

Baking Bricks for Babel?*

DOUGLAS FARROW

McGill University

Montreal, Canada

WHEN *Caritas in Veritate* appeared last year, some readers wondered whether they had mistakenly picked up a copy of the latest white paper from UNESCO. Was it really the pope who was calling for “a worldwide redistribution of energy resources” (§49) and other such monumental exercises in central planning? Was it indeed Benedict XVI—he who once invoked Hugh Benson’s *Lord of the World* to dampen enthusiasm for a new world order—who was now speaking of the “urgent need of a true world political authority” to give “concrete reality” to the idea of the family of nations (§67)? Could he have become a proponent of world government after all? Must he be numbered among those whom his namesake, Benedict XV, had frowned upon (in *Bonum sane*) for seeking *l’avvento di una certa repubblica universale*? And did he actually suppose that such an authority as he envisioned could arise, in any satisfactory form, from a retooling of the United Nations?

While this encyclical contains several controversial proposals, it should be no surprise that the proposal in §67 captured much attention, especially in North America. Talk of a world economic and political authority—one “vested with the effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for rights”—makes freedom-loving people uneasy, however laudable the ends in view. International problems no doubt require international solutions, as John XXIII asserts in *Pacem in Terris*; but unhappy experience with global organizations—especially those operating under the aegis of the United Nations to promote “solutions” that

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fundamentally contradict Catholic teaching—has made the faithful wary, both on this continent and around the world. Many doubt that a new global authority “with real teeth” (as the English translators have it) would prove a just and beneficent suzerain, wielding its power with modesty and restraint. Most likely it would do what nation-states have already begun to do: defy natural law, undercut genuine liberty, overwhelm citizens and peoples by re-engineering their social, civic, and religious life. Besides, is not the Church itself, as Benson tried to depict in his novel, the *réalité concrète* that God has given to the concept of the family of nations? Is it not, as Ambrose claimed, the form that justice takes? What would a world political authority be but a secularist—or perhaps some day an Islamist—competitor to the Church, intent on imposing on her its own very different concepts of security, justice, and rights? What would its supreme leader be (for it must surely have one) but a kind of anti-pope?

Questions such as these deserve to be asked, and we must not be shy of asking them. Nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to read *Caritas in Veritate* as an ill-considered venture into the realm of international problems that offers naïve and dangerous solutions. At work in this encyclical, as elsewhere in Benedict’s writings, is a profound theological vision of the human vocation and destiny. If we do not take the trouble to grasp that, we cannot hope to grasp the meaning of the proposals he makes, in the matter of governance or any other matter. These proposals arise, as I hope to show, from a vision that is bound to respect and encourage the impulse towards human unity that international organizations may represent; but they are also tempered by a keen awareness of the difference between true and false unity. They comprise a warning as well as an invitation. The biggest challenge that faces the reader of *Caritas*, and the Christian in the age of globalization, is to get this dialectic right.

The Call for Global Governance

The term “world government,” we should note immediately, does not appear in the new encyclical; nor for that matter in *Populorum Progressio*, whose larger theme—development—Benedict is expounding. Neither did it appear in *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the first encyclical to call for a form of global governance. Oliver O’Donovan observes that John XXIII’s model of global authority was, *mutatis mutandis*, “more papal than imperial,” which is also to say that it preserved the notion of a free association of nations: “What was needed was not world government, but a seat of judgment that could declare international right with sufficient authority to strengthen the aspirations for peace among independent political communities. ‘This public authority,’ as John XXIII put it, ‘having world-

wide power and endowed with the proper means for the effective pursuit of its objective, which is the universal common good in concrete form, must be set up by common accord and not imposed by force.’”¹

O’Donovan himself offers a theoretical basis for such a seat in *The Ways of Judgment*, but warns against any breach of eschatological reserve that would lead beyond formal international cooperation to actual world government. The very idea of world government, short of the kingdom of God, rests on a false abstraction; that is, on an international “community” that is not in fact a community in the true political sense, and cannot legitimately be governed as if it were.² “The role of international authority,” he insists, must therefore remain “an ancillary one, though not for that reason of less importance,” or less real, than the independent authority of the peoples or nations who combine to exercise it.³

Even in circles where theology does not feature in the discussion, the term “global governance” is generally preferred to “world government.”⁴ That is because it has not proved easy to overcome the practical objections already raised by Kant. Though he famously desired a universal *civitas gentium*, he recognized that it would be difficult to get much beyond “an enduring and gradually expanding federation likely to prevent war.”⁵ For his part, John speaks of “a public authority which is in a position to operate in an effective manner on a world-wide basis” (§137). “The moral order itself,” he tells us, “demands that such a form of public authority be

¹ *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 217, quoting *Pacem in Terris* §138.

