

Love in Truth

A talk for the Permanent Diaconate in the Archdiocese of Southwark, 1 May 2010

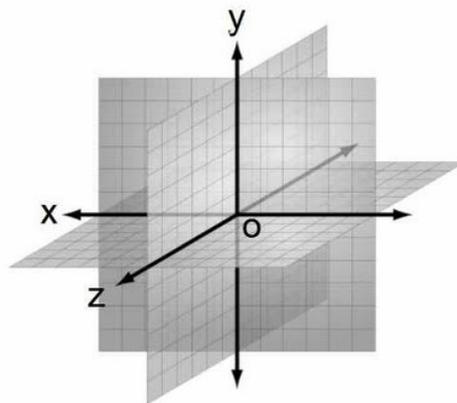
Stratford Caldecott

In this talk I will be trying to open up some of the riches and implications of Pope Benedict's third encyclical, his first specifically on social doctrine, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) and undoubtedly the most difficult of the three to read. In March 2010, meeting with Italian business leaders, the Pope spoke as he often does of the global recession as an opportunity to rethink our models of development and the way we organise finance. Of course, even in Italy not many people listen to the Pope. But the shock of the crisis has shaken many out of their complacency, and there have been signs that some have begun to think about the need for change. The encyclical suggested some of the directions that thinking might take. More importantly for those of us who are not business leaders or political figures, it speaks to each of us about the way we conceive our own relation to the world of work and of money, and the meaning of our day-to-day experience of economic life.

To begin with, I should explain where I am coming from. This will be relevant when we come to touch on the more controversial aspects of the encyclical. My own background is in neither economics nor political theory nor sociology. I studied philosophy and psychology at Oxford, and regard myself as a philosophical type who now finds theology the most interesting topic in the world. I was not raised as a Christian, but converted as an adult after some time spent on other religious pathways. I began my professional life as an academic and later religious publisher, and later started with my wife a small research centre and journal exploring the relationship of faith and culture, together with various activities for young people. Our "Second Spring Association", based in Oxford, consists of family, friends, students and contacts in the UK and elsewhere who are attempting in various ways to respond to the call of John Paul II and now Pope Benedict for a re-evangelization of culture. I also work closely with a small American liberal arts college, and my most recent book was about reviving the idea of the "liberal arts" in education as a way of overcoming our cultural fragmentation. In Oxford I also look after a research library devoted to G.K. Chesterton and his circle. A few years ago I taught an introductory course on "Christianity and Society" at the ill-fated Plater College. That led to my writing the CTS booklet on Catholic social teaching which led to my being asked here to speak to you today.

So it was Plater College that opened my eyes to the importance of "Catholic social teaching", as it did to so many people. This term is often taken to refer to the contents of the ongoing series of social encyclicals beginning with *Rerum Novarum* by Leo XIII in 1891. But as you know from reading Rodger Charles and others, the Church had a social doctrine long before the 19th century. To begin with, Christians inherited the ancient social teaching of Israel, enshrined in the Ten Commandments and the Torah. The Christian Covenant was an extension and remaking of the Jewish Covenant, now applied through Christ to everyone. In the Apostolic Age, Christians were a small minority, often persecuted, within a pagan Empire. But when the Empire itself became Christian in the 4th century, the Church had to work out a compromise with the secular authorities, and this inevitably shaped her social teaching. For a millennium the tensions between Pope and Emperor remained unresolved. Then the fragile unity of Christendom was shattered by the Reformation, and a more radical separation of Church and State took shape in France and the United States. Throughout all these transformations, the Church remained the Church. Today she is the longest-lasting and most complex of all global corporations, a living body of more than a billion people, with the accumulated wisdom of two thousand years and a galaxy of saints to whom to look for inspiration. An interesting legacy, as anyone will admit, even those who do not believe the Church draws her life from the Holy Spirit.

