

## METAPHYSICS AND SOCIETY: A COMMENTARY ON *CARITAS IN VERITATE*

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

*The article examines the place of Caritas in veritate in the documentary tradition of Catholic social teaching, its application of metaphysics to social questions, and its interpretation of social norms and the natural law. It treats the formative role of charity on government and world community and the application of the ethic of gratuitousness and communion on the market economy, government, and civil society. It concludes with a look at social carriers in advancing the message of the letter and with the suggestion of possible topics for investigation in theology and social ethics.*

EXPECTATIONS HAD BEEN HIGH. There had not been a social encyclical since *Centesimus annus* in 1991. Even though Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI had made numerous pronouncements on the ecological crisis, environmentalists were eager for a fuller statement on the topic.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime globalization had swept the world during the 1990s, and many people wondered how Catholic social teaching would adapt to the new complexities of economic life brought about by the phenomenon. Some thought a new social encyclical would appear in 2007 on the 40th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*, but it did not.<sup>2</sup> Then came the financial crisis of 2008, and many observers wondered

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J., received his Ph.D. from Yale University and is now Editor in Chief of *America*. His areas of special competence are Catholic social ethics, international affairs, Middle East Christians, and environment. He has recently coedited with Saliba Sarsar *Michel Sabbah, Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land* (2008); and has authored: "The Context of the 'Common Word,'" *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 6.4 (2008); and "The Ethics of Peacemaking: The Genesis of *Called Together to Be Peacemakers*: Report of the International Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue (2004)," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44.2 (2010). In progress are six "Chapel Talks" for the 2010 Star Island meeting of the Institute for Science and Religion on the topic of Catholic social teaching and energy ethics.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, *Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI Speaks Out for Creation and Justice* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> An account of the delays in publication can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caritas\\_in\\_Veritate#Preparation\\_and\\_publication\\_delays](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caritas_in_Veritate#Preparation_and_publication_delays) (this and all other URLs herein cited were accessed on November 24, 2009).

what the Vatican has to say about the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression. Finally, some devotees of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's early critiques of political theology were longing for a retrenchment from the Catholic Church's heavy involvement in social action, an engagement that, the suppression of Liberation Theology aside, had proceeded apace under his predecessor John Paul II. When, on July 7, 2009, the Vatican released *Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI's third encyclical and his first social encyclical, it was clear why the pope had delayed.<sup>3</sup> He had tried to meet all but the last of those expectations, and in the course of doing so he offered the most radical teaching on economic life any modern pope has given, calling for an economy marked by "gratuity and communion" (no. 39).

The resulting text is both long and unwieldy, demonstrating the pope's desire to address many questions for many audiences as well as to give his own theological reading of the modern Catholic social tradition. The document's language is alternately highly abstract and surprisingly concrete. Its treatment of particular social issues is in some places as sophisticated as anything to be found in Catholic social teaching, save for some technical papers prepared for major international events, like the UN conferences on racism or meetings of the World Trade Organization, and not widely circulated even in the Catholic world. The letter's title, Love in Truth, as well as its theological method and framework bear the imprint of Benedict's own preoccupation with Truth as the antidote to the ills of secular relativism.<sup>4</sup> So intimidating was the language, however, that some commentators never got beyond objecting to its style to consider its rich and challenging content.<sup>5</sup>

### THE DOCUMENTARY TRADITION

Most surprising of all was the encyclical's dedication to the memory of Paul VI and *Populorum progressio*, a document often seen as the

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*. This and all other cited Vatican documents are available on the Vatican Web site and easily found by a title search using a search engine.

<sup>4</sup> The encyclical uses both upper and lower case for "truth." The former refers to the Logos or Truth (or body of truths about the human existence). The latter seems to refer to particular truths. I use upper case here because "Truth" refers to the ability of the Truth to counter relativism, which, by my analysis of transcendence in the text, applies to the Logos as Truth.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Peter Steinfels, "From the Vatican, A Tough Read," *New York Times*, July 17, 2009; and Kirk O. Hanson, "What's the Business Plan?" *America* 201.16 (November 30, 2009) 14–15. In a lengthy and serious review of the encyclical, David Nirenberg laments the letter's difficulty both because it impedes communication and because its heavy theological cast will put off secular readers who would otherwise profit from its content. "Love and Capitalism," *New Republic* 240.17 (September 23, 2009) 39–42.

fullest expression of liberal postconciliar activism.<sup>6</sup> “At a distance of over forty years from the Encyclical’s publication,” Benedict writes, “I intend to pay tribute and to honour the memory of the great Pope Paul VI, revisiting his teachings on *integral human development* . . . to apply them to the present moment” (no. 8).<sup>7</sup> The pope goes on to express his “conviction that *Populorum progressio* deserves to be considered ‘the *Rerum novarum* of the present age’, shedding light upon humanity’s journey towards unity” (no. 8). Clearly implied in that commendation is a proposal that Paul’s encyclical needs regular commemoration just like *Rerum novarum*. The opening chapter of the current encyclical, moreover, provides an extended interpretation of “The Message of *Populorum progressio*” as a foundation for its treatment of integral human development (see the subsection “The Meaning of Truth” below).

The letter also situates itself in a direct line with John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), a pivotal letter in which the late pontiff adopted a more progressive social teaching, thematically more in line with that of Paul VI, Vatican II, and John XXIII than his early teaching had been.<sup>8</sup> *Sollicitudo* had been rejected by neoconservatives, who previously had disparaged the pope’s teaching in *Sollicitudo* because of its allegedly drawing a “moral equivalence” between the moral deficiencies of Eastern and Western blocs at the end of the Cold War and for its stinging critique of consumer-driven capitalism.<sup>9</sup> After the appearance of *Centesimus annus* in 1991, *Sollicitudo* was largely ignored by neoconservatives and others, in favor of the new encyclical’s endorsement of capitalism for the newly liberated countries of Eastern Europe, ignoring its caveats about the deficiencies of developed societies, the limits of

<sup>6</sup> On the context and impact of Paul VI’s *Populorum progressio*, see Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., “*Populorum progressio*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. et al. (Washington: Georgetown University, 2004) 292–314. It is also worth comparing John Paul II’s treatment of *Populorum progressio* in his *Sollicitudo rei socialis* nos. 2–4, 5–10 to Benedict’s treatment in *Caritas in veritate* nos. 8, 10–20.

<sup>7</sup> It can hardly be a slip of the pen that Benedict applies the honorific “great” to Paul VI, a title many, including Benedict XVI, applied to John Paul II immediately following his death.

<sup>8</sup> *Sollicitudo* was officially signed on December 30, 1987, to fall within the 20th anniversary year of *Populorum*, but it was not published until the following spring. I provided a critical survey of John Paul’s more conservative first decade of social teaching in “Social Justice and Consumerism in the Thought of John Paul II,” *Social Thought* 13 (1987) 60–73.

