

On the Continuity of *Caritas in Veritate*

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EVEN EIGHT YEARS SINCE ITS RELEASE, Pope Benedict's social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* [hereafter, CV] continues to win admirers and to resist easy evaluation. Theologians, economists, and scholars of many related fields are still scrambling to come up with a balanced and complete assessment of its message and significance. This essay is a modest attempt to map out just a small corner of that territory from my own perspective as a social ethicist and close observer of Catholic social teaching.

Assessing Benedict's Social Encyclical

Since its publication, CV has garnered much attention and prompted a great range of commentary. A first wave of coverage in the Catholic press and other popular media was followed by substantive treatments in more scholarly venues. For example, in the calendar year following its release, as many as seven major articles treating various aspects of the encyclical appeared in *Theological Studies*, the most prominent journal of Catholic theology in the United States. Symposia of articles on the encyclical have appeared in journals ranging from *America* magazine (see its November 30, 2009, issue featuring six short essays) to the *Journal of Business Ethics* (which ran a ten-article supplement in March of 2011), and several volumes of collected essays analyzing many aspects of the encyclical have recently appeared. I collect a small sampling of this literature in the notes and appended bibliography, but my selected list could be multiplied many times over.

The timing and topic of CV surely accounts for a major share of the extraordinary interest in it. It was published eight short months

after the stunning collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment firm, perhaps the most dramatic moment in the string of events in the fall of 2008 that triggered a global economic recession. After months of news stories about the financial crisis, personal and corporate bankruptcies, skyrocketing unemployment rates, government bailouts, a foreclosure tsunami in the housing industry, stimulus packages, austerity measures and other reactions that we are still assessing, the world seemed hungry for a theological perspective on all this economic turmoil.

Employing well over thirty thousand words, Pope Benedict produced one of the longest encyclicals ever. Some wags commented that there were actually several separate encyclicals nested inside the covers that bind the text of *CV*. No social encyclical had offered such a detailed account of the economic issues of the moment. Benedict delved into the complex tasks of diagnosis, prescription, and even prognosis regarding the moral and material health of the entire global economic system. Even many secular observers would confirm Benedict's point that the 2008 economic crisis was best understood not as any kind of accidental bad luck, but as a moral crisis whose long and deep roots manifest themselves in faulty business practices, malfeasance of many varieties, ethically suspect behaviors, and objectionable public (as well as corporate) policies. Benedict was eager to connect these failings to deep anthropological errors and even metaphysical misunderstandings so that progress toward a more stable and just future would depend on correcting this range of abuses. In short, it is a challenging encyclical about both human nature and human experience, an ambitious vehicle for a religious leader to address timeless truths about the human condition, as well as crucial matters of the moment, such as current abuses of power in the international finance industry.

Because Benedict has one eye on the current outward manifestations of this moral crisis and the other eye on its philosophical and theological roots, a single section of *CV* at once contains an appeal to uphold the "traditional principles of social ethics, like transparency, honesty and responsibility," and a fervent plea to embrace "the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as expressions of fraternity [which] can and must find their place within normal economic activity" (§36). In short, *CV* concerns the depths of our relationship with God, so it can be called a contribution to mystical theology. It proposes certain principles, so it is a contribution to moral theology

and social ethics. It addresses practical proposals to solve social problems of a specific moment in history, so it is a work of policy analysis and advocacy.

Precisely because of its ambitious agenda, CV received a fair bit of criticism. Those seeking guidance exclusively on practical economic matters, for example, were put off by having to wade through its more profound and, at times, abstract theological treatments, like making cases against moral relativism, syncretism, and various forms of materialistic reductionism. Even those sincerely interested in the full range of topics covered in this encyclical have to admit that, in all honesty, CV probably attempted to do too much. But even a much longer work would not answer all the relevant questions to the satisfaction of all potential critics, if it were possible to imagine extending Benedict's work to achieve an all-time papal record for encyclical length.

