

Caritas in Veritate and the Present Global Economic Crisis

This Plenary is not my first opportunity to speak in Sainte-Adèle. In 1966, I made an academic presentation here on “The Church and Economic Growth in Quebec” – much to the displeasure of some economists who at the time of Quiet Revolution did not want the Church to have any voice on the economy.

Earlier, in 1958, I translated into English Gerard Gilleman’s classic *Le Primat de la Charité en Théologie Morale (The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology)*. Gilleman’s writings, which have influenced my economic thinking over the years, contain the seeds of thought at the basis of Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*. The encyclical’s English title is *Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth*. It is the latest and most complete expression of Catholic Social Doctrine and Teaching.

First, a word on social doctrine and its role in authoritative Catholic teaching. The basis of social doctrine is the right relationship we must develop between God and humans, among humans themselves, and between humans and all of Creation. Its foundation is the God-given dignity of every person and a gospel preferential option for the poor.

Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI all talk of the essential relationship between faith and justice, between social doctrine and evangelization. For Benedict, love and justice are inseparable. Perhaps the clearest and strongest reference to this relationship is found in the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod on The New Evangelization. Quoting Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Benedict states: “Evangelism would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social. [...] Testimony of Christ’s charity, through works of justice, peace and development, is part of evangelization, because Jesus Christ, who loves us, is concerned with the whole person. These important teachings form the basis for the missionary aspect of the Church’s social doctrine, which is an essential element of evangelization. The Church’s social doctrine proclaims and bears witness to faith. It is an instrument and an indispensable setting for formation in faith.” [130]

I turn now to the theological basis of *Caritas in Veritate*, mentioning a few of Benedict’s important applications. I will expand on what he calls the “social economy” which fosters a stronger role for civil society, including the Church, in integral human development.

The consuming passion that animates this remarkable encyclical is a theological and pastoral effort to engage all of us with the question of what it means to become fully human in a globalizing world. We are now massively interconnected on the material and practical level. But how will we learn to take personal and collective responsibility – each in his or her own measure – for the integral human development of each person and of all persons? How will we develop the capacity to “love our neighbours as ourselves” now that the whole planet is our neighbourhood and so requires evangelization?

Caritas in Veritate accepts economic globalization as a fact and as a world-transforming cultural event. Pope Benedict is not greatly concerned with analyzing this phenomenon, or with assigning a moral category to it. Rather, *Caritas in Veritate* is consumed with the question of how we can evangelize, and so civilize, the global economy; how we can penetrate it with the

values, insights, networks and institutions that will make room for the full human emergence of everyone.

For Benedict, this will require a “broadening of our concept of reason.” [31] Yes, the effort can only be sustained by radical love, remembering that “intelligence and love are not in separate compartments..” [30] And yes, this transcendent and mighty effort can only be fulfilled in a faith which gratefully contemplates God’s infinite love, incarnate in Jesus Christ, making all the difference – the crucial difference – in human history.

This quest for a new and transcendent “global” humanism is truly a sign of the times, because even in the secular world, in recent years, there has been a growing consensus that we need a new mindset – a new way of seeing the present-day world. Our models and tools are proving inadequate; we seem to be walking where there is no clear path or purpose. We humans, with all our power of reasoning and of science and technology, still remain fallible and sinful, dependent on one another and, above all, on the sustaining power and love of God ever struggling to emerge in each of our hearts.

In a seminar on *Caritas in Veritate* in Rome, Stefano Zamagni, an economist at the University of Bologna and a friend of Pope Benedict, suggested deeper reasons why Benedict also sees the need for a whole new way of seeing, understanding and evaluating our present global situation. He sees that we have, in recent decades, lost our way because powerful ideologies have broken the basic bonds of meaning by separating the economic from the social dimension of our lives; by separating labour from the origins of wealth; by separating the market from democracy. These bonds, broken by avarice and greed, can only be replaced by restoring a dimension of love, fraternity or friendship in all our interrelationships including those in economic and commercial life. This conviction is not new to Catholic social teaching, but *Caritas in Veritate* expresses it with a fullness that might penetrate many minds and many networks in this searching generation.

