

The puzzle of *Caritas in Veritate*

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Coming on the heels of the global economic crisis, Pope Benedict's 2009 social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (*Love in Truth*), was keenly awaited. It was issued to highlight the continuing relevance of Pope Paul VI's 1967 landmark encyclical, *Development of Peoples*, but Benedict's 30,000-word document is almost five times as long and at times very obscure.

The encyclical falls into two distinct parts, the first (#1-20), possibly written by Benedict himself, is a perplexing philosophical discussion about Christ as the full Truth revealing God to humankind. Many readers have been confused by the document's use of the word "truth", wondering if they were misunderstanding critical aspects of the Pope's thought.

This article argues that Benedict uses the notion of truth in different senses, almost in an abstract neo-Platonic way that is invoked to determine specific moral teachings. The encyclical slides between the Truth of God revealed in Christ and moral truths about human action, without clearly distinguishing the different types of truth involved. This readily gives an impression of inflating the Church's role in deciding moral truths, on the assumption that Church authorities have special access to such truths because of Christ's Revelation to and through the Church.

While understanding the Pope's determination to oppose moral relativism, the implication that the Catholic Church alone has access to this fullness of human truth stands in marked contrast to his commitment to ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, and also admissions by the Second Vatican Council and Benedict's papal predecessors that the Church has made mistakes in the past and has had much to learn from its critics and even enemies.¹

Later sections of the encyclical restore some balance by urging greater collaboration between reason and religion, and cooperation with other religious traditions.

The bulk of the encyclical (chapters 2 to 6; #21-77) surveys issues of economic and social development in the light of Paul VI's *Development of Peoples*. Written in a more accessible style, these chapters draw loosely, and selectively, from Paul's encyclical as they attempt to respond to recent economic events, the global financial crisis and continuing challenges for development, including threats to the environment. There is much here that reinforces the social initiatives of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI. However many will be disappointed with its treatment of the population issue and that it did not endorse or even mention the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Benedict and truth

The title of this encyclical, *Love in Truth*, is puzzling to many, especially since its full title or subtitle is "On Human Development in Charity and Truth". The emphasis on love is immediately understandable, and continues the theme of love in Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, which the new encyclical complements by developing the implications of social justice.

Benedict draws the title, *Charity in Truth*, from St Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians in this well known passage: "Love is patient; love is kind... it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the

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¹ Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World*, 44.

truth” (1 Cor: 13: 4-6). Benedict’s interpretation of St Paul implies that truth is readily identifiable and is derived from faith in Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). In Christian understanding, Jesus represents the full unveiling in his person of who God is, what God has done to save people, and what God asks of human beings. But how far does such privileged access to truth go?

It is not clear in Benedict’s writing how he moves from the Truth of God to moral truths. In St Paul’s context, truth seems to have the meaning of “right conduct”, in contrast to “wrongdoing”, and not an abstract notion of intellectual truth. The Greek word for truth, *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια), literally means “unveiling” or “non-concealment”, though the word has a very complex usage in the Scriptures and in both philosophy and Christian tradition. If one were to substitute the word “unveiling” for “truth” in these scriptural passages, one would not see it so much in terms of intellectual propositions or a synthesis of truths about the human condition which can be deductively derived to guide human decision-making.

And who is to decide what moral truths follow from belief in the Truth of God? The encyclical clearly implies that this is the role of the Church rather than the individual believer. Benedict implies that adherence to Christ as the Truth (unveiling, revelation) of God gives the Church privileged access not just to doctrinal truths, but especially moral truths and the intimations of the natural law. The Pope wants to restore the cutting edge to the word “*caritas*” so that it is not undervalued or “detached from ethical living”. Hence he uses the notion of truth as a way to link it to “moral responsibility” (#2). He writes that charity can be emptied of meaning and “easily dismissed as irrelevant for interpreting and giving direction to moral responsibility.”

Hence the need to link charity with truth not only in the sequence, pointed out by St Paul, *veritas in caritate* (Eph 4:15), but also in... *caritas in veritate*... not only do we do a service to charity enlightened by truth, but we also help give credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living. This is a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativises truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasing reluctance to acknowledge its existence (#2).

Caritas in Veritate insists: “Only in truth does charity shine forth... without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way... It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions”, and is distorted “to the point where it comes to mean the opposite” (#2).

At times Benedict identifies the Word of God as the Truth, which believers would readily accept. But then he seems to move to a more abstract plane which is not identified with God but which nevertheless has an existence outside and above human existence. “Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things”. He reiterates that Christ is “the Truth” and only “in the truth of God’s word (*logos*) is dialogue ‘authentic’.”

In the present social and cultural context, where there is a widespread tendency to relativise truth, practising charity in truth helps people to understand that adhering to the values of Christianity is not merely useful but essential for building a good society and for integral human development. A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance. In other words, there would no longer be any real place for God in the world. Without truth, charity is confined to a narrow field devoid of relations. It is excluded from the plans and processes of promoting human development of universal range, in dialogue between knowledge and praxis (#4).

Benedict writes that the “Church does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim ‘to interfere in any way in the politics of States’”, but still it has a “mission of truth” about the human vocation.

Without truth, it is easy to fall into an empiricist and sceptical view of life, incapable of rising to the level of praxis because of a lack of interest in grasping the values – sometimes even the meanings –

with which to judge and direct it. Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom and of the possibility of integral human development... Open to the truth from whichever branch of knowledge it comes the Church's social doctrine receives it, assembles into a unity the fragments in which it is often found, and mediates it within the constantly changing life-patterns of the society of peoples and nations (#9).

“Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power...” (#5).

Truth – which is itself gift, in the same way as charity – is greater than we are, as Saint Augustine teaches. Likewise the truth of ourselves, of our personal conscience, is first of all given to us. In every cognitive process, truth is not something that we produce, it is always found, or better, received (#34).

“Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift” (#52).

In my view, this is not well expressed, since it seems to make people passive receptors of truth, with no discussion of how people seek, understand, discern or appropriate truth in their moral decision-making.²

Moreover, the implications of claiming such unqualified possession of the truth appear to leave little room for the findings of science and human experience. Yet other parts of the encyclical much later invite dialogue and collaboration with other sources of knowledge, recognising that these have a role to play in guiding moral decision-making. This tension in the encyclical is unfortunately unresolved, and perhaps indicates an attempt to accommodate opposing views.

Conscience and limits to “the Church principle”

There is nothing in the encyclical about truth relating to traditional Catholic moral theology and the role of conscience.³ This is doubly surprising, given Ratzinger's earlier writing on conscience. In his commentary on the documents of Vatican II, a younger Joseph Ratzinger accepted Cardinal Newman's view on the significance of conscience:

[F]or Newman, conscience represents the inner complement and limit of the Church principle. Over the pope as the expression of the binding claim of ecclesiastical authority there still stands one's own conscience, which must be obeyed before all else, if necessary even against the requirement of the ecclesiastical authority.⁴

Or as St Thomas Aquinas wrote in *On the Sentences* (VI, 38.2.4 q.a3), it would be better to die excommunicated than to violate one's conscience. Yet the encyclical indicates no such limits set by conscience to “the Church principle”.

As well as situating the Church's teaching authority in relation to personal conscience, one would have expected the encyclical to spell out the various levels of authority in the Church's social teaching,

² Moral theologians distinguish between the primary precepts of the natural law (“seek good, avoid evil”), and secondary precepts that attempt to detail what this means in the generality of cases; but such precepts are contingent and not absolute. These are not the same as “moral truth”, which must be sought and found by each individual in the complexities of daily life. The truth where charity works is found wherever people promote genuine human development and wellbeing. See Brian Lewis, “Truth in Life and in Action”, *Australian EJournal of Theology*, Issue 3 (August 2004), at http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_3/lewis.htm I am grateful to Dr Lewis for his advice about this article.

³ See LEWIS, Brian “Vatican II and Roman Catholic Moral Theology – forty years after”, *Australasian Catholic Record*, 80, 3 (July 2003), 275-86. See also Lewis, “The Primacy of Conscience”, July 2009 at <http://www.socialpolicyconnections.com.au/Portals/3/docs/Lewis.%20Primacy%20of%20conscience%20July09.pdf>, and his “Conscience in Christian Thought”, July 2009, at <http://www.socialpolicyconnections.com.au/YarraInstitute/Publications/Articles/tabid/531/Default.aspx>

⁴ RATZINGER, Joseph “The dignity of the human person”, in H. Vorgrimler (ed.), **Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Vol 5** (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 134-36.

indicating the difference between fundamental moral principles and more contingent judgments about social and political matters where believers may have greater insight and information, and hence come to a different conclusion about what needs to be done. The Australian and US episcopal conferences, among others, have done this in their major social statements, so as not to compromise the consciences of people when matters of faith are not involved.⁵

Science and other religious traditions

Only later in the encyclical do other sections begin to balance the early ambit claims for truth by discussing the role of reason, the sciences and other sources of knowledge that inform decision-making about moral issues. “Faced with the phenomena that lie before us, charity in truth requires first of all that we know and understand, acknowledging and respecting the specific competence of every level of knowledge. Charity... engages them in dialogue from the very beginning”, “never prescinding from the conclusions of reason, nor contradicting its results” (#30). Hence the encyclical wishes “moral evaluation and scientific research” to go hand in hand, and “faith, theology, metaphysics and science to come together in a collaborative effort in the service of humanity” (#31).

The encyclical urges us to look inside ourselves “to recognize the fundamental norms of the natural moral law which God has written on our hearts” (#68). Surprisingly there is little mention of the work of the International Theological Commission and its 2009 document, *The Search for a Universal Ethics: a New Look at the Natural Law*, which is searching “for an objective foundation for a universal ethics” (#133).⁶

Very importantly, the encyclical invites collaboration with other religious and philosophical traditions. “Other cultures and religions teach brotherhood and peace and are therefore of enormous importance to integral human development”. However, it rejects religious or cultural influences that obstruct human development, or isolate them in a search for individual wellbeing, or result in “separation and disengagement” (#55).

But religions “can offer their contribution to development only if God has a place in the public realm, specifically in regard to its cultural, social, economic, and particularly its political dimensions.” “Reason always stands in need of being purified by faith: this also holds true for political reason, which must not consider itself omnipotent. For its part, religion always needs to be purified by reason in order to show its authentically human face” (#56).

Fruitful dialogue between faith and reason cannot but render the work of charity more effective within society, and it constitutes the most appropriate framework for promoting fraternal collaboration between believers and non-believers in their shared commitment to working for justice and the peace of the human family.

It follows that believers must “unite their efforts with those of all men and women of good will, with the followers of other religions and with non-believers, so that this world of ours may effectively correspond to the divine plan”, and help make a better world, “living as a family under the Creator’s watchful eye” (#57).

