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## **Searching for Human Dignity: The Anthropological Dimension of Moral Teachings of Benedict XVI**

### **Abstract**

Shaping the Christian vision of moral life, Pope Benedict XVI referred to the anthropology centred around the Biblical vision of man. The first and fundamental thesis of the revealed anthropology is the truth about the dignity of a human person. Nevertheless, in today's world one can observe certain symptoms of the lack of respect for self-dignity and dignity of other people. Being aware of this fact, in his teachings, Benedict XVI pointed out the value of human dignity; he promoted it and presented a genuine vision of personal dignity. Man and his dignity was the first principle, "so to say heart and soul" of the moral teachings of Pope Benedict XVI.

### **Keywords**

teachings of Benedict XVI, anthropology, human, dignity, permissivism, morality, Church

## 1. Introduction

The fundamental value of human life is human dignity. It makes human life meaningful. However, in the contemporary world, one can observe a conspicuous lack of respect for the dignity of the human person, which is a manifestation of practical moral permissivism. It is this permissivism that, in various modes, leads to the destruction of modern man, who is a free creature and endowed with an inalienable dignity, a creature redeemed by Christ and summoned to eternal life.

In the face of the destructive influence of permissive tendencies and phenomena on man, it is necessary to rediscover and promote the complete truth about human dignity. Bearing this in mind, Pope Benedict XVI conveyed in his teachings, a clear message concerning the value and dignity of each and every human being. He defended this dignity and struggled to exhibit its real dimension. He repeatedly emphasised that there is an urgent need for recreating “the Christian tissue of human society”<sup>1</sup>, since, wherever God is disregarded as the ultimate good, “the human dignity is jeopardized.”<sup>2</sup> The Church, as Benedict implies, is committed to make her vision of humanity known to the whole world. In this vision, dignity has the essential meaning.

## 2. *Imago Dei* – the foundation of dignity and the factor of morality

The Church, in proclaiming Christ to the whole world, has, from the outset, exercised care about the appropriate understanding of human dignity and has emphasised this extraordinary human value. The writings and documents of the Church that have been promoted throughout the course of history have always referred, and still refer to, the subject of human dignity, confirming the special commitment of the Church for this value.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI – J. Ratzinger, *Odkryć oblicze Boga*, Pol. trans. W. Sapalski, Wydawnictwo “M”, Kraków, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI – J. Ratzinger, *Odkryć oblicze Boga*, Pol. trans. W. Sapalski, Wydawnictwo “M”, Kraków, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. J. Buller, *Godność osoby ludzkiej wymiarem podmiotowości człowieka w gospodarce*, “Annales. Etyka w Życiu Gospodarczym” 15 (2012), pp. 52–53.

In his teachings, the great theologian, Pope Benedict XVI, continued in this tradition and reflected upon the question of human dignity, elaborating new, significant features for this value which was so frequently undermined during his pontificate. According to his vision “the dignity of a human person and human rights constitute a central issue”<sup>4</sup> and its “transcendent nature cannot be disregarded nor omitted.”<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI often reminded that the source of the properly – understood and true dignity of man is found in God Himself and in the genuine relationship with Him, which should be sustained every day. Humanity can be saved from the destruction of personal dignity only if it is truly and deeply rooted in God.

Analysing the question of the dignity of man, it has to be noted that “humanity today is unfortunately experiencing great division and sharp conflicts which cast dark shadows on its future.”<sup>6</sup> It is still true that many people and nations follow blindly erroneous ideologies, believing that they will bring them happiness. Regrettably, they simultaneously lose the gift of dignity and true faith. Christians are obliged to help such people by presenting to them the right way. “That is why contemporary man, without delay, must be shown a way that will lead Him to the “discovery” of the real image of God who revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Without doubt, for a Christian, “the desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to Himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, man can satisfy this desire only by knowing God and bringing his heart closer to Him.