<sup>9</sup> For criticism of the two blocs, see *Sollicitudo* nos. 20–22 and 29 for its critique of “superdevelopment.”

capitalism, and the continued utility of Marxian analysis in relation to enduring phenomena such as alienation and exploitation.<sup>10</sup>

The immediate antecedent of *Caritas in veritate* is Benedict XVI's own inaugural encyclical *Deus caritas est*.<sup>11</sup> It offered an inviting vision of love as at the heart of Christian revelation and the substance of the Church's life.<sup>12</sup> But the second part seemed to put love and justice in tension in a way foreign to the modern tradition of social teaching beginning with John XXIII, placing emphasis on direct service rather than on transformation of societal structures.<sup>13</sup> These developments appear to have been the result of internal Vatican disputes between the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the office directly responsible for aid to the poor, and two other agencies: the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in charge of advancing Catholic social doctrine, and the federation of donor agencies of local churches represented by CIDSE (International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity), which provides the lion's share of Catholic aid to the world's poor and was elected to advocate globally on issues of justice and peace.

Then Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, director of Cor Unum, is said to have prepared an early draft of Part II of the letter on "The Practice of Love by the Church as a Community of Love," which is somewhat critical of the over-professionalization of the Church's caritative ministries as well as of the excesses of political involvement entailed by public advocacy.<sup>14</sup> Those readers fearing a shift away from social engagement drew consolation from the assertion that "[the Church] cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice," but, in the teaching of *Deus caritas est*, the Church's role remains essentially educational and formational, offering rational arguments and spiritual inspiration. (No. 28)

In *Caritas in veritate*, by contrast, Benedict speaks of the practice of charity along "the institutional path . . . the political path . . . of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters our neighbour directly" (no. 7). The pope clearly affirms the Church's social mission as dealing with structural change, describing the common good as dealing with "that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and socially, making it the *pólis*, or 'city'" (ibid.). He goes on to explain that work for the common

<sup>10</sup> For the criticism of developed, capitalist societies and retrieval of Marxian social analysis, see John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* nos. 38–42.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert P. Imbelli, "The Pope and the Poet," *America* 194.9 (March 12, 2006) 8–10.

<sup>13</sup> See the debate on the issue of direct service versus justice: Richard Ryscavage, S.J., "Bringing Back Charity," and Thomas J. Massaro, S.J., "Don't Forget Justice," *America* 194.9 (March 12, 2006) 14–16, 18–20.

<sup>14</sup> See Ryscavage, "Bringing Back Charity."

good “paves the way for eternity through temporal action”; and he concludes: “Man’s earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to building of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family” (ibid.).<sup>15</sup> With such formulations, he not only sets himself in the line of the social teaching of Paul VI, but embraces as well the optimistic, immanent, Teilhardian eschatology of Vatican II.<sup>16</sup>

### METAPHYSICS AND SOCIETY

While *Caritas in veritate* gives renewed, even intensified support to the Church’s service of the world, its intellectual style and philosophical-theological underpinnings seem noticeably different from that of the preceding tradition. Certainly John Paul II wrote often and at length of truth in the moral life, especially in *Veritatis splendor*, but 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, a model 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.<sup>17</sup> The metaphysical appeals also may make the terms

<sup>15</sup> Benedict’s vision of “the universal *city of God*,” which is the goal of the history of the human family, seems to be a modification of the Augustinian conception of the city of God that coexists in time with the city of man, distinguished by the object of their loves. See Augustine, *City of God*, intro. Etienne Gilson, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. et al. (New York: Doubleday Image, 1958) 14.28.321–22. Here Benedict has overlaid the idea of the city with Thomistic and Vatican II approaches to politics, history, and eschatology, seeing the advancement of the human community contributing to building up the city of God (see no.16).

<sup>16</sup> The key text of Vatican II, celebrating Christ “the Consummator,” as Bishop Karol Wojtyła called him, and anticipating the transformation of “fruits of our human nature and enterprise” in the end-time, can be found in *Gaudium et spes* nos. 38–39. John Paul II’s later affirmation of this eschatology can be found in *Sollicitudo* no. 31. For his earlier criticism of the council’s majority perspective of Christ the Consummator in favor of the symbol of Christ the Redeemer (also embraced by the council), see George Hunston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York: Seabury, 1981). In an Angelus homily on July 24, 2009, in Aosta, Italy, Pope Benedict cited Teilhard de Chardin, whose Christ the Omega is regarded as the source of the council’s Christ the Consummator, to speak of the transformation of the world as a cosmic liturgy.

<sup>17</sup> See “Veritatis Splendor: Complete Text,” in *Considering Veritatis splendor*, ed. John Wilkins (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994) 79–182. For the council’s encouragement of positive theology, see Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* no. 23. The key text on reading the signs of the times is *Gaudium et spes* no. 4: “The church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel.” See also no. 11: “[The Church] labors to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age.” Paul VI employed the signs-of-the-times method routinely. John Paul II introduced the practice of

of the encyclical seem less accessible for many readers, not only because the council inaugurated a different style of presentation, but also because, as Benedict himself recognizes, modern Western culture generally no longer articulates its fundamental convictions in metaphysical terms.

Benedict writes, for example, “The Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes a metaphysical interpretation of the ‘humanum’ in which relationality is an essential element” (no. 55). Again, “A metaphysical understanding of the relations between persons is therefore of great benefit for development.”(51) Methodologically, he contends, “metaphysics is found along with faith, theology and science among the underpinnings of Catholic social teaching”; and, he observes, “the rejection of metaphysics by the human sciences” and the tensions between science and theology “are damaging not only to the development of knowledge, but also to the development of peoples, because these things make it harder to see the integral good of man in its various dimensions” (no. 31). Nos. 30-31, however, with their strong affirmation of the interdisciplinary nature of Catholic doctrine, offer a caution to those who stress the metaphysical and theological character of Pope Benedict’s social theology as something distinctive. For, as he writes, the function of theology (and metaphysics) is to supply “the wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and final ends” required for furthering the development of the human family. (no. 30)

So, while there is plenty of experiential material in the encyclical and reminders that “deeper reflection”—a kind of poor man’s metaphysics—is needed on many issues, the letter’s guiding principle is a Christian metaphysics, or a metaphysically conscious theology that in Benedict’s hands provides both a critique of secular readings of society and positive guidance for human flourishing in integral development. While the encyclical draws heavily on the writings of Paul VI, it is more self-consciously philosophical than Paul’s social teaching. Paul left us with memorable metaphors like the rich man and Lazarus sitting down together at God’s table as a symbol of economic equality (no. 27), or with the detailed description of how the Church discerns the signs of the times in *Octogesima adveniens*.<sup>18</sup> As Benedict himself repeatedly reminds us, moreover, when Paul sought to introduce implicit philosophical ideas, he simply called for “deeper reflection” (no. 19). Indeed, that is what Benedict sometimes also does

---

explicitly noting both positive and negative signs of the times. See, e.g., *Sollicitudo* nos. 11–26.

<sup>18</sup> For the Lazarus and the rich man metaphor, see *Populorum progressio* no. 47; for Paul’s articulation of how the Church reads the signs of the times, see *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4.

without articulating in technical terms the metaphysical conclusions he hopes his readers will draw for themselves.

