

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
VISION OF *CARITAS IN VERITATE*  
IN LIGHT OF ECONOMIC AND  
CULTURAL LIFE IN  
THE UNITED STATES

• David L. Schindler •

“Catholic social teaching is a vision of reality  
—an understanding of being, man, and God—  
that unfolds an entire way of life, at the heart of  
which is a moral-social practice.”



“The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development” (n. 18). This, says Pope Benedict XVI in his recent encyclical, *Caritas in veritate* (CV), is “the central message of Paul VI’s *Populorum progressio*, valid for today and for all time” (n. 18).

Integral human development on the natural plane, as a response to a vocation from God the Creator, demands self-fulfillment in a “transcendent humanism which gives [to man] his greatest possible perfection: this is the highest goal of personal development.” The Christian vocation to this development therefore applies to both the natural plane and the supernatural plane . . . . (n. 18, citing *PP*)

According to Benedict, God-centered charity in truth is the key to this “integral human development.” “Everything has its origin in God’s love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it” (n. 1). Love is “the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members, or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic, and political ones)” (n. 1).

The call to love is thus not imposed on man from the outside, as an extrinsic addition to his being, nor is it something in which only some are meant to participate. On the contrary, “the interior impulse to love” is “the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person,” even as this love is “purified and liberated by Jesus Christ,” who reveals to us its fullness (n. 1). “In Christ, *charity in truth* becomes the Face of his Person” (n. 1). The Church’s social teaching thus, in a word, is “*caritas in veritate in re sociali*: the proclamation of the truth of Christ’s love in society” (n. 5).

This, in sum, is the root proposal of the encyclical. My purpose is to discuss the anthropological vision informing the Church’s social teaching as summarized in this statement and articulated in the encyclical, in its meaning for economic and cultural life.<sup>1</sup>

### I.

To get at the heart of what I wish to propose, let me begin by indicating some questions raised by various commentators in America regarding the encyclical. I limit my discussion here to representative responses from “mainstream” Catholic academic and cultural leaders which, while favorable in many respects, also raise critical questions, and thereby bring into relief the most basic claims of the encyclical.

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was delivered at the conference, “Family, Common Good and the Economic Order: A Symposium on *Caritas in veritate*,” held at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C. (4 December 2010). Earlier versions were presented at the conference, “Tradition and Liberation: *Charity in Truth* and the New Face of Social Progress,” sponsored by the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois (20–23 April 2010) and the Vatican II International Symposium of University Professors, “*Caritas in Veritate*, Towards an Economy Supporting the Human Family: Person, Society, Institutions,” organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Rome, Italy (24–27 June 2010).

(1) One author suggests, for example, that “the intellectual style and philosophical-theological underpinnings seem noticeably different from that of the preceding tradition of the Church. . . . Benedict XVI’s repeated appeal to metaphysics, as important as it is to his own theology and to his social message, seems to return to an earlier deductive model of teaching on social questions.” This model, the author says, has been “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.” The author says further that the encyclical’s approach risks making the terms of the encyclical “less accessible for many readers” because, as “Benedict himself recognizes,” “modern Western culture generally no longer articulates its fundamental convictions in metaphysical terms.”<sup>2</sup>

(2) Not unrelated to these concerns, another author has suggested that, “where John Paul II or Paul VI cultivated an ecumenical voice when they wished to speak about global problems, Benedict cultivates a dogmatic one.” Consistent with his Regensburg address in 2007, Benedict invites dialogue, but then sets “the Catholic synthesis of faith and reason as a prerequisite for that dialogue.” To be sure, says the author of this criticism, in “a de-secularizing age” such as our own, we should be free to draw on the wisdom of each of our traditions. Nevertheless, if such “teachings are to contribute to global ‘unity and peace,’ they will have to be taught in a way that seeks to transcend the boundaries of the traditions that produced them.” The author says that Pius XI and John Paul II both understood this, and, although Benedict presents *CV* as a continuation of their teaching, he does not follow their example. On the contrary, “Benedict’s ‘love’ is narrowed by his ‘truth.’”<sup>3</sup>

(3) Also pointing toward a discontinuity between *CV* and earlier documents of the Church’s social teaching, though in a different vein, a third author has said that Catholics must ask themselves whether there are now two social-doctrine traditions, one reaching from Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* to *Centesimus annus*, the other from *Populorum progressio* through *Sollicitudo rei socialis* to

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<sup>2</sup>Drew Christiansen, “Metaphysics and Society: A Commentary on *Caritas in veritate*,” *Theological Studies* 71 (March 2010): 3–28, at 7.

<sup>3</sup>David Nirenberg, “Love and Capitalism,” *The New Republic*, 23 September 2009.

