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## **Benedict XVI's Assessment of Contemporary Threats to Peace<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** Since God created man for peace, the question arises: What are the causes of wars? Benedict XVI often spoke about the threats to peace to diplomats, people who are especially responsible for building peace. The author of the article examined these statements in terms of threats to peace and systematized them according to a theological key. Thus, for Benedict XVI, who put God first in the life of man and society, it was evident that the source of threats to peace is the rejection of God the Creator and Giver of the natural moral law, the deprivation of religious freedom, reductionism of man and his life, as well as erroneous ideologies. From this rejection of the transcendent dimension of reality comes social disorder, that is: injustice, deception leading to violence, evil as a source of further evil, terrorism, the struggle for access to natural resources, and poverty – all of these are direct or indirect threats to peace.

**Keywords:** Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, injustice, negation of God, peace, threat

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### **Introduction**

The Creator assumed in his eternal plan that humanity would live in peace. He also implanted in human nature the need for living in peace to be a natural state for all. Peace, or divine order, is – in fact – a gift of God, i.e., an all-human good, but it is also dependent on the free will of man. It is a condition for the integral development of the human person as it is the natural environment of human life. And its absence severely affects individual people and entire

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

societies, brings the horror of death, destruction, harm and hatred. It is understandable, therefore, that peace has been a constant subject of the teaching of the Catholic Church, especially of recent popes. It is also not surprising that this doctrine raises great interest among scholars of the Catholic Church's social teaching, moral theology and political science, and thus been the subject of many studies that are difficult to enumerate, whether in footnotes or bibliography. In these studies of peace and its absence, two currents can be distinguished: in the first one, the analyses focus on the essence of peace, its great importance for humanity and the conditions for its maintenance,<sup>2</sup> while in the second current, attention is focused on the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning its attitude to war.<sup>3</sup>

In the first current, one can already include the teaching of the Vatican Council (*GS* 78–83), the messages of the popes for the World Peace Days, as well as papal speeches on peace. When it comes to publications, one can place here the book by Joachim Kondziela, in which he presents extensively the Church's teaching on peace, and devotes two paragraphs to threats to peace, focusing on two: the arms race and injustice.<sup>4</sup>

The article by Sławomir Bylina,<sup>5</sup> devoted to the issue of peace in Popes Benedict XVI and Francis, can be included in this current. Basically, it is a discussion of the former's message (1.01.2013) and the latter's statements. The main line is the conditions that must be met to preserve peace: respect for human life, protection of family and marriage rights, the development of a new model of economic development, commitment to peace and, of course, prayer for peace, especially in the context of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima. Other authors focus mainly on the study of Benedict XVI's pre-pontifical publications.<sup>6</sup> And as concerns papal messages and speeches,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bylina, "Pokój jako wartość," 325–334; Kusiak, *Władza polityczna*, 162–177.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nagórny – Pokrywka, *Wojna sprawiedliwa?*

<sup>4</sup> Kondziela, *Pokój w nauce Kościoła*, 79–86.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bylina, "„Pielgrzymi prawdy, pielgrzymi pokoju”,” 291–304. Cf. also Szulist, "Niepodległość warunkiem pokoju," 485–500; Szulist, *W Bogu początek*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Machinek, "Kardynał Joseph Ratzinger," 133–148; Bachanek, "Rozumienie pokoju," 27–39; Pogoda-Kołodziejak, "Rola Kościoła," 81–92.

authors tend to put first his theology of peace and the theological and social justification of the need to involve everyone in the work of defending and perpetuating peace, and only then, rather additionally, discuss the threats to it.<sup>7</sup>

As for the issues related to the other current, in general questions concerning just or unjust war were examined. So, S. Bylina who traced this issue in the 20th century popes writes that Pius XI, as a threat to peace, pointed to the “excessive love towards one’s country” and narrow nationalism, which restricts the other nations’ right to live and develop.<sup>8</sup> On the eve of World War II, Pius XII warned against nationalism mixed with racism and totalitarianism seeking excessive state autonomy. War, once unleashed, introduces moral disorder and a departure from God. As a result, “state power ceases to be guided by supernatural and universal values that come from natural law, which always take into consideration the dignity of man as an individual in society.”<sup>9</sup> Just at the end of the war, the problem of the nuclear threat and the related doctrine of deterrence arises, and therefore the pope’s attention was also directed to these issues. John XXIII, in his great encyclical on peace *Mater et Magistra*, writes that the first right is the right to life. He rejects both the theory of “just war” and the doctrine of deterrence and instead seeks to get nations to withdraw from the path of mutual distrust, rivalry and hatred and instead build a new civilization based on peaceful international relations.<sup>10</sup>

In turn, during the Second Vatican Council the concept of “just war” was replaced with the term “right to defence,” which does not close the way to defend oneself against unpunished aggression. The Council condemns nuclear war as total war and warns of its catastrophic consequences, which no one can redress.

The Council – as part of its extensive exposition of the theology of peace – also points to the sources of what endangers it. It is worthwhile to present them, since they are very similar to those discussed by Benedict XVI. What happens to be the source of this

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kusiak, “Prawa człowieka,” 17–25.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bylina, “Pokój jako wartość,” 328.

<sup>9</sup> Białas-Zielińska, “Stanowisko papieżstwa,” 61.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Białas-Zielińska, “Stanowisko papieżstwa,” 64.

threat? Well, this danger results first of all from the fact that the human will is wounded by sin, hence it is volatile. Admittedly, at this point the Council does not specify which sin is being referred to, but it is known from theology that original sin is meant, and then – personal sins, passions over which man ceases to have control (*GS 78*).

In order to introduce lasting peace, it would be necessary, first of all, to eradicate the root causes of conflicts, which then turn into wars. Among these conflicts, the Council puts first all “manifestations of injustice” that should be removed, for: “Not a few of these causes come from excessive economic inequalities and from putting off the steps needed to remedy them.” The Council then notes that: “Other causes of discord, however, have their source in the desire to dominate and in a contempt for persons” These, in turn, have deeper causes in man, and these are human jealousy, distrust, pride and other selfish passions. Thus, the Council points out that the essential sources of conflicts lie in the very interior of man, i.e. in his vices. Similar vices are not only the cause of conflicts between individual people, but also cause conflicts at the international level. Hence, properly coordinated international institutions, increasingly and more closely interacting with each other, should overcome and forestall them and keep violence once unleashed within limits (*GS 83*).

If, in the Council’s terms, “A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace” (*GS 78*), then, in view of this, any lack of a firm will to respect the dignity of other people and nations and the lack of the persistent study of brotherhood, as well as the failure to provide intellectual (like education) and spiritual goods to individuals and communities, will be a threat to the building of peace. And since “earthly peace” is born of love of neighbour, the lack of this love is the first step toward a threat to peace. At the same time, this earthly peace: “symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father.” Thus: peace has, as it were, its two sources: human, that is, love of neighbour, which is inspired by the commandment to love God and neighbour anyway, but is also a reflection of Christ’s love for man, and at the same time the effect of the peace of Christ flowing from God the Father, “for by the cross the incarnate Son, the prince

of peace reconciled all men with God. By thus restoring all men to the unity of one people and one body, He slew hatred in His own flesh; and, after being lifted on high by His resurrection, He poured forth the spirit of love into the hearts of men” (*GS* 78). Even earthly peace, therefore, has its prototype and its source in Christ and in God the Father, and it should be built on this and prayed for, since it is a gift and work of God.