² “World government is an abstract idea: the government of a people with no internal relations of mutual recognition. A people with no relations has no identity, and the government of those with no identity has no legitimacy” (ibid., 214).

³ Ibid., 218.

⁴ World government is taken to entail, at a minimum, “compulsory peaceful settlement of all disputes by third-party decision in accordance with law; general and complete disarmament at the state and regional levels; a global legislative capacity backed up by enforcement capabilities; and some form of centralized leadership” (Richard Falk, *On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995], 7). But at this minimum—give or take state disarmament—world government and global governance may be difficult to distinguish.

⁵ *Perpetual Peace*, Section II, Second Definitive Article. Cf. John Rawls, who in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 36, claims to “follow Kant’s lead . . . in thinking that a world government—by which I mean a unified political regime with the legal powers normally exercised by central governments—would either be a global despotism or else would rule over a fragile empire torn by frequent civil strife as various regions and peoples tried to gain their political freedom and autonomy.”

established.”⁶ Yet this demand is indeed a qualified one. Not only are nations right “in their reluctance to submit to an authority imposed by force, established without their co-operation, or not accepted of their own accord” (§138), but “the same principle of subsidiarity which governs the relations between public authorities and individuals, families and intermediate societies in a single State, must also apply to the relations between the public authority of the world community and the public authorities of each political community. It is no part of the duty of universal authority to limit the sphere of action of the public authority of individual States, or to arrogate any of their functions to itself. On the contrary, its essential purpose is to create world conditions in which the public authorities of each nation, its citizens and intermediate groups, can carry out their tasks, fulfill their duties and claim their rights with greater security” (§140f.).

In *Populorum Progressio* (1967), however, these qualifications move into the background as issues of economic justice and international development move into the foreground. War on war requires war on misery. “The world is sick,” and its sickness consists in large part of a failure to take seriously the solidarity of the race and the progress of all its peoples. That will require, *inter alia*, the kind of international collaboration that will issue finally in a universally recognized order of justice. “Who can fail to see the need and importance of thus gradually coming to the establishment of a world authority capable of taking effective action on the juridical and political planes?” asks Paul VI.⁷ Some, he allows, “would regard these hopes as vain flights of fancy,” but he chides them with the following rejoinder: “It may be that these people are not realistic enough, and that they have not noticed that the world is moving rapidly in a certain direction. Men are growing more anxious to establish closer ties of brotherhood; despite their ignorance, their mistakes, their offenses, and even their lapses into barbarism and their wanderings from the path of salvation, they are slowly making their way to the Creator, even without adverting to it” (§79).

Whatever this world authority might look like, there is an important shift here in the terms of the debate. Establishment of such an authority is

⁶ The *Catechism* explains at §1911 (quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, §84): “Human interdependence is increasing and gradually spreading throughout the whole world. The unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy natural dignity, implies a *universal common good*. This good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to ‘provide for the different needs of men; this will involve the sphere of social life to which belong questions of food, hygiene, education . . . and certain situations arising here and there, as for example . . . alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world, and assisting migrants and their families.’”

⁷ §78 (quoting remarks made earlier in New York to the United Nations).

not merely a practical necessity, backed by moral reason, but something related to the maturation of the race, backed by theological reason. Paul, building on *Gaudium et Spes*, leans even more heavily than John on the notion of universal brotherhood, stressing the ontic dimensions of global community as well as its moral necessity. Which begs the question: What in principle is to prevent such an authority, if founded on the idea of universal brotherhood and on a theory of providence or progress, from passing over—as supranationalist utopians desire—into world government? It is one thing to say, as O'Donovan does, that “Christians, if they are wise, will understand upholding international authority as a duty of practical political reason in obedience to the hope of the Gospel”;⁸ it is quite another to lend credence to what he calls “secular millennial hopes,” as Paul VI appears to do. Peace, he says, “is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men (§76).”

The call for global governance in these encyclicals is prescriptive not descriptive, leaving doubts on many points. Of John we might want to ask: Are today's problems really so different from yesterday's? Might there be other ways to address them than to create a global authority? From what or from whom is this authority to be derived? How will it be constituted and maintained? By what will it be restrained? Could it create greater problems than it solves? But of Paul we must ask: Is this reading of history (which seems to owe more than a little to the optimism of Lessing and Kant) a sound reading? What are we to make of the propensity of man, especially modern technological man, to “wander from the path of salvation” and to lapse into barbarism? New killing fields in Europe, Africa, and Asia; acts of terrorism on every continent; the rise of atheism and the return of militant Islam; despair and demographic suicide in the West; fifty million abortions annually, both voluntary and coerced, not to mention other egregious signs of a broken moral compass—does all this not suggest a more sober assessment of modern man? And if of modern man, then also of his readiness to shoulder the burden of global governance?

