

Caritas in Veritate

Encyclical letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth
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Those who have read Pope Benedict XVI's most recent encyclical letter in the hope of finding solutions to the financial and economic crises are certainly disappointed. Anyone who expected something radically new in the analysis of the economy will have searched in vain. Similarly, anyone hoping for support for a definite policy line in responding to the crises will not have found it here.

The tragedy of this letter is its timing. Coming at a time when the western world, and indeed the whole world to some extent, is attempting to cope with the collapse of an international banking system with its markets for financial assets and subsequent credit crisis, the expectation was raised that the Pope would use his moral authority to make some clear statements about what many could see was not only a technical financial issue, but at heart a moral problem as well. This expectation was reinforced by the excuse sometimes heard for the delay in publication, that the reason was to incorporate a response to the contemporary crisis.

As it turns out, there is no dedicated in-depth analysis of the current crisis, there is nothing new in terms of the debates on political and social issues, nor is there a privileged insight into possible strategies for remedying the damage caused by this one or avoiding such crises in the future.

Timing is the problem. The letter was timed to mark an anniversary, not to address any particular issue. The fortieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's letter, *Populorum progressio, on the development of peoples*, was the occasion for the letter. Marking the anniversaries of previous letters is something of a straight-jacket. Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* has been marked on its 40th (*Quadragesimo anno*), 80th (*Octagesimo adveniens*) and 100th (*Centesimus annus*) anniversaries. It is understandable, perhaps, that Pope Leo's letter should be picked out in this way. Among the papal contributions to the developing series of social encyclicals, *Populorum progressio* is the only other letter whose anniversary has been noted, being marked by John Paul II on its 20th anniversary (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*). Pope Benedict has chosen to fit in to this timetable and produce something for its 40th anniversary. Actually, the original letter on development appeared in March 1967, and John Paul II's commemoration at the end of 1987, so this letter appearing in mid 2009 is a little late for any festivities.

Even forty year on, the issues of development still seem urgent. Benedict reemphasises the key points made by his predecessor. And in fact, he also repeats many of the themes stressed by John Paul II in more recent writings. Whatever is new in this letter is not in the area of the social, economic and political, but rather in the theological perspectives Benedict brings to bear on these areas. These perspectives are already familiar from his earlier encyclical *Deus caritas est*, and from various statements. It suffices for me in this context to note three of these: love, gift and

freedom. I will then pick out some ideas, which while they are not in themselves new, stimulated fresh reflections for me and may stimulate others to read the letter.

Love, Caritas

The drama of love provides the whole context for the Pope's reflections. He locates that drama originally in the relations of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity, in the Father's love for the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (§5). The notion of truth, important for the title of this letter, is linked to the *logos*, the Incarnate Word of God (§4). The Church's commitment to the work of charity is motivated by this love, which, the Pope insists, is saved from being mere sentimentality by being rooted in truth, in reality.

Gift

A linked theological theme in this letter is gift, grace (§5). Recipients of love are gifted, and in fact they are to see themselves as gifts. This theme can colour the social and political issues. For instance, while writing about development, the Pope puts it in the context of a vocation, a call to be more, which can be experienced as gift (§16).

Freedom

A third theological theme, very much a concern of this Pope, is a proper understanding of freedom (§§17-18; 68-70). This was already a topic highlighted in his first major statement on his inauguration. He is aware of the desire for freedom and encourages this in the direction of an appropriate autonomy which is rooted in reality and is exercised responsibly.

Many of the standard themes of Catholic social thought recur in the letter, from the emphasis on human dignity, to solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good. I pick out a few elements of these reflections which have stimulated me.

The twin criteria of the common good

The original letter on development is praised for promoting a view of integral human development, which is understood as the development of every person, and of the whole human person (§11). This theme resonates throughout the letter. Benedict links this to his theological themes of vocation and gift. The development of the whole person is not achieved simply by the accumulation of wealth or by extensive consumption. A relationship with God the source of love and life is integral to a complete development since such a relationship provides a very special context for relationships with fellow men and women. Those social relationships are impoverished, and less than they might be, if they are not experienced within the divine drama of love and gift.

These theological reflections are rich and have considerable potential. However, they speak of matters which are mysterious, and which we can only intimate tentatively in our ordinary everyday language. I find it helpful to deal with these ideas along the lines worked through in my book, *A Grammar of the Common Good* (London: Continuum, 2008). There are two dimensions in integral human fulfilment: fulfilment of every person, and fulfilment of the whole person. In speaking of these matters, it is helpful to note that our language is heuristic. With the notion of fulfilment we identify something that we strive for, that is not yet completely achieved, so cannot be completely known. Yet enough is known about it to enable us to say some things, and

to qualify what we are looking for. I make this point in particular about the notion of the common good. I have elaborated two criteria to guide the application of the idea. We might not be able to say what exactly the common good consists in, but we can at least say that it is not being achieved when these criteria are violated. The first criterion is that no person or group should be excluded from enjoyment of any good we pursue in the socio-economic-political order. The second criterion is that no dimension of human good or wellbeing should be deliberately excluded from consideration in what we pursue together. The twin aspects of integral human fulfilment underlined by Pope Benedict, that it is the development of each person and of the whole person, echo this pair of criteria. His application of the thought leads to some strong language as he repeats Paul VI's condemnation of the scandal of 'glaring inequalities' (§22). Exploitation of workers, diversion of international aid, protectionism, are among the factors condemned because they foster this scandalous inequality which excludes persons and groups from participating in wellbeing. The second criterion is at work in his subsequent emphasis that 'progress of a merely economic and technological kind is insufficient' (§23).

