

## ***Caritas in Veritate: Proposal for Ending the Great Recession and Ensuring that It Doesn't Happen Again***

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On 29 June 2009, Pope Benedict XVI's long awaited social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, was released to the general public to coincide with the 35<sup>th</sup> G8 summit being held in the city of L'Aquila, Abruzzo, on July 8-10 of that same year. The main issues of the summit were,

A response to the global economic and financial crisis; the restoration of grassroots confidence and a boost to growth on a more solid and balanced basis, also through the definition of new, shared ground rules for economic activities; a focus on the social aspect of employment, to help the weaker sectors of society both in the industrially advanced countries and in the poorer countries; the struggle against protectionism and the deregulation of world trade for everyone's benefit; the resolution of regional crises; food security and safety; and the struggle against climate changes.<sup>1</sup>

Benedict XVI not only wanted to commemorate and update Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* on its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary; but also *Caritas in Veritate* "is widely seen as a message by the pontiff to leaders of the world's most advanced nations" meeting in L'Aquila.<sup>2</sup>

If the most important "social question" of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was the labor question (the

relationship between worker and capitalist); the social, economic, political and cultural question of the beginning of the third millennium is the true meaning of human development. This was the main topic of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*. Hence, Pope Benedict XVI considers *Populorum Progressio* "the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age," which in turn was considered the *Magna Carta* of Catholic Social Teaching by Pope John XXIII.<sup>3</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* hopes to shed light upon humanity's journey towards " 'development of the whole man and of all men' [John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, n. 42], to hope for progress 'from less human conditions to those which are more human' [ibid., n. 20]" in the new millennium.<sup>4</sup> In summary, the purpose of Pope Benedict's social encyclical is to take what Pope Paul VI said about authentic human development and apply it to the current context of globalization—the "explosion of worldwide interdependence"—<sup>5</sup> and as a response to the "Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2008" — considered by many economists to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s—<sup>6</sup> and the consequent and continual "Great Recession."<sup>7</sup>

As Pope John Paul II stated in his 2001 *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, and quoted by Benedict XVI in his social encyclical (see n. 42), "globalization, a priori, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it."<sup>8</sup> However, although some poor countries have greatly benefited from it economically (notably China and India and to a

lesser extent Brazil); the developed nations, and not the poor, have been the major beneficiaries “who have benefited more from the liberalization that has occurred in the mobility of capital and labor.”<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, Benedict teaches that globalization is not “deterministic” since it results from human freedom and choice, and can thus be guided towards the common good understood as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the Holy Father warns that there is a real danger of depersonalization in the process and/or project of globalization and, preying on fallen human nature, it can lend self to individualism and the pursuit of private gain over the common good.<sup>11</sup> The Holy Father laments throughout his entire encyclical that the latter reality has taken precedence in today’s world culminating in the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2008 and its consequent and continual Great Recession.

The proposal of *Caritas in Veritate*, then, is an urgent and timely one and, although it admits that the Church does not have technical solutions to offer to the current crisis, it does “have a mission of truth to accomplish... for a society that is attuned to man, to his dignity, to his vocation.”<sup>12</sup> The Church’s service to humanity requires “fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom (cf. Jn. 8:32) and of the possibility of integral human development.”<sup>13</sup>

Authentic global human development must be, as Pope Paul VI reminds us, “integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person [in the world] and of the whole person [body, mind and soul].”<sup>14</sup> This definition means that wealthier nations “cannot claim to be developed when they remain morally and spiritually bereft, nor while they are prepared to tolerate inhuman disparities of economic

wellbeing both within their own nation, and between themselves and poorer nations.”<sup>15</sup>

Fully adopting this integral definition, Pope Benedict XVI examines in his encyclical those factors currently impeding global integral development (viz., a crisis in morality, a technological *weltanschauung*, and the near exclusion of God from society);<sup>16</sup> and offers a plan and model out of the current global recession, namely, love in truth —*caritas in veritate*. Within this pairing, the Pope develops two of the vital principles of Catholic social teaching: subsidiarity and the less mentioned and often misunderstood principle of gratuitousness. He also admonishes in all cases transparency, honesty and responsibility.