However, it must be remembered that becoming familiar with the Creator is impossible if man concentrates solely on his human desires. Unfortunately in many communities this claim is rejected and seems to be unacceptable. Consequently, it happens quite often that it is man who occupies the place of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict XVI, *Godność osoby i prawa człowieka to kwestia centralna. Przemówienie wygłoszone do uczestników sesji plenarnej Papieskiej Akademii Nauk Społecznych* (Vatican – 4 May 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 7–8, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, *Wolność religijna drogą do pokoju. Orędzie na Światowy Dzień Pokoju 2011 roku* (Vatican – 1 January 2011), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 32 (2011), no. 1, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, *Rodzina wspólnotą pokoju. Orędzie na Światowy Dzień Pokoju 2008 roku* (Vatican – 1 January 2008), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 29 (2008), no. 1, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI – J. Ratzinger, *Odkryć oblicze Boga...*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, Wydawnictwo “Pallottinum”, Poznań 1994, nr 27.

In such circumstances, the foundation of human dignity is frequently forgotten, since self-centredness, excessive care about one's own welfare and the pursuit of pleasures take precedence over the true love which has its source in God.<sup>9</sup> It has to be noted that, in numerous cases, such behaviour, is a result of the rejection of the truth about man being created by God. In most cases, disregarding this truth leads man not only to the conviction that he is allowed to name Himself the master of his own life and lives of other people, but also to the idea that he is the rightful lord of people's fates.

The truth that God has brought man into existence is irrevocable and has been handed down in the Bible. There are two Biblical passages provided in the Book of Genesis which can serve as a confirmation of the truth about the creation of man. The central idea emerging from both of these passages is that the dignity of man is based upon the creation of man by God as a beloved and desired being.<sup>10</sup> Pondering upon this question, Pope Benedict XVI has observed that man occupies an exceptional place in the whole work of creation. He has grounded this thought firmly on the messages emanating directly from the Bible. He pointed out that man has been created in the image and in the likeness of God (Cf. Gen 1:26)<sup>11</sup>, therefore he is entitled to respect and dignity, which cannot be taken away from Him in any way. He rightly argues that all human beings amount to something much greater than simply a collection of genetic combinations which they received from their parents.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it means that man, endowed by God with reason and free will, "must, as Benedict XVI explains, live true humanity, true humanism; he must be educated, have a human formation, human virtues; he must develop his intelligence, his will, his sentiments, his affections; he must be a true man, a man according to the will of the Creator,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Tajemnicze pragnienie Boga. Audycja* (Vatican – 7 November 2012), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 34 (2013), no. 1, pp. 37–39.

<sup>10</sup> Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja duszpasterska o Kościele w świecie współczesnym "Gaudium et spes"*, in: Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucje. Dekrety. Deklaracje*, Poznań 2008, Wydawnictwo "Pallottinum", no. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Elementarz Josepha Ratzingera – Benedykta XVI dla pobożnych, zbuntowanych i szukających prawdy*, ed. M. Zawada, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2008, p. 18; Cf. also: A. Proniewski, *Benedykta XVI perspektywa dialogu miłości Stwórcy ze stworzeniem*, "Studia Teologii Dogmatycznej" 7 (2021), p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Człowiek to coś więcej niż kombinacja informacji genetycznych. Przemówienie wygłoszone do uczestników XV Zgromadzenia Zwyczajnego Papieskiej Akademii «Pro Vita»* (Vatican – 21 February 2009), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 4, pp. 31–32.

of the Redeemer.”<sup>13</sup> Accepting the truth that man is a being created by God in His image and in His likeness (Cf. Gen 1:27), man can be certain that he is strongly linked with his Creator. Regardless of the corner of the world he lives in, if “God is denied, human dignity also disappears.”<sup>14</sup>

Following the teachings of Benedict XVI and taking into consideration the above mentioned description of the act of creation, it may be noticed that the fact that humankind has been descended from the same first parents (Cf. Gen 3:20), constitutes the confirmation of the idea that all people are equally entitled to the fundamental human rights.<sup>15</sup> It has been explicitly stated by the Pope in the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “I would like also to call the attention of everyone to the importance of defending and promoting the human rights of every person, based on the natural law written on the human heart, which, as such, are ‘universal, inviolable and inalienable’. The Church expresses the hope that by the recognition of these rights human dignity will be more effectively acknowledged and universally promoted, inasmuch as it is a distinctive mark imprinted by the Creator on his creatures.”<sup>16</sup> It is worth noticing that no man should restrict his neighbour’s rights to which the latter is unquestionably entitled, let alone taking his own life under the allegation of old age, physical suffering or dysfunction of some organs that may be diagnosed on an unborn child.<sup>17</sup>