*Caritas in veritate*. The author sees these two traditions stressing, respectively, freedom, virtue, human creativity, and the market economy, on the one hand, and such things as the benefits of “world political authority” and the redistribution of wealth over wealth-creation, on the other. He emphasizes in this context that *Centesimus annus* had “jettisoned the idea of a Catholic ‘third way’ that was somehow ‘between’ or ‘beyond’ or ‘above’ capitalism and socialism—a favorite dream of Catholics ranging from G.K. Chesterton to John A. Ryan and Ivan Illich”—and implies that *CV* weakens this claim. This critic also points toward what he thinks is the incomprehensibility of such views expressed in *CV* as that “defeating Third World poverty and underdevelopment requires a ‘necessary openness, in a world context, to forms of economic activity marked by quotas of gratuitousness and communion.’”<sup>4</sup>

Likewise questioning in a similar spirit the comprehensibility, or “realism,” of *CV*, another author, writing in the journal *First Things*, asks whether the encyclical’s call for “a true world political authority” may not involve Christians in “merely baking bricks for some yet more calamitous Babel.” He suggests that we need to recall in this context St. Augustine’s doctrine of the two cities, in which Augustine distinguishes clearly between the Church and the world, and their respectively eternal and temporal forms of community.<sup>5</sup>

(4) There is the further suggestion that the encyclical “reflects only the most limited insight into the practical moral problems of people” in business. According to the author of this criticism, “Benedict reiterates recurring themes from Catholic social teaching on the rights of workers but offers no further counsel on how to resolve the difficult employment, sourcing, safety, and environmental challenges business executives face.” In a word, the pope chooses to address moral decisions only at the “systemic level.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>George Weigel, “*Caritas in Veritate* in Gold and Red,” *National Review Online*, 7 July 2009.

<sup>5</sup>Douglas Farrow, “Charity and Unity,” *First Things* (October 2009): 37–40, at 39. For a discussion of *CV*’s theology of grace, and its concept of nature, see Philippe Gabriel Renczes, S.J., “Grace Reloaded: *Caritas in veritate*’s Theological Anthropology,” *Theological Studies* 71 (June 2010): 273–90.

<sup>6</sup>Kirk O. Hansen, “What’s the Business Plan?” in “Papal Correspondence,” *America*, 30 November 2009.

(5) Another author asks for a greater recognition by the encyclical of “the contested nature of the ‘truly human’ in a global society and a deeper epistemological humility in expressing ‘the truth about man.’” She finds, for example, that the connections made in *CV* between “human ecology” and “physical ecology” are unsatisfactory. The encyclical rightly critiques liberal rights and freedom, but in a way that is nevertheless too narrow, in its rejection *tout court* of same-sex marriage, contraception, and medically assisted reproduction. According to this scholar, the encyclical’s appreciation of sexual difference and gendered roles gives insufficient attention to the social, economic, and political conditions that undermine genuine equality between men and women, and, more specifically, block recognition of the importance of empowering women “as the cornerstone of sustainable development.”<sup>7</sup>

(6) Finally, discussing what she terms Benedict’s “global reorientation,” one theologian notes that

Benedict’s longstanding concern with the recovery of Christian religious faith in Europe [had led] him to accentuate the divinity of Christ, a Word Christology, and the availability to humans of transcendent communion with God. Yet Benedict’s emergent investment in reform of global social structures requires a Christology in which the incarnation, resurrection, and Pentecost offer the possibility of historical transformations modeled on Jesus’ eschatological ministry of the kingdom or reign of God.

The author suggests in this connection that there has been a development in Benedict’s *CV* and other recent papal writings that contrasts, for example, with his first encyclical and his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Implied in these developments is “a view of Christ and Christian faith as enabling charity and hope, not only as interior dispositions or gateways to eternity but also as active, practical virtues through which Christians join with others to work for global justice and structural change.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Maura A. Ryan, “A New Shade of Green? Nature, Freedom, and Sexual Difference in *Caritas in veritate*,” *Theological Studies* 71 (June 2010): 335–49, at 345–48.

<sup>8</sup>Lisa Sowle Cahill, “*Caritas in veritate*: Benedict’s Global Reorientation,” *Theological Studies* 71 (June 2010): 291–319, at 291–92.

These brief comments to be sure scarcely capture the nuances of the arguments in each case. Nor do my comments call attention to the authors' positive assessments of various aspects of the encyclical. I direct attention to their questions mainly to set a backdrop for the theme I wish to address, and limit myself in response to summary statements of principle in their regard. The questions all draw attention in different ways to what is perceived, not incorrectly, as the anthropological, metaphysical, or "dogmatic" nature and emphasis of *Caritas in veritate*. My purpose is to demonstrate, against the background of the critical questions as outlined, that the methodological role played by anthropology is just the point. The burden of the encyclical, in other words, lies decisively in its anthropological orientation—and in this sense its development within continuity—of Catholic social teaching. What I therefore hope to show is that *CV* conceives the Church's social teaching in a way that challenges the terms of that teaching as presupposed in the criticisms.

My presentation thus has two main parts: to consider the basic anthropological terms of Catholic social teaching; and to indicate how these terms reconfigure in subtle but crucial ways the dominant approaches to socio-economic life in today's increasingly global liberal order.