In turn, Paul VI taught that peace based on a rational and moral social order having its roots in God Himself,<sup>11</sup> is the fruit of justice understood as respect for the human person. A selfish and belligerent mentality is a threat to peace,<sup>12</sup> so it is threatened when there is no respect for the human person, his dignity and rights, and human relations are not directed towards the common good.<sup>13</sup>

John Paul II introduced in the minds of his contemporaries the message that the fundamental threat to peace comes from man’s selfish outlook on the world. He called for the building of peace, based on social justice and the dignity and rights of every human person.<sup>14</sup> And he deemed every armed attack to be intrinsically immoral. Admittedly, John Paul II did not reject the right to defence, but only “limited it to the principle of proportionality,” since “peoples have the right and duty to defend, by appropriate means, their freedom against unjust aggression.”<sup>15</sup> He also referred with great reserve to the doctrine of deterrence. He condemned the huge expenditures devoted to the arms race, as keeping weapons in readiness causes the world to be threatened by further conflicts, making peace fragile. In his view, deterrence will never be an effective method of maintaining peace.<sup>16</sup>

Turning to Benedict XVI’s teaching on peace and its threats, it should be noted that it has attracted the interest of social science researchers at secular universities (A. Pogoda-Kołodziejak, E. Kozerska),

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Paul VI, Message, 1 January 1969; Bylina, “Pokój jako wartość,” 331.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Paul VI, Esortazione, 4 October 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Paul VI, Message, 1 January 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Appello, 1 January 1985; Bylina, “Pokój jako wartość,” 331–332.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, Message, 1 January 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Białas-Zielińska, “Stanowisko papieżstwa,” 68–70.

as well as at theological ones (G. Bachanek), with the former dealing mainly with social issues and the latter more with theological thought. And so, Adriana Pogoda-Kołodziejak, mainly based on the book “Time of Change in Europe...” writes that J. Ratzinger singles out four dangers: nationalism, living the myth of the superiority of one’s own nation, utilizing religion for this purpose, classical warfare waged for many years in various regions of the world, the problem of maintaining internal peace in a country where so-called liberation movements appear due to a sense of injustice, tyranny in a totalitarian state.<sup>17</sup> A little further on, the author adds to these causes a mention of ignoring the existence of God and the lack of respect for the human person. In another article, perhaps even closer to us thematically, the author provides J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s assessment of terrorism in the light of the doctrine of just war, above all based on his statements while he was still a cardinal. Also in the author’s article, we find mention of the rejection of God, and the consequence of this turns out to be a lack of humanity, an consent to killing, a lack of respect for international law.<sup>18</sup>

Two articles are included here from English-language publications that have religious and philosophical character. In the first, Mary F. McKenna<sup>19</sup> reports extensively on issues of reason as a catalyst for science, culture, ethics, politics, law and religion. Of interest for our object of study is the author’s reflection on how Benedict argued for embracing the foundations of transcendent values and, on the other hand, how contemporary science and philosophy distance themselves from these. On the question of how to discern what is right, what is just, how to discern between good and evil, Benedict rejects the positivist practice according to which this should be decided by the majority, and took as his foundation human dignity as the rational criterion for distinguishing between good and evil. Sensitivity to the truth is necessary, expressed in listening to conscience, which tells everyone what is good and what is evil and commands to do

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<sup>17</sup> Pogoda-Kołodziejak, “Rola Kościoła,” 82–83; Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pogoda-Kołodziejak, “Terroryzm i wojna sprawiedliwa,” 161.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. McKenna, “In Search of Justice,” 1–18.

good. If the academic ethos obeys the truth, then it is in harmony with the Christian faith. For we know, thanks to the self-revelation of God as Logos and as Good in Christ, that the knowledge of truth leads to the knowledge of good; truth makes people good, and what is true is good. And it is only with this conception of the rationality of reason that true dialogue is possible between the cultures and religions of the world, which contributes to the building of peace.

In the second article, J.T. Pawlikowski<sup>20</sup> presents Benedict's teaching during his trip to Jordan and the Holy Land, assessing the extent to which it may have contributed to improving relations between the great religions in the area.

It can be said that the difference between the aforementioned publications and our study, and thus also its originality, lies in the fact that what is a secondary issue for political scientists, for both Benedict XVI and the author of the article occupies the first place: threats to peace arise from the negation of God, and this entails the negation of the transcendent dimension of man, law and all reality, and consequently leads to social disorder as a direct threat to peace.

Turning to the presentation of this paper, the reader should be warned that it is based primarily on papal speeches by Benedict XVI addressed mainly to diplomats accredited to the Holy See and to politicians from various countries for whom the essence of the diplomatic mission is a commitment to the service of peace and the strengthening of fraternal international relations. However, there are no references – apart from occasional ones – to the content of Pope Benedict XVI's messages for the World Days of Peace, as they have been researched and published in an article that has been accepted for publication in a memorial book dedicated to Rev. Prof. Jerzy Szymik to be published in 2023. These are two independent articles with similar themes, but based on different sources.

It seems that the novelty of this article is, above all, the analysis of the threats to peace that are so topical and needed today, especially their identification of a kind, in a theological, anthropological, ethical and social key, so as to counter them effectively. In the course of the reading, the reader will be able to see that Benedict XVI

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Pawlikowski, "Pope Benedict XVI," 467–480.

addressed many of the threats to peace outlined above, while at the same time sensing new ones that have emerged in the contemporary world. The research used to a large extent a deductive method, that is, it attempted to extract the threats from papal texts that speak of the conditions for peace. From some forty different addresses of Benedict XVI, statements pertaining to the main theme were selected and compiled systematically. Threats to peace could, of course, be classified in multiple ways as: nuclear and conventional, global and regional, international and intra-national, ethnic and pseudo-religious, direct and indirect, proximate and distant, ideological and pragmatic, obvious and hidden, imperialist and liberationist, etc. The assessment of the threats discussed – according to the nomenclature given – is left to the individual reader's approach. Instead, a theological key has been used for the systematic presentation of these threats, i.e. the starting point is to identify the negation of God as the deepest source of almost all other negations, as well as the sin of man. The reader can see this most clearly in the case of Benedict XVI's polemic against erroneous worldview concepts which, according to him, pose a great threat to the future of humanity. However, the paper is not limited to merely listing these dangers, but it follows the Pope in pointing out ways of countering them, just as Scripture does not stop at sin itself, but usually points to the possibilities of liberation from its bondage.

## **1. Threats to Peace Arising from the Rejection of the Transcendent Foundations of Reality**

### 1.1. Rejection of God

Benedict XVI spoke about the source of the threat to peace, which is the rejection of God and a false image of God, at a meeting with representatives of world religions in Assisi. Beforehand, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had spoken on the subject in a particularly powerful way during the ceremony commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy (1944). He pointed out that the situation which led to the war and the need to defend Europe against German fascism had its origin in the “corruption of reason,”



“in the construction of a world without God, in the relegation of God and religion to a purely private, subjective sphere, dictated by a supposed respect for those who think differently and by the fear of the historically known cases of religiously motivated acts of violence and religious fundamentalism”<sup>21</sup> – thus in what is still happening today.

The question of the denial of God as a source of threat to peace was undertaken to some extent by J. Pawlikowski in his critical discussion of Benedict XVI's visit to Jordan and the Holy Land in May 2009. According to the author, “Benedict XVI makes the Nazi ‘godless’ political regime responsible and never admits any guilt on the part of the Catholic community.”<sup>22</sup> As proof of this, the author sees Benedict XVI's speech at Yad Vashem, in which he attributed the Holocaust to Nazism, but said nothing about Christians also bearing responsibility through their anti-Semitism. This was only acknowledged by the Pope during his visit to a synagogue in Rome with the words of John Paul II, spoken at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Be that as it may, Nazism was godless, and its rejection of God was at its root a threat to peace. Also, anti-Semitism cannot be reconciled with the authentic image of God, who wants all people to be brothers to one another. Furthermore, in Benedict XVI's speeches to all audiences, the Pope encouraged mutual respect, recognition of the need for greater justice for Palestinians, including their own state, and at the same time greater security for Israel and an end to attacks. He pointed out that religious reconciliation is closely linked to political reconciliation. In Bethlehem, he called for tearing down the walls of hatred erected around human hearts, which is the source of constant conflict, and therefore for reconciliation. Thus, the sources of threats to peace presented in this article were also present in the Pope's teaching in the Holy Land. They can be analysed in more detail and one can wonder whether they found an audience and a response.

Benedict XVI, referring several times to the biblical description of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, when the angels sang: “Glory

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<sup>21</sup> Machinek, “Kardynał Joseph Ratzinger,” 137.

