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The moral virtue of religiosity as a response of faith: An analysis of selected ascetic and devotional practices in the reflection of Pope Benedict XVI

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Abstract

This article analyses the moral virtue of religiosity, understood as a personal and existential response of faith, in light of Benedict XVI's theological and moral reflection. It presents religiosity not only as a set of external practices but also as an interior disposition of the human person directed toward rendering due honour to God and rooted in the truth of the relationship between the creature and the Creator. In this context, selected ascetic and devotional practices, such as sacrifice, pilgrimage, and vows, are discussed as concrete forms of realising the virtue of religiosity. Benedict XVI's reflection reveals their importance in the maturation of faith, the integration of moral life, and the formation of conscience. The article argues that, according to the pope's teaching, genuine religiosity maintains a dynamic balance between its interior and exterior dimensions, thereby protecting the believer from both formalism and subjectivism. It also emphasises that, in order to be truly valuable, religious practices require conscious participation and personal commitment. In this way, religiosity becomes a path toward fuller moral and spiritual development, integrating faith with everyday life.

Keywords

virtue, religiosity, Benedict XVI, morality, sacrifice, pilgrimage, vows, Christian life

The virtue of religiosity occupies a significant place in moral theology because it concerns the fundamental relationship between the human person and God and, consequently, the integral shape of human life. Religiosity, perfected by divine grace and by the theological virtues, constitutes the moral response of faith, in which worship and ethos mutually inform one another. Joseph Ratzinger emphasised that “morality always lives inscribed in a broader religious horizon that constitutes its breath and vital context” (Ratzinger 2005a, 91), thereby indicating the inseparable connection between morality and the religious dimension. Detaching moral life from this horizon leads to its formalisation and weakening, depriving it of its interior dynamism.

In this context, the virtue of religiosity appears as a stable moral disposition that enables the human person to render to God the worship due to Him and to shape the whole of life within a cultic perspective. As a transcendent and symbolic being, the human person enters into relationship with God through specific acts of worship, which constitute part of moral life. Particularly important manifestations of Christian religiosity include sacrifice, pilgrimage, and vows; in them, the disciple of Christ finds a supernatural impulse for spiritual and moral growth. These acts express an interior disposition of devotion to God in response to His gift and to the work of grace.

An analysis of the teaching of Benedict XVI reveals religiosity as a universal vocation inherent in human nature. The pope reminded us that “man is religious by nature, he is *homo religiosus*” (Benedict XVI 2011b, 49–50), carrying within himself a desire for God that finds its moral expression in a cultic attitude. “The *homo religiosus* does not only appear in the sphere of antiquity, he passes through the whole of human history. In this regard, the rich terrain of human experience has seen the religious sense develop in various forms, in the attempt to respond to the desire for fullness and happiness, to the need for salvation and the search for meaning” (Benedict XVI 2011b, 49–50).

The present article analyses selected ascetic and devotional practices in the teaching of Benedict XVI, presenting them as concrete manifestations of the moral virtue of religiosity. The aim of the reflection is to show that religiosity as a response of faith shapes the whole moral life of the Christian and determines his or her fundamental orientation toward God and the Church. Therefore, from an early age, formation in the virtue of religiosity is necessary, since this virtue enables and obliges every Christian to render to God the worship that is due to Him.

1. Sacrifice as a moral act of love for God and neighbour

One of the most significant manifestations of the virtue of religiosity is sacrifice—an act deeply inscribed in the spiritual experience of the human person since the dawn of history. It has accompanied humanity from the beginning of its existence, carrying with it a reference to the idea of atonement, born after original sin.¹ Separated from God's love, the human person has lost original happiness and has since lived burdened by guilt, by a constant sense of smallness, and by an awareness of moral decline. It is in this particular experience that the origins of worship should be located: as an attempt to face guilt and to strive to restore the disturbed order of human life.

However, in recognising the truth of his own guilt, the human person is not left alone with the burden of sin; rather, in this act of sincerity, he experiences the nearness of God. Religious worship becomes a space of encounter in which the desire for reconciliation and for the renewal of the broken bond is born. It is inseparably connected with the need to make sacrifices, understood as signs of expiation, atonement, and the pursuit of communion with God. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “it is right to offer sacrifice to God as a sign of adoration and gratitude, supplication and communion” (CCC 2099). At the same time, it emphasises that an external sacrifice acquires true value only when it expresses a spiritual sacrifice: the interior devotion of the human heart and will.

