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Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Faith on the Basis of Benedict XVI's Encyclicals

Filozoficzna analiza pojęcia wiary na podstawie encyklik Benedykta XVI

ABSTRACT: The article deals with the problem of faith based on three encyclicals of Benedict XVI. The author pays attention to what and how the pope says about faith from the point of view of philosophical analysis (realistic trend). It is important to show the essence, purpose and structure of the act of faith. The conducted study allows us to conclude that Benedict XVI defends the claim that supernatural faith is the substance (basis) of invisible things (Letter to the Hebrews). Thanks to it, it becomes possible to present the goal in the form of eternal (happy) life. Its updated demands the involvement of intellect and will in an act of faith. In this way, the pope emphasizes that faith is constituted by both purposeful and subjective reasons (the structure of faith). The philosophical analysis of the concept of faith presented in the article is not only about quoting the position of Benedict XVI, but also about recalling the views of those thinkers (Bacon, Luther, Kant) with whom the pope argues.

KEYWORDS: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, substance, Immanuel Kant, Martin Luther, Thomas Aquinas, realist philosophy, act of faith, philosophical analysis of faith, reductive concepts of faith

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł podejmuje problem wiary w oparciu o trzy encykliki Benedykta XVI. Autor zwraca uwagę na to, co i w jaki sposób papież mówi o wierze z punktu widzenia analizy filozoficznej w nurcie realistycznym. W tym podejściu ważne jest ukazanie istoty, celu oraz struktury aktu wiary. Przeprowadzone studium pozwala wnioskować, że Benedykt XVI broni twierdzenia, które głosi, że wiara nadprzyrodzona to podstawa (baza, substancja) rzeczy niewidzialnych (List do Hebrajczyków). Dzięki wierze możliwe staje się uobecnienie celu w postaci życia wiecznego (szczęśliwego). Zaktualizowanie pełni życia domaga się zaangażowania intelektu i woli w akcie wiary. W ten sposób papież podkreśla, że wiarę konstytuują zarówno racje przedmiotowe (cel), jak i podmiotowe (struktura wiary). Filozoficzna analiza pojęcia wiary ukazana

w artykule nie polega tylko na przytoczeniu stanowiska Benedykta XVI, lecz dotyczy również przywołania poglądów tych myślicieli (Bacon, Luter, Kant), z którymi papież polemizuje.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Joseph Ratzinger, Benedykt XVI, substancja, Immanuel Kant, Marcin Luter, Tomasz z Akwinu, filozofia realistyczna, akt wiary, filozoficzna analiza wiary, redukcyjne koncepcje wiary

Introduction

Pope Benedict XVI, whose pontificate covered the years from 2005 to 2013, is the author of three encyclicals. The first is dedicated to love (*Deus Caritas Est*), the second to hope (*Spe Salvi*) and the last to integral human development (*Caritas in Veritate*). Although the issue of faith is the main theme in none of them, each of the encyclicals addresses the problem of faith to a greater or lesser extent, presenting its various aspects.¹ Bearing in mind that the Pope authored numerous publications and statements dedicated to the virtue of faith, it is worth noting what and how he writes about faith in his encyclicals.

This study is an attempt to reconstruct the concept of faith from three papal documents. However, faith is not explored from the point of view of theology, but realist philosophy which provides a comprehensive cognition of reality. It focuses above all on the essence, the object (purpose) and the structure of faith. This makes it possible to know what faith is (essence) and what its subjective (structure) and objective (purpose) conditions are. Quotations from the Pope (including those of J. Ratzinger), as well as those from St Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*) and St John Paul II (*Fides et Ratio*), situate the problem in the context of the teaching of the Catholic Church.

¹ It is reasonable to assume that Benedict XVI intended to prepare an encyclical on the faith as a culmination of the Year of Faith that began on 11 October 2012. As he stepped down on 28 February 2013, the Year of Faith ended under the pontificate of his successor, Pope Francis, on 24 November 2013. For this reason, the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013) was promulgated by Francis and not Benedict XVI. However, the latter is the author of the apostolic letter *Porta Fidei* (11 October 2011) for the indiction of the year of faith, in which the Pope addresses many issues related to faith. Cf. E. Guerreiro, *Świadek prawdy. Biografia Benedykta XVI*, transl. J. Tomaszek, Kraków 2018, pp. 524–525 (English edition: E. Guerreiro, *Benedict XVI: His Life and Thought*, transl. W.J. Melcher, San Francisco 2018).