<sup>22</sup> Pawlikowski, “Pope Benedict XVI,” 478.

to God in the highest, and on earth peace for men of good will” (Luke 2:14), notes and emphasises how closely linked are the glorification of God and peace on earth; for peace is born of God’s love and not merely of human effort. Hence the inverse: it is not praising God but forgetting Him that in turn gives rise to violence: “For when one ceases to appeal to objective and transcendent truth, how can there be authentic dialogue? – asks Benedict XVI – How, in this case, can one avoid violence, overt or covert, becoming the norm of human relationships? In fact, without an openness to transcendence, man easily falls prey to relativism and then finds it difficult to act in accordance with justice and to commit himself to peace.”<sup>23</sup>

The prophet Micah foretold (Mic 5:4) that the future ruler of Israel would bring peace. And indeed, Christ gave the gift of peace to the apostles (John 14:27); therefore, in the liturgy, he is communicated as a personified Peace, giving himself as reconciliation beyond all boundaries. Thus, wherever He is received, islands or oases of peace spring up. Yes, people would like Christ to banish all wars once and for all, destroy weapons and establish universal peace. However, one has to agree that peace simply cannot be achieved against the will of man, because violence must lead to even more violence. As the angel in Bethlehem said, peace is connected with *eudokia*, the opening of human hearts to God. It must be understood, therefore, that peace can only come about when hatred and selfishness are overcome within the very core of human beings. Because this is difficult, world peace remains still volatile and fragile. Of course, humanity suffers greatly because of this. A similar condition is therefore a call for Christians to allow themselves to be permeated from within by the peace of God and to bring its strength into the world.<sup>24</sup>

Starting from the time of the Enlightenment<sup>25</sup> onwards, the enemies of religion have seen in it the main source of violence in the history of mankind and therefore believe that religion should disappear altogether. However, the opposite is true. It is precisely the rejection

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<sup>23</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 22 December 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

of the existence of God that has been the cause of immeasurable cruelty and violence. And it became possible only because atheists stopped recognising any norms of social coexistence and neither did they recognise any judge over themselves. For they accepted that they could set all norms for themselves. Thus, the horrors of the gulags and concentration camps turn out to be a direct consequence of the lack of belief in God.

Benedict XVI spoke in a similar spirit during his trip to the United Kingdom. At that time, he stated that 20th century atheistic dictatorships, which intended to eradicate God from the life of society and rejected the belonging of all people to the one human family, murdered, persecuted, above all, pastors and religious – preachers of truth and love. He also stressed that: “as we reflect on the sobering lessons of the atheist extremism of the twentieth century, let us never forget how the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society and thus to a ‘reductive vision of the person and his destiny’ (CV 29).”<sup>26</sup> All the more so, therefore, in this situation: “may [the UK] always maintain its respect for those traditional values and cultural expressions that more aggressive forms of secularism no longer value or even tolerate. Let it not obscure the Christian foundation that underpins its freedoms; and may that patrimony, which has always served the nation well, constantly inform the example your Government and people set before the two billion members of the Commonwealth and the great family of English-speaking nations throughout the world.”<sup>27</sup>

## 1.2. False Image of God – Terrorism

Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI spoke on several occasions on the subject of terrorism, which spread at the turn of the century on an unprecedented scale. Ewa Kozerska, who has analysed his teaching from this point of view, has pointed out that his statements deal with terrorism arising from two sources: liberation theology and

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 16 September 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 16 September 2010.

Islamic fanaticism.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while he was still Cardinal, he pointed out – probably thinking more of the Western terrorism that raged in the 1970s and 1980s – that at its origin was a protest against the existing situation and a kind of religious enthusiasm, which was given an earthly direction to build a better world, thus bringing an otherworldly messianism to earthly reality. Faith in God and in a supernatural reality was shaken, and it was demanded to be fulfilled here on earth. However, forcing people to act according to their own self, without regard to the will of others, is a morally wrong attitude.<sup>29</sup>

Benedict XVI sees another source of terrorism, especially Islamic terrorism, in ignorance of the true face of God. In recent years, completely new forms of violence have emerged, which, unfortunately, use even the Name of God to justify the terrorist acts undertaken. “This, however, stands in clear contradiction to God’s prohibition of invoking the name of the Lord God to justify blasphemous behaviour” (Exod 20:7). Furthermore, fanatics falsify religion itself, because its real purpose is actually contrary to their theses. Religion is primarily intended to reconcile man with God, to enlighten and purify consciences and to make it clear that every human being is the image of God the Creator.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, in the case of supporters of terrorism: “in a way that is more subtle but no less cruel, we also see religion as the cause of violence when force is used by the defenders of one religion against others.”<sup>31</sup> Rather than serving peace, which it is called to do, religion serves to justify the merciless cruelty of those who believe that they are allowed to bypass the laws for the sake of the “good” they are pursuing. Religious fanaticism is therefore pernicious and causes many deaths in many countries also represented at the Holy See. Therefore, both the representatives of the world’s religions summoned by John Paul II to Assisi and the representatives of this meeting cry out with great force and great firmness: “this is not the true nature of religion. It is the antithesis of religion and

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Kozerska, “Benedykt XVI o terroryzmie,” 21–23.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie*, 17; Pogoda-Kołodziejak, “Terroryzm i wojna sprawiedliwa,” 160.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

contributes to its destruction.”<sup>32</sup> Referring to the Christmas Day attacks in Nigeria (2012) and on the people praying in them, murdered in a barbaric manner, the Pope notes with pain that it seems as if hatred wants to transform shrines of prayer and peace into places overrun by fear and division.<sup>33</sup>

Undoubtedly, the fact that religion is sometimes used to motivate believers to use violence causes deep concern and pain for religious people. All the more so because similar terrorist acts lead some to perceive religion as a threat to society and consequently to attack and discredit religions in such a way as if they were not agents of peace. Hence, Benedict XVI reminds us that religious leaders have a duty to interpret the Word of God in truth, i.e. in such a way that believers might act nobly and be promoters of peace, so that societies may open up to religion and religion – to society. Benedict XVI also reiterated his conviction: “of the irreplaceable role of religion for the formation of consciences and the contribution which it can bring to – among other things – the creation of a basic ethical consensus in society.”<sup>34</sup> While a false image of God, or the denial of His existence, depraves man, deprives him of moderation and leads to violence,<sup>35</sup> a properly lived relationship between man and God is the most real peace-bringing force. Hence it is always necessary to purify the lived religion through dialogue.

If in the past Christians have resorted to violence in the name of the faith, then: “We acknowledge it with great shame. But it is utterly clear that this was an abuse of the Christian faith, one that evidently contradicts its true nature.”<sup>36</sup> The former unlawfulness of a similar use of the faith recognised and acknowledged by the Catholic Church today for two fundamental reasons: firstly – the God in whom Christians believe is the Creator and Father of all human beings, hence it follows that all are brothers and sisters to each other and constitute one family. Secondly – the cross of Christ is

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<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 12 September 2008; Benedict XVI, Address, 29 May 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

for Christians the sign of a God who chooses to suffer with one's neighbour and love with one's neighbour instead of violence. His name is "God of love and peace" (2 Cor 13:11). Therefore, all those who are charged with any responsibility for the Christian faith must feel a duty to continually cleanse the Christian religion from within, so that, despite all human weakness, it truly constitutes an instrument of God's peace in the world.<sup>37</sup>

The topic of purifying religion through reason, addressed by Benedict XVI, was taken up in the philosophical article of M.F. McKenna,<sup>38</sup> extending the field of research to several of the Pope's flagship speeches (Regensburg, La Sapienza, Collège des Bernardins, Westminster Hall, Reichstag, Assisi). The author brought out Benedict's thesis from the aforementioned lectures: reason has a purifying role towards religion, so that it does not fall into sectarianism or fundamentalism, which create social problems, but religion also has a corrective role towards reason, so that it does not fall into ideologies that do not have regard for the full dignity of human being. The author notes that, for the Pope, issues of justice and peace point towards Truth and Goodness, which are for the Pope the ultimate criterion of what is true and good (theocentrism).