A myriad of social experiments have been tried over the centuries. Some were failures and have been forgotten, others – such as the great Benedictine experiment – continue to be successful. Others are relatively recent – I am thinking of the new movements – and the results are not yet in. But the essence of the Church’s social teaching involves certain key principles and themes, which have come increasingly into focus in the course of time. In some places you will find ten of these, in others twelve or some other number. I have come to the conclusion that they can be boiled down to four. It can be presented in geometrical terms, beginning with a point, which represents the human person, extended into a line, which represents solidarity or the relationship of self to neighbour. You then add the vertical dimension to represent subsidiarity or the way in which authority is organised, and finally the dimension of time, which shows that we have a responsibility both towards the past and for the future:



(O) The inalienable dignity of the *human person* as created and called to perfection by God (“personalism”). This is normally expressed in a doctrine of human rights.

(X) *Solidarity*, the intrinsic relationship of the person to the family, the community, and the common good.

(Y) *Subsidiarity*, the maximization of human freedom and responsibility at the lowest and most local level compatible with the common good.

(Z) *Sustainability* or stewardship, the responsibility of humanity for cultivating and maintaining through time the resources that have been entrusted to it.

All in all, CST is a very comprehensive system, which can be unpacked and expanded in very many ways – as, for example, the bishops did in their document, *Choosing the Common Good*. But though we may be proud of it, and excited by it, there is a danger in it too. We must not fall into the delusion that it is an ideology, a closed system of ideas. This is very clear from the encyclicals themselves. John Paul II writes, for example:

“The Church has no models to present; models that are real and effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with each other. For such a task the Church offers her social teaching as an indispensable and ideal orientation... towards the common good” (CA, 43)... “Since it is not an ideology, the Christian faith does not presume to imprison changing socio-political realities in a rigid schema, and it recognizes that human life is realized in history in conditions that are diverse and imperfect” (*Centesimus Annus*, 46).

Practical programmes and policies are the responsibility of the lay faithful, and of statesmen and politicians, to develop. These must conform to the moral law, it being the Church's role to set out what that law demands through her social teaching. CST is not a political or social manifesto. It "belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly of moral theology" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41, see also CA, 56). This is a comfort to me personally, since as I explained I come to this topic from a background in philosophy and theology. But it also leaves the popes themselves free to make *suggestions* and indicate *directions* for future development and application of doctrine, without fearing that these will be taken as anything more than this.

How Not to Read an Encyclical

The "reception" (as it is called) of papal encyclicals has always been a complex matter, and especially since the publication in 1968 of the most famous one of all, *Humanae Vitae*, which proved to be the occasion for so much argument and even dissent. An encyclical is a teaching letter of the Pope. It is not normally seen as an exercise of the infallible *magisterium*, the highest level of the Pope's authority, which comes into play when a doctrine arguably *already* pretty universally held by the Church is formally defined as part of the Faith and therefore necessary for all the faithful to believe. These so-called "*ex cathedra* pronouncements" take place rarely. The most recent concerned the dogma of the Assumption in 1950. The one before that was the doctrine of Infallibility itself in 1870, and before that the Immaculate Conception in 1854. People are sometimes surprised that there are so few papal pronouncements that claim this level of authority. Encyclicals have a lesser authority, and are to be received with respect, but may contain misleading statements or be otherwise misguided. If so, they may be corrected by future papal teaching. At the lowest end of the scale of papal authority are the personal opinions and private statements of the Pope, which are not imposed on the faithful and which may even be heretical.

On the face of it, therefore, it might seem that someone who disagreed on rational grounds with any given encyclical should have no problem. But not so fast. Not only are we expected to give the Pope's teaching the benefit of the doubt ("religious submission of the intellect and will") – that is, unless we have good grounds for disagreeing with it – but if the encyclical is issued with an explicit intention on the Pope's part to resolve an important controversy (as was the case with the controversy concerning contraception in 1968) it could be argued that the "*ordinary magisterium*" comes into play, and that the document must reflect an infallible judgement. This simply because we believe that God would not permit the Pope to lead the whole Church astray in such an important matter.