The Church is constantly inviting every person to strengthen his or her bonds with Christ, since it constitutes the starting point for the development of the dignity of God’s children in their consciousness. Thanks to this relationship, man is even more obliged to take care not only of his own dignity, but also the dignity of his neighbours. Pope Benedict XVI has emphasised that such acts

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<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI, *Uczmy się przeżywać z Chrystusem cierpienia życia duszpasterskiego. “Lectio divina” dla duchowieństwa diecezji rzymskiej* (Vatican – 18 February 2010), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 31 (2010), no. 5, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Ten, kto broni Boga, broni człowieka. Przemówienie wygłoszone do Kolegium Kardynalskiego, Kurii Rzymskiej i Gubernatoratu* (Vatican – 21 December 2012), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 34 (2013), no. 2, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. D. Cieślak, *Nienaruszalność życia ludzkiego w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI*, “Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego” 35 (2015), p. 210; Cf. also: F. J. Mazurek, *Godność osoby ludzkiej podstawą praw człowieka*, Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI, *Adhortacja apostolska “Verbum Domini”*, Wydawnictwo “M”, Kraków 2010, no. 101.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Francis, *Między godnością i transcendencją. Przemówienie w Parlamencie Europejskim* (Strasbourg – 25 November 2014), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 35 (2014), no. 12, p. 10.

of gratuitous charity help us to overcome temptations “teaching us to respond to our neighbour’s needs and to share with others whatever we possess through divine goodness.”<sup>18</sup> Impoverishment thwarts the appropriate development of man to which he was summoned by the Creator. What is more, in societies stricken by poverty, there is a lack of esteem towards neighbours, which frequently manifests itself in violence that is ensued by dramatic social inequalities. Benedict XVI has noticed that “this is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, every form of poverty, especially, that which is imposed, is incompatible with respect and the transcendent dignity of man.

Nowadays, thanks to social media and news websites, it is easier than ever before for contemporary man to gain access to the information about injustices that other people experience in different corners of the world. However, a lot of people observe this in all conscience and remain indifferent in situations when human dignity is destroyed and when injustice is spreading. Unfortunately many human hearts remain closed in the face of humiliation of the people living next to them. Pope Benedict XVI has drawn attention to this fact, emphasising that: “while the poor of the world continue knocking on the doors of the rich, the world of affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing those knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human.”<sup>20</sup> Such an attitude is neither an expression of Christian love, nor attention to the dignity of a human person, which should both be learned from Jesus Christ. Benedict argues that the promotion of human dignity is expressed in everyday reception of God’s love and in showing charity to others.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile this charity should be “understood not merely as generic benevolence but as self-giving, even to the

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<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI, *Chrystus dla was stał się ubogim. Orędzie na Wielki Post 2008 roku* (Vatican – 30 October 2007), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 29 (2008), no. 2, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, *Zwalczanie ubóstwa drogą do pokoju. Orędzie na Światowy Dzień Pokoju 2009 roku* (Vatican – 1 January 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no 1, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyklika “Caritas in veritate”*, Wydawnictwo “Biblos”, Tarnów 2009, no. 75.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, «Caritas» wyraża troskę Kościoła o potrzebujących. Przemówienie wygłoszone do uczestników 19. Zgromadzenia Ogólnego «Caritas Internationalis» (Vatican – 27 May 2011), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 32 (2011), no. 7, pp. 37–39.

sacrifice of one's life for others in imitation of the example of Jesus Christ."<sup>22</sup> It is necessary to encourage governments to provide for such regulations which will be conducive to reaching out to those who live in inequity.<sup>23</sup> Justice, being a moral virtue, and charity are the features which are inestimable in the process of promoting human dignity.