The issue of sacrifice also occupies an important place in the teaching of Benedict XVI. In one of his catecheses devoted to the mystery of worship, the pope reflected on the essence of sacrifice, referring to the teaching of St. Paul and showing its profound spiritual dimension: “I beseech you therefore, brethren,

¹ In his work *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, Odo Casel aptly notes this truth: “This first sin not only passes, like a contagious poison, through human generations; it repeats itself over and over again, and each time the end result is the same: the rebel becomes a slave. But perhaps man has never been so enslaved as he is today, when he thinks he is free from all bonds, when in fact he is not dependent on individual tyrants, but on much worse and more cruel, impersonal powers that weigh heavily on him and from which he cannot escape in any way. He has blocked the last path to freedom that was also available to the slave of the ancient world: the path to the freedom of the children of God. Thus, he is completely bound and shackled by matter. While he believes he has mastered it, it is rather matter that imposes its will on him. A soulless machine, dead gold, rule over him like idols; he must make bloody sacrifices to them, sell his heart and his soul – a sad end to individualism, which began so temptingly and promisingly. Therefore, we are not surprised that even today we see its effect with horror, as seductive and alluring as its beginnings were” (Casel 2000, 61).

by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” These words contain an apparent paradox: while the offering of sacrifice normally involves the death of the victim, Paul speaks of sacrifice in relation to the life of the Christian.

The expression “present your bodies,” in conjunction with the word “sacrifice” that follows it, takes on the cultic meaning of “offering a sacrifice, sacrificing.” The call to “offer your body” refers to the whole person; indeed, in Romans 6:13, Paul exhorts believers to “yield yourselves” (Benedict XVI 2009b, 33; Benedict XVI 2007d, 70). A little further on in the same catechesis, the pope specifies: “Paul describes this kind of behaviour as ‘a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.’ Here we encounter the word ‘sacrifice.’ In common usage, it belongs to a sacred context and refers to the killing of an animal, which may be partly burned in honour of the gods and partly eaten during the sacrificers’ feast. Paul, however, uses this word in reference to the life of a Christian. He actually describes this sacrifice using three adjectives. The first one, ‘living,’ speaks of its vitality. The second, ‘holy,’ recalls the Pauline vision of holiness associated not with places or objects, but with the person of the Christian. The third, ‘acceptable unto God,’ perhaps refers to the frequent biblical description of sacrifice as ‘sweet savour unto the LORD’ (cf. Lev 1:13, 17; 23:18; 26:31, etc.)” (Benedict XVI 2009b, 33; Ratzinger/Benedict XVI 2011, 245–249; Ratzinger/Benedict XVI 2009, 140–141).

It follows from the vision presented above that the life of the believer should be a life of sacrifice grounded in love for God. Christians, aware of the immeasurable love that God shows to humanity, are called to give themselves generously in service and love to God and their neighbours. Benedict XVI emphasised that sacrifice is an act of love directed toward God and neighbour. Just as Christ sacrificed His life for the salvation of humanity, Christians are called to a similar spirit of sacrifice in their daily lives. In union with Christ and His sacrifice, they are to make their own lives a sacrifice to God. “In this union, and only in it,” the pope stated, “can we become in Him and with Him a ‘living sacrifice’” (Benedict XVI 2009b, 34; 2008, 18; Borowski 2018, 80–83; Porosło 2023, 51–56; Biedroń 2018, 50–54).

In the opinion of Benedict XVI, many people thirst for truth and admire the courage of those who do not hesitate to give their lives to and for the One in whom they believe. The pope notes that such examples attract others. He further observes that every person today is called to radical Gospel faithfulness. Gratitude is due to God because so many Christians throughout the world continue to bear the highest and most faithful witness to love of God and neighbour,

often through the sacrifice of their own lives, paid for with the blood of martyrdom (Benedict XVI 2007b, 49; 2009e, 48–49; 2010d, 32).

