

CARITAS IN VERITATE: BENEDICT'S GLOBAL REORIENTATION

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Benedict's first encyclical, Deus caritas est, assigned political work to the laity and restricted the Catholic Church's social activities to charity. Benedict's Word Christology, presented in Jesus of Nazareth, coheres with his longstanding vision of a countercultural Church centered in Europe. Caritas in veritate envisions the Church and its representatives as advocates for global justice. The encyclical's concerns parallel those of the Second Synod for Africa (Rome, October 2009). The significance of this shift in focus for Benedict's Christology, ecclesiology, and politics is still unfolding.

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S 2009 ENCYCLICAL ON CHARITY, *Caritas in veritate*, is an excellent lens through which to view the interdependence of social context, political commitments, and theology.¹ Benedict's theology, centered on a relation to God in Christ, aims to bolster the countercultural voice of the Catholic Church against modernizing trends in European culture. This theology is most fully displayed in Benedict's book *Jesus of Nazareth*, and backs his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est. Caritas in veritate*, however, is a concrete response to global poverty and violence, especially the inequities and imbalances of power that lie behind the global economic crisis of 2008 to 2010. The context and politics of *Caritas in veritate* demand a Christology with a robust connection among the divine, the human, and social change.

Benedict's longstanding concern with the recovery of Christian religious faith in Europe leads him to accentuate the divinity of Christ, a Word Christology, and the availability to humans of transcendent communion with God. Yet Benedict's emergent investment in reform of global social

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¹ I am grateful to my colleagues Robert J. Daly, S.J., David Hollenbach, S.J., and Stephen J. Pope for critical reviews of a draft of this article, and to Robert P. Imbelli for research advice.

structures requires a Christology in which the incarnation, resurrection, and Pentecost offer the possibility of historical transformations modeled on Jesus' eschatological ministry of the kingdom or reign of God. In other words, the divinity-focused Word Christology, until now favored by Benedict, is necessary but not sufficient to sustain the social role he has begun to envision for the Church and its members since becoming pope in 2005.

Incarnational by definition, a Word Christology could give greater emphasis to God's proleptic transformation of human societies. Equally relevant is the socially-engaged Jesus of the Synoptics, who acts in God's Spirit, announces the inbreaking of God's new order, and, as risen, sends his Spirit to enliven the community and enable its action. And, in fact, clues and indications of a different, complementary Christology are visible in several of Benedict's recent writings and addresses.

Among these are communications surrounding the African synod that was in preparation at more or less the same time as *Caritas*: Benedict's World Day of Peace messages for 2009 and 2010 and the encyclical *Spe salvi* (2007). Implicit is a view of Christ and the Christian faith as enabling charity and hope, not only as interior dispositions or gateways to eternity but also as active, practical virtues through which Christians join with others to work for global justice and structural change. This developing vision contrasts with earlier papal writings, especially *Deus caritas est* and *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Another important development in *Caritas in veritate* is Benedict's renegotiation of distinctions made earlier between the Church and the laity and the Church and the world. When he envisions the Church's role in Europe, these distinctions are strong. When redirecting his gaze to global injustice, and especially when describing the activities of Catholic social agencies and the Church's commitment to social change, these distinctions blur. This is even truer when complex emergent structures of global agency and authority are taken into account, as *Caritas in veritate* clearly does (nos. 64–66). The corresponding global justice mission of the Church is significant ecclesio-logically: the Church's action in the world not only assumes and depends on lay participation; it also assumes integral partnerships with non-Catholic and nonreligious agencies and projects. This mission is also significant for Catholic social teaching: its concept of a "universal common good" supervised by a worldwide "public authority" (*Pacem in terris* nos. 134–35, 137) may no longer be viable, even if reaffirmed (*Caritas in veritate* nos. 24, 67).

JOSEPH RATZINGER AND THE EARLY BENEDICT XVI

Revival of Christian Europe

Benedict's concerns with European identity and protests against modern reason go back half a century, as does his proposal of an invigorating

spiritual retreat from modernity's corrosive influences.² Joseph Komonchak traces these themes to Ratzinger's doctoral dissertation on Bonaventure and his activism against the Thomistic and incarnational theologies shaping *Gaudium et spes*.³ Lieven Boeve confirms that Ratzinger was one of the first to point out dangers in exaggerated overtures to modernity. He was particularly skeptical about blessing technological innovations in the spirit of naïve optimism associated, for example, with Teilhard de Chardin.⁴

Alarming, Ratzinger thought, autonomous reason and ungrounded freedom had made inroads in the Church and its theology.⁵ He believed Paul VI was too lenient with misguided theological developments and saw it as the duty of ecclesiastical authority to intervene.⁶ Komonchak maintains that the new Pope Benedict arrived with a consistent theological approach to Christianity as the only true liberator. Neither philosophy, nor science, nor any theology that internalizes scientific and philosophical standards can provide answers to human crises.⁷ Christians—and all Europeans—must realize that modern ideals are undermined fatally by sin and chaos; justice must be based on revealed truth. In Ratzinger's own words, the really novel and significant core of Christianity is “*the Logos, the Truth in person.*”⁸ The Church is guardian of that truth, the seed of a new society capable of renewing European culture.⁹

Boeve notes the dual and even oppositional character of Ratzinger's distinction between church and world, revelation and history. Revelation occurs in a historical-cultural context, but the historical does not in any way constitute or modify the content of revelation.¹⁰ The same is true of the Church. Again Ratzinger: “the Church is indeed composed of men who organize her external visage,” but the Church's fundamental and inviolable

² See Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2009) esp. 11–26, 44–47, 52–57, 62–64; Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Church in Crisis: Pope Benedict's Theological Vision,” *Commonweal* 132.1 (June 3, 2005) 11–14; Lieven Boeve, “Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief? Perspectives from the Vatican,” *Modern Theology* 23 (2007) 205–27. Komonchak's essay is a brief but erudite overview without scholarly apparatus; Boeve's article is a fully referenced treatment of multiple writings and speeches of Ratzinger/Benedict, including and translating German sources. Another extensive study, originally published in 1988 and covering writings through 1986, is Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Burns & Oates, 1988, 2005).

³ Komonchak, “Church in Crisis” 12. ⁴ Boeve, “Europe in Crisis” 206.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Komonchak, “Church in Crisis” 14.

⁷ *Ibid.* 13.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) 99, emphasis original.

⁹ *Ibid.* 125–26.

¹⁰ Boeve, “Europe in Crisis” 221–22.

structures are divinely willed, invariably authentic, and guaranteed. "Behind the *human* exterior stands the mystery of a *more than human* reality, in which reformers, sociologists, organizers have no authority whatsoever."¹¹ For the Church to function as a countercultural alternative, its identity and voice must be strong and clear. Receptiveness to dialogue and certainly to critique threatens the distinctive proclamation of the gospel. Boeve himself expresses a more historical orientation:

Faith and Church are not in opposition to the world, they participate in constituting the world and, furthermore, they are in part constituted by the world. Given the fact that God reveals Godself in history and that it is precisely in history that God can be known by us, it follows that history ultimately becomes co-constitutive of the truth of faith.¹²

What Boeve says of faith and revelation is even more obviously true of the Church. The Church's structures and practices developed historically, often borrowing from and adapting cultural and political models. These call for reform and revision to meet the needs of different eras.¹³

When Joseph Ratzinger became pope in April 2005, he chose two namesakes: Pope Benedict XV and Benedict of Nursia, the sixth-century founder of Western monastic communities with a common rule of life. Benedict XV mounted a prophetic struggle to avert World War I, limit its destruction, and negotiate a just termination. Afterward, he invested massive church resources to aid returning soldiers, prisoners of war, refugees, and war orphans. The Vatican became known as "the Second Red Cross." The Muslim city of Istanbul erected a monument honoring "the great pope of the world tragedy . . . the benefactor of all people, irrespective of nationality or religion."¹⁴ The new Benedict XVI likewise aspires to serve "reconciliation and harmony between persons and peoples."¹⁵

¹¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985) 46, emphasis original.

¹² Boeve, "Europe in Crisis" 221. See also Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, trans. Brian Doyle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003) chap. 1.

¹³ Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI* 45.

