

CHARITY AND JUSTICE IN THE RELATIONS AMONG PEOPLE AND NATIONS: THE ENCYCLICAL *DEUS CARITAS EST* OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

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It is an honor and a pleasure for me to address this distinguished Pontifical Academy at the start of your thirteenth plenary session, and to bring you the greetings of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, William J. Levada, who, with Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes and Cardinal Renato Martino, first presented Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* to the world at a press conference on 25 January 2006, but who is unable to join you today. It is a particular pleasure to share the podium with Archbishop Cordes who, as president of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, plays a crucial and active role in securing the charity and justice in the relations among people and nations that is your topic in this session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

The focus of your discussion is the Holy Father's short but tightly argued first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. In its two parts, the encyclical makes two hugely important points. I should like first to state what I think these two points affirm, and then to suggest something of their significance within a social scientific perspective informed by the Catholic faith.

Eros and Agape: The Sanctification of Desire

As everyone who has read the encyclical will know, in his discussion of *eros* and *agape*, Pope Benedict insists on the unity of these two forms of love, as well as the continuity between them. He is particularly concerned to refute the widespread notion that the Christian faith separates these two loves, and even suppresses the one – *eros* – in favor of the other – *agape*. On the contrary, asserts the encyclical, *eros* is ever reaching out towards its fulfillment in *agape*. The powerful dynamism of desire is

itself a sign that human persons are made for and directed toward a love that never ends.

In order to clarify this immensely significant first point, allow me to turn for help to one of Pope Benedict's favorite authors, St. Augustine.

In his writings, and especially in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine frequently invites his readers to consider the things that they have desired and the things that they desire now – to consider, in effect, the experience of desire. When we have thought about things that we have desired very badly, and have worked very hard to possess, St. Augustine asks us to acknowledge that, in the end, we have often lost interest and become bored with these very things, and that we then move on to seeking other things. For St. Augustine, this is most definitely not a cause for lament. On the contrary. In pondering the experience of desire, we learn something very important about ourselves: no good thing that we have wanted and even possessed can finally quench desire itself, because we are made for the uncreated Good which is God himself.

This means that the good things of this world – and all the more so, the good of other persons – far from being obstacles in our quest for ultimate happiness, point us to the Good itself which is their source and in which they share. If we do not love the good things of this world, how shall we be able to love their Maker? The triune God, who made us for himself and who wants to share the communion of trinitarian love with us, uses the good things of this world to lead us to him who is, we could say, Goodness itself. The challenge – and, sometimes, the tragedy – of human existence is to desire and love the created good as if it were divine, to invest an absolute value in what cannot finally satisfy the human heart. That is what sin is. But rightly ordered desire and love of the good things of this world and the good of other persons is already a participation in the Good which is God himself.

These lessons from St. Augustine help us to grasp the point the Holy Father is making in the first part of *Deus Caritas Est* – that *eros* is meant to lead us to *agape*, to the love of God and to the love of one another in God. Pope Benedict resists absolutely the misreading, sometimes perverse, that claims to see in Christian faith the suppression of the ordinary fulfillments of human earthly life, particularly human intimacy and love, in favor of a good beyond life. On the contrary, for Christian faith the whole range of human desire – or, to use more technical language, the inclination to the good embedded in the very structure of human existence – finds its complete fulfillment in the love of the triune God, and nothing less. Although Pope Benedict does not use this expression in the encyclical, we might call this unity of and continuity between *eros* and *agape* 'the sanctification of desire'.

The Service of Charity: The Integral Human Good

The second principal point argued in *Deus Caritas Est*, according to the reading I am suggesting today, is actually implicit in the first and is advanced in the second part of the encyclical. This second point is captured brilliantly in a passage from paragraph 19 of the encyclical: 'The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament...; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs'. This 'the service of charity' is directed to the integral human good, a description of which is the substance, as we have seen, of the encyclical's first major point.

For, while it is true that no created good can satisfy the desires of the human heart, God nonetheless intends us to enjoy these created goods precisely as his gift to us, affording a participation in his own Goodness. These created goods are not rendered irrelevant or dispensable by the fact that they are not themselves ultimate or absolute. The ultimate good does not cancel out or exclude limited or subordinate goods: they retain their integrity and finality in their very ordering to the ultimate good. Man does not live on bread alone, indeed, but he needs bread in order to live. Integral human fulfillment encompasses a range of created goods even as it necessarily entails a directedness, an inner tendency, toward the enjoyment of the uncreated Good who is God himself, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who enjoy a communion of life into which we, created persons who are not God, are invited to share as their friends – and nothing less.

This integral human good is the object of the Church's service of charity: the ultimate good *and* the intermediate or subordinate goods, the spiritual well-being *and* the material well-being, the goods of this earthly life *and* the good beyond life.

Again, Pope Benedict is concerned to refute the pernicious suggestion that, by affirming the priority and ultimacy of a good beyond earthly life, the Church overlooks the poverty and suffering of this world, or, worse, conspires with the 'principalities and powers' to maintain the unjust structures that are responsible for this human suffering. On the contrary. The service of charity encompasses the whole range of the integral good of human beings. The encyclical explains at length how this service of charity has been exercised in Christian history and how it can be exercised in the present day. In the midst of this service, the Church keeps to the forefront

that vision of the human good and human dignity that God himself has revealed and inscribed in the human heart from the very moment of the creation of the universe. 'The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man' (*Deus Caritas Est* §19).

