

The Encyclical DEUS CARITAS EST in the Context of the work of J. Ratzinger

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The Mozart of theologians is how Cardinal Meisner once described Joseph Ratzinger. His first encyclical "On Christian Love" is a kind of symphonic poem. In it, various themes that he had developed in his earlier writings are taken up again, developed, and woven into a new vision that is original and, now quite literally, authoritative in content - as well as being authoritative in form, as Papal teaching. Pope Benedict wants "to speak of the love which God has lavished on us and which we in turn must share with others", a message that, as he says, is both timely and significant in a world "where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence" [#1].

The difficulty is that theological discourse on the love of God and love of neighbour has been undermined by certain ideas and practices in the Church. These are basically two: a false understanding of divine love and, secondly, uncertainty about the relationship between justice and charity. Both have affected the Church's organized charitable organizations with the consequent danger of their losing their Christian bearings and becoming no different from secular NGOs. The Encyclical sets out to correct these misunderstandings. What Professor Ratzinger once said about the way St Paul puts forward the "official" teaching about faith's moral form can be said to apply to Pope Benedict's encyclical: he does not moralize or issue threats but rather explicates the inner demands of grace.¹ But Pope Benedict does more than correct misunderstandings: he proposes a vision of one of the essential, but rarely explicated, aspects of the Church's mission, namely organized charitable activity. Further, he outlines a spirituality for that activity, a spirituality that, rooted in Scripture, responds to suffering and tragedy on a massive scale, as in today's world.

The Encyclical's central message is summed up in the opening paragraph of the Introduction: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction". That short sentence reflects the profound insight into the nature of Revelation which Ratzinger discovered during his post-doctoral study of St Bonaventure and which found its confirmation in the Conciliar Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. Revelation is not a series of doctrinal statements but a person: Jesus Christ, the culmination of man's encounter with the living God - an encounter that is ever present in the Church, his Body, and is ever transformative.² And he adds in the Introduction: "Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere command; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us" [#1]

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "The Church's Teaching Authority - Faith - Morals" in Heinz Schürmann, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Principles of Christian Morality*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 67.

² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Salvation History, Metaphysics and Eschatology" in *Principles of Catholic Theology. Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, transl. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.D.N. (San Francisco, 1987) 171-90, espec. 184-90 [*Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamental Theologie* (Munich, 1982) 180-99, espec. 193-9]; re St Bonaventure, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras*, [= Gesammelte Schriften, 2] (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 2009); re Vatican II, see the relevant sections of his *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* [= Gesammelte Schriften, 7] (2012); for an overview, see his *Der Gott Jesu Christi. Betrachtungen über den Dreieinigen Gott* (Munich, 1976).

In the prize essay that became his doctoral dissertation, Ratzinger noted the marked change in Augustine's understanding of salvation from his earlier writings after his conversion to his more mature theological reflections. In Augustine's youthful writings, the final goal of all effort was the inner understanding and perception of true reality, since the truth is God. But in his more mature years, his ultimate theological aim was to understand "the *love* of the Church towards her divine Bridegroom, from which man in a true sense is reborn and his new life, his most interior transformation, consists of the indwelling [*Insein*] of the Holy Spirit of love in him. [...] The most profound goal of man now is being in the Love through being in the Church."³ It could be said that this is the basis on which Ratzinger's whole theological endeavour is based, first manifested in his Inaugural Lecture on the University of Bonn, 1959.⁴

Apart from a brief Introduction and Conclusion, *Deus caritas est* is made up of two parts: the first is, by nature, speculative, the second practical. The speculative part explores, on the basis of Scripture, the meaning of divine and human love revealed in the Pierced One, the source of the Church's mission, while the second part explores the work of the Holy Spirit breathed out by the dying Jesus and actualized in the Church's history. What I propose is to look at three central themes: 1) Recovering the nature of Christian love as passion and gift; 2) the relationship between justice and charity; and 3) a spirituality for those charged with the Church's charitable activities. Tracey Rowland once noted that, in his commentary on the section on spirituality in *Gaudium et Spes* (##15-17), "Ratzinger was quite appalled that anyone could attempt to speak about spirituality without thinking that Christian love might have anything to do with it." *Deus caritas est*, she claims, "can thus be read, in part, as a long-awaited remedy to what he saw as the lopsided intellectualism of the treatment of spirituality in *Gaudium et Spes*."⁵

1) Christian love as passion and gift.