### **3. The mission of the Church in the face of the permissive phenomena menacing the dignity of man**

It is worth mentioning that in the attitudes presented above, which express care about the dignity of man, there is an evident mission of the Church, which is constantly supported by the Holy Spirit, in order that everyone is able to experience joyful truth about God's mercy, which should be manifested in actions.<sup>24</sup> The Church is obliged to bring to realization the teachings of the Son of God. As Benedict XVI teaches, apart from proclaiming and giving testimony her task is to constantly manifest that "the Church prolongs Christ's saving mission in time and space: She wishes to reach out to every human being, moved by a concern that every individual come to know that "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Conf. Rom 8:35)."<sup>25</sup> Through such activity, the Church pours into human hearts hope and confidence that no matter what circumstances man finds Himself in, he is loved and accepted by his Creator. Besides, the Church, prolonging the salvific mission of Christ, is obliged to look after the dignity of each and every man; she is also to demand that people behave in such a way that helps to accentuate this great God's gift which was offered to man.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *Na początku Bóg stworzył... Cztery kazania o stworzeniu i upadku. Konsekwencje wiary w stworzenie*, Pol. trans. J. Merecki, Kraków 2006, pp. 49–57.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Benedykt XVI, *Encyklika "Deus caritas est"*, Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów, Kraków 2006, nr 26.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Bogactwo miłosierdzia i dobroci Boga. Rozważanie wygłoszone przed modlitwą "Regina caeli"* (Vatican – 11 April 2010), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 31 (2010), no. 6, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, «*Caritas*» wyraża troskę Kościoła o potrzebujących..., p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Pozytywny rozwój społeczny powinien przywrócić godność człowiekowi i jego pracy. Homilia wygłoszona na zakończenie XXV Krajowego Kongresu* (Ankona – 11 September 2011), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 32 (2011), no. 10–11, pp. 31–33.

In the 21st century, when it may appear that the humanity lives in a state of a great welfare and prosperity, there is even greater need to spread and give constant testimony of love which people receive from God, and which is manifested among other things, by the dignity given to them by the Creator.<sup>27</sup> Pope Benedict XVI made his appeal to Catholics many times, and, during the World Youth Days in Madrid, he called especially upon young people to stand up for the sensitivity to human suffering. Moreover, the Pope exhorted not to ignore human suffering, which sometimes constitutes a great cross and may occur all over the world in the form of war, exclusion, addiction to drugs, fratricidal struggles, impoverishment or social exploitation. God expects that man, in the face of such situations, will share with his neighbour all the best he has, namely the ability to love and sympathize.<sup>28</sup>

It should be emphasised that every man has received from God freedom and right to life in unity with Him. However, nowadays there are a lot of communities which cannot freely profess their faith. Pope Benedict XVI educates that wherever spiritual development is restricted, there always occurs the violation of the fundamental human dignity to which every human is entitled. As a result, a person has no access to the truth and goodness, which are deeply rooted in every man from the very beginning, and correspondingly, the possibility of one's own development is hindered or prevented.<sup>29</sup>

Another great gift that man received is the opportunity to benefit from the world that God created. Many things that were created are indispensable for man's existence and survival.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, there are many gifts which, if misused, may result in a broken bond with the Creator. To use the gifts judiciously, man is required to maintain good relations with God.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *List na rozpoczęcie Roku Kapłańskiego z okazji 150. rocznicy «dies natalis» świętego proboszcza z Ars* (Vatican – 16 June 2009), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 7–8, pp. 3–8.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Nie przechodźcie obojętnie wobec cierpienia. Przemówienie wygłoszone na zakończenie Drogi Krzyżowej na Plaza de Cibeles* (Madrid – 19 August 2011), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 32 (2011), no. 10–11, pp. 15–16.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Wolność religijna drogą do pokoju...*, pp. 4–11.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Świat nie jest czymś, co się posiada, by rabować i wykorzystywać. Audjencja generalna* (Vatican – 6 February 2013), "L'Osservatore Romano" (Pol. ed.) 34 (2013), no. 3–4, pp. 44–45.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*, Pol. trans. Z. Włodkova, Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy "Znak", Kraków 2006, p. 190.



people should remember that “where God is denied and people live as though he did not exist, or his commandments are not taken into account, the dignity of the human person and the inviolability of human life also end up being rejected or compromised.”<sup>32</sup>