¹⁴ John W. O'Malley, S.J., *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010) 273.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, "Reflection on the Name Chosen: Benedict XVI," General Audience, April 27, 2005. All church and papal documents cited in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are available on the Vatican Web site and easily found via an Internet search. This and all other URLs cited were accessed on February 5, 2010.

Yet, like his successor of 2005, the pope of World War I maintained as his original and key focus not the world but the unity of Europe, broken by a “fratricidal” war amounting to “the suicide of civilized Europe.” Benedict XVI assumes leadership during what he perceives as a period of equal turmoil. Both have recourse to a spiritual solution: Benedict XV counseled European Catholics to “retire within themselves, far from worldly spectacles and amusements” to pray that God’s wrath be averted and peace bestowed.¹⁶ Likewise, Benedict XVI intends prayer to build up God’s gift of peace.¹⁷

Hence the equally apt comparison to Benedict’s second namesake, the father of Benedictine monasticism and patron of Europe. Saint Benedict, the new pope explains, is “a fundamental reference point for European unity” and of Europe’s “indispensable Christian roots.”¹⁸ Just as the Benedictine Order helped spread Christianity across Europe, Benedict’s rule furnishes a neomonastic model for Europe’s reevangelization: “Prefer nothing to the love of Christ’ (Rule 72:11; cf. 4:21).”¹⁹

In the summer following his election as pope, Cardinal Ratzinger published a book and an essay again lamenting the loss of Europe’s Christian roots, and defending public life and morality based on consciousness of God, not on secular, positivistic rationality and freedom.²⁰ “What we most need at this moment of history,” Ratzinger urges, “are men who make God visible in this world through their enlightened and lived faith,” people “touched by God” who, “like Benedict of Nursia,” emerge purified to found a “city on a hill” that shapes “a new world.”²¹

¹⁶ “Pope Calls War Suicide of Europe; Again Appeals for Just, Lasting Peace,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1916, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=980DE3D8103FE233A25755C0A9659C946796D6CF>. This article is a translation of the Italian letter, dated March 4: “Epistola al tremendo conflitto del Papa Benedetto XV al Cardinale Presbitero Basilio Pompili, Vicario Generale di Roma, per esortare i Cattolici ad effettuare elemosine a favore degli orfani di guerra.”

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, “Reflection on the Name Chosen.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Europe in the Crisis of Cultures,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32 (2005) 345–56; and Pope Benedict XVI, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005). The collection of essays is a response to questions of European identity and the expansion of the European Union. Both works raise concerns about modern understandings of science, reason, and freedom, and present true Christianity as a unifying and counter-cultural force.

²¹ Ratzinger, “Europe in the Crisis of Cultures” 355. The early monastic ideal counters what is to Ratzinger’s eye the bad influence of the postconciliar religious orders whose identities vacillated and membership declined (Ratzinger, *Ratzinger Report* 55.)

Christology

Benedict's view of Christ is of a piece with his construal of a countercultural (European) Church with a supramundane orientation. To Benedict, Christian faith is about a God "who looks out from Eternity into time and puts himself into relationship with us."²² The Eucharist enables Christians to rise above historical trials by holding on to the enduring presence of God, just as Jesus did in death.²³

Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth* provides the theological backing for his cultural and ecclesial program. Its Johannine high Christology becomes the hermeneutical lens for the Synoptics. "Man lives on truth and on being loved: on being loved by the truth . . . ultimately what he needs most is the Word, love, God himself."²⁴ One of the most controversial and puzzling aspects of the Jesus book is that, while Ratzinger claims to accept "modern exegesis,"²⁵ he dissociates himself from virtually all results of historical-critical research, which he perceives as denying the divinity of Christ and the role of faith in biblical interpretation.²⁶ Ratzinger actually equates "the Jesus of the Gospels" with "the real, 'historical' Jesus in the strict sense of the word."²⁷ From Gospel accounts, he claims, it is obvious that Jesus was regarded as divine even during his own lifetime. Christian faith is, then, no invention of some later community, the church (against Bultmann); it is validated in Jesus' very life, of which the Gospels are a trusty historical record, including of the transfiguration.²⁸ As one reviewer observes, Ratzinger "parts company with the critical majority in treating even this floridly mythological episode as a historical event no more problematical for open-minded historians than Jesus' birth in Palestine."²⁹

²² Joseph Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003) 11.

²³ *Ibid.* 39.

²⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007) 279. Ratzinger's Word Christology was earlier developed in his *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1985). On love, see *God Is Near Us* 32; and *Ratzinger Report* 81.

²⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* xxi; see 111.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 48, 54–55. See also Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002) 203: All reconstructions of the historical Jesus "have been undertaken with one guiding idea: There can be no such thing as God made man." Another deconstruction of "a modern stock idea of the 'historical Jesus'" appears in Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* 157–59.

²⁷ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* xxii. ²⁸ *Ibid.* 305–18.

²⁹ Jack Miles, "Between Theology and Exegesis," *Commonweal* 134.13 (July 13, 2007) 21.

Ratzinger's stress on Christ's divinity and his hermeneutics of the kingdom as communion in the Word with God are part of his campaign to restore European openness to infinity and the divine. Because politically engaged theologies seem to turn the religious imagination in the opposite direction, Ratzinger has always been intransigently suspicious of them. He rails against varieties of Christianity "that reduce the core of Jesus' message, the 'kingdom of God,' to the 'values of the kingdom,' while identifying these values with the main watchwords of political moralism . . . all the while forgetting about God."³⁰ In Ratzinger's "mystical interpretation," "man's interiority" is "the essential location of the Kingdom of God."³¹

Yet, though social consequences are not a key focus, communion with God does have such consequences for Ratzinger. If we accept the kingdom as God's dominion, then we will give God and other human beings their just due³² and seek the common good.³³ What Ratzinger does not do is emphasize the obligatory nature of these consequences, or give them content via the teaching and actions of the Synoptic Jesus.

Benedict's first encyclical on love fills out a social ethics that is interdependent with his European campaign and his version of Word Christology. *Deus caritas est* was written the year Ratzinger became pope, when he was still decrying "Europe in crisis," and possibly working on *Jesus of Nazareth*. The christological basis of the 2005 encyclical is union with God in Christ and in the Eucharist (no. 14). Benedict emphasizes that the encyclical's main message is evangelization through the witness of love of neighbor (nos. 1, 36). As exemplar, Benedict offers Mary, "the mother of the Word Incarnate," who proclaims, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1:46), her personal surrender to God's will. The reader is not reminded that the Magnificat announces that God "has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk 1:52–53).

Deus caritas est seems to distance the Church from work for structural change (no. 28). The gift and call of the Church consist in being a counter-sign to modern society, not reinforcing and supplementing its better values. Political work "for a just ordering of society" is appropriate for "the lay faithful," but not "the Church" (no. 29). The unavoidable connotation is that the Church's "real" identity inheres in the ordained and in ecclesial structures supervised by the episcopacy. This church does assume apolitical charitable activities, undertaken by official Catholic service organizations

³⁰ Ratzinger, "Europe in Crisis" 347. ³¹ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* 49.

³² Ratzinger, "Europe in Crisis" 146. ³³ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* 279.

and holy individuals,³⁴ but these activities do not include work for structural reform. Developing the nature of Christian love, Benedict repeatedly gives examples—the Good Samaritan, Martin of Tours, Mother Teresa, and monasteries with ministries of hospitality—that offer immediate personal assistance to the needy without directly challenging inequitable institutions (nos. 15, 18, 23, 31, 36, 40). “Social charity” (no. 40) comes across as a personal disposition to aid the needy, and as the dedication of formally constituted Catholic groups to alleviate *de facto* hunger, poverty, and illness (no. 31a).³⁵

The pope adamantly opposes “ideologies aimed at improving the world,” “means of changing the world ideologically,” and “worldly stratagems” (nos. 31, 33). He does not name specifically their fatal liabilities but mentions Marxism as a bad example (nos. 26, 31). He takes to task Christian activists who supposedly have been infected by a “growing secularism” (no. 36). The main point of acting charitably in the world is not to improve the lot of one’s fellow human beings, but to witness to the supernatural. Acts of charity reveal the inspiring reality and power of God and love of God. Hence, conclude many critics, *Deus caritas est* is “too heavy on personal responsibility and not heavy enough on social change.”³⁶ The rationale behind this emphasis on personal responsibility, one may infer, is not so much that Benedict is against big government and social welfare programs, or for bootstrap self-reliance and free enterprise. Rather, he wants to keep the focus of all Christian formation, including moral formation, on spiritual access to the supernatural.