During the funeral Mass for Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger said of the Polish pope: “Our pope—we all know this—never wanted to save his life, to keep it for himself; he wanted to dedicate himself unreservedly, until the very last moment, to Christ and also to us” (Ratzinger 2005b, 21). These words seem to express the essence of understanding and accepting the mystery of the cross in one’s personal life, in union with Christ in His sacrifice. This sacrifice is made present in a bloodless manner in the Eucharist, which Benedict XVI always saw both as a sacrament and as a sacrifice. In the latter sense, he defined the Eucharist as “the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross” (Benedict XVI 2012c, 41; 2009b, 34; 2007a, 37; Benedict XVI 2007d, 1, 7, 10, 11; 2010a, 29–30; 2009c, 10–11; 2006b, 8). In the Eucharist, Jesus gives not “something” but Himself: He offers His body and sheds His blood.

Since the Eucharist is called a sacrifice, the fundamental moral call that flows from this sacrament is the call to a sacrificial attitude throughout one’s life. This attitude of self-giving should be realised above all in the mission of bringing Christ the Saviour to the world. Benedict XVI explained that “the Eucharist, as the sacrament of our salvation, inevitably evokes the unity of Christ and the salvation accomplished by him at the price of His own blood. Therefore, the Eucharistic mystery, which is believed and celebrated, demands the constant education of all for missionary work, the main component of which is the proclamation of Jesus, the only Saviour” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 86; Benedict XVI 2011c, 32). Christ is the only Saviour, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Christ makes this work of salvation present above all in the Eucharist, which is an action of both Christ and the Church (Antoniewicz 2009, 107–113).

It should be emphasised that the Eucharist is first of all the sacrifice of Christ as Priest, “who gives Himself to us, building us up continually as His body” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 14). In instituting this sacrament, Christ pointed to Himself as the Priest who gives Himself up to death and thus offers Himself as a sacrifice (Luke 22:19–20) (Benedict XVI 2009c, 10; 2009a, 20). Pope Benedict explained this truth in the following words: “In instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection. At the same time, he reveals that he himself is the true sacrificial lamb, destined in the Father’s plan from the foundation of the world” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 10). The gift that Jesus made is above all a gift to His Father.

However, in the Eucharist—as on the cross—Christ not only offered Himself to the Father; together with Himself, as Head, He also offered the whole Church. Benedict reminded us of this in *Sacramentum caritatis*: “Catholic doctrine, in fact, affirms that the Eucharist, as the sacrifice of Christ, is also the sacrifice of the Church, and thus of all the faithful” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 70; Benedict XVI 2012b, 18). In offering His sacrifice to the Church, Christ also desired to accept as His own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself while offering Christ’s sacrifice.

Thus, the Church has the duty to offer herself to God in union with Christ’s sacrifice. In the Eucharistic sacrifice, the universal priesthood of the faithful finds its special place and its most profound application. By exercising their priesthood and offering themselves in the Eucharistic sacrifice together with the whole Church, Christians join in the one sacrifice of Christ and thus participate in the most perfect way in the fruits of His sacrifice, precisely as Benedict XVI taught: “The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of His self-giving.” He “draws us into Himself” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 11; Benedict XVI 2005b, 26–27; Benedict XVI 2005a, 13; Ropiak 2006, 268; Jeżyna 2005, 190).

In the Eucharist, it becomes especially clear that the sacrifice of the Christian should be united with the sacrifice of Christ and accomplished according to His pattern: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Eph 5:1–2). Christ offers Himself to His Father through our bodies and our lives. It is Christ Himself who offers us to God, and we offer Him to God. There is no other sacrifice than His sacrifice and no other love than His love (Michalik 2008, 253; Biedroń 2020, 68–70).

Since the Eucharistic sacrifice is the sacrifice of Christ and the Church, and since all believers are members of the Church, it is evident that a Christian who offers him or herself in sacrifice—following the example of Christ—does so, and should do so, not only for him or herself but also for those who are brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, a Christian not only has the right but also the duty to offer him or herself as well as his or her life and spiritual gifts for others. “By sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross,” Benedict XVI points out, “the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 82; Cozzoli 2009, 133–135). It follows that every deed of love can be a deed of sacrifice. “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love

is intrinsically fragmented” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 82; Benedict XVI 2005a 14; Wojtczak 2007, 73; Ptak 2007, 91–93).