Deus Caritas Est in the Perspective of the Faith and the Social Sciences

What I have identified as the two major points of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* pose a range of challenges to the reflection of Catholics whose professional life is devoted to one or other of the social sciences. In this brief paper, I can only hint at some of the more significant of these challenges – not only because of the richness of the encyclical's teaching, but also because of the diversity of the social sciences themselves.

For the most part, the program of this plenary session takes its inspiration from the second part of *Deus Caritas Est* in which the Holy Father has a great deal to say about the Catholic understanding of the service of charity and about the practical implications of this understanding for contemporary politics, society and culture. These issues are the bread and butter of social scientists like those who make up this distinguished academy.

To contribute to a robustly Christian engagement with these issues, social scientific inquiries informed by faith must take into account the truth about human nature which is in part already legible in the creation of men and women in God's image and is fully revealed in the contours of the face of Christ – what the encyclical terms 'the integral human good'.

The contribution of the social sciences to Christian reflection on these issues thus needs to be framed within the context of the Church's generous tradition – expressed with great clarity in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* – according to which the truth discovered in the sciences is in principle coherent with the truth contained in revelation. The fundamental reason for this lies not in our ability to manipulate bodies of knowledge, but in the nature of truth itself which is one, and thus more radically, in the nature of God himself who is the author of the created order just as much as of the economy of salvation. The Catholic principle is that what is discovered to be true by human reason cannot contradict what is known to be true by faith. This principle forms the background for the important things that Pope Benedict XVI has to say about faith and reason in his discussion of politics in paragraph 28 of *Deus Caritas Est*.

The Holy Father's observations here have a direct bearing on the contribution of the social sciences to Christian reflection on the service of chari-

ty, understood as an instance of the interface of faith and reason. As an encounter with the living God, faith opens up 'new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason'. 'But', continues Pope Benedict, faith 'is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly' (*Deus Caritas Est* §28).

In accord with the traditional Catholic principle, reason retains its integrity and proper finality, but faith contributes to its work by locating the objects of scientific inquiry on, so to speak, the widest possible conceptual map – that provided by our awareness of the divine desire to share the communion of trinitarian life with creaturely persons, or, to use the terms of the encyclical, the integral human good.

With these principles firmly in place, it seems to me of the greatest possible importance for social scientists like yourselves to resist reductionist accounts of human nature and society, and relativistic accounts of moral reasoning and norms – accounts which almost by definition obscure the wider horizons of faith about which Pope Benedict speaks in the encyclical. Such accounts are by no means entailed by research in the social sciences, but often arise from pre-existing philosophical assumptions that come to influence and shape the conclusions of scholarship. This is not the place to trace the complex history of these connections and dependences.

But there is no reason why research that focuses on specific aspects of human behavior and interaction needs to deny the existence of the wider horizon which faith reveals to us. As Pope Benedict tellingly affirms in *Deus Caritas Est*, 'faith liberates reason from its blind spots'. What is not susceptible to observation and generalization within the limits of a particular social scientific discipline or model can nonetheless provide the context for a fuller understanding of the objects of social scientific inquiry.

I mention this point because the Church faces a huge challenge in the present day in her interaction with international agencies and national governments whose social policies have been influenced by reductionist social science. It can be demonstrated that an entirely secular anthropology – in the sense of an alternative account of the meaning of human existence – has, especially since the '90s, come to shape the programs and policies of many international organizations, including the United Nations. In place of an earlier paradigm in which universal human rights and a common human nature played a normative role, the alternative anthropology espouses the socially constructed character of truth and reality, the priority of cultural diversity, the deconstruction of all moral norms, and priority

of personal choice. Although the roots of this secular anthropology are philosophical, the social sciences have been the principal vehicle for its diffusion in modern western societies.

When the Church, in this environment, advances her vision of the integral human good, her interventions are frequently caricatured as retrogressive and intrusive. The alternative anthropology has so powerful a hold on the media, the international aid agencies, many NGOs, and other influential bodies that it is difficult to advance the Christian vision of the integral human good through dialogue, argument and counter-argument. The new anthropology is viewed, in effect, as self-evident and not in need of argument. This situation has created many practical problems that sometimes make it difficult for Catholic aid agencies even to function at the local, national, and even international levels.

Some years ago, when the then Cardinal Ratzinger was its prefect, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith invited about thirty Catholic university faculties across the world to sponsor consultations and symposia on the natural law and universal human values. It is significant that, now as Holy Father, he should state in *Deus Caritas Est* that 'the Church's social teaching argues on the basis on reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being' (§28). But it must be admitted that this newly emergent secular vision denies the applicability – indeed, the knowability – of any universal account of human nature and destiny.

It is urgent for social scientists whose practice of their disciplines does not in principle exclude some broad account of the integral human good to counter this secular anthropology and the social engineering programs inspired by it. The straightforward, and well-argued account of the Christian vision of the integral human good presented in *Deus Caritas Est* should facilitate the kind of discussion and argument which needs to take place. I cannot think of a better forum for this much-needed debate than the floor of this distinguished academy.

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The encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* bears the date of Christmas 2005, the first Christmas of the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. This is significant. The only-begotten Son of God took on human nature in order that human persons might share in the divine life. It is this communion of life with creaturely persons that the triune God desires. 'I wish in my first

Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others' (*Deus Caritas Est*, §1). St. Augustine somewhere remarks that it is very difficult for human beings to believe in this love. But we can see that no account of the human condition can be complete that neglects, excludes or denies that the integral human good is found only in the love of God revealed to us on the first Christmas in the Incarnate Word made flesh.