The Early Benedict

In summary, Joseph Ratzinger and the Benedict of 2005–2007 gauge their theology and politics to the needs of a specific existential situation: the secularization of Europe and the breakdown of European unity. This is not to say that the theology of *Jesus of Nazareth* or *Deus caritas est* is simply

³⁴ Reportedly, the second half of the encyclical, on Catholic organizations, was based on a preliminary document, produced under the aegis of *Cor Unum* before the pope’s election. The Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* for Human and Christian Development is a part of the Curia of the Catholic Church, established in 1971 to coordinate the activities of Catholic agencies.

³⁵ Contrast the term’s use in no. 29, where the “political activity” of the laity is inspired by “social charity.”

³⁶ Thomas J. Reese, S.J., “Pope Benedict on Economic Justice,” http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2009/07/pope_benedict_on_economic_justice.html. For scholarly discussions of the same point, see Stephen J. Pope, “Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est*: An Ethical Analysis,” in *Applied Ethics in a World Church: The Padua Conference*, ed. Linda Hogan (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008) 271–77.

“projected” from that situation and not reflective of divine realities truly revealed in Jesus Christ or of relevance to the wider church. Rather, aspects of the divine-human relationship engaged by Benedict are those he regards as most highly disclosive for and of value to his context. The role of the Church in response to that context is to reinvigorate Christian identity and to broaden and deepen Europe’s connection to God. The correlative Christology of Benedict’s church centers, then, on the incarnate Word and on the world-transcending identity of Jesus Christ. The social ethics that parallels Benedict’s Christology views holy neighbor love as proof of the inner-worldly presence and power of God.

Critique

So far, so good; but from the standpoint of a Christian social ethicist, so far is not far enough. Benedict’s Word Christology is biblically attested, theologically coherent, and ethically necessary in that it grounds Christian love and social action in God’s initiative and grace. But no authentically incarnational theology can fail to incorporate explicit social and political dimensions that go beyond church affiliation. Nor is their omission true to the Gospels.

Christologies of the incarnate Word and of the Synoptic Jesus filled with God’s Spirit can each validate humanity and divinity. After all, the Word becomes fully human; and the Synoptic authors all in their own way attest to Jesus’ unique status, even if they do not explicitly term it “divine.” Within his Word Christology, Ratzinger does stress Jesus’ humanity as one who is always in communion with God. The problem is not that this Word Christology excludes the humanity of Jesus; it is that it unduly limits its significance.

To be human is not only to be spiritual, with a capacity to glimpse the infinite; it is also to be material, embodied, relational, social, political, and historically both responsible and changing. It is with this full human reality that the divine in history engages. That is why Jesus chose a corporate, political metaphor for God’s action among human beings. Jesus may be “the kingdom of God in person” (on this Ratzinger follows Origen), but God’s personal presence does more than establish interior, mystical communion. It creates historical communities, breaks barriers, overturns expectations, and challenges the imagination to envision and embrace new ways of being with fellow humanity. Jesus’ parables adapted these new ways to the social worlds of his hearers; perhaps Jesus himself even learned from interlocutors how customary ways were being divinely realigned (consider his interaction with the Syro-Phoenician woman in Mt 15: 21–28; Mk 7: 24–30). Jesus’ kingdom preaching was very much in touch with the real world and interactive with it.

Historical methodology cannot recover much factual information about Jesus’ historical life, due to the scarcity of extrabiblical sources. It

cannot provide incontrovertible details about Jesus' earthly career, or even identify with certainty which cultural roles he embodied. Yet one can certainly agree with Ratzinger that the significance of Jesus "exceeds the scope of the historical method"³⁷ without thereby seeing that method as of no account. Some critical historical methods—social history and research on Second Temple Judaism, for example—can shed light on the likely historicity and the original impact of sayings and deeds attributed to Jesus by New Testament authors. Social historians tell us that first-century Mediterranean societies were largely hierarchical and patriarchal, with zero-sum economies and honor-shame systems in which those of lower social status depended on client relationships to powerful patrons. In Palestine, Jesus lived in a Jewish world under Roman imperial rule, one in which some Jewish collaborators contributed to the oppression of their communities. In addition, the religious establishment exploited the poor and the peasant class.³⁸

Jesus' reported exhortations about mercy, inclusion, sharing, repentance, and sincerity of heart, his modeling of relationships with "unacceptable" people and with women, would have impelled reversals of customary hierarchies. The Synoptic Jesus shares table with those deemed rejects, losers, and sinners. The Gospels already presume agreement between Jesus and Jewish tradition on the importance of and connection between love of God and neighbor (Mt 22:34–40; Mk 12:28–34; Lk 10:25–27). What Jesus accentuates (building on Jewish precedents) is the expansion of "neighbor" to include the alien (Lk 10:25–32; Jn 4:5–42; Mk 7:25–30; Mt 15:21–28), the enemy (Mt 5:38–42, Lk 6:27–38), and the outcast (Mk 2:15; Mt 21:31; Lk 7:34, 37–39).³⁹ Jesus provoked listeners to grasp that a renewed relation to God reconfigures human relations, not just personally but by making inroads on dominant social practices. Jesus was not "an economist or social planner," but his teachings "had economic and social implications for those who took them seriously." This, according to Daniel Harrington, is exactly "what got him into trouble with the Jewish political and religious leaders as well as with the Roman imperial officials."⁴⁰

By illuminating Jesus' likely contextual meaning, historical research helps to identify what characteristics of the kingdom were salient to his hearers and to the first Christians, and remain normative analogously for Christian life today. Challenges to the religious, social, and political status quo in

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* xxiii.

³⁸ See K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

³⁹ See Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 381–94.

⁴⁰ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Jesus: A Historical Portrait* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger, 2007) 65, 61.

favor of the lowly, rejected, oppressed, and suffering, it is widely agreed, are implied by Jesus' kingdom preaching and deeds. Countercultural practices and politics⁴¹ remain normative for any spirituality of the kingdom or reign of God preached in Jesus' name.

Another crucial and controversial contemporary issue, to which historical research speaks, is the practical possibility of experiencing in history, as the result of Christian conversion and action, at least some of the reordering effects of God's coming rule. The Christ of the Christian Scriptures mediates "transformative encounter with the living God,"⁴² enabling life within God's reign, as inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus. Though this possibility cannot be historically proved, research can support the hypothesis that it was part of Jesus' own worldview.

Generally speaking, first-century Jewish apocalyptic is born of desperation. Abandoning hope of successful resistance to historical oppressors, it invokes God's mighty intervention beyond history's ordinary course.⁴³ Jesus certainly saw God's reign as an eschatological, even apocalyptic, reality. But in his public ministry, Jesus not only announces, he actually inaugurates God's eschatological reign (Mk 1:14–15). Jesus' favored self-appellation, "Son of Man," refers to an apocalyptic figure who will judge at the end of time. Nevertheless, God's reign is tasted through presently experienceable effects. Jesus exhorts hearers to get ready, prepare, and to hope; but also to lay hold of what is available now. The kingdom "is among you" (Lk 17:20).⁴⁴ In this, Jesus' apocalyptic message is distinctive.⁴⁵

Ratzinger concurs on this point; his program of spiritual renewal is completely contingent on the present possibility of the kingdom experience. Jesus "is quite simply proclaiming God," the "living God" who acts in the world.⁴⁶ Through Jesus, God enters history in a new way, offering Jesus himself as "the treasure; communion with him is the pearl of great price."⁴⁷ But for Ratzinger, what divine action makes present in history is a world-transcending "anticipation of the next world," accessible through personal faith, prayer, and spirituality.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Following Aristotle, "politics" is practical concern with action whose goal is the happiness of members of a social body, and their attainment individually and corporately of the human good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.2). Christian identity brings commitment to the human personal and social good.

⁴² Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) 197.