The Pope's starting point is the universal human experience of falling in love, what the Greeks termed *eros*. This is experienced as an ecstasy that seems divine, but one which, if not purified and disciplined, can become destructive. Over the past century, a severely spiritualistic understanding of divine love had emerged that stressed love as self-less, entirely giving. This notion of divine love as radically unselfish, indeed literally self-less and unmotivated, was called *agape*, the Greek term used in the New Testament almost exclusively for love. By comparison with *agape*, human loves (now designated as *eros*) were seen as being essentially selfish: a search for one's own satisfaction or happiness. *Eros* (human love) and *agape* (divine love) were in opposition to each other. The classic work is that by the Swedish Lutheran scholar, Anders Nygren, entitled *Eros and Agape* (1930 and 1936). According to James Barr, the effect of Nygren's book on a large public "was to leave them thinking that *agapé* and *agapan* formed the unequivocal designator of a particular kind

³ *Haus und Volk Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* [= Gesammelte Schriften, 1] (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 2011), 223.

⁴ *Der Gott der Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der theologia naturalis*, ed. by Heino Sonnemans (Leutersdorf, 2004), 11-35. He concludes by pointing out that the specific nature of theology is *Quarite faciem eius semper*, as Richard of St Victor expressed it, following St Augustine and the psalms. According to Augustine, theological enquiry, which denotes love, is never ending; rather enquiry into the Beloved grows as love grows.

⁵ Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith, The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford, 2008), 41. She refers to Ratzinger's contribution to Vorgrimler's *Commentary* on Vatican II (p.130-1).

of love, self-giving and self-sacrificing, quite distinct from the kinds of love designated by other words. Agape had become the standard word of modern theological [language]..."⁶

It is of note that, already in his doctoral dissertation on Augustine, we find Ratzinger's initial, questioning response to Nygren's thesis.⁷ In an essay on the theology of marriage published in 1968, we find a more explicit, critical engagement with Nygren. Following Henri de Lubac, Ratzinger vehemently rejects any suggestion of an opposition between *eros* and *agape*, as suggested by Nygren, Brunner, Barth, and others. Rather, he says, both are in fact intertwined, and their intertwining is nothing less than the intertwining of creation and covenant [redemption] when these are translated into ethical categories. He noted that theologians have yet to come to terms with the fact that the Song of Songs - one of the greatest erotic poems in world literature - was accepted into the canon of Scripture. "From the very beginning, [the incorporation of the Song of Songs into the canon] embraced both sides of *eros* indivisibly: *eros* as the infinite desire of man that yearns for God; *eros* as the relationship of man and woman to each other, which for that reason can only be a 'sacrament' of that yearning for the divine because it is itself a 'sacrum'. [...] As covenant without creation is empty, so agape without eros is inhuman."⁸ Since the topic, Eros and Agape, will be covered in detail by H.E. Cardinal Scola, here it will suffice to indicate merely the general thrust of the Pope's argument, since Part Two cannot be understood without it.

To begin with, Pope Benedict XVI situates the question in its broader cultural context of the Enlightenment's critique of Christianity which culminated in Nietzsche's accusation that Christianity had poisoned *eros*, a criticism that, the Pope admits with typical honesty, was not without some foundation. However, when one examines the Church's fuller theological and spiritual tradition, it soon become obvious that in fact Christianity did not poison *eros* but rather purified, deepened, and enabled it to find its perfect expression. Benedict demonstrates that "biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it" [#8].

The Bible's image of God as One, the Creator of heaven and earth, implies that "his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and 'made' by him. The second important

⁶ James Barr, "Word for Love in Biblical Greek" in: L.D. Hurst, N.T. Wright (Ed.), *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament, Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (Oxford, 1987), 4. Barr points out that there is no evidence from the linguistic usage of any such opposition as Nygren et al. posited, though he admits that the noun *agape* does receive a special theological nuance in the Epistles and in John.