Benedict’s holistic paradigm is at once spiritual, theological and anthropological. It is a vision of faith. God, Divine Love, present and sustaining all creation, offers Godself as the transforming, respectful partner to every human heart. Our hearts come into their own when the fire of God’s love enkindles its own flame in them. Enlightened by the wisdom that springs from faith and reason in dialogue, and educated by the virtues as well as through human cultures, institutions and structures, we can enter human history as partners of the saving, creative love of God. Thus Divine Love is at work bringing about a civilization of love through the processes of integral human development which, however imperfectly, already prefigure the promised new heaven and new earth.

Because human persons are capable of such a life-transforming response to divine Love, it follows that generosity will be the inner law of our growth and of our efficacy. As Benedict repeats often, we are “made for gift.” This law is so deeply true of our humanity that it seeks expression not only in family life and personal friendship, but equally in political and economic life. Integral human development flourishes when space has been made for the dimension of love or friendship in all our attitudes, actions and enterprises.

The word used in *Caritas in Veritate* for this spontaneous, sustained, sometimes institutionalized but always free generosity, is “gratuitousness.” Unfortunately, “gratuitousness” has lost its meaning in contemporary English. As an alternative, I will use the phrase “the spirit of gift,”

even if something is lost in that translation. The concept, however named, is of fundamental importance in Benedict's social theology of *Caritas in Veritate*. For him the logic of profit needs to be replaced by the logic of gift.

The spirit of gift brings about a human society that is the antithesis of putting a price on everything and getting ahead of one's neighbour. Working for integral human development coincides with evangelization because of its indispensable need for the Gospel to build "a civilization animated by love."

Among the essential dimensions of integral human development, Benedict emphasizes pro-life – in such development every human life must be welcomed – and ecology. Right relations between humans and nature rank with those of social justice. He lauds the many positive applications of modern technology and the media but remains concerned that a growing ideology of "technologism" may try to create humans according to the agenda of powerful interests and impose life models that destroy ancient values and drain our cultural energies.

Let me develop more fully Benedict's thinking on "social economy." I will begin with how Benedict wants the global economy to be changed. *Caritas in Veritate* includes vivid descriptions of malfunctions and distortions in the existing, and emerging, global market economy. How can we judge the economy? By remembering that the economy exists "to serve the national and global common good." [41] Economic action must never be separated from moral conscience, from social responsibility, from human solidarity. Because Pope Benedict wants the entire economy to be humane, he wants the "social economy" enhanced.

His suggests that there is not just one economy, but several kinds of market economies. He sees that all of them need an orientation to mutual generosity – a tending towards "a world in which all will be able to give and receive" [39] – in order to work effectively in today's world. For Benedict, this is not Utopianism; it is practical ethics, and it is theology. Remember that for him Divine Love is the ultimate driving force in any historic movement towards integral human development in charity or love and truth.

Thus the true criterion for measuring success in any human institution is how fully it contributes to integral human development. He repeats what his predecessors said strongly about the rights of workers to working conditions and compensation in accord with their human dignity and their family and communal responsibilities. He upholds their right to unions and collective bargaining and abhors the growing number of unemployed, whom he sees among the most lonely and isolated of all people. And just as labour cannot be considered merely a commodity or factor of production, so too "every immigrant is a human person who ... possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone in every circumstance." [62]

Benedict insists that corporations must lift more of the new social burdens. He wants all stakeholders, including workers, to be recognized in the decisions companies make. Investors, and the managers who work for them, must not be the only determinative voices in the production process. He wants a just distribution of earnings accomplished primarily within the production process itself, and not as something later done by government. He is harsh on financiers' greed and selfishness – those who make huge profits on money and credit rather than on economic production – and deplors the lack of adequate supervision of banking and investment houses. He wants those who use non-renewable resources to pay the full social costs

of them. He sees preoccupation with short-term profit to be at the heart of most of these negative developments. Finally, he foresees the need for a global authority at the service of the international economy.

But what is particularly emphasized in *Caritas in Veritate* is the energy and proliferation of socially oriented forms of business that embody social hope in the near and medium future. Benedict broadens the concept of business to include a much bigger role for non-profit and not-just-for-profit enterprises and so enhances a bigger role for civil society in integral human development. He speaks directly to the social economy as belonging to the real economy, not limited to the sidelines as a peripheral social organization.