⁴³ See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 5, 11, 280.

⁴⁴ See E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 1995) 169–88 for an overview of different senses of "kingdom" in the Gospels, in relation to Jewish thought.

⁴⁵ Harrington, *Jesus* 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 61.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* 55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 57.

Ratzinger's Christology could be helped by a broader biblical and historical horizon. The fact is that the early church communities expressed their experience of God in Christ in diverse ways. Beyond John's Christology of the Word or Logos, we see in the New Testament multiple titles for Jesus Christ and plural emergent Christologies. Some speak more powerfully to certain times, situations, and needs than others, just as they did originally. Examples are Word or Logos, Son of Man and eschatological judge, the anointed Messiah of Israel, High Priest, adopted Son of God, Jesus as Lord, a "divine man" capable of mighty works, envoy of divine wisdom, and the crucified, risen, and exalted one. Each of these captures authentic aspects of Jesus' identity and role, without being all-sufficient or exclusive.⁴⁹ According to Raymond Brown, John's Gospel yields more insight into Jesus as true God; but Mark's Gospel, in which the divine Sonship of Jesus is a secret to everyone during his lifetime, gives more insight into Jesus as true man. "No one Gospel would enable us to see the whole picture, and only when the four are kept in tension among themselves has the church come to appreciate who Jesus is."⁵⁰ Given that the books of the New Testament were in the process of composition for over half a century after Jesus, "more than likely even the high Christological terms meant different things to different people."⁵¹

Because of contextuality, pluralism, and development in the Bible, a similar development in theology is to be expected. There is no huge gap but rather a bridge between Jesus' historical life and death and his later proclamation as Christ,⁵² but postresurrection reflection was required.⁵³ It was through a communal process that Jesus of Nazareth,

⁴⁹ For further discussion of titles and their implicit Christologies, see Harrington, *Jesus: A Historical Portrait* 85–98; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1994); Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (New York: Oxford University, 1995); Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Thomas P. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003); and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

⁵⁰ Brown, *New Testament Christology* 124.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 5.

⁵² A credible Jesus must be recognizably similar both to his first-century Jewish context and to the early church, even though in other ways dissimilar to each. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 93; and Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Historians See the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 163–66.

⁵³ Brown, *New Testament Christology* 24; O'Collins, *Christology* 308.

obviously human, came to be worshipped “as a God,” and then specifically characterized as “divine.”⁵⁴ The fact of a diachronic process necessarily implies the involvement of human, historical communities in rendering the meaning for the church of the incarnation. That this theological development was not unitary and unambiguous is attested by the need for multiple councils, over at least four centuries, to settle the issue of who exactly Jesus Christ was and is. “Confessing Jesus as divine is one thing, and thinking through coherently what this involves is quite another matter,”⁵⁵ writes William Loewe.

What is crucially important is to retain together (however inexplicably) the authentic divinity and the full humanity of Jesus, the former decisively affirmed by Nicea, the latter by Chalcedon. Both are essential to the redeeming power of the incarnation. Without Jesus’ divinity, the incarnation has no power to transform human existence; without Jesus’ humanity, redemption not only lacks its essential point of contact with that existence; it also lacks form and content. Even by the time of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) Jesus’ full divinity and humanity could be affirmed but not conclusively explained. In fact, the conciliar formulations establish frameworks and parameters for worship, for other Christian practices, and for theology; they do not furnish definitive theological clarifications of what the formulas mean.

By declining to acknowledge any impact on the Gospels of post-resurrection, communal experiences of Christ, Ratzinger overrides the controlled christological pluralism and synergy that the New Testament itself models. He eliminates the rich narrative and theological matrix so necessary to the successful mediation of Christ’s paradoxical identity, “human and divine.” He also undermines the crucial role of the resurrection in inspiring Christian faith.⁵⁶ In effect, he seems to reject the entire proposition that “the real Jesus”⁵⁷ is the risen Jesus present in the church, a locus in traditional Catholic theology of continuing revelation.

⁵⁴ According to the Roman proconsul Pliny, the members of the Christian cult whom he was investigating in 111 C.E. sang hymns to Christ “as to a god” (Pliny [the Younger], *Epistles*, 10.96, as cited by Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005] 13).

⁵⁵ William P. Loewe, “Classical Christology,” in *Thinking of Christ: Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning*, ed. Tatha Wiley (New York: Continuum, 2003) 50.

⁵⁶ Ratzinger regards the attribution of Gospel confessions to “post-Easter faith” as “very much on the wrong track” (*Jesus of Nazareth* 303).

⁵⁷ This is a phrase of Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 1997).

Benedict's Political Reorientation

Caritas in veritate and the roughly concurrent African Synod process are usefully framed by Benedict's World Day of Peace Messages 2009 and 2010. In 2009, he cites John Paul II to urge reduction of the global gap between rich and poor as a condition of world peace.⁵⁸ This is an important complement to his 2005 invocation of the two Benedicts in support of an intention to build up peace through prayer. Specifically Benedict mentions decline, pandemic diseases, child poverty, military expenditures, and food shortages, all of which require "global solidarity," and a common sense of ethics. Structural changes in international commerce and finance are necessary and will demand coordinated efforts by governments and civil society.⁵⁹ Despite Ratzinger's "almost visceral aversion" to communism,⁶⁰ and hence to liberation theology's supposed Marxist-derived "anarchy,"⁶¹ Benedict in 2009 adopts one of liberation theologians' central themes. "The 'preferential love for the poor'" constitutes charity's practical expression.⁶²

The World Day of Peace Message 2010 makes peace contingent on protection of the natural environment. The Church is neither indifferent nor impassive in the face of climate change, desertification, agricultural decline, water pollution, decreasing biodiversity, natural disasters, and deforestation.⁶³ "The Church" has a duty to protect earth, water, and air, and a "duty to exercise that responsibility in public life," fostering processes by which national and international governments establish rules for the use of natural resources, taking into consideration the special needs of poor countries.⁶⁴

Set between these two messages, *Caritas in veritate* could be seen as a revision of *Deus caritas est*. Points of continuity include the need for political action to be guided by objective norms (truth); the importance of faith, charity, and a public place for religion (no. 56); and strong warnings about uncritical reliance on technological "fixes" (nos. 68–77). However, in line with its commemoration of Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*, *Caritas* prioritizes

⁵⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, "Fighting Poverty to Build Peace" no. 1, World Day of Peace 2009.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.* nos. 8–13.

⁶⁰ Boeve, "Europe in Crisis" 211.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the South III and South IV Regions of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference on Their "Ad Limina" Visit, December 5, 2009.

⁶² Benedict XVI, "Fighting Poverty" no. 15. In this 2009 World Day of Peace Message Benedict cites "preferential love for the poor" from two encyclicals of John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (no. 42) and *Centesimus annus* (no. 57).

⁶³ Benedict XVI, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation" no. 4, World Day of Peace Message, 2010.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* no. 12; see also no. 7.

“integral human development and authentic development,”⁶⁵ which is “the heart of the Christian social message” (no. 13). Though still centrally concerned with the divine gift of charity in Christ, *Caritas* names work for structural change as intrinsic to Christian love as such, not only for laity. Love (*caritas*) leads to “courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace” (no. 1). Benedict expressly worries that charity might be evacuated of any “social, juridical, cultural, political and economic” meaning and so “dismissed as irrelevant . . . to moral responsibility” (no. 2).

Though the pope may be thinking of political activists who give short shrift to the theological virtues, his caution applies equally well to theologians who fail to give charity any real political bite. Perhaps to convince skeptics that religion and its virtues make an important political contribution, Benedict offers Catholic social teaching as confirmation that charity is inseparable from justice, and the common good of “the whole human family” (no. 7). Moving into the international arena, Benedict employs the term “solidarity” to name “gratuitous” concern for fellow humanity, mutual responsibility, justice, and the common good (no. 38; see also nos. 34–36, 43, 58, 61, 67). In an overture to potential global partners, God’s presence is seen in *all* those who work for justice (no. 78), presumably even those reliant on “worldly” goals and stratagems.