The essence of faith (definition)

The three papal encyclicals provide the following attributes of faith: “Christian faith,” “religious faith,” “biblical faith,” “apostolic faith,” “faith in eternal life,” “faith in Jesus Christ.” Despite their diversity, Benedict XVI never explains the specific meaning of any of them. However, on reading the encyclicals, one can conclude that the Pope uses them interchangeably and identifies them with faith in the supernatural sense. Instead, he focuses on clarifying what faith is in itself (faith in general).

In addition to the above terms, the notions of “rational faith” (Kant) and “faith in progress” (Bacon) also occur in the same texts. They do not carry the supernatural meaning, but a natural one,² since they do not refer to the revelation of God. In addition, they can be recognised as true without the support of grace, but exclusively with the use of man’s natural faculties (intellective and appetitive). At this point it should be mentioned that the Pope also uses the term “crisis of faith.”³

The problem of the definition of (supernatural) faith is addressed by Benedict XVI primarily in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*. In order to show the essence of faith, the Pope quotes and discusses its definition from the Letter to the Hebrews. In none of the other encyclicals does he quote this definition or other definitions of faith. In addition to the Letter to the Hebrews, the Pope refers to statements by thinkers who also commented on and explained the meaning of faith, most notably St Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther or Immanuel Kant.⁴

Benedict XVI’s explanation of what faith is mainly based on two terms used in the definition. He draws attention to the meaning of the concepts of “substance” and “proof.” To this end, he juxtaposes the Greek and Latin equivalents of both terms.

The text from the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:1), named by Benedict XVI as “a kind of definition of faith,” reads in *Spe Salvi* (no. 7): “Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen.” The central concept of this definition is the Greek word *hypostasis*: “Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις,

² On the various types and aspects of faith, see e.g. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 30–32; K. Tarnowski, *Usłyszeć niewidzialne. Zarys filozofii wiary* [To Hear What Is Unseen. An Outline of the Philosophy of Faith], Kraków 2005, pp. 24–58.

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17; P.N. Cain, *Technology and Freedom: Pope Benedict XVI on Faith, Reason, and Politics*, “Perspectives on Political Science” 41 (2012), p. 3.

⁴ St Thomas Aquinas devotes a separate article in which he explains the definition of faith given in the Letter to the Hebrews. See STh 2–2, q. 4, a. 1. He also quotes other definitions of faith in subsequent articles.

πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων.”⁵ It was translated as “realisation/confidence/substance/assurance,” and *substantia* in Latin (e.g. in the Vulgate). Faith is then the substance of those goods (things) which are expected.⁶

The Pope mentions that for the Church Fathers and medieval theologians, the translation of the Greek word *hypostasis* was not a problem. They rendered it with the Latin term *substantia*. At that time, the Latin text of the definition of faith, as formulated in the early Church and also quoted in the encyclical *Spe Salvi*, reads: “Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium.”⁷

Benedict XVI observes that St Thomas Aquinas introduced terminology of the philosophical tradition which modified, as it were, the understanding of the concept of substance, and with it the question of faith. Aquinas, who in *Summa Theologica* also commented on and clarified the definition of faith given in the Letter to the Hebrews, introduced the term *habitus* in place of the term *hypostasis* (*substantia*). Then the definition of faith proposed by him is: “Fides est habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum assentire non apparentibus.”⁸ He thus conceived faith as “a habitus, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see” (*Spe Salvi*, no. 7).⁹

⁵ See <https://ruchbiblijny.pl/ebook/greeknt/heb.htm> [access: 17.06.2023].

⁶ Sometimes the term *hypostasis* is translated as “certainty.” Cf. T. Horak, *Teologia wiary w Liście do Hebrajczyków* [The Theology of Faith in the Letter to the Hebrews], “Colleganea Theologica” 61 (1991), p. 50.

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, no. 7. The concept of “substance” was already used by ancient philosophers (Aristotle paid particular attention to it). They used the term to denote a kind of being which is entitled to an independent existence. Moreover, “substance” is a subject for other kinds of being (e.g. accidents, relations). This means that “substance” expresses the objective state of things and specifies “being” *sensu stricte*. Cf. A. Maryniarczyk, *Koncepcja substancji w ujęciu Arystotelesa i św. Tomasza z Akwinu* [Concept of Substance in the View of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas], [in:] *Substancja. Natura. Prawo naturalne* [Substance. Nature. Natural Law], eds. A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stępień, P. Gonddek, Lublin 2006, pp. 89–119.

⁸ See http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_IIb/Q4 [access: 17.06.2023]; cf. M. Płotka, *Habitus w koncepcji Arystotelesa i jego średniowiecznych komentatorów* [Habitus in Philosophy of Aristotle and His Medieval Commentators], “Hybris” 31/4 (2015), pp. 1–20.