### **The Charity-Truth Pairing**

Pope Benedict XVI’s 2006 encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* defines charity in a very demanding way. He takes on those who dismiss charity as irrelevant in today’s society or simply as individual action (viz., almsgiving).<sup>17</sup> He insists that charity, foremost, begins with justice, “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. ...justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity.”<sup>18</sup>

Pope Benedict also pairs charity with the common good: “The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity... This is the institutional path—we might also call it the political path— of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, in *Caritas in Veritate*, the Pope adds that true charity is by its very nature gratuitous and this, he explains, is what the current economic life lacks —“the spirit of gift.”<sup>20</sup> As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, economic life is built on commutative justice,

“which is concerned about the mutual dealings between two persons;” but one needs to go beyond this particular justice in order to create a true human society based on charity.<sup>21</sup> A perfectly just society can lead to a selfish society in which it gives only that which is due the other. It is only this unconditional love for one’s brothers and sisters and all of creation, “that will prompt the generosity necessary so that every person on this planet may know firsthand the full development to which she or he is called as a human being.”<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, without possessing the full truth (*veritas*) about the human person—and this truth can only be known to us from both faith (*viz.*, Revelation, since “God reveals man to himself”) and reason (*viz.*, the natural law), “in which creative Reason shines forth, reveals our greatness, but also our wretchedness insofar as we fail to recognize the call to moral truth”<sup>23</sup> authentic integral human development is impossible.

Ultimately, it is not a matter of only charity *and* truth, but charity *in* truth (*caritas in veritate*), since “deeds without knowledge are blind, and knowledge without love is sterile.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, when we have the pairing “charity-truth” we also have the virtue of wisdom, which is the ability to judge things “in the light of [man’s] first beginning and his final ends.”<sup>25</sup> Wisdom is the capacity to see the “whole picture”: “a clear vision of all economic, social, cultural and spiritual aspects” of the human person and society.<sup>26</sup> Only with this wisdom can we hope, not only to move out of the current Great Recession, but towards an integral and authentic global human development that is also ecologically sustainable.

Pope Benedict understands the global financial crisis and the current recession as “an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future” and “new efforts for holistic understanding and a humanistic synthesis.”<sup>27</sup> A future in which charity infused with wisdom—and not mere sentimentality—

is the “driving force” of integral human development.

### The Principle of Subsidiarity

In *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict XVI captures the essence of the principle of subsidiarity in a more complete fashion, more explicitly, highlighting the help (*subsidium*) that is needed as well as the appropriate response of the recipient of that subsidy. Benedict defines subsidiarity, which is “a particular manifestation of charity and... an expression of inalienable human freedom,”<sup>28</sup> as “first and foremost a form of assistance [*subsidium*] to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies.”<sup>29</sup>

Developing countries not only need external help of various types but also internal help to truly achieve their development: “the international community [needs to] take up the duty of helping them to be ‘artisans of their own destiny’ ( *PP*, n. 65), that is, to take up duties of their own. The sharing of reciprocal duties is a more powerful incentive to action than mere assertion of rights.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, *Caritas in Veritate* deals with the needs of developing countries from the perspective that highlights, above all, the response of the countries in need. This perspective implies planning integral development for developing countries, where “it is very important to move ahead with projects based on subsidiarity, suitably planned and managed, aimed at affirming rights yet also providing for the assumption of corresponding responsibilities.”<sup>31</sup> For Benedict XVI,

In development programs, the principle of the centrality of the human person, as the subject primarily responsible for development, must be preserved. The principal concern must be to improve the actual living conditions of the people in a given region, thus enabling them to carry out those duties that their poverty does not presently allow them to fulfill. Social concern must never be an abstract attitude. Development programs, if they

are to be adapted to individual situations, need to be flexible; and the people who benefit from them ought to be directly involved in their planning and implementation... Alongside macro-projects, there is a place for micro-projects, and above all there is need for the active mobilization of all the subjects of civil society, both juridical and physical persons.<sup>32</sup>

These points that highlight commitment and responsibility must be complemented with guidelines that assure that this subsidiarity does not feed a state of dependence so endemic in our times and protect the principle of participation: “[Aid] must be distributed with the involvement not only of the governments of receiving countries, but also local economic agents and the bearers of culture within civil society, including local Churches. Aid programs must increasingly acquire the characteristics of participation and completion from the grass roots.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, these guidelines should elicit the appropriate response from all levels involved.

