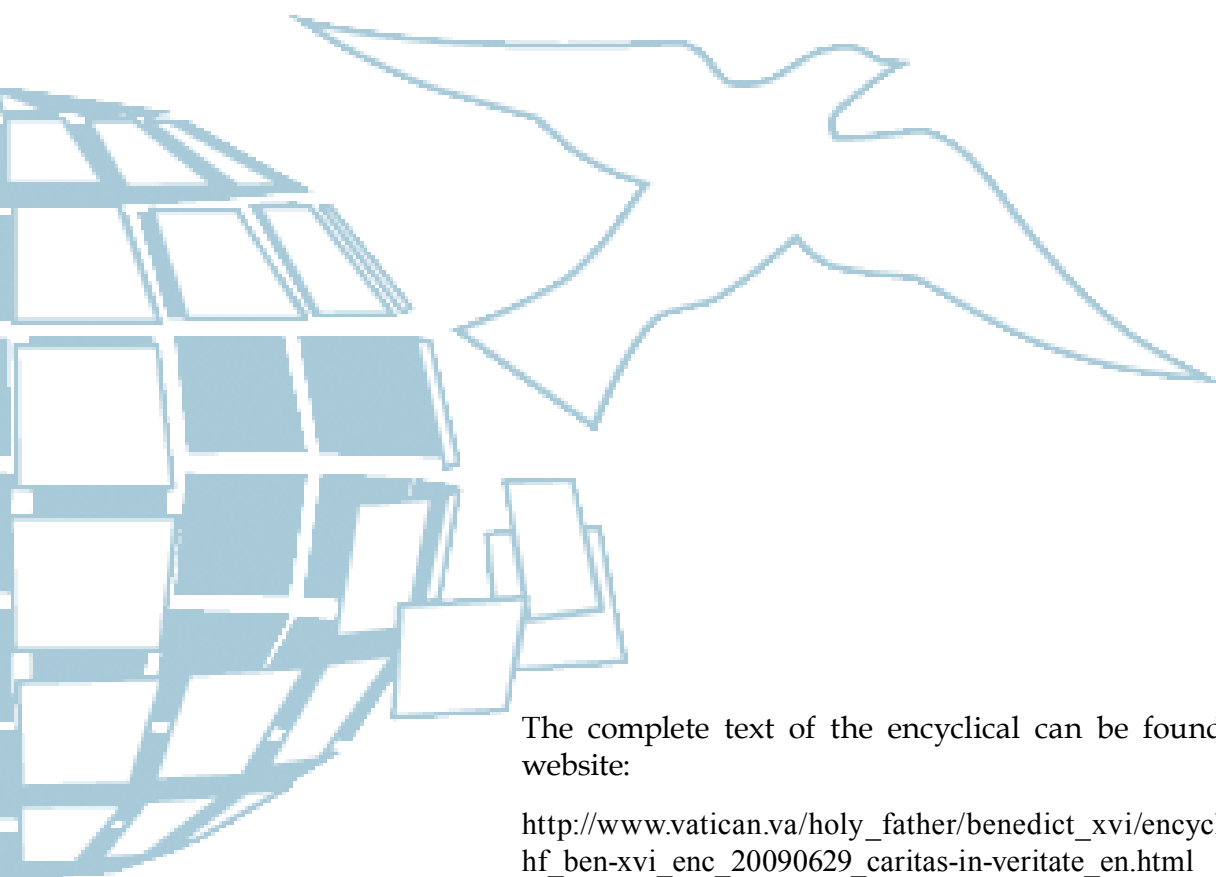


ACSJC Discussion Guide: Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate*

Pope Benedict XVI issued the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*) on 29 June 2009. The encyclical addresses the challenges of an increasingly globalised world: the growing gap between the poorest and the richest, consumerism focused on 'having more' rather than 'being more', a financial crisis born of a morality that is not centred on humanity, and the search for a way of using earth's resources wisely and economically.

Pope Benedict's encyclical begins with a meditation on love and charity – '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' (n 1). Charity, the synthesis of the entire Law, is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine, and 'only in truth can charity shine forth ... Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity' (n 3). The introduction also points to two fundamental aspects of that doctrine: justice and the common good.

Underpinning Pope Benedict's treatment of secular crises in the economic, social and political fields is an extensive theological appreciation of our personal relationship with God and with each other.



The complete text of the encyclical can be found at the Vatican website:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html

The Pope speaks of **'the astonishing experience of gift'**.

The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension. (n 34)

'Because it is a gift received by everyone, charity in truth is a force that builds community, it brings all people together without imposing barriers or limits,' Pope Benedict says (n 34).

Pope Benedict's inspiration for this document is the 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI. Benedict speaks of Paul VI's broad-ranging and inclusive vision of **development** – a concept that includes the active participation of all people, their access to education and the development of democratic society that can ensure freedom and peace.