Paul VI, of course, was sober enough. The progress for which he hoped, he hoped against hope. Certainly he understood “the weaknesses of the ideologies” and the siren songs of the utopias, the danger of building new idols and of succumbing to totalitarianism.⁹ Perhaps he would not have been much surprised to find John Paul II speaking pointedly in *Evangelium Vitae* about “an objective ‘conspiracy against life’ involving

⁸ *Ways of Judgment*, 227.

⁹ See e.g. *Octogesima Adviens* §28 and §36f.; cf. *Caritas* §14.

even international institutions" (§17). Significantly, though, John Paul II did not pursue his predecessors' line of thought in the matter of global governance when he penned his own treatment of *Populorum* in 1987, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in which he distinguished sharply between "development" and the cult of progress (§27); or in *Centesimus Annus*, where he cautioned against politics based on "the illusion of creating paradise in this world."¹⁰ John Paul II acknowledged the role of international organizations and the need for "a greater degree of international ordering at the service of societies, economies and cultures of the whole world"—indeed, for "a real international system"¹¹—but he stopped short of calling for a world political authority or global governance. Moreover, he emphasized that the Church is the only true model of unity, because it is capable of a communion of which the world is incapable and because it alone has an antidote for sin and the structures of sin which form the greatest obstacle to human unity.¹² Why then, we may wonder, has Benedict taken up that idea again? And what has he done with the *Pacem/Populorum* heritage?

Globalization and the Ambiguity of Progress

The first thing to say is that Benedict has done something bold. He has not merely applied the hermeneutics of continuity to the works of his predecessors.¹³ He has responded to the unforeseen rapidity of globalization and to its destabilizing effects—making of the economic crisis in particular a teaching moment—by raising the stakes in the entire discussion of development. The second thing to say is that he has done so by deepening and extending the logic of *Pacem in Terris* and *Populorum Progressio*, rather than abandoning it, while also directing it to a different end. We need to attend to this if we mean to take stock of his own contribution to the problem of global authority.

The deepening and extending begins with Benedict's argument that globalization is something more than the inevitable consequence of technology. Globalization tells us something about the way humanity is made.

¹⁰ *Centesimus Annus* §25 asserts that "no political society . . . can ever be confused with the Kingdom of God," while nonetheless insisting that "what Sacred Scripture teaches us about the prospects of the Kingdom of God is not without consequences for the life of temporal societies. . . . The Kingdom of God, being in the world without being of the world, throws light on the order of human society, while the power of grace penetrates that order and gives it life. In this way the requirements of a society worthy of man are better perceived, deviations are corrected, the courage to work for what is good is reinforced."

¹¹ *Sollicitudo*, §§26, 39, 43, 56f.

¹² *Ibid.*, §40.

¹³ Thus already *Sollicitudo*, §3ff.

It reflects the fact that humans are made for God, that they are by nature open to God and hence also to one another. Globalization, in other words, is a consequence of divine design. It is no mere accident of history affording “unusual opportunities for greater prosperity” (*Centesimus Annus* §58) but belongs rather to the very essence of history. For history, as Paul VI suggests, is the site of development, and development is the function of a vocation, at once personal and corporate, to an end that lies beyond history.¹⁴ On the way to that end, globalization, in one form or another, is bound to happen. Humanity has been called together by God in Christ, and will come together.

The rapidity mentioned, however, raises urgently the question as to whether globalization, which still lacks definition and value, will happen in this way or in that. Will humanity indeed seek God, and so move toward the fulfillment of its divinely given potential so far as life in this world allows? Or will it opt instead for some lesser end, and so for some perversion of its potential?¹⁵ That is the most pressing question, and it joins the concerns of John XXIII and Paul VI to those of John Paul II and of Benedict himself. It is the very same question already raised in *Spe Salvi*, and to put that question forcefully is the different end towards which the discussion is directed.

It is important to read *Caritas in Veritate* in sequence with Benedict's own encyclicals and not merely in the sequence that runs its winding course from *Rerum Novarum* to *Centesimus Annus*. Having pointed, in his first encyclical, to the Church as the community of love that mirrors God's own being and, in his second, to the hope of salvation that the Church announces to the world, Benedict now speaks out of his conviction that, what the Church is, human society is meant to become. Like his predecessors, he

¹⁴ Cf. *Sollicitudo*, §30f.: “Today's ‘development’ is to be seen as a moment in the story of creation, a story which is constantly endangered by reason of infidelity to the Creator's will, and especially by the temptation to idolatry.” It nevertheless corresponds to the nature and vocation of man, such that we may not rightly renounce “the difficult yet noble task of improving the lot of man in his totality, and of all people.” This task and this meaning are given to our own history—not withdrawn from it—by that truly unlimited progress which belongs to man, through the resurrection of Jesus, in the eschaton.