One departure Benedict makes from Paul VI on social imagination has to do with utopian thinking. *Caritas in veritate* stresses Paul's negative criticisms of utopian schemes because they "place [the] ethical and human dimensions [of politics] in jeopardy" (no. 14). Paul, however, after criticizing utopianism and ideology "as a facile alibi for rejecting immediate responsibilities," had also affirmed the positive value of such thinking:

It must be recognized that this kind of criticism of existing society often provokes the forward-looking imagination, both to perceive in the present disregarded possibility hidden within it, and to direct itself toward a fresh future; it thus sustains social dynamism by the confidence that it gives to the inventive power of the human mind and heart; and, if it refuses no overture, can also meet the Christian appeal. (*Octagesima adveniens* no. 37)

Paul goes on to argue that the Spirit of Christ overcomes the restrictions of human thinking and action, thereby renewing the earth. The two popes' respective attitudes to utopianism is a minor point of difference. However, it indicates not just a shift of tone, but of theology as well, with Paul trusting in the renewing work of the Spirit and Benedict looking to the directive power of truth in the Logos.

In support of its foundational turn to metaphysics, *Caritas in veritate* also explicitly rejects the notion that there are shifts in the trajectory of the Catholic social tradition, warning commentators and historical theologians to avoid noting the reemergence of a modified classicist approach to Catholic social teaching and drift of the magisterium away from using a historically conscious method.<sup>19</sup> The encyclical rejects analyzing the tradition of social teaching into phases with distinctive emphases and methods. "Clarity is not served," Benedict writes, "by certain abstract subdivisions of the Church's social doctrine," for "there is a *single teaching, consistent and at the same time ever new*" (no. 12). The proper context within which to view *Populorum progressio* and the whole social tradition "is that of the *Tradition of the apostolic faith*" (no. 10).

### The Meaning of Truth

The transcendental terms that dominate the encyclical are, of course, love and truth: God as "Eternal Love and Absolute Truth" and God in Christ, the Logos, in whom "*charity in truth* becomes the Face of his Person" (no. 1). The encyclical is careful to make love and truth correlative terms, as it does with other terms like science and faith. In a key

<sup>19</sup> On classical and historical consciousness, see Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto, 1971).

paragraph, no. 4, Benedict writes, "Truth opens and unites our minds in the *lógos* of love." By moving humans beyond their subjective perspectives, truth enables them to become capable of both communication and communion. Without truth, he says, Christian charity "would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance."<sup>20</sup> He goes on to argue, with great import for Catholic social teaching, that without truth, charity "is excluded from the plans and processes of promoting human development of universal range, in dialogue between knowledge and praxis" (no. 4). "Without truth," he adds, ". . . there is no social conscience and responsibility" (no. 5). So, on the one hand, possessing sure "moral compass points" prevents Christian charity from collapsing into a *Gesinnungsethik*, a morality of feeling; on the other hand, it presents specific guidance for the Church's participation in shaping public policy debate and for moral education of the wider culture.

From there, the letter moves naturally on to discuss some basic norms of social life, which I will take up shortly. Underlying them, however, is an Augustinian ethic mediated through Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*, that is, the theology of human desire. Moral norms are embedded in the theological anthropology Benedict draws from Paul VI.

*Populorum progressio* no. 21 contains a key passage explaining the desiderata of human development. Its logic is that humans desire more and more, and the culmination of that desire is the enjoyment of God. Paul rests this passage on a positive theological anthropology in which the advance of human development leads one to religious experience and hence to God: through "less human conditions," "conditions that are more human," "additional conditions that are more human," and finally "conditions that are still more human."<sup>21</sup> In a sense, Pope Paul followed a *via inventionis*, a method of discovery from basic human needs to our highest satisfactions. Pope Benedict, for his part, mostly follows a *via doctrinae*, moving from the full knowledge of truth to judgments about experience. What needs to be underscored is that much of the moral content of the encyclical is founded on the Augustinian dynamism of desire and the ethics that follow from it. All created goods are "referred to" God. Having experienced God we are attuned to the limits of particular created goods and so are able to critique particular social developments and policies for their insufficiencies, their lack of depth and scope, and relativism.

<sup>20</sup> For a profound analysis of the superficial psychologism and emotionalism of contemporary culture, see no. 76 and the encyclical's treatment of technology.

<sup>21</sup> Also, see *Populorum progressio* no. 16: "This harmonious enrichment of nature by personal and responsible effort is ordered to further perfection. By reason of his union with Christ, the source of life, man attains to new fulfillment of himself, to a transcendent humanism . . . the highest goal of human development."

### Social Norms

For Benedict XVI, the key norm for social action, then, as it was for John XXIII in *Mater et magistra*, for the council in *Gaudium et spes*, for Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* and John Paul II in *Sollicitudo*, is the “vocation” to integral human development, the unfolding of the ever greater depth and range of capacities in the human person: “*the whole human person in every single dimension*” (no. 11).<sup>22</sup> The component elements of development do not emerge clearly in the explicit discussion of norms in the opening section of the encyclical but rather in the subsequent treatment of specific issues: the rights of labor (nos. 25, 67), the right to food and water (no. 27), the respect for life (no. 28), access to employment (no. 32), business responsibility to all stakeholders (no. 40), and responsibility for the environment (no. 51).

Benedict writes more generally of “the inviolable dignity of the human person and the transcendent value of natural moral norms” (no. 45). It would be mistaken, however, to regard all these norms as holding transcendent value in the sense of being unconditioned moral absolutes. Certainly human life is in that category, but the right to food and water, the rights of labor, and responsibility to stakeholders rather than to stockholders alone are all derivative of the inviolable value of the human person made in the image and likeness of God.<sup>23</sup> Other values, like responsibility for the environment, are derived from our duties to this and future generations, from the right to a healthful environment, from the human capacity to find esthetic satisfaction in nature, and from duties to the intrinsic values of other creatures and natural environments. For Benedict, what gives moral norms salience is the transcendental experience of the incompleteness of given human experiences and the yearning for and experience of the divine. In general, then, “transcendent” seems to refer to connections that at a given time exceed our explicit formulation and conscious goals, yet necessarily affect the human purposes at hand. The explicit norms emerge and evolve from a “transcendent” background in which specific projects and previously defined norms are embedded. It is in the human calling to integral development, the call to be “more and more” in a human community and a created world before God, therefore, that we find the transcendent religious basis of specific moral norms.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to giving rise to a range of social ethical norms, “the Christian vocation to development helps the advancement of all men” because it pertains to the whole human community. As Paul VI wrote, “What we

<sup>22</sup> On “what it means to be more,” see *Caritas in veritate* no. 18.

