

CARITAS IN VERITATE

By Jim Seghers

The day Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical on social justice, *Caritas in Veritate* – “Charity in Truth,” appeared in English, I happened to tune in to a conservative talk-show while I was driving. The moderator was commenting on the Holy Father's letter based on a summary he read in the New York Times. This was surprising, because normally this radio personality would consider articles in the New York Times only suitable for wrapping fish. Nevertheless he charged forth with positive and negative observations of the encyclical. Obviously, he had not read the document, which consists of 47 pages of single spaced pages and 9 additional pages of footnotes.

Nevertheless, his remarks prompted me to download a copy of the encyclical from the Vatican Web Site. As I read the letter I felt like a prospector finding gold. The sweep of the topics covered and the Holy Father's amazing insight expanded my understanding in many ways.

To stimulate your appetite, I have cited below passages that appealed to me as I read the encyclical. They are intended for your reflection, but they should not be considered an adequate summary of the Pope's insightful message. The appropriate paragraph numbers are listed behind each quotation. Occasionally the English spelling follows the British form.

“Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity.” # 1

“Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine.” (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). # 2

“Charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first *Encyclical Letter*, “God is love” (*Deus Caritas Est*): *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it.* Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope.” # 2

“*Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived.*” # 3

“Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way.” # 3

“Development, social well-being, the search for a satisfactory solution to the grave socio-economic problems besetting humanity, all need this truth. What they need even more is that this truth should be loved and demonstrated. Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation, especially in a globalized society at difficult times like the present.” # 5

“Fidelity to man requires *fidelity to the truth*, which alone is the *guarantee of freedom* (cf. Jn 8:32) and of *the possibility of integral human development.*” # 9

“Authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension. Without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing-space.”
#11

“Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him or her and to mature in a love that “becomes concern and care for the other.” #11

“The Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* emphasizes both the unitive and the procreative meaning of sexuality, thereby locating at the foundation of society the married couple, man and woman, who accept one another mutually, in distinction and in complementarity: a couple, therefore, that is open to life.” # 15

“To regard *development as a vocation* is to recognize, on the one hand, that it derives from a transcendent call, and on the other hand that it is incapable, on its own, of supplying its ultimate meaning.” # 16

“Christ, “in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals humanity to itself.” #18

“The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development.” # 18

“I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world's economic and social assets, that the *primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity*: “Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life”. # 25

“Openness to life is at the centre of true development. When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man's true good.” # 28

“Man is not a lost atom in a random universe^[70]: he is God's creature, whom God chose to endow with an immortal soul and whom he has always loved. If man were merely the fruit of either chance or necessity, or if he had to lower his aspirations to the limited horizon of the world in which he lives, if all reality were merely history and culture, and man did not possess a nature destined to transcend itself in a supernatural life, then one could speak of growth, or evolution, but not development. When the State promotes, teaches, or actually imposes forms of practical atheism, it deprives its citizens of the moral and spiritual strength that is indispensable for attaining integral human development and it impedes them from moving forward with renewed dynamism as they strive to offer a more generous human response to divine love.” # 29

““all social action involves a doctrine” # 30

“Deeds without knowledge are blind, and knowledge without love is sterile.” # 30

“Human costs always include economic costs, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs.” # 32

“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’ In the list of areas where the pernicious effects of sin are evident, the economy has been included for some time now. We have a clear proof of this at the present time. The conviction that man is self-sufficient and can successfully eliminate the evil present in history by his own action alone has led him to confuse happiness and salvation with immanent forms of material prosperity and social action. Then, the conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from “influences” of a moral character, has led man to abuse the economic process in a thoroughly destructive way. In the long term, these convictions have led to economic, social and political systems that trample upon personal and social freedom, and are therefore unable to deliver the justice that they promise.” # 34

“Economy and finance, as instruments, can be used badly when those at the helm are motivated by purely selfish ends. Instruments that are good in themselves can thereby be transformed into harmful ones.” # 36

“Business activity has a human significance, prior to its professional one.” # 41

“Many people today would claim that they owe nothing to anyone, except to themselves. They are concerned only with their rights, and they often have great difficulty in taking responsibility for their own and other people's integral development. Hence it is important to call for a renewed reflection on how *rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere licence.*” # 43

“The sharing of reciprocal duties is a more powerful incentive to action than the mere assertion of rights.” # 43

“To consider population increase as the primary cause of underdevelopment is mistaken, even from an economic point of view.” # 44

“The Church, in her concern for man's authentic development, urges him to have full respect for human values in the exercise of his sexuality. It cannot be reduced merely to pleasure or entertainment, nor can sex education be reduced to technical instruction aimed solely at protecting the interested parties from possible disease or the “risk” of procreation.” # 44

“It is irresponsible to view sexuality merely as a source of pleasure, and likewise to regulate it through strategies of mandatory birth control.” # 44

“The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa.” # 51

“It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves. The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society.” # 51

“Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift. Their ultimate source is not, and cannot be, mankind, but only God, who is himself Truth and Love.” # 53

“The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.” # 53

“As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God.” # 53

“Religious freedom does not mean religious indifferentism, nor does it imply that all religions are equal.” # 55

“The term ‘education’ refers not only to classroom teaching and vocational training — both of which are important factors in development — but to the complete formation of the person. In this regard, there is a problem that should be highlighted: in order to educate, it is necessary to know the nature of the human person, to know who he or she is. The increasing prominence of a relativistic understanding of that nature presents serious problems for education, especially moral education, jeopardizing its universal extension.” # 61

“Not only are other persons outside our control, but each one of us is outside his or her own control. *A person's development is compromised, if he claims to be solely responsible for producing what he becomes.* By analogy, the development of peoples goes awry if humanity thinks it can re-create itself through the “wonders” of technology, just as economic development is exposed as a destructive sham if it relies on the “wonders” of finance in order to sustain unnatural and consumerist growth.” # 68

“True development does not consist primarily in “doing. . . . we must reappropriate the true meaning of freedom, which is not an intoxication with total autonomy, but a response to the call of being, beginning with our own personal being.” # 70

“Development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good.” # 71

“Yet the rationality of a self-centered use of technology proves to be irrational because it implies a decisive rejection of meaning and value.” # 74

“It is no coincidence that closing the door to transcendence brings one up short against a difficulty: how could being emerge from nothing, how could intelligence be born from chance?” # 74

“While the poor of the world continue knocking on the doors of the rich, the world of affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing those knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human.” # 75

“The question of development is closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul, insofar as we often reduce the self to the psyche and confuse the soul's health with emotional well-being.” # 76

“Development must include not just material growth but also spiritual growth, since the human person is a “unity of body and soul”, born of God's creative love and destined for eternal life.” # 76

“Social and psychological alienation and the many neuroses that afflict affluent societies are attributable in part to spiritual factors.” # 76

“There cannot be holistic development and universal common good unless people's spiritual and moral welfare is taken into account, considered in their totality as body and soul.” # 76

“Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is.” # 79

*“Development needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*, [Charity in truth] from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us. For this reason, even in the most difficult and complex times, besides recognizing what is happening, we must above all else turn to God's love.” # 79*

“God is at the beginning and end of all that is good, all that leads to salvation: “the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:22-23). “ # 79

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour” (Rom 12:9-10).

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