¹⁵ “If globalization is viewed from a deterministic standpoint, the criteria with which to evaluate and direct it are lost. As a human reality, it is the product of diverse cultural tendencies, which need to be subjected to a process of discernment. The truth of globalization as a process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good. Hence 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).

seeks in ecclesial principles a vision of society that can be offered to the world for the sake of its development. For, as *Populorum* says, “the Church has never failed to foster the human progress of the nations to which she brings faith in Christ” (§2) and to bring to bear on that progress a global perspective (§13). Benedict thus takes the catholicity of the Church as a sign of promise for the wholeness of humanity.¹⁶ He speaks, in charity and hope, of what we may look forward to under globalization. At the same time, however, he is quite frank about the fundamental alternatives facing the world. He speaks truthfully about its options, much as Paul did in *Humanae Vitae* or John Paul in *Evangelium Vitae*. He offers, along with his encouragement, an admonishment and a warning: *This* way forward, not that.

There is no hint here of a naïve optimism about progress. Quite the contrary. In *Spe Salvi* Benedict has already rehearsed, without the policy-oriented interruptions that complicate the present encyclical, how modern western history has, as it were, thrown up a new tower of Babel, or rather several provisional attempts at such a tower—attempts that profess in the name of “reason” and of “freedom” to offer a redemptive unity that is based, not on the recovery in Christ of man’s vocation for God, but on something strictly immanent in man himself and in history as such. Beginning with Francis Bacon and working through to the atheism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he has shown how the hope of redemption that is vouchsafed to the Church, and that rests ultimately on the return of Christ, was transformed into a vision that rests on human effort alone and on a false faith in progress. Progress, *Spe Salvi* points out, is ambiguous: “Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man’s ethical formation, in man’s inner growth, then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world” (§22).

In the new encyclical Benedict speaks about globalization in much the same terms: “‘Globalization, *a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it.’ We should not be its victims, but rather its protagonists,

¹⁶ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *God and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 350: “The Church belongs to the whole world, to all cultures and every age. . . . She is always there to ensure that boundaries are transcended. She is to prevent the occurrence of Babel. The Church is there to prevent the confusion of opposition and contradictions from dominating mankind. She should, instead of this, bring the whole wealth of human existence, in all its languages, to God—and should be thereby herself a power for reconciliation among mankind.”

acting in the light of reason, guided by charity and truth. 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" (§42, quoting John Paul II). But authentic globalization requires God and must fail if we do not turn to God; for if man cannot make his own justice, he cannot make his own unity either. "As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers. Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is" (§19). Paul VI, to be sure, asked the United Nations "to bring not just some peoples but all peoples together as brothers."¹⁷ But Benedict—leaning on Paul—reminds us that "the human community that we build by ourselves can never, purely by its own strength, be a fully fraternal community, nor can it overcome every division and become a truly universal community. The unity of the human race, a fraternal communion transcending every barrier, is called into being by the word of God—who-is-Love" (§35).¹⁸ "Christians long for the entire human family to call upon God as 'Our Father!'" (§79).

Viewed in this light, *Caritas in Veritate*—whatever its shortcomings from a literary or even a practical point of view—is no mere hotchpotch of high-minded theology and questionable prudential judgments, as some seem to think. Rather it is one long call to conversion. If that call was already present in *Pacem in Terris* and *Populorum Progressio*, it is much more pressing and urgent here. A "civilization of love" requires willing participation in the divine economy opened up to man through the Incarnation, and that willing participation can come only by way of a profound change in individuals, peoples, and nations. "It requires new eyes and a new heart, capable of rising above a materialistic vision of human events" (§78). It requires a spirit of receptiveness, an openness to the idea of "gift" as a fundamental principle of human existence, operative in all the diverse spheres of human life, including bioethics, economics, and governance.

Bioethics is particularly important, and receives special emphasis, just because "in this most delicate and critical area, the fundamental question asserts itself forcefully: is man the product of his own labours or does he

¹⁷ See again *Populorum* §78.

¹⁸ Cf. *Spe Salvi*, §14. I say "leaning on Paul" because at §18 he summarizes Paul thus: "If it [development] does not involve the whole man and every man, it is not true development. This is the central message of *Populorum Progressio*, valid for today and for all time."

depend on God?" In bioethics "we are presented with a clear *either/or*" (§74): either we operate with a reason that is open to transcendence, that respects the principle of gift and dependence, or we choose a self-enclosed and self-assertive reason that is incapable of producing a civilization of love. The same either/or, it is safe to say, presents itself in the political sphere. Either we will have a form of global governance fit for a civilization of love, or we will have a form that serves a civilization of death. There is, on Benedict's view, no third alternative. Which of the two will eventually emerge remains an open question. But he points the way to the former, lest the latter prevail. For "a 'Kingdom of God' accomplished without God . . . inevitably ends up as the 'perverse end' of all things as described by Kant: we have seen it, and we see it over and over again" (*Spe Salvi*, §23).

