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THE LOVE OF GOD AS A GIFT AND A COMMANDMENT  
IN THE LIGHT OF THE ENCYCLICAL  
*DEUS CARITAS EST* BY BENEDICT XVI

**Abstract.** Love, which according to Pope Benedict XVI is the essence of Christianity, must be re-presented (presented anew) today, because God loves everyone without exception. The message of divine love must also be properly explained. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to present theological and moral truth about God who loves and is love in the light of the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI contained in the encyclical *Deus caritas est*. The work shows reciprocal love of God and man, with particular emphasis on the priority of God's love. The issue of human response to God's love, which finds its fulfillment in the commandment of love, is further illustrated. Moreover, the relationship between the love of God and the love of neighbor, which have always been interpreted together, has been presented.

**Key words:** God; love of God; Jesus Christ; man; commandment of love; encyclical; Benedict XVI.

Due to its fundamental importance, the theme of Christian love has been present in the theological reflection of the Catholic Church for centuries. This does not mean, however, that today this topic is outdated in any way. On the contrary, the declaration that God is love and the human answer to the Divine love must be passed on to people today too, because, as Pope Benedict XVI points out in his encyclical letter *Deus caritas est*, “[i]n a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or

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even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant.”<sup>1</sup> That is why it is so important to explain this message correctly and to present the proper understanding of the teaching, thanks to which it is possible to approach God and enter the space of His love.

This article will first outline the perspective of reciprocity between God’s love towards man and man’s love of God, in the light of the encyclical *Deus caritas est* and with particular emphasis on the priority of God’s love. Also, an attempt will be made to identify specific areas of experiencing Divine love by people (1). In the later part, I will talk about human answer to God’s love, which finds its realization in the commandment of love. Forms by means of which people can express their love of God will also be discussed (2). Finally, there will be a reflection on the relationship between the love of God and the love of neighbor which have always been interpreted together due to their insertion by Jesus in one commandment (cf. Mk 12:30–31) (3).

## 1. PRIORITY OF GOD’S LOVE

In his encyclical *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the fundamental truth that God first loved man and always first reaches out to man in a very specific relationship.<sup>2</sup> Man’s love of God, to some extent ordered by the commandment, is, in fact, only a response to the gift of God’s love. God first makes people participants in His own love, and then summons them to love.<sup>3</sup>

This truth acquires fundamental meaning in the understanding of the whole of Christian life. That is why it has been emphasised by Benedict XVI in the encyclical *Deus caritas est*. The Pope writes there that the words from the First Letter of John stating that God is love in particular express the essence of Christian faith, and the principle of life is to know God’s love and believe in it.<sup>4</sup> “We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an

<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est* (Kraków: Znak, 2006) No. 1 (hereinafter: DCE).

<sup>2</sup> DCE, No 1.17.

<sup>3</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2013), No12. See also: M. KLUZ, “Życie w Chrystusie życiem wiary, nadziei i miłości,” *Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne* 30(2011), 2: 49; A. MICHALIK, *Zrozumieć chrześcijaństwo. Istota chrześcijaństwa według Josepha Ratzingera* (Tarnów: Biblos, 2008), 172–173.

<sup>4</sup> DCE, No. 1.

event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction [...]. Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”<sup>5</sup>

Since at the beginning of this love relationship between God and man there is the experience of being endowed by God on His initiative, one can ask: how is this love expressed? How can people experience Divine love so that they could respond with their love? The answer to these questions must be embedded in two contexts that cannot be separated, but must be understood integrally. The first context—the indirect context—is provided by the story of salvation. Man can encounter God’s love first, when he realizes that the whole history shows God as the One who still approaches man with love, and that all that happened even in the most distant time and space, and all that is happening at present day has real influence on people and their life.<sup>6</sup>

God reveals himself as full of love, and his love is the essence before time and before creation—in eternity. This great message concerning God’s love is therefore visible already in eternity, as emphasized by Benedict XVI. St. John the Apostle is the man who made a huge step in this matter. In the reconstruction of the earthly history of Christ, others stopped at his birth of Mary, while John made a great leap backwards, i.e. from time to eternity: “In the beginning there was the Word” (J 1,1). Then, divine love was revealed in the work of creation.<sup>7</sup> God who created everything through the Word, sustains the creation, and gives testimony about himself in the created things,<sup>8</sup> because “[c]reation is the setting in which the entire history of the love between God and his creation develops.”<sup>9</sup> Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus caritas est* emphasises that “the universe in which we live has its source in God and was created by him. Certainly, the notion of creation is found elsewhere, yet only here does it become absolutely clear that it is not one

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<sup>5</sup> DCE No. 1. See also: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Poznań: Pallottinum, 1994), No. 2083 (hereinafter: CCC); J. NAGÓRNY, “Moralność chrześcijańska. Życie z Chrystusem i w Chrystusie we wspólnocie Kościoła,” in *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Introduction*, ed. M. Ruścki, E. Pudełko (Lublin: RW KUL, 1995), 202.