## II.

Let me then begin by saying that the "integral human development" introduced by Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* and reaffirmed by Benedict in *CV* is entirely consistent with what *Centesimus annus*, published shortly after the political events of 1989, affirms as "the positive value of an authentic theology of integral human liberation."<sup>9</sup> *CV* recalls the teaching of John Paul II in this latter encyclical, which states that a comprehensive new plan of development is called for not only in the formerly Communist countries of Eastern Europe but also in the West. Benedict emphasizes that this is "still a real duty that needs to be discharged" (n. 23).

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<sup>9</sup>*Centesimus annus*, n. 26. This statement references the CDF's Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis conscientia* (22 March 1986): AAS 79 (1987), pp. 554–99.

The Church, in other words, has a duty in relation to *both* the socialist economies that had prevailed in Eastern Europe *and* the liberal market economies of the West, even if this duty is not symmetrical in its respective implications for the one and the other.

On the one hand, then, the purpose of the Church is not to suggest a distinct economic system *as an economic system*. Catholic social teaching has no intention of providing technical solutions with respect to economics and development (n. 9). At the same time, by virtue of her sacramental embodiment of the truth of Christ as Creator and Redeemer, the Church does become an “expert in humanity,”<sup>10</sup> to use the words spoken at the United Nations by Paul VI, in the sense that she has “a mission of truth to accomplish, in every time and circumstance, for a society that is attuned to man, to his dignity, to his vocation” (n. 9).

The point is that the Church proposes principles that affect all human activities from within, including activities in politics and the public realm (n. 56) and in economics (n. 37). This implies that the Church does not begin by simply accepting the terms of freedom and rights and liberation as conceived in the dominant forms of either socialism or the liberal market, while then *adding* a Christian intention. The Church accepts what is true in the dominant forms of social-economic activity, but only as it dynamically re-orders these in a way that reaches to their roots, in light of man’s nature as destined for fulfillment in the love of Jesus Christ. In a word, the Christian difference, as it affects the economic and political order, is one not merely of *additional motivation* but of *inner transformation*.

### III.

But if the Church’s social teaching is neither a set of technical solutions nor simply an alternative economic system, even as it informs, or indeed dynamically transforms, all such solutions and systems, then what is it?

What I take to be the answer of *CV* is this: Catholic social teaching is a vision of reality—an understanding of being, man, and

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<sup>10</sup>Pope Paul VI, *Discourse to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 4 October 1965, n. 3.

God—that unfolds an entire way of life, at the heart of which is a moral-social practice. Catholic social teaching, in a word, is a social practice only as at once a matter of truth. Four brief comments will clarify what this means.

(1) The foundation for this claim lies in the encyclical's affirmation of the unity of truth and love in the person of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the trinitarian God. Jesus Christ is the *Word* or *logos* of God as the *deed* of God's love. Christ embodies in his person the original unity of truth (hence "theory" or "dogma") and love (hence deed: *pragma, praxis*): the original unity of truth and social practice.<sup>11</sup>

(2) This unity of truth and love is also disclosed in the structure of creaturely being as gift. Our being is a being-given meant itself to give. As St. Augustine says, citing the words of the apostle John: "We cannot love unless we are first loved."<sup>12</sup> "In this is love, that God has first loved us" (1 Jn 4:10).

(3) Love whom or what? We love God naturally above all things. As Augustine and Aquinas both say in their different ways, we naturally love God more than ourselves, because he is more interior to us than we are to ourselves.<sup>13</sup> And we cannot but naturally love all other creatures with whom we share a common relation to God: above all other persons, but also non-personal entities that share proportionately-analogically in the creaturely meaning of being as gift, which makes them good in themselves, by virtue of their creation.

Our love, in other words, is in its roots *filial*: we are not the unoriginated origins of love but participants in a love that is always first given to us by God. And this love is by nature radically *social*:

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<sup>11</sup>The theologian Ratzinger already developed this theme in a profound way in his early book, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1968), which shows that, according to Christian belief, at the origin of things lies the Creator who is characterized by the unity of reason and love, or freedom. Ratzinger comments on the Trinity in this light, and then shows how Christological dogma, and in turn each of the articles of the Creed, articulate the concrete meaning of love: articulate the *meaning* or *doctrine* of God in relation to the world, as *love* and thus already as *action* that is *social*.

<sup>12</sup>St. Augustine, *Sermon* 34, 1–3.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Augustine, *Confessions* 3, 6; Aquinas, *ST I*, 8, 1 and *De Veritate*, q. 22, ad 2.



it is at once God-centered and inclusive of the whole of creation, of all being and of each singular, unique being.

(4) This filial-social love that we participate in *by nature*, by virtue of creation, is destined for, and fulfilled in, our participation *by grace* in God's own love, as revealed in Jesus Christ through his sacramental Church.

It is helpful, in light of these four comments, to recall here the text that both John Paul II and Benedict XVI take to contain the central teaching of the Second Vatican Council: *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22, which states that, in his revelation of the trinitarian love of God, Jesus Christ discloses the meaning of man and, by implication, of all physical creation, to itself.