On the one hand, then, Benedict warns us against the alienation that results "when too much trust is placed in merely human projects, ideologies and false utopias" (*Caritas in Veritate*, §53).¹⁹ He is well aware of "the 'types of messianism which give promises but create illusions'" by denying "the transcendent dimension of development" (§17). He knows that "a humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism" (§78) and he is conscious of the risk that globalization will produce "a dangerous universal power of a tyrannical nature" (§57). That is why he calls for a "polyarchic" form of governance based on the principle of subsidiarity.²⁰

On the other hand, he refuses to draw back from the notion of global community and global governance. That would involve a denial of the vocation to development and to unity, which would itself be faithless and

¹⁹ Benedict needs no reminder—though the same cannot be said, perhaps, of his co-laborers on this encyclical in the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace—that the world will not come to its perfection "through rational planning"! The very idea, he once insisted, is "an abuse of rationality" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988], 210).

²⁰ Just what "polyarchic" governance would look like is not made clear, but see the *Catechism* at §1885: "The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to all forms of collectivism. It sets limits for state intervention. It aims at harmonizing relationships between individuals and societies. It tends toward the establishment of true international order." Russell Hittinger remarks that "Catholic social doctrine is unique in proposing that authentic social order requires a multiplication of authorities" (Claude Ryan Lecture in Catholic Social Thought, McGill University, 8 October 2004). That proposal, however, and the subsidiarity principle itself, have made an impact on public debate; cf. Kok-Chor Tan, e.g., who indicates in *Toleration, Diversity and Global Justice* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) that most liberals now "propose that sovereignty be dispersed vertically, upwards towards supranational bodies, and also downwards toward particular communities within states" (101).

godless. "The idea of a world without development indicates a lack of trust in man and in God" (§14). "Precisely because God gives a resounding 'yes' to man, man cannot fail to open himself to the divine vocation to pursue his own development" (§18). The Christian especially must take this to heart, reckoning with the power of charity in truth to convert and transform the city of man, fitting it for God's own salvific purposes: "Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God" (§7).²¹

Such is Benedict's dialectic, and we must not try to dissolve it by reading too much into the words "cannot fail." Benedict makes no attempt to say how or when history will reach its goal. He does not tell us whether he believes that global governance of the kind he is calling for will actually materialize in the present age. He tells us only that we cannot rightly refuse to aim at it.

Confusing the Two Cities?

If we must not dissolve his dialectic, however, we must certainly probe it with another very important question: What has happened here to the doctrine of the two cities? Benedict appeals to the distinction between the earthly city and the heavenly city, meaning the temporal form of human community that we ourselves generate with God's help, and the eternal form that only God can generate. Fair enough. But in doing so he seems to obscure the equally fundamental distinction between the city of man and the city of God—meaning, respectively, the form that human community takes when directed by self-love and the *libido dominandi*, and the form it takes when directed by the love of God and of neighbor. Or rather, he seems at times to treat these as hypothetical alternatives between which we must choose in deciding our collective future, rather than as presently co-existing communities between which individuals must decide: "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" (§53).

Now this observation might lead to a much more serious charge against Benedict than the charge of naïveté. It is one thing to say that he has

²¹ Cf. *Sollicitudo*, §48.

misjudged the moment—that he has issued an invitation to a life of communion that the world and its leaders are not yet ready to hear and are likely to get all wrong. It is quite another thing to say that he has misjudged history itself; that he has confused the Church and the world, in some more or less Hegelian way, by supposing that history must sooner or later produce their synthesis. Benedict is quickly cleared of either charge, however, if only we allow that *Caritas* is indeed a call to conversion. To the greater charge it may be replied that Benedict is undertaking no such triumphalist revision of Augustine as late-Protestantism was wont to produce. He does not make the mistake (a mistake Augustine himself had to correct) of thinking that history must move the world ever closer into the heart of the Church. Rather he thinks that the Church, like Christ, must move ever closer into the heart of the world; that it must extend to the city of man, as Christ extended to Israel, an urgent and audacious invitation to embrace both the means and the ends of the city of God. To the lesser charge it may be replied that he has spoken just when he had to speak—as mankind enters the rapids of globalization and its destiny draws near.