The social encyclicals of the Church in the modern period were conceived as a response by Pope Leo XIII to the changed social conditions of the 19th century brought about by the Industrial Revolution. These same conditions had led to the revolutionary movements of 1848 and the development of communism. The Pope called for the amelioration of "the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class", and supported the rights of labour to form unions, but also affirmed the right to private property. He spoke of the duties of both workers and employers to collaborate in building a prosperous and peaceful society. Pope Leo, in other words, opposed communism, but also opposed the extreme forms of capitalism. Later Popes built on the foundation laid by Leo, and tried to maintain this delicate balance.

During the 20th century social conditions changed in some ways for the better. After two world wars, the creation of the European Community, the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a period of relative prosperity, it was easy to assume that the complex economies of the West had found their way to a Promised Land. The assumption was strengthened by the euphoria that followed the defeat and collapse of communism in 1989. There were, however, many forms of poverty still unaddressed. Consumerism itself is often linked to a spiritual emptiness

which Mother Teresa likened to desperate spiritual poverty. In some ways the wealth of the industrial nations had been built on the exploitation of the third world, and the using up of natural resources that could not be replaced.

The question of whether the Western economies still needed radical reform came to the fore in 1991 with the publication by John Paul II of *Centesimus Annus*. Several so-called “Catholic Neoconservative” writers in America saw this encyclical – published to mark the end of a century from *Rerum Novarum* – as a clear endorsement of the dominant American free-market or liberal approach to economics. In 1994 I was one of the signatories of a manifesto called “Towards a Civilization of Love” which criticized this Neoconservative interpretation of the encyclical, calling attention to the fact that the Pope had gone so far as to question the “models of production and consumption” in present-day economic theory, and even “the established structures of power which today govern societies” (n. 58). In no way was the document a simple rubber stamp for American-style capitalism. The argument between the Neocons and us “Paleocons” was never resolved.

Now with *Caritas in Veritate* the same controversy has resurfaced. One of the Neoconservative writers just mentioned, George Weigel, normally a strong advocate and defender of the Pope, wrote a response to the new encyclical in which he described it as “a duck-billed platypus”, and as the “revenge” of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace against John Paul II. A seasoned observer of the Vatican, Weigel knew that there are often tensions between the Pope and the different organs of the Holy See. His interpretation saw Justice and Peace as a council dominated by sentimental, muddle-headed left-wingers burrowing into the woodwork, held in check during the pontificate of John Paul II but now running rampant under Pope Benedict. Weigel claimed that Benedict had permitted the Council to write substantial portions of his encyclical for him – especially the passages that Weigel himself found unintelligible. These passages are precisely those which tend to undermine the Neoconservative interpretation of the earlier encyclical.

The question is, do we need to be worried by this critique, or let it put us off reading *C in V*? I don’t think we do. I agree with Weigel that *C in V* is neither as lucid nor as coherent as its two predecessors, *Deus Caritas Est* and *Spe Salvi*. And it is well known that most encyclicals are drafted by various committees and advisers before being submitted to the Pope for revision or approval. But the fact is that once the Pope adds his signature to the document, it is issued with his own authority, not that of the people who drafted it. He has made their words his own. It is no good, therefore, trying to pick it apart in order to concentrate only on the golden words that come from the Pope’s own pen. A truly Catholic approach would search the document for harmony, not discord, trying to discern the message as a whole, balancing one part against another. Then, of course, we continue to apply our intelligence to the document, judging for ourselves the merit of its arguments, and reading it in the context of the whole of Church teaching and tradition, including previous papal encyclicals. Not an easy matter, of course, and I am not sure that I have succeeded in doing it either, but the point is that we should be trying to read with the mind of the Church, and not with a view to our preconceived opinions or ideological commitments.

Development in Love and Truth

Having clarified my approach to the encyclical (or at least my intended approach), I want now to summarize some of its main points, looking first at the substantial ways in which the Pope consolidates and builds upon previous Catholic social teaching, and then moving on to underline the more original contributions he makes to the development of that tradition.