Benedict and the New World Order

The immediate precipitating cause and focal concern of *Caritas* is the global economic meltdown. One praised solution is the generosity of Catholic-owned businesses that assist the poor and build civil society toward an “economy of communion” (no. 38).⁶⁶ This is admirable and useful as far as it goes, and is far above the moral standards of most for-profit businesses. Where it does not so clearly go is toward global structural change. The bigger economic picture, well-registered by Benedict, includes global deregulation and mobility of trade and finance, outsourcing, the disappearance of social security systems, poverty and economic migration, lack of

⁶⁵ The term “development” is contentious due to the connotation that the rest of the world should “develop” according to modern Western models. However (except for its sexist expression) the idea that “integral” development “has to promote the good of every man and the whole man” opens the door to more complete cultural and global debate about what constitutes constructive economic activity, a good society, and justice (*Caritas* no. 18, citing Paul VI).

⁶⁶ On the “economy of communion” inspired by the lay Catholic movement Focolare, see Amelia J. Uelmen, “Religious Values and Corporate Decision Making: The Economy of Communion Project,” *Fordham Journal of Corporate and Financial Law* 11 (2006) 645–80; and Uelmen, “*Caritas in veritate* and Chiara Lubich: Human Development from the Vantage Point of Unity,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 29–45.

respect for human life, food shortages, decolonization and neocolonialism, violence, and abuse of the natural environment (nos. 25–29, 33, 48).

Where does Benedict think solutions lie? Somewhat predictably, he follows the predilection of Catholic social teaching to envision the world “community” on analogy to the family, local community, province, nation-state, and regional associations of states. Concentric circles of relationship and authority are united under single heads, constituting together incrementally higher and more comprehensive associations in a common good. Just as family members are united under the *paterfamilias*, so families are united within local communities, organizations, and governments; local and state governments are united under a federal government; national states are united in regional alliances; and finally all are united under a “world political authority” (no. 67).⁶⁷

Benedict has remarkable expectations for the United Nations. It should be reformed so as to put “real teeth” into its regulation of economic institutions and international finance, and into its management and revival of the global economy. It should guarantee observance of the responsibility to protect and the democratic voice of developing countries in international decision-making. It should supervise migration, “disarmament, food security and peace,” human rights, and environmental protection. To accomplish all this, the United Nations would need to be universally recognized, have the authority to “ensure compliance,” and be vested with coercive power (no. 67).

This vision of just governance for the common good, even when paired with Benedict’s conception of “objective truth,” has much in common with the post-World War II ideal of “liberal internationalism.” There is reason to suspect that both visions fly in the face of the real roles, capacities, and limits of the United Nations; and of emerging, much more complicated, forms of global authority and control in “the globalization era.” In the first place, the United Nations does not and will not have fully effective global regulatory authority over the economy, the environment, human rights, and violent conflict because states and other entities are simply not willing to cede the power they now hold in these areas. The very premise of global UN control—universal international recognition of and compliance with its ultimate authority—is highly unrealistic. This does not mean that the United Nations does not exercise a vital leadership function, or that its sponsored treaties and goal-setting agreements are ineffectual.⁶⁸ But it is unlikely ever to function as the worldwide equivalent of a state’s federal government.

⁶⁷ Benedict refers to both Paul VI (no. 24) and John XXIII (no. 67) as precedents for his endorsement of UN authority.

⁶⁸ See Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, and Thomas G. Weiss, *UN Ideas That Changed the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2009).

A growing literature identifies emerging structures of global governance that are much less unitary, less hierarchical, and, if less predictable, more open to pluralist intervention. This development is significant for world politics, for the normative Catholic conception of the common good, Catholic social ethics, and the nature and role of international Catholic organizations as having both a religious identity and a political presence.

In 1992, Bryan Hehir (citing Stanley Hoffman) noted that converging trends in world politics are destabilizing the internal sovereignty of nation-states assumed since the 17th-century Peace of Westphalia ending the wars of religion in Europe. So-called "humanitarian interventions" in Bosnia, Somalia, and Iraq signal both an "erosion of national sovereignty" and the coming-to-be of new standards of decision and action among states, alliances, and the United Nations.⁶⁹ State sovereignty is being reconfigured by calls for self-determination by regions or ethnic groups within states; by (selective) international interest in human rights regimes and violations; and by trends toward global economic integration with the consequent interpenetration of national economies. Moreover, states sometimes "pool" sovereignty in certain areas (think of the European Union) to increase their leverage.

Novel forms of relationship, authority and control coexist with governments of states. Anne Marie Slaughter, Dean of Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, has long argued that a centralized, all-powerful world government would be no ideal protector of the universal common good. Nor is such a government even possible. We are living in a "networked" world in which the power of nations is "disaggregated" into interdependent and cooperative legal, judicial, and regulatory regimes that cross borders and connect states. Included in these networks are nongovernmental organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, Microsoft, Amnesty International, and the Roman Catholic Church. Slaughter cites examples of transnational agreements on finance, trade, market regulation, interstate cooperation on organized crime and terrorism, and law enforcement. She gives extended attention to communication and precedent-setting among national judiciaries and international and regional courts that work to harmonize global jurisprudence.⁷⁰ National governments interface with multilateral

⁶⁹ J. Bryan Hehir, "World of Faultlines," *Commonweal* 19.16 (September 25, 1992) 8–9.

⁷⁰ Anne Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2004). See also Jessica T. Mathews, "Power Shift: The Rise of Global Civil Society," *Foreign Affairs* 76.1 (January-February 1997) 50–66; and Anne Marie Slaughter, "The Real New World Order," *Foreign Affairs* 76.5 (September-October 1997) 183–97.

and transnational networks that sometimes limit, sometimes reinforce, sometimes extend their power.

This state of affairs opens the door for greater influence of non-governmental organizations and global social movements on national and international policies and structures. This influence includes religious bodies and movements. CIDSE, an international alliance of Catholic development agencies, has taken great interest in the impact of global governance systems on its advocacy work.⁷¹ The IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO have all been responsive to pressure from environmental, labor, and women's movements, and religious advocates have been engaged in all of these.⁷² Nongovernmental organizations, including Oxfam, and religious organizations, including the Roman Catholic Church, were instrumental in pressuring the WTO to adapt international patent law to make patented drugs available globally at lower prices for HIV/AIDS and other diseases of the poor.⁷³ Several Catholic NGOs, including CIDSE members, campaign to bring ruthless corporations and corrupt governments that extract natural resources in developing countries into compliance with international and national laws, regulations, and agreements.⁷⁴

It is abundantly evident that Catholic charitable and social organizations are not today (if ever) separate from laity doing political work. Catholic agencies are in fact doing this work directly. Already within *Deus caritas est* there is a subtly expansive vision of the Church's work for justice. This vision develops into a significant shift in *Caritas in veritate*. First, *Deus caritas est*. The pope's ostensible position is that "building a just social and civil order" is not "the Church's immediate responsibility" but "a political task" proper to the laity (nos. 28–29). Yet he grants that human solidarity and mutual assistance transcend national boundaries and are global, that government agencies and nongovernmental organizations work toward global justice on complex levels, and that therefore "Church agencies" will work with other religious organizations and with civil agencies to achieve "solutions to the social and political problems of the day" (no. 30b, emphasis added).

⁷¹ See Caritas Internationalis and CIDSE, *An Introduction to Global Governance through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching*, April 2007, http://www.cidse.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Publication_repository/cidse_misc_intro_global_governance_may07_EN.pdf.

⁷² See Robert O'Brien et al., *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University, 2000).

⁷³ See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, and Change* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2005) 163–68.

⁷⁴ See http://www.cidse.org/Area_of_work/Extractive_industries/?id=56.