Full participation in the sacrifice being offered is also a source of moral transformation of the human heart, which becomes the dwelling place of God. In Benedict XVI’s understanding, the moral transformation implicit in Eucharistic worship is “a tension and a heartfelt yearning to respond to the Lord’s love with one’s whole being, while remaining ever conscious of one’s own weakness” (Benedict XVI 2007d, 82; Seewald 2011, 165). This transformation of the human heart is not the fruit of human effort alone but of God’s action. Nevertheless, the disposition of the will is significant: it must be expressed in readiness to give one’s heart to the Saviour, who has the power to transform it. The Eucharist, in which the transformation of the human heart takes place, plays an important role on the path of perfecting love. This path is associated with effort and human toil, but human effort becomes fruitful when it is sustained by God’s action.

2. Pilgrimage as a sign of the path of faith toward God

An important manifestation of a person’s religious and moral life is going on pilgrimage to shrines. For pilgrims seeking authentic, living sources of faith, shrines are unique places for experiencing forms of Christian prayer “as the Church.” In such holy places, pilgrimages acquire a special meaning (Benedict XVI 2010c, 24–25; John Paul II 1999, 23; 1994, 12–14; CCC 2691).

In Benedict XVI’s approach, “pilgrimage is an expression of religious devotion that is nourished by and at the same time nourishes prayer” (Benedict XVI 2012a, 52). The pope has emphasised that pilgrimage provides an opportunity for a more intense encounter with God and for the strengthening of faith; therefore, he encouraged the faithful to make pilgrimages to holy places, especially shrines. “Of course, someone might criticise pilgrimages,” Benedict argued, “saying that God is everywhere, there is no need to go to another place. But it is also true that faith, in accordance with its essence, is ‘being a pilgrim’” (Benedict XVI 2010b, 22). During pilgrimages, liturgical feasts are celebrated, services are held, and prayers are offered; all these practices strengthen the bond with God and bring Him closer to the faithful. Pilgrimages are therefore an important component of religious practice and have spiritual significance for many believers (Piwko 2011, 179–181).

In his teaching, Benedict XVI explained that pilgrimage is a time of conversion and spiritual transformation. Believers have the opportunity to examine their lives, to convert, and to draw closer to God. “To go on pilgrimage,” the pope stated during his visit to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, “is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art, or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe” (Benedict XVI 2010e, 26; Ostrowski 2014, 36–37). In this perspective, pilgrimage becomes not only a physical effort but also a spiritual act with profound meaning for each participant. A pilgrimage is also an excellent opportunity for expiation; that is, for making amends to God for sins committed by oneself or by others. Our Lady called the children of Fatima to such expiation (Benedict XVI 2010f, 20–21).

According to Benedict XVI, pilgrimage is a sign of God’s special presence and action in the human person. It is also a sign of human love for God, a particular form of rendering to Him the worship that is due. Since God has given, and continues to give, human beings so many proofs of His love, Christians should in return also do something that signifies their love for God. One such sign can be pilgrimage, which is not only a time of penance and conversion of heart but also an act of worship of God as Creator and Lord (Benedict XVI 2010c, 24–25; Ostrowski 2005, 79–107).

Pilgrimage is also a sign of the journey toward eternal happiness. Benedict XVI saw in pilgrimage a symbolic reflection of every person’s path to eternity. “We are all pilgrims,” the pope emphasised during his pastoral visit to Loreto. “We must always be on the way ... to the definitive home, to the Eternal City” (Benedict XVI 2012d, 6; 2010g, 8). By journeying toward God, believers express their faith in the promise of eternal life. Pilgrimage thus becomes an expression of trust that the final encounter with God will bring the fullness of joy and salvation (Benedict XVI 2011a, 7–8). The pope encouraged pilgrims to use pilgrimage as an opportunity to lift their eyes toward eternity. During pilgrimage, believers are called to reflect on the meaning of eternal life and on the pursuit of union with God (Benedict XVI 2010b, 22).

Benedict XVI also emphasised that pilgrimage is a communal experience and a time for building community: remaining together and journeying together toward the destination, which is the sanctuary. Individual pilgrimages certainly have value, but collective pilgrimages possess a particular ecclesial significance.