<sup>6</sup> FRANCIS, Encyclical *Lumen fidei* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UPJPII, 2013), No. 17.

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (Tarnów: Biblos, 2009), No. 5 (hereinafter: CiV).

<sup>8</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, “Konstytucja dogmatyczna o objawieniu Bożym *Dei Verbum*,” *Konstytucje. Dekrety. Deklaracje* (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Poznań: Pallottinum, 2002), No. 3 (hereinafter: KO).

<sup>9</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2010), No. 9.

god among many, but the one true God himself who is the source of all that exists; the whole world comes into existence by the power of his creative Word. Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and “made” by him. The second important element now emerges: this God loves man.”<sup>10</sup>

Benedict XVI clearly makes us realize the fact that God is the original source of all existence in the absolute sense; however, this creative principle of all things—Logos, the primary cause—is also someone who loves with the passion relevant to the real love. Therefore, it can be said that love of the almighty Father is fully expressed in calling man into existence, in which beauty, splendour and harmony are reflected in a particular way.<sup>11</sup> God as Lord, Creator and Father loves man from the very beginning. Out of love he creates the world and out of love he also creates man, to endow him with His love. Man owes his existence to God’s love, and the work of His creation is a special instance of the revelation of God’s love in the prehistory of salvation.<sup>12</sup>

It must be emphasized that God’s love is present in the entire history of the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> In the history of the chosen people, God reveals his face to the people, and it is the face of a Father who loves mercifully.<sup>14</sup> In the encyclical *Deus caritas est*, pope Benedict XVI stressed that “[t]he one God in whom Israel believes [...] loves with a personal love. His love, moreover, is an elective love: among all the nations he chooses Israel and loves her—but he does so precisely with a view to healing the whole human race. God loves, and his love may certainly be called eros, yet it is also totally agape.”<sup>15</sup>

The incarnation of God’s Son is the culmination of the entire history of salvation. Jesus Christ brings new comprehensive revelation of the Divine love. “[A]ll this finds fulfillment in the mystery of his Incarnation, in his becoming man, in his sharing our human weakness,”<sup>16</sup> writes Benedict XVI

<sup>10</sup> DCE, No. 9.

<sup>11</sup> M. ŁANOSZKA, “Tajemnica ojcostwa Boga objawiająca się w historii zbawienia,” in *Bóg Ojciec*, ed. P. Łabuda (Tarnów: Biblos, 2015), 21–22; H. SZMULEWICZ, “‘Miłość daży do wieczności’. Ponadczasowa droga miłości w świetle Encykliki ‘Deus caritas est,’” *Currenda* 156 (2006), 1: 74.

<sup>12</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Na początku Bóg stworzył... Cztery kazania o stworzeniu i upadku. Konsekwencje wiary w stworzenie* (transl. J. Merecki, Kraków: Salwator, 2006), 38.

<sup>13</sup> DCE, No. 9–10.

<sup>14</sup> KO, No. 3.

<sup>15</sup> DCE, No. 9.

<sup>16</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2012), No. 13.

in *Porta fidei*. Love of the incarnate Son of God is manifested in His entire life: in deeds, in service, caring courteousness, and, above all, in His cross, through which He exonerated all sinners.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, God's love is revealed throughout the history of the Church, when a person encounters Divine love in the work of mystical body of God's Son, because the Church community is the witness to God's love in the world. According to Benedict XVI, "[t]he entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs,"<sup>18</sup> and in this way the Church realizes God's love in the world.

