

Eternal Truth and Everlasting Love

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On June 29, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI issued his third encyclical “*Caritas in Veritate*”. The original language of this encyclical was Italian.

Problems encountered in the Chinese translation

We originally hoped that the Chinese version of the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* could be published at the same time as those in other languages, such as English, French, and German. However, because of new regulations regarding translation laid down by the Holy See, our wish did not come true. The new regulations of the Holy See are:

- (1) The translation cannot be done by one individual alone; it must be done by a team of translators.
- (2) The translation must be done in Rome, so that if there is any problem with the translation the team can discuss it with the relevant officials of the Holy See. For instance, if there is a problem with the meaning of the original language, the team can ask for an explanation or a clarification from the Holy See.
- (3) Before the original version of the encyclical is published, it cannot be taken away from the Holy See, lest it be leaked.

Due to these various new regulations, we were not able to line up a team of translators to do the translation in Rome within a short time. As a result the Chinese translation was not able to come out at the same time the encyclical was published in its original language.

The original plan called for three parties, the dioceses of Taiwan, the Macau Diocese and the Hong Kong Diocese, to collaborate on the Chinese translation. According to the plan, the Macau and the Hong Kong dioceses would employ a translator to translate the whole encyclical, and then four experts from Taiwan would check the translation. Pressed for time, we initially invited Mr. Stanislaus Lee to help in the translation. The Taiwan dioceses also invited a priest, who is very experienced in the field of translation, to help check the translation. To speed up the process, I also joined in the translation work. However, since we all had different schedules, we found it hard to come together at a time convenient for all. Thus the task was delayed for some time. This team of three persons not only did the translation, but we did the checking work as well. Now the Chinese translation has finally been published. Although it is not perfect, we are glad that it is done.

The title of the encyclical was initially translated as 《在真理中的愛德》 (Charity in Truth), but at the time of publication we changed it to 《在真理中實踐愛德》 (Practice Charity in the Light of Truth). According to experts, it is wrong to translate in this way, since it is not faithful to the original language. Texts should be translated literally, they say. But the work of translation already involves interpretation. It is not simply translation.

Usually, when the pope promulgates an encyclical, the first two words of the encyclical would be used as the title. In accordance with this practice, the meaning that is not carried in the first two words should not be added. Nevertheless, this encyclical talks about practicing charity, therefore we adopt our present Chinese title. It can be said that we are translating the meaning of this encyclical as well, and not translating the title word for word.

Why do we call truth eternal?

Let us now turn to the Holy Father's encyclical itself. Several years ago I had already heard that the Pope intended to write an

encyclical on the Church's social teachings. However, some topics in this field are more technical now. The Holy Father was careful and sought advice from experts; thus the plan was postponed for some time. Finally this neither too long, nor too short, encyclical came out.

I chose to write on the topic "Eternal Truth and Everlasting Love", which is easier to deliberate. The "eternal" element is something basic, though not something new, and is the most precious part of the encyclical. The Holy Father emphasized more than once in the encyclical that the Church has the responsibility to voice its opinion on matters in society. Indeed, it is fitting that she does so, and she has the right to do so. The title of this encyclical is *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in the light of Truth); obviously it is related to Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love). The Holy Father first of all expounded on the theme "God is Love", and then went on to elaborate how the Church lives out this love (charity) in the world. This new encyclical places the emphasis on "truth". It takes its theme from the phrase in the Bible, "truth in love" (Eph 4:15).

When we talk about truth, we sometimes emphasize truth so much that we are not sympathetic enough towards other people's situations, and so are lacking in charity. Usually we would say: "To live out the truth with love." We must remember that when we live out the truth, and respect the truth, at the same time, we have to be understanding regarding the difficulties other people are facing. On the other hand, while living out charity, we need the illumination of truth. If we only speak of love, then love could be reduced to a blind sentiment, which is unreliable. The living out of charity has to be based on truth, and illuminated by the truth.

