



Ever Ancient, Ever New. *Caritas in Veritate* and Catholic Social Doctrine

Thomas D. Williams, L.C.

Saint Matthew relates Jesus' praise for a scribe who becomes a disciple, comparing him to "the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."¹ This ability to keep up with a changing world while holding on to what is perennially valid and useful is particularly precious to Catholic Social Doctrine, a discipline that must constantly apply evergreen moral principles to fluctuating social realities.²

Striking this balance often proves difficult, and involves not only knowing what to throw out and what to keep, but sometimes even what to fish out of the dustbin. Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* ("On the Progress of Peoples") has often been pooh-poohed as a rambling, incoherent document that uncritically embraced a typically 1960s *gauchiste* read of the economy and of the

¹ Matt. 13:52.

² "This twofold dimension is typical of her teaching in the social sphere. On the one hand it is constant, for it remains identical in its fundamental inspiration, in its 'principles of reflection,' in its 'criteria of judgment,' in its basic 'directives for action,' and above all in its vital link with the Gospel of the Lord. On the other hand, it is ever new, because it is subject to the necessary and opportune adaptations suggested by the changes in historical conditions and by the unceasing flow of the events which are the setting of the life of people and society" (Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [1987], hereafter SRS, no. 3).

causes of wealth and poverty. Recently Lord Brian Griffiths, Vice-Chairman of Goldman Sachs International, summarily described *Populorum Progressio* as “the encyclical published by Paul VI in 1967, at the height of anti-capitalism in Europe. It attacked liberal capitalism, was ambivalent about economic growth, recommended expropriation of landed estates if poorly used and enthused about economic planning.”³

Pope John Paul II obviously didn’t share this severe critique of the text, and issued a commemorative encyclical in 1987 entitled *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in which he called *Populorum Progressio* a “distinguished encyclical” with “enduring relevance.”⁴ This was the first time that any social encyclical except *Rerum Novarum* had been commemorated in this fashion.

With the promulgation of *Caritas in Veritate*, however, Pope Benedict XVI has arguably gone one step further. Not content with merely producing a second encyclical in commemoration of *Populorum Progressio*, Benedict expresses his conviction “that *Populorum Progressio* deserves to be considered ‘the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age.’”⁵ This statement holds exceptional importance. For decades *Rerum Novarum* has been considered the “Magna Charta” of Catholic Social Doctrine,⁶ and Pope John Paul II wrote that through *Rerum Novarum* Pope Leo had “created a lasting paradigm for the Church.”⁷ In what will likely be the only social encyclical of his pontificate, Benedict has modified this vision in no insignificant way. For this reason alone, *Caritas in Veritate* may very well be, as one commentator has observed, “more than just another social encyclical.”⁸

The purpose of the present article will be to examine Benedict’s re-evaluation of *Populorum Progressio*, discern what it means practically for Catholic social doctrine, and explore Benedict’s discussion of integral human development and its requirements for the world of today.

³ Lord Brian Griffiths, *London Times*, July 13, 2009.

⁴ SRS, no. 2.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), hereafter CV, no. 8.

⁶ See Pope Pius XI, encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), hereafter QA, no. 39; Pope John XXIII, encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra* (1961), hereafter MM, no. 26.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus* (1991), hereafter CA, no. 5.

⁸ Scott P. Richert, “First Thoughts on *Caritas in Veritate*,” July 7, 2009 (<http://catholicism.about.com/b/2009/07/07/first-thoughts-on-caritas-in-veritate.htm>).

***Populorum Progressio* as the “*Rerum Novarum* of the present age”**

In the rather brief history of formal Catholic social doctrine, Popes have sought to continually update historical evaluations of social events and processes in an effort to keep social doctrine current and culturally relevant. In fact, since the vast majority of social encyclicals have been written to commemorate other social encyclicals (nearly always *Rerum Novarum*), each has sought to distill the perennial principles offered earlier (thus guaranteeing continuity) and to apply them to present circumstances (thus guaranteeing contemporary relevance). This has been, in practice, the standard methodology when popes have wished to contribute something to the ongoing corpus of social teaching.

Rerum Novarum has conveniently lent itself to this endeavor, in no small part through its title. Having treated the “new things” of his day, Leo XIII provided a perfect justification for his successors to continue applying the same dynamic. Thus he not only furnished a foundational document, but also a helpful model for what would become an important subset of papal teaching. Pope John Paul II, to take one example, in his encyclical commemorating the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, *Centesimus Annus*, proposed a re-reading of Leo’s encyclical, which expressly included looking around “at the ‘new things’ which surround us and in which we find ourselves caught up, very different from the ‘new things’ which characterized the final decade of the last century.”⁹

One of the side effects of this continual bringing up to date of papal social teaching has been a substantial amount of repetition of prior material. If one undertakes the sizable challenge of reading through the entire corpus of social encyclicals, one is necessarily struck by this phenomenon. The same ideas, principles and concepts are repeated over and over again, sometimes directly citing earlier encyclicals and sometimes simply reiterating the same reflections in slightly altered language. This is certainly true in the case of *Caritas in Veritate*, which restates ideas of traditional Catholic social teaching throughout.

