

GRACE RELOADED: CARITAS IN VERITATE'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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More detailed than preceding social encyclicals, Pope Benedict XVI's Caritas in veritate appears to supply a theological foundation for the Catholic Church's social doctrine. The article argues that the theological anthropology contained in the encyclical (which leads to a notable reevaluation of the role of grace) complements Joseph Ratzinger's life-long reflections on the relationship between faith and reason, and provides a key to understanding choices the pope makes in his effort to offer a reliable Catholic orientation in a rapidly changing world.

POPE BENEDICT'S XVI'S LATEST ENCYCLICAL, *Caritas in Veritate*, is his first to address "all people of good will."¹ This may seem surprising, considering that the two preceding encyclicals, *Deus caritas est* and *In spe salvi*, were also aimed at a readership beyond the Catholic Church, at least as their message and language suggest. In fact, *Caritas in veritate's* whole introduction (nos. 1–9) can be seen as an attempt to sound out the suitability of that all-encompassing, yet "classified," "mailing address" used at certain times in papal encyclicals.

From an anthropological perspective, the encyclical seems to carry out Joseph Ratzinger's previously announced project to engage the Christian faith and secular rationality in a "polyphonic" correlation: "This would permit," affirms Ratzinger, "the growth of a universal process of purification in which those essential values and norms that are known or at least guessed at by all men could acquire a new radiance. In this way, that which

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¹ This formulation was first used by John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in terris* (1963).

keeps the world together would once again become an effective force in mankind.”² In the light of both the dramatic events connected to the 2008–2009 world-wide economic crisis and the long-term challenges posed by globalization and climate change, much can be said in favor of this desire to go “back to the basics” concerning the conditions of human coexistence, a concern that clearly reflects Ratzinger’s priority agenda for Christian theology and life in the modern world.³

From a more specifically theological point of view, the pope’s address “to all people of good will” documents his readiness to make known to the world his conception concerning the identity of a “Catholic social doctrine” as distinct from a “social doctrine” as such. In 1964, at the beginning of his professorial activities and toward the final year of the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger had bluntly remarked: “A proper theological social doctrine does not exist, though the attempt at the ever new ‘evangelization’ . . . in man’s concrete social history does exist.”⁴ Thus, one might read in the period of the encyclical’s redaction a manifestation of not only the careful attention that the abruptly changing global market situation required but also, on a deeper level, the complexity that Ratzinger discerned in the subject itself.

My claim here is that the foundational reflections, particularly in its introductory chapter, that the encyclical dedicates to the provision of “building stones” for a theological social doctrine constitute in themselves a revisit of Ratzinger’s own efforts to encourage the development of a theological anthropology. The emerging perspective itself then discloses the theo-anthropological principles that, in Ratzinger’s well-known style, find close-knit application in the encyclical’s reflections in regard to those cultural values traditionally addressed by social encyclicals. In what follows I will highlight some of the encyclical’s structural components that reveal a widespread influence of patristic (and not only Augustinian!) theology.

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Europe: Today and Tomorrow*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007) 82; originally published as *I suoi fondamenti oggi e domani* (Milan: San Paolo, 2004). Throughout this article I use “Benedict” when referring to his writings as pope, and “Ratzinger” when referring to his earlier writings.

³ See Pope Benedict XVI, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre” (March 10, 2009). This and all other papal and Vatican documents cited in this article are available on the Vatican Web site and are easily found by an Internet search. All such sites were accessed on February 20, 2010.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, “Naturrecht, Evangelium, und Ideologie in der katholischen Soziallehre: Katholische Erwägungen zum Thema,” in *Christlicher Glaube und Ideologie*, ed. Klaus von Bismarck and Walter Dirks (Mainz: Grünewald, 1964) 28 (my translation).

THE MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE: HUMAN BEING

The opening words of *Caritas in veritate* exude a resolute confidence:

Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness . . . is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. Love—*caritas*—is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth. (No. 1)

In phrases such as these one cannot detect any effort to employ distinctions that might help differentiate within these oftentimes inflated concepts of love and peace that are all too easily compromised by self-illusion and various distortions. Finally, there is not the slightest reference to the contemporary world's diminishing willingness to accept the purported self-evidence of such a vision. In contrast with Ratzinger's well-known criticism of the "astonishing optimism"⁵ of Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, this encyclical delivers a panegyric to the possibility of human beings—"the most valuable resources" (no. 58)—to achieve a just ordering of global affairs in a never-ending pursuit of integral human development.