In a word, truth is a *logos* of love, and love is the way of truth, as revealed by God in Jesus Christ and, naturally-analogically, in creation itself.

#### IV.

Thus we have the fundamental principles in terms of which *CV* is able to respond to the criticisms noted briefly above.

(1) First, regarding the metaphysical character of the encyclical and its so-called "deductive model" of social teaching: the relevant point is to see that this criticism is mediated by its own notion of truth ("theory") and love ("social practice") and of the relation between them, though this notion remains implicit and thus unaccounted for. The criticism implicitly disjoins truth from love in a way that *CV* does not. The author's different way of approaching the relation between the two is thus a function not of no metaphysics but of what is rather an alternative metaphysics, one containing an alternative understanding of what it means for God to be author of, and present in, his creation. It is true that Western culture today no longer articulates its vision of things in metaphysical terms, and that explicitly metaphysical language is not readily accessible to contemporary readers. However, metaphysics—some vision of reality inclusive of ideas about being, man, and God—does not cease to operate, and to guide one's social practice, simply because it is ignored or left tacitly implied. It is in this context that we see the importance of *CV*: to recuperate the authentic meaning of social practice *as a vision of reality* whose most basic content is God-

centered love; and in so doing to expose the inadequate alternative visions of reality that are implied in and give the basic form to the conventional economic models of socialism and the liberal market, even where these alternative visions remain unconscious as *metaphysical*, and at least by implication also *theological, visions*.<sup>14</sup>

(2) Second, regarding dialogue and the recovery of an ecumenical voice: the key again is *CV*'s unity of truth and love. Genuine dialogue need not, and should not, fracture this unity. In entering into dialogue, the weight should not be placed on bracketing the truth in its fullness—though of course not everything needs to be made explicit on every occasion—but rather on demonstrating ever more fully the nature of truth as the *logos of love*, and thus on giving integrated witness to truth *as love*. *CV* presumes that the way of dialogue for Christians is given in Jesus himself, who testifies with his whole being, in a way that wholly respects and does not impose on others, even as he demonstrates that truth rightly understood tends toward witness, even unto the suffering of death. Benedict in other writings also offers the non-Christian Socrates as an example of one who testifies to the transcendent origin and reality of truth with his entire life—and martyr's death—all the while imposing nothing on others, but inviting them when he is questioned to look at what has convinced him and why.

*CV* thus finds the common ground necessary for dialogue in man's concrete nature as restless to be loved and to love, all the way to the ultimate source and end of this love. The author who criticizes *CV*'s lack of an ecumenical voice seeks instead a more abstract common ground, one that disposes the dialogue partners to leave implicit their own concrete search for meaning and to bracket what matters most to them, indeed to separate their verbally articulated claims from the wholeness of their reality as embodied in deed and social practice. From the perspective of *CV*, dialogue rooted in such an abstract common ground can give only fragmented witness. And in fact such an abstract ground seems to be accepted as genuinely common, as universally accessible and meaningful, only by those who already hold to Western liberal assumptions. *CV* thinks on the contrary that a truly common ground

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<sup>14</sup>Pope John Paul II's publication of the encyclical *Fides et ratio*, with its emphasis on the recovery of metaphysics in the articulation of faith, is not at all unrelated to the concern indicated here.

can be found for all persons only by starting from within the reality of each person in the concrete wholeness of his or her search for meaning in its ultimate source and end.

(3) Regarding the question of a “third way”: what I have said above already answers this in principle. Let me add only that those who criticize *CV* for implying openness to a “third way” beyond socialism and the liberal market fail to grasp that what is at stake in Catholic social doctrine is precisely the nature of God’s relation to the world, as expressed in Christ and his Church. These critics invariably assume that there realistically exist today only two economic alternatives, socialist-liberationist on the one hand and liberal-capitalist on the other; and that the task of the Church in this context is to add a distinct Christian-moral intentionality that would provide support for, but without truly *informing*, either alternative. But this implies a reductive understanding of the rightful “worldly” implications of the reality of God, Christ, and the Church for socio-economic institutions and practice. The critics thus leave intact in their different ways, from the left and from the right, the fragmentary vision of man that may be termed *homo economicus*, a vision that wrongly abstracts the economic meaning of man from the ontological and theological roots of his being.

Regarding the question of the “realism” of such economic and political proposals: it is not the case that *CV* does not appreciate the difficulties involved, or indeed does not recognize that the realization of what it proposes cannot be fully accomplished short of the eschaton. The point is that Christians, nevertheless, have a responsibility to work at all times and places, private and public, for the true end for which man was created. The nature of this end, which is participation in God’s love, itself determines the appropriate means of its realization. These appropriate means demand patient and prudential rather than coercive action toward others in one’s economic and political activity. Patient and prudential action, however, emphatically does not obviate the need for a witness in economic and political life that involves sacrifice and suffering.