Thus the encyclical acknowledges that the Church relies on the sciences and other disciplines, and the experience of peoples over time, to come to a better understanding of moral truth. But it leaves little room for change in the Church’s social teaching, or for acknowledging mistakes made in the past such as Pope

⁵ CLANCY, Cardinal Edward, “Foreword” in the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, **Common Wealth for the Common Good** (Melbourne: CollinsDove, 1992), p. ii; and the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops, **The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and our Response** (3 May, 1983), pars. 8-9.

⁶ CHRISTIANSEN, Drew SJ, “Metaphysics and Society: a Commentary on *Caritas in Veritate*”, *Theological Studies*, 71 (March 2010), 13-14.

John Paul II apologised for during the Great Jubilee.⁷ An expression of humility about some of the Church's track record would not have gone astray instead of such unqualified pronouncements about its access to truth.

Scholars from other theological traditions, including the Thomists, could argue that moral truth is not always self-evident or clear, and that the Church advances in its moral awareness over time, as in its opposition to slavery or torture, and its modern attention to human rights and freedom. Moreover, the Church is not the only source of moral truth, and has had to learn much from the Enlightenment thinkers and other social and political movements, as Vatican II recognised.⁸

There are important issues of epistemology and metaphysics to be addressed by Christian thinkers in the Church's dialogue with contemporary movements and so-called post-modernity, as Charles Taylor points out in *A Secular Age*.⁹ This is a complex process, and the Church needs to be careful not to exaggerate its truth claims, lest perceptions of an authoritarian mindset undermine wider efforts at consensus on important social issues, like responses to population growth.

Nevertheless, Benedict's reflections underpin what Vatican II said in the Declaration on Religious Freedom (par. 2): "It is in accordance with their dignity as persons... that all should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth", the objective truth of their situation as said above.

Values and the economy

The world is anxious to develop a deeper consensus about human values for a globalising world. The World Economic Forum in early 2010 published its report *Faith and the Global Agenda: Values for a Post-Crisis Economy*, with contributions from 16 leaders of world religions. In a Facebook poll of 130,000 respondents in ten countries, more than two-thirds considered the economic crisis one of values and ethics as well.¹⁰

Yet there is little evidence in the encyclical that the Pope is engaging with this wider and very promising global dialogue. Instead, as David Nirenberg argued in an incisive critique, the Pope has given the impression that only the Church has the truth about social morality.

Or as Daniel Finn lamented, "the document moves directly from principles based on doctrines about the Trinity, Christology, or even Christian anthropology, to moral conclusions."¹¹

In the view of the Dominican theologian, Aidan Nichols, Benedict is seeking to "shoe-horn papal social doctrine into tradition with a capital 'T'." In other words, this social doctrine is not to "be regarded as merely prudential or exclusively natural in character", but that "the authority of the apostolic Paradosis in some way also covers social encyclicals of this kind".¹²

Observers were expecting that Benedict would have much to say about the role of values in the operation of markets and economics, and Nirenberg posits the question this way: Can the values that markets and

⁷ See DUNCAN, Bruce "The Significance of the Pope's Proposed Apologies for Errors by the Church", *Australasian Catholic Record* (October 1999), 462-475. See also Tissa Balasuriya OMI, "A missing dimension in papal encyclical", *Sedos Bulletin* 41: 9/10 (September-October 2009), 239-44.

⁸ See the Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World*, especially 43-45, 57 ff, 92-93.

⁹ TAYLOR, Charles *A Secular Age*, Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. See also Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁰ BANCHOFF, Thomas, "Faith, values and the World Economic Forum", Georgetown/On Faith, 18 January 2010, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2010/01/faith_values_and_world_economic_forum.html

¹¹ FINN, Daniel "Economics of Charity: Pope Benedict's "Caritas in Veritate", *Commonweal*, 14 August 2009, 10.

¹² NICHOLS, Aidan. "Benedict gives social teaching an injection of theology", *Catholic Herald*, 17 July 2009, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/features/f0000440.shtml>

societies “require to function properly be produced from within themselves, or must those values come from beyond themselves?”¹³

The question goes to the heart of the current debate, since classical economics has been built on the assumption of individuals competing to maximise their economic advantage and increase their wealth. Historically, societies have developed moral and cultural constraints on the accumulation of individual wealth to ensure adequate distribution of resources and the wellbeing of the whole society, the “common good”. Yet from Plato on, in contrast to the more enthusiastic recent advocates of neoliberalism, self-love and greed were seen as inimical to the common good. As Nirenberg writes:

Today, of course, self-love or self interest, as we prefer to call it – is the governing principle of all mainstream economics, widely believed to be the only sentiment capable of maximising the common good by coordinating human industry and distributing its fruits as efficiently as possible. This reversal of a millennial moral consensus must surely rank among the greatest revolutions in human thought, and it happened with astonishing rapidity.¹⁴

In the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the greed of the rich and powerful is constantly contrasted with God’s demands for social equity and justice for the poor. Jesus too repeatedly warns of the dangers of riches and God’s demands for solidarity with the poor. Yet surprisingly little of this rich Scriptural background appears in the encyclical.