<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.* no. 45.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion of transcendent norms in natural law below, p. 14.

hold important is man, each man and each group of men, and even the whole of humanity.”<sup>25</sup> Benedict is concerned to avoid the common misinterpretation that integral development is simply an individual calling. Rather, it is a personal one and as such entails the development of the whole human family. The universality of the human calling is integral to a proper human development. Elsewhere Benedict appeals to doctrines, especially the Trinity, and Christian metaphors, like the human family, to reinforce the affirmation of humanity’s solidarity in development. What is important for readers less attuned to metaphysics than the pope is that both personal human flourishing and the universality of the call to fulfillment are to be experienced in the desire to become more and more and are accordingly experientially available to all. Though some may regard love for the human family an illegitimate leap of moral imagination, when looked at from the perspective of the dynamism of desire, its consistency with our reflected human experience becomes apparent, and the truth about human nature appears less an abstract metaphysical principle.<sup>26</sup>

Before exploring specific dimensions of development, Benedict identifies two classic principles as governing the social order in a globalized world: justice and the common good. (no. 6) The brief treatment of justice is drawn mostly from Paul VI.<sup>27</sup> Charity entails justice in the recognition and respect for the legitimate rights and duties of individuals and peoples as its minimum expression. At the same time, “charity transcends and completes [justice] in the logic of giving and forgiving” (no. 6). While the exercise of rights and duties contributes to the life of the “earthly city,” relationships of gratuitousness, mercy, and communion contribute far more. Interestingly, the encyclical does not advert to Paul VI’s specific use of the principle of justice for the rectification of (global) institutions—in the case of *Populorum progressio* the structures of world trade—though Benedict certainly advocates reform of institutional structures including the UN and the international financial institutions (see below).

In explaining the common good, Benedict seems to have adapted, as noted above, Augustine’s “earthly city” language to the immanent eschatology of *Gaudium et spes* and the love-transforming-culture approach of Paul VI. For example, Benedict writes:

Like all commitment to justice, [commitment to the common good] has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action. Man’s earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity,

<sup>25</sup> *Populorum progressio* no. 18.

<sup>26</sup> For a philosophical articulation of the widening circle of love, see Margaret Visser, *The Gift of Thanks: The Roots and Rituals of Gratitude* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), chap. 26, “Partiality and Transcendence” 366–80.

<sup>27</sup> See *Caritas in veritate* no. 6.

contributes to building up of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalized society . . . it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family . . . in such a way as to shape the *earthly city* in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and prefiguration of the undivided *city of God*. (No. 7)

So, charity not only shapes human affairs, “to some degree” it anticipates the heavenly Jerusalem as the end of history. The gravity of the “heavenly city,” as it were, carries the “earthly city” with it. Theologically this set of moves is of major significance, showing the profound influence of Paul VI and Vatican II on Benedict’s thought. In turn, they prepare the way for the transformative social policy proposals that will follow.

Benedict makes explicit what is sometimes less obvious in Catholic social teaching, namely, that the common good is primarily effected through institutions; it is “that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis* or ‘city’” (no. 7). The common good is “the institutional path—we might also call it the political path—of charity” (no. 7). For anyone still tempted to think that Benedict does not favor a structural approach to social justice, the encyclical’s treatment of the common good is strong evidence to the contrary. Just as charity “directly encounters the neighbour,” so also it expresses itself through institutions and their reform in a way that is essentially “political.” With Paul VI, Benedict also believes in the urgency of institutional reform. “It is Christ’s charity that urges us on” (no. 20).<sup>28</sup>

### Natural Law

References to the natural law and its principles are found throughout the encyclical. These ought to be read in light of “The Search for a Universal Ethics: A New Look at Natural Law,” the June 2009 document of the International Theological Commission (ITC).<sup>29</sup> Although dense, it is a comprehensive and balanced statement of the natural law tradition for a time when, in response to globalization, many, particularly in the business and environmental communities, are exploring the possibilities of a common ethic, drawing on what the ITC refers to as the world’s “wisdom” traditions. Appealing “to the spokespersons of the world’s great religious, sapiential and philosophical traditions of humanity,” the ITC concluded:

<sup>28</sup> Pope Benedict importantly insists that institutional reform for the sake of integral human development is a shared responsibility to be taken up in freedom. See no. 17.

<sup>29</sup> I will be working with the unofficial English translation by Joseph Bolin: <http://www.pathsoflove.com/universal-ethics-natural-law.html> (accessed December 6, 2009).

We should reach the point of saying, behind our religious convictions and the diversity of our cultural presuppositions, what are the fundamental values for our common humanity, in a manner to work together to promote comprehension, reciprocal recognition and peaceful cooperation between all the members of the human family. (No. 116)

The restrained tone of the document evinces a spirit of intellectual sincerity. It does not project an intellectual straightjacket on others. "This natural law," it reads, "is not at all static in its expression; it does not consist in a list of definitive and immutable precepts. It is a source of inspiration that always springs up in the search for an objective foundation for a universal ethics" (no. 113). Though the ITC's document affirms the Church's role as an interpreter of the natural law, its principal concern is to promote a contemporary *lex gentium*, a global ethic with appeal across traditions.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, its teaching is premised on the belief that "an exchange on the level of reason is possible when it is a matter of experience and of saying what is common to all men endowed with reason and of establishing the requirements of life in society" (no. 114).

Employing the same phrase for political society found in the encyclical, "the city" (*pólis*), the ITC identifies four values also found in the encyclical as essential to political life: liberty, truth, justice, and solidarity. Interestingly, however, the principal contribution of the natural moral law to political society, according to the ITC, is not its specific moral norms, but the function of defending the transcendent dimensions of the human person against absolutizing any created good, particularly the state. "If God and every transcendence were to be excluded from the political horizon," it argues, "nothing would remain but the authority of man over man" (no. 97). It goes on to explain the corrective affects of natural law on the social manifestations of reason.

<sup>30</sup> This universalistic approach is consistent with the proposals Pope Benedict has made to other religions for finding common ground in the area of morality. He has done this primarily in setting out an agenda for dialogue with Muslims, but on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2009, he seemed to extend it to Jews as well. The ITC also makes explicit links to the UN-sponsored Compact for a Global Ethic headed by the Swiss theologian Hans Küng. See ITC, "Search for a Universal Ethic" no. 6. Küng's work was initiated in 1993 by the World Parliament of Religions. For the English language version of the Parliament's *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, see <http://www.weltethos.org/dat-english/03-declaration.htm>. See also Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1993); and *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1997). For another view of a "religious humanist" ethic for a globalizing planet, see Fred Dallmayr, *Peace Talks—Who Will Listen?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame: 2004).