These social business forms may or may not aim at profit, but they have other more primary goals of social and human welfare. He offers no developed examples of social enterprise, but Pope Benedict is known to admire such inspiring, non-profit businesses as those initiated by the Focolare movement. Founded in 1943 in northern Italy, it has by now launched more than 750 businesses in many countries.

Canadians will recognize social enterprise in the values and energies that gave rise early in the 20th century to the “*caisses populaires*” in Quebec and the Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia – both with strong Church involvement – followed by the cooperative movement right across Canada. The United Nations has named 2012 The International Year of Co-operatives. With its 9,000 members, earning annual revenue of some \$50 billion, the Canadian Association of Co-operatives is organizing an international summit in Quebec City, October 8 to 11, with the theme “The Amazing Power of Cooperatives.”

In these “civil markets” of social enterprises, cooperatives, credit unions, etc., members are owners so that there is a more communal approach to taking initiatives, making decisions and sharing earnings. The human vocation to become a gift to others can play a much fuller role here than in regular corporate businesses. Benedict hopes that the growth of social enterprise will provide alternatives to powerful corporate structures, and not only as “another way.” He foresees that the growing plurality of business forms will influence “mainstream” business for good, and will help bring about more civilized, less monopolistic markets.

Finally a very important reminder! For Benedict here, and in other applications he makes in *Caritas in Veritate*, it is always about how divine love thirsts to transform the world, through converted human hearts, into God’s healing kingdom of justice and peace, for the life, and the growth into full humanity, of every human being. We must trust the Spirit active in directing and strengthening us so that we can always give a witness to our beliefs in joy and hope – mindful that the whole process is in the hands of God.

We should note that some critics see Benedict as downplaying social justice in favour of love, seeing love as a weak word in our popular culture when contrasted with justice, a strong word. What they do not appreciate is how strongly he insists that love cannot be separated from justice and vice versa. A similar problem arises from the ambiguous use of *caritas* or charity. For Benedict it is the fullness of love planted in our hearts by divine love. In our culture, charity is routinely limited to a direct response to the poor and needy. This same ambiguity arises from the use of the phrase “works of charity” in the working document for the upcoming Synod.

How can the Church, how can Christians, find ways to put into practice this demanding social teaching of Pope Benedict? To take up the challenge to infuse our individualist, materialist, money-mad culture with love and justice will take a profound political and spiritual conversion on the part of both individual Catholics and our institutional Church so that we can enter into Benedict's freeing mindset and vision. And it will involve substantial changes in how we witness personally and as a community to our faith and how we communicate it publicly so that observers may say, as they said of the early Church: "See how these Christians love one another."

Here I will limit myself to a few additional suggestions:

1) Church leaders should recall that Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church* reminds the laity that their holiness consists in evangelizing the world, "seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will." [31]

2) Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens (Call to Action)*, in 1971, stated: "It is up to the Christian communities with the help of the Spirit, in communion with the bishops ... and in dialogue with other Christians and persons of good will, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social political and economic changes seen in many places to be urgently necessary." [11] Today, many parishes would be hard pressed to undertake such a mission. It would seem good, therefore, to complement their work with a small group approach to more easily engage in social discernment and dialogue. The Ontario bishops have taken an initiative in this direction by publishing "A Guide for Discussion and Action." This workbook unpacks the teaching of *Caritas in Veritate* and has had some success in some dioceses and parishes. We should not underestimate the potential influence of small groups of ardent, committed believers to bring about changes in both the Church and the world.

3) Today there is room for fruitful open discussion and friendship between religion and the environmental movement, often based on biblical teaching.

4) The Pontifical Council Justice and Peace has issued an excellent Reflection on *The Vocation of the Business Leader* which offers an opportunity to acquaint Catholic business leaders with the Church's social teaching – an influential group which usually is unaware of, or hostile to, this teaching.

We must work to make the insights of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), come alive in our time: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of this age, especially of those who are poor or in some way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

Bill Ryan sj, September 25, 2012