

PLACING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AT THE CENTRE OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the key innovation of Caritas in Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth) is Benedict XVI's placement of integral human development, rather than work, at the centre of the 'Christian social message' today.

He attributes this insight to Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On the Progress of Peoples), which he says "deserves to be considered 'the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age', shedding light upon humanity's journey towards unity"².

Benedict notes that until *Populorum Progressio*, the only social encyclical to be revisited and applied to contemporary circumstances in a commemorative encyclical was *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XII's landmark document on the condition of the working classes in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. *Rerum Novarum* is widely considered the beginning of systematic Catholic social teaching for the modern period, and it placed work at the centre of 'the social question'.

Benedict stresses the coherence of Catholic social teaching as a *corpus* or body of thought: "consistent and at the same time ever new", dynamically faithful to "a light received"³.

To place integral human development at the centre of the social message of Christianity is not to reject previous teaching on work as the key to a just society, but rather to understand work more deeply in its broader context today.

Access to decent work is a marker of a just society, however people are not only workers and their

fulfilment requires more than fair work relationships. Benedict points to a shift in the focus of Catholic social teaching away from insisting on the dignity and rights of workers in the context of an ideological struggle between unbridled capitalism and totalitarian socialism, towards asking how we might order society - locally and globally - so as to facilitate integral human development for all in a globalised world.

Benedict suggests that a human centred perspective on development is needed, and one that is grounded in the truth about being human. He also highlights the need for space within the economy for values such as love, gratuity, gift and solidarity.

DEVELOPMENT & TRUTH

Paul VI rejected a purely economic or material vision of development, introducing the expression integral human development into Catholic Social Teaching. He called for development of the whole person, of every person, and for all peoples⁴.

Such development must be open to the transcendent. This stance was underpinned by Paul's understanding of what it is to be a human being – his Christian anthropology. It is from Benedict's reflection on, and application of this vision of the human person to the field of development, that *Caritas in Veritate* takes its name – the basis of the encyclical is Benedict's understanding of the truth about being human.

Paul, and now Benedict, reminds us that every life is a vocation – we are made by God out of love and called to develop our God-given gifts, to grow as persons, and to seek our fulfilment⁵. Because we are a unity of body and soul, our development includes a spiritual dimension as well as the material, cultural and political dimensions.

¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n 13.

² CV, n 8.

³ CV, n 12.

⁴ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n 14.

⁵ PP, n 15; CV, n 16 - 17.

As social beings, our development is communal as well as personal and it takes place in the context of culture⁶.

As Paul points out, we can only grow and achieve our potential in the context of our relationships with others:

“We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries: for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us to enlarge the human family. The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty.⁷”

While this call to develop comes from beyond us and cannot be answered without reference to its source in God, it also requires of us an exercise of our God-given freedom, as Benedict notes:

“To regard *development as a vocation* is to recognise, on the one hand, that it derives from a transcendent call, and on the other hand that it is incapable, on its own, of supplying its ultimate meaning...

A vocation is a call that requires a free and responsible answer. *Integral human development presupposes the responsible freedom* of the individual and of peoples: no structure can guarantee this development over and above human responsibility.⁸”

Development is not just a matter of building the right structures and institutions.

Looking back, Benedict sees that the 1960's were overly optimistic. Too much hope was placed in institutions, leading Benedict to stress now that our fulfilment as human beings lies in knowing, loving and serving God⁹. To know the truth of who we are before God, creation, and others, is to acknowledge that all that we have, and are, and may become, is the gift of God not the product of our own efforts. It is to acknowledge that we are sisters and brothers to one another, and to accept our responsibility for the stewardship of creation.

The call to integral human development is a call to live as though the truth about being human were true.

⁶ PP, n 17.

⁷ PP, n 17.

⁸ CV, n 16 – 17.

⁹ CV, n 11.

A little over forty years after *Populorum Progressio*, in the wake of the global financial crisis, Benedict finds it timely to remind us that it is *not true* that:

- development is purely economic
- the fields of economics and finance lie outside the realm of morality
- the unfettered operation of markets can meet all human needs
- development is a purely technical or scientific problem
- better structures and institutions would be sufficient to ensure development for all
- human beings are rational maximisers of self interest
- altruism, generosity, heroism and love have no place in the market
- our own good can be effectively pursued without consideration of the good of other people, communities and generations
- creation does not have its own integrity which must be respected
- human ecology and natural ecology are not intimately linked
- humanity can achieve our own development ourselves.

LOVE & THE MARKET

The driving force of development is not economic self-interest, but love:

“Love – *caritas* – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth ... 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 being.¹⁰”

If we look at our world with open eyes we see that love, actually, is all around us - even in the economy.

¹⁰ CV, n 1.

Every day people donate money and volunteer in charities, they take jobs that pay less but fit their family life better, they choose 'green' and fair trade products. Altruism is empirically observable. Love is as perennial as the grass. Yet the dominant market model presumes that the pursuit of profit maximisation is our key motivation, and that development is primarily about having more rather than doing more or being more.