Keeping in mind the context in which St. Thomas Aquinas generally explains the principle of subsidiarity,<sup>34</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* also highlights that “[t]he help received — as it happened with [Aquinas’] explanation of the way in which God governs the world<sup>35</sup> seeks not only the development or perfection of the individual helped but at the same time that such a person also becomes an instrument of improvement for others.”<sup>36</sup> This leads us to the final principle of Catholic Social Teaching elaborated by Pope Benedict.

### **The Principle of Gratuitousness**

Pope Benedict teaches that “economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the principle of gratuitousness, as an expression of fraternity.”<sup>37</sup> He further develops the

elements that compose this gratuitousness in solidarity. First of all, the “recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.”<sup>38</sup> Rediscovering this meaning of “human family” and making “a deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation” are crucial in order to build, in solidarity and gratuitousness, a just and peaceful society. Every single person is gift. Human development must be identified with the “inclusion–in-relation of all individuals and peoples within the one community of the human family, built in solidarity on the basis of the fundamental values of justice and peace.”<sup>39</sup>

However, in our postmodern human family, the relation of giving is mostly practiced either as a duty or as a giving in order to have. But, if human relations are based primarily on exchange only, which is the underlining principle in political and economic relations; our society does not have a bright future. Instead, human development should seriously meditate on the meaning of gratuitousness/giftedness. Gratuitousness “bursts into our lives as something not due to us, something that transcends every law of justice. Gift by its nature goes beyond merit, its rule is that of superabundance.”<sup>40</sup>

Another interesting element in our human doing is to seek efficiency and utility in development. But the Pope reminds us that “True development does not consist primarily in ‘doing.’ The key to development is a mind capable of thinking in technological terms and grasping the fully human meaning of human activities, within the context of the holistic meaning of the individual's being.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, human dignity and human rights can be jeopardized if human development is based only on economic and political efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, Pope Benedict reiterates, “human rights risk being ignored ... because they are robbed of their transcendent foundation.”<sup>42</sup> That is, when people forget that

God is the guarantor of humans' true development, in as much as, having created man and woman in God's image not out of necessity but free love, God also established the transcendent dignity of men and women as pure gift.<sup>43</sup>

Integral human development must also rediscover the gratuitousness of love and truth: "truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as gift."<sup>44</sup> The encyclical affirms that love and truth are the destiny of human beings. First, as a transcendental or theological ends and then, secondarily and rightly, as a human ends.<sup>45</sup> They are inherent ends, because they are not of man but of God. Yet, it is in the nature of God's action in the world that human beings discover truth and enact it in love. This is the human enterprise: to live in love and in truth. Integral human development is compared by *Caritas in Veritate* to "environmental ecology": it is coined as "human ecology."<sup>46</sup> This analogy appeals to the principle of ordering. But the principle of ordering is not made; God establishes it as free gift since the moment of Creation.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, humanity can only discover it. It is this discovery that provides the key to integral human development according to Benedict: True human development involves discovering "a meaning that is not of our own making" but is freely given by God.<sup>48</sup> Love and truth cannot be produced; they can only be received as a gift. The ultimate source is not, and cannot be humankind, "but only God, who is himself Truth and Love."<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Official 35<sup>th</sup> G8 website, URL: [http://www.g8italia2009.it/G8/Home/G8-G8\\_Layout\\_locale-1199882116809\\_Summit.htm](http://www.g8italia2009.it/G8/Home/G8-G8_Layout_locale-1199882116809_Summit.htm) [accessed 29 June 29, 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Deutsche Presse-Agentur (July 1, 2009) transcribed in *FreeForumZone*, n.p., URL: <http://freeforumzone.leonardo.it/lofi/-39-CARITAS-IN-VERITATE-39-/D8669430.html> [accessed 29 June 2013].

## Conclusion

*Caritas in Veritate* may be summarized in St. Catherine of Siena's metaphor of the tree of Pride and the tree of Love.<sup>50</sup> The tree that does flourish is the tree of Love: "whose pith is patience and goodwill toward one's neighbor... God is in the soul by grace... that for love of its Creator disdains the world, and loves insults whencesoever they come."<sup>51</sup> The tree that does not flourish is the tree of Pride: "from which oozes the sap of anger and impatience... inordinate love [...] for themselves and for temporal things, which they love apart from God; so that to have them they do not mind losing their soul, and putting it into the hands of devils."<sup>52</sup>

*Charity in Truth* is a document of vision and hope and it calls for imagination and courage, gratuitousness and responsibility, on the part of all who have a stake in the future of this earthly city that points towards the city of God, signaled by the love and truth implanted in human hearts. It is to these human hearts that this encyclical is finally addressed. Benedict XVI calls all people to a deeper life of the spirit for "the question of development is closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul."<sup>53</sup> "All this," the Pope writes, "is essential if 'hearts of stone' are to be transformed into 'hearts of flesh' (*Ezek. 36:26*): the true answer for ending the Great Recession and ensuring that it doesn't happen again."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 8. Also see John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, n. 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 33.