⁹ Cf. STh 2–2, q. 4, a. 1; J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo* [Introduction to Christianity], transl. Z. Włodkowska, Kraków 1994, pp. 39–44. On the subject of *habitus*, see, e.g., STh 1–2, q. 49–54. Elsewhere, Aquinas explains how faith is to be understood as a substance: “faith is called a substance not because it is in the genus of substance, but because it bears a certain similarity to a substance, viz., insofar as it is a first inception of and, as it were, a sort of foundation for the whole spiritual life—in just the way that

Although Thomas Aquinas uses the expression “habitus mentis,” he does not actually deny what the notion of “substance” renders. Thus, he emphasises that faith is an act of the mind (intellect). He thus draws attention to its subjective aspect, which is not emphasised in, for example, the Letter to the Hebrews. He also points out that in order to function properly, the intellect requires this “habitus.” In matters pertaining to God, the “habitus” of the intellect is faith. Ultimately, this understanding of faith does not depart from the understanding of faith as a substance. Again, it is an assurance of the presence of things yet to come. Actually, they are already present, i.e. initiated, given “in embryo” (potency) (*Spe Salvi*, no. 7), but for dynamic development, i.e. to full actualisation.¹⁰

Benedict XVI points out that there was a dispute among exegetes on the key concepts used in the definition of faith in the Letter to the Hebrews, which began at the time of the Reformation. This mainly concerned the concepts of “substance” and “proof,” and arose, among other things, from the clash between two philosophical positions: the realist and the nominalist.

In his reflections on faith as the substance of things to come, Benedict XVI referred to the thought of Luther, who interpreted and explained the issue of faith differently.¹¹ Since Luther did not use the concept of the essence of things (nominalism), in the Protestant view substance cannot denote an objective state of things, but a subjective (internal), i.e. human-dependent, attitude of the believer.¹² For this reason, also the notion of “proof” contained in the definition of faith acquired a different basis and was linked to the attitude of the believer.

The Bible in German in Martin Luther’s translation gives the following definition of faith: “Es ist aber der Glaube eine feste Zuversicht dessen, was

a substance is the foundation of all beings” (<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/translat/aquinas5.htm> [access: 30.11.2023]); cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Kwestie dyskutowane o prawdziwie* [Issues on Truth], vol. 1, transl. A. Aduszkiewicz, L. Kuczyński, J. Ruszczyński, Kęty 1988, p. 636 (q. 14, a. 2, ad 1).

¹⁰ Cf. J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Part 1: *Od chrztu w Jordanie do przemienienia*, transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2007, p. 71 (English edition: J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, transl. A.J. Walker, New York 2007); *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 163.

¹¹ Luther also commented on the Letter to the Hebrews and the concept of faith contained therein. Cf. D. Nowakowski, *Rozum i wiara w myśli Marcina Lutra* [Reason and Faith in the Thought of Martin Luther], “Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Philosophy” 13 (2016), p. 257.

¹² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 7; V. Possenti, *Faith and Reason: What Relationship?*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 59/1 (2016), p. 11.

man hofft, und ein Nichtzweifeln an dem, was man nicht sieht.”¹³ The term *Zuversicht* is used in the sense of “conviction” rather than “substance.” Thus, faith is viewed from a subjective rather than an objective perspective.

A consequence of the subjective approach to faith is also that it is no longer “proof/evidence” of things to come, but a “conviction/assurance/confidence.” The latter has a subjective sense, while “proof” denotes an objective one.¹⁴ In view of this, the Pope points out that Protestants tend to depart from this kind of interpretation of faith.

A contemporary ecumenical German translation of the New Testament renders the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews in this way: “Glaube aber ist: Feststehen in dem, was man erhofft, Überzeugtsein von Dingen, die man nicht sieht,”¹⁵ which is translated in *Spe Salvi* as: “faith is: standing firm in what one hopes, being convinced of what one does not see.”¹⁶ According to Benedict XVI, this interpretation of faith attracts few adherents today. Even Luther’s followers draw the conclusion that faith is not tantamount to a mere expectation of future things, but “it gives us something” in the present. Therefore, faith not only foreshadows but also makes present what is yet to come. For this reason, the Pope points out, a common (Catholic and Protestant) interpretation of the concept of faith is possible. It presupposes a return to the idea of “substance.”