Logos and Logoi

Certainly, behind *Caritas in veritate*'s initially positive cast one can detect Ratzinger's well-known programmatic emphasis on the Christian option for reason and rationality that has become, especially after his 2006 Regensburg address, his signature thought: "'In principio erat Verbum'—at the beginning of all things is the creative power of reason,"⁶ a remark that the encyclical's opening phrase explicitly invokes by inserting: "truth to which Jesus Christ bore witness" (no. 1). With this, Pope Benedict restates for our time the genuinely patristic theology of "Logos-creation" that explores the relationship between the christological significance of "Logos," drawn from John's Gospel and Paul's letters, and an anthropological connotation of *logoi* (reasons) pertaining to all human persons that the Church Fathers retrieved, in various inflections, from Stoic and Platonic philosophy.⁷

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 380.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) 181.

⁷ Origen seems to have been the first to present a noteworthy theology of the *logoi* of creation in combination with Logos-Christology. This *theologoumenon* then passed to the Alexandrian School, in particular to Athanasius, Cyril, Evagrius, and Ps.-Dionysius, before it received its most systematic development in Maximus the Confessor. On the Latin front, it is reflected particularly in Augustine's

Accordingly, the concept of Logos, in its aspect of pointing to the Second Person of the Trinity, allows Ratzinger to emphasize the “fideistic” side of the “intrinsic relationship of faith and reason”⁸: “In fact, it must be *firmly believed* that, in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (*Jn* 14:6), the full revelation of divine truth is given.”⁹

We find Ratzinger’s more typical use of “Logos,” however, in his effort to promote a recognition of intelligibility as itself a condition of human knowledge and action, which leads to the recognition of a creator-God as ultimate guarantor of the plausibility of comprehensibility:

The world is objective mind; it meets us in an intellectual structure, that is, it offers itself to our mind as something that can be reflected upon and understood. From this follows the next step. To say ‘*Credo in Deum*—I believe in God’ expresses the conviction that objective mind is the product of subjective mind and can only exist at all as the declension of it.¹⁰

Faith and Reason between Idealism and Historicity

It appears that Ratzinger’s argumentation leading to the more “philosophical” side of the relationship of faith and reason is based on an intricate reasoning that can be broken down into two lines of thought. The first (A) refers back to the “fideistic” dimension, but this time to the fideistic aspect of reason itself: If there is knowledge and science in this world, in the strict sense this may be affirmed only insofar as one chooses to trust reason’s operational validity, but if one does not trust reason, one cannot engage in scientific research. This definitive trustworthiness of reason, however, cannot itself be proved; it can only be accepted “on faith.” This is why,

conception of the *rationes* in the created world, which he regards as immutable principles. For an overview of the *Logos-logoi* theologoumenon, see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosmos and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995) 71–72.

⁸ Tracey Rowland used this formulation to render Ratzinger’s understanding of the reason-faith relationship. See her *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University, 2008) 122. I believe that one can fully subscribe to the designation “intrinsic” in the context of the reason-faith relationship only insofar as an immediate christological context can be ascertained. My sense is that Ratzinger prefers to preserve a pronounced “dialogical character” between faith and reason, so as to safeguard their mutual “autonomy.” See Philipp Gabriel Renczes, “La patristica e la metafisica nel secolo XX,” *Gregorianum* 90 (2009) 76–85, at 84.

⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), Declaration “*Dominus Iesus*” on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (August 6, 2000) no. 148.

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) 108.

according to Ratzinger, human reason always involves an interaction of “knowledge” and “understanding.” Whereas knowledge can be defined as a merely cognitive act, understanding grows out of one’s history, which involves not only the intellect but also the will: “‘Understanding’ only reveals itself in ‘standing’, not apart from it. One cannot occur without the other, for understanding means seizing and grasping as *meaning* the meaning which man has received as *ground*.”¹¹ We can detect in this argument the influence of “dialogical philosophy” associated with Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner, and Martin Buber; Ratzinger became acquainted with it through Theodor Steinbüchel.¹²

The second line of thought (B), which is typical of a Platonic-Augustinian tradition, is advanced by many contemporary scholars to reestablish the validity of “metaphysics” as a philosophical discipline in the post-Kant era.¹³ The argument grows out of the so-called transcendental approach that sets out to inquire into the conditions of an event’s very possibility. In my consideration here, the question becomes, What circumstances must be met so that the possibility of reason’s existence can be examined? At this point, one realizes that to articulate the possibility (or impossibility) of reason’s existence, its very presence in a reasoning agent is already implied. Admittedly, anyone can decide in favor of the primacy of irrationality, but in that case one is involved in self-contradiction insofar as the act of asserting irrationality must appeal to the rational “platform” whose existence the assertion has disavowed—and this involves one in a contradictory act. This is why Ratzinger rhetorically asks: “Can reason really renounce its claim to the priority of what is rational over the irrational, the claim that the Logos is at the ultimate origin of things, without abolishing itself?”¹⁴

One might observe that this question, which obviously calls for a negative answer, places Ratzinger in the ambit of German idealist philosophy (which may trouble some neo-Scholastic mindsets); it also places him close to Karl Rahner’s approach that detects in human beings a constitutive

¹¹ Ibid. 46, emphasis original.