(4) Regarding the objection that *CV* neglects to provide counsel on how to resolve the practical moral problems in business: this objection fails to see that the Church rightly considers herself to be an “expert in humanity” in the sense indicated above, not an expert in the technical aspects of employment, sourcing, safety, environmental problems, and the like. This does not mean that the

Church has no concrete interest in such problems. Rather, as *CV* insists, the purpose of the Church, and the purpose of the teaching expressed in her social encyclicals, is to demonstrate that God-centered love affects all human activities and makes a significant difference to *every* technical solution, ordering each from within toward the common good and toward an integrated view of human dignity.

(5) Regarding gender and the sexual difference and the connections between “human ecology” and “physical ecology”: these matters of course raise profound questions regarding the nature of the human body. The argument of *CV* in their regard presupposes, in accord with Pope John Paul II’s teaching on the body, that the body is itself an order of love. This teaching runs counter to the physicalist views of the body prevalent in the West especially since the seventeenth century. The author who criticizes *CV*’s position regarding gender and the link between human ecology and physical ecology, if her criticisms are to be adequate, must first recognize and argue for the differences between John Paul II’s notion of the human body and the understanding of the body implied in her criticisms.

(6) Finally, regarding the claim that Benedict’s theology has developed from an emphasis on the divinity of Christ and on charity as an interior disposition opening to eternity: in response it seems to me that we need only ponder more deeply here the implications of what Ratzinger said already in his 1960s commentary on *Gaudium et spes* regarding the importance of the social nature of man. Though of course historical circumstances have drawn out the further implications of Ratzinger’s views in this matter, he has never held a position that could rightly be interpreted to imply a dichotomy between so-called interior virtues and active virtues, relative to the question of global justice and structural change. What Ratzinger said in his *Gaudium et spes* commentary, what he said as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding liberation theology in the 1980s, and what he says in *CV* all affirm the same principles, albeit articulated in ways that fit the different historical circumstances of each document.

But let me conclude this first part of my discussion simply by taking note of persons whose lives seem to me to render concrete the unity of truth and love or social practice articulated by Benedict in *CV*, and thereby provide concretely embodied responses to many

of the above criticisms of Benedict. I have in mind, for example, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day in America and Madeleine Delbr el in France, the latter a contemporary of Day who lived and worked among the Communists who were dominant in the economic and political institutions of Ivry, near Paris.<sup>15</sup> In their different ways, each of these persons recognized that God is a social good, that meaninglessness is the deepest form of poverty, and that “social work” takes place at the intersection of time and eternity. They understood that the question of the meaning and existence of God lies at the core of social practice, and that wealth consists most fundamentally in the quality of one’s relationships to those with whom relation is given constitutively, in the act of creation: God, family, other persons, and all the creatures of nature.

These persons, in a word, all lived the truth articulated by Mother Teresa when she said that her social work involved at root being a “contemplative in the heart of the world.”<sup>16</sup>

The persons named here are sometimes criticized for emphasizing too much a personal approach to social justice that fails really to transform or liberate institutions. But these persons show us what is in fact the true meaning of such liberation as presupposed in *CV* (and *CA*): that personal transformation of meaning in love is the inner condition of, and gives the anterior form to, any institutional change that would be genuinely human and not simply a rearrangement of external structural machinery.<sup>17</sup>

#### V.

We turn to the second part of the argument. As indicated, the main presupposition undergirding the argument of *CV* is the universality of the vocation to love. According to Pope Benedict, all of us know, even if only implicitly and thus not fully consciously, that we “are not self-generated” (n. 68). An implicit sense of the Creator abides in each of us, which Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict describes in other writings in terms of *anamnesis*, the

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<sup>15</sup>See Madeleine Delbr el, *We, The Ordinary People of the Streets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), with its fine introduction by Fr. Jacques Loew.

<sup>16</sup>1994 National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, D.C.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 42.

memory of God that is “identical with the foundations of our being.”<sup>18</sup> This memory of God can be ignored or denied, but it is never absent from any human consciousness. In a word, a dynamic tendency toward communion with God, and with other creatures who share relation to God, lies in the inmost depths of every human being and not only Christians, even as this tendency is fulfilled only in the grace of God’s own love that is revealed in Jesus Christ.

The encyclical’s call for a new trajectory of thinking informed by the principles of gratuitousness and relationality takes its starting point from this universal *anamnesis* of love and God (cf. nos. 53, 55). Let us now consider how this new way of thinking reorders some key aspects of the prevalent approaches to social-political justice.

(1) Regarding tendencies expressed in Western socio-economic institutions, *Caritas in veritate* rejects the reading of *Centesimus annus* that would understand the three “subjects” of the social system—the state, the economy, and civil society—each to have a logic of its own, only extrinsically related to the others (cf. n. 38–40). As Cardinal Bertone stated in an address to the Italian Senate: “This conceptualization . . . has led to identifying the economy with the place where wealth or income is generated, and society with the place of solidarity for its fair distribution.”<sup>19</sup> *CV* rejects this dichotomy between “subjects” that would undermine the call to love as integrative of every human activity and of all development. To paraphrase Cardinal Bertone, we must supersede the dominant view that expects the Church’s social teaching, involving as it does the centrality of the person and, in this light, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good, to be confined to societal-cultural activities, as it were, while “experts in efficiency” are charged with running the economy, and indeed the order of politics.

