



For the common good

Reflections on Pope Benedict's encyclical
Caritas in Veritate

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About Progressio:

We are a progressive international charity with Catholic roots which tackles poverty by:

- Changing lives – through 100 highly-skilled people from around the world working with grassroots organisations in long term projects benefiting hundreds of thousands of poor and marginalised people in 11 developing countries
- Changing minds – by challenging structures and relationships that combine to keep people poor
- Mobilising people – to act, because every step, however small, helps to achieve lasting change.

Progressio is the new name of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, registered in the UK as a charity (number 294329) and a company (number 2002500).

Cover photo:

Solidarity in East Timor: Sister Guilhermina Marcal of the Canossian Convent in Dili, East Timor, with some of the East Timorese people forced to flee their homes during a period of political violence.

Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio

About the contributors:

Fr Jim O’Keefe is the Parish Priest at St Bede’s Denton Newcastle and is the Chair of the *livesimply* network.
Sr Pamela Hussey is a member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and a former staff member at Progressio.
Ellen Teague is part of the Columban Faith and Justice Team which produces *Vocation for Justice*, and is a freelance journalist.
Tim Aldred is Progressio’s Advocacy Manager.

About the encyclical:

The text of the encyclical is available at www.vatican.va
– click on ‘latest updates’.

Introduction

Many people think the Catholic Church is preoccupied with contraception, abortion and death. Yet beyond that sometimes self-inflicted stereotype there is hidden treasure – a centuries-old tradition of radical, progressive action and insight on matters of social justice.

I meet few people of faith or no faith – never mind Catholics – who are aware of the existence and extraordinary breadth of Catholic Social Teaching, delivered via Papal letters or encyclicals. Without doubt it is Catholicism’s best kept secret.

How about this from an encyclical from Pope Pius XI in 1931 in the wake of the 1929 financial crash. Addressing the “irresistible power” grabbed by trustees and directors of invested funds, he criticises their hold over credit which enables them to “supply the life-blood to the entire economic body, and grasping as it were, in their hands the very soul of the economy, so that no one dare breathe against their will.” In a plea for better regulation that could have been uttered in 2009, rather than nearly 80 years ago, the Pope declared that: “free competition, and especially economic domination, must be kept within definite and proper bounds, and must be brought under effective control of the public authority.”

In these times, as we face a loss of confidence in economic institutions and the political class, we need to hear a different analysis. There is a thirst for a voice of reason and realistic alternatives. Catholic Social Teaching could provide some answers. It talks about systems where people can be fully human, where global solidarity is put into practice and where the resources of the earth are used for the benefit of the common good, not the few.

All these points are in the recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (‘Love in Truth’) by Pope Benedict. It comes at a time when confidence in economic and political systems is at an all-time low, and we look for a system that goes beyond mere transactions, one to where people can be more fully human. That’s a central message of the Church’s Social Teaching. It’s also a central plank of Progressio’s work.

We have asked Fr Jim O’Keefe, Sr Pamela Hussey, Ellen Teague and Tim Aldred to give some thoughts on the key messages in the encyclical. I hope you enjoy these reflections on Pope Benedict’s first encyclical on social issues.

Christine Allen
Executive Director, Progressio

On love

“Love – *caritas* – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace.”
(para 1)

Pope Benedict's first encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* ('God is Love') was about Christian love, and he expands his message on the importance of love in *Caritas in Veritate*. The words of the opening paragraph of *Caritas in Veritate* will resonate with many of us. Do we need to hear anything more inspiring?

In writing about the need for love, the Pope draws deeply on the teaching in *Gaudium et Spes*: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, para 1)

Caritas in Veritate applies this teaching to present-day concerns, dealing with a series of contemporary crises in, to quote *The Tablet*, a “fusion of spirituality and social action under the banner of integral human development”. These are 21st century reflections in 21st century language. They will therefore be accessible to most people on our planet, making this encyclical relevant to everyone regardless of his or her own beliefs.

Sr Pamela Hussey

“Deeds without knowledge are blind, and knowledge without love is sterile...” (para 30)

Just because we can do things, doesn't mean we must. Whether it is in the area of 'genetic engineering' or technological advances in general, “when technology is allowed to take over,” as the Pope writes, “the result is confusion between ends and means, such that the sole criteria for action in business is thought to be the maximisation of profit, in politics the consolidation of power, and in science, the findings of research.” (para 71)

Fr Jim O'Keefe

On globalisation and global institutions

“As society becomes ever more globalised, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers...” (para 19)

Quite simply, the 'human family' is one family. There is no room for racism,

oppression, torture, wastage in relation to the arms trade or the maintenance of systems that enslave people in abject poverty.

Fr Jim O’Keefe

“There is a strongly felt need ... for a reform of the United Nations organisation, and likewise of economic institutions and international finance, so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth ... giving poorer nations an effective voice in shared decision-making.” (*para 67*)

These lines have a strong call. The power in global decision-making is not accountable to the poorest nations. Attendance at a G8 or G20 summit is by invitation, not right, and that means that most poor nations are excluded from the table – despite the fact that decisions taken will have massive implications for their economic future, for good or ill. The United Nations has the mandate but is too often toothless, while decisions are taken at the private members club of a G8 or G20. Benedict says clearly that this is no longer acceptable, and must stop.