### 1.3. Deprivation of Religious Freedom

After issuing a message for the World Day of Peace on religious freedom as an essential condition for peace-building, Benedict XVI addressed the diplomatic corps, saying: "The religious dimension is an undeniable and irrepressible feature of man's being and acting, the measure of the fulfilment of his destiny and of the building up

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<sup>37</sup> All these arguments by Benedict XVI refute the Moscow Patriarchate's support of Russia's genocidal aggression against Ukraine. Benedict XVI could not issue official assessments of this war, as he was no longer the Pope in office. However, it is known from press reports that he met with Archbishop Svyatoslav Shevchuk and assured him of his sympathy and prayers for Ukraine, and that he urged the German politician to bring peace together. For those interested in the issue of the war in Ukraine, the article can be recommended: Bylina, "Reakcje Stolicy Apostolskiej," 159–176.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. McKenna, "In Search of Justice."

of the community to which he belongs. Consequently, when the individual himself or those around him neglect or deny this fundamental dimension, imbalances and conflicts arise at all levels, both personal and interpersonal.”<sup>39</sup> For peace is built and maintained only when man can freely seek God and serve Him in his heart, in his life and in his relationships with others. The Pope cited the bill *On blasphemy in Pakistan* as an example of the taking away of religious freedom: it has become a pretext for the use of injustice and violence against religious minorities, especially Christians. It also stands in stark contradiction to worshipping God, who encourages brotherhood and love, not hatred and division. As we can see, taking away religious freedom can be a serious threat to peace. For religious freedom is: “an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, is a cornerstone of the structure of human rights.”<sup>40</sup>

Peaceful coexistence is also endangered by situations in countries which, on the one hand, adopt pluralism and tolerance and, on the other, marginalise religion as an irrelevant element, alien or even destabilising to contemporary society. In this way, religion is deprived of any influence on social life, for example denying health professionals the possibility of practising their profession in accordance with their religious convictions.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, the Pope spoke during the *Angelus* prayer, pointing out that secularism, often in an insidious manner, pushes religion to the margins in order to reduce it to a merely private sphere, while at the same time fundamentalism is spreading, which would like to impose religion by force. According to Benedict XVI, both attitudes are wrong, since the only privileged way to build peace is through religious freedom. For where religious freedom is truly recognised, at the same time the dignity of the human person is respected at its very roots, and at the same time, through a sincere search for truth and goodness,

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<sup>39</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 10 January 2011.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, Message, 1 January 1988; Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 10 January 2011.

moral awareness is consolidated, and the very institutions and civil coexistence are strengthened.<sup>42</sup>

Although it is true that, throughout the ages, religions have been a factor of conflict, it is also true that religions, when lived according to their profound essence, have always been and continue to be a force for reconciliation and peace.<sup>43</sup> In order that this may also be true at this moment in human history, religions must, through sincere and honest dialogue, seek a path of purification in order to be ever more in harmony with their true vocation.

In this respect, Benedict XVI very often spoke about the need for interreligious dialogue: “dialogue of religions is a necessary condition for peace in the world and it is therefore a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities.”<sup>44</sup> He understood such a universal dialogue of religions as a dialogue of life, i.e. a dialogue addressing the concrete problems of coexistence and shared responsibility for society, for the state, for humanity, for justice and peace, i.e. a dialogue on the criteria of evaluation, which is the basis of everything, and thus becomes a struggle for truth, for the human being, for the proper way of being of the human person. In this way, it becomes a process during which, by listening to each other, both parties can find purification and enrichment. If, on the other hand, this dialogue is lacking, a threat to peace inevitably appears.

As Benedict XVI believes – distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can also become the cause of serious social problems. “These distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion.”<sup>45</sup> This process works both ways. For religion provides a corrective for reason, which can fall prey to similar distortions. This happens when it is manipulated by an ideology, or used in a biased manner that does not take full account of human dignity. A similarly distorted use of reason has been at the root of many evils, such as

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Reflection, 1 January 2011. This thought was quoted by the Pope from his Message, 1 January 2011, no. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 17 December 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 21 December 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 17 September 2010.



the slave trade or the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, as well as a number of other kinds of misery.

Nonetheless, Benedict XVI asserts that the Church: “can support [with her thoughts] the quest to strengthen security and justice both locally and internationally, based on the foundation of reason, natural law and the Gospel, that is, on the foundation of what is compatible with and at the same time transcends the nature of every human being.”<sup>46</sup>

#### 1.4. Reductionism and Human Decadence

As has been mentioned, both the Council Fathers and Pope Paul VI were of the opinion that disrespect for human beings and peoples is the root of threats to peace. Benedict XVI undertook this topic on several occasions. Thus, in an address to the United Nations, he recalled that the events of the Second World War caused a deep and serious shock to humanity when: “reference to the meaning of transcendence and natural reason was abandoned, and in consequence, freedom and human dignity were grossly violated. When this happens, it threatens the objective foundations of the values inspiring and governing the international order and it undermines the cogent and inviolable principles formulated and consolidated by the United Nations,”<sup>47</sup> particularly in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Man, separated from God and thus deprived of vertical reference, is then inevitably reduced to a single dimension, i.e. the horizontal one, or more specifically, to the merely corporeal dimension, and it is precisely this kind of reductionism that becomes one of the fundamental causes of the totalitarianisms that led to the tragic consequences in the 20th century and to the crisis of values today. Benedict XVI presents this crisis as follows: “By obscuring the reference to God the ethical horizon has also been obscured, to leave room for relativism and for an ambiguous conception of freedom which, instead

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<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 21 September 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with the Members, 18 April 2008.

of being liberating, ends by binding human beings to idols,”<sup>48</sup> that is, it enslaves him through a disordered attachment to created things: addictions, including drug addiction, hedonism, etc.

Speaking to the people of Lebanon tormented by years of war and terrorist acts, Benedict XVI justified the need for peace on the grounds that in every human being there is a desire for peace and reconciliation that has always been inscribed in the plan of God, who has engraved it in our hearts. He pointed out, however, that the peaceful future of humanity would depend on people’s commitment to peace-building: “The energy needed to build and consolidate peace also demands that we constantly return to the wellsprings of our humanity. Our human dignity is inseparable from the sacredness of life as the gift of the Creator. In God’s plan, each person is unique and irreplaceable.”<sup>49</sup> Recognising God as the only Creator of man – every man, regardless of his religious creed, social status or views – each will respect the other in his uniqueness and diversity. For God, there are no better or worse categories of human beings, such as the dominant or subject. “For God – points out Benedict XVI – there is only the human being whom he created through love and whom he wants to see living in his family and in society, in brotherly harmony. The discovery of God’s wise plan for the human being leads to recognition of his love. For the believer or person of good will, the resolution of human conflicts, such as the delicate coexistence of the different religions can be transformed into human coexistence in an order full of goodness and wisdom whose origins and dynamism are in God. This coexistence with respect for the nature of things and their inherent wisdom that comes from God the *tranquillitas ordinis* is called peace”<sup>50</sup> – concludes the Pope.

A threat to peace, according to him, is also the failure of secular circles to accept a healthy anthropology. With it, the greatness and unity of the spiritual-bodily human person and the *raison d’être* of his existence can only be found in God. Thus, the unconditional recognition of the dignity of each human person, of each of us, and

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<sup>48</sup> Benedict XVI, Catechesis, 14 November 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 15 September 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 17 December 2009.

of the sacredness of life entails the responsibility of all before God.<sup>51</sup> And without this, true peace cannot be built.