Thus, man encounters Divine love when he realizes that his whole life is embedded specifically in the history in which there are works loving God manifested. Man also encounters Divine love when they notice that they live in the world created out of divine love, and that they are not a work of coincidence, but have existed eternally in the mind of God. It was out of His love that they appeared in this world to live in the cultural context shaped by history of salvation and to live in the Church, which is the mystical Body of Christ to be experienced in a mysterious way. This is the wider context in which one can speak about the experience of the priority of God's love.<sup>19</sup>

As Pope Benedict XVI points out, the second (direct) context includes personal experience. It is a meeting which takes place on different planes and establishes a personal relationship with God "in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. In the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives."<sup>20</sup> A sensitive man will live convinced that loving God will never leave him alone, and that He sustains and leads him.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> DCE, No. 12. See also: CCC, No. 1994.

<sup>18</sup> DCE, No. 19.

<sup>19</sup> CiV, No. 5.

<sup>20</sup> DCE, No. 17. See also: P. GWIAZDA, "Bóg pierwszy nas umiłował," in *Refleksje nad encykliką Benedykta XVI „Deus caritas est,”* ed. M. Przybył (Poznań: Pallottinum, 2006), 37.

<sup>21</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Bóg i świat. Wiara i życie w dzisiejszych czasach. Z kardynałem Josephem Ratzingerem rozmawia Peter Seewald*, transl. G. Sowinski (Kraków: Znak, 2001), 90.

In this perspective, it can be said that love between God and man appears truly as a relationship of reciprocity. This mutuality has a special character, because its subject, beside human being, entails a special person who absconds all anthropological interpretations. God, who transcends all the patterns of human relations, participates in this relationship. He is first to come forth with his perfect love. How does one answer to the love of God? How does imperfect, limited man can show his love to the invisible, perfect and omnipotent God? What does it really mean, according to Pope Benedict XVI, to fulfill the commandment to love the Lord?

## 2. REALISATION OF THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE THE LORD

Sometimes one may come across the following doubt: insofar as the expression of love towards another man is obvious, how does one love God who seems so distant? Is it possible at all? On the other hand, there is a moral obligation to love God which is expressed in the commandment of love.<sup>22</sup> The answer to such a problem must be unambiguous, stating that man can show love to God, though it must be remembered that all forms of human activity which could be described as “love” will always remain imperfect. What is actually man’s love of God? In *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* it can be read that “charity leads us to render to God what we as creatures owe him in all justice”<sup>23</sup> and is expressed in the human attitude that we call the virtue of religiousness. This attitude has many components; therefore, only the most important ones will be discussed below.

At the very beginning, it must be stated that invisible God can only be loved when one is aware of his presence. In *To Look on Christ*, Joseph Ratzinger writes that the presence of God in our lives is the most important thing. We must therefore believe in God not only theoretically, but also consider Him as the reality that is more real than all other things in our lives. As the Scripture says, God should penetrate all levels of our life and fill them completely: He should touch our heart, our soul, the energy of our will, our reason, and our thoughts. He must be everywhere and our basic relationship with Him must be a relationship of love.<sup>24</sup> Only with this

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<sup>22</sup> P. ROSTWOROWSKI, *Wiara, nadzieja i miłość. Trzy filary chrześcijańskiego życia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Benedyktynów Tyniec, 2012), 54.

<sup>23</sup> CCC, No. 2095.

<sup>24</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Patrzeć na Chrystusa*, transl. J. Merecki (Kraków: Salwator, 2005), 102.

awareness can one try to specifically respond with one's own love to the love of God.

What happens when one is already aware of God's presence, when one has recognised and accepted being before God, and with God? From now on "love manifests itself most often as a simple inclination towards God. Man is delighted that God is like that. We have complete joy in the sense that the object of joy is the same as the object of God's joy [...]. Man enjoys God's work, God's ways and the wisdom that has devised human redemption through Incarnation and Pentecost; Mary's Immaculate Conception and that everything is his work."<sup>25</sup> Joy coming from the awareness of God's proximity and from His redemption is an expression of love for Him.

Consequently, another attitude arises from this experience: love coming from appreciating God is adoration. With the help of grace man can become aware of and fully accept the need for God<sup>26</sup>. It could be even said that man joyfully accepts it. "Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love [...]. To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the 'nothingness of the creature' who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt Him and to humble oneself [...]. The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world."<sup>27</sup> In adoration, a man recognizing his dependence on God, can try to adjust his own life and behaviour so as to respond by means of them to the love of God, i.e. so that all his life and behaviour could be an expression of one's love of God.