The first thing to note is that *C in V* does not claim to be about every aspect of social teaching, but about “integral human development”. The occasion for writing it was the 40th anniversary of Paul VI’s encyclical on development, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), which he summarized in the first

chapter – although Benedict’s tribute was delayed for two years by various factors, including the need to address the global financial crisis. The concept of “development” is an interesting one. Like “evolution” the word means an “unrolling” of something, though of what may be unclear, and like “progress” it has a predominantly positive connotation. Mere “change” may be for the better or for the worse, but we tend to assume development and progress are good things at any rate. Personally, I suspect that this is a myth, a product of social Darwinism and technocratic optimism, but the Church since Vatican II has tried very hard to adopt an optimistic tone – perhaps to win the attention of the modern world she is trying to influence for the better. Development (as the Pope sees it here) is towards unity and peace; it is a path to be travelled “with the ardour of charity and the wisdom of truth” (8).

In his first chapter Pope Benedict summarizes *Populorum Progressio*. He shows how, for Pope Paul, integral human development is another name for the Church’s primary goal – evangelization, or the conversion of the world to Christ. As Pope John Paul always did, Pope Benedict quotes *Gaudium et Spes* 22: Christ, “in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals humanity to itself” (18). Thus he links the encyclical on progress to others his predecessor wrote on evangelization and even on contraception, making the point that “openness to life” is the centre of true development (28). In chapter 2 he goes on to contrast Pope Paul’s historical situation with our own. Economic and ecological crisis, advanced globalization, widespread poverty and political corruption, as well as growing threats to religious freedom and the family, call for “new efforts of holistic understanding and a *new humanistic synthesis*” (21, 31).

What is the basis for this new synthesis? There can be only one answer, and it is already indicated in the beautiful Introduction to *C in V*, which links this encyclical very carefully with the Pope’s previous ones on love and hope. Love is the heart of the Church’s social doctrine. It is applicable to everyone, Christian or not. And love is not merely a mood or a feeling, but “*Logos*”, or intelligible order. (The mention of *Logos* is very characteristic of Pope Benedict’s writing.) What gives meaning and value to charity, saving it from sentimentality, is truth. Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which in turn is the only guarantee of freedom (9). It is the truth that sets us free; that is to say, the truth of God’s love. This is, in a way, an old teaching because it goes back to the Gospel. But it is also brand new, because it breaks into the present and shatters the chains of habit and ignorance. God’s word is alive and active in us, not a dead message from the past. By drawing life from it, we are made new and the world is re-created.

The linkage of love and truth at the heart of the encyclical was foreshadowed in the famous “Dictatorship of Relativism” address that Cardinal Ratzinger gave to the cardinals on the eve of his election as Pope in April 2005, where he said: “Truth and love coincide in Christ. To the extent that we draw close to Christ, in our own lives too, truth and love are blended. Love without truth would be blind; truth without love would be like ‘a clanging cymbal’ (1 Cor 13: 1).” He sums it up in the slogan (suitable for T-shirts at the next World Youth Day, I would say), *Make truth in love*.

Gratuitousness

One way in which the encyclical links charity to truth is through what it calls the principle of “gratuitousness” in chapter 3. This is expressed, for example, in the following statement. “The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension” (34). Implied here is the whole of John Paul II’s personalism and his theology of the body. But Benedict wants to apply this directly to economics. An economic system, he says, cannot fulfil its proper function or serve the common good if governed entirely by “the equivalence in value of exchanged goods” (35). Therefore the “logic of gift” must be introduced even into the market (36-8). Economists have often built their theories around *homo economicus* – the self-interested individual – but that model is here overturned. Economic activity must be human and therefore either ethical

or unethical (45-6). It is not merely that the free market must come under the influence of a moral culture – it is itself a form of ethical activity. We are called to create space within the market for economic entities aiming at a higher goal than pure profit, based on mutualist principles and pursuing social ends (38, 40). There is also in this chapter mention of new “hybrid” forms of economic activity that must be encouraged (38), as well as cooperatives, credit unions, micro-finance, and the “economy of communion” (46). I will come back to this in the last section.

