



## **The Pope on 'Love in Truth' \***

**Anyone seeking a repudiation of the market economy will be disappointed.**

**By ROBERT A. SIRICO**

In his much anticipated third encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Love in Truth), Pope Benedict XVI does not focus on specific systems of economics -- he is not attempting to shore up anyone's political agenda. He is rather concerned with morality and the theological foundation of culture. The context is of course a global economic crisis -- a crisis that's taken place in a moral vacuum, where the love of truth has been abandoned in favor of a crude materialism. The pope urges that this crisis become "an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future."

Yet his encyclical contains no talk of seeking a third way between markets and socialism. Words like greed and capitalism make no appearance here, despite press headlines following the publication of the encyclical earlier this week. People seeking a blueprint for the political restructuring of the world economy won't find it here. But if they look to this document as a means for the moral reconstruction of the world's cultures and societies, which in turn influence economic events, they will find much to reflect upon.

*Caritas in Veritate* is an eloquent restatement of old truths casually dismissed in modern times. The pope is pointing to a path neglected in all the talk of economic stimulus, namely a global embrace of truth-filled charity.

Benedict rightly attributes the crisis itself to "badly managed and largely speculative financial dealing." But he resists the current fashion of blaming all existing world problems on the market economy. "The Church," he writes, "has always held that economic action is not to be regarded as something opposed to society." Further: "Society does not have to protect itself from the market, as if the development of the latter were *ipso facto* to entail the death of authentically human relations."

The market is rather shaped by culture. "Economy and finance . . . can be used badly when those at the helm are motivated by purely selfish ends. Instruments that are good in themselves can thereby be transformed into harmful ones. But it is man's darkened reason that produces these consequences, not the instrument *per se*. Therefore it is not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility."

The pope does not reject globalization: "Blind opposition would be a mistaken and prejudiced attitude, incapable of recognizing the positive aspects of the process, with the consequent risk of missing the chance to take advantage of its many opportunities for development." He says that "the world-wide diffusions of prosperity should not . . . be held up by projects that are protectionist." More, not less, trade is needed: "the principal form of assistance needed by developing countries is that of allowing and encouraging the gradual penetration of their products into international markets."

The encyclical doesn't attack capitalism or offer models for nations to adopt. "The Church does not have technical solutions to offer," the pope firmly states, "and does not claim 'to interfere in any way in the politics of States.' She does, however, have a mission of truth to accomplish, in every time and circumstance . . ." Benedict is profoundly aware that economic science has much to contribute to human betterment. The Church's role is not to dictate the path of research but to focus its goals. "Economic science tells us that structural insecurity generates anti-productive attitudes wasteful of human resources. . . . *Human costs always include economic costs*, and economic dysfunctions always involve human costs."

He constantly returns to two practical applications of the principle of truth in charity. First, this principle takes us beyond earthly demands of justice, defined by rights and duties, and introduces essential moral priorities of generosity, mercy and communion -- priorities which provide salvific and theological value. Second, truth in charity is always focused on the common good, defined as an extension of the good of individuals who live in society and have broad social responsibilities. As for issues of population, he can't be clearer: "To consider population increase as the primary cause of underdevelopment is mistaken, even from an economic point of view."

Several commentators have worried about his frequent calls for wealth redistribution. Benedict does see a role for the state here, but much of the needed redistribution is the result of every voluntary and mutually beneficial exchange. To understand such passages fully and accurately, we do well to put our political biases on the shelf.

This encyclical is a theological version of his predecessor's more philosophical effort to anchor the free economy's ethical foundation. Much of it stands squarely with a long tradition of writings of a certain "classical liberal" tradition, one centered on the moral foundation of economics, from St. Thomas Aquinas and his disciples, Frederic Bastiat in the 19th century, Wilhelm Roepke, and even the secular F.A. Hayek in the 20th century. It also clearly resonates with some European Christian democratic thought.

*Caritas in Veritate* is a reminder that we cannot understand ourselves as a human community if we do not understand ourselves as something more than the sum of our material parts; if we do not understand our capacity for sin; and if we do not understand the principle of communion rooted in the gratuitousness of God's grace. Simply put, to this pope's mind, there is no just or moral system without just and moral people.

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