In singling out *Populorum Progressio* as the new *Rerum Novarum*, Benedict in no way intended to break from the tradition of his predecessors. Rather he takes pains to stress the unity and continuity

⁹ CA, no. 3.

of all Catholic social doctrine, and to place both *Caritas in Veritate* and *Populorum Progressio* squarely in the line of his predecessors' works. Benedict does not seek to place *Populorum Progressio* in a class by itself, but rather notes that the Pauline encyclical "would be a document without roots" if viewed outside of tradition of the apostolic faith.¹⁰

To this end, Benedict locates *Populorum Progressio* in the context of Paul VI's entire magisterium (with intriguing reflections on encyclicals not normally associated with Paul's social teaching, such as *Humanae Vitae*) as well as in the still broader horizon of Catholic social doctrine generally. Benedict declares that Paul VI's social magisterium did not mark "a break with that of previous Popes" and warns against "certain abstract subdivisions of the Church's social doctrine," as if there were "two typologies of social doctrine, one pre-conciliar and one post-conciliar." On the contrary, Benedict contends, "there is a single teaching, consistent and at the same time ever new."¹¹ This is especially noteworthy in Benedict's continuity with his immediate predecessor Pope John Paul II. In *Caritas*, the most cited magisterial text after *Populorum Progressio* itself is John Paul's *Centesimus Annus*, the capstone of his social magisterium.

Yet, clearly, by honoring *Populorum Progressio* with the title of "the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age," Benedict meant to elevate *Populorum Progressio*, conferring on it a paradigmatic status not dissimilar to that enjoyed by *Rerum Novarum* throughout the twentieth century. He didn't, after all, just state that *Populorum Progressio* was an important or useful encyclical. He called it "the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age." What specifically about *Populorum Progressio* provoked this important move by Benedict? In what way can *Populorum Progressio* assume a referential role for the present day like that played by *Rerum Novarum* for the past 120 years?

As I have argued elsewhere, *Rerum Novarum* was itself an unlikely candidate for the central place it was to assume in Catholic social thought.¹² Leo XIII obviously had no idea that his letter on the "worker question" would generate an entirely new category of papal encyclicals, and indeed a new theological discipline! Leo penned an

¹⁰ See CV, no. 10.

¹¹ See CV, no. 12.

¹² See "Abortion and Catholic Social Doctrine," *Nova et Vetera* 6/3 (2008): especially 649-50.

incredible 87 encyclicals, several of which could be considered “social encyclicals,” yet it was *Rerum Novarum* that was singled out for this exalted function. Why not, for instance, *Diuturnum* (June 29, 1881) on the origin of civil authority? Why not *Immortale Dei* (Nov. 1, 1885) on the Christian constitution of states? How about *Graves de Comuni Re* (Jan. 18, 1901) on Christian democracy? Or even *Inscrutabili Dei Consilio* (April 21, 1878) on the evils of modern society?

The prominence of *Rerum Novarum* grew out of its tremendous popularity, especially among workers, and the rise of real Socialism, which had been condemned by the encyclical. It was, however, the decision of Pius XI to commemorate it in 1931 with *Quadragesimo Anno* that locked *Rerum Novarum* into its critical role. In introducing that encyclical, Pius wrote that it was *Rerum Novarum* out of all Leo’s writings that had the special distinction of laying down for all mankind “the surest rules to solve aright that difficult problem of human relations called ‘the social question.’”¹³ Yet for all its importance and opportuneness, *Rerum Novarum* was, after all, a letter that addressed the worker question and the socialist response, and not a treatise on social morality.

Populorum Progressio, on the other hand, for all its real deficiencies, effected an important conceptual shift in Catholic social thinking by moving from the worker question (with its attendant concerns of just wages, private property, working environment, and labor associations) to the broader and richer issue of *integral human development*. As a touchstone for Catholic social thought, integral human development is unquestionably more central and encompassing than the labor question, and, in fact, comprises it.

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict gives evidence that it was fundamentally this shift in focus—rather than Paul’s analysis of concrete development issues or practical solutions to those problems—that led Benedict to hold up *Populorum Progressio* as especially apt for our age. In fact, regarding contingent judgments, Benedict notes that “an evaluation is needed of the different terms in which the problem of development is presented today, as compared with forty years ago.”¹⁴ On the contrary, Benedict summarizes the substantive and enduring contribution of *Populorum Progressio* as “two important truths” conveyed by Paul VI. The first is that the whole Church, in all her being

¹³ QA, no. 2.

¹⁴ CV, no. 10.

and acting—when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity—“is engaged in promoting integral human development.”¹⁵ In other words, human development (rightly understood) stands at the very center of the Church’s mission, and everything the Church does can be seen as a service to this development.