Benedict, in other words, has by no means abandoned the doctrine of the two cities. Yet there is still a difficulty here that must not be glossed over. The doctrine of the two cities—in so far as it identifies two incompatible projects, not one project with a provisional and a final form—is a legitimate source of theological resistance to globalization and especially to the idea of world government. That resistance need not deny what recent popes have affirmed about global problems requiring global solutions. It can even admit the relative antiquity of the idea of global governance, and its naturalness to Christianity, which after all inherited the whole Graeco-Roman world as the vast site on which to develop its Jewish patrimony of monotheism and messianism. But it will also insist that the idea is fraught with peril and that it has been tainted from the outset by utopianism. Perhaps there was a place for contemplating it under the conditions of Christendom, where an attempt was made to avoid utopianism by public recognition of the strictly provisional nature of the *saeculum* and by the doctrine of the two swords.²² Those conditions, however, are long gone—witness Benedict's own pleading against "exclusion of religion from the public square" (§56). One may happily agree that there can be no substantial family of nations, universal in scope, that is bound together by anything less profound than the love of God and by kinship with Christ.²³ But is that not something that even Christendom failed to produce? How then

²² Even in Dante's dream of a universal monarchy, this would have prevented an inordinate concentration of political power.

²³ Cf. Augustine, *City of God* 4.15.

are Christians to aim at global governance with any assurance that they are not merely baking bricks for some still more calamitous Babel?

What might Benedict say in response to this? He would not waste much time, I suspect, on the question of assurance. The only assurance afforded us in history is that God is sovereign over it, and gracious in his sovereignty, and that Christ will triumph in the end. That we could meanwhile witness a perverse end to the project of global governance has already been granted, by Benedict as well as by Kant. Nevertheless, it is Christianly necessary to aim with Kant at global governance, both because God in Christ wills the unity of mankind and because conversion to Christ must be held out as a real possibility for man. And this can only mean proceeding as if Christendom—a wider and more authentic Christendom capable of a nation-transcending form of governance—lies before us rather than behind us.

Benedict's "as if" is not like Kant's, however. Kant knew that the kingdom of promise would never come, but that the cult of progress would lose its appeal if we did not pretend that it would come. The city of perpetual peace is an ideal after which we must strive, though its realization can only be perpetually postponed. Benedict, on the other hand, knows that Christendom can and will come, for Christ himself can and will come. He therefore has grounds for a confidence, on the very deepest level, that Kant cannot share. His approach is like Kant's only in this sense, that it reposes no trust in structures as such: "The right state of human affairs . . . can never be guaranteed simply through structures alone, however good they are. . . . Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last forever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good."²⁴

On the other hand, precisely because Benedict's confidence is in Christ, and because the kingdom of freedom in which he believes is a gift that may be accepted or rejected, he can and does take more seriously than Kant the possibility of a perverse end in our own history. It is not therefore an *unqualified* call that he issues in support of new and more concrete forms of global governance, but rather a call in principle, hedged round with conditions. Urgent need of a true world political authority there may be. Yet that authority, he says, "would need to be regulated by law, to observe consistently the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, to seek to establish the common good, and to make a commitment to securing authentic integral human development inspired by the values of charity in truth." Indeed, "the integral development of peoples and international

²⁴ *Spe Salvi*, §24; cf. *Caritas* §11.

cooperation” implied in the creation of such an authority would “require the construction of a social order that at last conforms to the moral order” (§67). That is a very tall order—though no taller, perhaps, than the creation of a just and stable economy, which on Benedict’s view requires that the whole world adopt “the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift” that the Church has learned from the Savior (§36).

We are not only entitled to take all of this into account when weighing Benedict’s support for international institutions and global governance; *we must* take it into account in order to act charitably in the truth. Which is to say: the work of evangelization must surely precede any attempt to establish an operative world authority, for the construction of a social and political order that conforms to the moral order—of a political union that is also a form of communion—has the conversion of the peoples of the world as its condition of possibility.

Just here we may need reminding that “the Church offers her social teaching as an indispensable and ideal orientation” (*Centesimus* §43). It is indispensable because Jesus Christ is the one “to whom every authentic vocation to integral human development must be directed” (*Caritas* §18). It nonetheless remains ideal because we await Christ, while hastening the day of his appearing. This applies also to the call for global governance. Benedict has given such governance an evangelical mandate—the highest possible mandate—but in doing so he has called into question every other mandate that one might try to give it. In that way, and to that extent, he has already accommodated the theological resistance that is demanded by the doctrine of the two cities.