Although it may be too soon to pretend to have reached a comprehensive assessment of its lasting contribution, it is not too soon to offer a tentative account of some of its accomplishments. In what follows, I will describe three of the document's major achievements. First, CV continues the tradition of social concern faithful to Catholic thought since *Rerum Novarum* [hereafter, RN]. Second, on a closely related point, Benedict's encyclical advances in a constructive way Catholic reflection on the relationship between justice and charity, especially in light of a perceived need to clarify that relationship after his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* [hereafter, DCE]. Third, Benedict continues his momentous contribution to environmental concern; his already substantial credentials as the "Green Pope" were greatly enhanced by the content of this social encyclical, which paved the way for the 2015 encyclical of Pope Francis on integral ecology, *Laudato Si'*.¹ As with the preceding two areas, the most complete treatment of the Pope's achievements in ecology would consider many writings and actions besides CV.

I leave to Vincent Strand's essay in this collection, "On Method, Nature and Grace in *Caritas in Veritate*," to treat Benedict's stunning portrayal of an alternative civil economy best captured in the signature phrases "economy of Communion" and "relationships of gratuitousness." These propose a vision of the social order in which the business sector is no longer separated from the functions of charitable

¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (2015) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 107 (2015): 847–945].

concern. Here Benedict breaks new ground by issuing a radical challenge to overcome the dichotomy between the economic sphere, long ruled by a logic of self-interest and exchange, and the social sphere, governed by the logic of gift and mutuality.

How CV Continues the Catholic Tradition of Social Concern

I have already portrayed the timing of the encyclical's publication as essential to appreciating its contribution to Catholic social thought. I emphasized that it represents Pope Benedict's response to urgent justice concerns arising from the global economic crisis that struck with such disastrous force in 2008. But one begins to realize that there is far more to the story. CV was originally intended to serve as a fortieth anniversary encyclical for *Populorum Progressio* [hereafter, PP]. The vestiges of this original intention are still clear enough in the text of CV, starting with its subtitle (which includes Pope Paul VI's signature phrase "integral human development"). They are fully evident when, in heaping lofty praise on Paul, Benedict announces his intention to "revisit [Paul's] teachings" and "to apply them to the present moment" (§8). Indeed, the title of chapter one of Benedict's social encyclical is "The Message of *Populorum Progressio*." Each of that chapter's ten long sections explicates elements of Paul VI's social teaching, including the intriguing §15, which draws connections to his controversial encyclical on human life and procreation (*Humanae Vitae*) and to his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on evangelization and missionary activity (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*).²

Vatican watchers knew that the Holy See had been preparing a third encyclical ever since the release of *Spe Salvi*. Anniversary social encyclicals had missed their targeted release date before. In fact, John Paul II marked the twentieth anniversary of PP with his social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which did not appear in 1987 at all (despite the date it bears of December 30, 1987). It finally came out several weeks into 1988.³ On at least two occasions, Vatican spokesmen admitted delays in the writing process due to Benedict's desire to address unfolding developments in the global economy. As the financial crisis of 2008 gathered steam, saying anything substantial about social justice in the international arena came to resemble

² Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (1976): 5–76].

³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 80 (1988): 528–31].

something akin to hitting a moving target. In granting himself a nineteen-month extension until CV's eventual release, Benedict was wisely insuring that his text would squarely address the latest realities of global financial markets while still maintaining continuity with the best tradition of Catholic social teaching.

The core principles of Catholic social encyclicals have been set for many decades now: the dignity of the human person, the common good, the rights and responsibilities of owners of property, subsidiarity, and solidarity with all members of humankind, especially the poor and marginalized. Successive social documents have clarified the content of these core principles and helped readers apply them appropriately to new times and the varied cultural and social contexts of a changing world. French theologian Bernard Laurent offers a helpful list of principles highlighted by Benedict:

Many elements of *Caritas in veritate* subscribe to the logic of the previous social encyclicals: the necessary subordination of the economy, the condemnation of materialism in modern society, the primacy of labor, the recognition of moderate profit, the legitimacy of certain public interventions, the call for integral human development.⁴

Because of Benedict's intention to reaffirm the traditional concerns of Church social doctrine, certain sections of CV resemble a veritable checklist of social justice concerns. Between §§ 25 and 29 alone, we hear about poverty and hunger, threats to worker rights, the manipulations of local cultures, the need for greater agricultural development through rural infrastructure, the spread of abortion and imposition of sterilization and birth control, the denial of religious freedom, consumerist "superdevelopment," and the threat of violence and terrorism. These sections of chapter 2 of CV carefully footnote the statements of papal predecessors, particularly Paul VI, signaling that the current Pontiff is building upon the established tradition of Church social concern, even as he paves the way for innovative ways of approaching economic and ecological realities.