Nirenberg writes that in contrast with earlier encyclicals, *Caritas in Veritate* “foregrounds the argument that only Catholicism contains the ‘Love in Truth’ that is necessary to address our global problems. Only Catholicism produces the synthesis of faith and reason, or spirit and flesh, necessary to produce an ‘authentic’ economic development that does not lapse into either ‘mere’ technical knowledge (materialism) or fanatical rejection of the world and its wealth.”¹⁵

Nirenberg considered the problem was that “Benedict is claiming to offer general answers to global questions that affect people of every faith (and sometimes of no faith), while at the same time insisting that the only possible answer to those questions is Catholicism.” Nirenberg continues that Benedict addresses his insights “in an insular manner, as a defense of Catholicism’s exclusive claims to truth”.¹⁶

Nirenberg was hoping for a papal statement that was more inclusive of people of other philosophical or religious views. In his view, “religions offer one of the few reservoirs of moral values still deep enough to nourish popular visions of a more ‘common good’”, but prescriptions in our global world “must be intelligible and adoptable” by others, otherwise calls to love contract into a sectarian pattern. There are other theories of distributive justice as well as Catholic ones, and the other great religious traditions, including Islam and Judaism, “have produced an immense body of thought about economic morality, and that thought has great resonance.”¹⁷

Nirenberg concludes that Benedict has not followed in the path of his predecessors who called for a consensus about human values in renewing world order. Benedict’s notion of love “is narrowed by his ‘truth’”.¹⁸

In defence of the encyclical, one could respond that it does, later, recognise the role of the sciences and academic disciplines, and invites collaboration with other churches and religious traditions. But these passages are not integrated with the early passages to give a balanced picture. This anomalous treatment may indicate the work of different people, with differing points of view.

¹³ NIRENBERG, David “Love and capitalism”, *New Republic*, 23 September 2009, 39-42.

<http://web.ebsncohost.com/ehost/delivery?vic+3&hid+111&sid+ed>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Background debates behind the encyclical

Social encyclicals often attempt to adjudicate debates in the Church between differing views, trying to give a direction for Church activists but also preserve face for those who lose the argument. The second part of *Deus Caritas Est* focused on the active charitable works of the Church but did not deal with the social justice dimensions of evangelisation. According to Drew Christiansen, this was the result of a difference of views between peak social justice agencies (including the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace and CIDSE, the International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity, which provides most of Catholic aid globally); and the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*. *Cor Unum* wanted Church activity to withdraw from political lobbying and institutional change in favour of more direct evangelisation in a spiritual sense, the Church's role being "essentially educational and formational".¹⁹

Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes, the president of *Cor Unum*, reportedly helped draft the latter sections of *Deus Caritas Est*, and at the launch of *Caritas in Veritate* on 17 July 2009 contended that "The Church's task is not to create a just society". He lamented that secularisation was drawing the Church into becoming "a political agent. The Church inspires, but does not do politics." "Woe to those who reduce the Church's mission to a worldly pressure movement to obtain political results". He continued that the Church's social doctrine was not "a political program ... to attain a perfect society", which would risk creating a theocracy.²⁰ In other words, he wanted Caritas Internationalis and Catholic social organisations to give more attention to the spiritual dimensions of evangelisation and direct charitable work, rather than engage in politicking for institutional changes.

In a further address (in Australia) on 27 November 2009, Cardinal Cordes made an unexpected and concerted critique of the theology of M-D Chenu OP and the "signs of the times". He was concerned about how much theological weight should be given to interpreting one's concrete life situation, particularly by the oppressed. He quoted Chenu: "'We have passed.... From theory to praxis, we no longer deduce abstract principles, we observe reality, where we have discovered an endowment for the Gospel'. So Chenu pioneers the self-abolition of social teaching", commented Cordes.²¹ Cordes contended that Chenu was in error when he argued that rather than speak of the social directives of the Church as "doctrine", one should speak of "teachings". Cordes considered that "the Church's social doctrine seemed to flounder" in the second half of the last century, and it was disputed if there would be continuity "of Church instruction as doctrine outside of historical developments and local circumstances... Universal 'teaching' could not be formulated."²²

It seems that Cordes was arguing that Revelation should determine the content of the social doctrine, and he wanted to downplay the historical and social science emphasis on discerning the "signs of the times". Hence he quoted Benedict that truth is "not something that we produce, it is always found, or better, received" (#34). In unexpectedly undiplomatic style, Cordes then criticised "certain participants" in the 2009 Synod of Bishops of Africa for a "politicisation of the Church's mission". "Under no circumstances should the mission of the Church be reduced to an inner worldly 'pressure group' with political goals".²³

Further, he said the Church "has no political program, whose realization would lead to a perfect society". He said of the Synod for Africa that "it would be inappropriate to identify all of the apostolate with social teaching".²⁴ He lamented that the *Lineamenta*, the preparatory paper for the Synod on the theme "Justice, Peace, Reconciliation", "spoke of the keyword 'justice' no less than 160 times (the word 'love' appeared just three times)".

¹⁹ CHRISTIANSEN, op-cit 6.

²⁰ CORDES, Cardinal Paul Josef, "*Cardinal Cordes on "Caritas in Veritate"*", 17 July 2009, www.zenit.org/article-26486?l=english

²¹ CORDES, Cardinal Paul Josef "*Not without the light of Faith: Catholic social doctrine clarifies its self-understanding*", Address at Australian Catholic University, Sydney, 27 November 2009, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Even more disturbing is the fact that almost exclusively engagement on behalf of humanity wishes to change social gravities. In this way, the understanding of *Caritas* and its goals will be dominated by a merely political perspective. Obviously the example of certain large Church charitable organizations, which accompany some UN events and world gatherings with political protests, encouraging the “protest culture,” has become a school.