Rights and Environment

Chapter 4 opens with a discussion of rights. We have all witnessed how today’s “rights culture” has grown out of hand. Human rights are fine, and establishing the idea of them in the early modern period was an important way to ensure a measure of respect for the human person. But the Pope believes that rights flow only from genuine needs. We all need life, sustenance and opportunities to flourish, and these are things to which we mostly agree we are entitled. But we cannot claim “rights” to things that we don’t need but merely want (I think of Gollum claiming the Ring as his “birthday present”), and that is exactly what happens when society loses any sense of objectivity about human nature and fulfilment. The Pope argues that it is *duties* which set a limit on rights by tying them to the truth of who we are and what we need in order to achieve happiness (43). It seems to work like this: a human need imposes a duty on others to respond, on the understanding that we are here to do good and to help one another. A “right” is merely a duty looked at from the point of view of the one to be helped.

Chapter 4 goes on from this to address concerns about population growth and ecology. The Pope encourages a “responsible” approach to procreation, as long as this does not compromise the true nature of human sexuality or the need for families to make their own decisions (44). Sex must not be reduced to mere entertainment, nor procreation to a “risk” from which couples or society need to be protected. In some developed countries it is falling birth rates that are the problem, not overpopulation. After a brief consideration of the notion of “business ethics” the Pope spends the rest of the chapter on ecology. “The environment is God’s gift to everyone,” he says, “and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole” (48). Nature is not more important than the human person, and must not be worshiped, as it is by some neo-pagan groups. On the other hand it is “more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a ‘grammar’ which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation.”

This implies that “technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption, either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens,” with a view to “a worldwide redistribution of energy resources” and “*responsible stewardship over nature*” (50). These points were later taken up also in his Message for the World Day of Peace in January, along with the very important link he makes between environmental ecology and what he calls “human ecology”. Human beings are part of the ecosystem, and so a genuine concern with the whole system of life on earth must take account of the dignity of the human person, particularly “the right to life and to a natural death. . . . Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person.” Thus the Church “must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction” (51).

The Human Family

The next chapter, chapter 5, is about the “cooperation of the human family”. It applies the horizontal and vertical principles of solidarity and subsidiarity to international aid, education,

tourism and migration, labour unions, finance, consumer associations and global governance (58-67), grounding them in the spiritual nature of the human creature. Human beings are “defined through interpersonal relations” (53) in the image of the Trinity (54), and grow to maturity by living these relations properly. For Benedict, the Trinity is Christianity’s greatest contribution to culture, and the basis for human solidarity. That is partly because to say God is a Trinity is another way of saying that God is not power but love. Each of the Persons in the Trinity is distinct from the others, yet completely united in love without needing to force the others to his will. I think the Pope would therefore argue that idea of the Trinity is what inspired the philosophy behind modern democracy, pluralism and freedom. Faith in the Trinity taught mankind the principle of *difference in unity*, a principle that bore fruit as the toleration of diversity.

These values, which became one of the pillars of the European Enlightenment but which we now think of in purely secular terms, can easily be lost again or become distorted if we lose sight of their philosophical and Christian roots. Thus the Pope calls for the social sciences to work with metaphysics and theology in order to do justice to “man’s transcendent dignity” as a social and therefore relational creature. Connected with this emphasis on wisdom and metaphysics is an insistence that God and theology cannot be excluded from the public realm (cultural, social, economic, political) without damaging or seriously distorting human development (56). This is a point on which he has written extensively elsewhere, and because of its importance I will come back to it at the end.

Technology

Finally, chapter 6 tackles the whole question of technology, in which the distinctive problems of modernity come to a head. We seem to be haunted by the fear of our machinery and what it is doing to us, or what might happen when it goes wrong. According to landmarks of popular culture such as the *Terminator* and *Matrix* movies and *Battlestar Galactica*, sooner or later the machines will turn upon us. They will use us as a source of energy, or treat us as a biological infection to be expunged. At best they will regard us with disdain. Again, J.R.R. Tolkien dramatized the dangers of technology and the dark side of globalization in his novel *The Lord of the Rings*. In his letters he refers to the Ring of Power as “the Machine” – a symbol of the attempt to gain power over the world.