Along the way, Benedict conforms to a pattern set by recent popes whenever they have commented on the thorny questions of

⁴ Bernard Laurent, "Caritas in Veritate as a Social Encyclical: A Modest Challenge to Economic, Social and Political Institutions," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010): 515–44, at 543.

correcting economic injustices. When markets fail to solve social and economic problems, then public authorities are obliged to intervene to accomplish important goals of social justice. Catholic social teaching has often been criticized for too readily recommending government interventions, even for overlooking the prudential principle of subsidiarity, which was, incidentally, invented whole cloth in *Quadragesimo Anno* [hereafter, QA] (§§79–80). But one of the distinctive and enduring strengths of the Catholic social teaching tradition is its willingness to engage in structural analysis of economic problems, relying on the methodology of “see-judge-act” to probe causes and consequences of injustices and, at times, to recommend ambitious remedies applied through public agencies. In line with long-standing Catholic social theory, there is a legitimate role for public authorities in acting as an irreplaceable agent of the common good, even when this justifies potentially controversial measures such as progressive taxation, welfare-state entitlements, and similar policies that enact measures for wealth redistribution. True to its roots in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, Catholic social thought is thoroughly communitarian in emphasis, displaying a strong commitment to the good of the community, even when this rubs up against the individualism of the ascendant neo-liberalism that Benedict decries in chapter 2 of CV and elsewhere.

Like the long social encyclical *Centesimus Annus* [hereafter, CA] of John Paul II, CV can be parsed in various ways and even quoted against itself to obscure or dispute some of these important points. But I think it safe to say that, in continuity with previous social encyclicals, Benedict displays a keen eye for the structural dimensions of economic justice. Underdevelopment in the global South, food insecurity, declining worker protection—none of these are the results of bad luck or randomness, in Benedict’s estimation, but are squarely attributed to skewed priorities and structures of sin operating within our global economy. These systems will be reversed only through concerted efforts that must include public agencies and even coercive actions by government authorities. To put a finer point on it, Benedict’s social encyclical continues the analysis of previous popes who concur that, since markets (at least in their current form) are ultimately not self-regulating, and since market outcomes when left to themselves are frequently at odds with the common good, there is an obvious need to subordinate markets to moral principles, which ordinarily enter the economic system through the political sphere and by means of state interventions. These claims of Benedict are reminis-

cent of what John Paul II dared to say in CA: even at the moment of the seeming definitive triumph of free markets in the early 1990s, the Polish pontiff had the courage to remind the world that markets must be “circumscribed within a strong juridical framework” in order that they not become exploitative but rather are, without exception, placed “at the service of human freedom in its totality” (§42).

Benedict not only concurs with previous papal thought on the necessity for structural changes to advance social justice; he actually proposes specific structural reforms. Reflecting a keen awareness of global economic integration and the flowering of the new “knowledge economy,” CV contains proposals for progress towards justice in these new dimensions of the global marketplace. Benedict’s concerns about social justice in this age of globalization even led him to comment on certain items that previous popes had overlooked. For example, he warns against excesses in “the speculative use of financial resources,” insisting that investors prioritize “long-term sustainability” over “short-term profit” as they invest their money (§40). He also offers extended commentary on such often overlooked issues as: the right of access to energy, calling for worldwide redistribution of energy resources (§49); the reform of international development aid and more equitable international trade (§58); excesses in the increasingly hedonistic and even sexually exploitative international tourist industry (§61); and enhanced international cooperation for “greater access to education” (§61). The sense of urgency with which this text treats these reforms reveals a Pontiff ardently advocating structural change tailored to benefit the billions of people who are currently disadvantaged in our globalized age.