By contrast, he argued: “We cannot stop spreading the message of *Deus Caritas Est* with its faith orientation for all Church *diakonia*.”²⁵

His dissatisfaction with the political dimension of Church justice agencies was again apparent in his final words:

The clear change of paradigm, which Pope Benedict orders for Church social doctrine, ignored for much time previously, and the clear shift in papal argumentation in terms of divine Revelation and its requirement is of less concern for the commentators. But politicians, society and the public, on the other hand, also seem to have less difficulty in rooting human life and Church teaching in the faith. The time for the Church to be silent about its specific and binding foundation thus lies behind us.²⁶

This is anything but a ringing endorsement of Paul VI’s encouragement of independent lay initiatives to advance social justice through political processes, most forcefully in his 1971 document, *Octagesimo Adveniens*. In *Development of Peoples* Paul VI insisted that “it belongs to the laymen, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit” into institutions and their communities.²⁷

Cordes has now passed the official retiring age of 75, but given his involvement with the drafting of *Deus Caritas Est* and his role at the launch of *Caritas in Veritate*, his views and influence with Pope Benedict need to be taken seriously.

This debate in Rome helps explain some of the positions adopted by the encyclical, especially in the early sections, though other parts generally do not support Cordes’s views.

Benedict affirms public advocacy and lobbying for institutional change

In contrast to efforts to depoliticise Church social movements, Benedict has firmly supported recent Church social teaching. Far from trying to retract from the social justice initiatives of Pope Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council, Benedict has strongly endorsed them. He is hoping that the message of *Development of Peoples* will continue to inspire and guide Catholics and others in this new era of globalisation.

Further, instead of withdrawing Church social activities from lobbying and political advocacy, he reaffirmed the essential link between faith and the Christian vocation to help “reshape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God” (#7). Indeed, “In the notion of development, understood in human and Christian terms, [Paul VI] identified the heart of the Christian social message” (#13). And again, “Testimony to Christ’s charity through works of justice, peace and development, is part and parcel of evangelization” (#15).

Contrary to Cordes, *Caritas in Veritate* advocates taking “the institutional path... the political path, of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters our neighbour directly”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Development of Peoples*, 81.

(#7). The Church must promote the common good and engage in structural transformation. Such action “paves the way for eternity through temporal action.”²⁸

Benedict does not oppose charity to work for justice. Far from it. “Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity; justice is inseparable from charity... Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI’s words, ‘the minimum measure’ of it.” Charity “demands justice... [and] strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice.” (#6).

And far from seeing charity as restricted to private and personal acts of charity between individuals, Benedict highlighted the “institutional path – we might also call it the political path - of charity... man’s [sic] earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family... Rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God” (#7).

Hammering the point home, Benedict extols *Development of Peoples*, saying that Paul VI urged us to travel “the path of development with all our heart and all our intelligence, that is to say with the ardour of charity and the wisdom of truth”. Benedict is convinced “that *Populorum Progressio* deserves to be considered ‘the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age” (#8). He could hardly express his endorsement more strongly.

Where Cordes does find some support from Benedict is the renewed stress on social “doctrine” and the authority of the Church to determine its content. Christiansen acknowledges that the encyclical’s “repeated appeal to metaphysics... seems to return to an earlier deductive model of teaching on social questions, a model abandoned by Vatican II’s move to the symbolic rhetorical style of positive theology and reading the signs of the times in its social teaching”.²⁹

Curiously, as Christiansen points out, the encyclical rejects the belief that there was a shift from the classicist approach based on deductive method and a neoscholastic philosophical framework to a more inductive approach, allowing much more for historical changes and developments.³⁰ The encyclical mentions that “clarity is not served by certain abstract subdivisions of the Church’s social doctrine... there is a single teaching, consistent and at the same time ever new” (#12).

Very few commentators would agree with this assertion. The standard histories of Catholic social thought amply document the changes and sometimes reverses in papal social thought since Pope Leo XIII.³¹ Who today defends the reactionary social thinking of St Pius X, or even, despite much of great value in his 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, the details of Pius XI’s third-way “vocational groups” or his clumsy condemnation of socialism?

Yet whereas Paul VI noted positive and negative aspects of utopian thinking, Benedict concentrates on the negative. Christiansen notes these differences in emphasis, “with Paul trusting in the renewing work of the Spirit and Benedict looking to the directive power of truth in the Logos.”³²

On Integral Development

²⁸ In his commentary, Drew Christiansen adds that Benedict even “embraces as well the optimistic, immanent, Teilhardian eschatology of Vatican II”. CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

³¹ See especially HIMES, Kenneth (ed.), **Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations** (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004); SCHUCK, Michael. **That they be One: the Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals 1740-1989** (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990); and DUNCAN, Bruce **The Church’s Social Teaching: from Rerum Novarum to 1931** (Melbourne: CollinsDove, 1991).

³² CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, 9.

Most of *Caritas in Veritate*, from chapter two to six, is devoted to development issues. Though it is not clear who was involved with consultations about the encyclical, these sections were reportedly based on the work of Stefano Zamagni, an economist from the University of Bologna.³³ It is not clear if the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace was involved, or how much specialists from the Secretariat of State or other Church agencies were consulted. This writer has heard no reports of consultations with episcopal conferences either. And though it was issued under his name and delayed two years, it is not even evident how much Pope Benedict was involved with writing the encyclical. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that he supervised its production closely.

Many observers had been expecting a thorough-going critique of the economic philosophies and practice that resulted in the global economic crisis,³⁴ and particularly of the ideology of neoliberalism. They expected a moral evaluation of contemporary globalisation, along with current efforts to alleviate global hunger and poverty.