¹² See Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI: Die Entwicklung seines Denkens* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2007) 108–9. Ratzinger himself remarks in his memoir: “The encounter with the personalistic thought, which we find elaborated with new convincing force in the great Jewish thinker Martin Buber, became for me an essential formative experience. It needs to be said that this personalism ‘spontaneously’ (= *wie von selbst*) linked itself with the thought of Augustine which I encountered with all its human passion and depth in the *Confessions*” (*Aus meinem Leben: Erinnerungen [1927–1977]* [Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1998] 49 [my translation]).

¹³ See for instance, Emmerich Coreth, *Metaphysics* (New York: Seabury, 1973) 46–68; Béla Weissmahr, *Ontologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985) 30–49.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance* 181.

orientation (*Hinordnung*) to the divine economy, which Rahner elaborated in *Hearer of the Word*.

In regard to both lines of thought, Ratzinger himself acknowledges his proximity to both German idealism and Rahner—at least at a first stage:

The idealistic solution to the problem of being accordingly signifies the idea that all being is the being-thought by one single consciousness. . . . To be sure, it [Christian belief in God], too, will say: Being is being-thought. Matter itself points beyond itself to thinking as the earlier and more original factor.¹⁵

He [the hearer of the word] is the being who lives not just from the depths of his own being, who finds his fulfilment, not in what issues from himself, from his very nature, but, by reason of this nature, keeps watch for what can come to him only in freedom and from without. . . . Christian history thus loses its extrinsic character; it is, rather, a necessarily free answer to the free necessity and the necessary freedom of the being *man*. Up to this point, we have been able to follow Rahner's thoughts without difficulty.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, many scholars have expressed astonishment that Ratzinger would subsequently dissociate himself from both idealist philosophy and Rahner's theological anthropology, a step that in their eyes "artificially" sundered anew the very same conjunction of faith and reason that Ratzinger had held in such high regard. Thus, for example, to Ratzinger's affirmation that "there is no ultimate demonstration that the basic choice involved in Christianity is correct as even philosophical thought reaches its limits,"¹⁷ Hansjürgen Verweyen counters: "It should be possible to show *philosophically* why only a divine Thou which comes to me through another human being can satisfy my fundamental need of religiousness."¹⁸

One might certainly be tempted to conclude at this point that, granted (with Ratzinger) there is ultimately no possibility to positively state the meaningfulness of rationality but only to affirm the irrefutability of its necessity as a formal framework, one may swiftly turn back to line of thought (A) and ascribe to the human person the capacity to entrust to oneself the responsibility to choose the option for rationality (and thereby the option for Christianity). It seems, though, that a simple delegation of human confidence would foreground the "fideistic" dimension of reasoning, even with the concession that any acknowledgement of Absolute Being as definitive warrantor of rationality involves the freedom of choice.

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 110.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* 163.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003) 70–71.

¹⁸ Verweyen, *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI* 113. See also Klaus Müller, "Die Vernunft, die Moderne, und der Papst," *Stimmen der Zeit* 226 (2009) 291–306, at 303–4 (my translation).

In fact, Ratzinger did not reject the rationalizations he detected in the arguments of idealist philosophy (and in Rahner) on the basis of the suggestion that one ought to replace them with trustful human decision-making. Rather, his reserve toward them was motivated by the prominence of rational, abstract “universalisms” present in those accounts, which ultimately could not but make the particularity of revelation’s historicity appear implausible, or at least unappealing. “For Christianity, the explanation of reality as a whole is not an all-embracing consciousness; on the contrary, at the summit stands a freedom that thinks.”¹⁹ “Thus, the whole is communicated to him in the particular.”²⁰ That God’s concrete creative and redemptive acts simply resist any attempt to rationally deduce them seems to have become Ratzinger’s *ceterum censeo*.

While the caveat that God’s freedom cannot be rationally derived is no doubt necessary, a certain uneasiness on the part of anyone familiar with the biblical revelation also accompanies its articulation. In fact, it seems undeniable that, with regard to the “originating cause,” each intervention by God on the world’s behalf, beginning with creation and culminating in Christ’s incarnation, does not refer to any reason other than God’s personal and free love, excluding thereby deducible universal reasons. On the other hand, concerning the same intervention’s inherent “finality,” each intervention appears to be conveying universality as well, a universality that can be qualified as a shared union of divine life and created lives, in a vertical and horizontal sense. Regarding the causes of justification,²¹ one might reformulate Trent’s expression of them thus: whereas the Efficient Cause of created reality is God’s unique and particular freedom only, the Final Cause is universal salvation for each human being realized in a particular and universal fashion simultaneously for every human being individually and for all human beings communally.

THE TURN-ABOUT: GRACE AS “LOVE IN TRUTH”

In this light, it is significant that *Caritas in veritate* sets out to deliver yet a different answer to the question, What might establish the foundation of the relationship of faith and reason without betraying the reservations regarding the alleged idealist reductions? Methodologically, the answer is given in a twofold manner, both suggesting “grace” as the fundamental link: explicitly, by emphatically invoking the term in the introductory

¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 110.