Not every commentator on CV agrees with my assessment that Pope Benedict has achieved an impressive structural analysis of our globalized economy. Laurent, for example, contends that the concerns that consume Benedict are still excessively disassociated from actual institutions. Citing some of Benedict’s language on the importance of the responsible freedom of individuals that appears in CV (§17), Laurent comments: “Never before had a pope, on matters of the social doctrine of the Church, sidelined institutions to this extent, emphasizing instead their moral reform as the solution to problems.”⁵ It is easy enough to generate sympathy for Laurent’s evident impatience to see Benedict offer a more thorough critique of neo-liberalism, the ideology arguably responsible for the excesses that

⁵ Laurent, “*Caritas in Veritate* as a Social Encyclical,” 534.

Benedict laments. And to his credit, Laurent does us the great service of pointing out certain curious lacunae in CV, such as its failure to mention explicitly the terms “capitalism,” “socialism,” or “social sin” even a single time. But ultimately, Laurent makes too much of these silences, strange as they may be, since what we most need to hear from Benedict are his calls for reform in global economic structures, not a pointed analysis of the ideology of neo-liberal capitalism or market fundamentalism that we might, at least arguably, blame for the excesses we observe.

My repeated references to structural reforms in the global economy may beg the following question: How specific should a voice of a religious community generally, and the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church specifically, venture when addressing complex economic matters? Successive social encyclicals, as well as pastoral letters from episcopal conferences, such as the U.S. Bishops’ letter “Economic Justice for All,” have sought to clarify the matter by drawing distinctions between moral and technical expertise.⁶ CV (§9 and note 10) cites the key loci classici within Catholic social teaching that support the commonly heard conclusion that the Church has no economic models or technical solutions to offer. But this admonition does not prevent Benedict and other Church leaders from recommending some rather specific courses of action to advance the common good and to pursue economic justice in this era of globalization.

Just as John Paul II had gone out on a limb to support the agenda of the “Jubilee Justice” movement for international debt forgiveness at the dawn of our millennium, so Benedict has similarly advocated specific measures and institutions that might contribute to the reform of international financial practices. In CV alone, the Pope assigns a number of tasks to international agencies that we may judge as currently underperforming in their duties to regulate global functions. For example, the International Labor Organization is mentioned as a promising instrument for greater protection of the rights of workers (§63). More prominently, “a reform of the United Nations Organization, and likewise of economic institutions and international finance” is called for, “so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth” (§67). In the subsequent few sentences, Benedict lists a bewildering array of important UN functions, including “to

⁶ United States Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy* (1986), accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.usccb.org/upload/economic_justice_for_all.pdf.

manage the global economy,” “to revive economies hit by the crisis,” “to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace,” and “to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration.” The Pope concludes: “for all this, there is urgent need for a true world political authority.” Reading this same section led ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill to comment wryly: “Benedict has remarkable expectations for the United Nations.”⁷

With these suggestions about what needs to be done to reform the global economy, as well as about who should be entrusted with these vital tasks, Benedict is probably getting as specific as this genre of the papal encyclical allows. He risks losing the support not only of those who are skeptical about the effectiveness of the UN, but also of those who, perhaps rightly, claim that papal encyclicals should avoid such a high level of policy detail. Such advocacy might better be left to other genres of Church statements. In fact, an even more detailed analysis of urgent structural reforms of the global economy was subsequently presented in a document of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The report of this Vatican commission bears the title “Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority.”⁸ Just three days later, the Brussels-based Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) issued its own statement on related issues called “A European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility: A Statement of the COMECE Bishops on the EU Treaty Objective of a Competitive Social Market Economy.”⁹ Although this body of European bishops is not actually an arm of the Vatican, its work to produce a values-based analysis of current conditions in our distressed global economy is emblematic of ongoing Church-based reflection and advocacy on what encyclicals have long called “the social question.”

⁷ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “*Caritas in Veritate*: Benedict’s Global Reorientation,” *Theological Studies* 71 (June 2010): 291–319, at 306.

⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority*, October 24, 2011, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20111024_nota_en.html.