⁷ *Das Haus und Volk Gottes*, op. cit., 265, 311.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "Zur Theologie der Ehe" (1969), 102 (reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften [= G.S.] IV*, 565-92, here 582); see also "Geschichte der Theologie der Liebe [Lexikonartikel 1961], *G.S. IV*, 393-9; "Jenseits des Todes", *Communio* 1 (1972), in *G.S. X*, 374, where he refers to the extensive discussion on the subject by Josef Pieper, *Über die Liebe*, 92-106 as also to Henri de Lubac, *Der geistige Sinn der Schrift*, 103. In his spiritual exercises on the three theological virtues, Ratzinger takes up the insights of Josef Pieper in his essay on love. For Pieper, to love is say "yes", to affirm the existence of the other: "How good that you are". This affirmation effects a kind of rebirth in the loved one, without which one's actual birth would be incomplete. "It is only rebirth in being loved that completes birth and opens up for men and women the space of meaningful existence." This helps us understand both the mystery of creation and that of redemption. Since love is creative, we can begin to comprehend "that God's love was the force that created being out of nothing, the real foundation on which all reality stands." Likewise we can begin to grasp how "God's second 'yes' that was made manifest on the cross is our rebirth ..." Finally, we are called to share in his "yes" by continuing his creation, becoming "co-creators" when we affirm the other. See *To Look on Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love*, transl. by Robert Nowell (Slough, 1991), 84-5 [= *Auf Christus schauen. Einübung in Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe*, Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 1989, 90-1].

element now emerges: this God loves man." [#9] Scripture describes divine love, first of all, in terms of God's *eros*, his passionate love for the Chosen People in the first place and finally for humanity, for each person. But God's love is also totally *agape*, i.e. totally gratuitous, unmerited, a love that forgives. The Prophets of the Old Testament depict God as a passionate lover, who has been jilted by "the wife of his youth" (Hosea) but continually reaches out to forgive her, because he is God not man (Hos 11:9). The New Testament, sees in spousal love the image of Christ's love for His Church (Eph 5:23ff). Commenting on the philosophical (metaphysical) dimension of this Biblical vision, Benedict says: "God is the absolute and ultimate source of all being; but this universal principle of creation - the *Logos*, primordial reason - is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love" [#11].

The importance of this recovery of the passion of spousal love is that it most perfectly expresses what is meant by divine love: God's passionate desire for man that finds its ultimate expression in his self-giving on the Cross. "By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf Jn 19:37), we can understand the starting point of this Encyclical Letter: 'God is love' (Jn 4:8). [...] It is from there that our definition of love must begin. [Contemplating this truth] the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move" [#12].

In his classic work, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger describes the Cross not as "the work of expiation which mankind offers to a wrathful God, but as the expression of that foolish love of God's which gives itself away to the point of humiliation in order to save man."⁹ This, in a sense, is a leitmotiv in all his writings, seen most recently in his trilogy, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Already in the *Introduction to Christianity*, we find an attempt to explain the mystery of Christ's Resurrection by taking as his starting-point the verse from the Song of Songs: "Love is strong as death" (8:6).¹⁰ Having outlined how that love found its ultimate expression on the Cross: the Pierced One, wounded by love,¹¹ the rest of Part One describes how we partake of that love in the Eucharist, and how our lives are transformed, so that we can love as God loves, thus making the love of neighbour possible. It is interesting to recall that, in his doctoral dissertation, Ratzinger discovered that for Augustine, what is distinctive about Christian worship is, in the final analysis, *caritas*, which he describes as follows: "each act of authentic Christian love, each act of mercy, is in a true and proper sense sacrifice, the

⁹ *Introduction to Christianity*, transl. J.R. Foster (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 215; see the entire section on the Cross, 213-5 [= G.S. IV, 257-60], one of his finest pieces of writing.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 230 [=G.S. IV, 275]

¹¹ In a paper given to the Congress on the Sacred Heart in Toulouse, July 1981, Ratzinger referred to Origen's thesis about the suffering of God, which is not restricted to the suffering of Jesus but also affected the Christian picture of God: "When you hear speak of God's passions, always apply what is said to love: So God is a sufferer because he is a lover; the entire theme of the suffering God flows from that of the loving God and always points back to it. The actual advance registered by the Christian idea of God over that of the ancient world lies in its recognition that God is love." (Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, "They Mystery of Easter: Substance and Foundation of Devotion to the Sacred Heart" in his book: *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, transl. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco, 1986), 58 [*Schauen auf den Durchborten: Versuche zu einer spirituellen Christologie* (Einsiedeln, 1984, 50). Ratzinger often repeats the wonderful formula of Bernhard von Clairvaux developed in the spirit of the early Fathers: "Gott kann nicht leiden, aber er kann mit-leiden." In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict also shows how the new image of God also profoundly affected the Biblical image of man. "Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God [who is love] is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature" [#11].

realization [*Setzung*] of the one, unique sacrificium christianorum".¹² Further, love of God and love of neighbour are reciprocal - the love of God opens our eyes to the needs of the neighbour and gives us the strength to love, while love of neighbour draws us ever closer to God.