²⁰ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* 171.

²¹ See Heinrich Denzinger, ed., *Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 37th ed., ed. Peter Hünermann (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991) no. 1529.

chapters (nos. 1–9), which are foundational for the encyclical’s approach;²² implicitly, by entrusting the term’s content with the task of supporting the encyclical’s construction as a whole.²³ What may at first strike one as a fairly trivial move proves on closer inspection to have far-reaching and thought-provoking consequences for the development of a theological anthropology. In fact, it foregrounds grace with its theological and, more remarkably still, philosophical significance, thus allowing Benedict to address the principles of Catholic social doctrine to “all people of good will.” Moreover, contrary to most current presentations of the notion of grace, from its appearance in the writings of Paul and Augustine, it is not seen as limited to a residual space for a higher being’s intervention into human existence that requires a spiritual willingness to embrace it; rather, the meaning of grace encompasses the very principles of the conditions of human life stretched between the poles of past and future, matter and form.

The integration of the philosophical and theological richness of the concept of grace appears, then, to enable Benedict to appeal in his encyclical to the principles of his theological anthropology, on the basis of which he can both ground the Church’s social doctrine and implement certain timely aspects of it.

In attempting to identify those various principles with concepts borrowed from the classical tract *De gratia*, I try to specify their content, but I do not intend thereby to give the impression that Ratzinger’s approach to grace needs *per se* a more detailed parsing. In fact, it can be noticed that the proposed classifications without exception belong to the pre-Scholastic period when a unified concept of grace was axiomatic.

The Anthropological Pole: Life as Being-given (*Gratia praeveniens*)

Life is constituted and structured in all its vital expressions by the dimension of superabundance, received and passed on with a gratuitousness that exceeds the logic of recompense (see nos. 34, 52). Grace precisely contains the idea of a continuous, dynamic structure that sustains human existence in its relation to ultimate meaning. Attesting to grace suggests that life makes sense as “being-received” from a preceding, greater love and as

²² “Grace” appears three times in the encyclical’s introduction, where it is closely tied to “love.” However, in *Deus caritas est*, which focuses entirely on “love,” “grace” occurs only toward the end, in nos. 35 and 42, both times in rather specific contexts: first to illustrate the right attitude of the faithful as God’s servant, then to highlight the eminent role of the Mother of God.

²³ While Benedict prefers to appeal to the more accessible notion of “gift” when referring to ideas essential to the concept of grace, in fact his focus on “grace” at the beginning (nos. 1–9), middle (no. 34), and end (no. 78) positions “grace” as the encyclical’s very framework.

handed over to others. In this sense, “grace” decisively carries in itself a dynamic reception—more so than does the notion of “gift” to which the encyclical likes to appeal—although it often qualifies the term to underscore its inherent dynamism: e.g., a “gift which expresses and makes present” (no. 34); “a lasting gift from God” (no. 78).

This peculiarity of human existence, denoted in the encyclical through a kind of “existential-metaphysical phenomenology,” can be designated as *gratia praeveniens*, without necessarily implying the condition of sinfulness associated with this term in the semi-Pelagian controversy.²⁴ Well before the anti-Pelagian polemics, Augustine, in the exordium of his *Confessions*,²⁵ formulated his conviction that later on would be formalized as *gratia praeveniens*: all human striving for God, even the very recognition of this striving, is itself enabled by God’s prior intervention. Interestingly, this passage in the *Confessions* shows that to the extent that the order of “who precedes whom” clearly emerges, the preceding “subject” itself (God) remains shrouded in mystery. Precisely with this quality of mystery, which assigns the concept of *gratia praeveniens* to, as it were, the sphere of apophatic theology, the term manifests its relevance for anthropological discourse today.

Moreover, it is critical to note that grace, circumscribed by Benedict as “the driving force of charity in truth” (no. 1), comprehends the spheres of love and knowledge alike, thereby cutting through the compartmentalized trajectories of “reason” and “faith.” It is especially in virtue of this quality that the consideration of grace constitutes the most decisive novelty in Ratzinger’s attempt to vindicate the correlation of reason and faith.

The Theological Pole: “Natural-Supernatural Finality” Inscribed into Human Development (*Gratia elevans*)

The formula “the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity” (no. 3), which can easily be identified as a circumscription of

²⁴ Especially with regard to the specific question of where to situate the “beginning of faith” in the postlapsarian condition of man in need of justification the term *gratia praeveniens* passed from the patristic to the Scholastic period and then to the post-Tridentine theology of grace.