In his recent address to the ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, Benedict XVI leaves an important admonition: “the building of peace always comes about by the protection of human beings and their fundamental rights. This task, even if carried out in many ways and with varying degrees of intensity, challenges all countries and must constantly be inspired by the transcendent dignity of the human person and the principles inscribed in human nature. Foremost among these is respect for human life at every stage.”<sup>52</sup> Further on, with a dose of sadness he states: “sadly, especially in the West, one frequently encounters ambiguities about the meaning of human rights and their corresponding duties. Rights are often confused with exaggerated manifestations of the autonomy of the individual, who becomes self-referential, no longer open to encounter with God and with others, and absorbed only in seeking to satisfy his or her own needs. To be authentic, the defence of rights must instead consider human beings integrally, in their personal and communitarian dimensions.”<sup>53</sup>

### 1.5. Threat to Life

The annihilation of life as a source of threat to peace can be taken very broadly and can include many of the assaults on life discussed in this article, as pointed out by Paweł Kusiak.<sup>54</sup> The point here is to draw attention to the taking of human life as a person, which is done through abortion, euthanasia, genetic manipulation, as they all open the way for the taking of life from another human being, as St Teresa of Calcutta stated: “if a mother can take the life of her child, no one can stop us from taking each other’s life.”

Benedict XVI has repeatedly spoken of the link between the defence of life and the degree of commitment to peacebuilding, and vice versa: a lack of respect for life and human dignity manifests itself in

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 15 September 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Kusiak, “Prawa człowieka,” 20.

a lack of commitment to the defence of peace. Hence, if humanity wants peace, it should defend life. This logic excludes wars and terrorist acts, but also any attack on the life of a human being, created in the image of God. Indifference to or denial of man's true nature makes it impossible to respect its "grammar," which is the natural law inscribed in the human heart. The Pope perhaps most poignantly writes about it in his Message for the World Day of Peace on 1.01.2007:

"As far as *the right to life* is concerned, we must denounce its widespread violation in our society: alongside the victims of armed conflicts, terrorism and the different forms of violence, there are the silent deaths caused by hunger, abortion, experimentation on human embryos and euthanasia. How can we fail to see in all this an attack on peace? Abortion and embryonic experimentation constitute a direct denial of that attitude of acceptance of others which is indispensable for establishing lasting relationships of peace."<sup>55</sup>

If the path of peace is a shared sense of the greatness of each person and of his/her being a gift to himself or herself, to others and to humanity, then a threat to peace is acceptance of what hinders respect for each human being as well as a lack of solidarity in support of political action and initiatives leading to the unification of people in an honest and just manner.

Moreover, assaults on the physical integrity and lives of individuals in the form of: unemployment, poverty, corruption, various addictions, exploitation, illicit trafficking of all kinds and terrorism are undeniable threats to peace; all of which entail unacceptable suffering for those who fall victim to them, resulting in an overall weakening of human potential.

Peace is also threatened by certain ideologies which challenge, directly or indirectly and even legally, the inalienable value of the human person and the natural basis of the family, thus undermining the foundations of society, since they are attacks on the construction and harmony of common life.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Human Person*.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *The Human Person*.

### 1.6. Rejection of Natural Law

Benedict XVI repeatedly pointed out in his speeches that if social, intra-state and international relations were to be sustainable and equal, they should be based on the natural moral law. Here, however, he recognised the difficulty in that many have only an empirical conception of nature and not a metaphysical one. Furthermore, the modern philosophy of legislation is based on a positivist conception of law, i.e. on an arithmetical majority enacting particular laws. Unfortunately, this majority is often manipulated and has made serious mistakes many times in the past, such as in Germany when it was the majority that elected the Nazis who unleashed the Second World War. So clearly law needs a double foundation – both transcendent and immanent. And such can only be the natural moral law, implanted in human nature by the Creator. Therefore “it must appear clearly that the denial of the ontological foundation of the essential values of human life inevitably ends in positivism and makes law dependent on the currents of thought that predominate in a society, thereby corrupting law and making it an instrument of power instead of subordinating power to law.”<sup>57</sup> This seems to have been overlooked by the secular philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who postulated the development of rules of conduct by way of discussion taking into account sensitivity to truth, to which J. Ratzinger responded that this was a valuable postulate, but extremely difficult to implement.<sup>58</sup>

The Dominican friar Francesco De Vitoria wrote about having a “natural reason common to all peoples,”<sup>59</sup> and St Augustine formulated the principle of natural law in a simple form: “Do not do unto another what is disagreeable to you,” which no national differences can change.<sup>60</sup> It is an interpretation of Christ’s words: “As you would have men do unto you, so do ye also unto them” (Luke 6:31; Matt 7:12), and which is also expressed in the maxim: “do good and avoid evil.” The obviousness of this truth imposes itself on everyone. “Natural

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<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 1 December 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Lecture, 17 January 2008. Cf. Kusiak, *Władza polityczna*, 174; McKenna, “In Search of Justice,” 7.

<sup>59</sup> Cit. from Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with the Staff, 18 April 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Augustinus Hipponensis, *Doctr. chr.* III, 14.

law is, definitively, the only valid bulwark against the arbitrary power or the deception of ideological manipulation [...]. Therefore, no law made by man can override the norm written by the Creator without society becoming dramatically wounded in what constitutes its basic foundation. To forget this would mean to weaken the family, penalizing the children and rendering the future of society precarious.<sup>61</sup> From this basic principle of law other, more specific, principles are derived, which regulate the ethical judgement of the rights and duties of every human being (e.g. the principle of respect for human life from its conception to its natural end).

It cannot be denied that human beings, as corporeal and at the same time spiritual beings, feel the action of Divine Wisdom, which enables them to distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil, the better from the worse, justice from injustice. This capacity to distinguish makes each person capable of recognising the “natural law,” which is directly participation in the eternal law.<sup>62</sup> Natural law is therefore a universal guide recognisable by everyone and can therefore be the basis for mutual understanding and love between all human beings. Human rights are therefore ultimately rooted in the wisdom of God, who, in creating man, endowed him with reason and freedom. “If this solid ethical and political basis is ignored, human rights remain fragile since they are deprived of their sound foundation.”<sup>63</sup> Hence the conclusion that “human rights, must be respected as an expression of justice, and not merely because they are enforceable through the will of the legislators,”<sup>64</sup> as the positivist understanding of the law would have it.

The Church promotes human rights on the basis of rational reflection, so that they can be accepted by all people of good will, regardless of their religion. This does not mean, however, that human reason does not need constant purification by faith, since it is always threatened by a kind of ethical blindness caused by disordered passions and sin. And, moreover, human rights must be assimilated

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<sup>61</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 12 February 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I–II, 91,2.

<sup>63</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 4 May 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with the Members, 18 April 2008.

by each generation and each individual, and human freedom – which is expressed in free choice – is always fragile and needs God's help.<sup>65</sup>

During the era of American discoveries in the 16th and 17th centuries, the so-called *ius gentium* was developed, i.e. the awareness of human rights as such and their universal character was formed.<sup>66</sup> In the twentieth century, the international community developed a new system of international law, based on human rights and, after the indescribable crimes of totalitarian ideologies, it was applied in order to normalise international relations. It was probably inspired by Benedict XV's World War I call to replace the material force of arms with the moral force of law.<sup>67</sup> In this way "human rights became the reference point of a shared universal ethos – at least at the level of aspiration – for most of humankind. These rights have been ratified by almost every State in the world. The Second Vatican Council, in the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, as well as my predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II, forcefully referred to the right to life and the right to freedom of conscience and religion as being at the centre of those rights that spring from human nature itself."<sup>68</sup>

This contribution was also appreciated by a German philosopher who declares himself a non-believer – Jürgen Habermas. According to the aforementioned thinker, in modernity Christianity was a catalyst for normative self-consciousness, but not only that. Christianity brought – according to him – also a so-called "egalitarian universalism," that is, it proclaimed universal equality, from which originated the ideas of freedom and solidaristic coexistence, which were based on the heritage of Judaic justice and the Christian ethic of love. This heritage – immeasurable in its essence – was then continually critically assimilated and reinterpreted over and over again. To this day, there is no alternative to it.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 4 May 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 4 May 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Benedict XV, *Dès le début*.

<sup>68</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 4 May 2009.

<sup>69</sup> The thought of J. Habermas is presented after the quote: Benedict XVI, Address, 7 September 2007.