The second “important truth” proposed in *Populorum Progressio*, according to Benedict, is that authentic human development “concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension.”¹⁶ The truth of development, Benedict insists, “consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development.”¹⁷ And the Pope importantly adds: “This is the central message of *Populorum Progressio*, valid for today and for all time.”¹⁸ Here Benedict underscores the nature of human development as going beyond the economic or merely material dimension and comprising every aspect of the person’s good, including the spiritual. In fact, Benedict immediately invokes “the perspective of eternal life” as essential to human progress. To be true, “development requires a transcendent vision of the person, it needs God.”¹⁹

Benedict’s most lavish praise of *Populorum Progressio* is that Paul VI identified in the notion of integral development “the heart of the Christian social message.”²⁰ And Benedict concludes that Paul’s vision of development at the core of *Populorum Progressio* is “the principal reason why that Encyclical is still timely in our day.”²¹ To see *Populorum Progressio* as the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age, therefore, is to grasp its vision of integral development as the kernel of Catholic social thought.

“Charity in truth” as the core of Catholic social doctrine

Along with Benedict’s significant statement concerning the enduring relevance of *Populorum Progressio*, he also offered another

¹⁵ CV, no. 11.

¹⁶ CV, no. 11, referencing *Populorum Progressio* (1967), hereafter PP, no. 14.

¹⁷ CV, no. 18.

¹⁸ CV, no. 18.

¹⁹ CV, no. 11.

²⁰ CV, no. 13.

²¹ CV, no. 16, emphasis added.

substantial contribution to the Church's social magisterium by introducing and developing the idea of "charity in truth" as the pivotal virtue underlying Catholic social thought. This, too, may represent a more important change than first meets the eye. Ever since *Rerum Novarum*, the papal social magisterium has never accepted the notion that justice alone was sufficient as the ordering principle required to produce a truly human society. To those who would substitute a system of relief organized by the State, Leo XIII replied that "no human expedients will ever make up for the devotedness and self-sacrifice of Christian charity."²² Yet although popes from Leo on had insisted that justice alone wasn't enough to rightly order human society and that charity was also essential, none more than Benedict had placed charity so squarely in the center of Catholic Social Doctrine.²³ "Charity," he writes, "is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine." Moreover, charity is the font from which the doctrine emerges. "Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity."²⁴ Benedict recognizes charity as the unique source of all of social doctrine, placing it even higher than the virtue of social justice, long considered the core virtue of Catholic social thought.

Yet to this idea of Christian charity Benedict importantly adds the complementary principle of *truth*. From his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict acknowledged the ways that charity or love has become distorted in the modern mind, and the consequent need for a rehabilitation and purification of the term.²⁵ Now in *Caritas* he returns to this ambiguity as a justification for tying charity closely to

²² Pope Leo XIII, encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* (1891), hereafter RN, no. 30. Pius XI similarly decried "rash reformers" who would concern themselves with justice alone while rejecting the assistance of charity. Even supposing that everyone should finally receive all that is due him, Pius reasoned, "the widest field for charity will always remain open. For justice alone can, if faithfully observed, remove the causes of social conflict but can never bring about union of minds and hearts" (QA, no. 137, *AAS* 23 [1931], 223).

²³ It would be mistaken to suppose that Benedict's special emphasis on charity represents a departure from past social teaching. John XXIII, for instance, taught that charity "summarizes the whole of the Church's social teaching and activity" (MM, no. 6). It is rather the case that Benedict wishes to underscore this element of Catholic social doctrine and hold it up for particular consideration.

²⁴ CV, no. 2. In this Benedict echoes the Catechism, which states: "Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it" (CCC, no 1889)

²⁵ See especially encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), hereafter DCE, no. 2, where Benedict writes that "the term 'love' has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words."

truth. “I am aware of the ways in which charity has been and continues to be misconstrued and emptied of meaning,” he writes, and it is precisely in the “social, juridical, cultural, political and economic fields”—the very areas dealt with by Catholic social doctrine—where charity is most exposed to this danger. “Hence the need to link charity with truth,” Benedict concludes.²⁶ Charity and truth need each other, complement and complete each other. “Deeds without knowledge are blind, and knowledge without love is sterile.”²⁷ Moreover, “love is rich in intelligence and intelligence is full of love.”²⁸ This leads to an altogether new definition of Catholic social doctrine as “*caritas in veritate in re sociali*.”²⁹ “*Caritas in veritate*,” Benedict writes, “is the principle around which the Church’s social doctrine turns.”³⁰

Witness to Truth as a Form of Charity

Benedict links charity to truth with a number of original considerations, of which we can distinguish five. He sees dedication to the truth, in the first place, to be a *form* of charity. To defend, articulate, or bear witness to the truth is an exalted expression of love for one’s neighbor. Since knowledge of the truth is essential for true human development, the assistance we give others in this process of discovering and adhering to the truth aids them in their development and thus constitutes an act of love for them. “Each person finds his good by adherence to God’s plan for him, in order to realize it fully: in this plan, he finds his truth, and through adherence to this truth he becomes free.”³¹ In other words, the human person is fulfilled through discovery of and adherence to the truth—and not just abstract, speculative truth, but the truth of his own existence and the divine plan for his life. His true good is tied directly to his knowledge and embracing of this truth. It is for this reason that “[t]o defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore exacting

²⁶ CV, no. 2.

