

## Homily for the Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B) (09/08/09)

### A Summary of The Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*

This letter sets out to consider human development, but it goes far beyond mere political and economic issues. For the Pope human development cannot just be about improving political and economic conditions throughout the world; real development requires attention to the whole person, to enabling every person to become more truly human, more truly themselves, and while political and economic improvements are a part of this, they are certainly not the whole (11). This is the first important point: just making people richer, or making them politically freer, will not on its own make them more fully human, or even more happy. **'If it does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development'** (18). Fundamental to the Pope's vision of development is its inclusion of the divine. Without God all I see in front of me is another creature; if I recognise the divine image in the person in front of me, my approach to them will be far richer, more profound, more human (11,18).

This is why the Pope insists that charity, love, which is the driving power behind real human living, given that God is love and we are made in God's image, charity can only really bear fruit if it is allied to truth. **'Without truth charity degenerates into sentimentality'** (3). Truth allows me to escape from my own opinions, from the limitations of being tied to one historical time and one geographical place (4). If there is no sense of values, of what is true, social action has lots of power but no direction; love is the power but truth is the steering which prevents love merely serving the interests of the most powerful or those with the loudest voices (5).

The Pope makes the point that charity goes beyond justice: justice means I give you what is really yours; charity means I give you what is really mine. There can be no charity without justice - I cannot give you what is mine if I withhold what is actually yours (6). Fundamental to true development is a deeper sense of brotherhood, yet as the world shrinks we seem if anything more fragmented, more isolated: **'As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers'** (19).

The Pope's vision of development is strongly focussed on human beings. It would be possible to take an approach that made political ideology, or technology, or knowledge, or financial success the overriding principle of ones actions, the guiding light that influenced every decision, but the Pope rejects any such approach. Really this is the central point, that the Pope returns to again and again. Financial profits are good, but only if they serve the common good rather than promoting inequality (21); technological progress is good, but on its own it is not enough because without reference to some values it becomes just another tool for the powerful to exploit the weak (23). Knowledge, especially in the sense of scientific advances, is all very well so long as the question 'what can we do' is always tied to the question 'what should we do'. **'Human knowledge is insufficient'** (30) and if scientific advances are to help real development, **the development of the whole person and the whole of humanity, they must be allied to charity in truth. 'Moral evaluation and scientific research must go hand in hand'** (31). True development is centred on people. **'The primary**

**capital to be safeguarded is man, the human person in his or her integrity'** (25). Yet life is fragile, and in some cases the lack of simple necessities such as food and water mean it is extremely insecure; more than this, lack of food and water represents a real threat to world peace, so in addition to our individual belief that people should not starve, the Pope suggests that it is 'necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings' (27).

Of course, this letter was written in the context of a major economic crisis, and it takes some pains to refer to this. Many people began to read the letter by scouring it for signs that it favoured capitalism, or that it favoured socialism, but in fact it does neither, and people who are only interested in such a division miss all the things that really matter. It is true that the Pope talks about economics and the market, but once more it is in the context of the question: what promotes the flourishing (in the widest sense) of all human people. He looks at the question of globalization, the breaking down of borders, and asks us to see this as a chance to see beyond competing interests, and to see the world not as lots of (rather artificial) little states, but as a single human family: 'a sustained commitment is needed so as to promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence' (42). So he can say '**the market is the economic institution that permits encounter between persons'** (35), that is to say they can meet and interact in a way that fulfils the needs of all parties, but he also says that '**the market is not, and must not become, the place where the strong subdue the weak'** (36). Pure commercial logic alone is not enough because our sinful nature inclines us to greed, so there needs to be political activity from governments that ensures the market is just, and is aimed at promoting the common good. We must not forget that '**every economic decision has a moral consequence'** (37). But charity requires a further step: the market suggests we give in order to acquire; the state demands that we give through duty; if this is as far as it goes humanity is impoverished because they lose sight of charity, free giving with no motive at all, giving based on human solidarity (39).

The Pope recognises that there have been attempts in recent times to come up with forms of trade and investment that are based on ethical considerations. But he points out that if this is to make any real difference those ethics must be people-centred, and here he returns to the theme that he pursues throughout the letter (45). The Church's moral vision can be very helpful here because it is based on man being created in the image and likeness of God, which means that every human being has an inviolable dignity, and there are therefore some moral truths that simply cannot be ignored.

The Pope talks about international aid, and once again he focusses this firmly on the human person. '**The principal concern must be to improve the actual living conditions of the people in a given region, thus enabling them to carry out those duties which their poverty does not presently allow them to fulfil'** (47). This cannot be separated from the issue of care for the environment, because '**The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa'** (51). This is one of the letter's more controversial points. There is a certain 'givenness' about human life, about respect for life and death, about respect for the unborn and the sick, and if we show no care for these issues, if we feel we can simply do as we please with no respect for the givenness of humanity, we will never learn to

respect the givenness of the natural world. **'Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person'** (51). People will never learn to respect the environment if they are not taught to respect the human person. We need to consider seriously our life-style, and to turn away from an individualistic pleasure-seeking towards a way of living based on solidarity and civic friendship, because the alternative is increasingly wasteful of resources and destructive of the environment.