Benedict XVI has noted that the progress which has occurred in science does not always contribute to the development of man and to the heightening of his awareness of the worth, which is connected with the fact of his existence. This progress in the fields of science and technology has also generated certain doubts, which man living in the 21st century, has to challenge as never before. This doubt is connected with the fundamental question concerning human existence, namely whether one man is just a product of another man’s work, or whether his life may have some significance and dependent upon God. The Pope has also noticed that man has to make the ultimate decision of either-or.<sup>33</sup> This crucial decision has influence on the attitude of man towards the value of his own life, but most of all towards lives of other people. The rejection of the fact that human life depends on God, is equal to the renunciation of the truth that, “the dignity of a person must be recognized in every human being from conception to natural death.”<sup>34</sup>

Currently there is a need for families who are prepared to give testimony with their life, and confirm that the child whom they received from God is the evidence of His love. Furthermore, it is necessary to appreciate and take the utmost care of the families who have decided to accept the child, who while in mother’s womb, did not undergo a healthy development process. What is more, there is also an urgent need to disseminate the information about the heroic efforts of the women who were perfectly aware of the fact that their pregnancy had been diagnosed as complicated and dangerous, but despite all that, they decided to stand up bravely for new life and accept the child, regardless of numerous uncertainties. Those who received the great gift of faith should do their best to aid families and women expecting a child and undertake initiatives aimed at supporting women.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, *Encyklika “Evangelium vitae”*, Wydawnictwo “M”, Kraków 1995, no. 96.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Encyklika “Caritas in veritate”*, Wydawnictwo “Biblos”, Tarnów 2009, no. 75.

<sup>34</sup> Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Instrukcja dotycząca niektórych problemów bioetycznych “Dignitas personae”*, Wydawnictwo “Biblos”, Rzym 2008, no. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Aborcja nie rozwiązuje problemów społecznych. Przemówienie wygłoszone do włoskiego Ruchu Obrony* (Vatican – 12 May 2008), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 29 (2008), no. 6, pp. 41–42.

It is worth noticing that defending the institution of family, which is based upon the marriage of a woman and a man, is conducive towards accepting new life and ensuring decent conditions for living. Pope Benedict XVI relentlessly strived for assistance to families.<sup>36</sup> In one of his speeches, he rightly argues that “the family occupies a fundamental role in a person’s upbringing. It is a true school of humanity and perennial values.”<sup>37</sup> In the light of the evident relationship between the dignity of a person and appropriately understood family values, the Pope advocates the necessity of shaping a family-oriented politics and culture.<sup>38</sup>

Today, it is necessary for every family to learn to shy away from the ideologies of the modern world, which try to deprive the conceived child of its dignity, and by the same token, to narrow it down to a role of a mere burden. In the 21st century, it is necessary more than ever, for families to influence society by giving testimony of the dignity of family life and the dignity of life of its every member. Furthermore, they should teach the modern world about the Gospel of life, through careful upbringing of children, which is manifested in constructive words, appropriate example, and the attitude of affection towards this member of the family, who is the smallest and the most defenceless, and who waits for the gift of love.<sup>39</sup> Such attitudes result in a properly-shaped society and strengthen and inspire people to reflect upon the dignity of the family and every child, even the one who is the most vulnerable.

Addressing the question of the dignity of man and its worth in the modern world, it should be emphasised that the issue of euthanasia, which is always a departure from and degradation of human dignity, must never be ignored. For a person of faith, suffering carries an extraordinary meaning, which has its exceptional source in the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> 21st century

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Wychowanie młodzieży do sprawiedliwości i pokoju. Orędzie na 45 Światowy Dzień Pokoju 2012* (Vatican – 8 December 2011), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 33 (2012), no. 2, pp. 4–5.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, *Rodzina szkołą wartości ludzkich i chrześcijańskich. Przesłanie do uczestników spotkania rodzin w ramach VI Światowego Spotkania Rodzin w stolicy Meksyku* (Vatican – 18 January 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 3, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Rodzina szkołą wartości ludzkich i chrześcijańskich. Przesłanie do uczestników spotkania rodzin w ramach VI Światowego Spotkania Rodzin w stolicy Meksyku* (Vatican – 18 January 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 3, pp. 23–24.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Encyklika “Evangelium vitae”*, Wydawnictwo “M”, Kraków 1995, no. 92.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Encyklika “Spe salvi”*, Wydawnictwo “Biblos”, Tarnów 2007, no. 37–39. Cf. also: Benedykt XVI, *Eutanazja jest fałszywą odpowiedzią na dramat cierpienia. Rozważanie*