The Pope does not entirely share this fear of technology. He says that technological progress is a legitimate response to God’s command in Genesis to “till and cultivate” the earth. It “enables us to exercise dominion over matter, to reduce risks, to save labour, to improve our conditions of life” (69). On the other hand, it can become “an ideological power that threatens to confine us within an *a priori* that holds us back from encountering being and truth. Were that to happen, we would all know, evaluate and make decisions about our life situations from within a technocratic cultural perspective to which we would belong structurally, without ever being able to discover a meaning that is not of our own making” (70). That is a perfect (if rather abstract) description of the premise of *The Matrix*, in which all of mankind are living in a virtual world unaware that there is anything outside called “reality”. The big question the movie poses is whether, if we did suspect the truth, we would really want to confront that reality, or would we choose to remain in blissful ignorance?

We have come to rely on “automatic or impersonal forces” to improve our lot, but the Pope thinks this is a mistake. “When technology is allowed to take over, the result is confusion between ends and means, such that the sole criterion for action in business is thought to be the maximization of profit, in politics the consolidation of power, and in science the findings of research” (71). He reminds us of the Catholic understanding that there must always be “moral consistency” between ends and means. That is to say, technology (including biotechnology) must be at the service not of

our desires and intentions, but of truth, and in particular the truth of the human person who is made for love.

The Pope thinks that “the development of peoples goes awry if humanity thinks it can re-create itself through the ‘wonders’ of technology, just as economic development is exposed as a destructive sham if it relies on the ‘wonders’ of finance in order to sustain unnatural and consumerist growth” (68). And this means we must change the way we think and act.

“Technologically advanced societies must not confuse their own technological development with a presumed cultural superiority, but must rather rediscover within themselves the oft-forgotten virtues which made it possible for them to flourish throughout their history. Evolving societies must remain faithful to all that is truly human in their traditions, avoiding the temptation to overlay them automatically with the mechanisms of a globalized technological civilization” (59).

In conclusion, the message of *C in V* is that human development depends on our becoming aware of the “*call of being*”, especially our personal being – that is, our human nature (70).

The Originality of *C in V*

Well, that completes my little summary of *C in V*. But where does it leave us? I am aware that I have left out or skimmed over a great deal. In this last section of my talk, all I can do is briefly focus on five of the most interesting aspects of the document, which may serve as topics for discussion. For me, these are the Pope’s insertion of *homo socialis* into economics, the question of global governance, the linking of human and natural ecology, the dangers of reliance on technology, and the place of religion in public life.

First, then, by introducing the principle of “gratuitousness” and “reciprocal gift” into economics the Pope wanted to break up what he calls “the binary model of market-plus-State” (38, 39, 41), that model which has dominated economic thinking for a hundred years. By this he means that our lives are increasingly shaped either by market forces or by the decisions and policies of government – squeezing out the realm of “civil society” with its various communities and regions of independent action. Our “freedom” is narrowly interpreted as merely the ability to choose – to choose a government (by democratic election), and to choose from an array of products on the supermarket shelf. In response to this dangerous situation, John Paul II “spoke of the need for a system with three subjects: the *market*, the *State*, and *civil society*”. Thus culture or ethics enters as an influence on the economy alongside the State. That is right in one way, but it does not go far enough for Benedict. He is more radical still (see 38). He does not think the market in itself is ethically neutral. Ethics or “fraternal reciprocity” must be present in the market as market, even before it is influenced by civil society. Justice must enter into the economy from the outset, and justice is made perfect only in “giving and forgiving”. But what might this mean in actual practice?