²⁷ CV, no. 30.

²⁸ CV, no. 30.

²⁹ CV, no. 5.

³⁰ CV, no. 6.

³¹ CV, no. 1.

and indispensable forms of charity.”³² Without this witness to the truth, we fail to promote the true good of our neighbor; we fail to love fully.

Charity as Source of “Credibility” for Truth

Second, Benedict sees charity as giving “credibility” to truth. A self-assured possession of truth, devoid of charity, can easily be viewed as nothing more than hubris. Moreover, in this context the truth can be wielded as a weapon, and rather than a liberating force, it appears as a hostile and even enslaving instrument to be feared rather than pursued and welcomed. Where truth is either feared in this way, or dismissed as irrelevant, charity serves to restore and showcase its value. When charity is “understood, confirmed and practised in the light of truth,” we help “give credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living.”³³ One who claims to possess the truth but does not love impoverishes the truth and weakens its message. Charity, on the contrary, makes the truth believable, especially in a world where it has been discredited.

Truth Substantiates Charity

Third, according to Benedict, the truth performs a reciprocal service to charity. It enlightens, authenticates and gives meaning and value to charity. Under the light of truth—the truth of both reason and faith—charity shines as valuable and precious. The truth permits love to achieve its goal of truly serving the good of another, allowing charity “to be authentically lived.”³⁴ Without truth, on the other hand, “charity degenerates into sentimentality,” vague well-wishes with no objective content, and becomes “an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way.”³⁵ Without truth, social action carried out in the name of charity ends up “serving private interests and the logic of power.”³⁶

³² CV, no. 1; “Now it is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ” (Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (1968), hereafter HV, no. 29).

³³ CV, no. 2.

³⁴ CV, no. 3.

³⁵ CV, no. 3.

³⁶ CV, no. 5.

The danger of a relativistic culture is that not only is the truth lost, but love as well. Those who would sacrifice truth in favor of love find that they have forfeited both. When love loses its moorings to truth, it takes on a radical subjectivism where good intentions have no objective reference in action. Only the truth can preserve love and liberate it from emotionalism and fideism.

Dialogue in Truth Leads to Communion

A fourth important link between charity and truth can be found in Benedict's fascinating discussion of the role of truth in fostering communion. Because it is filled with truth, charity is intelligible, and therefore also communicable. The truth serves charity directly, in that it "is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos*, and hence communication and communion."³⁷ Communication consists in making common what was particular. I take the truth I possess and offer it as a gift to another, without thereby ceasing to own it. It becomes a common possession, in which we both participate, and as a result a "common good" that creates communion between us. Historical and cultural prejudice and particularities that often separate human beings are overcome in a common search for the truth that underlies all things. The truth makes it possible for people "to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things," and rescues the human person from isolation.³⁸ Love, then, becomes communion in the truth. Without this mutual search for truth, no deep or lasting communion is possible and nor is integral development of the person or society.

Jesus Christ as Truth and Love

A fifth and final consideration regarding the bond uniting charity with truth bears a more theological stamp. Benedict notes that is God is "both *Agápe* and *Lógos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word."³⁹ In his person Jesus Christ unites love and truth, perfectly revealing the love of the Father and the truth of both God and man. "In Christ, charity in truth becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan. Indeed, he himself is

³⁷ CV, no. 4.

³⁸ CV, no. 4.

³⁹ CV, no. 3.

the Truth.”⁴⁰ This theological consideration also makes evangelization possible and fruitful, since “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 true integral human development.”⁴¹ 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.”⁴²

Charity and Justice

Along with these five considerations, the intrinsic link between charity and truth sheds light on charity’s close relation to justice as well. Far from abandoning the critical principle of justice for Catholic social doctrine, Benedict shows how the two are mutually implicative. Justice, writes Benedict, “is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it.”⁴³ Justice is, moreover, “the primary way of charity.” I cannot “give” what is mine to another, Benedict reasons, “without first giving him what pertains to him in justice.”⁴⁴ If charity is *true*, it must therefore be *just*, since justice provides charity with its first essential content. “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them.”⁴⁵ At the same time, Benedict will also insist throughout the encyclical that “charity transcends justice.” We cannot attain authentic human development “merely by relationships of rights and duties” but must complement them “by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion.”⁴⁶

Charity in Economic Life

Benedict’s innovative reflections on the role of charity (as opposed to mere justice) in the field of economic life furnish another example of Benedict’s original contribution to Catholic social thought. He dedicates the entire third chapter of the encyclical—titled “Fraternity, Economic Development and Civil Society”—to these considera-

⁴⁰ CV, no. 1.

⁴¹ CV, no. 4.

⁴² CV, no. 4.

⁴³ CV, no. 6.