man, witnessing a developed medical science, is inclined to recognise euthanasia as the best way to solve the problem of human suffering. Pope Benedict repeatedly stood against this trend explaining “that euthanasia is a false solution to the drama of suffering, a solution unworthy of man.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, every man, especially those who crave for beauty and pleasure, but are very much afraid of suffering and accompanying hardship, cannot reject the truth that “human life is beautiful and should be lived to the full, even when it is weak and enveloped in the mystery of suffering.”<sup>42</sup> Man created in the likeness of God, is summoned to give testimony of love. Euthanasia constitutes the negation of the natural vocation of man to life.<sup>43</sup>

Another rapidly growing threat which strikes directly at the dignity of man and family is the so-called “gender ideology”. The proponents of this idea do not approach masculine and feminine gender as a natural fact resulting from the biological sex, but rather as a social role about which every man and woman can decide of their own volition. Such conviction leads to the questioning and contradicting of one’s own nature, and by the same token, to the idea that gender is not a gift, but a creation about which a person can decide. In such behaviour, Pope Benedict XVI recognises dangerous “aspiration to become independent from the creation and the Creator. Man wants to create Himself on his own and always dispose autonomously of everything that concerns Him. However, as a result he behaves against the truth and against the Creator Spirit.”<sup>44</sup> In such a model of society, in which a person who is still developing their personality decides on their gender, the question of human sexuality is not understood as God’s gift. Such ideology is erroneous and it leads to the wrong perspective on anthropology and to negation of the fact that human being is created by God as a man and a woman. Anthropological revolution destroys humanity and its dignity.

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wyłoszone przed modlitwą “Anioł Pański” (Vatican – 1 February 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 4, p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Eutanazja jest fałszywą odpowiedzią na dramat cierpienia. Rozważanie wyłoszone przed modlitwą “Anioł Pański”* (Vatican – 1 February 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 4, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Benedict XVI, *Życie ma wielką wartość, nawet kiedy jego piękno przysłania tajemnica cierpienia. Orędzie na XVII Światowy Dzień Chorego 2009 roku* (Vatican – 2 February 2009), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Pol. ed.) 30 (2009), no. 3, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Eutanazja jest fałszywą odpowiedzią...*, pp. 43–44.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, *Radość wiary*, Pol. trans. M. Romanowski, Edycja Świętego Pawła, Częstochowa 2012, pp. 77–78.

## 4. Conclusions

Adopting the Christian ethical Personalism, Pope Benedict XVI saw the real point of moral duty in the dignity of human person. In his teachings, he not only emphasised the value and the dignity of man, but he also defended his dignity and strived to convey the real dimension of human dignity. In his opinion, it is necessary to take a careful and critical look at the present social and cultural situation, and evaluate the new tendencies and challenges of the modern world, in the light of the central position of Christ and Christian anthropology, whose first and fundamental thesis is the truth about the dignity of a human person. Anthropology, stemming from the Bible, holds the key to the mystery of man and brings hope to the contemporary world.

Also today, bearing in mind the achievements of Christianity in culture throughout the course of history, it is necessary to present the evangelical approach – theoretical and practical – towards reality and man. In fact, at the beginning of The 21st century man possessing his unquestionable dignity has the opportunity to fathom the Mystery of Christ and to take part in the salvation that He offers, and escape from the permissive doubts and uncertainties. Learning about one's own dignity, the dignity of a Christian, may become a strong motivation to make constant effort to sanctify one's own life. Therefore, personal dignity is *the most precious possession of an individual*.<sup>45</sup> It has a significant influence on the appropriate shape of the moral life of man.

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<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, *Adhortacja apostolska “Christifideles laici”*, Wydawnictwo “Pallottinum”, Poznań 1989, no. 37.

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