In pilgrimage, the Church journeys together as a community of believers, thereby strengthening the bonds among members of the community on their journey to God. “It is also and always a pilgrimage,” the pope observed. “It is not only coming out of oneself towards something greater, but is also travelling together. The pilgrimage unites: together we journey towards the other and thus we discover each other” (Benedict XVI 2010b, 22). Pilgrimage thus becomes a symbol of the common journey of the faithful, both on earth and toward eternity.

Of particular value are pilgrimages in which all members of the family participate. They create a religious environment within the family community and bring its members together in a distinctive way. The model to follow, Benedict taught, is the family of Jesus, who made a pilgrimage every year “in order to take part in the rites in the Holy City. Jewish families, like Christian families, pray in the intimacy of the home but they also pray together with the community, recognizing that they belong to the People of God, journeying on; and the pilgrimage expresses exactly this state of the People of God on the move. ... The Holy Family’s pilgrimage was one of faith, of the offering of gifts—a symbol of prayer—and of the encounter with the Lord whom Mary and Joseph already perceived in their Son Jesus” (Benedict XVI 2012a, 51–52).

Furthermore, Benedict XVI emphasised the particular significance of pilgrimage from an ecumenical perspective, seeing it as a valuable space for encounter and dialogue among Christians of different denominations. Joint pilgrimages foster mutual understanding, help to overcome prejudice, and gradually build attitudes of reconciliation among Christian communities. The pope pointed out that the experience of journeying, prayer, and shared effort opens hearts to what unites rather than to what divides, leading to a deeper experience of unity in Christ. In this sense, according to the pope, pilgrimage becomes a clear testimony to God’s presence in human life, a sign of an emerging community, and an image of each believer’s spiritual journey toward full encounter with God (Benedict XVI 2010b, 22).

3. Vows as a radical form of response to God’s call

One of the extraordinary acts of the virtue of religiosity to which Benedict XVI devoted particular attention in his teaching is the vow. The pope presented vows as an essential expression of personal worship through which a person freely and consciously responds to God’s call. In a broader sense, a vow is a voluntary and

deliberate promise made to God, consisting in a commitment to pursue a higher good motivated by the virtue of religiosity. Vows made to God remain a living practice of the faithful, deeply rooted in the tradition of the Church and still relevant in contemporary experience of faith.

Benedict XVI discerned particular religious and spiritual values in this form of devotion, seeing in it a sign of mature faith and readiness to subordinate one's life to God. At the same time, he emphasised that a vow is not merely an external act but requires an interior attitude of fidelity and responsibility. The object of a vow may be either a personal or a material good, provided that it leads to the deepening of one's relationship with God and serves the spiritual growth of the person making the promise. The essence of a vow and its faithful fulfilment can be understood only in connection with the fundamental moral duty of the human person: to serve God and to do His will, in accordance with the Gospel call, "No man can serve two masters" (Mt 6:24) (Pagacz 2023, 55–57).

Pope Benedict XVI usually associated the issue of vows with consecrated life, seeing it as a privileged space for realising the virtue of religiosity. He particularly emphasised the value of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, which lead the consecrated person to the total gift of self—to making a sacrifice of one's life to God. These vows, lived in fidelity and freedom of heart, become not only a form of radical imitation of Christ but also a clear sign of the eschatological orientation of human existence and a witness to the primacy of God in all dimensions of life.

In the pope's opinion, this is particularly manifest in obedience, which is modelled on the obedience of Jesus Christ in love for the Father. It presupposes the capacity to renounce egoism, self-centredness, and one's own preferences, and it requires the rejection of voluntarism and spontaneity. The burden of consecrated persons will be much easier, the pope emphasised in his address to the superiors general of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, the more they "know how to rediscover the value of professed obedience—which has Abraham, our father in the faith, as its model—and even more so that of Christ. It is necessary to take refuge from voluntarism and spontaneity to embrace the logic of the Cross" (Benedict XVI 2006a, 36).

It should be stated that obedience for supernatural reasons is less and less understood today; therefore, appropriate formation is necessary. The motivation of a person who possesses the virtue of obedience is the desire to fulfil God's will, to become more like the Lord Jesus, to undertake penance, and to offer oneself for the salvation of sinners (Derdziuk 2003, 52–66). Benedict XVI further

explained that obedience does not mean unconditional or blind acceptance but requires sound judgment and discernment (Benedict XVI 2007c, 24).