²⁵ *Confessions* 1.1.1: “Grant me, O Lord, to know and understand which should come first, prayer or praise; or, indeed, whether knowledge should precede prayer. For how can one pray to you unless one knows you? If one does not know you, one may pray not to you, but to something else. Or is it rather the case that we should pray to you in order that we may come to know you? But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe without a preacher? And again, they that seek the Lord shall praise Him; for they that seek shall find Him, and they that find Him shall praise Him. Let me seek you, Lord, by praying to you and let me pray believing in you; since to us you have been preached. My faith prays to you, Lord, this faith which you gave me.” (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner [New York: New American Library 1963] 17).

“nature receiving grace,” summarizes well how Pope Benedict describes humanity’s destiny. In particular it helps him elucidate *Populorum progressio*’s notion of “transcendent humanism” (no. 18). The human person is presented here as addressed by a call to realize his or her personal, as well as humanity’s, development that comprises both the natural and supernatural planes. While the use of the distinction “natural”/“supernatural” certainly indicates the need to respect the difference between the two spheres, yet, on the basis of the correlation of love and truth, it is more important to insist on the intrinsic link between those two dimensions, inasmuch as their dynamic realization is concerned.

Henri de Lubac’s insight that humanity’s unique aspirations can be pursued only against the horizon of a unifying totality²⁶ inspired Benedict’s observation in *Caritas in veritate*: “The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development” (no. 18). And “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” (no. 16).

Significantly, Benedict avoids the thorny question of how to define the “supernatural” itself in relation to the natural order of human beings, the Pandora’s box that de Lubac, however, had opened in 1946, with the publication of *Surnaturel*.²⁷ Does Benedict, by not “individualizing” a supernatural gratuitousness distinct from the natural gift of being-created common to all created reality, implicitly collapse the one into the other and deny any significance to a natural finality, as many commentators suspect was the case in de Lubac’s writings? Insofar as the encyclical consistently juxtaposes the supernatural and natural planes, Benedict is certainly careful not to eclipse the presence of the latter in human reality (which clearly means more than the affirmation of its necessity as abstract hypothesis). However, he appears to say indirectly that no purely natural actuation of human beings’ aspirations (which in his view are always both natural and supernatural) occurs in the world—a view that would, in fact, draw him very close to de Lubac’s position.²⁸

²⁶ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (London: Burn, Oates, & Washbourne, 1950) 167.

²⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). This work, never translated into English, was later revised into “twin volumes” that found their way into two English translations as *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (London: Chapman, 1967) and *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (London: Chapman 1969).

²⁸ On this point see Raymond Moloney, S.J., “De Lubac and Lonergan on the Supernatural,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 509–27, at 514–15.

At any rate, in the past Ratzinger seemed to focus rather on the need to safeguard human existence against the possibility that the dynamics of a too close relationship with transcendence might compromise humanity's proper autonomy.

The *exitus*, or better, the free creative act of God, does in fact aim at *reditus*, but this does not mean that created being is revoked. Rather, it means the coming-into-its-own of the creature as an autonomous creature answers back in freedom to the love of God, accepts its creation as a command to love, so that a dialogue of love begins—that entirely new unity that only love can create.²⁹

The encyclical, by adopting the perspective of grace characteristic of patristic and *ressourcement* theology, shifts its attention to the analysis of the conditions of the possibility of human development itself. This shift enables it to emphasize the *telos* of human existence:

God is *the guarantor of man's true development*, inasmuch as, having created him in his image, he also establishes the transcendent dignity of men and women and feeds their innate yearning to "be more." . . . 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. (No. 29)

The Theo-Anthropological Relation: "Creativity" as Social Activity (*Gratia co-operans*)

Arguably one of the most original contributions of *Caritas in veritate* is the elaboration of a social doctrine out of humanity's finality to create that results from the human person's capacity to give as a consequence of having him/herself gratuitously received. "Because it is a gift received by everyone, charity in truth is a force that builds community, it brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits. . . . Economic, social and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the principle of gratuitousness as an expression of fraternity" (no. 34). This reasoning, in fact, can be taken as following from the two preceding assessments: both presented a theology of grace that sees the dimension of God's preceding gift always in connection with the "effect(s)" that this gift brings about in human persons, enabling them to actively cooperate for both themselves and others—indeed even in place of others—so that they correspond to the goodness that God is and by which they have been created. In some way, one can argue that at this point *Caritas in veritate* completes *Deus caritas est*, in that it now makes clear that the principle of love, which is ultimately rooted in the trinitarian relations,

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The End of Time* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2004) 20–21.

is not only “consequential” in the relationship of human beings with God and one another (as the second part of *Deus caritas est* had elaborated),³⁰ but is also “constructive”: Love as grace is not only a moral obligation or mission; it is also—and prior to that—ontologically received creativity.