It certainly does not mean that everything must be given away, or that the profit motive is unimportant or evil. One way of fleshing it out is by looking at the examples he gives of alternative “economic entities” that act on principles other than pure profit, or which treat profit merely as a means to a social end, including cooperatives, credit unions, and the “economy of communion”. The latter is an extremely successful innovation of the Focolare movement that began in Brazil and spread to many other countries. What Focolare have done is create businesses that divide their profits three ways: one third is ploughed back into the business, one third given to the needs of the community, and one third used to create other businesses of a similar type. This interweaves the business with the community in a much healthier way, and makes charity an equal goal alongside

profit. It shouldn't work, according to the logic taught in most business schools which revolves entirely around competition, but it does, because it reflects the truth of human nature as fundamentally relational or social, rather than individualistic.

Similarly, the Mondragon cooperative in Spain has become one of that country's biggest industrial entities, yet is entirely owned and run by the workers for their families and communities. The Grameen Bank and other forms of credit union have succeeded where the big, impersonal banks fail because they operate on the basis of local knowledge and personal trust. In case after case, it is the human and humane approach that actually succeeds best, especially when the measures of cost and success are revised to take account of the big picture, and the longer term. There is a famous study commissioned by Shell that demonstrates how those corporations that treat their workers as human beings rather than cogs in a machine are precisely the ones that survive in the marketplace for hundreds of years. This is what the Pope means by "fidelity to man" in the economic order, and it is these successful examples of alternative economic practice – what you might call "economic democracy in action" – to which he draws our attention. I have information about some of them on my blog.

Secondly, as has been pointed out by George Weigel and others, the Pope speaks in section 67 on the "*urgent need of a true world political authority*" to manage the global economy. It would have "the authority to ensure compliance with its decisions from all parties, and also with the coordinated measures adopted in various international forums", so that "the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth." This is all rather alarming. It sounds like a recipe for global tyranny. But here we must remember the need to read each part of the encyclical in the light of others, rather than taking phrases out of context – especially a phrase like "real teeth" that is not present in the original text and was only introduced by the English translator to spice up the text. Thus the Pope adds in the very same section: "Such an authority 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." In section 57, he has already said:

"In order not to produce a dangerous universal power of a tyrannical nature, *the governance of globalization must be marked by subsidiarity*, articulated into several layers and involving different levels that can work together. Globalization certainly requires authority, insofar as it poses the problem of a global common good that needs to be pursued. This authority, however, must be organized in a subsidiary and stratified way, if it is not to infringe upon freedom and if it is to yield effective results in practice."

In other words, the Pope does not think that international law should be determined by "the balance of power among the strongest nations" (67), but nor should it be dictated by some arbitrary authority. The authority should not be arbitrary but governed by the principles he has outlined. Furthermore, its only role is that of serving and coordinating the other "layers" of political authority. How this could be done – if it is possible at all – is for others to work out. "The Church does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim 'to interfere in any way in the politics of States.' She does, however, have a mission of truth to accomplish, in every time and circumstance, for a society that is attuned to man, to his dignity, to his vocation" (9).

Thirdly, there is the matter of ecology. The sections on this topic are rather extensive, and have been reinforced by other speeches and homilies of the Pope. Clearly he has taken the message of the environmental movement to heart as his immediate predecessor did – not bad for a man the media portray as having been traumatized by the student movements of the 1960s, for which the environment was an important cause. But he links the cause of the environment to the cause of man in a way that many in the Green movement find incomprehensible – because they have fallen into

another of those “binary models” that the modern world loves so much, in this case the opposition of man and nature. For the Pope, man is part of nature and interconnected with the whole of it. The way we treat our own nature – that is, with respect or disrespect – determines the way we will treat nature in general. Secular ecologists, of course, recognize interconnectedness in their own way, but reduce it to material factors alone, leaving the spirit and even human psychology largely out of the picture, except to portray Nature as a goddess whose realm man has attacked.