⁴⁴ CV, no. 6.

⁴⁵ CV, no. 6.

⁴⁶ CV, no. 6.

tions, as well as important sections of other chapters.⁴⁷ In a manner redolent of Pope John Paul II, Benedict suggests that the human person's essential vocation as being "made for gift" has concrete applications in the economic sphere. By its nature, Benedict reasons, gift "goes beyond merit, its rule is that of superabundance."⁴⁸ Merit, of course, is the language of justice, whereas superabundance is that of charity. For people accustomed to thinking of economic relationships merely in terms of justice, this language can prove unsettling. How, one may wonder, can such superabundance be applied in commercial affairs? Is this a case of theological idealism misapplied to human sciences?

Yet Benedict eschews such easy judgments, giving evidence of both moral realism and a surprising grasp of economic processes and systems. Regarding his realism, Benedict points immediately to man's fallen nature, noting (as John Paul had) that "Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action and morals."⁴⁹ He knows he is not counseling angels, but fallen human beings. He also is fully aware that "attitudes of gratuitousness cannot be established by law."⁵⁰ The encyclical's grasp of the reality of economics, on the other hand, manifests itself throughout the text, in passages too numerous to mention. To his assertion that "in *commercial relationships* the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity*," Benedict suggests that the market needs "commercial entities based on mutualist principles and pursuing social ends" alongside profit-oriented private enterprise, a reality which is in fact occurring in many parts of the world. It would seem that Benedict is asking for a twofold change: a broadening of possibilities for real-world economic enterprises, and a still more important broadening of mentality to transcend a minimalist, justice-based ethics in favor of a charity-based ethics.

⁴⁷ See, for example, CV, nos. 45-47.

⁴⁸ CV, no. 34.

⁴⁹ CV, no. 34.

⁵⁰ CV, no. 39.

The Requirements of Integral Human Development

When this charity is directed according to the truth of the human person, it contributes effectively to human development—both that of individuals and that of societies. In what does such development consist? In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict reiterates many of the components of genuine human development brought forward by Paul in *Populorum Progressio*. Benedict speaks of integral development as a “vocation,” for instance, as Paul had.⁵¹ Benedict underscores the spiritual dimension of development, as Paul had.⁵² Benedict re-proposes the need for a global political authority (regulated by principles of solidarity and subsidiarity), as Paul had.⁵³ Benedict stresses the importance of basic education for development, as Paul had.⁵⁴ Benedict also decries the scandalous gap separating rich from poor as a dire threat to development, as Paul had.⁵⁵

Significantly, however, he also adds some original requirements to the list and attributes special importance to them. Foremost among these issues are respect for human life, the right to religious freedom and concern for the environment. These are, if you will, some of the “new things” that Benedict discovered in his analysis of the contemporary world situation.

Life Issues

Bioethical concerns, and especially the scourge of abortion, do not appear as tangential issues in *Caritas in Veritate*. Not content with merely including life issues in his discussion, Benedict insists: “*Openness to life is at the centre of true development.*”⁵⁶ Benedict underscores the importance of life issues for human development in no uncertain terms, and returns to the topic several times throughout the encyclical. He calls respect for life one of the “most striking aspects of development in the present day” denouncing an “anti-birth mentality” and the added evil that it is often considered “a form of cultural pro-

⁵¹ See CV, nos. 11, 16-19; PP, nos. 15-16.

⁵² See CV, nos. 76-77, 79; PP, no. 16.

⁵³ See CV, nos. 41, 57, 67; PP, no. 78.

⁵⁴ See CV, no. 61; PP, no. 35.

⁵⁵ See CV, no. 22; PP, nos. 8-9, 29, 57.

⁵⁶ CV, no. 28, emphasis in original.

gress.”⁵⁷ This anti-birth mentality opposes true development because of the moral depravity it supposes, but for other reasons as well. Benedict calls morally responsible openness to life “a rich social and economic resource.”⁵⁸ He notes that population size has been a necessary component to the economic growth of populous nations, and that population decline has become “a crucial problem for highly affluent societies.”⁵⁹ A decline in births (at times beneath the replacement level) “puts a strain on social welfare systems, increases their cost, eats into savings and hence the financial resources needed for investment, reduces the availability of qualified labourers, and narrows the ‘brain pool’ upon which nations can draw for their needs.”⁶⁰ These situations are symptomatic—Benedict asserts—of “scant confidence in the future and moral weariness.”⁶¹

In its link to integral human development, Benedict looks at a growing lack of respect for life as a new form of “poverty and underdevelopment,” both where it is imposed as a method of demographic control and, especially in economically developed countries, where anti-life legislation “has already shaped moral attitudes and praxis.”⁶² Benedict ties bioethical questions to human development at the level of basic attitudes, where he sees them as necessarily related. “If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of a new life is lost,” Benedict reasons, “then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away.”⁶³ If a society ceases to value the life of its weakest and most vulnerable members, how can it find strength or motivation to assist other neighbors in their needs?⁶⁴ Where abortion and euthanasia are accepted, how can there be any true interest in the needs of the poor and underprivileged? And so Benedict cites John Paul II in saying that a society lacks solid foundations when, “on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically

⁵⁷ CV, no. 28.