Such cooperation works against Benedict's provision that the Church is limited to charitable work in at least four ways. First, even officially Catholic agencies include nonordained members who are politically engaged interdependently with the mission of the Catholic organization. "Church" and "laity" are in this sense not separate. For example, Ken Hackett, president of Catholic Relief Services, an agency of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, oversees humanitarian operations in 99 countries, with a global staff of 5,000; has served numerous other justice-oriented entities sponsored by the Vatican and national episcopacies; and, in 2004, was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve on the board of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a federal aid effort.⁷⁵

Second, Church agencies as such participate in social and political collaboration. Catholic Charities USA serves homeless families, supports affordable housing, and advocates for home purchasing. "Catholic Charities agencies rely on partnerships with government, public housing authorities, private business, and community groups to leverage resources and provide housing services for the poor and the vulnerable. The non-profit community cannot do this work alone. Government must be an equal partner."⁷⁶

Third, the specific mission of many Catholic agencies and of formal ecclesial representatives is to advocate for justice at the regulatory, legal, and global levels, and to participate directly in advocacy efforts. One might recall Benedict's own exhortation to the newly-elected U.S. President Barack Obama to "build a world of peace, solidarity and justice";⁷⁷ or Benedict's explanation of *Caritas* as initiating a search for "new models of a responsible economy both in individual countries and for the whole of humanity."⁷⁸ Vatican and episcopal representatives and delegations advocate for structural justice in numerous national and international venues. The Vatican representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, is a firm voice favoring Catholic principles of justice and the common good in world politics.⁷⁹ The U.S. bishops are highly

⁷⁵ See <http://www.changingthepresent.org/advisors/show/56>.

⁷⁶ <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=333&srcid=318>.

⁷⁷ Cindy Wooden, "Pope Sends Congratulatory Message to Obama," Catholic News Service, November 6, 2008, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0805616.htm>.

⁷⁸ Remarks while flying to the Czech Republic, September 2009, as quoted by Mark Pattison, "Nation's Economic Woes Have Effect on Society and Church in 2009," *Pilot*, official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston, December 25, 2009.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Rich Heffern, "Statement by Archbishop Celestino Migliore to the U. N. Climate Change Conference," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 21, 2009, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/statement-archbishop-celestino-migliore-u-n-climate-change-conference>.

activist in politics, identifying specific candidates, policies, and laws that they do or do not support. Around the globe bishops and bishops' conferences have taken stands on HIV/AIDS, poverty, government corruption, and civil conflict and reconciliation. The USCCB and Catholic Relief Services, through their "Catholic Campaign against Global Poverty," aim specifically to influence U.S. trade policies.⁸⁰

Fourth, a plethora of additional Catholic organizations, including lay organizations and movements, and joint ventures between "official" ecclesial organizations (such as bishops' conferences, dioceses, and religious orders) and "nonofficial" Catholic organizations (such as universities incorporated under civil law, or groups dedicated to national and international justice projects) partner with non-Catholic or nonreligious groups, and with local, national, and international governments. CIDSE campaigns for policy reform serving its "social justice agenda," by targeting "key events" internationally as one of its "core priorities and strengths."⁸¹

One might conclude that *Deus caritas est* is simply out of step with the international ecclesial reality; or that, aware of this reality, its author is sending signals to rein in political activity. Given the encyclical's internal tensions regarding Catholic agencies, such conclusions would be premature. When this document is compared to *Caritas in veritate* and contextualized alongside writings in a similar time frame, such conclusions become untenable.

Caritas in veritate grasps the fact of changed global governance—with its implications for the networked political presence of the Church—when it introduces a derivative innovation in papal social teaching. Unlike John XXIII, Paul VI, or even John Paul II, Benedict explicitly recognizes that the universal common good can be neither unitary nor advanced by a cohesive world authority. The world of Paul VI, Benedict notes in *Caritas*, was "far less integrated than today's world," whereas today, production, consumption, finance, and regulation exceed national boundaries and hence traditional governance structures. Therefore the nation-state must "address the limitations to its sovereignty imposed by the new context of international trade and finance," a context that has "altered" its "political power" (no. 24).

"New forms of cooperation at the international level" are demanded, including trade unions, workers' associations (no. 25), and labor unions, which should collaborate with workers in developing countries (no. 64). It is crucial to build up sustainable local infrastructures (no. 27)—implying the convergence of charity, work for justice, and the empowerment of those on the economic margins. Benedict recognizes effective power at the grassroots and in midlevel structures when he calls on "consumer associations"

⁸⁰ See http://education.crs.org/get_involved.cfm.

⁸¹ <http://www.cidse.org/aboutus/?id=31>.

with a sense of social responsibility (no. 66); and microfinance and development projects that give agency to the poor (no. 65). These realizations sit uneasily with the conventional call for enforceable UN authority (no. 67). They also show why it is impossible for Catholic agencies serving the poor to remain aloof from politics.

The 2009 Synod for Africa

The sociopolitical awareness of Benedict XVI at the turn of the decade seems quite different from that of Joseph Ratzinger and the new pope of 2005. The commensurate adjustment of his vision of the Church's social mission—as global rather than Eurocentric, as politically engaged as well as evangelistic—reflects his new, global responsibilities. At the time of publication of *Caritas*, preparation was underway for the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa, held in October 2009.⁸² Remarks, messages, documents, and practical and theological responses surrounding the synod envision the Church as a catalyst for political reform, a role embraced by African bishops, ardently hoped for by ordinary African Catholics,⁸³ and ultimately embraced by the pope himself.

The African situation is diverse and complicated, and the road to justice uneven and never-ending. Although a first Synod on Africa was held 15 years ago, conflicts and wars continue to rage, economic devastation to spread, and justice and peace to be rarities.⁸⁴ A difficult issue is the contributory role of the Catholic Church itself in conflict in Africa. In a presynod workshop, Burundi's Emmanuel Ntakirutima, O.P., observed that the most highly Christian nations on the Continent are Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Congo-Brazzaville; the prevalence of Christianity correlates, then, with violence and slaughter. Work toward conversion, both spiritual and political, needs to be done within the Church before the Church can be a credible champion of reconciliation.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, in their final message, the African bishops assert that "Africa must not despair" of "bringing effective solutions to our problems,"

⁸² *The Hekima Review: Journal of Hekima College*, No. 41 (December 2009) is dedicated to the theme, "Celebrating the Second Synod for Africa." Articles by two participants, Peter Henriot, S.J. and Benezet Bujo, outline challenges, consequences, accomplishments, and possible lacunae and failures of the Synod.

⁸³ Mwansu Pintu, "After synod, Africa's Catholics hope bishops promote good governance," CNS, November 17, 2009, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0905112.htm>.

⁸⁴ See Peter Henriot, S.J., "The Second African Synod: Challenge and Help for Our Future Church," *Hekima Review* 41 (December 2009) 9.

⁸⁵ John L. Allen, "Synod for Africa opens to high hopes, but realism," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 2, 2009, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/synod-africa-opens-high-hopes-realism>.

initiatives in which the bishops intend to take part.⁸⁶ Citing *Caritas in veritate*, they claim a “responsibility to be instruments of reconciliation, justice and peace.”⁸⁷ Specifically, the bishops mention poverty, micro-finance, the situation and roles of women, development, peacekeeping, AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, sexual responsibility, the unjust structures of the world economic order, practices of multinational corporations, conflict, war, refugees and internally displaced persons, child soldiers, rape in war, the arms trade, the exploitation of natural resources, and the lack of good governance in Africa.

A most important additional point is that the sociopolitical roles of the Church in Africa are taken up with a real expectation of positive outcomes against cynicism and warranted doubt as to Africa’s future. The justice mission of the Church is a response to human suffering, and Catholic leaders who exist in massive suffering’s daily hells call their people and the church universal to follow faith and trust in the Lord with active concern, personal investment, social solidarity, and practical politics.

What is the theological and ecclesiological basis of their hope? Christ’s renewal of humanity in the Spirit regenerates relationships with God, among fellow human beings, and within historical societies. The pope’s opening prayer implores a “new Pentecost” for Africa and petitions the Holy Spirit to make the Church a catalyst.⁸⁸ In lunchtime comments shortly before the synod’s close, Benedict remarked the need to balance a fundamental metanoia with commitment to a “political dimension . . . because without political achievements, these changes of the Spirit usually are not realized.”⁸⁹

Benedict and Augustine

Although Benedict XVI is sometimes termed “Augustinian” in his theology and politics,⁹⁰ that characterization is limited, if not incorrect. At the very least, Aidan Nichols observes, it must be recognized that “the

⁸⁶ “Synod Message: Africa, Rise up and walk!” <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=16681&geo=20&size=A>.

⁸⁷ Ibid. no. 15.