Fourthly, the “rise of the machines”. This is a scary subject to enter into, because we are so dependent on our technology, even to get us out of the problems we have created. This is precisely the Pope’s point. He is not a Luddite, wanting to take us back to an earlier phase of human evolution. But he insists on pointing out that the effect of “Promethean presumption” (68) separated from moral responsibility and wisdom is the reduction of truth to utility, efficiency and power, and a growing tendency to assume we *should* do things just because we can. Morality has largely been relegated to the private or subjective sphere, allowing technology to dominate the public realm, as if it were an “ideological power” in its own right (70). I think one way to put this is that technology is not “neutral”. Its moral impact is not due solely to “the way it is used”, but often to the *fact that it is used*. The fact that there are good and bad uses of cars, televisions, computers, drugs, bombs and electricity is secondary to the fact that they change our lives simply by existing, and the way they do so is largely a function of the logic built into them from their very design. (The social networking websites, for example, change the way we relate to each other just by being used.)

Finally, I come to the role of religion in public life, which the Pope begins to discuss in section 29. I recommend also a 2005 essay by Cardinal Ratzinger called “Europe’s Crisis of Culture” which you can find on the sheet. There he explores in much more detail the legacy of the Enlightenment, disentangling the important acquisitions we should never renounce, including the realization that faith cannot be imposed by the State, from the distortions that enter with a confused concept of freedom, or rather from the detachment of freedom from truth. In the end, this detachment transforms freedom into a kind of dogmatism which entails the elimination of Christian and other religious views based on belief in God from public life, sometimes on the feeble excuse of not wanting to “offend” anyone. As he says there, “It is not the mention of God that offends those who belong to other religions, but rather the attempt to build the human community absolutely without God.” The mention of God or Christ offends mainly atheists, who now no longer wish to be merely free not to believe, but to exclude other points of view from the public realm. The future Pope instead challenges those who have no faith to live “as if God existed”, because in no other way can a society be built in which all men and women are equally respected, and in which love is treated as the highest value. In place of an “inhuman humanism” that excludes transcendence, he proposes a humanism “open to the Absolute” (78-9).

FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church (Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), especially Part Three.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004). The encyclicals from which much of this teaching is drawn are available from CTS in London, and are also available at www.vatican.va. Documents of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales available at www.catholicchurch.org.uk include *The Common Good* (1996) and *Vote for the Common Good* (2001), as well as *A Spirituality of Work* (2001) and the recent *Choosing the Common Good* (2010).

Introductions

Rodger Charles SJ, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (Family Publications, 1999) and *Christian Social Witness and Teaching*, 2 vols. (Gracewing, 1998)

Stratford Caldecott, *Catholic Social Teaching: A Way In* (CTS, third revised edition 2010). Look out for the CTS series on Catholic social teaching.

Web Resources

- An impressive website produced by the Office for Social Justice of the Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis: www.osjspm.org/cst
- *The Busy Christian's Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*: www.uscatholic.org/cstline/tline.html.
- The home page of CAFOD: www.cafod.org.uk
- Cardinal Van Thuan Observatory on CST: www.vanthuanobservatory.org
- Catholic resources on ecology: <http://conservation.catholic.org/index.htm>
- Educational resources: www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/resources
- A library of Catholic social teaching: www.shc.edu/theolibrary/cst
- Stratford Caldecott's blog: <http://theeconomyproject.blogspot.com>
- A site edited by Stratford Caldecott: www.secondspring.co.uk/economy
- Selected articles by Pope Benedict are available in the Articles section at www.secondspring.co.uk, including "Europe's Crisis of Culture" (2005).

Further study

The Fall 2009 issue of *Communio* journal (www.communio-icr.com) contains D.C. Schindler on the metaphysics of money, Thomas Storck on whether "usury" is still a sin, and Wendell Berry on "Inverting the Economic Order". For the Neocon-Paeocon debate see *Wealth, Poverty and Human Destiny*, ed Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler (ISI, 2003). On "gratuitousness in the economy" see Adrian Walker's paper in that book (also online at secondspring.co.uk/economy) and Lewis Hyde, *The Gift* (Canongate, 2006). On personalism see Thomas R. and R.A.C. Rourke, *A Theory of Personalism* (Lexington, 2005); on economic democracy see Race Mathews, *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society* (Distributist Review Press, 2009); and on the Radical Christian Romantic tradition see John Hughes, *The End of Work: Theological Critiques of Capitalism* (Blackwell, 2007)