This rejection of the idea of three different logics proper to each “subject” of the social system presupposes reaffirmation of the idea of the common good. The common good, says Benedict,

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<sup>18</sup>Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. B. McNeil (New York/San Francisco: Crossroad/Ignatius Press, 2006), 92.

<sup>19</sup>Address of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State, During His Visit to the Senate of the Italian Republic, 28 July 2009, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/card-bertone/2009/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20090728\\_visita-senato\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/card-bertone/2009/documents/rc_seg-st_20090728_visita-senato_en.html), p. 3 of typescript.

concerns the entire “complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically, and culturally, making it the *polis*, or ‘city’. . .” (n. 7). Commitment to the common good shapes “the *earthly city* in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided *city of God*” (n. 7). The pope insists that economics cannot resolve social problems simply through the application of *commercial logic*, but “needs to be *directed towards the pursuit of the common good*, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility” (n. 36). “The *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity*,” as expressed in *commercial relationships* (n. 36).

Benedict’s rejection of an extrinsic relation between the three “subjects” of society, tied to a consequent emphasis on the common good, bears two especially important implications. On the one hand, it entails rejection of the dualism between temporal and eternal that is a hallmark of liberal societies. Contrary to the view of John Locke, for example, and countless of our contemporaries, Benedict holds that public-economic activity is not a matter exclusively of the temporal order, as though the eternal order, or the heavenly city, arrives only *after* life on earth, or in any case remains in this life something purely “private.”<sup>20</sup>

*CV* thus also makes clear that the Church affirms the notion of the *common good*, rather than that of *public order*, as the proper purpose of political and economic activity. The encyclical, in other words, implies rejection of the “juridical” idea of political and economic institutions, according to which such institutions do not project any view of human nature or destiny, but are on the contrary limited simply to the securing of the procedural mechanisms necessary for the fair and equal exercise of freedom by citizens. This juridical understanding of institutions has been a prevalent reading not only of John Paul II’s *Centesimus annus*, but also, for example, the Council’s *Dignitatis humanae*. As noted above,

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<sup>20</sup>Thus Locke’s view, from the perspective of *CV*, is already the beginning, not of “legitimate secularity,” but of secularism. The point here is important in connection with Benedict’s call for a new reflection on the concept of “laïcité.” See, for example, his statement in the opening address of his apostolic visit to France: “I am firmly convinced that a new reflection on the meaning and importance of ‘laïcité’ is now necessary” (12 September 2008).

however, this reading is subject to the criticism that *CV* makes regarding those who interpret *CA* to affirm an extrinsic relation between the end of civil society and the end of the market and the state.<sup>21</sup>

In light of the foregoing comments, we should see that *CV* carries a significant challenge with respect to the dominant logic of economic and political institutions as conceived in liberal societies. *CV* challenges the assumption that these institutions are simply procedural mechanisms whose purpose is to create space for the exercise of freedom, and not to offer any pedagogy regarding the meaning, order, and end of man. Such an understanding is inconsistent not only with this encyclical but also with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states that “every institution is inspired, at least implicitly, by a vision of man and his destiny, from which it derives the point of reference for its judgment, its hierarchy of values, its line of conduct” (n. 2244).

In sum, we can say that a central task of an “authentic theology of integral human liberation” and “integral human development” with respect to the West lies in a dynamic transformation of the core meaning of the West’s liberal economic and political institutions in light of a common good infused with the idea of truth as an order of love.

(2) The idea of humanity as a single family, together with its emphasis on the social role of marriage and family, plays an important role in providing a foundation for, and in giving original form to, the principles of gratuitousness and relation, and indeed the logic of freedom and rights, that is implied by the notion of the common good, as outlined above.

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<sup>21</sup>The juridical idea of political or constitutional order is advanced with respect to both *Dignitatis humanae* and the American constitution by American theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J. Indeed, Murray affirms an identity in the two documents with respect to their understanding of the right to religious freedom as a primarily “juridical” right. For a defense of Murray, which contrasts Murray’s view with that of John Paul II, see Herminio Rico, S.J., *John Paul II and the Legacy of Dignitatis Humanae* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002). For a critical study of Murray’s juridical idea, see my “Civil Community Inside the Liberal State: Truth, Freedom, and Human Dignity,” in volume I of *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011 [forthcoming]).



Strikingly, Benedict says that “*the development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family . . .*” (n. 53); and that “the Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes a *metaphysical interpretation of the ‘humanum’ in which relationality is an essential element*” (n. 55). The idea that all human beings make up a single family derives from the common origin of each in the Creator. “The unity of the human race is called into being by the Word of God-Who-is-love” (n. 34).