If the care for the development of dialogue and friendly international relations is the real ground for peace,<sup>70</sup> the rejection or absence of such dialogue in truth poses a serious threat to peace. Indifference to regional conflicts and a lack of intervention on the part of international organisations – as Pope Benedict XVI stated at the UN<sup>71</sup> – cause real damage. A deeper search for ways to prevent and control conflicts is needed, as well as exploring all possible diplomatic avenues, and paying attention to and encouraging even the smallest signs of dialogue and a desire for reconciliation.

### 1.7. Erroneous Ideologies

What was usually the cause of wars in Europe? Benedict XVI, looking back into history, noted that Europe had made terrible mistakes, taken the wrong paths and suffered because of them. He listed the following errors: “ideological restrictions imposed on philosophy, science and also faith, the abuse of religion and reason for imperialistic purposes, the degradation of man resulting from theoretical and practical materialism, and finally the degeneration of tolerance into an indifference with no reference to permanent values. But Europe has also been marked by the capacity for self-criticism, which gives it a distinctive place within the vast panorama of the world’s cultures.”<sup>72</sup>

Particularly important from this point of view seem to be: respect for the centrality of the human person and human rights, working for peace, fighting for justice for all, especially when peace is threatened: “when human rights are violated, the dignity of the human person suffers; when justice is compromised, peace itself is jeopardized.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore the Pope encourages the centre-right parties to make “efforts to serve the common good, taking it upon yourselves to prevent the dissemination and entrenchment of ideologies which obscure and confuse consciences by promoting an illusory vision

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 9 January 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with the Members, 18 April 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 7 September 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 21 September 2007.



of truth and goodness.”<sup>74</sup> An example of such an erroneous ideology would be the conviction or assumption that the human mind is incapable of grasping the truth about the good and, consequently, of pursuing the good corresponding to the dignity of the person, as, for example, in the case of the identification of the good with profit, which deprives ethics of its intrinsic force and consequently proves to be a threat to profit alone. This is the case with the belief that human life can be destroyed in the prenatal or terminal phase, or with the acceptance of the crisis of the family, the basic unit of society, based on the indissoluble bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Careful observation alone shows that: “when the truth about man is subverted or the foundation of the family undermined, peace itself is threatened and the rule of law is compromised, leading inevitably to forms of injustice and violence”<sup>75</sup>.

In order to defend peace from such threats, it would also be necessary to deconstruct the political ideologies which today seek to take the place of truth.<sup>76</sup> Although the tragic experiences of the 20th century have shown the inhuman consequences of suppressing the truth and trampling on human dignity, unfortunately attempts are also being made today to spread false values under the guise of promoting peace, development and the protection of human rights. In doing so, these efforts are usually aimed at satisfying particular interests: “Individuals, communities and states, without guidance from objectively moral truths, would become selfish and unscrupulous – Pope Benedict XVI warns – and the world a more dangerous place to live.”<sup>77</sup>

A strong risk is connected with the relativisation and subjectivisation of values, rights and duties<sup>78</sup> – the risk that they will be deprived of an objective, rational and common foundation for all peoples. For if they were to be based solely on individual cultures, the decisions of legislators or court decisions, this would imply that they could not provide a solid, lasting foundation for supranational

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<sup>74</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 21 September 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 21 September 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 5 June 2010.

<sup>77</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 5 June 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 8 September 2010.

institutions working for peace. And if there were no common values, no immutable laws, no universal principles understood in the same way by all member states, for example of the Council of Europe, fruitful dialogue between different cultures would not be possible either. The Christian faith, on the other hand, acknowledges that values, rights and duties have their origin in the natural dignity of every human person, which is something accessible to human reasoning and study. Therefore, the faith does not oppose such study but, on the contrary, even encourages the search for the supernatural basis of this dignity.<sup>79</sup>

### 1.8. Relativism

Benedict XVI repeatedly condemns the relativistic ideology, often aggressive, which tries to influence many areas of life.<sup>80</sup> He notes that even in international debates, relativistic logic often appears, according to which the only guarantee of peaceful coexistence would be the renunciation of the recognition of the natural moral law, and nothing more than short-term interests or ideological manipulation would become the real basis of international norms would become. Visible manifestations of this are the attempts to recognise egocentric lifestyles, the lack of interest in the economic and social needs of the poorest nations, the disregard for humanitarian law or the selective defence of human rights.<sup>81</sup>

As can be seen, relativism detaches human rights, presented as the common language and ethical foundation of international relations, from the foundation that human rights find in natural law, inscribed in the human heart and present in different cultures and civilisations. Yet, it is precisely their universality, their indivisibility and their interdependence that are the guarantee of the protection of the dignity of every human being because of the common origin of human beings from God the Creator. Detaching human rights from this foundation means narrowing their scope to only certain individuals and social

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 27 October 2011.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Warzeszak, “‘Dyktatura’ relatywizmu,” 291–322.

<sup>81</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 1 December 2007.

groups and giving way to a relativistic conception. And according to this conception, the meaning and interpretation of rights can change and their universality can be negated in the name of different cultural, political, social or even religious views. And if this does indeed occur, then one forgets that it is not only rights that are universal, but also the human person who is the subject of these rights.<sup>82</sup>

In our times, there seems to be a very real threat that: “dictatorship of relativism threatens to obscure the unchanging truth about man’s nature, his destiny and his ultimate good. There are some who now seek to exclude religious belief from public discourse, to privatize it or even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty. Yet religion is in fact a guarantee of authentic liberty and respect”<sup>83</sup>. Hence, the Pope encourages the faithful to ask for: “the right to live, not in a jungle of self-destructive and arbitrary freedoms, but in a society which works for the true welfare of its citizens.”<sup>84</sup>

Benedict XVI, speaking to the ambassador of the Principality of Andorra and expressing his appreciation for the country’s democracy, strongly based on Christian values, stressed that “a democracy without values, in fact, turns into a tyranny of relativism with the loss of its own identity, and in the long run can degenerate into open or insidious totalitarianism, as history has frequently shown”<sup>85</sup>.

The Pope also notes with regret that in some countries, especially in the West, a sense of disrespect and sometimes even hostility, not to say contempt, towards religion, especially Christian,<sup>86</sup> is spreading in political and cultural circles, as well as in the media which shape them. It is obvious that if one considers relativism to be a constitutive element of democracy, there is a danger that laicism will be understood solely as an exclusion, or more precisely, a rejection of the social significance of religion. Unfortunately, such an approach does not lead to peace, according to Benedict XVI, but to conflicts and divisions, harms peace, and disturbs the human ecology by

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with the Members, 18 April 2008.

<sup>83</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, 16 September 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, 16 September 2010.

<sup>85</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 1 December 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 11 January 2010.

rejecting, as a matter of principle, attitudes different from one's own. In order to avoid this, the Pope calls for an urgent definition of a positive, open secularity, such that is "grounded in the just autonomy of the temporal order and the spiritual order, can foster healthy cooperation and a spirit of shared responsibility."<sup>87</sup>

## 2. Threats Originating from Social Disorder

### 2.1. All Kinds of Injustice

The Second Vatican Council seems to see the main threat to peace in prevailing injustice (*GS* 78, 83). At the same time, the Council's words may also mean that, although absolutely perfect justice cannot be achieved, people should devote themselves in a special way to working for peace: "as they thirst after ever greater justice" (*GS* 78).