Constant reference to natural law impels one to the continuous purification of reason. Only thus can the political order avoid the threat of the arbitrary, of particular interests, of organized untruth, of manipulation of spirits. The reference to natural law keeps the State from yielding to the temptation to absorb civil society and to subject men to an ideology. It also keeps a State from becoming a providence that deprives persons and communities of every initiative and takes responsibility away from them. (No. 99)

In support of its position, the ITC cites “the totalitarian experiences of the 20th century.” Freed of pretensions to ultimacy, the political order is capable of pursuing its proper end, establishing conditions in which human beings can pursue their own fulfillment in freedom.<sup>31</sup>

### LOVE AND THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Globalization is one of the major contemporary trends that Benedict addresses. In doing so, he takes up a characteristically Catholic theme with resonances back to John XXIII’s exposition of “universal common good” and Vatican II’s definition of the church as a sacrament “of the unity of the human family” with the concomitant duty to foster the processes of “socialization” at work in the contemporary world.<sup>32</sup> Updating the social teaching’s tradition on globalization, the pope gives special attention to the economic dynamisms underlying the larger phenomenon, including examining the moral model of commercial exchange and proposing as his own radical alternative “an economy of gratuitousness and communion.” He comments on labor, shareholder responsibility, and the structures of society. In addition, he writes of the distribution of political authority and the responsibility to protect (no. 67). Underlying all these topics is Benedict’s vision of love working itself out on a global scale. Of the “urgent need for reform” for which Paul VI called and Benedict himself is calling, he writes: “It is Christ’s charity that drives us on: ‘*caritas Christi urget nos*’ (2 Cor 5:14) The urgency is inscribed not only in things, it is not derived solely from the rapid succession of events and problems, but also from the very matter at stake: the establishment of authentic fraternity” required by globalization (no. 20). Charity in truth, he explains,

is a force that builds community, it brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits. The human community that we build by ourselves can never, purely by its own strength, be a fully fraternal community, nor can it overcome every division and become a truly universal community. The unity of the human race . . . is called into being by the word of God-who-is-Love. (no. 34)

<sup>31</sup> See ITC, “Search for a Universal Ethic” nos. 83–85.

<sup>32</sup> On the universal common good, see John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* nos. 139–45. On the church as sacrament of unity and its promotion of socialization, see *Gaudium et spes* nos. 25, 42.

So, while social forces promote globalization, world community is the work of grace.

Though the acceleration of “socialization” has been a theme in Catholic social teaching for more than 40 years, Pope Benedict identifies “the *explosion of worldwide interdependence*, commonly known as globalization” as “the principal new feature” of the world situation. It embraces “all economies,” but, while it “represents a great opportunity,” it also leads to “underdevelopment in whole regions ” (no. 33). The “shared sense of being close to one another,” he writes, “must be transformed into true communion.” He later adds: “*The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family* working together in true communion” (no. 53). Theologically, the pope roots the unity of the human family, “all individuals and peoples within one community,” in the Trinity. God, moreover, “desires to incorporate us into this reality of communion ‘that they may all be one even as we are one’ (Jn 17:22)” (no. 54). Philosophically, Benedict reminds us, the conception of the one human family presupposes a metaphysical understanding of human nature in which “relationality” has a key role to play, so that “true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration” (nos. 54–55).

### Religious Freedom

At this point, the encyclical criticizes “religions and cultural attitudes” that “do not fully embrace the principle of love and truth” and so impede authentic human development (no. 55). Under the influence of globalization, the argument runs, religions have a tendency to become syncretistic. Ironically, this syncretism leads to segregation in a multiplicity of subcommunities and social disengagement of people from one another rather than to their integration into wider communities. How this happens is not clear, but perhaps it is because, as syncretism allows every individual or small group to assemble a “bricolage” of belief, symbols, and practices, it diminishes the possibility of communication over a common body of religious truth.<sup>33</sup>

The practical implication of the critique of syncretistic relativism is that some discernment is necessary in the promotion of religious freedom.

<sup>33</sup> “Bricolage” is the term Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2007) employs to describe individuals’ random assemblage of beliefs and practices into a private religious identity. The term corresponds to processes Thomas Luckmann foresaw in his *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967). The self-enclosure that results from such syncretism is the opposite of the dialogue made possible by openness to the truth of the Logos, as Pope Benedict explains in *Caritas in veritate* no. 4.

“Religious freedom does not mean religious indifferentism, nor does it imply that all religions are equal.” The complex criterion for discernment is “emancipation and inclusivity, in the context of universal human community. . . . Christianity, the religion of the ‘God who has a human face’, contains this very criterion within itself” (no. 55). From the side of Catholic doctrine, what is intriguing about the articulation of the criterion is the generalized character of the norms: emancipation, inclusiveness, and universal community. They are neither particularistic nor peculiarly Catholic or Christian. While the criteria permit discernment among religions and religious movements, like the global ethic of the ITC, they seem to show considerable latitude toward those faiths that promote world community.

Furthermore, by contrast with religious relativism, the encyclical affirms that genuine religious freedom means “*God has a place in the public realm . . . in regard to its cultural, social, economic, and particularly its political dimensions*” (no. 56). This clarification represents a critique of both secularist and aggressive majority religions that would narrow religious liberty to freedom of worship alone, in the one case for all religions, in the other for minority religions, thus keeping “God in the sacristy.” When religion is excluded from the public square, the pope argues, “public life is sapped of its motivation, and politics takes on a domineering and aggressive character. Human rights risk being ignored” and “the possibility of fruitful dialogue and effective cooperation between reason and religious faith” is precluded” (no. 56).<sup>34</sup> Benedict insists, moreover, that in the cultural realm religious freedom entails the recognition, not just of psychological desires aimed at individual satisfaction, but of religious-spiritual aspirations that connect people to the wider world, creation, and the divine (see the treatment of psychologism below). There is a double critique here, first, of secular democratic politics that would disallow religious views from politics, and, second, of reductive views of religion and the spiritual life.<sup>35</sup>

### **Gratuity and Communion**

The heart of the encyclical, however, is its bold affirmation of gratuity (gratuitousness) and communion as the heart of the contemporary Christian social vision and the special remedy that Christian love brings to the

<sup>34</sup> See also no. 29.

<sup>35</sup> The encyclical acknowledges that violence inspired by religious fundamentalism impedes integral human development and other human goods, but its principal concern seems to be “the promotion of religious indifference or practical atheism,” especially when it is promoted by the state (no. 29). Practical atheism is also a product of the export of “moral underdevelopment” from rich to poor countries through commerce, particularly in cultural products, such as entertainment.

current needs of the world community, its institutions, and practices. (I prefer “gratuity” to “gratuitousness,” the word used in the official translation, because in American usage “gratuitousness” bears a connotation of arbitrariness. “A gratuitous act” is unwarranted, unreasonable, or unsuited to the context. Others may object that “gratuity” has taken on an entirely materialistic meaning, as in “a tip” or a “bonus.” Dictionaries differ on usage. The root concept, however, is clear: that the central moral posture commended to us is one of freely giving and freely sharing for the good of all.)<sup>36</sup> “Love is God’s greatest gift to humanity,” Benedict writes. (no. 2) “It is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small communities) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)” (no. 2). Again, “charity reflects the personal yet public dimensions of faith in the God of the Bible who is both *Agápe* and *Lógos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word” (no. 3). Like Paul VI before him, Benedict grasps “the connection between the impetus toward the unification of humanity” we now call globalization “and the Christian ideal of a single family of peoples in solidarity and fraternity” (no.13).<sup>37</sup>

### Nature and Grace

According to Benedict, human reason has the capacity to understand the equality of all men and women. It establishes stability for their social coexistence. What it cannot do is foster fraternity among them. Fraternity “originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first” (no. 19). Accordingly, the expression of the Christian vision of love in the public sphere is rooted in God’s love freely given to humanity.<sup>38</sup> It is this primordial experience that lies at the heart of the ethic of gratuity and communion. The establishment of fraternity, the mobilization of “hearts,” is necessary “to ensure that current economic and social processes evolve toward fully human outcomes” (no. 20).<sup>39</sup> While the encyclical criticizes sentimental views of charity, “subject to contingent subjective emotions and opinions” that lead to distortions of the virtue, it sometimes speaks of the Christian contribution to ethics, as it does here, as if its primary role were motivational. Motivation is quite correctly a contribution that religion offers ethics; nonetheless, the Church’s “value added” is more than motivational. It coheres with and emerges from the pope’s fundamental vision of faith—the gift of God’s love—which provides a heuristic for understanding the whole pattern of human experience. Motivation is also

<sup>36</sup> On the importance of freedom in gift-giving, see Visser, *Gift of Thanks* 123–26.