This idea of a single unified family deriving from a common relation to the Creator invites further reflections drawn from the theological anthropology of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict and Pope John Paul II: notably, regarding the idea of filiality, in the former, and regarding the “original solitude” of man, in the latter. *CV* emphasizes the love that is first received by us, not generated by us. Already in his commentary on the anthropology of *Gaudium et spes*, Ratzinger stresses the capacity for worship as the primary content of man’s imaging of God. This is so because human beings are most basically sons and daughters in the Son: they are images of God in and through Jesus Christ who is God precisely as the *Logos* who is from-and-for the Father (cf. Col 1:15–18); or, as Ratzinger puts it succinctly elsewhere, “the center of the Person of Jesus is prayer.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, John Paul II affirms the primacy of man in his “original solitude,” by which he means that man’s relationality begins most radically in his “aloneness” before God. The point is not that man is originally without relation, but that man’s relationality, his original being-with, is a being-with God before (ontologically, not temporally) it is a being-with other human beings. Man’s being-with God, as creaturely, is first a *being-from*, in the manner of a child who participates in being only as the fruit of the radical generosity of the One Who Is.

Here, in what we may call the filial relation associated with the family, we find the root meaning of the encyclical’s central category of relation as *gift*. Indeed, once we see the radicality of this relation, which originates in God as the Creator, we see that it must include not only all human beings (though especially and most properly these), but *all* creatures, including also all natural, physical-biological, entities. Benedict states in this connection that “*nature*

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<sup>22</sup>Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 25.

*expresses a design of love and truth.* It is prior to us . . . and speaks to us of the Creator (cf. Rom 1:20) and his love for humanity. It is destined to be ‘recapitulated’ in Christ at the end of time (cf. Eph 1:9–10; Col 1:19–20). Thus it too is a ‘vocation.’ Nature is given to us . . . as a gift of the Creator who has given it an inbuilt order, enabling man to draw from it the principles needed in order ‘to till and keep it’ (Gn 2:1)” (n. 48). We could thus say that, in its own analogical way, and with the help of man, nature participates in the prayer constitutive of the creature in its inmost filial movement toward the Creator.

A further implication regarding filiality: we teach our children to say “please” and “thank you.” But, rightly understood, this is not a matter merely of manners. On the contrary, it is a matter of teaching them who they are in their deepest reality: gifts from God who are thus meant to be grateful, to act in gratuitous wonder, in *response to* what is first *given*, as *gift*. Here is the origin of that recognition of being as true and good and indeed beautiful—*quia given* and not simply *quia factum* or as a function of human making—which must lie at the basis of any healthy human society. Here is the root of the encyclical’s call for new lifestyles centered around the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others (cf. n. 51).

Of course, children are sons and daughters of God only through a human father and mother, and the child is born as itself apt for either fatherhood or motherhood. The fruitfulness of the union of the father and the mother is a continuing sign and expression of the creative generosity of God. Ratzinger in his commentary on *Gaudium et spes* refers to this spousal communion between a man and a woman as the immediate consequence (*Folge*) of the content (*Inhalt*) of the person’s imaging of God that lies first in the person’s “unitary” being as child of God.<sup>23</sup> John Paul II refers to this constitutive aptness for spousal union–fruitfulness as the “original unity” of man and woman. This aptness for spousal union,

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<sup>23</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, “Introduction and Chapter I: The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (Herder and Herder: New York, 1969), article 12 (“*Erster Hauptteil: Kommentar zum I,*” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche 14: Der Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, vol. 3, ed. H. Vorgrimler et al. [Freiburg: Herder and Herder, 1968], Artikel 12).

established first in man's and woman's common filial relation to God, is constitutive of the human being.<sup>24</sup> Each human being is a member of the single family of creatures under God, in and through membership in a particular familial genealogy of his own. This is the ground for the encyclical's calling on the state to promote "the centrality and the integrity of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character" (n. 44).

The implications of this constitutive relationality affirmed in *CV* are radical: *no relations taken up by human beings in the course of their lives are purely contractual*, or simply the fruit of an originally indifferent act of choice, as in liberal "contractualism."<sup>25</sup> Man is never, at root, "lonely," which is to say, in the language of *CV*, never poor in the sense of "isolated" (n. 53). On the contrary, his being is always a being-with.

Hence, *regarding human freedom*: freedom is an *act* of choice only as already embedded in an *order* of naturally given relations to God, family, others, and nature (cf. n. 68). And *regarding human rights*: just as the juridical idea of rights presupposes a contractualist idea of freedom, so does a truthful order-bearing idea of rights presuppose a relational idea of the self. Just as the contractualist idea entails a priority of rights over duties, so does the relational idea entail a priority of duties over rights,<sup>26</sup> though of course rights remain unconditional coincident with this anterior responsibility (cf. n. 43). Rights, in a word, are properly invested in every person, but no person is a solitary agent who can be abstracted from relations. On the contrary, the creaturely person as he or she concretely exists by nature is innerly ordained to God, is conceived by a father and a mother and born into a family, is sexually differentiated, and is intrinsically related to the whole of humanity and all cosmological

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 37, 110, and 147.