The Holy Father has repeatedly mentioned that there are two aspects of truth, namely, reason and faith. However, since we have to dialogue with non-believers, we have to start with reason. The Church emphasizes that the natural law is the principle of moral ethics. This can be seen in human nature; therefore even non-believers can understand it. Thanks be to God, He personally

revealed the truth to us. With God's revelation, we know exactly what the truth is. In order that we can generally understand all the truth, we need God's revelation. Thus the Church is particularly in a position to show humankind the way to understand the truth.

The object of love particularly refers to the development of individuals and peoples. But what is authentic development? Since Pope Paul VI, or even tracing back to the time before the Second Vatican Council, the development of the human race refers to the development of all peoples, the development of the whole person and of all persons. The Holy Father stresses that throughout history there have been guidelines at appropriate times, but the journey of the Church is on-going and perpetual. We should not distinguish between pre- or post-Vatican Council II, as if they belong to two different worlds. The teaching of the Church is continuous and consistent.

The Ecumenical Councils, and Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II have left us rich treasures, which are the social teachings of the Church. A substantial part of this encyclical deals with the basic principles of the social teaching of the Church. It concerns people. First of all we need to know what it means to be a human person. How does God want us to live a human life? Of course every person has his/her own personal life, but the focus here is on social life, because the theme is on social moral ethics.

Justice and the Common Good in *Caritas in Veritate*

At the very beginning of his encyclical, the Holy Father highlighted two very important themes: "justice" and "the common good". "Justice" means "giving to the other what is his or hers". We need to respect what is due to others. Under justice, we have no right not to give what is due to others by reason of their being or acting. Charity goes beyond justice. Charity is an offering. It is giving what is "mine" to the other. We have to respect both of these virtues, but justice is more fundamental.

“Justice” basically has two aspects: one between individuals is sometimes called contractual. It assures that justice is observed in exchanges between individuals. The other is social justice, or justice in distribution. This means that those who have the responsibility of governing society must see to it that every person in society can share fairly in the common good.

Conventionally we divide society into capitalist society and socialist society. Some people even say that the Catholic Church supports capitalism, but this is not so. We support and respect private property, but that does not mean that we support capitalism. However, individual Catholics may think that the capitalist system is better than the communist one. Nevertheless, we do not agree with the theory that “capital is supreme”, which capitalism advocates. God has made this world for every person; so every person should have what he/she requires to make a living. The foremost principle is that the things of this world are for the human person. On this basis we should consider what sort of structure we want to set up to achieve this end.

Economic development is not equivalent to an increase in production. Consideration has to be given as to how things are distributed. Increase in per capital gross domestic product (GDP) is not necessarily equal to the development of the country. If productivity increases without fair distribution, with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, this is not development. It is regression. Pope John XXIII clearly stated: “If production increases, but the distribution is very uneven, then it is better that the increase in production slows down, and a more even distribution takes place.”

Development should not only take into account the level of production, but should also consider justice, such that every person in society gets what he/she needs. From here, we can talk about wages, about what a person should get from their work. Social justice is positive; it is for those who have a responsibility towards the society. From the perspective of the nation, or from the political viewpoint, the objective is to fulfill the obligations of

justice, and that the people can have what they require to live their lives. Production and distribution are inseparable. It should not be a matter of increasing production first, and then considering the method of distribution. They should go hand in hand. This means that how things are produced directly affects distribution. Therefore, the Holy Father emphasizes “the common good”, which means that everyone should share the benefits, not just one person, or a small group of persons. Every person should benefit from development. The “common good” covers a wide range of areas. It is not just a matter of having enough to eat or having a job. It refers also to other social matters, such as medical care, education, cultural affairs, and other matters having to do with human dignity. Many problems in this world still remain to be solved, but we must remember that the most important are matters relating to the human person.

Pope Paul VI was the first to speak of the term “development”. In his opinion, the primary aim of “development” is to free the peoples from starvation, poverty, illness and illiteracy. From the economic perspective, it means that people can take an active role in the operation of the world’s economic system and find fair play there. From the political viewpoint, it is to consolidate the democratic system and to assure freedom and peace.