⁵⁸ CV, no. 44.

⁵⁹ CV, no. 44.

⁶⁰ CV, no. 44.

⁶¹ CV, no. 44.

⁶² CV, no. 28.

⁶³ CV, no. 28.

⁶⁴ See also Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), hereafter EV, no. 20.

acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized.”⁶⁵ But the contrary is also true. By cultivating openness to life, Benedict adds, “wealthy peoples can better understand the needs of poor ones.” The acceptance of life “strengthens moral fibre and makes people capable of mutual help.”⁶⁶ In this light, a culture’s basic attitudes toward human life can be seen as a thermometer of its ability and will to achieve true human development. But openness to life is also a door toward greater commitment to development generally.

In this same vein, Benedict discovers a relationship between the “culture of death” and “a materialistic and mechanistic understanding of human life.” These are, in Benedict’s words, signs of a “highly disillusioned culture, which believes it has mastered every mystery, because the origin of life is now within our grasp.”⁶⁷ When this happens, Benedict suggests, it signals the supremacy of technology over true humanism, and in such a culture “the conscience is simply invited to take note of technological possibilities” rather than to guide the use of technologies so that they serve human development.⁶⁸ And so, Benedict notes, in our day the social question has become a radically anthropological question, “in the sense that it concerns not just how life is conceived but also how it is manipulated.”⁶⁹ And once again the Pope asks how we can be surprised by “the indifference shown towards situations of human degradation, when such indifference extends even to our attitude towards what is and is not human?”⁷⁰

Benedict concludes with an observation that mirrors many people’s concerns in a politically correct world, where morality is detached from the truth of human nature. “What is astonishing,” he states, “is the arbitrary and selective determination of what to put forward today as worthy of respect. Insignificant matters are considered shocking, yet unprecedented injustices seem to be widely tolerated.”⁷¹ And thus we commonly witness the shock and scandal of citizens over

⁶⁵ CV, no. 15; see also EV, no. 101.

⁶⁶ CV, no. 28.

⁶⁷ CV, no. 75.

⁶⁸ CV, no. 75.

⁶⁹ CV, no. 75.

⁷⁰ CV, no. 75.

⁷¹ CV, no. 75.

a person's choice to smoke a cigarette, or to go hunting, or to fail to recycle, and the cavalier acceptance of the truly horrifying moral evils of abortion, human cloning and euthanasia.

Religious Freedom

Ever since the promulgation of the Vatican II Decree on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the popes have not failed to hold up religious freedom as a fundamental human right. Pope John Paul II sought to connect this important Conciliar principle with the Church's entire social tradition, citing Leo's insistence on the right to discharge one's religious duties as a "springboard" for the principle of the right to religious freedom.⁷² John Paul went so far as to call religious freedom "the source and synthesis" of human rights, understood as "the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person."⁷³

In continuity with this tradition, in *Caritas in Veritate* Benedict highlights religious freedom as a core human right, but he does so with some surprising nuances that merit careful analysis. In the first place, he puts forward religious freedom as a key component of human development.⁷⁴ True human development is impeded when religious freedom is obstructed or suppressed. Benedict notes that this happens in different ways, and specifically mentions religious fanaticism (once more condemning killing "in the holy name of God") as well as "the deliberate promotion of religious indifference or practical atheism," which ends up stifling spiritual and human resources.⁷⁵ In this way, the state can become an enemy of religious freedom (and thus of development) either by embracing a narrow-minded confessionalism that refuses to recognize the rights of those outside of it, or through implicit or explicit atheism.⁷⁶ Thus when "the State promotes, teaches, or actually imposes forms of practical atheism," it keeps citizens from moving forward in their human and spiritual development.⁷⁷

⁷² See CA, no. 9.

⁷³ CA, no. 47.

⁷⁴ See CV, no. 29.

⁷⁵ See CV, no. 29.

⁷⁶ "The exclusion of religion from the public square -- and, at the other extreme, religious fundamentalism -- hinders an encounter between persons and their collaboration for the progress of humanity" (CV, no. 56).

⁷⁷ CV, no. 29.