⁹ Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community, *A European Community of Solidarity and Responsibility: A Statement of the COMECE Bishops on the EU Treaty Objective of a Competitive Social Market Economy*, October 27, 2011, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.comece.eu/dl/KttMJKJOMNkJqx4KJK/20111027PUBSOCMARKET_EN.pdf.

CV earned its permanent place as the broadest and most prominent of the contributions to Catholic social thought to emerge during the papacy of Benedict XVI. As such, the encyclical continues the Catholic tradition of social concern that gives credit to our faith. It advances our understanding of the social dimension of our presence as Catholics living in a world characterized by great need and troubling injustice.

How CV Addresses the Relationship between Charity and Justice

We are all familiar with the terms “charity” and “justice,” as well as the customary ways in which these two ethical orientations towards the needy are treated in the Christian tradition. Most social encyclicals, dating back to RN and especially QA, devote several lines or even multiple sections to the task of relating them.

In the context of this charity–justice dyad, “charity” refers to works of direct service for those in need, well illustrated by the traditional corporal works of mercy. The emphasis is on the voluntary and occasional nature of the assistance we might offer to relieve the suffering of our hungry, homeless, or sick neighbors. The corresponding category of “justice,” by contrast, emphasizes efforts we undertake for the cause of structural change and tends to carry a sense of duty and obligation for the privileged to contribute to the building up of a better world. If an orientation toward charity calls us to show mercy to the victims of worldly events, then an orientation toward justice issues a call to prevent victimhood in the first place by addressing the deeper social causes of injustices and perhaps even empowering the victimized to become agents of their own history. The paradigmatic charitable activity is the handout, which supplies at least temporary relief of misery. The paradigmatic work for justice is advocacy, such as contributing to lobbying efforts to support programs to lift up the needy or (even better) to supply the resources by which they might lift themselves up, whether this is motivated by faith-based concern or secular humanitarianism. If charity can sometimes be accused of applying mere Band-Aids to deep wounds, then justice aims to perform the corrective surgery upon social problems that aspires to heal the underlying pathologies.

It would be a serious mistake to imagine an overly sharp opposition between charity and justice, as actions that might at first appear geared toward either side of this dyad generally find themselves converging and blending into the other side. Providing subsidized

educational programs or legal aid for disadvantaged groups, for example, is at once a work of charity and justice. Each of these actions meets an immediate need and simultaneously contributes to more equitable structures of opportunity. In the interest of clarity, it may still be worthwhile to maintain the distinction between charity and justice, but, to emulate the best of the Scholastics, we distinguish, ultimately, in order to unite. A genuine faith-filled response to poverty and deprivation does not choose between justice and charity, but affirms each at the proper moment. It is not an “either–or” but a “both–and” proposition for Catholics to enact charity and justice.

These long established themes in Catholic social thought came to the fore once again during the pontificate of Benedict XVI. The relationship between works of charity and justice in the name of the Church was treated at considerable length in DCE (§§20–32). Here, in the Pope’s discussion of how the Church practices love in the world, charity emerges as so eminently noble and lofty that it seems to overshadow justice and perhaps threatens to eclipse it entirely. Charity appears to transcend justice so thoroughly that some commentators wondered whether there was any role remaining for the operations of justice at all, such as redressing imbalances of political power and advocating for social change. Surely, as excellent as the virtue of charity might be, it does not fully replace justice without remainder. The criminal justice system, for instance, would become redundant if a universalization of the principle of merciful charity were allowed to abrogate any sense of accountability to victims. Even the most enthusiastic supporters of the Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis would recognize a permanent place for the administration of retributive justice. Combined with certain related statements of Benedict regarding the role of the laity and the mission of the church (DCE, §§26–29), it seemed to some as if a pendulum had not only swung rather far in one direction, but had perhaps come off its track entirely.