For a deeper explanation of the meaning of faith and understanding it as a “substance,” Benedict XVI refers to another passage from the Letter to the Hebrews (10:34). It mentions those persons who experienced persecution because of their faith. They were affected by, among other things, the loss of possessions (Gr. *hyparchontom*, Lat. *bonum*). However, they obtained better and lasting things (Gr. *hyparxin*, Lat. *substantiam*). The plundered property (*hyparchonta*) is “the means of support,” “the basis” (“substance”) for earthly life. They guarantee the basic conditions for existence and sustenance, but their absence does not mean the loss of life. In addition to these, there remains a “basis” in the form of faith, which cannot be taken away. Faith as an enduring basis has acquired a greater value than the material base. It has become a new foundation (base) on which to base the deeper dimension of life.¹⁷

¹³ *Die Bibel nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers*, <https://www.die-bibel.de/bibeln/online-bibeln/lesen/LU17/HEB.11/Hebr%C3%A4er-11> [access: 17.06.2023].

¹⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 7.

¹⁵ *Die Bibel. Altes und Neues Testament. Einheitsübersetzung*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2002.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 7.

¹⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 8, 13, 28; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara i egzystencja* [Faith and Existence], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Przyszłość wiary. Refleksje teologiczne* [The Future of Faith. Theological Reflections], transl. J. Marecki, Kraków 2019, p. 42; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara*

Benedict XVI explains that the attitude of both the persecuted martyrs and of those who abandon everything for Christ in the name of faith is proof of the existence of things that are not visible. What is visible is the attitude of believers. Faith and the way of living, thinking and acting that follows it actually constitute the new principle (substance) of the existence and future reality that is thus already made present.¹⁸ The testimony of the lives of believers constitutes evidence of the truthfulness of things beyond the natural cognition of man, but available through the supernatural cognition, which is faith.

The purpose of faith (objective rationales)

Does faith have a sense? What is the purpose of faith? Is faith capable of sustaining and transforming the life of contemporary man? These are the kinds of questions Benedict XVI does not leave unanswered. Referring to the dialogue that takes place during the administration of the sacrament of baptism, he stresses that faith is closely linked to eternal life.¹⁹ On the one hand, baptism signifies incorporation into the community of believers (the Church) and the beginning of a process of faith development (rebirth) and, on the other hand, it points to the purpose of faith, which is eternal life. Thus, faith is the key to this kind of life. Its essential role is to guide to participate in eternal life. Since

a teologia [Faith and Theology], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Kościół. Pielgrzymująca wspólnota wiary* [The Church. Pilgrim Community of Faith], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2005, p. 15; Benedykt XVI, *Moja wiara* [My Faith], transl. A. Gogolin, Kraków 2023, p. 9; J. Węclawik, *Horyzonty antropologiczne encyklik papieża Benedykta XVI* [The Anthropological Horizons of Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclicals], "Nurt SVD" 152/2 (2022), p. 229. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matt 6:25).

¹⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 8–9. Furthermore, drawing on the Letter to the Hebrews (10:36–39), the Pope adds that believers are characterised by an attitude of patience and perseverance (Gr. *hypomone*). The opposite attitude implies a lack of courage and fear of the truth (Gr. *hypostole*).

¹⁹ The question what faith gives us is included, for example, in *Obrzędach chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych* [Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults], Katowice 1988, p. 43. A synonym for eternal life is salvation, for example: "Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:8–9). Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 15; D. Wąsek, *Foundations of the Definition of Faith in Dialogue with Porta Fidei by Benedict XVI*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 62/9 (2015), pp. 162–166.

faith is not an end in itself, one believes in order to attain (possess) eternal life.²⁰ Thus, in baptism one affirms the conviction that faith is the substance of a life that transcends temporality.

Benedict XVI not only points to the purpose of faith, but also explains this purpose. He therefore undertakes to answer the question of what life is and what eternity is. Such an undertaking seems necessary in order to demonstrate that eternal life is appropriate for man and is his natural (often unconscious) desire.

A wrong understanding of eternity can deter possible followers. On the other hand, a correct understanding of the essence of eternity makes man strive and care for faith, which is the means leading to eternity.²¹ Otherwise, faith turns out to be something trivial and superfluous. In this context, the Pope notes that one of the obstacles to the expectation of eternal (future) life is attachment to and desire for temporal (present) life. There is no shortage of proponents of putting temporality before eternity. For many, the focus on faith and eternal life is an obstacle to preserving and pursuing the temporal life, which they value more highly. The Pope admits that for some people “to continue living for ever—endlessly—appears more like a curse than a gift.” Prolonging life indefinitely is “ultimately unbearable.”²²

Correcting this kind of thinking, Benedict XVI points to a kind of contradiction that appears in the human understanding of life and eternity. He explains that, on the one hand, man does not want to die (he postpones death indefinitely) and, on the other hand, he does not want to live indefinitely.²³ Overcoming the above *aporia* involves what, following St Augustine, Benedict XVI calls “happiness” or “the blessed life.” The trouble, however, is that it is difficult to explain what it is. It is easier to claim that the present life is not a happy life.