Certainly the critique is there, but its edges have been blunted. Neoliberalism is never once mentioned, nor even capitalism. As Eugene McCarragher commented, “It’s called capitalism, Your Holiness: why not say so?... Today, when neoliberal economics is more tarnished and vulnerable than ever before, we need a rebuke to the gospel of Mammon that has deluded us for a generation, beguiling us to kneel before the idols of Markets and Productivity.”³⁵

Yes, the encyclical criticises the “speculative use of financial resources” and the extolling of market mechanisms geared to maximising short-term profits for share-holders without due moral consideration of other stakeholders or the overall economy (#40). There are references to “the ethical and cultural considerations of an individualistic and utilitarian nature” (#42); and an occasional inference to free-market ideology: “when the sole criterion of truth is efficiency and utility, development is automatically denied” (#70).

The encyclical recognises the need to turn finance to “improved wealth creation and development”. For this, financiers “must rediscover the genuinely ethical foundation of their activity” (#65). But one searches in vain for the sharp rebuttal of economic liberalism made by Paul VI in *Development of Peoples* (pars. 26, 58-61). One would also have expected a more rigorous and incisive critique of inadequate philosophical assumptions and the tragic failures of recent economic theory and practice. The encyclical mentions the positive and negative features of globalisation, and boldly argues: “The processes of globalization, suitably understood and directed, open up the unprecedented possibility of large-scale redistribution of wealth on a world-wide scale” (#42). However, the encyclical does not indicate how this might eventuate, and does not mention proposals like the Tobin Tax.

Neoconservative responses

Predictable responses came from right-wing neoconservative commentators. George Weigel attacked the encyclical for its sections on social justice. He rejected Paul VI’s *Development of Peoples* as “barely... in continuity with the frame for Catholic social thought” and for its “misreading of the economic and political signs of the times (which was clouded by then-popular leftist and progressive conceptions about the problem of Third World poverty, its causes and its remedies).”³⁶

³³ STEINFELS, Peter “From the Vatican, a tough read”, *The New York Times*, 18 July 2009; HEFFERN, Rich “New encyclical echoes a green vision”, *National Catholic Reporter*, 24 July 2009, 6.

³⁴ See O’HANLON SJ, Gerry, “A New Economic Paradigm?”, in *Working Notes*, 63 (March 2010), 3-10, at <http://jcfj.ie/analysis/analysis-main/17/462-wniss63-paradigm.html>

³⁵ McCARRAHER, Eugene “Not bold enough: why did Benedict pull his punches?” *Commonweal*, 14 August 2009, 11.

³⁶ WEIGEL, George “*Caritas in Veritate* in gold and red: the revenge of Justice and Peace (or so they think)”, *National Review*, 7 July 2009.

Michael Novak considered the encyclical failed to recognise the achievements of capitalism in reducing poverty and increasing wellbeing in different countries. “There are many more omissions of fact, questionable insinuations, and unintentional errors... The staff work has been rather poor.”³⁷

Joseph Loconte from the American Enterprise Institute criticised the encyclical for its “loose talk about redistribution schemes and global governance”, and for not giving enough attention to the obstacles to economic development. “The encyclical eventually drifts into the realm of fantasy”, especially with its “siren song of utopianism” in calling for a worldwide redistribution of wealth imposed by a global political authority.³⁸

Benedict’s proposals

Yet much of the encyclical follows the general consensus among development economists about what is needed to improve living conditions for peoples in developing nations.³⁹ It is not just a matter of eliminating hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases and illiteracy, but of fostering “active participation, on equal terms, in the international economic process” and in democratic regimes (#21).

Caritas in Veritate agrees with recent development thinking stressing that programs need to be flexible, “and the people who benefit from them ought to be directly involved in their planning and implementation. The criteria to be applied should aspire towards incremental development in a context of solidarity....” (#47).

Benedict recognises a legitimate role for profit, as long as it serves the common good in a sustainable way, but profit must not become “an exclusive goal” which ends by destroying wealth and creating poverty. The encyclical claims that recent economic growth “has lifted billions⁴⁰ [sic] of people out of misery”, but major crises are apparent from “largely speculative financial dealing, large-scale migration... [and] unregulated exploitation of the earth’s resources”. It continues that the “world needs to rediscover fundamental values on which to build a better future”, using the crisis as “an opportunity... to shape a new vision for the future” (#21).

As well as recognising a legitimate role for the market, “the social doctrine of the Church has unceasingly highlighted the importance of distributive justice and social justice” (#35), and here the “political community” has responsibility to ensure the economy works for the common good. *Caritas in Veritate* warns against “wealth creation” becoming “detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution... Admittedly, the market can be a negative force, not because it is so by nature, but because a certain ideology can make it so... it is not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility” (#36).

The encyclical recognises that wealth has grown, but inequalities have increased. Corruption is not confined to developing countries (#22), and because of the economic crisis, “systems of protection and welfare” have found it difficult to pursue “true social justice”. In addition, it argues that

- production has been outsourced to reduce costs

³⁷ NOVAK, Michael “Pope Benedict’s XVI’s *Caritas*”, in *First Things*, 8 August 2009.

³⁸ LOCONTE, Joseph “Morals, markets, and the Pope”, *The American*, The Journal of the American Enterprise Institute, 17 July 2009.

³⁹ See TODARO, Michael and Stephen C SMITH, *Economic Development* (9th ed.), (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2006); STIGLITZ, Joseph. *Making Globalization Work* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); **Global Monitoring Report 2008: MDGs and the Environment: Agenda for Inclusive and Sustainable Development** (Washington DC: World Bank, 2008); and **World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development** (Washington DC: World Bank, 2007).

⁴⁰ It would be difficult to defend the view that “billions” have been lifted out of misery with recent growth. Most of the reduction in extreme poverty in recent years has been in communist China and East Asia. According to *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*, the number of people living in extreme poverty (less than US\$1.25 per day) dropped from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion between 1990 and 2005, but was estimated to increase between 55 and 90 million because of the global economic crisis. China accounted for 475 million people lifted from such acute poverty. (New York: United Nations), 4-5.