<sup>37</sup> See treatment of natural law above, pp. 13–15.

<sup>38</sup> See also no. 34. <sup>39</sup> See *ibid*.

rooted in the dynamism of desire built into human nature, so that it also coheres with natural human tendencies. A problem that arises from the length and complexity of the encyclical is that the motivational dimensions of ethics sometimes appear disconnected from their theological and anthropological foundations.

Given Pope Benedict's doctrinal stress on the unique salvific universality of Jesus, the stipulation of the motivational extra that Christian faith provides to natural reason and the political enterprise may also arise from the affirmation of the distinctiveness and finality of Christianity. What is more sure is that, in the encyclical's own terms, humanity's proven insufficiency—exemplified in the recent financial crisis and over many decades in an array of failed economic development programs—affirms the doctrine of the Fall, as well as the need of both charity and truth. It is evident, as the pope writes, that “the human community that we build ourselves can never, purely of our own strength, be a full fraternal community, nor can it overcome every division and become a truly universal community” (no. 34). The weakness of human self-transcendence, the pope argues, means that “the unity of the human family . . . is called into being by the word of God—who-is-Love” (no. 34). This argument is intuitively comprehensible to believers, but to nonbelievers it may seem an appeal to “the God of the gaps.” Some further argument would seem helpful to make the affirmation of faith more persuasive to the nonbelieving person of goodwill.<sup>40</sup> (The scandal of the implausibility of the economy of gift may be reduced, however, for those who accept the pope's challenge for “*further and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its goals*” [no. 32]).

### Gift-giving and the Market

The single most difficult test of the persuasiveness of the encyclical lies in whether its vision of society as gift and communion can penetrate economics and commerce, fields that—as the encyclical acknowledges—had sealed themselves off from outside influences and from theology in particular.<sup>41</sup> Here a less generalized appeal to insufficiency goes a long way toward making the theological vision of gift and communion more plausible for the general reader. Benedict observes that the market cannot be viewed in abstraction; it is embedded in a wider web of relations. For that reason, the commutative justice of the market “cannot produce the social cohesion that it requires in order to function well. *Without internal forms*

<sup>40</sup> See the discussion of David Nirnberg's review of the encyclical below, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> On the specious autonomy of economics from outside moral influences, see *Caritas in veritate* no. 34.

*of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function*" (no. 35).

The comment about social cohesion, solidarity, and trust is sociological and for that reason may be suspect to some, but the recent financial crisis underscores its empirical reality.<sup>42</sup> The encyclical clearly ascribes to the social cohesion theory. For commenting on the negative effects of inequality, the pope notes, "not only does social cohesion suffer, thereby placing democracy at risk, but so does the economy, through the progressive erosion of 'social capital': the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence" (no. 34).

In the exposition of gratuity and the market, the pope's point is that "today it is this trust that has ceased to exist, and the loss of trust is a grave loss" (no. 36). Here he takes one of those short, intermediate steps that for attentive readers begins to make the theological appeal more plausible. The market by itself cannot produce justice. "It must draw its moral energies from other subjects that are capable of generating them" (no. 35). Religion, of course, is a primary source of that moral energy, but more immediately Benedict identifies "political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution" as the antidote to the unregulated market. The state, as he affirms, is a constitutive domain of human society, and the economy should not eclipse the state's proper role in promoting the common good. Economic relations can embody basic human values, but only where other dimensions of human existence, including government, are permitted to fulfill their functions.

In a globalized economy, moreover, especially as we continue to undergo the current financial crisis, Benedict argues, commercial relations must better embody "the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity"(no. 36).<sup>43</sup> He continues:

Today we can say that economic life must be understood as a multilayered phenomenon: in every one of these layers, to varying degrees and ways specifically suited to each, the aspect of fraternal reciprocity must be present. In the global era, economic activity cannot prescind from gratuitousness, which fosters and disseminates

<sup>42</sup> The notion that religion contributes to social cohesion and mutual trust derives from Emile Durkheim and has a considerable history of commentary that continues today in both sociology and anthropology. See most recently Nicholas Wade, *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures* (New York: Penguin, 2009), esp. chap. 8, "Morality, Trust, and Trade" 192–210. For a more critical and religiously sensitive interpretation see Visser, *Gift of Thanks*, chap. 6, "Why Give Back?" 69–78, and esp. subsection D of chap.10, "A Gift Is Not a Commodity" 126–31.

<sup>43</sup> Visser, *Gift of Thanks*, chap. 10, "The Give-and-Take of Everyday Life" 111–42, provides a thick sociological description of the phenomenon of giving.

solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good among the different economic players. (No. 38)

These attitudes are needed in the other dimensions of society, politics, and the civic sector, as well. For “solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone for everyone, and it cannot be merely delegated to the state.” In fact, the binary model of market-plus-state “is corrosive of society” (no. 39). Social responsibility across society—in business, politics, and civic action—arises only where there are underlying attitudes of giving and sharing. “The market of gratuitousness,” the pope writes, “does not exist, and attitudes of gratuitousness cannot be established by law. Yet both the market and politics need individuals who are open to reciprocal gift” (no. 39).

Benedict offers two applications of this ethic that illuminate its functioning. The first is familiar to Americans from the corporate responsibility movement, namely, “the stakeholder society.”<sup>44</sup> The second is a mixed model: for-profit firms consciously working for the common good. This second model originated with the late Chiara Lubich and the Focolare movement, which now counts more than 700 firms built along these lines.<sup>45</sup>

“Without doubt, one of the greatest risks for businesses,” Benedict writes, “is that they are almost exclusively answerable to their investors, thereby limiting their social value” (no. 40). Investor control combined with growth and territorial expansion of corporate activities, outsourcing of production, and the mobility of directors weakens the social ties of business to society, resulting in irresponsibility toward other stakeholders: “the workers, the suppliers, the consumers, the natural environment and broader society.” Appealing to a sign of the times, the positive moral aspirations of the day, Benedict writes:

There is nevertheless a growing conviction that *business management cannot concern itself only with the interests of the proprietors, but must also assume responsibility for*

<sup>44</sup> The “stakeholder” approach to business management is a widespread concept in the corporate social responsibility movement that is given added heft by United Nations Global Compact, an effort to promote global business ethics in the areas of human rights, labor, environment, and anticorruption (see: <http://www.unglobalcompact.org>). This more common use of “stakeholder society” is not to be confused with a stronger redistributive proposal to correct income inequality advocated by Bruce Ackerman and Ann Alcott in their *The Stakeholder Society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> For more on Focolare and the economy of communion see <http://www.edc.online.org>; and Amy Uelmen, “In the Market for Humanity,” *America* 201.16 (November 30, 2009) 12–13. For an extended economic theory of reciprocity see Serge-Christophe Kolm, *Reciprocity: An Economics of Social Relations*, Federico Caffè Lectures (New York: Cambridge University, 2008).

