosis that is presented to us, and there seem to be few voices today that are raised to contradict it. This means that, of the various dimensions of the concept of nature on which the earlier concept of the natural law was based, only one remains. Ulpian summed this up in the early third century after Christ in the well-known words: '*Ius naturae est, quod natura omnia animalia docet*' ('The law of nature is that which nature teaches all sentient beings')¹⁶.

Considering the above, it is worth invoking the concept of natural law found at the beginning of the *Decretum Gratiani* (approx. 1140), to which Cardinal Ratzinger is referring: "*Humanum genus duobus regitur, naturali videlicet iure et moribus. Ius naturale est quod in lege et Evangelio continetur, quo quisque iubetur alii facere quod sibi vult fieri et prohibetur alii inferre quod sibi nolit fieri* (The human race is governed by two things, namely, the natural law and customs. The natural law is that which is contained in the law and in the gospel, whereby each one is commanded to do to another what he wishes to be done to himself and is forbidden to inflict on another what he does not wish to be done to himself)"¹⁷.

Addressing the question of natural law in reference to modern times, Cardinal Ratzinger made the following remarks: "The philosophical doctrine about the State, in antiquity and in the Middle Ages and even in the debates of the modern era, has appealed to the natural law, which *recta ratio* [right reason] can recognize. But today this *recta ratio* no longer seems to provide an answer, and natural law is regarded not as something self-evident to all, but rather as a specifically Catholic doctrine. [...] Now, it seems, there is only partisan reasoning, instead of reason that is common to all men, at least in major, fundamental value judgments"¹⁸.

¹⁶ J. Ratzinger, J. Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization. On Reason and Religion*, San Francisco 2006, p. 69-70. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the International Theological Commission*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071005_cti.html [12.04.2019]; John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html [13.04.2019].

¹⁷ J. Ratzinger, J. Habermas *The Dialectics of Secularization*, footnote 3 in Part Two, p. 71. For a discussion of natural law, see J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco, 1990.

¹⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow. Addressing the Fundamental Issues*, San Francisco 2007, p. 63.

5. Family and Education

One of the first and most important values which should be fostered by the State and the Church is the family. In his papal address for the International Day of Peace on January 1, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI defended the natural structure of marriage against being made equal with other types of relationships: “There is also a need to acknowledge and promote the natural structure of marriage as the union of a man and a woman in the face of attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different types of union; such attempts actually harm and help to destabilize marriage, obscuring its specific nature and its indispensable role in society”¹⁹.

In the natural order of things, according to His Holiness Benedict XVI, the family is “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society” and a “cradle of life and love”²⁰. It is in the family and through the family that one can find such values as love, peace, brotherhood, justice or community. Through the family, one can understand the principle of subsidiarity and learn to help others: the elderly, the sick or the disabled. And it is thanks to the family that one can learn acceptance for others and embrace such attitudes as tolerance towards people with different systems of values and world views, towards different faiths and different cultures. Furthermore, according to Benedict XVI, the family provides an ideal environment in which one can develop an attitude of forgiveness. Therefore, by providing proper education and instilling correct patterns of behavior or a properly structured hierarchy of values, the family is the first school in which one receives appropriate, original education for which there is no substitute; it is in such a properly functioning family that the value of peace can be promoted. Otherwise, as Benedict XVI notes, the weakening of the institutions of marriage and family makes it difficult to adhere to the law and hinders efforts to maintain peace. This is why the Pope clearly and specifically demands that the family and its rights be respected, and that appropriate conditions be created for it to function²¹.

The stance taken by Pope Benedict is consistent with the postulate put forward by Pius XII in 1942 in his radio address on Christmas Eve: “He should give to the family, that unique cell of the people, space, light and air so that it may attend to its

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121208_xlvi-world-day-peace.html [10.04.2019].

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *The Human Family, a Community of Peace: Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace.html [10.04.2019].

²¹ *Ibidem*.

mission of perpetuating new life, and of educating children in a spirit corresponding to its own true religious convictions”²².

Another issue relevant to the family is education. As Pope Benedict XVI noted, “education is the most interesting and difficult adventure in life. Educating—from the Latin *educere*—means leading young people to move beyond themselves and introducing them to reality, towards a fullness that leads to growth. This process is fostered by the encounter of two freedoms, that of adults and that of the young. It calls for responsibility on the part of the learners, who must be open to being led to the knowledge of reality, and on the part of educators, who must be ready to give of themselves”²³.

6. The Principles of Subsidiarity and Solidarity in Development and Progress²⁴

The last aspect of the experience of national community that I would like to address is subsidiarity. Benedict XVI offered the following definition: “The principle of subsidiarity requires that each group within society be free to make its proper contribution to the good of the whole”²⁵. In addition, during his meeting with participants in the 14th Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on May 3, 2008, the Pope noted that “subsidiarity is the coordination of society’s activities in a way that supports the internal life of the local communities”²⁶.

²² Pius XII, *Con sempre nuova freschezza*. AAS 35/1 (1943), p. 19-20. English version according to the official translation of the Christmas Address broadcast over the Vatican Radio Station (December 24, 1942) as recorded and transcribed by the New York Times, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/1942-12-24b.html> [09.04.2019].

²³ Benedict XVI, *Educating Young People in Justice and Peace: Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111208_xlv-world-day-peace.html [10.04.2019].