In his third Advent sermon delivered in the Cathedral of Münster in 1964, he sums up his own answer to the question: what is the essence of Christianity, as follows: "God himself lives and acts according to the law of superabundance (*Überfluss*), that love which can give nothing less than itself. A Christian is one who has [that] love. That is the simple answer to the questions as to the essence of Christianity.."¹³

2) Justice and Charity

According to Pope Benedict, "The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love." This reflects Joseph Ratzinger's vision of the Church's mission, which helped to shape the vision of the Second Vatican Council. He sees the foundation of mission in the mystery of the Trinity. "In my opinion", he wrote as a member of the theological commission drawing up *Ad Gentes*, "the first foundation of all mission theology must be the mission given by the Father to the Son for the salvation of the world, and consequently in the Holy Spirit's mission which continues the former mission (cf. for example Jn 16:17)."¹⁴

Early in his career Ratzinger wrote that Christology "is concerned not with just freeing the individual from his sins [...]; it is most deeply concerned with the future of man, what can be accomplished only as the future of the whole human race."¹⁵ Salvation "is precisely a liberation from isolation into subjectivity in the service of the whole."¹⁶ This is made possible by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, the Encyclical teaches, that enables man to love as Christ loved, who bent down to wash his disciples' feet and "above all when he gave his life for us (cf. Jn13:1, 15:13)" [#19]. But it is also the Holy Spirit, who "is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son" [#19]. This then becomes the launching pad for the Pope's treatment of *caritas*, here understood in the modern technical sense of organized charitable activity, which today tends to be limited to "developmental aid", important though that is.

But he intends to deal with the topic of *caritas* within the context of "the practice of love by the Church as a 'community of love'."¹⁷ In doing so, he now develops a topic which as far as I can ascertain, he more or less took for granted in his previous writings. However the essentials he had already expressed in one his very first publications, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (1960 in German). There he defines the concrete, day-to-day manner

¹² According to Augustine, Christianity's new cult ("Der neue Kult") is rooted in his understanding of Christian unity as comprising of three interconnected levels: sacramentum corporis Christi -- corpus Christi -- caritas; see Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes* = G.S. I, 291.

¹³ *Vom Sinn des Christseins* in G.S., IV, 393-4. "Excess is God's trade mark in his creation, as the Fathers put it, 'God does not reckon his gifts by the measure'. At the same time excess is also the real foundation and form of the history of salvation, which in the last analysis is nothing other than the truly breathtaking fact that God, in an incredible outpouring of himself, expends not only a universe but his own self in order to lead man, a speck of dust, to salvation." (*Introduction to Christianity*, op.cit.,197 = G.S. IV, 240).

¹⁴ Jared Wicks, "Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *peritus* before and during Vatican Council II", *Gregorianum* 89 (2008) 233-311, here 285-6.

¹⁵ *Principles*, op. cit., 187 [*Prinzipienlehre*, 196].

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188 [197].

¹⁷ This is the title of Part Two.

of Christian service to humanity at large, under the rubric of the 'other' brother (i.e. the non-baptized). The community of the Church - Christian brotherhood - has a threefold obligation to the 'other' brother, namely: 1) missionary activity, 2) *agape* or charitable activity, and 3) vicarious suffering for the non-baptized, following the example of the Master.¹⁸ With regard to *agape*, he wrote: "[it] takes two forms, first the relations of Christians among one another ought to have an attractive and exemplary force, constituting an effective active mission [with ref. to Mk 4:21; Mt 5:14; Phil 2:15]. But then he adds: "that is not enough". Quoting Mt 5:47 about Christians only saluting their own brethren, he affirms: "Everyone who needs their help is, by virtue of that, and independently of his own belief, a brother in Christ - in fact a manifestation of the Lord himself",¹⁹ with reference to the Last Judgement (Mt 25:31-46), to which Pope Benedict dedicated considerable attention in his Trilogy.