Experience of various forms of love through which man realizes that he has been touched by God who loves him, arouses a great joy in man, the motive of which is to experience being loved in the world thirsting for love.<sup>28</sup> In response, this experience demands not only the involvement of the sphere of emotions and feelings, but also, and above all, the will and intellect. Pope Benedict XVI teaches that "[a]cknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the 'yes' of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all-embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never 'finished' and complete; throughout life,

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<sup>25</sup> P. ROSTWOROWSKI, *Wiara, nadzieja i miłość*, 54–55.

<sup>26</sup> C.S. LEWIS, *Cztery miłości*, transl. P. Szymczak (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2010), 159.

<sup>27</sup> CCC, No. 2096–2097.

<sup>28</sup> DCE, No. 9, 17.

it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself. *Idem velle atque idem nolle* — to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing — was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23–28).<sup>29</sup>

Faith—as Pope Benedict XVI taught in Warsaw in 2006—cannot be reduced to the acceptance of a set of truths about God, man, life, death, and future realities. In truth, faith is a relationship with Christ: a deep and personal relationship based on the priority of His love (for he loved us first). His love is so powerful that it led him to a total offering of himself on the cross, which St. Paul described in the Letter to the Romans: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5,8). Our response to such great love can involve a heart that is open and ready to love.<sup>30</sup> But what does it mean to love Christ? According to Benedict XVI, “[i]t means trusting him even in times of trial, following him faithfully even on the Via Crucis, in the hope that soon the morning of the Resurrection will come [...]. Love for Christ expresses itself in the will to harmonize our own life with the thoughts and sentiments of his Heart. This is achieved through interior union based on the grace of the Sacraments, strengthened by continuous prayer, praise, thanksgiving and penance.”<sup>31</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI pays attention to the expression of loving God through a union. He does not speak about abstract reality. This union is to be manifested specifically in the liturgy, in the sacraments and in prayer, but also, according to Benedict XVI, in suffering. Christ himself provided people with an example of suffering. Benedict XVI wrote in *Spe salvi* that “it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of

<sup>29</sup> DCE, No. 9, 17.

<sup>30</sup> BENEDICT XVI, “‘Zachowujcie i pogłębiajcie waszą wiarę’. Homilia w czasie Mszy świętej na placu J. Piłsudskiego (Warszawa, 26.05.2006),” in *Benedykt XVI w Polsce. Homilie i przemówienia* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2006), 36–37.

<sup>31</sup> BENEDICT XVI, “Zachowujcie i pogłębiajcie waszą wiarę,” 37.

God.”<sup>32</sup> Suffering, motivated by the love for God, has a deep meaning and great value, but the most perfect way of loving God is the readiness to sacrifice life for Him. Attitude of faithfulness is also an expression of loving God. Trust is the basic response to God’s faithfulness. Faithfulness and trust arise from the belief that one is loved by God.

In reflection on various forms of man’s love towards God, one needs to go further because “all Christians know there is another way of endowing God: every stranger whom we feed or clothe is Christ. And this apparently is a gift of love to God whether we know it or not.”<sup>33</sup> As Pope Benedict XVI teaches, since no one has ever seen God directly, one could ask: how can we love Him? The answer is given by the First Letter of John: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn4:20). The Pope remarks that this text does not exclude the possibility of loving God, but even elevates it to the rank of *condition sine qua non* of Christian life. John’s words demand one to love God and at the same time point to an unbreakable relationship between loving God and loving neighbour.<sup>34</sup> “One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him altogether. Saint John’s words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God.”<sup>35</sup>

Talking about the love of neighbour as a way of realizing the love of God, it must be added that it is impossible to truly love God when one negates any of His commandments. Pope Benedict XVI also takes up this thought and teaches that experiencing faith as love of Christ, is automatically connected with readiness to give up everything that could be a denial or negation of that love. That is why the following teaching of Christ is so important: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). And what are His commandments? Jesus claimed that he did not come to change the Law, but to fulfill it. The law, as expressed in the Decalogue, is the law that the God–Creator put in the hearts of people. However, Jesus gave this law a new justification—love which is more important than the sacrifice required by the Law itself: “To love [God] with all the heart, and with all the understand-

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<sup>32</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi* (Tarnów: Biblos, 2007), No. 47.

<sup>33</sup> C.S. LEWIS, *Cztery miłości*, 158.