One of the intuitions that the Pope shares on this issue is that a happy life is certainly not subject to death. It is not even contradicted by the fact that man has no experience of living in such a way. The second intuition is related to the fact that the same man desires a happy life and even comes to the conclusion that it must exist, but at the same time he does not know what it is

²⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 10; J. Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, Part 2: *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, transl. W. Szymona, Kielce 2011, pp. 95–98 (English edition: J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, transl. P.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011); STh 2–2, q. 2, a. 2.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 3.

²² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 10.

²³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 11.

and for this reason he fears it.²⁴ In the Pope's view, this known and unknown and at the same time ultimate reality is precisely what the term "eternal life" is attributed to.²⁵ The Pope realises that it is insufficient to convey the essence of a happy life.²⁶ He explains that it can be compared to being immersed in an ocean of infinite love, accompanied by joy and fullness of life.²⁷ Man does not possess this life by himself or for himself. It is a relationship with that which is his source.²⁸ This kind of life is only possible with God.²⁹

The understanding of faith and its purpose developed in the Church and Catholic theology encountered criticism in the modern era. This was due to the clash between the old and new ways of perceiving the world and a happy life. If hitherto faith had guaranteed happiness, with the new understanding of happiness also faith gained a different perception.

According to Benedict XVI, the abandonment of the vision of a happy life developed by Christianity and the supernatural faith leading to it is linked to ideas born in the modern age. Among those who contributed to their formulation was Francis Bacon, who proposed and applied a new method of investigating the world and practising science. "Science and praxis" (experimentation), creating mathematical natural science, made it possible to learn the laws of nature more effectively than the methods previously used (e.g. syllogism) in order to rule

²⁴ "Eternal', in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; 'life' makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12). Similar intuitions resounded in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy], vol. 3, Warszawa 2002, pp. 64–67.

²⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1024.

²⁶ "To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality – this we can only attempt" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12).

²⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 12; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1045.

²⁸ "If we are in relation with him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life. Then we 'live'" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 27); cf. Benedykt XVI, *Wiara, nadzieja, miłość. Przewodnik po życiu chrześcijańskim* [Faith, Hope, Love. A Guide to the Christian Life], ed. T. Samulnik, Kraków 2022, pp. 66–67; Benedykt XVI, *Wiara to nie idea, lecz życie* [Faith Is Not an Idea but Life], transl. R. Skrzypczak, [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Co to jest chrześcijaństwo? Testament duchowy* [What is Christianity? A Spiritual Testament], Kraków 2023, p. 124; Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 10.

²⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 14.

the world.³⁰ Thanks to this, a belief spread that God's commissioned dominion over creation, lost through sin, had been restored to man. So far, the recovery of what man had forfeited (a happy life) has been possible through faith in Christ. In modernity, this is done by "dominion over creation" (nature). Thus faith has lost its original meaning and has been displaced onto the level of "private and other-worldly affairs," i.e. irrelevant for the world.³¹ According to the Pope, this kind of modern vision of scientific knowledge and worldview shaped the crisis of faith (also present today).

Supernatural faith was replaced by "faith in progress," which Benedict XVI calls "the ideology of progress." Only this type of faith found justification in the context of modern ideas. The hope was to replace the kingdom of God with the kingdom of man. This was to be achieved, among other things, by new discoveries and inventions as a result of an interplay of science (theory) and praxis. According to Bacon, man is saved by science, not by faith. Progress does not consist in and contribute to union with God, but to a life capable of knowing and mastering nature.³²

A special place in the idea of modern progress was occupied by reason and, with it, freedom. Progress meant first and foremost an increase in the dominion of reason, which was conceived as "a force of good and a force for good."³³ Progress manifested itself in the overcoming of the various kinds of dependency occurring between faith, Church and State. In this way, perfect (unlimited) freedom could become present.³⁴ The Pope emphasises that progress aimed at the creation of the rule of reason, in which humanity remains completely free (this kind of tendency was attempted, for example, by the French Revolution).³⁵

³⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 70; P. Jaroszyński, *Nauka i jej cele w kontekście historii* [Science and its Purposes in the Historical Context], [in:] *Spór o cel. Problematyka celu i celowościowego wyjaśnienia* [A Dispute over the Purpose. The Problem of the Purpose and Teleological Explanations], eds. A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stępień, P. Gondek, Lublin 2008, pp. 57–71.

³¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17.

³² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 17; J. Ratzinger, *Wiara – prawda – tolerancja. Chryścijaństwo a religie świata* [Faith – Truth – Tolerance. Christianity and the World's Religions], transl. R. Zajączkowski, Kielce 2005, pp. 111–112.

³³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 18.

³⁴ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Wolność i prawda* [Freedom and Truth], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Prawda i wolność. Rozważania o współczesności* [Truth and Freedom. Reflections on Modernity], transl. R. Zajączkowski, Kraków 2020, pp. 143–144.

³⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 18.

A significant role in the field of the modern understanding of a happy life and the method of achieving it was played by Immanuel Kant.³⁶ The Enlightenment philosophy he developed aimed to realise the ideals of a kingdom without God. Ultimately, reason laid claim to taking His place and, as a fully autonomous power, also aimed to establish moral law. A path conducive to the establishment of the new order was Kant's proposed new understanding of faith, which he called pure practical rational faith.³⁷ This type of faith formulated on the basis of practical cognition did not refer to revealed truths, but to the postulates of practical reason. According to the philosopher from Königsberg, the kingdom of man begins where supernatural "ecclesiastical faith" is abandoned and replaced by "a pure rational faith."³⁸ At the same time, it should be remembered that the goal of this faith is not union with God (eternal life), but *summum bonum*, i.e. the synthesis of morality (virtue) and happiness proportionate to it.³⁹

Benedict XVI explains that similar expectations of faith in progress also occurred after the Age of Enlightenment. As a result of the development of technology and industrialisation, a new type of society was created in which the working class and proletariat dominated. The way to direct them and use them to build the New Jerusalem (the happy life) was proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It led through criticism of the existing order and revolution (the transformation of everything). It was dominated by politics, which replaced both science and faith.⁴⁰ However, a vision of this kind was

³⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 19.

³⁷ Cf. M. Sieńkowski, *O wierze i religii w systemie Immanuela Kanta* [About Faith and Religion in the System of Immanuel Kant], "Człowiek w Kulturze" 28 (2018), pp. 421–437; Sieńkowski, *Przedmiotowy aspekt wiary według Immanuela Kanta* [The Objective Aspect of Faith According to Immanuel Kant], "Studia Elckie" 20/4 (2018), pp. 429–439; A. Tomaszewska, *Kant's Reconception of Religion and Contemporary Secularism*, "Roczniki Filozoficzne" 64/4 (2016), p. 130.

³⁸ Cf. I. Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. T.K. Abbott, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5683/5683-h/5683-h.htm> [access: 30.11.2023]; cf. I. Kant, *Krytyka praktycznego rozumu*, tłum. J. Gałęcki, Warszawa 2012, pp. 230–233; Benedykt XVI, *O Wierze, rozumie i uniwersytecie* [On Faith, Reason and the University], [in:] Benedykt XVI, *Poznanie prawdy. Wykłady papieskie* [Knowing the Truth. Papal Lectures], Kraków 2017, p. 39; J. Corkery, *Reflection on the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI)*, "Acta Theologica" 32/2 (2012), p. 27.

³⁹ Cf. I. Kant, *Krytyka praktycznego rozumu*, op. cit., pp. 180–181 (I. Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, op. cit.); M. Sieńkowski, *Koncepcja dobra najwyższego w ujęciu Tomasza z Akwinu i Immanuela Kanta* [Conception of the Highest Good according to Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant], "Nurt SVD" 145/1 (2019), pp. 244–247.

⁴⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 20.

not free from error. The Pope recognises that it was based on materialism and the economic conditions associated with it.⁴¹

In Benedict XVI's view, the above attempts to create a new world, i.e. to realise the desire for a happy life, focused on only certain aspects of human life, neglecting the holistic view. In the Pope's opinion, progress in the material field should not be neglected, however, it also demands development in the moral field.⁴² Along with the acquisition of knowledge and mastery over nature, it is also necessary to perfect freedom, which leads to the improvement of the will and the ability to decide responsibly.⁴³ The learning of freedom, in turn, involves knowing and choosing the good, and therefore also the supreme good, which is God. Man is not saved by science or politics, but by the immortal love of God, which gives new meaning to life.⁴⁴ Whoever experiences this kind of love grasps what a happy life (living life to the full) is.⁴⁵

The structure of faith (subjective rationales)

Within the philosophical analysis of the concept of faith, attention is usually drawn to its subjective conditions. Since faith pertains to the invisible (cf. Heb 11:1), it demands the cooperation of man's personal faculties. Therefore, the act of faith is constituted by the actions of the intellect and the will, which are facilitated by divine grace. Finally, it remains to address the problem of the structure of the act of faith in relation to the papal encyclicals.