Tim Aldred

For the Church

“The whole Church, in all her being and acting – when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity – is engaged in promoting integral human development ... authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension...” (*para 11*)

There never has been, nor can there be, a separation between the Gospel and political activity – if we believe in a God made flesh, we must be passionately concerned about the whole person and every person.

Fr Jim O’Keefe

On economics

“Business management cannot concern itself only with the interests of the proprietors, but must also assume responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of business: the workers, the clients, the supporters of various elements of production, the community of reference...” (*para 40*)

Christ’s teaching on greed is brought firmly into the boardroom. There is no room for greed or exploitation in the world of production. The shareholders are not the only concern: the wellbeing and livelihood of every single person is of the essence when it comes to any form of development.

Fr Jim O’Keefe

“The poor are not to be considered a burden, but a resource ... It is nevertheless erroneous to hold that the market economy has an inbuilt need for a quota of poverty and underdevelopment in order to function at its best.” (*para 35*)

This is an essential part of our understanding of God’s love for the poor and we all need to hold on to this truth. Every human being has a right to a dignified and fulfilled life, free of poverty. We must never accept that a ‘measure’ of human misery is ‘necessary’ for the greater good.

Tim Aldred

“Every economic decision has a moral consequence ... economic life needs just laws and forms of redistribution.” (*para 37*)

This deceptively simple statement speaks to the heart of the issue. Decisions taken on Wall Street or Canary Wharf can damage developing world economies, health and social security services, education, communities, livelihoods – and people. Bad economic decisions not only hurt people, they can kill. Economic decision-making does not exist in a technocratic bubble; it is intimately interconnected with people around the world, and has very real impacts. This is why the ethical values that we choose to adopt at the heart of our financial regulation and management structures are deep expressions of our care and concern for each other, and especially the poorest.

Tim Aldred

On the stewardship of creation

“The environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations, and towards humanity as a whole.” (*para 48*)

Too often, at present, humanity sees the environment as a threat, a danger to be tamed. How much more positive to see it as a gift, a shared inheritance, and then to understand our need to care for and steward it with responsibility.

Tim Aldred

“The whole of creation ... must not be bequeathed to future generations depleted of its resources. Human beings legitimately exercise a responsible stewardship over nature, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways.” (*para 50*)

These lines are a very clear statement of the integrity of the whole of creation. They

point to the need for every one of us to develop habits of life which respect this fact. If we cannot respect our planet, it is very unlikely that we will respect the people living on it.

Fr Jim O'Keefe

"The economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources [should be] recognised with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations: the protection of the environment, of resources, and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith." (*para 50*)

Benedict XVI is challenging governments to act with justice, and put in the resources required to tackle climate change and its effects. We must ask ourselves, what actions are we taking as active citizens to convince governments that we are not only prepared to accept, but are actually demanding, the hard choices that action on climate change could require?

Tim Aldred

"The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its lifestyle, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality, which can lead to the adoption of new lifestyles 'in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments'." (*para 51; quotation from Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus*)

The common destiny of people and planet is highlighted here, reminding us of the insight found in the nineteenth century testimony of the indigenous North American Chief Seattle that "whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth". There is also the suggestion that the earth will retaliate if abused, and indeed climate change has sometimes been described as the planet's response to human plunder of the natural world.

In industrial societies, such as Britain, human disregard of the environment is demonstrated by 'throw-away' lifestyles and rampant consumerism, with shopping emerging as a leisure activity. Here we have the strongest call yet by the Vatican that human society must review its understanding of development, discard destructive lifestyles and reduce carbon footprints. This is imperative because poor communities in the global South are already experiencing more drought, food insecurity and disasters because of global warming, deforestation, mining, loss of

biodiversity and soil erosion. The Vatican warns us not to be solely otherworldly in the practice of our faith, but to address earthly realities involving human and environmental justice.

Ellen Teague

On community and communion

“The theme of development can be identified with the inclusion-in-relation of all individuals and peoples within the one community of the human family, built in solidarity on the basis of the fundamental values of justice and peace. This perspective is illuminated in a striking way by the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity within the one divine Substance. The Trinity is absolute unity insofar as the three divine Persons are pure relationality. The reciprocal transparency among the divine Persons is total and the bond between each of them complete, since they constitute a unique and absolute unity. God desires to incorporate us into this reality of communion as well: “that they may be one even as we are one” (Jn 17:22). The Church is a sign and instrument of this unity. Relationships between human beings throughout history cannot but be enriched by reference to this divine model. In particular, in the light of the revealed mystery of the Trinity, we understand that true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration. This also emerges from the common human experiences of love and truth.” (*para 54*)

This paragraph on the Trinity is the fundamental teaching that we should reflect on.

Fr Jim O’Keefe

What now?

For us in Britain, Christian communities everywhere could sign up to the *livesimply* initiative, join Christian Ecology Link, and support the climate campaigns of CAFOD, Progressio and Operation Noah. Catholic parishes should strive to be eco-congregations and Catholic schools eco-schools. At a personal level, we could spend our money ethically, including a commitment to buying fairly traded products, and our investments could be ethical, informed by such organisations as the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility.

Ellen Teague

There is much more to discuss, and Progressio hopes that this short document can be the beginning of a conversation that helps us use this letter from the Pope in a positive way to help us all construct that world where we can all be more fully human, and achieve what the Pope calls integral development.