<sup>25</sup>In the liberal societies of the West, the tendency is to conceive human relations most basically in contractual terms. And, when such relations appear rather to be natural or "constitutive," as for example in the case of the family, the tendency is then to reduce such "constitutive" relations to matters merely of physicalist biology.

<sup>26</sup>Duties are not to be understood here as opposed or extrinsic to charity and the logic of gift: see *CV*, nos. 6, 34, and 38.

entities.<sup>27</sup> An adequate idea of rights must take into account this order of relations that is constitutive of each person. The prevalent liberal idea of rights and freedom in America, on the contrary, presupposes a Cartesian human subject that bears no constitutive relations to other beings or to his or her own body.

(3) Thirdly, *Caritas in veritate* says that Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae vitae*, is "highly important for delineating the *fully human meaning of the development the Church proposes*" (n. 15). This encyclical makes clear "the *strong links between life ethics and social ethics*, thus ushering in a new area of magisterial teaching that has gradually been articulated in a series of documents, most recently John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium vitae*" (n. 15).

The pope notes in this connection *HV's* emphasis on the unitive and procreative meaning of sexuality, thereby locating "at the foundation of society the married couple [who] are open to life" (n. 15). He suggests that the tendency to make human conception and gestation artificial contributes to the loss of "the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology" (n. 51). The point here, though not explicitly developed in *CV*, is that *HV*, in its affirmation of the unity of the personal and the procreative meaning of sexuality, implies a "new" understanding of the body as a bearer of the objective order of love, in a way consistent with and instructive for *CV's* view that the nature of the physical-biological cosmos as a whole "expresses a design of love" (n. 48).

Regarding the relation between life ethics and social ethics, the pope notes in this connection the inconsistency of societies which, affirming the dignity of the person and justice and peace, tolerate the violation of human life when it is at its weakest and most marginalized (n. 15). He thus insists that "*openness to life is at the*

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<sup>27</sup>I am presupposing a concept of nature with respect to the features affirmed here as characteristic of the human person, and this concept of nature requires an argument beyond what can be undertaken in the present forum. To be sure, strong objections are posed today regarding the universality of one or other of these features. My statement presupposes that exceptions to these features, when and insofar as they obtain, are signs of objective disorder and do not suffice to call into question the natural order rightly understood, or to overturn its natural dynamisms. Nor, it should go without saying, does the presence of "objective disorder" in a person attenuate his or her human dignity. But, again, all of this needs to be argued more extensively elsewhere.

*center of true development*" (n. 28), and that we need to broaden our concept of poverty and underdevelopment to take account of this question of openness to life. It is precisely in its increasing mastery over the origin of human life manifest, for example, in *in vitro* fertilization, the harvesting of human embryos for research, and the possibility of manufacturing clones and human hybrids, that we see "the clearest expression" of a supremacy of technology in contemporary society (n. 75).

(4) *CV* takes up the complicated question of technology in its last chapter. Benedict of course acknowledges that technology "enables us to exercise dominion over matter" and to "improve our conditions of life," and in this way goes to "the heart of the vocation of human labor" (n. 69). The relevant point, however, is that "technology is never merely technology" (n. 69).<sup>28</sup> It always invokes some sense of the order of man's naturally given relations to God and others. Technology thus, rightly conceived, must be integrated into the call to holiness, indeed into the covenant with God, implied in this order of relations (cf. n. 69): integrated into the idea of creation as something first *given to man*, as *gift*, "not something self-generated" (n. 68) or *produced by man*.

Here again we see the importance of the family. It is inside the family that we first learn a "technology" that respects the dignity of the truly weak and vulnerable—the just-conceived and the terminally-ill, for example—for their own sake. It is inside the family, indeed the family as ordered to worship, that we first learn the habits of patient interiority necessary for genuine relationships: for the relations that enable us to see the truth, goodness, and beauty of others as given (and also to maintain awareness of "the human soul's ontological depths, as probed by the saints": n. 76). It is inside the family that we can thus learn the limits of the dominant social media of communication made available by technology, which promote surface movements of consciousness involving mostly the gathering of bits of information, and foster inattention to man in his depths and his transcendence as created by God. It is in the family that we first become open to the meaning of communication in its ultimate and deepest reality as a *dia-logos* of love that is fully revealed

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<sup>28</sup>That is, technology is never "pre-moral," to use the language employed by *Veritatis splendor*, n. 48, in its rejection of the idea that the body as body is neutral with respect to human-moral meaning.

by God in the life, and thus including also the suffering, of Jesus Christ (cf. n. 4).

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In light of the foregoing, we can see, in sum, why *Caritas in veritate* insists that the social question today “has become a radically anthropological question” (n. 75); why “the question of development is closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul” (n. 75); and why “only a humanism open to the Absolute can guide us in the promotion and building of forms of social and civic life—structures, institutions, culture and *ethos* . . .” (n. 78). □

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