

BENEDICT XVI - DEUS CARITAS EST (ON CHRISTIAN LOVE) – 25
December 2005

(selections)

“God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them” (1 Jn 4:16) expresses with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith. In the same verse “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us” offers a kind of summary of the Christian life (n1).

The love-story between God and humanity consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God’s will increasingly coincide. God’s will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but is now my own will....(n17).

I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend.If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other any more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in them the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be “devout” and to perform my “religious duties”, then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely “proper”, but loveless (n18).

Love grows through love (n18).

Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God is first and foremost a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level....As a community the Church must practise love....(Its essential core is that) within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life (n20).

Since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church’s charitable activity, subsequently developed with particular insistence by Marxism: the poor it is claimed do not need charity but justice. Works of charity – almsgiving – are in effect in way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the status quo, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world’s goods and no longer have to depend on charity. There is admittedly some truth to this argument, but also much that is mistaken (n26).

(In the wake of the changed relations between capital and labour which took place in the nineteenth century) it must be admitted that the Church’s leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just structuring of society needed to be approached in a new way (27).

Marxism had seen world revolution and its preliminaries as the panacea for the social problem: revolution and the subsequent collectivization of the means of production, so it was claimed, would immediately change things for the better. This illusion has vanished. In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed **in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live** (n27).

The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics...The State may not impose religion, yet it must guarantee religious freedom and harmony between the followers of different religions. For its part, the Church, as the social expression of Christian faith, has a proper independence and is structured on the basis of its faith as a community which the State must recognize. The two spheres are distinct, yet always interrelated (n28).

Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God – an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where **Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgement and attainment of what is just** (n28).

The Church... is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run (n29).

We can see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization – we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need....**Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that “among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing inescapable sense of solidarity between all peoples”** (AA 8) (n30).

(The) Encyclical Ut Unum Sint emphasized that the building of a better world requires Christians to speak with a united voice in working to inculcate “respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenceless” (UUS 43) (n30).

Charity...cannot be used as a means of engaging in what nowadays is considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a means of achieving other ends (n31).

...A pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak (n31).

Love is possible and we are able to practise it because we are created in the image of God (39).