*all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers . . . the community of reference.* (No. 40)

The ideal manager (and corporate board) is one who recognizes the links between the firm and the territory in which it operates. Similarly, the model financier is one who “weighs the long-term sustainability of the enterprise, its benefit to the real economy and attention to the advancement . . . of further economic initiatives in countries in need of development.” Thus, the plausibility of the case for an economy of gift and communion rests not just on theology and social theory but gains strength from attitudes and trends found in business itself.

Drawing once more on social trends, the encyclical argues that because of the emergence of an intermediate type of enterprise, the customary distinction between for-profit and nonprofit firms does not do justice to the pluriformity of contemporary commerce. There is a wide spectrum of firms that break the mold: companies “subscribing to social aid agreements in support of developing countries, charitable foundations associated with individual companies, groups of companies oriented toward social welfare, and the diversified world of the so-called ‘civil economy’ and the ‘economy of communion.’” What these enterprises have in common is that, while they do not “exclude profit,” they consider “it a means for achieving human and social ends.” Benedict’s hope is that this array of alternative institutions will lead the economy more broadly to serve the common good, resulting in a market that is “*not only more civilized but also more competitive*” (no. 46). These novel pro-common-good enterprises are not to be taken as an alternative economy. They are to model the moral norms and the creative practices of social responsibility for the economy as whole. At the same time, all businesses are expected to follow the stakeholder model, and government is expected to operate in its coordinating and regulatory roles.

### Government in the Global Village

*Caritas in veritate* takes special note of the loss of state power under the impact of globalization. “In our own day,” it reads, “the State finds itself having to address the limitations to its sovereignty imposed by the new context of international trade and finance. . . . This new context has altered the political power of States” (no. 24). It is especially affected in the area of social welfare, making it harder for governments to be successful in their role as the guarantor of “social justice through redistribution” (no. 36).<sup>46</sup> The global market has forced governments into competition for business that “has led to *downsizing of social security systems* as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage” (no. 25). As a result, the letter

<sup>46</sup> On redistribution, see also no. 37.

reports, there has been a diminishment in the enjoyment of human rights, particularly the rights of labor to organize. Action is required to forestall excessive inequalities and “to *prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone*” (no. 32).

The renewal of political life in the global village, the letter goes on to explain, requires a dispersion of political authority on different levels alongside more active participation by civil society. The mechanics of government can differ from place to place, but the fundamentals of a “State of law: a system of public order and effective imprisonment that respects human rights [and] truly democratic institutions”—are essential to human development. (no. 41) While urging increased solidarity in development between the governments of developing and industrialized nations, the encyclical underscores the need of active participation by the people themselves and the principle of subsidiarity (understood as mutual assistance) “through intermediary bodies.” Subsidiarity defends personal dignity and autonomy. Insofar as it gives firsthand expression to reciprocity, it also provides an antidote to any “all-encompassing welfare state” (no. 57).

While globalization demands new forms of authority to meet the problems of a global common good, as John XXIII foresaw, the structure of global authority must be organized, Benedict writes, “in a subsidiary and stratified way, if it is not to infringe upon freedom and if it is to yield effective results in practice” (no. 57). This notion of new, but stratified, forms of authority is a direct answer to critics who charge that the social teaching tradition is statist and that it supports a single world government. Subsidiarity is a two-sided coin, and when smaller units are unable to serve the common good, then higher entities have a responsibility to intervene. When those higher, regional or global institutions do not exist, they need to be established in the interest of the common good. The system as a whole, however, will not function well without distinct levels of authority along with intermediate associations built on reciprocity.

One special dimension of political authority in a globalized world is “the responsibility to protect” (“R2P”).<sup>47</sup> Integral development and cooperation among nations “require the construction of a social order that at last conforms to the moral order, to the interconnections between moral and social spheres, and to the link between politics and the economic and civil spheres as envisaged by the Charter of the United Nations” (no. 67). “A true world political authority,” as projected by John XXIII, is needed to address the economic crisis and other pressing global issues, including disarmament, food security, protection of the environment, and regulation of migration. For the world community to address these issues there must

<sup>47</sup> For an earlier, extended defense of the responsibility to protect, see Benedict XVI’s April 18, 2008, Address to the UN General Assembly.

be a reform of the United Nations as well as of international economic and financial institutions. UN reform includes “effective power” to ensure security, justice, and human rights for all and the authority to require compliance with its decisions within a cooperative network of international organizations.<sup>48</sup> Pope Benedict has been a consistent advocate of the responsibility to protect R2P and of the UN system, but *Caritas in veritate* represents the Vatican’s most authoritative statement yet on behalf of UN reform with the goal of making R2P a reality.

### SPECIAL TOPICS: LABOR, ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY

The encyclical treats a great many issues of social concern, including development aid, respect for life, population policy, migration, trade, and even tourism. Three topics deserve particular consideration: labor, environment, and technology.

#### Labor

While the encyclical’s passages on labor do not have a chapter heading of their own, they are the most significant statement on labor since John Paul II’s *Laborem exercens* nearly three decades ago (1981). They may also be the strongest endorsement of workers’ right to organize since the start of the modern social teaching tradition in Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* in 1991. In the competitive atmosphere stimulated by globalization, Benedict observes, the decline of organized labor represents a loss of protection for the socioeconomic rights of citizens. “*Trade union organizations experience greater difficulty in carrying out their task of representing the interests of workers, partly because Governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labour unions*” (no. 25). The mobility of labor, provoked in part by deregulation, when it becomes widespread, creates instability for workers and their families, “giving rise to difficulty in forging coherent life-plans, including that of marriage” and result in new forms of lasting economic marginalization. While defending unionization as an instrument of worker justice, the encyclical also calls for unions to consider workers outside their membership and especially “workers in developing countries where social rights are often violated” (no. 67).

<sup>48</sup> For recent statements on UN reform, see the address of Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the United Nations, to the 64th UN General Assembly, September 24, 2009, [http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/VA\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/VA_en.pdf). On November 17, 2009, moreover, Migliore called for limiting the veto power of the Big Five in the Security Council because it had repeatedly prevented the international community from intervening out of the duty to protect; see <http://www.zenit.org/article-27583?l=english>.