⁸⁸ See Jesus Colina, “Pope: Love Conquers All Divisions, Including Africa,” *Zenit*, October 6, 2009, http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=34569.

⁸⁹ Benedict XVI, “Reflections during the First General Congregation,” October 5, 2009.

⁹⁰ Boeve, “Europe in Crisis” 218–19, referring to Komonchak, “Church in Crisis”; Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI* 47–52. Rausch helpfully recounts Ratzinger’s experience as a youth under the relentless Third Reich, when he was made to serve in the Hitler Youth, drafted out of the seminary into the armed forces, captured at his home postwar by the Americans, and marched in uniform to a POW camp (ibid.

modalities of . . . a relationship with Augustine are very various."⁹¹ Like Augustine, Benedict has an acute awareness of the reality of sin in the world, of the irrepressible nature of the *libido dominandi*.⁹² Like Augustine, the earlier Ratzinger draws a contrast between the eternal city and the earthly city.⁹³ True worship (*latreia*⁹⁴), an authentic connection to God, is available only through Christ. But whereas Benedict's writings through at least 2005 call for a countercultural Church whose members turn away from worldly corruption, Augustine exhorts Christian officials and generals to enter the fray of worldly life,⁹⁵ accepting its necessary miseries,⁹⁶ in order to better earthly peace with an intention of love.

If anything, Augustine's critics could legitimately object that he compromises too readily, as in the notorious example of judicial torture⁹⁷ or in his failure to set clear limits on means in war,⁹⁸ rather than that his politics are quietist, separatist, or otherworldly. Augustine expects Christians to engage in politics fully, but he does not hold out much hope for this-worldly transformation. Although peace of a sort can be had as "the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule," the civic order does not participate in the virtue or true peace that come from charity. "The heavenly city . . . makes use of this peace only because it must,"⁹⁹ not because it has an integral connection with God's redeeming presence. Augustine, like other premodern figures, does not envision the possibility of broad democratic participation or global movements for equality, rights, and political self-determination. He does not envision the incipient reordering of the earthly city by the inbreaking kingdom of God, or Christian political participation to that end.

As of 2007, Benedict portrays Augustine as a man fully committed to the welfare of Rome. "Amid the serious difficulties facing the Roman Empire," Augustine's faith and hope "enabled him to take part decisively and with all his strength in the task of building up the city" (*Spe salvi* no. 29). Augustine of course did admire many of the "pagan" virtues of the Romans that led to their military and political successes. Moreover, he saw the hand of God in the conquests of the Christian emperors Constantine and Theodosius.¹⁰⁰ But for Augustine there always

11–15). Such experiences might understandably dampen confidence in conscientious work for social change.

⁹¹ Nichols, *Thought of Benedict XVI* 27.

⁹² Augustine, *City of God*, 1. Preface and 1.30.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 14.28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 10.1.

⁹⁵ Augustine, Letter 138, "To Marcellinus"; Letters 189 and 220, "To Boniface."

⁹⁶ Augustine, *City of God* 4.7.27.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 19.6.

⁹⁸ Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichean* 22.74, 76. The "real evil in war" is not killing but the lack of an "inward disposition" of love.

⁹⁹ Augustine, *City of God* 19.17.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* 5.

remains a decisive difference between the peace of the earthly city and that of the heavenly one. “Augustine’s notion of charity is . . . far removed from an activist concept of the same.”¹⁰¹ Christians should support the public order, but Augustine would never have envisioned the church as the seed of general social reform toward just structures that reflect heavenly goals.

The later Benedict here departs from Augustine. Benedict is always strongly impressed by the presence of sin in the world. He is always concerned with enlivening Christian commitment within the Church. He always sees a relation to God as the only sure foundation of positive social change. But the Benedict of *Spe salvi*, *Caritas in veritate*, and the African Synod also sees the Church as gifted with a new Pentecost that emboldens its political mission. For the Africans he prays “that the Lord may bring about the outpouring of his Spirit now and recreate his Church and the world.”¹⁰² Time will tell whether Benedict’s theological center of gravity remains with the Africans, and whether the Second Synod accomplishes more than the First.

Church as Mediator of Renewal and Justice

Since well before the Second African Synod, African theologians have been in substantial agreement that “the church in sub-Saharan Africa constitutes a community capable of influencing and transforming social situations” in the socioeconomic and political realms.¹⁰³ This is not the place (nor the author) to survey African theology, or its responses to the social crises facing Africa. Rather, representative African construals of the Church’s contextual mission will be invoked to illustrate a larger point about the theology of *Caritas in veritate*, nuanced in concert with the practical and theological demands of the Synod for Africa. To the extent that this encyclical, and Christian theology in general, move toward transformative social engagement as necessary to Christian identity and the theological virtues, they imply and require a theology of the incarnate and risen Christ as redemptively present to social and political relationships and

¹⁰¹ Nichols, *Thought of Benedict XVI* 40.

¹⁰² Benedict XVI, “Reflection during the First General Congregation.”

¹⁰³ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees, and Poverty* (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 2005) 13. Orobator gives multiple specific examples of church involvement in work for social change in Africa. Christine Bodewes in her *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums* (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 2005) shows how one parish in a Nairobi slum, Kibera, worked to transform its circumstances.

structures.¹⁰⁴ According to Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, the incarnation makes the Church *imago dei*, conforming it to the actions of God (“solidarity, liberation, compassion”). The mission of the Church is to be redemptively present with God’s people in their suffering. “If the incarnation reveals that the Divine is not averse to the conditions of human existence (sickness, refugeeness, and impoverishment), it also sets a standard for the community that claims to be the concrete manifestation of the ‘glory, grace and truth’ of God in human history.”¹⁰⁵

The early Pope Benedict sought solutions to the “crisis in Europe” and “crisis in the Church” in world-transcending communion with God, enabled by the divine Word. Orobator moves “from crisis to *kairos*,” seeing the Word as the manifestation of God’s politically powerful creativity, and so also that of the Church. The Church’s healing function takes its lead from Jesus’ healing power and liberating praxis. In the contexts of AIDS, refugees, or poverty, advocacy is “an ecclesial sacramental action” that restores human dignity by introducing God’s redeeming power.

Teresa Okure, a Nigerian biblical scholar and theologian appointed as expert consultant for the synod, joins Orobator in depicting the kind of Christology implied not only by the synod but also by *Caritas in veritate*. Okure engages biblical symbols of both Word and Spirit to render a “global Jesus” whose ministry of the kingdom is both concretely human and divinely empowered. Through Christ, “God has begun to restore the goodness of creation,” conquering “the anthropological sins of racism, sexism and classism with their multiple global branches.”¹⁰⁶ The public ministry of Jesus furnishes the concrete, social content of redeemed relationships and illustrates their historical possibility.

Peter Henriot, present at the synod, ventures that its most characteristic note, even in the face of overwhelming problems, was the surprising one of hope.¹⁰⁷ Laurenti Magesa sees in the bishops’ message of justice, reconciliation, and peace, “a fine expression of Christian hope, one which can conquer every evil in Christ in the same way as Jesus himself triumphed over death.”¹⁰⁸ Jean-Marie Quenum calls for an end to “Afro-pessimism.” “The theology of hope and solidarity” is today’s testimony to an authentic

¹⁰⁴ On this point, see, e.g., Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 94. Jesus as the “protoancestor” is the source of life for the community, bestowing spiritual life, and also true social development.

¹⁰⁵ Orobator, *Crisis to Kairos* 241.

¹⁰⁶ Teresa Okure, S.H.C.J., “The Global Jesus,” in *Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (New York: Cambridge University, 2006) 237–59, at 244, 248.

¹⁰⁷ Henriot, “Challenge and Help” 11.

