

6th Sunday (A)

12th February 2023

‘Pope Benedict’s teaching IV: *Caritas in Veritate*’

Ecc 15; 1Cor 2; Mt 5:17–37: *you have heard how it was said ... but I say to you ...*

It’s a tremendously important passage which we have just heard in the Gospel there, from the heart of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’: Jesus taking some of the teachings of the Old Law, *Do not kill ... Do not commit adultery ... do not break your oath ...* and deepening those teachings and refining them, redefining them in new terms, according to a higher, Christian, standard: *elevating humanity’s morals*.

In a not dissimilar vein I want today to continue my pre-Lent excursion with you through the papal teaching documents of Pope Benedict XVI. We have only this Sunday and next to do that, so I intend just to treat one more Encyclical Letter and one more Apostolic Exhortation of his before we embark on our Lenten journey towards Easter. Today we will consider his 3rd Encyclical, [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) — ‘On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth.’ As last week, there’s no possible way to try and tackle it all, so I intend only to give a brief overview of his opening themes, his contextualising the

enormity of the topic. It’s very different to the documents we have considered in previous weeks, because this is not a Letter that treats exactly theological doctrines, but more *social* doctrine — Catholic social teaching: how Christ and the Church can help all humanity to live well as a society.

Yesterday I was at a great Catholic Conference in Westminster along with 1300–1500 others, and the keynote address was by the American Bishop, famous in the blogosphere and on social media for his energetic evangelization, Bishop Robert Barron. In the middle of his talk, he quoted Pope Leo XIII who was the first Pope to write a whole Encyclical addressing themes of social doctrine, responding to the societal upheaval and profound economic changes of the Industrial Revolution. *Rerum Novarum* (1891) was this ground-breaking document of Leo XIII — the “new things” of its title refer to the new challenges which confronted the world, particularly concerning capital and labour. The one line of *Rerum Novarum* that Bp Barron quoted as he spoke of a personal, lay approach to adopting the discipline of poverty, was

this: “Once the demands of necessity and propriety have been met, the rest that one owns belongs to the poor” — a challenging principle, that helps us get into perspective the economic demands of love for our neighbour!

Almost every Pope since Leo XIII has continued to address questions of Catholic social teaching, including Pope Francis, of course, in his much-talked-about teaching on human and environmental ecology, *Laudato Si'*; but going back into previous papacies: John XXIII in 1963, *Pacem in Terris*; Paul VI in 1967, *Populorum Progressio*; St John Paul II in 1981, *Laborem Exercens*, in 1987, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and in 1991 *Centesimus Annus*, amongst others. Often these have been issued on the anniversaries of previous papal teachings, esp. the various decade-anniversaries of 1891 (*Rerum Novarum*), and of 1967 (*Populorum Progressio*). It's into this scheme that the papal teaching of Pope Benedict, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) falls: not quite an exact decade anniversary, but basically issued as a 40th-anniversary response to Paul VI's assessment of the 1960s world social order [*Populorum Progressio*](#). Effectively, Pope

Benedict wants to revisit the teaching and the hopes for human development from Pope Paul's document of the late 60s, and see where we have got — how has the world changed since then; how much has it heeded the words of that great and prophetic Pope?

Of course Pope Benedict in his characteristic style, frames the whole question of human development in theological terms that reach right back into the heart of God. Here are some of his opening words in *Caritas in Veritate*:

1. CHARITY IN TRUTH, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. ... All people feel the interior impulse to love authentically: love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person. The search for love and truth is purified and liberated by Jesus Christ from the impoverishment that our humanity brings to it, and he reveals to us in all its fullness the initiative of love and the plan for true life that God has prepared for us. ...

2. Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. ... as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, “God is love”: *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it.* Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is His promise and our hope.

And also, rather as he did in his Encyclical on Christian hope, when he showed how *hope* and *faith* were interlinked and almost inter-changeable; here he dwells on the interdependence of Love (*Caritas*) and Truth (*Veritas*):

Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. (n. 3)

So, he argues, we cannot approach any questions of loving our neighbour and addressing the common good — the progress or development of humanity socially and economically — without completely understanding the *truth* of the religious nature of man, and indeed his origins in God's plan. Only the two operating in tandem — love & truth — allows the Church's social teaching to operate and make sense: "*Caritas in veritate* is the principle around which the Church's social doctrine turns, a principle that takes on practical form in the criteria that govern moral action" (n. 6). Natural human justice, too, is a pre-requisite, Pope Benedict says: "I cannot give what is mine to the other, without first

giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just to them. ... Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, 'the minimum measure of it'" (n. 6). We see, then, even in these opening paragraphs, that Pope Benedict sets such a high standard of loving our neighbour as he addresses global themes of poverty and power. But without the fundamentals, subverting our sinful tendencies to the *truth* of God about *love*, we will never set off on the right track with regard to human co-operation and fraternity.