### Environment

Protection of the environment, like the responsibility to protect, has been a consistent theme of Pope Benedict's teaching ministry, and the environment takes up five numbers in the letter's fourth chapter (nos. 48–52). The encyclical considers duties to the environment in the context of development. These passages stand as an indirect reminder that for a period following *Populorum progressio* Catholic social teaching was charged with neglecting the environment for the sake of human development. At the same time, these passages remind environmentalists that the fate of the earth is closely bound to the fate of humanity. "The deterioration of nature," it observes, ". . . is closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: *when 'human ecology' is respected, environmental ecology also benefits*" (no. 51).

While the letter links environment to the overall theme of charity in truth, it finds its positions in the doctrine of creation.<sup>49</sup> It makes glancing criticisms at evolutionary determinism, neopaganism, and dominion theory. While not mentioning climate change explicitly, it singles out energy as a problem deserving special attention and urges international cooperation between advanced and developing countries in resolving the twin problems of the need for energy for development and the deleterious impact of energy use on the environment.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the letter recalls that sustainable environmental solutions include a dimension of intergenerational justice.<sup>51</sup> Finally, it reminds its readers of the indivisibility of nature, including "life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations" (no. 51). While the integration of life and family issues into environmental ethics is a characteristically Catholic advocacy, with time it may prove a prophetic contribution as humanity comes to appreciate how much it is part of the web of nature.

### Technology

Chapter six (nos. 68–77) consists of a sustained critique of the technical mindset in development, advocating in a strong way for "humanistic principles" to guide the process. It takes up the frequently addressed questions of bioethics, but also less-treated social topics like "peace-building," social communications, and what could be called psychologism. The application of the technicist critique to both peace work and psychology is both novel and telling.

<sup>49</sup> See nos. 48–49.

<sup>50</sup> See nos. 49–50.

<sup>51</sup> See nos. 48, 50.

In what has come to be called “peace-building,” technicism is most evident in economic development work, especially the financial engineering used to open markets.<sup>52</sup> “Development,” the pope writes, “will never be fully guaranteed through automatic or impersonal forces” (no. 71). Both professionalism and moral vision are necessary for successful development.<sup>53</sup> Professionalization without moral guidance has resulted in the failure and disappointing gains of many development schemes. Likewise, peace cannot be considered as “merely the outcome of agreements between governments” or of economic assistance projects. Peace requires multiple contributions from different fields of human endeavor (diplomacy, economics, education, the military), but it has to be “based on values rooted in the truth of human life” (no. 72). The technical contributions can establish peace only when they serve efforts to unite people “on the basis of love and mutual understanding.”

The treatment of the technical mindset in psychology seems to be written with particular feeling—and pastoral insight. “*The question of development is closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul* insofar as we often . . . confuse the soul’s health with emotional well-being” (no. 76). Psychological reductionism disallows the spiritual dimension of human development. Spiritual growth, however, comes about in dialogue with the self and God. Prosperous societies’ displacement of spiritual growth with material satisfactions results in feelings of “emptiness in which the soul feels abandoned, despite the availability of countless therapies for body and psyche.” Holistic development, the letter argues, serves human beings “in their totality as body and soul” (no. 76).

### TRANSMISSION AND IMPACT

*Caritas in veritate* is a long and difficult text. Considerable commentary has been dedicated to noting its impenetrable prose.<sup>54</sup> That is unfortunate because it is an ambitious addition to the body of Catholic social teaching. Its central teaching on gratuity and communion is a genuinely radical one and deserves to be understood especially by businesspeople, financiers, and

<sup>52</sup> On peace-building, see the forthcoming volume from the Catholic Peacebuilding Network: Robert Schreiter, Scott Appleby, and Gerard Powers, eds., *Catholic Peacebuilding: Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (2010).

<sup>53</sup> That development is integral to peace is a theme that reaches back to Paul VI and his famous phrase, “development is the new name for peace” (*Populorum progressio* no. 76). The need for both professionalism and moral vision seems to revisit the disputes over professionalization of the Church’s charitable work related above, pp. 5–7 and nn. 13–14.

<sup>54</sup> See n. 6 above.

economists. Like all social encyclicals, it will have carriers.<sup>55</sup> Labor advocates, environmentalists, pro-life advocates, and others will carry the parts of its message close to their concerns. But businesspeople and the Catholic faithful will need to have it translated for them.<sup>56</sup> In addition, many non-Catholics and even nonbelievers of good will look for the kind of accessible exposition of the encyclical that Cardinal Ratzinger, in his *Without Roots*, seemed to promise nonbelievers who share a common moral and social agenda.<sup>57</sup> As David Nirenberg wrote in his *New Republic* review:

In a de-secularizing age and with our faith in self-interest shaken by economic crisis, we should want to draw on the wisdom of that ocean of (religious) thought. But . . . [that teaching] will have to be taught in a way that seeks to transcend the boundaries of the traditions that produces them. . . . Values are not a zero-sum game. God's place in the world is not lost when one religion tries to translate some of its truths into helpful good sentiments for those of other or no faith, something that both Pius XI and John Paul II understood.<sup>58</sup>

I would hope Pope Benedict himself, whose weekly homilies are so often examples of clarity and spiritual insight, would himself continue to explicate his teaching and apply it both to situations of everyday life and to pressing global challenges.

*Caritas in veritate* challenges philosophers and theologians to revisit the question of gift-giving and the economy. There are rich scriptural resources in the Synoptic Gospels and the letters of Paul—I think especially of Luke's Gospel (see, e.g., Lk 6:30–38)—that the encyclical has not exploited, and the anthropological and sociological theories of gift-giving, on which the encyclical draws but too little explores, need to be examined and elaborated. Theologies of gift based on the phenomenology and anthropology of everyday life might also provide more thick description in which to root the principle of gratuity and make it clearer to the average person.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> On the historical connection between movements and Catholic social teaching, see Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> See Hanson, "What's the Business Plan?" Groups like Hanson's own Markula Center at Santa Clara University, the *Centesimus Annus* Foundation in Italy and the United States, the John A. Ryan Institute of Saint Thomas University, St. Paul, Minn., and the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University, among others, are equipped to carry out the task of popularization and application.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, foreword George Weigel, trans. Michael F. Moore (New York: Basic, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> See Nirenberg, "Love and Capitalism" 42. Nirenberg's serious and sympathetic reading of the encyclical is itself worth study.

<sup>59</sup> On gratuity (freedom) in gift-giving, see Visser, *Gift of Thanks*, chap. 16, "Freedom and Equality" 210–18.

Some may want to explore the impact of Benedict's appropriation of Paul VI's social theology on his previously held views on history and society. For Catholic social ethics, the letter provides a mine of topics for investigation from UN reform and the architecture of international financial institutions, to cooperation in development and peace-building, to the reciprocity between subsidiarity and solidarity, to the place of metaphysics in social ethics, and even to the subversion of spirituality by psychologism. Finally, there is the significance for the Church's social ministry of the continuity in the tradition that Benedict has firmly established between Paul VI, John Paul II (in *Laborem exercens* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*) and his own teaching, freed from the political spin to which John Paul II's economic teaching in particular had become victim.