¹⁰⁸ Laurenti Magesa, “The Second African Synod: Random Thoughts on a Process,” *Hekima Review* 41 (December 2009) 31.

experience of Jesus Christ as “living Word.” It stresses “social justice, freedom, reconciliation, and peace in a continent plagued with corruption, authoritarianism, tyranny, and politicized ethnicity.”¹⁰⁹

Perhaps the most important present task of theology is to sustain hope that change is really possible. The greatest contemporary threat to Christian identity is neither otherworldly spirituality nor the reduction of faith to social justice; it is “political realism” pronouncing that the world runs on self-interest and power, that it always has done so, that this will never change, and that the best Christians can do is cooperate with the status quo or seclude themselves within the Church. This is exactly the problem identified by the 2007 encyclical, *Spe salvi*. The world needs hope so that we can live to change the present (no. 2); “salvation has always been considered a ‘social’ reality” (no. 14). In *Spe salvi* Benedict repeats at least three times that the gospel is not only “informative,” it is “performative” (nos. 2, 4, 10). We live irrevocably in union with other people and all people; even Benedict’s cloistered monks, the pope here insists, have a “responsibility for the world” (no. 15).

The Christian virtues of hope and charity inspire work with others to build more just social structures (*Spe salvi* no. 24). “All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action” (no. 35). Without triumphalism, complacency, or overreliance on human efforts, it is still possible and necessary to say that Christian identity and the theological virtues have moral and political consequences. Faith, hope, and charity are practical virtues that enact God’s redeeming power against the conditions, causes, and systems of suffering and evil.

THE LATER BENEDICT XVI

Between 2005 and 2009, Benedict’s attention has broadened from Europe to include the global Church and the harsh realities of world poverty and war. Now it is important that renewed Christian identity stimulate action for the common good. Justice advocacy is a direct mission of the Church. Benedict’s specific recognition of complex global opportunities to exercise and limit power signals a changed perception of the Church’s global presence and networked methods. Church, laity, and world are not completely separate spheres.

A rich theological resource could be the Jesus of the Synoptics, “full of the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:1), who proclaims and enacts God’s “good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). Yet, the christological emphases of the later Benedict remain ambiguous. Although his World Day of Peace Message 2009 adopts

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Marie Hyacinthe Quenum, S.J., “The Challenges of an African Christian Theology of Hope and Solidarity,” *Chicago Studies* 48 (2009) 177–93, at 190.

the preferential option for the poor, he has not filled that in theologically with reference to Jesus' kingdom ministry as eschatologically reversing exclusionary practices. He has not explicitly interpreted the incarnation as reordering society because human sociality and historicity have been united with the divine nature. Christological moves of this sort may be implied by Benedict's theologies of Christian virtues and of the Holy Spirit, but they have not yet been brought into direct dialogue with his Christology of the Word.

Ironically, liberation theologians like Jon Sobrino (the object of a 2006 "Notification" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF))¹¹⁰ appeal to the power of the incarnation, resurrection, and Spirit¹¹¹ to promote the kind of structural changes lately of interest to the pope. Yet shortly after *Caritas in veritate* and the African Synod, Benedict revived the 25-year-old "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation" to broadside "certain theologians" and "certain deceptive principles" supposedly reliant on Marxism.¹¹² The various political commitments that Benedict now envisions as proper to the Church have yet to be integrated into a Christology and ecclesiology that are adequate to their scope.

Still, by indicating that the theological virtues necessarily result in and are displayed by social action, Benedict carries on the characteristic Roman Catholic tradition that saving grace entails sanctification and the regeneration of the moral life. As convener of the African Synod, Benedict sees the Church's work as Spirit-generated, holding out hope for concrete successes. The Church's socially transformative work will be mightily expanded wherever it is active in evolving paths of global connection and agency.

That this work is shared with other cultures and religions is implied by the Church's global activities, for example, in Africa. The inclusive social ethic of *Caritas* and the synod coheres with a theology in which salvation touches people in many faiths.¹¹³ Again, these new directions stand in tension with Benedict's formative concern with Euro-Christian cultural unity. He has yet theologically to clarify the relation of non-Christians to the "common good" in societies that are religiously pluralistic by virtue of longstanding demographics, changing national borders, recent conversions, or immigration.

¹¹⁰ CDF, "Notification on the Works of Father Jon Sobrino, SJ," November 26, 2006.

¹¹¹ Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001) 74–78, 115–16, 314–15, 327–30.

¹¹² Benedict XVI, "Address to Brazilian Bishop's Conference," December 5, 2009.

¹¹³ See the CDF's 2001 document, signed by Ratzinger, *Dominus Iesus* nos. 21–22.

The Parenetic Role of Theology

Biblical scholars sometimes distinguish between two types of biblical material: catechesis and parenesis. Catechesis is instruction for those who believe; parenesis seeks the further conversion of people whose Christian identity is in formation. Parenesis has an ethical orientation; it exhorts believers to better conform their lives at the practical level to realities illumined by faith.¹¹⁴ It places the experience of Christ within social relations, bonds, and obligations. Theology, in contrast, is defined as the quest for intellectual understanding of God and of humans in relation to God.¹¹⁵

It is obvious from the cross-fertilization of Benedict's theological and pastoral writings that these roles are in reality hard to separate. Theology does aim to grasp and explain reality in an intellectually clear and persuasive way. Yet in registering and explaining specific dimensions of reality, theologies are selective and responsive to their contexts. Theologies are parenetic insofar as they aim to shape and encourage, not only understanding but also desires, affections, emotions, and habits of practice. This is equally true of liberation theologies, feminist theologies, Ratzinger's theology for a secular Europe, Augustinian theologies that highlight the reality of sin, and African theologies of empowerment and reform. Theologies are necessarily contextual, though many realities they identify will be context-transcendent and hence relevant in some way to multiple situations, or able to connect contexts of belief within a broader vision.

Benedict XVI's fundamental and consistent message is that personal communion with God is important and possible. This message will resonate not only with recovering European secularists but also with many in the post-Vatican II generation in North America, which (like Africa) is still a "religious" continent. Many of this generation's parents embraced the world-engaging message of Vatican II on the basis of a strongly instilled (if often too tribal and constraining) Catholic sense of mystery, sacraments, and prayer. But many younger Catholics (and younger theologians) hunger for a communal identity, liturgies with a vertical approach to the sacred, and a distinctive religious lifestyle. They have come of age not only in a changing church, but in a culture that is fast-moving, recombinant,

¹¹⁴ To the Apostle Paul, e.g., "the ethical life, a sign of the Holy Spirit, entails an ethic of response and growth" (Benjamin Fiore, "Paranesis and Protreptic," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992] 5:164).

¹¹⁵ Aquinas called *theologia* a reasoned mode of understanding the truths held by faith; theology signifies "an intellectual discipline, i.e., an ordered body of knowledge about God" (William J. Hill, O.P., "Theology," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987] 1015, 1011).

consumerist, globalized, and unreliable. For these transcendence-questioning audiences, as well as for the justice-committed heirs of *Gaudium et spes*, it can be parenetically important to identify the obvious: suffering and evil are historical realities that cannot be escaped. They require from Christians a willingness both to sacrifice and to act. It is precisely the experience of God in Jesus Christ that inspires and nourishes Christians laboring for justice in the world. *Caritas in veritate*, African theology, and other theologies of liberation attest to the inherent and indispensable unity of love of God and love as work for structures that positively affect the lives, sufferings, hopes, and joys of near and distant neighbors. This message becomes parenetically essential in contexts blighted by apathy or despair.

If the Church in Africa is truly “changing the continent,” it requires “a theology that arises from the resources of the living Christian community,” where traditional cultures meet the Christian message. “This experience produces a new way of being church,” and also a new theology.¹¹⁶ The social context of the Church affects its nature and mission, its mediation of Jesus Christ, its ethical and political presence, and the content of theology itself.

Responding to his own multiple and changing contexts, Benedict too theologizes contextually and parenetically. He begins with the spiritual and cultural conversion of post-Christian Europe. Later he sees justice work as essential to the theological virtues, and as accountable to the poor. Justice is a responsibility of the Church, its formal representatives and agencies, of other Catholic organizations, of the laity, and of Christians and of all persons in global solidarity and cooperation. Benedict's global reorientation illustrates the fully incarnational and hence historical dimensions of the risen Jesus present to the Church, of revelation, faith, and theology. Benedict's theology to date is responsive in more than one direction. It is a work in progress, not a cohesive system. The next years of his papacy will surely introduce new contexts, audiences, and social problems. They too will test Benedict's Christology, ecclesiology, and politics for coherence, truth, and parenetic value.

¹¹⁶ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996) 9.