The encyclicals point to the conclusion that Benedict XVI focuses more on the relation between faith and reason, and the mutual benefits of this relation, and less on the role of reason and will in faith. In this first aspect, faith and reason are treated as two separate types of cognition.⁴⁶ Reason and will, on the other hand, are necessary components of the act of religious faith. Sometimes

⁴¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 21.

⁴² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 22, 24; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 31.

⁴³ "Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 24); cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28; J. Ratzinger, *Europa Benedykta w kryzysie kultur* [Benedict's Europe in the Crisis of Cultures], transl. W. Dzieża, Czestochowa 2005, pp. 57–61; P. Blanco Sarto, *Faith in the Year of Faith. Ratzinger's Proposal*, "Polonia Sacra" 17/2 (2013), pp. 9–10.

⁴⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, nos. 25, 26–27.

⁴⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 27; Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 10.

⁴⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 5; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 9; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 158; M. Sieńkowski, *Wiara a inne typy poznania* [Faith and Other Types of Knowledge], "Civitas et Lex" 4 (2014), pp. 69–81.

the will is treated by the Pope interchangeably with love and even with the heart. If he refers the heart to the good, he does not go beyond the sphere of aspiration (volition), since it falls within the sphere of the act of faith.⁴⁷

A characteristic feature of Benedict XVI's teaching is to show the relation between faith and reason as a relation that by no means generate conflict between them. Above all, he points to the balance that occurs between faith and reason and the mutual benefits of their interaction. Faith and reason (science) do not generate conflict because their common purpose is the pursuit of truth, which cannot contradict itself.⁴⁸

The Pope repeatedly emphasises the important role of reason in both human life and religious faith. To a somewhat lesser extent, he notes some observations about the will itself. In his view, overcoming what is unreasonable is a task also for the Christian faith. On the other hand, reason is capable of opposing God, of putting itself in His place, of abusing its dominion (cognition). This makes the dialogue between reason and faith all the more necessary, which also translates into a dialogue between believers and those who reject faith.⁴⁹

Benedict XVI explains that reason, which is constantly undergoing development, needs to be open to faith.⁵⁰ This means that reason should not remain indifferent to what faith proposes. Otherwise, it remains closed only within its own boundaries (immanence) and does not reach what is beyond the natural order of knowledge and understanding. The point is that the development of reason also includes the cognition of transcendent reality. Recognising it means expanding the concept of reason and thus also the capacity to use it.⁵¹

Reason also needs to be open to the discernment of good and evil. Benedict XVI points out that reason is called human when it guides the will.⁵² That

⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, *Pora Fidei*, no. 10; P. Blanco-Sarto, *Thomistic Themes in Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Theology*, "Wrocław Theological Review" 30/1 (2022), pp. 35–66.

⁴⁸ Por. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 5; Benedict XVI, *Pora Fidei*, no. 12; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 34; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 159; G. Bugajak, "Reason and Faith". *The Problem of the Separation of Disciplines*, "Studia Philosophiae Christianae" 56 (2020), Special Issue 2, pp. 152–154.

⁴⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 57; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 41; A. Proniewski, *Problematyka wiary w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI* [The Problem of Faith in the Teaching of Pope Benedict XVI], "Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej" 10 (2011), p. 116.

⁵⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 45–48.

⁵¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, nos. 31, 70, 74; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 67; K. Kaucha, *Joseph Ratzinger's Argument for the Epistemological Seriousness of Faith*, "Verbum Vitae" 39/4 (2021), pp. 1282–1283; M. Sieńkowski, *Wiara a racjonalność* [Faith and Rationality], *Flk* 2020, pp. 93–96.

⁵² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 13.

is to say, the will directed towards the good needs reason to recognise the real good and to guard against the choice of a merely apparent good. Thus faith and reason work together for the good.⁵³ Since there are different kinds of freedom (e.g. practical, moral) depending on the purpose, it is necessary to be able to harmonise them on the basis of a common criterion of evaluation, which is the foundation and purpose of freedom. Benedict XVI insists it is in God. In this sense, man needs God and reason needs faith.