Benedict’s Balancing Act and the Future of the *Pacem in Terris* Tradition

The Benedict who wrote *Caritas in Veritate* is the same Benedict who observed in his 2008 Epiphany homily that “‘thick darkness covers the peoples’, and our history.” Perhaps that was only his way of saying what Paul VI said—namely, that “men are making their way to the Creator without adverting to it”—but the change in tone and mood is noteworthy. People can and do get lost in the darkness. That is why they require the light of Christ, in politics and economics as elsewhere. And of course they can go only so far towards their Creator without advert-ing to it, for the Creator is none other than the God of charity, of truth, of communion. On my reading, Benedict is trying to make that clear. If he emphasizes our responsibility not to reject the human impulse to unity even where it lacks the knowledge of Christ, he also labors with his predecessors to infuse that knowledge into it.

Building on *Populorum Progressio* has enabled Benedict to redress the balance sought, but not fully achieved, by the Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium*'s own appeal to the two-cities doctrine was primarily for the purpose of overcoming any dichotomy between religious and social life, a dichotomy to be "counted among the more serious errors of our age." Christians, it pointed out, "are free to give proper exercise to all their earthly activities and to their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises by gathering them into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory" (§43). That was the task Paul took up in *Populorum*. There was always the danger, however, in political theory especially, that the pendulum would swing too far towards the notion of "one vital synthesis," leaving out of account the contrariety of the two cities. Against that danger *Gaudium* reminds us that "earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom" (§39). Moreover, it notices that the relation between the two is most problematic just where it is most evident. "Nations try harder every day to bring about a kind of universal community," it says, yet "the modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or the foulest"; before it "lies the path to freedom or to slavery, to progress or retreat, to brotherhood or hatred" (§9). John Paul II took up, in his turn, the task of making that plain. Benedict has undertaken both tasks simultaneously.

This schema oversimplifies, of course. Already in *Humanae Vitae* Paul looked ahead and saw what few wanted to see. He saw that men might after all refuse to advert to their Creator, with disastrous consequences. He saw that the path to freedom is not always the path we imagine it to be, that not all progress is progress, that there is development that is not true development. And he discovered, to his great distress, that this might be so even within the Church. Benedict has delivered a reading of *Populorum Progressio* that takes *Humanae Vitae* and *Octogesima Adviens* into account, along with the subsequent course of history and the pontificate of John Paul II.²⁵ His message in brief is this: Insofar as humanity is guided morally by the gospel, earthly reality can indeed prefigure, however modestly, the heavenly reality that is to come. Insofar as it is not guided by the gospel, earthly reality can only become a mockery of the heavenly reality, through a false progress and a false unity. But he is careful to point out that, either way, history *will* reach its divinely ordained goal. For that goal is the building of the Church—that is, the city of charity and truth, the city that will inherit the kingdom of God.

²⁵ See *Caritas* §13ff.

Benedict's balancing act, however, if I may venture an opinion, would benefit from a more direct restatement of the doctrine of the two cities, and from a refinement in that context of his claim that the kingdom of God is not a political concept.²⁶ Among other things, this would require a recovery of the Jewish origins of the concept, which hardly permit such a claim.²⁷ It is noteworthy that no reference to Jews or to the great international stumbling block of Israel can be found in *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio*, or *Caritas in Veritate*. That is a sure sign of the abstraction against which O'Donovan warns, and a serious flaw.

It would benefit, too, from a recognition of the gentle charity that underlies the strong curse of Babel, the charity with which God has thus far preserved the human race from its ultimate peril—a global union *without* communion. Perhaps that is too much to expect from an encyclical that is already, by most accounts, far too ambitious. But any subsequent analysis of what Benedict calls the institutional or political path of charity will have to take more fully into account what St. Paul describes as the “strong delusion” that threatens to transform humanity's vocation to communion into what Kierkegaard called a “conspiratorial” unity: a unity that, rejecting charity and truth, binds humanity together for the purpose of seizing the kingdom by force.²⁸

Why do I say that? As Vladimir Solovyov insisted in the preface to his final work, *Three Conversations*, “a willful blindness to the existing and coming state of things is too readily indulged in by many people today.”²⁹ He had in view first of all the looming challenge of militant Islam—a

²⁶ While it is right, in a certain sense, to say that the kingdom of God is not a political concept and that its realization “is not itself a political process” (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 58; cf. *Populorum* §13)—meaning that it will not fit our own conceptual schemes and that it does not come by way of our own historical machinations—it must also be asserted, at a still more fundamental level, that it is indeed a political concept and process. The doctrine of the two cities allows us to do that, and so also to articulate the fact that the kingdom of God is significant for political life “by way of eschatology” and not merely by way of ethics (*pace* Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 59; cf. *Jesus of Nazareth* [New York: Doubleday, 2007], 338f.).

²⁷ Benedict touches on this in *Jesus of Nazareth*, but in addressing the error of “regnocentrism” passes too quickly from the notion that Jesus, in proclaiming and living the kingdom or rule of God, was a “true Israelite,” to the notion that what he proclaimed and lived “transcended Judaism” (57).