Cardinal Ratzinger once addressed the question as to why Christianity is no longer seen to be an appropriate form of religion for Europe today. Before attempting a theoretical answer to the question, he warned his hearers at the Sorbonne that awaking a new sense of the truth of Christianity today demands more than an appropriate theory, important though it is. Rather "it demands that interplay of perception [theory] and action on which the Christianity of the Fathers founded its power to convince people".²⁰ In other words, any attempt to convince mankind of the truth of Christianity today "must, so to speak, be based on equal measure upon orthopraxy and orthodoxy. At the most profound level its content will necessarily consist [...] in love and reason coming together as the two pillars of reality: the true reason is love, and love is the true reason. They are in their unity the true basis and goal of all reality."²¹ The theologian Ratzinger was primarily concerned with the truth of Christianity (orthodoxy). But in his first Encyclical, the Pope turns his attention to what, for the most part, it seems to me, he had simply taken for granted, namely Christian action or orthopraxy understood as *agape*.

What prompted him to give it explicit attention in his first Encyclical? It was the way the Church's organized charities had drifted away from their original purpose to become material aid to developing countries, a development that alarmed the then-Archbishop Paul Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*. In an address Archbishop Cordes gave to the Irish Bishops' Conference (10 July 2003), he outlined his concerns about, the "international alliance of Catholic aid organizations working together for global justice" and known as CIDSE.²² According to Cordes, CIDSE, the umbrella organization for Catholic aid agencies such as Misereor, CAFOD and Trócaire,²³ was attempting to remove Church aid

¹⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993?), 81-84 [= G.S. VIII, 94-7].

¹⁹ Ibid. 83.

²⁰ *Address to the Sorbonne*, 27 November 1999, reprinted as "Christianity - the True Religion" in his *Truth and Tolerance*, transl. by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 177.

²¹ Ibid., 183.

²² The description is dated 18 January 2012, taken from CIDSE website, accessed 23 October 2015. It clarifies its mission as follows: "Our 17 member organisations from Europe and North America come together under the umbrella of CIDSE to fight poverty and inequality. We challenge governments, business, churches, and international bodies to adopt policies and behavior that promote human rights, social justice and sustainable development." The text of Archbishop Cordes's address was published in the *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004), 403-11.

²³ Its webpage lists the following as members: Broederlijk Delen – Belgium • CAFOD – England and Wales • CCFD - Terre Solidaire – France • Center of Concern – USA • Cordaid – the Netherlands • Development & Peace – Canada • Entraide et Fraternité – Belgium • eRko – Slovakia • Fastenopfer – Switzerland • FEC – Portugal • FOCSIV – Italy • Fondation Bridderlech Deelen – Luxembourg • KOO – Austria • Manos Unidas – Spain • MISEREOR – Germany • SCIAF – Scotland • Trócaire – Ireland

from the competence of the bishops and, more seriously, "to divorce development projects from missionary work within the Church."²⁴ According to one of CIDSE's own position papers "the Church's development work becomes tainted when it is done within the context of faith and motivated by a desire to indicate the way to God."²⁵ It is clear that the object of *Deus caritas est* is to correct this grave error; it is greatly indebted to H.E. Cardinal Cordes.

Pope Benedict introduces the topic by showing how love of neighbour is not limited to the sphere of personal responsibility but has also been, from the very origin of the Church in the original Christian community in Jerusalem, "a responsibility of the whole ecclesial community at every level" [#20]. It was this personal and corporate expression of love for the needy - be they Christian or not - that profoundly impressed the pagan world. The impression was such that in the 4th century Julian the Apostate, when he tried to restore the pagan religion of Rome, saw the need to link the pagan priesthood with organized charitable activity in imitation of the Church.²⁶ The most evident ecclesial expression of this was the order of diaconate in the early Church. Two facts emerge from his overview of the early centuries: In the first place, "For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could well be left to others, but it is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" [#25]. More precisely, he affirms that *Diakonia*, the ministration of charity, together with proclamation of the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*) and the celebration of the sacraments (*leitourgia*) express the Church's threefold responsibility. In a word, the ministration of charity is an indispensable part of the Church's nature and mission.