Additionally, one may observe that the notion of “grace” more genuinely entails the idea of “community” (especially if it involves such large communities as nations and humanity) than does the concept of “love,” which more typically refers to the intimacy of a two- or three-party relationship. The ease with which *Caritas in veritate*—always under the leitmotiv of “Love in Truth”—passes from the personal to the communitarian level, ultimately extending to the whole human race as counterpart to which the Church’s social teaching is addressed (no. 55), suggests that this theological anthropology must be anchored as much in Pneumatology as in Christology. The inextricable complementarity of the roles of Son and Holy Spirit in the bestowal of grace is precisely a classical topos of grace theology.³¹

THEO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF A LOVE-IN-TRUTH THEOLOGY

One would certainly expect *Caritas in veritate*’s choice for a revalorized theology of grace to imprint its features onto concrete teachings in relation to the encyclical’s theological anthropology. The second part of this article, therefore, tracks some specific configurations regarding the encyclical’s social teaching shaped according to this option. Corresponding to the fundamental character of “grace” that emerges in this encyclical, it seems both suggestive and appropriate to arrange my presentation according to the fundamental ways that human beings engage reality, that is, according to the categories of “space” and “time.”

Of course, the encyclical does not broach the issues of “space” and “time” as such; they arise as “theo-anthropologically-mediated” realities: “nature” and “development.” Furthermore, we encounter “nature” in the encyclical as “cosmological nature” (= environment) and “anthropological nature” (= the human person).

The encyclical privileges—at least in terms of weight given—the dimension of time over the dimension of space. On the one hand, this privileging was certainly dictated by the fact that *Caritas in veritate* sees itself as a homage to Paul VI’s *Populorum progressio*, for which “development” was pivotal. On the other hand, “time” in general seems a much more congenial dimension for the category of grace, which concretizes its spiritual reality according to the parameters set by salvation history. Once again, this

³⁰ *Deus caritas est* nos. 19–39.

³¹ Philipp Gabriel Renczes, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l’homme* (Paris: Cerf, 2003) 332–34.

primary relationship between “grace” and “time,” which moves the anthropological question from the essential to the existential order, has become manifest through Augustine’s *Confessions*. My own presentation here will reflect this distribution of weight.

On the Concept of Nature

Since Kant’s two *Critiques*, the possibility of uniting *Sein* and *Sollen* in the one term “nature” has been associated with the prescientific way of thinking—and thus the belief that universal principles of morality can be deduced from one’s biological existence has been rejected as a classical case of naturalistic fallacy. Benedict appears to share this suspicion, becoming skeptical even of Kant’s acceptance of the Categorical Imperative and other idealist attempts to find fixed vantage points within the subject’s self. He famously compares such attempts to the myth of Baron von Münchhausen, who tries to extricate himself and his horse from a bog by pulling on his pigtail.³² Consequently, during his 2004 public discussion in Munich with Jürgen Habermas, Ratzinger declared his readiness to renounce his own reasoning on natural law, traditionally at home in the Catholic Church, since “its blades have become blunt at a time when, with the victory of the theory of evolution, the idea of nature’s rationality has become obsolete.”³³

One may observe that his renunciation, which can certainly be interpreted as an indirect repudiation of neo-Thomism’s “two-tier”-inspired preference of “pure nature” as common ground between a liberal tradition and Catholicism, has, however, not led to a complete elimination of the term “nature.” *Caritas in veritate* at various places enriches its explanations with the concept of nature: “the destiny of man who cannot prescind from his nature” (no. 21); “wounded nature” (no. 34). Yet on the whole Benedict gives “nature” only a marginal role (as, incidentally, was already the case with Vatican II’s *Gaudium et spes*). More importantly, however, he submitted “nature” to a far-reaching reevaluation: in the encyclical he uses “nature” not to indicate a verifiable depository of an “ethical code,” but to highlight human beings’ reception of their own being from God, out of which follows the principle of gratuitously giving. In other words, nature has been “graced” to receive more grace. Thanks only to this

³² With this metaphor, Ratzinger alludes to the so-called Münchhausen-trilemma, introduced into contemporary philosophical discourse by Hans Albert, *Traktat über kritische Vernunft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968) 13. Albert uses it to indicate that, according to him, every attempt to found “objective truth” is faced with three alternatives, all of which fail. See Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 73.

³³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Werte in Zeiten des Umbruchs: Die Herausforderungen der Zukunft bestehen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005) 35 (my translation).

sense, which stems from de Lubac's contentions, can Benedict adopt John Paul II's speaking of nature both as "vocation" and "as a gift of the Creator who has given it an inbuilt order" (no. 48) that is "lived" in nature's dynamic realization.

In this light, it seems that the true opposite of natural law for Benedict would not be an anthropology characterized by a general or particular form of licentiousness or anarchy, but the explication of human existence by the mere arbitrariness of chance or the automatism of determinism, leaving human life without true finality (see no. 29).