A whole chapter in the letter is entitled 'The cooperation of the human family'. He recognises that isolation is one of the deepest forms of poverty, because man is a spiritual being and so he is defined by interpersonal relations: **'It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God'** (53). So, **'The development of people depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family'** (53). Development requires that all people be included in the human family, a family based on justice, solidarity and peace (**'how many natural resources are squandered by wars!** (51)). The Pope acknowledges that globalisation impacts on religion, too. Religious traditions formerly separated by distance and culture now come into contact with one another. While religion is essential to the fullest form of development, not all religions are equal (55) and some stand in the way of authentic human development, so that they need to be judged against the criteria of love and truth. Reason needs to be purified by faith, but religion also needs to be purified by reason (56).

The Pope is very anxious that development, globalization, and international solidarity should not become just another form of imperialism. **'Technologically advanced societies must not confuse their own technological development with a presumed cultural superiority'** (59). There is a danger that we try to export to other cultures our own ideas and prejudices in a way that is deeply destructive. So economic aid must not be tied to secondary objectives, and nor must it be used simply to ensure that other countries remain poor and dependent on us. There is no virtue in sending aid to poor countries if we are also effectively preventing them from selling their goods to us. We must balance solidarity (our generous help to others) with subsidiarity (enabling recipients to take responsibility for their own growth, free from our interference). The Pope also touches on the importance of broadening access to education, which is essential to **'the complete formation of the person'** (61), on international tourism that is directed to promoting mutual understanding more than on exploitation and pleasure-seeking (61), on a reasoned and less defensive approach to the question of migration (62) and on the link between poverty and unemployment. People need 'decent work', that is, amongst other things, **'work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman ... work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, ... work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level'** (63). The Pope also addresses the power of the consumer, who exercises considerable influence by what they decide to buy or not buy: **'It is good for people to realise that purchasing is always a moral - and not simply economic - act'** (66). Shopping brings with it a social responsibility.

On a more controversial note, the Pope calls for a reform of the United Nations which will give it real teeth as an instrument of the family of nations (67). He is concerned that without some international authority the globalised world will simply be controlled by the most powerful nations, but at the same time it has to be said that in

the past the UN has not only failed to produce a vision of global solidarity such as the Pope calls for, but it has actively undermined it; any renewed United Nations would need to establish its moral credentials before it could seriously address the issues the Pope raises.

At the end of the letter the Pope returns to the issue of technology, which has the ability either to liberate humanity from so many of the limitations and frustrations of life, or to enslave us. The Pope has no doubt about the benefits technology can bring. He sees it as a **'response to God's command to till and keep the land'** that enables us to improve our conditions of life (69). But it is dangerous if we assume that anything possible is always acceptable. It is dangerous **where 'too much attention is given to the 'how' questions, and not enough to the 'why' questions underlying human activity'** (70). Real development, that enriches human life, requires us to stop and think not just about what we might be able to do, but also about what human life is really all about. Technology can either make us more human, or less human, and if we lose sight of this there is a danger it will do the latter by default. Politicians, financiers, scientists all rightly look for new ways of acting, new possibilities, but if they do this without regard to morality and the pursuit of the common good, they risk impoverishing humanity (while perhaps enriching themselves in the short term) rather than promoting it. It is perhaps not surprising that the Pope turns, here to the field of bioethics. We have set about making decisions about who is, or is not, human and worthy of respect as a human being. In a sense issues such as abortion and euthanasia have dulled our senses so that we have come to believe that some human beings can be treated as if they were not really human. This has had serious consequences, because it means we are tempted to lose sight of the humanity of the poor and the starving. Once I feel I am free to decide who is and isn't human, I find it very easy to write people off. **'While the poor of the world continue knocking on the doors of the rich, the world of affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing those knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human'** (75).

The Pope ends his letter with a call for Christians to take a lead in promoting authentic development, that is to say in promoting a really human centred approach to helping people throughout the world develop their full potential. People must be placed at the centre of our struggle to renew the world, not in order to edge God out, but because people are made in God's image and likeness; people matter because they are a reflection of the divine, not because they can replace him. **'Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is'** (78). Christians realise that they have received love-filled truth from God; it is not alien to us, but it is a part of who we are; so it is not something alien to finance, or politics, or science, it is an integral part of what they are all about, and if those disciplines try to operate without reference to this love in truth, they become our masters rather than our servants, and so they will eventually enslave us.

*Underlined passages omitted in version preached at mass, for reasons of brevity*