Structure and regulation

A second item which caught my attention is the pairing of the words 'structured' and 'governed' when speaking of the need to direct economic activity in relation to integral human fulfilment (§36). Is this just a casual repetition of the same thought for rhetorical purposes, or is a distinction intended here? The context is the oft repeated injunction that the economy be directed to the common good. There is a lot in this paragraph, repeating an emphasis of Pope John Paul II in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, affirming the goodness of the market as an instrument and economic activity as inherently human. There is an explicit rejection of some views which might regard the market as something negative, of its nature an instrument of domination, and economic dealings as inhuman or less than human, a 'necessary evil' to be endured for the sake of the truly human activities engaged in apart from the economy. Where there are flaws, the fault lies not in the instruments but in the manner in which they are used. '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). And so the letter calls to account the personal and social responsibility of individuals. There are further sections devoted to ethics and business, but here the Pope is at pains to warn against the idea that a subset of investment or finance can be created which is labelled ethical. Rather he wants to underline the requirement that all economic activity be ethical, not least in its orientation to the common good (§§45-47). This means not increased wealth for some to the exclusion of others, but the generation of wealth in a context which includes provision for the needs of all.

The 'misuse' of financial instruments to create wealth for some, disregarding the interests of savers is to be corrected so that 'the entire economy and finance, not just certain sectors, must be used in an ethical way so as to create suitable conditions for human development and for the development of peoples' (§65). This is the context for speaking of structure and regulation. Is it fanciful to see in this a distinction between structures the ordinary operation of which insures a just and good outcome, and regulatory intervention, required to adjust aberrations? A structure might be a set of rules constituting and ordering certain activities, so that a participant would not have to deliberate on each occasion as to their ethical responsibilities. Following the rules

would normally be sufficient to assure anyone that they were acting well. Any such rule governed system requires procedures for responding to rule infractions. And in the longer view, it also requires some method for adapting and modifying the rules as experience reveals the need. Sports provide one source of analogy for this. But economic behaviour itself in the market place provides the prime analogue. The rules of the market are clear enough and participants can do well for themselves and together for all concerned if they trade according to the rules. The necessary regulatory background secures property rights and enforces contracts. The question arising now about financial instruments is primarily one of adjusting the rules system so that the structure will deliver what is required for the common good. Many features of the inherited system as a result of the crisis have appeared to be problematic. For instance, merchants who sold sub-prime mortgages were freed from any share in the risk; traders were rewarded with bonuses for selling and reselling assets which contributed to a bubble; short-term measures of success were used in rewarding traders, whose activity proved to be disastrous in the long-term; profits were privatized in a context in which the risks were mostly socialized.

Development aid

Recent literature has debated the usefulness of development aid, and some critics have claimed that the provision of aid hinders rather than fosters development. The Church and Church agencies have been implicated in this criticism. It struck me on reading the encyclical that the Pope seems to be aware of these debates, and while he continues to advocate international development aid he also points to the dangers involved. Subsidiarity and solidarity are two core values in the tradition reaffirmed in this letter. In an enlightening comment the combination of the two values appears as a tension. They have to be in balance, since the overemphasis on either leads to an exaggeration. Subsidiarity is the principle that responsibility for acting for any good must be devolved to the lowest possible level, and that the State should support the efforts of others and not replace them. At the same time solidarity emphasises the bonds which unite all human persons and communities, whether their shared human nature or their common divine vocation. Grasp of this solidarity can lead believers and non-believers to a fraternal collaboration. Exaggerated subsidiarity without solidarity leads to what the English text renders as 'social privatism', the individualism which encourages each to stand alone and pursue their good in isolation. Exaggerated solidarity without subsidiarity leads to 'paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need' (§58). Providing for the wellbeing of others without allowing them a role in determining their own good or the opportunity to get it for themselves is a temptation which Church agencies have also known. Solidarity must be combined with subsidiarity. This principle is articulated in relation to international development aid. Aid 'can sometimes lock people into a state of dependence and even foster situations of localised oppression and exploitation in the receiving country' (§58). So the letter stresses the priority of the people who are to be assisted; that their participation is critical to the success of aid; that their empowerment through the strengthening of human capital resources is key. Access to markets, access to education, and access to technology are important themes in international aid. With these qualifications in place the Pope's insistence on the obligation of developed societies to contribute international aid to developing countries is not naïve. A related factor is the Pope's strongly worded plea for a reform of the United Nations Organisation, and of the global economic and financial institutions. These organisations can be overly conditioned by the power struggles

between the strongest nations (§67), and so fail in their duties to protect the weakest and the poorest. That poorer nations are given an effective voice in shared decision-making is said to be necessary ‘in order to arrive at a political, juridical and economic order which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity’ (§67).

The more theological articulation of the context for the economic and political reflections offered in this letter and in the letter whose anniversary it celebrates is Pope Benedict’s distinctive contribution to the developing social learning of the Church. It is the constant challenge to reflect theologically on what is happening in our history. Theological analysis will not be the source of economic or technical insight, but it can motivate us to seek necessary understanding and provide the horizon of meaning for our engagement in action. But if a reader is disappointed by any lack of originality of economic analysis or prescription for policy, surely she cannot deny the urgency and validity of what Benedict recalls from the letter of his predecessor, still valid after forty years.

‘Paul VI had an articulated vision of development. He understood the term to indicate the goal of rescuing peoples, first and foremost, from hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases and illiteracy. From the economic point of view, this meant their active participation, on equal terms, in the international economic process; from the social point of view, it meant their evolution into educated societies marked by solidarity; from the political point of view it meant the consolidation of democratic regimes capable of ensuring freedom and peace’ (§21).

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