Our present Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI asked: “Has the development taken place over the past decades made Pope Paul VI’s hopes come true?” Benedict XVI is of the opinion that the expectations of Paul VI have not been totally realized. Benedict XVI admits that economic development has taken place, and that production and wealth have grown. Some countries have emerged as economic powers — I think he is referring to China here — but there are still a lot of problems. The wealth generated by the economic development is very unevenly distributed. Thus it cannot be considered an overall development. Economic development alone is not enough; there should be development in other aspects of life as well.

Moreover, economic development should not simply mean an increase in the GDP. Under the prevailing economic system, new problems have emerged. For example, due to global competition, in order to attract foreign capital, protection for the workers is ignored. Even workers' unions find it difficult to fight for the rights of workers. With the mobility of both capital and labor, a nation's government finds it more and more difficult to protect its own people. This does not mean that under globalization a national government has no role to play. As can be seen in the difficult situation of the economic tsunami, a national government can still have an influence. But the life of the citizens is getting more and more difficult under globalization.

Apart from economics, globalization also has an impact on culture. Culture is an invaluable asset of the human race. Although there are different cultures in the world, since all cultures have similarly evolved from human nature, all of them can vibrantly bring forth the riches of human nature. However, the unending commercialization of cultural exchange can lead to a two-fold danger. The first is a cultural eclecticism that is often assumed uncritically: cultures are simply placed alongside one another and viewed as substantially equivalent. It seems as if we do not need to learn from each other's culture, and that cultures are interchangeable. This easily yields to a relativism that does not serve true intercultural dialogue. The second danger is that of "cultural leveling", which can result in uniformity in manner and in our way of living. In this way, the different cultures among nations and the profound meaning of the ethnic tradition of peoples are in danger of disappearing altogether.

From the perspective of the human person, the emphasis of religion is on "life". It is contradictory if, on the one hand, one stresses human rights, but on the other hand one does not respect life, and supports abortion and euthanasia. How can one assert human rights if one does not respect life? In this encyclical, the Holy Father elaborates on the understanding of the human person from the perspectives of reason and faith. But most important of all

is the basic attitude that the development of the human race is a mission, which God has given to us. God wants us to construct this human family, in a spirit of charity, and in a willingness to sacrifice ourselves for the common good of society. We believers also have hope, because we know that we cannot accomplish our task by ourselves alone. We need God. Charity and hope empower us. Charity and hope come from our faith. It is the truth of the faith that illuminates us.

How should we respond?

We clergy are not economists, nor are we political leaders. In the light of this encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, there are many things we can do.

As clergy, we can always learn something in the documents from Rome. Rome disseminates a great number of documents, but at least we should keep abreast of the encyclicals, because these are the teachings coming directly from the Holy Father. We should pay attention to the encyclicals, and arouse the laity's interest in them. We are grateful for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who encourages the popes to continuously write new teachings for us. They are invaluable resources for us.

The encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* is a document on social issues, and therefore its impact is more on the laity than on the clergy. When the laity analyze social issues and form plans of action, *Caritas in Veritate* should have some influence on them. This encyclical covers a wide area. It is unlikely that every topic in the encyclical concerns everybody. But certain parts may be useful to some people. The encyclical can help Catholics to understand the world better, and can help them in their decision-making.

The Significance of *Caritas in Veritate* for Today's China

Like the other Social Teachings of the Church, *Caritas in Veritate* is not easy reading for people outside the Christian culture.

This is so because the values contained in the Church's Social Teachings are very different from the values of non-believers. Although many countries would say that their government policy is people-oriented, it is only within the realm of faith that real people-oriented policies can be found and be put into practice. The Church has a very great respect for people; therefore in discussing social issues, economic benefits would not be the priority. The Church respects every person, even those who are at the lowest level of society. The Church is also concerned about the development of the whole person. That is, development should be balanced, surpassing a material development only. Since China is still under the influence of Marxism, it seems that it would be very difficult for China to agree to the Church's values regarding human development.