The more specific ecclesiological question, of course, involves whether the Catholic Church’s social activities should be restricted to charity alone. What precisely is the proper relationship between the Church’s mission and social action? DCE seemed eager to draw clear and broad lines between the societal roles of church and state. The Church is here portrayed as a realm of charity alone and as endangering its mission when it ventures into the field of politics. It falls to the state alone to promote and administer justice. Benedict here is reflecting a certain eagerness exhibited by his immediate predeces-

sor, John Paul II, to roll back earlier understandings of the Church as properly an agent of social transformation. This agenda may well be attributed to the “*communio ecclesiology*” shared by both Popes. It displays an aversion to the bottom-up style of social activism that finds its vitality at the grassroots. Church documents from earlier decades had portrayed social action, especially the type grounded in local church communities, with greater enthusiasm. We might think, for instance, of *Gaudium et Spes* and the 1971 World Synod of Bishops’ document *Justice in the World*, whose introduction includes the rousing statement: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”¹⁰

This does not sound at all like what we read in DCE, although it can be far more easily reconciled with Benedict’s treatment of structural reform and social change in CV. To account for the change, one might point to the context and original purpose of CV. It is not hard to imagine that this or any encyclical intended to celebrate the achievements of PP would invariably emphasize social obligations that embrace engagement in projects of justice beyond the works of charity. The prominence of the themes of social solidarity and social responsibility in John Paul II’s anniversary encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* supports this contention. Many observers were in fact encouraged by the revision in Benedict’s approach over time and by the full-throated ways in which CV emphasizes justice and its relation to the mission of the Church. Whereas Benedict had earlier displayed a certain resistance to engaging in the realm of worldly goals and stratagems, here he walks far down these paths in his efforts to instruct the faithful on what is required to enact the full meaning of love in today’s interdependent world. Voluntary and generous charitable work to relieve human distress is crucial, of course, but work for structural change and institutional reform to support the common good is an indispensable feature of the Church’s mission today to humanize globalization.

There remain, of course, important and unanswered questions regarding just how broad is the mandate of the Church regarding

¹⁰ World Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (1971), §6, accessed May 4, 2017, <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>.

social justice and advocacy for change. Other open questions pertain to the role of the laity and its rightful participation in social transformation in the name of the Church; certain sections of Benedict's text might suggest that the Church's authentic social action is properly and perennially clergy-dominated. To what extent can lay Catholics act for justice in the name of the Church as a corporate apostolate, not just in their own name as individuals?

A related set of unanswered questions involves not just the speculative issue of what might be done in the name of the Church's social mission, but how to evaluate, and perhaps alter, what is already being done through Church auspices. The final sections of DCE raise concerns about the distinctive Catholic identity of the charitable organizations run by the Church. These sections have been cited in ongoing debates about the governance of Caritas Internationalis and CIDSE (an international alliance of sixteen Catholic development agencies). When Benedict's first encyclical referred to "the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work," many observers connected this description directly to the often heard charges that these have become so professionalized and bureaucratized that they now sacrifice too much of their Catholic identity (DCE, §16).

Ultimately, it falls to each reader of these encyclicals to interpret the significance of Benedict's choices in writing these words. Blogs, books, and articles treating Benedict's social teachings attest to a wide range of interpretations of his message on charity and justice. I personally find particularly telling Benedict's portrayal of the collective ecological duties of the community of faith: "The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere" (CV, §51). For me, this passage evinces support for a notion of corporate public responsibility precisely in the name of faith. DCE, by contrast, is more restrained in its justice advocacy. Passages elsewhere in CV allow the Church a public duty to respond to threats to human dignity and environmental degradation. CV thus less sharply defines the division of labor between church and state, between voluntary faith-based organizations and public authorities. The Church's public role entails a duty to promote justice and structural change, not only charity, and may even take the form of broad political advocacy to support important human values.

How CV Advances the Church's Deepening Environmental Concern

This section is the briefest not because its topic is by any means less important, but because the contribution of Benedict in the area of ecology is marked by continuity rather than novelty. Nonetheless, although several previous social encyclicals had dedicated a section or two to the human obligation to protect the natural environment from irreparable damage, none had made ecological concern so prominent as CV. The environment receives significant attention here and there throughout the encyclical, for example, in the context of assessing models of economic development (§32). But the second half of Benedict's fourth chapter is devoted entirely to ecology. Sections 48–52 not only present the longest treatment of the natural environment in any encyclical before *Laudato Si'*, but they draw some creative, even stunning, connections between environmental concern and a range of contemporary justice issues—from climate change and access to energy and water resources, to international development cooperation, and to our obligations to future generations. Benedict certainly escapes the charge leveled against his predecessors by some environmentalists that their social encyclicals forfeited opportunities to draw connections between facets of political and economic justice, on one hand, and environmental justice, on the other.