Reason and faith rely on each other in the perspective of full human development.⁵⁴ Reason needs purification by faith because it is not omnipotent. And faith needs reason in order to be a human faith.⁵⁵ Since faith makes the encounter with God possible, it is through faith that new horizons open up for man. They go beyond the natural scope of reason. Therefore, faith is a purifying force for reason. One could say that faith frees reason from blindness.⁵⁶

Benedict XVI refers on several occasions to the biblical formulation proclaiming that faith works through love (cf. Gal 5:6).⁵⁷ This means that the principle of faith is not knowledge, although this is an essential component of faith, but love. It is about the kind of love that responds to the love experienced from God. In this way, two dimensions meet in faith: the cognitive and the affective. In this way, faith actualises both the cognition of God who reveals Himself (makes Himself known) and the love which corresponds to the love

⁵³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, nos. 34, 75; R. Słupek, *Teologia aktu wiary w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI w Roku Wiary* [Theology of the Act of Faith in the Teaching of Benedict XVI in the Year of Faith], "Wrocław Theological Review" 21/2 (2013), p. 123.

⁵⁴ "Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfil their true nature and their mission" (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23).

⁵⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, no. 23; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 56. "[...] reason and faith can come to each other's assistance. Only together will they save man. Entranced by an exclusive reliance on technology, reason without faith is doomed to flounder in an illusion of its own omnipotence. Faith without reason risks being cut off from everyday life" (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 74; cf. no. 56).

⁵⁶ "From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28); cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 16.

⁵⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 1, 31, 33. In the context of the relationship between faith and love (works), Benedict XVI has written: "Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path" (Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 14; cf. no. 6).

received from God.⁵⁸ This is why, the Pope emphasises that faith that prompts love is inseparable with love. A similar relationship exists between faith and hope. Ultimately, the Pope affirms the truth proclaiming that the three theological virtues are intimately connected.⁵⁹

It is worth adding that the issue of love as a form of faith is also taken up by St Thomas Aquinas. Although Benedict XVI does not directly refer to his reflections, which are thoroughly substantiated, he draws similar conclusions. Aquinas emphasises first of all that the end (good) which is the object of the will determines the kind of action. In turn, what differentiates human acts is the form. And since faith aims at eternal life (*credere in Deum*), which is the object of the will, the act leading to it must be love (the pursuit of the divine good). Therefore, love is said to form, that is, to perfect and shape the act of faith.⁶⁰

Conclusion

It might seem that an attempt to reconstruct the concept of faith only on the basis of Benedict XVI's encyclicals, none of which concentrates directly on the issue of faith, is a misguided endeavour. It turns out, however, that the Pope ties the theological virtues together and, when discussing even one of them, raises issues concerning the others. In this way, it has become possible to consider the problem of faith addressed in three papal documents. Their content has made it possible to highlight to some extent those aspects of faith that play an important role from a philosophical (intellectual) point of view.

According to Benedict XVI, supernatural faith is first and foremost the substance (basis) of things unseen, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews particularly emphasises. Through faith it becomes possible to make present (gradually actualise) eternal life (fullness of life), which is the purpose of faith. Referring to faith as an improvement of the intellect proposed by St Thomas Aquinas, the Pope explains that this interpretation does not contradict that of faith as a substance, but further emphasises its subjective aspect. It does not mean the same thing as the internal (subjective) attitude emphasised by Luther,

⁵⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 9–10; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 3; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nos. 7–8.

⁵⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 39; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1812–1813; P. Seewald, *Benedykt XVI. Życie* [Benedict XVI. Life], transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2021, p. 818; W. Zyzak, *Faith According to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger*, "The Person and the Challenges" 3/1 (2013), p. 145.

⁶⁰ Cf. STh 2–2, q. 4, a. 3; Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 33.

but expresses the involvement of intellect and will in the act of faith. Since it is constituted by objective (purpose) and subjective rationales (structure of faith) relating to a transcendent God, Benedict XVI opposes the reductive and naturalistic conception of faith developed by Kant.

The Pope also entered into a discussion with the proponents of the modern concept of so-called “faith in progress.” In his opinion, by equating salvation (fullness of life) to the knowledge of the laws of nature, its mastery and the power of science, on the one hand, the holistic development of man is ignored, and on the other, God and His role in the salvific process is eliminated. The “faith in progress” presented by Bacon, according to Benedict XVI, turns out to be erroneous, because it is based on premises favouring reason (Kant) and freedom, while ignoring the moral growth of man.

Although the selected aspects of faith presented in the encyclicals cannot provide a comprehensive overview of this issue, they offer a preliminary reconstruction of the concept of faith as understood by Pope Benedict XVI, which can be supplemented and deepen with other statements of Pope Benedict XVI. Nevertheless, the issues raised in this paper correspond to the teaching of the Catholic Church, never diverging from the conclusions put forward by St Thomas Aquinas or St John Paul II.

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