Benedict calls for a new model of development that gives greater space to gratuity and 'the logic of gift' within the market itself rather than focusing narrowly on 'the logic of exchange'¹¹. This goes beyond promoting commutative justice in the operation of markets and then later seeking to achieve distributive justice through political action as a second stage¹².

Room must be made for values other than profit maximisation within economic life.

Every aspect of the economy, at every stage, must become ethical, not just certain sectors¹³. Benedict encourages the development of hybrid forms of enterprise that transcend traditional public/private, market/State, and profit/not for profit divisions¹⁴. He sees the causes and potential solutions to the current crisis as being increasingly interconnected, requiring a holistic understanding and "a new humanistic synthesis"¹⁵. Benedict calls for a profound cultural renewal, a rediscovery of fundamental values on which to build a better future¹⁶.

THE PERSON AT THE CENTRE

Putting the person, rather than the economy, at the centre of development led Paul VI to see development in terms of moving from less human to more human conditions:

"Less human conditions: the lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essential for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness. Less human conditions: oppressive social structures, whether due to the abuses of ownership or to the abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions. Conditions that are more human: the passage from misery towards the

possession of necessities, victory over social scourges, the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture. Additional conditions that are more human: increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning towards the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace. Conditions that are still more human: the acknowledgement ... of supreme values, and of God their source and their finality. Conditions that, finally and above all, are more human: faith, a gift of God accepted by the goodwill of [the person], and unity in the charity of Christ, Who calls us all to share as sons [and daughters] in the life of the living God, the Father of all ..."¹⁷

Putting the person, rather than the global financial crisis or environmental limits, at the centre of development today led Benedict to extend John Paul II's concern to unite life ethics and social ethics:

*"Openness to life is at the centre of true development. When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for [humanity's] true good. If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of a new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable to society also wither away. The acceptance of life strengthens moral fibre and makes people capable of mutual help. By cultivating openness to life, wealthy peoples can better understand the needs of poor ones, they can avoid employing huge economic and intellectual resources to satisfy the selfish desires of their own citizens, and instead, they can promote virtuous action within the perspective of production that is morally sound and marked by solidarity, respecting the fundamental right to life of every people and every individual."*¹⁸

Development that is integral and directed to the human person cannot be served by an anti-life mentality.

While advocating sustainable development and respect for the integrity of creation, Benedict explicitly rejects approaches to environmental issues that would place the natural world above legitimate human needs:

"In nature, the believer recognises the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our

¹¹ CV, n 37.

¹² CV, n 35 – 36.

¹³ CV, n 45.

¹⁴ CV, n 38.

¹⁵ CV, n 21.

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ PP, n 21.

¹⁸ CV, n 28.

legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. ...it should also be stressed that it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person.^{19,20}

Here Benedict is building on John Paul II's reflections concerning responsibility for the environment and development²⁰ offered in the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concerns), which was issued for the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*.

WORK & A JUST SOCIETY

From the time of Rerum Novarum Catholic Social Teaching has seen work as the key to the 'social question'.

Leo XIII stressed the human dignity and rights of workers in the face of early capitalist exploitation while warning also that socialism was a false solution. In the face of ongoing competition between ideologies based on different visions of the person and of how the economy operates, Catholic teaching used work as the key to draw attention to what was happening to people and to relationships between groups in society. It called on employers and workers to treat each other fairly and on the State to intervene where necessary in order to safeguard the common good.

Work remains an essential part of the human person's vocation to develop, and of a society's efforts to promote the common good. Today decent work has become an international concern of the entire human family. The power of States and of labour organisations to influence work relationships has been diminished by the globalisation of markets, trade deregulation, outsourcing, and competition among States to attract international investment. New forms of political authority and of political participation are needed.

Safeguarding decent work in a globalised world requires action promoting the global common good²¹.

Decent work for all remains a measure of the justice of a society, but it is not the only measure. Decent work enables people to address the essential material dimension of development and also to grow

in skill, self-understanding and self-expression. It provides a way in which people can contribute to the common good. But the development of the whole person, and of peoples, requires more.

Decent work will support, and may be the occasion of, spiritual growth, but the freedom to be formed in and to practice one's faith, both privately and collectively in public, is also essential. Access to education, participation in political and cultural life, and the opportunity to take up one's duties too are needed for the development of the person and of peoples. The development of persons and of peoples requires respect for human rights in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

Integral human development relies on fundamental values and how they are expressed in the way in which we relate to each other, personally and collectively, in every dimension of life.

CONCLUSION

Benedict XVI has placed integral human development at the centre of Catholic Social Teaching for our times. In doing so he transcends old ideological struggles and the politics of blocs – Caritas in Veritate does not even mention capitalism or socialism.

Benedict focuses on the goal of human flourishing, questioning anything that hinders this objective. He insists that development be holistic and person-centred.

Integral human development must be grounded in the truth about being human: that we are made and loved by God, are sisters and brothers to one another, and are called to be wise stewards of creation.

Development is not simply an economic process: it is a call to respond to God's love.

¹⁹ CV, n 48.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n 34.

²¹ CV, n 63 – 64.