Benedict insists that this religious freedom without which true development is impossible has a necessarily *public* dimension. Throughout the encyclical, the Pope emphasizes that religion has a social function and explicit recognition of God is integral to the growth of civilization. Religions can offer their contribution to development, Benedict states, “only if God has a place in the public realm,” specifically in regard to the cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions of society.⁷⁸

Second, Benedict makes the case that although “religion” and the acknowledgement of God is a good for humanity that ought to be promoted, not all religions are the same, and not all religions contribute equally to the development of individuals and societies.⁷⁹ Some, in fact, may obstruct it. The Pope places “cultures” and “religions” side by side, in part to show that his analysis is not so much theological as humanistic. He notes that certain cultures and religions “teach brotherhood and peace and are therefore of enormous importance to integral human development” yet other traditions “do not fully embrace the principle of love and truth and therefore end up retarding or even obstructing authentic human development.”⁸⁰ Some of this cultural retardation comes from the promotion of individualism in certain religious cultures. Rather than advancing communion among people, they focus on “individual well-being, limited to the gratification of psychological desires.”⁸¹ Though not mentioning them by name, the Pope seems to refer to New Age or self-help spiritualities as especially dangerous for development, since they fail to foment the interpersonal communion that is integral to true development.⁸² At other times, Benedict continues, religious cultures manifest their deficiencies as a kind of syncretism, which not only alienates persons from each other, but may also “distance them from reality.”⁸³

⁷⁸ See CV, no. 56.

⁷⁹ “Religious freedom does not mean religious indifferentism, nor does it imply that all religions are equal” (CV, no. 55).

⁸⁰ CV, no. 54.

⁸¹ CV, no. 54.

⁸² This analysis parallels an earlier critique of New Age, found in Ratzinger’s book *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004). See especially 126-29.

⁸³ CV, no. 55.

Benedict's analysis does not end here, however. He makes the bold proposal that in order to safeguard and promote the common good, political authority must in some way engage in the task of *discernment among religions*. "Discernment is needed regarding the contribution of cultures and religions," Benedict states, "especially on the part of those who wield political power."⁸⁴ The Pope is no doubt aware of the hornet's nest he stirs when suggesting that government is competent to judge between one religion and another. His earlier juxtaposition of religion and culture helps to obviate the criticism that the Pope is somehow inviting politicians to make theological judgments. In fact, Benedict goes on to say that the discernment needed has to be "based on the criterion of charity and truth" and that this criterion for evaluating cultures and religions is the "whole man and all men."⁸⁵ It is, in other words, an anthropological judgment, based on universal principles of the common good—which rightly falls in the province of political authority.

The Environment

In chapter four of *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict devotes extensive space (nos. 48-52) to the question of responsible stewardship for the environment, a topic he has addressed on numerous occasions elsewhere.⁸⁶ Not without reason has Benedict been called the "Green Pope."⁸⁷ Yet despite Benedict's undeniable environmentalism, it is a distinctly Catholic strain of environmentalism. His frequent calls for environmental responsibility bear none of the ideological tones common among more radical environmentalists, but rather see man's relationship to the environment in theological terms.

In the first place, Benedict's environmentalism is markedly *anthropocentric*. To the consternation of those who either view man as

⁸⁴ CV, no. 55.

⁸⁵ CV, no. 55.

⁸⁶ Among the many possible references, the Pope's 2010 message for the 43rd World Day of Peace, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, stands out. See also CV, nos. 27, 67, 69.

⁸⁷ "Pope Benedict XVI's track record on the environment already has been robust enough to justify a book-length treatment, *Ten Commandments for the Environment* by Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, in which he's proclaimed the greenest pope in history" (John L. Allen, Jr., "Benedict XVI's very own shade of green," *All Things Catholic*, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/benedict-xvi%E2%80%99s-very-own-shade-green>).

simply another piece in the cosmic puzzle or, worse still, a “cancer” for the environment, Benedict frames human environmental obligation in terms of our responsibility for one another. Thus the Holy Father notes that in our use of the environment “we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.”⁸⁸ In fact, the Pope sees our responsibility toward future generations as an expression of “*intergenerational justice*.”⁸⁹ Nowhere does Benedict speak of the environment for its own sake, but draws ethical conclusions from our responsibility toward other human beings. We are not responsible *to* the environment, but rather *for* the environment *for the sake of one another*. Therefore, Benedict asserts, “it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person,” a position that can only lead to “attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism.”⁹⁰

Man’s relationship with creation reflects the way he views himself and his fellow man. Or in Benedict’s words: “The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa.”⁹¹ Respect for one another necessarily generates respect for creation. The deterioration of nature, on the other hand, is “closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when ‘human ecology’ is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.”⁹² In his holistic view of human existence, Benedict sees a relationship between attitudes toward the environment and attitudes to other critical aspects of human existence, such as respect for life, for marriage, and the common good. “Our duties towards the environment,” Benedict states, “are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others.”⁹³

At the same time, Benedict’s vision is not only anthropocentric, it is also eminently *theological*—the environment is first and foremost “God’s gift to everyone.”⁹⁴ Even prior to our responsibility to one an-

⁸⁸ CV, no. 48.

⁸⁹ CV, no. 48. He further affirms that “we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it” (CV, no. 50).

⁹⁰ CV, no. 48.

⁹¹ CV, no. 51.

⁹² CV, no. 51.

⁹³ CV, no. 51.