<sup>6</sup> "Three Top Economists Agree 2009 Worst Financial Crisis Since Great Depression; Risks Increase if Right Steps are Not Taken" in *Reuters* (27 February 2009), n.p., URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/02/27/idUS193520+27-Feb-2009+BW20090227>.

<sup>7</sup> David Wessel, "Wessel, David 'Did 'Great Recession' Live Up to the Name?'" in *The Wall Street Journal* (April 8, 2010), n.p., URL:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303591204575169693166352882.html> [accessed 29 June 2013].

<sup>8</sup> Cf., *loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> CV, n. 42.

<sup>10</sup> II Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 26 § 1; cf. *GS*, n. 74 § 1.

<sup>11</sup> CV, n. 40.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>14</sup> *PP*, n. 18.

<sup>15</sup> William Newton, "Caritas in Veritate: Pope Benedict's Blue-Print for Development" in *Second Spring: A Journal of Faith & Culture* (2009), n.p., URL: [http://www.secondspring.co.uk/economy/newton\\_caritas\\_veritate\\_sower.pdf](http://www.secondspring.co.uk/economy/newton_caritas_veritate_sower.pdf) [accessed 29 June 2013].

<sup>16</sup> Especially see CV, nn. 14, 15, 24, 28, 29, 39, 48, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 66, 70, 74, 75, 76, and 78. For a full analysis of *Caritas in Veritate's* factors currently impeding global integral development see Newton's article cited above.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 7.

<sup>20</sup> CV, n. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, nn. 30-31.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth E. Carr, "The Principle of Gratuitousness in Caritas in Veritate" in *Interreligious Dialogue* (27 July 2009):n.p., URL: <http://irdialogue.org/articles/the-principle-of-gratuitousness-in-caritas-in-veritate-by-elizabeth-e-carr> [accessed July 3, 2013].

<sup>23</sup> CV, n. 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 30.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 57.

<sup>29</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 43.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 47.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 58.

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas considers that justice itself demands that, save perhaps in occasional emergencies, the individual members of a community must be left to fulfill their responsibilities on their own self-directed initiative: "it is contrary to the proper character of the State's governance {*contra reationem gubernationis [civitatis]*} to impede people from acting according to their responsibilities {official} —except in emergencies," *Summa Contra Gentiles* III c. 71 n. 4 [1470]. Also see *ST I-II* q. 98, a. 4; II-II q. 26, a. 8; q. 69, a. 3, q. 87, a. 2; q. 97, a.1; q. 118, a. 1; q. 186, a. 3; q. 187, a. 4; q. 188, a.3 and a. 5; q. 189, a.3 ; III q. 41, a. 4; q. 65, a. 1; q. 68, a. 4.

<sup>35</sup> "For as "it belongs to the best to produce the best," it is not fitting that the supreme goodness of God should

produce things without giving them their perfection. Now a thing's ultimate perfection consists in the attainment of its end. Therefore it belongs to the Divine goodness, as it brought things into existence, so to lead them to their end: and this is to govern" (*ST I-II*, q. 103 a.1).

<sup>36</sup> Gregorio Guitián, "Integral Subsidiarity and Economic of Communion: Two Challenges from Caritas in Veritate" in *Journal of Markets & Morality* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall 2010): 285.

<sup>37</sup> CV, n. 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 53.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 70.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, n. 45.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 52.

<sup>45</sup> See *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 4.

<sup>46</sup> CV, n. 51.

<sup>47</sup> *ST I*, q. 44, a. 4.

<sup>48</sup> CV, n. 70.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine of Siena, "Letter to Monna Agnese" in Vida D. Scudder, trans. and ed., *Letters of Catherine Benincasa* (Gloucester, U.K.: Dodo Press, 2006), 29-33.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>53</sup> CV, n. 76.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 79.