<sup>34</sup> DCE, No. 16.

<sup>35</sup> DCE, No. 16.

ing, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk12:33).<sup>36</sup> For true love of one's neighbour, according to *Deus caritas est*, is based on "the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or do not even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God."<sup>37</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger writes in one of his books that whoever loves God knows that there is only one real danger that threatens man: the danger of losing God.<sup>38</sup> Realization of the love of God raises such awareness and simultaneously excludes this danger. However, fulfillment of what is called the commandment of love of God is not just an assurance against what could threaten man in case of the negation of the commandment. The preservation and implementation of this commandment has a different purpose, namely happiness.

### 3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

After outlining the reality determined by the commandment to love God, which also included proper reference to man, one can ask the following question: where is the boundary between the love of God and the love of neighbour? One might have the impression that the two dimensions overlap, and the boundary is so unclear that it can be impossible to establish. Do we, however, need to set the boundary? Is this even a problem which interferes in any way in the realization of the commandment to love God and one's neighbour? It seems that it is not. How to understand, however, the relationship between one love and the other?

Pope Benedict XVI writes that in the Bible "[t]he unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him altogether [...]. [L]ove of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and [...] closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God [...]. True, no one has ever seen God as he

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<sup>36</sup> BENEDICT XVI, "Zachowujcie i pogłębiajcie waszą wiarę," 37–38.

<sup>37</sup> DCE, No. 18. See also: BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* (Tarnów: Biblos, 2007), No. 88.

<sup>38</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Patrzeć na Chrystusa*, 77.

is. And yet God is not totally invisible to us; he does not remain completely inaccessible [...]. God has made himself visible: in Jesus we are able to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Indeed, God is visible in a number of ways. In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us [...]. Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken within us a feeling of joy born of the experience of being loved."<sup>39</sup>

This experience stimulates the involvement in this special relationship. Recognizing the living God, man wants to answer Him with his love that involves the entire self: reason, will and feelings, so that they are more and more submissive to His will. It is a process that lasts: love develops; it matures and strives for perfection, so that God's will becomes less and less foreign, and more and more one's own inner will. The consequence of this is a state in which God becomes closer and more familiar to man than himself; devotion to Him increases, and all of this is the source of great joy. "Love of neighbour is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ."<sup>40</sup>

However, such attitude towards neighbour is not possible without a prior experience of a personal encounter with God who is love. Benedict XVI continues: "Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbour which the First Letter of John speaks of with such insistence. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be 'devout' and to perform my 'religious duties,' then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely 'proper,' but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well [...]. Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> DCE, No. 16–17.

<sup>40</sup> DCE, No. 18.

<sup>41</sup> DCE, No. 18.

Together with the duty to love God, Christians should therefore fulfill the commandment to love the neighbour. Christ expressed these duties in the following words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 22: 37–40). The combination of these two types of love—of God and of neighbour—is so strong that fulfilling one’s obligation towards one without fulfilling the obligations towards the other is impossible, and fulfillment of the second commandment becomes a practical way to verify the first.<sup>42</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI teaches: “Love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable and are mutually related. Jesus did not invent one or the other but revealed that they are essentially a single commandment and did so not only through the Word, but especially with his testimony: the person of Jesus and his whole Mystery embody the unity of love of God and neighbour, like the two arms of the Cross, vertical and horizontal.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, there is a connection between the two types of love: of God and neighbour, i.e. an intrinsic relationship or some kind of link of a significant meaning which causes that one cannot exist without the other. That is why true Christian morality is possible only when love of God and love of neighbour are not an alternative, but a conjunction. This connection springs from biblical teaching. Jesus clearly joins these two commandments so that they overlap and interpenetrate each other. Jesus attests to their unbreakable unity with His words and life. However, while maintaining their unity, each of them has its own value. Love of God does not dissolve in love of neighbour, as well as love of neighbour cannot exhaust love due to God. It cannot be said that God can only be loved in the neighbours.<sup>44</sup>

According to Benedict XVI, the starting point in experiencing love of God and love of neighbour must contain noticing God’s presence in life. God should permeate all levels of life and fill them. To live a happy life, however, it is not enough just to acknowledge that He is. It is necessary to agree with His will, to trust Him, even when not everything is understood. When the relationship with God is good, other relationships can also develop

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<sup>42</sup> S. WITEK, *Miłość chrześcijańska w życiu człowieka* (Warszawa: ATK, 1983), 49.