⁹⁴ CV, no. 48.

other, we have a duty toward our Creator. Benedict asserts that acknowledgement of God as Creator leads to environmental responsibility. True environmentalism cannot flourish outside of this theological horizon, but rather when nature, including human beings, “is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes.”⁹⁵ On the other hand, nature itself “speaks to us of the Creator” and “expresses a design of love and truth.”⁹⁶ In it we discover God’s loving hand, and the precious gift that serves as the setting for our earthly existence. And so respect for creation becomes a true “vocation,” and human beings are called to care for it, “to till and to keep it” (Gen 2:15).⁹⁷ The vocation to development, including respect for creation, is therefore “not based simply on human choice, but is an intrinsic part of a plan that is prior to us and constitutes for all of us a duty to be freely accepted.”⁹⁸ For this reason, man is called to avoid the two extremes of “reckless exploitation” on the one hand, and nature worship on the other, which would see in the environment an “untouchable taboo.”⁹⁹

Conclusion

Like so many of Pope Benedict’s writings, both prior to and consequent to his election to the Chair of Peter, *Caritas in Veritate* does not lend itself to quick comprehension, and the summary judgments of the encyclical that emerged immediately after its promulgation—whether favorable or unfavorable—necessarily missed the mark in important ways. Its dense language, the complexity of its ideas and its interrelatedness with the entire corpus of Catholic social doctrine ne-

⁹⁵ CV, no. 48.

⁹⁶ CV, no. 48. Benedict’s vision mirrors that of Saint Augustine, from whom he draws inspiration. Compare, for example, the following. “And what is this? I asked the earth, and it said, ‘I am not he.’ And all things in it confessed the same. I asked the sea and the deeps, and among living animals the things that creep, and they answered, ‘We are not your God! Seek you higher than us!’ I asked the winds that blow: and all the air with the dwellers therein said, ‘... I am not God!’ I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars: ‘We are not the God whom you seek,’ said they. To all the things that stand around the doors of my flesh I said, ‘Tell me of my God! Although you are not he, tell me something of him!’ With a mighty voice they cried out, ‘He made us!’ My question was the gaze I turned on them; the answer was their beauty” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, ch. 6).

⁹⁷ CV, no. 48.

⁹⁸ CV, no. 51.

⁹⁹ CV, no. 48.

cessitates a slow, careful reading and re-reading of the letter so as not to miss the subtlety of the arguments Benedict puts forth. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Benedict's proposal, his arguments cannot be lightly dismissed.

With *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict has left a substantial mark on Catholic social doctrine. In what will probably be the only social encyclical of his pontificate, he has laid out a series of priorities and offered points for reflection that will keep theologians and Catholic thinkers busy for years. While much of the material contained in this lengthy encyclical (at 30,000 words, the letter is nearly five times as long as the encyclical it commemorates!) reiterates the ideas and arguments of Benedict's predecessors, he adds a number of significant nuances to these ideas, as well as several important original reflections, as we have seen. His highlighting of integral human development as the central point of reference for Catholic social thought, his elevation of "charity in truth" as the core virtue for Christian social ethics, and his detailed and explicit inclusion of life issues, religious liberty and environmental responsibility as essential components of human development all affect Catholic social doctrine in substantial ways.

No one, least of all Benedict himself, sees Catholic social doctrine as the Pope's academic or pastoral forte. Despite his significant reflections in this area (think, for instance, of his excellent book *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*), they are usually derivative of other studies, and Benedict prefers topics closer to his own areas of expertise, with Fundamental Theology and Ecclesiology topping the list. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely because he approached this subject from a distinct perspective, both in *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate* Benedict has offered the Church a refreshing reconsideration of how fundamental moral principles, and especially the commandment to love, must be applied in the social sphere.

Summary: *The article analyzes Pope Benedict XVI's social encyclical Caritas in Veritate and its original contribution to Catholic social doctrine. The author begins by examining Benedict's claim that Populorum Progressio deserves to be considered the Rerum Novarum of the present age, and asserts that the substance of this claim is not Paul VI's specific evaluation of the social question but rather his elevation of "integral human development" as the overarching principle of Catholic social doctrine. The article goes on to explicate Benedict's understanding of "charity in truth" as the most suitable virtue for engaging in Catholic social ethics, underscoring five ways in which charity and truth complement one another. The essay concludes with a study of the requirements of integral human development*

as presented in Caritas in Veritate, with special emphasis given to the three most original components of this development as proposed by Benedict: respect for human life, religious liberty and environmental responsibility.

Key words: charity, truth, Caritas in Veritate, charity in truth, Benedict XVI, Catholic social doctrine, justice, solidarity, subsidiarity, Populorum Progressio, Paul VI, development, progress, Deus Caritas Est, respect for life, religious liberty, religious freedom, environment, environmentalism, responsible stewardship, social magisterium, Rerum Novarum.

Parole chiave: carità, verità, Caritas in Veritate, Benedetto XVI, dottrina sociale della Chiesa, giustizia, solidarietà, sussidiarietà, Populorum Progressio, Paolo VI, sviluppo, progresso, Deus Caritas Est, rispetto per la vita, libertà religiosa, ambiente, ambientalismo, magistero sociale, Rerum Novarum.