1. LOOKING AT TODAY'S WORLD

The Pope paints a complex picture of today's world, one in which there is a **'scandal of glaring inequalities'** between rich and poor. 'Corruption and illegality are unfortunately evident in the conduct of the economic and political class in rich countries, both old and new, as well as in poor ones.'

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 ... Yet it must be acknowledged that this same economic growth has been and continues to be weighed down by malfunctions and dramatic problems, highlighted even further by the current crisis. (n 21)

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. (n 22)

The systems of social welfare that do exist are finding it hard to pursue their goals of true social justice. The global market has stimulated

a search for areas in which to outsource production at low cost with a view to reducing the prices of many goods, increasing purchasing power and thus accelerating the rate of development in terms of greater availability of consumer goods for the domestic market. (n 25)

Nations are now competing to attract foreign businesses by offering favourable financial arrangements and deregulating labour markets, which in general has led to 'a downsizing of social security systems' (n 25). This leads to erosion of workers' rights and other human rights, and the decay of the solidarity we have traditionally come to expect.

The world needs 'a profoundly new way of understanding business enterprise'. Where businesses are responsible only to their investors, their social value is limited. Outsourcing of production 'can weaken the company's sense of responsibility towards ... the workers, the suppliers, the consumers, the natural environment and broader society' (n 40). There are potentially more material resources for rescuing people from poverty, but those resources have ended up largely in the hands of people from developed countries, who have benefited more from liberalisation and globalisation.

Globalisation's effects are not just material: it also has cultural effects in the increasing interconnection of peoples. Pope Benedict calls for 'a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence' (n 42). In a chapter

on the human family, Pope Benedict says that isolation is ‘one of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience’ (n 53). He points out that prosperous societies do not necessarily lead to authentic development, as we can see from the prevalence of drugs and lack of hope that so many experience. Lack of respect for human life – from conception to its natural end – is undermining the development of peoples.

Development is closely related to **our relations with the natural environment**. Nature ‘expresses a design of love and truth’, a gift of the Creator.

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. (n 48)

Energy resources, which are often found in poorer countries but stockpiled by richer ones, often give rise to exploitation and conflict (n 50).

Desertification and the decline in productivity in some agricultural areas are also the result of impoverishment and underdevelopment among their inhabitants ... Moreover, how many natural resources are squandered by wars! (n 51)

2. WHAT DO THESE OBSERVATIONS MEAN?

Charity, says Pope Benedict, is ‘the synthesis of the entire law’ (Mt 22:36–40) and is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine (n 2). Without a spiritual perspective, human progress ‘runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth’. He cites Pope Paul VI’s words: ‘**The vocation to progress drives us to “do more, know more and have more in order to be more.”**’ (n 18)

The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side. (n 53)

We need to ensure that our economic choices do not increase the inequality in wealth and that we work towards the goal of access to employment for all. In fact, the economy itself is damaged by social inequality. When (for example) we lower the standards of protection for workers, it is at the expense of lasting development (n 32).

The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly – not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centred. (n 45)

The market is governed by *commutative justice* (which deals with contract and legal liability). The Church, however, teaches that *distributive* and *social justice* also have a vital place in the market economy (n 35). **The market must not become ‘the place where the strong subdue the weak’** (n 36): it is false to claim that ‘the market economy has an inbuilt need for a quota of poverty and underdevelopment in order to function at its best’ (n 35).

Without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function. And today it is this trust which has ceased to exist, and the loss of trust is a grave loss. (n 35)

‘Profit is useful if it serves as a means towards an end,’ the Pope says, but it is not an end in itself. ‘Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty’ (n 21).

3. THE TASKS WE FACE

Pope Benedict says that the current crisis obliges us 'to re-plan our journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment' (n 21).

In doing this, the Pope reminds us of the **central importance of 'the human person in his or her integrity'**, who is 'the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life' (n 25).

Development also raises the issue of **respect for and acceptance of life**. 'Openness to life is at the centre of true development'; a society denying or suppressing life cannot find the 'motivation and energy to strive for man's true good' (n 28).

Hunger still 'reaps enormous numbers of victims' throughout the world, and eliminating it is a basic requirement for safeguarding the world's peace and stability. It still exists not because of any material shortage but because we lack a 'network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water' (n 27).

The natural environment, God's gift to everyone, is bound up with the concept of development. 'In our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole' (n 48). 'The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa' (n 51). It is the task of the developed nations to lower their use of scarce or non-renewable resources. This is not something that can be 'left in the hands of whoever is first to claim the spoils, or whoever is able to prevail over the rest' (n 49).

Pope Benedict also emphasises that solidarity with poorer developing countries 'can point towards a solution of the current global crisis'. In fact, he suggests, **we can help alleviate the global crisis** by solidarity with and support for economically poor countries, and in turn generate true economic growth and help sustain the productive capacities of rich countries (n 27).