The Pope sees that it is quite within the competence of the Church to intervene in questions of development, since "integral human development," as he calls it, is so much greater than the technical aspects of human life:

"Authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension ... Without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing space. Enclosed within history, it runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth; humanity thus loses the courage to be at the service of higher goods, at the service of great and disinterested initiatives called forth by universal charity." (n. 11)

As he analyses the hopes of Pope Paul VI 40yrs earlier, he

sees that many things have changed in the world, sometimes, but not always, for the better. E.g. regarding global wealth:

21. Paul VI had an *articulated vision of development*. He understood the term to indicate the goal of rescuing peoples, first and foremost, from hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases and illiteracy. ... The economic development that Paul VI hoped to see was meant to produce real growth, of benefit to everyone and genuinely sustainable. It is true that growth has taken place, and it continues to be a positive factor that has lifted billions of people out of misery — recently it has given many countries the possibility of becoming effective players in international politics. Yet it must be acknowledged that this same economic growth has been and continues to be weighed down by *malfunctions and dramatic problems* ...

22. ... *The world's wealth is growing in absolute terms, but inequalities are on the increase*. In rich countries, new sectors of society are succumbing to poverty and new forms of poverty are emerging. In poorer areas some groups enjoy a sort of 'superdevelopment' of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation. 'The scandal of glaring inequalities' continues."

So, he says, "more than forty years after *Populorum Progressio*, its basic theme, namely progress, *remains an open question*. ... The principal new feature has been the explosion of worldwide interdependence, commonly known as 'globalization'." (n. 33) Such great opportunities for a rise

out of underdevelopment come out of this global interplay, and yet it is also fraught with difficulties if approached with selfishness and not with "charity in truth."

Into this economic mix, then, as the Encyclical continues, Pope Benedict starts to introduce richly theological/social themes, to combat the risk of a merely financial drive: themes such as gratuitousness, gift, fraternity, ethical finance, responsible procreation, people-centred ethics, stewardship over nature, human ecology, integrity of the family, morally responsible openness to life, ... (I could go on!). You see how rich is the Church's vision of a truly human/humane living that the Pope presents?

There is no way to do justice to the contents of this Encyclical Letter, but what I can hope to have done is to remind all of you of the deep humanity of Pope Benedict; and the even deeper and richer care for the whole of humanity that the Church holds to in each and every age. For those of you studying business, finance, development, international relations, and all those allied fields of study: why not go and read this document in its entirety, as it will provide a much-

needed balance to any merely secular approaches? — in fact, for degrees like yours, and as Catholics, I think it's a must!

Of all the countless passages I could quote to you from this wonderful Encyclical — and so many were really tempting! — this is the one I have chosen to end with:

78. Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is. In the face of the enormous problems surrounding the development of peoples, which almost make us yield to discouragement, we find solace in the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches us: "Apart from me you can do nothing" and then encourages us: "I am with you always, to the close of the age." As we contemplate the vast amount of work to be done, we are sustained by our faith that God is present alongside those who come together in his name to work for justice. Paul VI recalled in *Populorum Progressio* that man cannot bring about his own progress unaided, because by himself he cannot establish an authentic humanism. Only if we are aware of our calling, as individuals and as a community, to be part of God's family as his sons and daughters, will we be able to generate a new vision and muster new energy in the service of a truly integral humanism. The greatest service to development, then, is a Christian humanism that enkindles charity and takes its lead from truth, accepting both as a lasting gift from God. Openness to God makes us open towards our brothers and sisters and towards an understanding of life as a joyful task to be accomplished in a spirit of solidarity. ...

God's love calls us to move beyond the limited and the ephemeral, it gives us the courage to continue seeking and working for the benefit of all, even if this cannot be achieved immediately and if what we are able to achieve, alongside political authorities and those working in the field of economics, is always less than we might wish. God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, because he is our All, our greatest hope.