If politics should work for the sake of justice and thus create the basic prerequisites for peace, the real threat to peace can be a politics that has justice for nothing and in this way does not create the basic prerequisites for peace.<sup>88</sup> There is the need for justice that manifests itself in the *unicuique suum* and, on the other hand, in the practice of solidarity that everyone, especially the disadvantaged, expect, hoping that the one whom fate has placed in a better situation will come to their aid.<sup>89</sup>

In turn, experience shows that an important source of unrest and escalation of violence in a country or region is the creation and maintenance of a situation of serious political, economic or social discontent that makes people feel excluded from society, removed from the sphere of decision-making and governance, deprived of the right to enjoy the fruits of the national product.<sup>90</sup> In order to avoid this, it would be necessary to make the pursuit of peace, justice and good understanding between all, taking into account the specific capacities of the state, one of the priority goals. So, those

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<sup>87</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 11 January 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 22 September 2011.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 12 February 2007.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 14 December 2006.

in power should therefore simply feel obliged to eliminate everything that opposes justice and solidarity, especially corruption and lack of resource sharing. For peace is at risk, especially when those in power do not endeavour to see their political and social commitment as a service to the nation, but only focus on obtaining benefits for themselves, or for a small number of people, thus causing damage to the common good.

It is known that during the years of Benedict XVI's pontificate, the world found itself in a situation of financial, economic and social crisis (2008–2009). It is therefore understandable that at that time the Pope made a special appeal<sup>91</sup> for politicians to fight effectively for the establishment of true peace, i.e. for the construction of a more just and prosperous world for all. He was convinced that it is precisely the injustices affecting some nations more than others, or at least prevailing within those nations, or any other process that contributes to divisions between peoples or leads to their marginalisation, that create a serious risk of conflict. The Pope also recalled that in his Message for 1st January 2009, referring to the universal concept of globalisation, he stated that “one of the most important ways of building peace is through a form of globalization directed towards the interests of the whole human family. In order to govern globalization, however, there needs to be a strong sense of global solidarity between rich and poor countries, as well as within individual countries, including affluent ones.”<sup>92</sup> This is because “peace can only be built by seeking courageously to eliminate the disparities spawned by unjust systems in order to assure to all a standard of living that makes possible a worthy and prosperous existence.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore refraining to act in favour of justice and solidarity can always become a threat to peace.

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 29 May 2009.

<sup>92</sup> Benedict XVI, Message, 1 January 2009.

<sup>93</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 29 May 2009.

## 2.2. Lie Leading to Violence

Benedict XVI dedicated his first message for the World Day of Peace to truth as the fundamental basis for building peace. He undertook this theme in an address to the diplomatic corps. From this speech, one could conclude that the rejection of action in favour of truth – and this means in particular the truth concerning man as such, the truth about good and evil, the truth about the most important aims and perspectives of life, the truth about the relationship with God – the rejection of all this leads inevitably to the acceptance of the law of the stronger, which feeds on lies. It has repeatedly been the cause of tragedies in human history, nationally and internationally. Although lie often take on the appearance of truth, in reality it is always selective and biased, expressing a selfish desire to instrumentalise and ultimately enslave human beings. The political systems of the past, but not just the past, are a bitter example of this.

For the Pope especially the failure to recognise and take into account the differences and equality of the parties to the dialogue can be a threat to peace. Without this, neither problems can be solved nor disputes fairly resolved. And when even one of these principles is not recognised, “it is then that misunderstanding arises, together with conflict, and the temptation to use overpowering violence.”<sup>94</sup> The search for truth in international relations, on the other hand, makes possible the opposite: “one can identify the most subtle nuances of diversity, and the demands to which they give rise, and therefore also the limits to be respected and not overstepped, in protecting every legitimate interest.”<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, when relativistic views of truth occur, this must inevitably lead to tensions, misunderstandings and disputes, the stronger the deeper these beliefs are. In the past, they have sometimes been the source of violent disputes, social and political conflicts and even religious wars. “But in every case it was the result of a series of concomitant causes which had little or nothing to do with truth or religion, and always, for that matter, because means were employed

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<sup>94</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 9 January 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 9 January 2006.

which were incompatible with sincere commitment to truth or with the respect for freedom demanded by truth.”<sup>96</sup>

Benedict XVI addressed the theme of truth and the lack thereof also at a meeting with representatives of the Holy See to international organisations.<sup>97</sup> He said then that relations between states and within individual states remain properly ordered precisely as long as the truth is respected. If, on the other hand, truth is evaded, then peace is violated, law is relativised, and the logical consequence is the proliferation of injustices. And the injustices themselves are transformed into borders, which begin to divide countries in a much deeper way than the boundaries drawn on geographical maps do. And often, they become not only external borders in these countries, but also internal borders. The injustices themselves also assume different faces, for example, that of disinterest or disorder, which goes so far as to offend the structure of that particular unit which is the family, or that of violence or arrogance, which can go so far as to become arbitrariness, making silent those who do not have the voice or the strength to listen to it, as in the case of an injustice which today is even more serious, because it takes the life of a person who is born or is ill.

### 2.3. Evil Breeds Evil

Speaking in Cotonou, Benin, Benedict XVI characterised the situation in Africa and elsewhere as follows: “Many conflicts have originated in man’s blindness, in his will to power and in political and economic interests which mock the dignity of people and of nature [...]. At this time, there are too many scandals and injustices, too much corruption and greed, too many errors and lies, too much violence which leads to misery and to death. These ills certainly afflict your continent, but they also afflict the rest of the world.”<sup>98</sup> Often the reason for this is the lack of a transparent system of government, resulting in confusion

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<sup>96</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 9 January 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 18 March 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 19 November 2011.

between private and general interests and, above all, a lack of peace and justice.

Pope spoke in similar vein at the presentation of letters of accreditation by Nigeria's new ambassador to the Holy See.<sup>99</sup> He noted at the time that friction between different groups was and is a matter of concern. Conflicts of this nature can be attributed to a number of factors, including administrative errors, specific traumas and ethnic tensions. He also stressed that both in Nigeria and elsewhere high levels of crime were a matter of concern. Murder, kidnapping for extortion, exploitation of women, children and foreign workers are some of the worst manifestations of this unacceptable practice. Lack of security, anxiety and aggression caused by family breakdown, unemployment, poverty and despair are some of the social and psychological factors behind this phenomenon. This already fragile situation is exacerbated by a pervasive materialistic mentality and a lack of respect for the human person. Sometimes a sense of hopelessness can lead people to seek deceptively simple solutions to their own problems. As a result of violent crime corruption can also appear, which discourages entrepreneurship and investment and undermines confidence in the country's political, judicial and economic institutions.

Nevertheless, in these situations of multiple tensions the Church does not cease to encourage to create a spirit of community, seeks to contribute to the eradication of prejudices and to stand for openness to all. The Pope assured that the Church would make its specific contribution through an integral education, based on honesty, integrity and love for God and one's neighbour. In this way, she will give opportunities to young people in difficult circumstances to live a life worthy of a human being.

Since it is Christians who most often fall victim of these criminal acts of terrorism, it seems most important to promote inter-religious dialogue in the hope that a firm attitude of solidarity among religious leaders will gradually translate into widespread expressions of peaceful acceptance, mutual understanding and cooperation at national level. And this in turn will become a real indicator of progress and

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 29 May 2008.



a sign of hope for the future. Unfortunately, as the media report, in recent years terrorist groups have spread in Nigeria, sowing death and destruction precisely among Christians.

#### 2.4. The Drive to Dominate

As already mentioned, Benedict XVI pointed to the lust for power<sup>100</sup> as a threat to peace. In other words, a frequent cause of tensions at various levels is the drive to dominate one over the other; there is a selfish and individualistic mentality of domination:<sup>101</sup> of the rich over the poor, of individuals over their neighbours, of leaders of particular peoples or nations over neighbouring ones,<sup>102</sup> of one culture over another, of big bureaucracies dominating those on the periphery;<sup>103</sup> one superpower cannot stand the hegemony of another superpower and safeguards itself against it in various ways: economic, military, nuclear, etc. One may ask: where does this come from? Benedict XVI sees the source of this in original sin, in the rebellion against submission to God, which consequently manifested itself in the destruction of harmony between human beings and the pursuit of man's dominion over man (Cain and Abel). The misery of this dispute over precedence is exacerbated by the fact that it was not just an episode at the beginning, but throughout history all tribes and peoples, instead of living with each other in peace and harmony, want to dominate one over the other. They want to come first at all costs and that is why human history is constantly being torn apart by bloody events, as exemplified by contemporary conflicts.