- countries have been compelled to offer favourable tax regimes to attract investment
- labour markets are pressured into deregulation
- there is down-sizing of social security in some countries, and
- trade unions have been weakened (#25).

In developing countries, the encyclical added, hunger is caused not so much by “lack of material things as” lack of social resources and economic institutions capable of guaranteeing access to sufficient food and water. Hence it favours “investing in rural infrastructure, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets” and agricultural technology, along with “equitable land reform” (#27).

The missing Millennium Development Goals

However, Benedict is silent about the global dialogue around the Millennium Development Goals, which have spelt out in unprecedented detail what aspects of the common good entail at this time. Certainly the Church does not agree with some of the more recent population and birth control policies being advocated by Jeffrey Sachs, but the MDGs cannot be dismissed as moral relativism. They conceivably represent the most concerted international effort to draw up a morally objective global consensus possible at this moment in history. The Goals combine both inductive and deductive approaches, and strive for as wide a consensus as possible.

Pope John Paul II strongly supported the Millennium Development Goals.⁴¹ And in various forums, Benedict has encouraged efforts to advance the Millennium Development Goals,⁴² especially to reduce disease, hunger and poverty, as well as protecting the environment. It is puzzling that in this encyclical he does not mention the MDGs, though he clearly supports many of their elements.

One might have expected the encyclical at least not to overlook key elements of the MDGs, most notably the goals to increase education for girls and women, to reduce maternal mortality, and to empower women to exercise more authority and control in their communities and societies. Demographers consider these aspects as the most crucial dimensions in being able to regulate fertility and procreation, as well as being essential for women to enjoy their full human rights. Nor did the encyclical give much attention to global campaigns to eliminate infectious diseases, despite the fact that the Church in developing countries is a very major provider of health care and education.⁴³

One might guess that the reluctance of the encyclical to mention the Millennium Development Goals springs from differences about how to respond to population growth in this period of global warming, and particularly with proposals for family planning and abortion. Jeffrey Sachs, one of the architects of the MDGs, in his 2008 book, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, argued for greater efforts to curtail population growth to peak at 8 billion by 2050, instead of the anticipated 9 billion. To achieve lower birth rates, he argued that governments need to promote birth control methods, including contraceptives and legalised abortion.⁴⁴ The Catholic Church is of course strongly opposed to such policies, even if they can be introduced without coercion. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to see how population growth could be so sharply curtailed without the use of extreme measures.

A dilemma for the encyclical is that other churches and religious traditions need not agree with the papacy’s strictures against contraception or even abortion in certain circumstances. Even many Catholics invoke rights of conscience in such matters.

Population issues

⁴¹ See my *Ending Hunger*, *op. cit.*, 5 ff.

⁴² “Pope: Millennium Goals hang on generosity”, 8 July 2008 ZE08070803.

⁴³ In Africa alone in 2004, the Catholic Church was operating 5000 hospitals, 500 homes for the disabled, 85,000 pastoral centres and 10,000 schools educating 13 million children. See Archbishop Lajolo at a symposium on “The Social and Economic Development of Africa”, Rome, 23 May 2004, in *Zenit*, ZE04052308.

⁴⁴ SACHS, Jeffrey *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 2008), 190.

The section on population issues is surprisingly skimpy, possibly suggesting differences of view among Vatican agencies. The encyclical mentions high rates of infant mortality and laments “practices of demographic control”, where some governments “often promote contraception and even go so far as to impose abortion”. It claims some NGOs promote abortion and sterilisation, “in some cases not even informing the women concerned. Moreover, there is reason to suspect that development aid is sometimes linked to specific health-care policies which de facto involve the imposition of strong birth control measures” (#28).

The encyclical argues: “To consider population increase as the primary cause of underdevelopment is mistaken, even from an economic point of view” (#44). Without developing that view, *Caritas in Veritate* lamely points to the rise in life expectancy in developed countries and the “alarming decline in their birth rate”. It then switches issues and discusses values in sex education: “it is irresponsible to view sexuality merely as a source of pleasure, and likewise to regulate it through strategies of mandatory birth control” (#44). However I suggest that, though many demographers would agree that population increase may not be the primary cause of underdevelopment, they would insist that it is nonetheless a serious concern, and in some countries could seriously hamper efforts to reduce poverty and hunger.

Nowhere does the new encyclical acknowledge that Paul VI had said in *Development of Peoples* (par. 37): “It is true that too frequently an accelerated demographic increase adds its own difficulties to the problems of population”.

It is certain that public authorities can intervene, within the limit of their competence, by favouring the availability of appropriate information and by adopting suitable measures, provided that these be in conformity with the moral law and that they respect the rightful freedom of married couples.

Paul VI insisted that the decision about raising children rested with the consciences of parents. “Finally, it is for the parents to decide, with full knowledge of the matter, on the number of their children, taking into account their responsibilities towards God, themselves, the children they have already brought into the world, and the community to which they belong” (par. 37).

In *Humane Vitae* in 1968, Pope Paul added:

In relation to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised, either by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a large family, or by the decision, made for grave motives and with respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth.

Responsible parenthood implies therefore that husband and wife recognize fully their own duties towards God, toward themselves, towards the family and towards society, in a correct hierarchy of values (par. 10).