²⁸ I have tried to speak to this in the penultimate chapter of *Ascension Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), “The Politics of the Eucharist.” On the contrast between true and false unity—between the Babel vector, as we might say, and the Pentecost vector—see also Ratzinger, *God and the World*, 348f.

²⁹ V. Soloviev, *War, Progress, and the End of History* (London: University of London, 1915), xxxii.

quite remarkable prediction in A.D. 1900—but more generally our failure to grasp the duplicitous nature of the cult of progress. In this work, which culminates in the Short Tale of the Antichrist, Solovyov recognized that the drive to unite the race would take not one form, but two, and that the contest between them would be settled not by the immanent processes of history but only by the parousia.³⁰ That was also Benson's point, eight years later, in *Lord of the World*.³¹ To put it in Augustinian terms: if two cities do indeed mean two loves, then there are and will be two competing forms of unity; the decision between them is man's, but the vindication of the one over the other is God's.

The city of God, then, must issue to the city of man its clarion call to unite under the banner of Christ. But it knows that the mystery of lawlessness, which is already at work, will (when the time is right) unfurl another and different banner "in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth." It will generate "a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh" (*Catechism* §675), and its "lying promises," to borrow Leo's words, "will only . . . bring forth evils worse than the present" (*Rerum Novarum* §18). Meanwhile the Four Horsemen will continue to ride, and it does no service to the common good to suppose that their steeds can be taken from them.³² The city of God must assist the city of man in compelling them, wherever possible, to dismount, as the *Pacem in Terris* tradition affirms; but it must stoutly resist every attempt to build temporal peace and prosperity on a false deification of man.³³

Long ago, Dante was already arguing that "the human race is most like God when it is most nearly one . . . and most nearly one when all of it is united in one unit."³⁴ Dante, of course, believed that the achievement of

³⁰ For Solovyov this was a somewhat belated recognition, obscured at first by the gnostic elements of his sophiology, from which at the end of his life he seems to have been partly emancipated; cf. the Translator's Preface, by Alexander Bakshy, xiv f.

³¹ It is one flaw in Benson's vision, however, that the Jewish people as such have almost wholly dropped from view.

³² We may recall here that Solovyov's "Short Tale of the Antichrist" draws to a close with the General remarking: "Note at what moment the curtain drops over this historical drama: it is war, a conflict between two armies. So the end of our discussion comes back to its beginning" (227). That beginning (cf. 7) was a query about the newfound determination to suppress war without actually solving the problem of the Fall that underlies it—an impossibility, as also with poverty, disease, and death.

³³ "The main thing that leaps out," says Benedict, in much of today's talk about building the kingdom, "is that God has disappeared; man is the only actor left on stage" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 54).

³⁴ "which cannot be unless it is all subject to one ruler" (*Monarchia* 1.8.3f.).

this divine resemblance required the advent of a universal monarchy, freely cooperating with the See of Peter—two swords, one spiritual and one temporal, each with global reach and each under a single command. This would indeed be a new and grander Christendom! Both Solovyov and Benson, however, understood that a new and grander Christendom, in which peace on earth is the rule rather than the exception, will appear only when the two swords are united in the hand of one ruler. They believed, on the basis of the biblical testimony, that history is pressing towards exactly that. But they also knew that this ruler must be either Christ or Antichrist.³⁵

Benedict, unless I am badly mistaken, is of the same persuasion. He has already provided ample warning of the perverse end towards which we are moving if we are not moving towards Jesus Christ himself. Yet there is plenty of willful blindness to contend with, even in the Church. If the tradition to which *Caritas* belongs is to confront that blindness, it will have to become still more critical of the conspiratorial character of secular millennialism and its “regnocentric” counterpart.³⁶ It will also have to take stock of the opportunities for an aggrandized world authority that the processes of globalization, and the threat of real or imagined global crises, are likely to generate; for the whole of the Catholic social encyclical tradition (not to speak of its eschatology) weighs against any abandonment of the human person, or of peoples and cultures, to the powerful riptides of the State. Otherwise put: the spiritual prerequisites of authentic human solidarity, on which this tradition has eloquently insisted from the days of Leo, will need to be articulated in ways that bear more directly on the prospects, limitations, and dangers of global governance this side of the parousia. N V

³⁵ That is why history has led, and will yet lead, to the suffering of the Church. It is a mistake to think that “the final tribulation is a unique event, a miracle of evil” (www.johnreilly.info/wgrcc.htm), if by that we mean that it attaches to history only accidentally.

³⁶ Cf. *Jesus of Nazareth*, 53. See also *Rerum Novarum* §18 and §21.