He also calls for space in the market for people or organisations that are **not primarily motivated by pure profit**, 'without sacrificing the production of economic value in the process' (n 37). Beyond that, we need a place in our relationships for free acts of charity and solidarity that are neither 'giving in order to acquire (the logic of exchange)' nor 'giving through duty (the logic of public obligation)' (n 39). The Pope also calls for a system that avoids speculation only for short-term profit (n 40).

It is necessary to correct the malfunctions, some of them serious, that cause new divisions between peoples and within peoples, and also to ensure that the redistribution of wealth does not come about through the redistribution or increase of poverty. (n 42)

The misuse of finance has wreaked havoc: now finance needs to go back to being 'an instrument directed towards improved wealth creation and development' (n 65).

Financiers must rediscover the genuinely ethical foundation of their activity. (n 65)

The Pope refers to the responsibility of the investor and calls for '**new forms of finance**, designed to support development projects', including the strengthening and refining of micro-finance.

The Church's social doctrine has always maintained that justice must be applied to every phase of

economic activity, because this is always concerned with man and his needs ... Thus every economic decision has a moral consequence. (n 37)

Turning to the subject of **international aid**, Pope Benedict points out that such aid can sometimes 'lock people into a state of dependence' and even give rise to oppression and exploitation. **Development aid is a way of creating wealth for all** (n 60). Such aid must not pursue secondary objectives and must involve the government and people of the country it is intended to help (n 58). The Pope also mentions that among those in developed nations there is a fear of imports from poorer nations. He stresses that for those poorer countries,

the possibility of marketing their products is very often what guarantees their survival in both the short and long term. Just and equitable international trade in agricultural goods can be beneficial to everyone, both to suppliers and to customers. (n 58)

Access to education, too, is essential for effective international cooperation. (n 61)

Migration is a social phenomenon that Pope Benedict describes as 'of epoch-making proportions'. He calls for international norms that will safeguard both migrants and the host countries.

[F]oreign workers ... make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labour, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these labourers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. (n 62)

He reminds us of Pope John Paul's support for the strategy of the International Labour Organisation and his appeal for a global coalition in favour of 'decent work':

work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labour; work that permits the workers to organise themselves freely ... (n 63)

All these issues foreshadow Pope Benedict's call for the **reform of the United Nations and international economic and financial institutions** 'so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth'. He refers to the responsibility to protect and give the poorer nations 'an effective voice in shared decision-making' in the interests of 'the development of all peoples in solidarity' (n 67).

'**Development must include not just material growth but also spiritual growth**', the Pope says. To meet these challenges we need more than technology. The development of individuals and peoples

requires new eyes and a new heart, capable of rising above a materialistic vision of human events, capable of glimpsing in development the 'beyond' that technology cannot give. By following this path, it is possible to pursue the integral human development that takes its direction from the driving force of charity in truth. (n 77)

In his conclusion, Pope Benedict reminds us that we cannot achieve this vision by ourselves.

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. (n 78)

FOR REFLECTION

Development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family. (n 53)

Development requires attention to the spiritual life, a serious consideration of the experiences of trust in God, spiritual fellowship in Christ, reliance upon God's providence and mercy, love and forgiveness, self-denial, acceptance of others, justice and peace. All this is essential if 'hearts of stone' are to be transformed into 'hearts of flesh' (Ezek 36:26). (n 79)

FOR DISCUSSION

What is *Caritas in Veritate*, charity in truth?

What is your experience of the extraordinary force of love as motivating and enabling?

Globalisation has increased the interconnection of people, yet isolation is named as a form of poverty. What is your understanding of this contradiction?

What would society be like if the common good was our goal?

What changes would we need to make to change our focus from 'having more' to 'being more'?

How can the human person be 'the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life'?

What changes in my lifestyle do I need to make?

building
social justice
networks

researching
policy

educating
on issues

presenting
Catholic teaching

promoting
a spirituality of
justice

advocating
change

LET US PRAY

God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth

You are both *Agápe* and *Lógos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word.

Love is your greatest gift to us. It is your promise and our hope.

Rejoicing in this truth,
we acknowledge that love is the synthesis of the entire Law
and the creative force which leads us to opt
for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace.

Responding to the call for truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*,
we turn to you, relying upon your providence and mercy,
love and forgiveness,
to recognise the divine image in the other,
the transcendent dimension in the human person.

Transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

Inspired by *Caritas in Veritate*

© Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This Australian Catholic Social Justice Council discussion guide may be reproduced in its entirety with appropriate permission and acknowledgement.

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Phone 02 8306 3499

Fax 02 8306 3498

Email admin@acsjc.org.au

Website www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

PO Box 7246 Alexandria NSW 2015