Caritas in Veritate mentions none of this. It contends that “Populous nations have been able to emerge from poverty thanks not least to the size of their population and the talents of their people” (#44), but it does not relate population pressures to other development factors, and nowhere concedes that population growth may be a serious impediment for development.⁴⁵

New business forms and other issues

The encyclical recognises that the economy “needs just laws and forms of redistribution governed by politics, and what is more it needs works redolent of the spirit of gift” (#37). It proposes a business model developed by the Focolare movement to channel part of business profits into social programs for

⁴⁵ See DUNCAN, Bruce. ‘Population and the Church in the context of global warming’, *The Japan Mission Journal*, (Winter 2006), 224-37.

disadvantaged groups.⁴⁶ The encyclical continues that “gratuitousness... fosters and disseminates solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good among the different economic players. It is clearly a specific and profound form of economic democracy” (#38). But as Christiansen writes, “The single most difficult test of the persuasiveness of the encyclical lies in whether its vision of society as gift and communion can penetrate economics and commerce”,⁴⁷ given the competitive nature of the market and the high-mindedness needed to pursue an “economy of communion”.

As well as the usual for-profit organisations, the encyclical calls for businesses “based on mutualist principles and pursuing social ends” (#38). The encyclical commends cooperatives (#66), though it is surprising that it does not make more of these, especially given the Church’s long involvement in promoting them.⁴⁸

The encyclical commends various forms of ethical financing, and “praiseworthy” micro-credit schemes (#45), without mentioning the work of Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank,⁴⁹ which has influenced international institutions to adapt the model of micro-credit elsewhere (see also #65).

Caritas in Veritate mentions other leading issues such as migration, unemployment and just family wages, tourism and sexual exploitation, and the rights of trade unions. It also links these social justice concerns with pro-life issues, concerning how life is conceived, in vitro fertilization, embryo research, cloning and euthanasia (#75).

It supports calls to reform the United Nations and international institutions, and “giving poorer nations an effective voice in shared decision-making”, along with “timely disarmament” (#67). It urges improved global governance, but with a “dispersed political authority” (#41), emphasising the principle of subsidiarity to foster “freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility” (#57).

Environmental concerns and the “energy problem” also appear in the encyclical and the request to lower consumption and redistribute energy resources, but strangely without explicitly mentioning global warming (#49). Benedict urges societies to adopt a more modest lifestyle to conserve resources for future generations and to meet the needs of poorer people. The encyclical notes that desertification, water shortages and “the decline in productivity in some agricultural areas” can fuel conflict (#51). “The Church has a responsibility towards creation and it must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, it must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. It must above all protect mankind from self-destruction” (#51).⁵⁰

The encyclical’s commendations of increased aid and greater transparency and participation in administering it would be widely accepted. More controversial are two unexpected recommendations: that increased aid could be funded out of the savings from better administration of welfare systems in developed countries: and secondly, “allowing citizens to decide how to allocate a portion of the taxes they pay to the State” so it can be transferred into foreign aid (#60). It is hard to see how these proposals could be politically viable.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ For the influence of the of Focolare model of “Economy of Communion”, see UELEN, Amelia L “*Caritas in Veritate* and Chiara Lubich: Human Development from the Vantage Point of Unity”, in *Theological Studies* 71 (March 2010), 29-45.

⁴⁷ CHRISTIANSEN, *op. cit.*, 19.

⁴⁸ See McKENNA SJ, Dermot “Co-operatives and the Economic and Environmental Crisis”, *Working Notes* (March 2010), 17-24, at <http://jcfj.ie/analysis/analysis-main/17/464-wniss63-co-operative.html>

⁴⁹ See YUNUS, Muhammad *Creating a World without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007).

⁵⁰ Benedict adopted a more vigorous statement against threats to the environment in his World Day of Peace statement for 2010. “If you want to cultivate peace, protect Creation”, World Day of Peace Statement, 1 January 2010, www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace_en.html

Only time will tell how successful is *Caritas in Veritate*. Such encyclicals have been of enormous importance in the past, not just in the Catholic world, but for giving direction for Christian social movements more widely and mobilising moral opinion behind social reform movements throughout the world. Benedict's encyclical also has appeared at a time of economic and social crisis, and attempts to respond from a moral perspective on how to reform our economic systems and ensure greater social justice and better living standards, especially for those hundreds of millions in hunger and acute poverty.

This is new ground for Pope Benedict, and it is perhaps not surprising that the encyclical seems to be having little impact. As an exercise in communication, it has been problematic. The early sections are very intimidating, even for scholars, and as I have argued, lack balance. The encyclical is far too long, and it would have been much better to have instead produced several smaller and more focused documents. *Caritas in Veritate* would certainly have benefited from wider consultation and one wonders why the Pope did not draw on the writers who produce many of his speeches and other documents, like the powerful World Day of Peace Statement for 2010, and his Lenten message. He also has expert resources available in Vatican representatives in international forums like the United Nations.

Nor will it be an easy matter to produce a simplified version of *Caritas in Veritate*, since there are unresolved tensions within the document itself, it is too laborious and magisterial in its style, and it fails to give a concise response to the question of values in human wellbeing. The insistence on seeing Church social teaching in terms of "doctrine" is also puzzling.

On the positive side, perhaps the encyclical's most important contribution is to refocus attention on the message of Pope Paul VI's *Development of Peoples* and the teaching of Vatican II. Despite the hopes of some conservatives that Benedict would reduce the Church's emphasis on social justice, he has powerfully endorsed it as part of the central doctrinal tradition of the Church, and reaffirmed its importance for the immediate future, particularly when faced with the issues of world hunger and poverty in the new context of climate change.