In Benedict XVI's understanding, vows, as an important component of religious life, should be considered—like the mystery of the cross—within the category of Christian paradoxes, which remain incomprehensible to many (cf. Mt 19:11–12). “Consecrated virginity,” the pope said, “cannot be inscribed in the framework of worldly logic; it is the most ‘nonsensical’ of Christian paradoxes and it is not given to all to understand and to live it (cf. Mt 19:11–12)” (Benedict XVI 2006a, 36).

In this context, Benedict spoke of the vow of chastity, which, by giving complete priority to the love of Christ as Bridegroom, involves renunciation: “To belong completely to the Lord, consecrated persons embrace a chaste lifestyle. ... To live a chaste life also means to give up the need to belong, to take on a lifestyle that is sober and modest” (Benedict XVI 2006a, 36; Ślupek 2013, 84–85). An undivided heart, fully devoted to God, is expressed in the ability to control one's body and spirit, both of which are wholly subordinated to the fulfilment of the vocation received from God (Augustyn 2011, 125–130). The choice of a chaste lifestyle, as the pope rightly pointed out, is more demanding today than ever before because the modern world is flooded by a wave of pan-sexualism in which the fundamental truths about human nature and vocation have been distorted. The pope encouraged the preservation and development of a pure heart, which enables a person to devote him or herself more openly to God and neighbour (Benedict XVI 2007c, 23–24).

The vow of poverty occupied a special place in Benedict XVI's reflection. The pope saw it as an essential dimension of consecrated life and authentic imitation of Christ. Evangelical poverty is possible only in the perspective of faith, through which the human person is united with God and learns to entrust himself or herself entirely to divine Providence. Without this attitude, it is impossible properly to discern the mystery of God's gift to humanity—a gift fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who emptied Himself for the salvation of the world. The ultimate and deepest motive for evangelical poverty is love for God, which leads to freedom of heart and readiness to give oneself to Him without reserve (Derdziuk 1999, 28–34).

“St. Francis of Assisi was an exemplary witness of this poverty chosen for love,” the pope emphasised in one of his homilies. “The Franciscan charism, in the history of the Church and of Christian civilization, constitutes a widespread trend of evangelical poverty which has done and continues to do such great good for

the Church and for the human family” (Benedict XVI 2009d, 41; Kiejkowski and Pagacz 2021, 109).

The vow of poverty involves interior freedom from material things and presupposes a spirit of renunciation and mortification. Those who have consecrated themselves to God desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ crucified and poor, immersing themselves in His mystery and choosing humility and poverty after His example. Benedict XVI spoke about this to the clergy and consecrated persons during Vespers at the shrine in Mariazell: “Anyone who wants to follow Christ in a radical way must renounce material goods. But he or she must live this poverty in a way centred on Christ, as a means of becoming inwardly free for their neighbour” (Benedict XVI 2007c, 23; Słupek 2013, 83–84). Poverty chosen as a way of expressing one’s dependence on God should therefore be manifested in everyday behaviour so that it becomes a clear sign for others.

Summary

The foregoing reflections show that an adequate human response to the gift of God’s presence and to God’s saving action in Christ should be a properly formed religious attitude. The moral virtue of religiosity permeates the whole of Christian life, regulating the human person’s relationship with God, with other people, and with the world. It is realised in specific forms of worship, such as sacrifice, pilgrimage, and vows, which give the life of faith a specific direction and interior coherence.

These practices not only express personal faith but also strengthen moral attitudes, promote goodness, and help the believer resist the evil present in the world. At the same time, they remind the human person of his or her inalienable dignity and of the vocation that follows from being a creature and child of God. Benedict XVI consistently sensitised the faithful to the various manifestations of cultic life proper to the virtue of religiosity, pointing to the worship and reverence due to God as Creator and Saviour.

However, acts of moral religiosity require systematic and in-depth formation so that they do not lose their authentic meaning and become merely external custom. Only mature religiosity enables the human person truly to worship God and to respond to His call. The practice of this virtue deepens one’s relationship with God and leads to more responsible and mature relationships with other people.

Benedict XVI emphasised that cultic life and moral life permeate one another, forming a single, indivisible whole. From this perspective, ever fuller participation in the life of Christ and in the building of the ecclesial community takes place. The moral virtue of religiosity, rooted in faith, hope, and love, therefore remains an indispensable element of the Christian path to salvation.

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