Nature as Environment

Within the "grace-structure" proper to humanity's being, the environment is seen in *Caritas in veritate* as the Creator's gift, containing a "grammar" (no. 48), the rules of which rather induce an imitation of the Creator's creativity than deliver detailed rubrics. One can detect here Benedict's twofold ambition, particularly apparent in *Deus caritas est*: on the one hand, to liberate Christianity from the moralistic traps that in recent centuries the *mentalité bourgeoise* of the Northern Hemisphere set up for religion by sacrificing creativity to the sterile obedience of fixed codes; and on the other hand, to propose a Christian vision of anti-Pelagianist humanism that fosters a freedom and commitment that do not oppose creation's *eros* to personal *agape*.³⁴ The inspiration may well have come from Greek patristic theology and its emphasis on the cosmological dimension of grace. Recall Maximus the Confessor's vision of a "cosmic liturgy," in which the human person, being a microcosm—thanks to the incarnation of the Logos—has been elevated to participate in Christ's mediation to unite all levels of the created world to God, as Logos-Christ is *logos* not only for the human species but for all other species as well.³⁵

According to Pope Benedict, two extremes are to be avoided: "idealizing technical progress" and "contemplating the utopia of a return to humanity's original natural state" (no. 14). Particularly evocative in this context is Benedict's designation of technology as a "covenant between human beings and the environment" (no. 69), just after he identified "nature" with "vocation" (no. 48). "Vocation" and "covenant" are closely related yet, placed side by side, manage to convey the idea of a "crescendo." In fact, Abraham first received a call (vocation) to the New Land (Gen 12) where, at a more advanced stage of his relationship with God, he then received the covenant (Gen 15). The confrontation of "vocation"

³⁴ See *Deus caritas est* nos. 5–7.

³⁵ For Maximus's most poignant presentation of this cosmological vision, see *Ambigua* 41 (Migne, PG 91.1309A–1312 B), Engl. trans. in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 59–60.

and “covenant” seems to imply a growth of involvement that God’s project of integral human development reserves for the human person’s part in this process. In other words, the dynamics of God’s grace know a proportional relation between *gratia operans* and *gratia co-operans*.

Nature as Human Person and Human Society

Whereas Catholic social teaching frequently insists on a development of structures, institutions, and the common good, *Caritas in veritate* recognizes the roots of all social action in theological anthropology: God giving Godself to humans who, in their being, reflect the finality of “giving.” “In reality, institutions by themselves are not enough, because integral human development is primarily a vocation, and therefore it involves a free assumption of responsibility in solidarity on the part of everyone” (no. 11). This same theological anthropology leads to the conclusion that the binomial “state-market” as the exclusive point of reference for social questions is inadequate: both governmental and financial institutions are to be subsumed into the dimension of grace (the “gift-finality”) that requires the former to undergo a “critical re-evaluation of their roles” (no. 24) and the latter to “rediscover the genuinely ethical foundation of their activity” (no. 65).

While the encyclical’s appeal to the superordinate “grace-principle” makes it clear that Benedict does not believe in the promotion of socialist-inspired regulatory mechanisms such as state-socialist models, it also explains his sympathy for a system of “three subjects” (see no. 38) so as to establish “a greater degree of international ordering,” even “a true world political authority” (no. 67). Both state and market need help to discover the integrity of the human person/community and to abandon the dominant logic of the past, which argued “that justice had to come first and gratuitousness could follow . . . as a complement” (no. 38). Benedict’s succeeding remark—“today it is clear that without gratuitousness, there can be no justice in the first place”—draws heavily on Augustine’s reflections on the interrelationship of mercy and justice,³⁶ and indirectly confirms the expectation that such ideas will take a long time to be fully implemented.

Another logical consequence of the “principle of grace” is the fundamental unity and interconnectedness of various human qualities. The encyclical’s conviction that, “just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature” (no. 51), once more shows its affinity with

³⁶ See, e.g., Augustine, *En ps.* 39.19: Non enim sic est Deus misericors, ut iniustus sit; nec sic iustus, ut misericors non sit (“God is not merciful in a way that that he would be unjust; nor is he just in a way that he would not be merciful” [my translation]).

patristic Greek thought, which developed the Stoic idea of the conformation of all virtues and capacities in a single “state of being” constituted and sustained by God’s grace.³⁷

On the Concept of Development

Pope Benedict’s affirmation that “development, in its origin and essence, is first and foremost a vocation” (no. 16) emphatically envisages the dynamism of human existence extending in time and in the light of prevenient grace. In fact, *Caritas in veritate* here draws on a long-cherished element of Ratzinger’s theological vision.³⁸ As opposed to the visible and tangible objects that delude us into thinking that we ourselves master this world simply by “staying where we are in the world,” time confronts us with our urge to be perpetuated beyond time; time is God’s preferential “space” for engaging with human beings, drawing them to Godself. In other words, time, rather than being regarded as a given state, is our given chance to develop toward “being-beyond-present-time.” However, whereas in the encyclical “development” takes on a very positive spin in its association with “vocation” and the implication “to move on” in correspondence to the contours of Paul VI’s *Populorum progressio*, in earlier writings Ratzinger had identified the theo-anthropological dynamism with “conversion,”³⁹ which he translates as a call to “about-turn,”⁴⁰ that is, away from the ordinary “worldly self.”⁴¹ It could be argued that in the end the theological significance is the same: to be transformed by grace—in that both *gratia sanans* and *gratia elevans* equally lead to encounter with God.