<sup>43</sup> BENEDICT XVI, “Od Boga uczymy się zawsze pragnąć dobra. Rozważanie przed modlitwą Anioł Pański (Watykan, 4.11.2012),” *L’Osservatore Romano* (Polish edition) 349 (2013), 1: 47.

<sup>44</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 1993), No. 14.

well. Therefore, it is important to learn to think, to feel and to want, like God thinks, feels and wants. That way love can shape human life. And then love of neighbour becomes obvious. When man follows love of God, then all relationships with people in his way become relationships of acceptance, trust, affirmation and love. However, if it is not so, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to summon up inner freedom to love.<sup>45</sup>

In accordance with the commandment of love, man is called for love like Christ did. But in order to be able to love that way, one must discover and know His face through faith. It is only in the growth of faith that love grows in man; love which is an existential bond with personal ideal of love, i.e. Jesus Christ. Through faith, one knows Him who is an example of love and desires to love as He loved, i.e. till the end. This love is at the same time Christ's love of and in man. He is the one who lives in man and loves with his own love. The degree of love, thus, depends on the degree of faith that allows to participate in God's life. It follows from this truth that it is impossible to love neighbour without loving God, which is also evident in the teaching of Benedict XVI. Man alone does not know how to properly love another person. It is Christ who loves in and through him. When one is open to the descending divine love, when one allows God to love oneself, one allows Him to love others through oneself.<sup>46</sup>

According to Pope Benedict XVI, the Eucharist is a perfect image of love of God and neighbor: "this sacramental 'mysticis'" is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants [...]. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become 'one body,' completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself."<sup>47</sup>

The relationship between the love of God and love of neighbour is so close and strong that the declaration of love of God separated from the practice of loving neighbour becomes a lie. In fact, there is only one love.<sup>48</sup> It can be said that fraternal love is the basis for the love of God. But also, love of God is the foundation for the love of neighbour, as S. Kierkegaard

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<sup>45</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Patrzeć na Chrystusa*, 102–104.

<sup>46</sup> T. DAJCZER, *Rozważania o wierze* (Częstochowa: Wdycja Świętego Pawła, 2012), 242–245.

<sup>47</sup> DCE, No. 13–14. See also: A. AMATO, "O encyklice *Deus caritas est*," *L'Osservatore Romano* (Polish edition) 285 (2006), 8: 42–44.

<sup>48</sup> DCE, No. 16. See also: J. NAGÓRNY. *Postannictwo chrześcijan w świecie*. Vol. 1: *Świat i wspólnota* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1998), 206–207.

states: “Love God above everything, and you will also love your neighbour, and in him—all people. Only when one loves God above all else, one can love one’s neighbour.”<sup>49</sup>

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Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus caritas est* emphasized the mutual relations of love of God and one’s neighbour. However, it is important to remember that God always has priority in this mutual relationship; he takes the initiative to come out with love towards man and invites him to participate in His love. Therefore, the moments of God’s “coming forward” with the initiative have been described in the context of the history of salvation: before time and creation, in the work of creation, in the history of the Old Testament, in the incarnation of Christ, in His saving act, and finally in the entire history of the Church and in the context of personal experience of a believer. It is only in this perspective that Benedict XVI shows man’s response to God’s love. The dynamics of man’s love of God includes: the awareness of God’s presence, the inclination towards God, the adoration, the desire to realize God’s will, the unification in the liturgy, sacraments and prayer, suffering, and love of one’s neighbour in whom Christ is present.

It is clear from the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI that, just as there is no true love of God when it is not realized by simultaneous love of neighbour, so it is impossible to talk about the real love of one’s neighbor when reference to God is excluded. Between the love of God and the love of neighbour there is an internal relationship of such great importance that one love cannot exist without the other. In the first case it would be just some sort of abstract “spirituality,” in the other, a kind of anthropocentric charity. Complete Christian love is a combination of one love with the other. Such connection is, of course, natural, and can be seen in the assumption discussed here: love of neighbour particularizes the love of God.

*Translated by Dominika Bugno-Narecka*

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<sup>49</sup> D. ADAMCZYK, “Zaproszenie do miłości w świetle encykliki Benedykta XVI *Deus caritas est*,” *Kieleckie Studia Teologiczne* 6 (2007): 17.

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