One especially incisive connection is drawn between world peace and environmental respect: “How many natural resources are squandered by wars? Peace in and among peoples would also provide greater protection for nature. The hoarding of resources, especially water, can generate serious conflicts among the peoples involved” (CV, §51). Benedict thus anticipates the analysis he would offer months later in his “World Day of Peace Message” on January 1, 2010.¹¹ Portraying environmental justice and ecological concern as keys to peace, this work is subtitled: “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.” Coupling that statement with the treatment of the natural environment in CV, we can only admire Benedict's recognition that the arrows of causality point both ways. Care for the environment leads to a more peaceful world, one featuring true global solidarity, even as a world free of war and hostility is more likely to protect the God-given inheritance of nature. A stark choice

¹¹ Accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html.

lies before humankind: either the vicious circle of conflict or the virtuous circle of care for creation.

Benedict's appeal for environmental concern is strong on what needs to be improved and why, but it may not be fully persuasive on the matter of who is to be the primary agent of ecological protection. The Pope seems to imply that action on the part of international authorities will be necessary. In the face of prevailing skepticism about the UN and other international agencies, however, this call for some unspecified type of global management remains a loose end in Benedict's treatment. While it is not impossible to imagine certain enhanced international institutions and binding agreements emerging from the nonbinding December 2015 Paris climate change accords (and other recent summits and rounds of negotiations on global carbon emissions and pollution), a frank assessment of the current situation cannot afford to be overly sanguine. Will enough nations around the world cede enough of their sovereignty to make a new covenant possible and effective? International cooperation is probably necessary to make substantial progress toward environmental sustainability. But we have yet to chart a reliable course toward this end, even after CV's strong support.

Conclusion

The fullest possible assessment of Benedict's social teaching would look well beyond CV to consider some sources mentioned only briefly or not at all. Examples might include his "World Day of Peace Messages" or his lively *Africae Munus*, based on the 2009 Synod on Africa.¹² Here he addresses the relationship between action for justice and the task of evangelization. It is also instructive to consider the most relevant of the large corpus of writings of Joseph Ratzinger before his elevation to the papacy. In 1984, for example, while still a Cardinal, he wrote an essay with the title "A Christian Orientation in a Pluralist Democracy?" Here he outlines his perspective on the possibilities and limits of the sometimes troubled relationship between Christianity and democracy. The final section of this essay bears the title "The Indispensability of Christianity in the Modern World" and opens with a question that still hangs in the air today long after his own papacy: "How can Christianity become a positive force in politics without being exploited politically

¹² Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (2011) [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 104 (2012): 239–314].

and, conversely, without usurping the political sphere?"¹³ It may just be that CV contains the essential elements of Benedict's long-delayed and well-considered answer to that important question.

No Church document can aspire to replace the multifaceted inherited wisdom associated with any human endeavor, whether business and the economy or government and politics. But a contribution like CV can shed light on the moral aspects of human society. Of course, it might be possible to criticize Benedict for conducting only a selective reading of "the signs of the times" or for reaching out only part of the way to the many potential dialogue partners, both secular and religious, as he constructed his approach to social justice.¹⁴ But none of these quibbles invalidates the remarkable contribution that Benedict has made to a more human world. His call to move beyond (quite literally) "business as usual," his appeal to a new kind of virtue to be practiced in the marketplace, and his challenge to foster an integral human development suited to our age of globalization and environmental degradation all hold out the promise of great progress toward charity in truth. N V

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¹³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008) [originally *Kirche, Ökumene und Politik* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni Paoline, 1987)], 203.

¹⁴ See Johan Verstraeten, "Dialogue in Light of the Signs of the Times," in *The Moral Dynamics of Economic Life: An Extension and Critique of Caritas in Veritate*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 120–23.

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