At any rate, it is crucial not to confuse “development” in Ratzinger’s theological sense with the term’s common secular understanding that connects time with a “development” that has already taken place and is now appropriated from the past into the present state. In such a perspective of “development,” we can say that, from Ratzinger’s point of view, time is again reduced to human space and cut off from transcendence.

Ratzinger’s different perception of time leads to several consequences, one being his penchant for creating “genealogies of thought” that, in the end, are not aimed at proving the present tense right or wrong but at alerting one to an occasion for “conversion.” The understanding of development

³⁷ See Philipp Gabriel Renczes, “L’educazione secondo i Padri della Chiesa,” *Civiltà Cattolica* 159 (2009) 252–65, at 263–64.

³⁸ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 50–52.

³⁹ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* 55–60.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 25 and passim.

⁴¹ In *Principles of Catholic Theology* 166, Ratzinger asks: “Is it not the main point of the faith of both Testaments that man is what he ought to be only by conversion, that is, when he ceases to be what he is?”

in this primarily eschatological sense, which points to the not yet realized “about-turn,” sheds a different light on Ratzinger’s infamous sprints through philosophical and theological history, such as we saw in his “Regensburg Address”⁴² that dealt with the relationship of faith and reason in Christianity from its beginnings to the present; or in his introduction to *Jesus of Nazareth*⁴³ where he sketches in a few paragraphs the extremely complex course of the quest for the historical Jesus of the last two centuries. Though at first sight those thought-genealogies seem to be constructed according to an anticlimactical pattern, on closer inspection they lose their character of “antipositions” or “downswings,” such that they cannot call us out of our entrenched positions.

In the *Introduction to Christianity*, we find a most surprising description of the development of Christian doctrine:

When one looks at the history of the dogma of the Trinity as it is reflected in a present-day manual of theology, it looks like a graveyard of heresies, whose emblems theology still carries around with it like the trophies from battles fought and won. But such a view does not represent a proper understanding of the matter. . . . Every heresy is at the same time the cipher for an abiding truth, a cipher we must now preserve with other simultaneously valid statements, separated from which it produces a false impression. In other words, all these statements are not so much gravestones as the bricks of a cathedral, which are, of course, only useful when they do not remain alone but are inserted into something bigger, just as even the positively accepted formulas are valid only if they are at the same time aware of their own inadequacy.”⁴⁴

Ultimately, it appears that Ratzinger’s thought is permeated by a “negative theology of grace,”⁴⁵ in other words, by the acknowledgement that no human expression can definitively grasp or determine the forms and ways of God’s action in human beings. As a consequence, we should get accustomed to read in human developments, insofar as they represent more or less cooperative answers to God’s invisible grace, occasions for further development.

Development regarding Tradition

The existential perception of development becomes the guideline for an appropriate attitude toward tradition: “The most distinctive characteristic

⁴² Joseph Ratzinger, “The Regensburg Address,” in Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Oxford University, 2008) 166–74, at 169–72.

⁴³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco: Ignatius) xi–xxiv, at xi–xiv.

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 122–23.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger acknowledges the necessity of a “negative theology” to appropriately engage in theological thought and discourse—see *ibid.* 87, 121–29, 192.

of tradition is, in fact, the ability to recognise my now as significant also for the tomorrow of those who come after me, and therefore, to transmit to them for tomorrow what has been discovered today.”⁴⁶ Obviously, against the backdrop of his insight that the incessant dynamism of grace creates interconnectivity through time, Benedict sees discontinuity as an interpretative frame as wrong (see *Caritas in veritate* no. 12). But more importantly, applying to one’s own propositions the content of one’s claims—the encyclical calls for “dynamic faithfulness to a light received” (no. 12)—results in an example, as it were, of effective “performative language”: a renewed appreciation of *Populorum progressio* that shifts one’s perspective from an anthropological to a theo-anthropological plane.

CONCLUSION

Time will tell how many of the numerous suggestions of *Caritas in veritate* will actually be appropriated by “people of good will.” Considering the reactions to the encyclical, one can be skeptical, at least regarding the Western world. This uncertainty, of course, extends also to the encyclical’s theological anthropology itself that in more sense than one can be seen as “counter-current” to widely held conceptions and behaviors based on them. But as the encyclical itself says—and this is unusual for a social encyclical which primarily aims to orientate consciences in the task of designing politics and economics—“truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift” (no. 52). It seems that it is time to take grace seriously.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* 87.