Nevertheless, peace is not merely the fruit of armed or economic domination, nor of unreliable efforts or skilled manipulation, it is not the simple absence of war. Instead, peace is the result of a process of cultural, moral and spiritual purification and ennoblement of every person and nation, in which human dignity is fully respected. Peace is a gift of God and at the same time God's plan to be realised. Therefore,

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 19 November 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Message, 1 January 2013.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 11 June 2011.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 1 December 2005.

perfect peace – if only because of the dangers discussed – cannot be achieved here on earth. The hope, however, is that a society reconciled with God is closer to peace.<sup>104</sup>

## 2.5. Struggle for Access to Natural Resources

The struggle for access to natural resources, be they water, energy sources or industrial raw materials is another cause of many conflicts, especially in Africa, and therefore a threat to peace.<sup>105</sup> For, according to Benedict XVI, life in peace requires that all legitimate human expectations should be fulfilled first, such as access to food, water and energy resources, but also to health care, technological achievements and to controlling the climate change.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, depriving the population of all this, failing to guarantee food supplies, as well as providing vital resources such as water and energy, is clearly a threat to peace. Therefore the cooperation of all international leaders is necessary, and they must show their willingness to apply the principles of natural law (do good, avoid evil) to countries in need, to apply the principle of subsidiarity and to strengthen solidarity with the poorest regions and peoples of the world. It is also “the most effective strategy for eliminating social inequalities between countries and societies and for increasing global security.”<sup>107</sup>

In the context of natural resources, the Pope also stresses that the reason for the existing conflicts is the fact that there are still vast areas, for example in Afghanistan or Latin America, where agriculture is still linked to the production of drugs, which creates substantial employment and livelihood opportunities for many people. If peace were not to be endangered in this situation, such crops should be transformed as soon as possible and the drug trade, with the moral and social problems it gives rise to, should not be permitted.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Message, 1 January 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 11 January 2010.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2008.

<sup>107</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 4 May 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 11 January 2010.

## 2.6. Poverty

Undoubtedly, material poverty in particular poses a threat to peace, whose victims are driven into misery and despair and whose human dignity is trampled upon with impunity, so it is inevitable that the „they [become] easy prey for those who incite to violence”<sup>109</sup> and by the same token can become a threat to peace. In order to oppose this, human rights must be promoted, as this is: “the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security.”<sup>110</sup>

Benedict XVI presented poverty as a threat to peace, describing in detail the effects of the financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009. This crisis made social inequalities even more visible, especially in countries with lower incomes. Indeed, the following have taken place: a drop in foreign investment, a collapse in demand for raw materials and a downward trend in international aid. Added to this is the decline in remittances sent to families remaining in their countries by expatriate workers, victims of a recession that has also affected host countries. This crisis could turn into a human catastrophe for the inhabitants of many weaker countries. Those already living in extreme poverty will be the first to suffer, as they are the most vulnerable. This crisis is also plunging people who previously lived prosperous lives into poverty. Poverty increases and has serious and sometimes irreversible consequences. Therefore, the recession caused by the economic crisis also has another effect. Namely: “the despair it causes leads some people to an anguished search for a solution that will enable them to survive from day to day. Alas, this search is sometimes accompanied by individual or collective acts of violence that can lead to internal conflicts which risk further destabilizing the weaker societies.”<sup>111</sup> In order to address and find a solution to this crisis situation, the Pope called on industrialised countries to increase aid to the most vulnerable countries, for greater fraternity, solidarity and true lively global generosity and a sober assessment of their way of life.

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<sup>109</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 8 January 2009.

<sup>110</sup> Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with the Staff, 18 April 2008.

<sup>111</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 29 May 2009.

Moral poverty can also be a threat to peace.<sup>112</sup> This is evidenced by the acts of discrimination and serious attacks on freedom and life suffered by thousands of Christians; for it is in poverty that these acts of violence are rooted. We deal here with a lack of understanding that religions can make a great contribution to the fight against poverty and to peace-building. Especially Christianity is a religion of freedom and peace and truly serves the good of humanity, the Pope emphasised.

Intellectual poverty can be another form of poverty. And if education is the privileged means of building peace, its absence can in turn lead to violent processes. Investing in education in developing countries – according to Benedict XVI – means, in fact, that one is helping them “to overcome poverty and disease, and to create legal systems which are equitable and respectful of human dignity [...]”. Consequently, building peace means training individuals to fight corruption, criminal activity, the production and trade in narcotics, as well as abstaining from divisions and tensions which threaten to exhaust society, hindering development and peaceful coexistence.”<sup>113</sup> Benedict XVI recalled the words of John XXIII on the fact that peace is “an empty word” if it is not animated and united with mercy. Hence, Pope Benedict states that – admittedly – mercy cannot replace the lack of justice, but also: “charity cannot take the place of justice that has been denied.”<sup>114</sup> In another address, Benedict XVI recalled the words of John Paul II about the need for forgiveness. If forgiveness is an indispensable prerequisite for peace, then the absence of it will be a threat to peace, in the words of Christ (John 8:7) and in the words of John Paul II: “no peace without justice no justice without forgiveness,”<sup>115</sup> for its only through forgiveness that “memory is purified, our hearts are made serene, and our gaze is clearly fixed on what the truth demands if we are to cultivate thoughts of peace.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 8 January 2009.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 7 January 2013 quoting John XXIII, *AAS* 55 (1963) 303.

<sup>115</sup> John Paul II, Message, 1 January 2002.

<sup>116</sup> Benedict XVI, Address, 9 January 2006.

## Conclusion

Comparing the causes of conflicts identified by Benedict XVI's predecessors, briefly presented in the introduction, one can see that they have been significantly developed by him. It seems to have been possible to extract them from the papal speeches and to present them systematically in a theological key. All these causes can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes the causes that arise from the rejection of the transcendent foundations of man's being and of his life in community, namely the rejection of God the Creator and Lawgiver, the false image of God on which religious terrorism feeds, the deprivation of religious freedom, human reductionism and decadence, the endangerment of life, the rejection of the natural moral law, erroneous ideologies or, finally, moral relativism. It is worth drawing particular attention here to Benedict XVI's polemic against erroneous contemporary views, as well as to the negative consequences of moral relativism that he has shown to be particularly threatening to the prosperous future of human society.

The second group of causes includes those that can be described as social disorder, which are also derived from the rejection of the transcendent dimension, namely injustice, lies leading to violence, evil as a source of further evil, the drive for domination, the struggle for access to natural resources, and material, intellectual and moral poverty. A deeper reflection on these threats to peace, namely the causes of wars, will probably help the readers to see how timely they are, so that they can better understand the causes of the war which is taking place beyond our eastern border, that is, Russia's attack on Ukraine.

### **Benedykta XVI ocena współczesnych zagrożeń dla pokoju**

**Abstrakt:** Skoro Bóg stworzył człowieka dla pokoju, to powstaje pytanie: Jakie są przyczyny wojen? O zagrożeniach dla pokoju często mówił Benedykt XVI do dyplomatów, osób szczególnie odpowiedzialnych za budowanie pokoju. Autor artykułu przebadał te wypowiedzi pod kątem zagrożeń dla pokoju i usystematyzował je według klucza teologicznego. I tak, dla Benedykta XVI, który stawiał Boga na pierwszym miejscu w życiu człowieka i społeczeństwa, było zrozumiałe, że źródłem zagrożeń dla pokoju jest odrzucenie Boga Stwórcy i Dawcy naturalnego prawa moralnego, pozabawianie wolności religijnej, redukcjonizm człowieka i jego życia, błędne ideologie. Z tego odrzucenia wymiaru transcendentnego rzeczywistości pochodzi nieporządek

społeczny, a więc niesprawiedliwość, kłamstwo prowadzące do przemocy, zło jako źródło dalszego zła, terroryzm, walka o dostęp do zasobów naturalnych oraz ubóstwo – wszystko to stanowi pośrednie lub bezpośrednie zagrożenie dla pokoju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, negacja Boga, niesprawiedliwość, pokój, zagrożenie

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