²⁴ In his interview for Peter Seewald, Pope Benedict XVI expressed concern about the contemporary state of progress and put forward many questions. The Pope noted that “a major examination of conscience should begin today. What really is progress? Is it progress if I can destroy? Is it progress if I myself can make, select, and dispose of human beings? How can progress be achieved ethically and humanely? But not only the criteria for progress would have to be reconsidered.” Benedict XVI, P. Seewald, *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times*, San Francisco 2010, p. 43.

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the 31st Session of the Governing Council of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090220_ifad.html [08.04.2019].

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the 14th Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080503_social-sciences.html [10.04.2019].

Therefore, one could see subsidiarity as a focus on promoting the individual, thus guaranteeing freedom while internally strengthening local communities and, in consequence, strengthening the society as a whole. Moreover, in Benedict XVI's view, subsidiarity is not limited to mutual assistance between individuals; the principle can also be extended to include the institutions of the nation or the State. John Paul II noted that "the State has the further right to intervene when particular monopolies create delays or obstacles to development"²⁷. This is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, which, in John Paul II's understanding, states that societies at a higher level of economic or social development should support societies at lower levels while preserving the autonomy of the individuals and the societies to whom such assistance is provided²⁸. In addition, Benedict XVI wrote the following in his third encyclical letter: "Subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, and it is always designed to achieve their emancipation, because it fosters freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility. Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others"²⁹.

Based on the above definitions of subsidiarity, one can distinguish a triple semantic range of the term. The first range refers to the substantive principle: the existence of specialized entities whose role is to assist individuals or groups which are dependent on them in becoming independent. The second one refers to the legal principle: institutions which serve the society should have clear and specific areas of activity defined by legal norms, intended to support both individuals and groups in becoming independent. And the third one refers to the social principle: restoring the correct functioning of an individual or group within their community through short-term or, in certain cases, long-term assistance, helping them overcome the difficulties or disfunctions they are experiencing³⁰.

Another aspect that needs to be addressed with respect to religious and national experience is solidarity. According to Benedict XVI, solidarity "refers to the virtue enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and

²⁷ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus on the Hundreth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html [08.04.2019].

²⁸ Cf. *ibidem*.

²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html [11.04.2019].

³⁰ Cf. J. Szulist, *Teologia państwa w pismach Josepha Ratzingera (Benedykta XVI)*, Toruń 2016, p. 305-306.

spiritual goods”³¹, and entails “responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone”³². Solidarity is founded on love, an attitude which is most fully embodied in brotherly love and love for one’s neighbor, and which is both a duty and a task. It is a duty in the sense that it arises from a sense of moral responsibility of the individual for and towards others. And it is a task because such love needs to translate into concrete actions and attitudes³³.

Furthermore, John Paul II taught that “the exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons”³⁴. This is because a human being possesses such an amount of internal resources that he or she can be responsible not only for himself/herself, but also for others: those closest to him or her (family) and those further away who are weak and unable to act for reasons beyond their control. The resulting sense of responsibility means acting in the spirit of solidarity, adopting an active stance that helps build the social fabric and contributes to the common good.

Summary

To summarize, one can observe that the two foundations of human experience—the Church and the nation—clearly constitute an important part of the moral teaching of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI, who points to the important role of these two institutions in the social sphere and in supporting the ideas of peace, justice and brotherhood; ideas which need to be rediscovered, reinstated and lived by. Without doubt, the teaching of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI make a valuable contribution to a more in-depth analysis of some of the most important issues in the world, with experience being the starting point for both the Church and the nation. Experience,

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the 14th Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080503_social-sciences.html [10.04.2019].

³² Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html [11.04.2019]; cf. Francis, *Visit to the Cathedral of Quito: Address of the Holy Father*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150706_ecuador-cattedrale-quito.html [13.04.2019].

³³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas est on Christian Love*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html [10.04.2019].

³⁴ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis for the Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html [14.04.2019]; cf. Paul VI, *Encyclical Populorum Progressio on the Development of Peoples*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html [14.04.2019].

which provides a basis for being a genuine part of the community of the Church and the nation, facilitates the development of the individual and the entire group, as well as economic and social development. This becomes possible thanks to culture and academia, thanks to the values promoted in the Church and the nation, and thanks to laws that derive their core tenets from natural law, the primary source of all law in the Church and the nation, which in turn translates to the correct functioning of the family and to proper education, making it possible to provide mutual assistance and act in line with the principle of social equity.

As a closing remark, I would like to quote the following passage by Cardinal Ratzinger: “The Christian faith—following the way shown to us by Jesus—banished the ideal of political theocracy. To put it in modern language, it promoted the secular character of the State, in which Christians live together in freedom with those who hold other beliefs, united by the common moral responsibility founded on human nature, on the nature of justice. The Christian faith distinguishes this from the Kingdom of God, which does not and cannot exist in this world as a political reality, but rather comes into being through faith, hope and charity and must transform the world from within. [...] This secular, ‘lay’ character of the State includes by its very nature this balance between reason and religion.”³⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger deliberately pointed to the principle of subsidiarity, according to which a Christian is no longer an isolated island, but rather takes an active part in the life of the entire national community. This is done without asking about religious affiliation first; instead, the main motivation for acting together is humanity as such. A Christian knows that the humanity of man is rooted in the humanity of Christ himself, and that through the commitment of individual believers, it can be discovered by those who see them and describe them. In this case, therefore, Joseph Ratzinger can be seen as a promoter of the age-old Christian principle of *verba docent, exempla trahunt*.

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³⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, p. 99.

- Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the 14th Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080503_social-sciences.html [10.04.2019].
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