This, it seems to me, is a new development for Benedict. In his address to the Irish Bishops, Archbishop Cordes spoke about the three fundamental means by which the Church's mission is served: *diakonia*, *leigurgia*, and *martyria*. This terminology the Pope now takes up and develops in a typically original way. However, the basic ideas are not new to him. In fact, what we find in *Deus caritas est* is an unfolding of what he had mentioned in summary form in his early essay on Christian Brotherhood,²⁷ and which he had addressed in a number of programmatic sermons as Archbishop of Munich.²⁸

But is charity sufficient? Is not justice more important? Could charity even be an obstacle to establishing justice in society by supporting the status quo and discouraging the poor from fighting for justice? Since the nineteenth century the cry has gone up, especially by Marxists, that "the poor ... do not need charity but justice" [#28]. In his attempt to clarify the relationship between justice and charity, Pope Benedict XVI draws on his earlier writings on politics, including his criticism of liberation theology.²⁹ Now they are brought to bear on

²⁴ *ITQ*, op. cit., 408.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 410

²⁶ "... Christianity was convincing [to the ancient world] because of the connection of faith and reason and by directing behavior by *caritas*, by loving care of the suffering, the poor, the weak, across any boundaries of class or status", as illustrated in the case of the Emperor Julian the Apostate. "Looking back, we may say that the power of Christianity, which made it into a world religion, consisted in its synthesis of reason, faith, and life: and it is precisely this synthesis that is summed up and expressed in the term *religio vera*." (Address to the Sorbonne, op. cit., 174).

²⁷ See above, footnote 18.

²⁸ See, for example, the sermon on Christian Faith and Europe, which he preached in Krakow on 13 September 1980 on the historic occasion of the first visit of the German hierarchy to the Polish Episcopate, reprinted in Joseph Ratzinger, *Christlicher Glaube und Europa, 12 Predigten* (München: Pressereferat der Erzdiözes München und Freising, 1981), 7-20, here:15-16. See also his sermons on "Die caritas der Heiligen Hedwig" (*ibid.*, 65-77), and on "Der Mann des Glaubens Vinzenz von Paul" (*ibid.* 87-99).

²⁹ See in particular Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, translated by Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008); *Values in a Time of Upheaval* transl Brian McNeil (San Francisco:

locating Catholic social teaching within the broader vision of the Church's mission. Catholic social teaching, he writes, is the somewhat belated response of the Church's teaching authority to the transformation of society caused by the industrial revolution [#26-7]. In our day, the Marxist illusion of solving the social problems by world revolution has vanished, the Pope comments. And in today's complex world situation marked by globalization, the more developed Church's social doctrine as found, for example, in the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* has emerged as "a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church" [#27]. These are guidelines that pertain to justice in society. The problem is, as he once remarked, that Catholics very often seem not to have much confidence in the Church's social teaching. Indeed, he himself was critical of its earlier expression in the Papal encyclicals up to John XXIII's *Mater et Magister*.³⁰ One reason for the lack of confidence in Catholic social doctrine, it seems to me, is that it is unclear as to where that teaching fits into the overall vision of the Christian life.³¹ Pope Benedict, it seems, now sets out to help clarify that question.

To do so, he has recourse to the real revolution that Christ inaugurated, when he said: give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (cf. Mt 22:21). This signified the end of that identity of religion and politics that is universal. According to Ratzinger, "the first service that Christian Revelation delivered to the political order was to liberate it from the burden of being the highest good of humanity. It destroyed the myth of the divine state, and in its place put the objectivity of reason."³² In other words, the New Testament relegated the sphere of politics to the realm of practical reason: ethos or morality. (History demonstrates how frequently Christendom in East and West succumbed to the temptation to fuse politics and religion.) Ratzinger's theology of political life is built on this essential distinction between religion and politics.

His theology of politics - as distinct from the so-called political theology of J.B. Metz and J. Moltmann that gave rise to liberation theology - is ultimately inspired by Augustine's distinction between the two cities.³³ But it was also influenced by his own critical engagement with the speculations of Joachim of Fiore (died 1202) in his study of Bonaventure. Incidentally, with regard to Joachim, one school of political science considers

Ignatius Press, 2006); *A Turning Point for Europe?* transl. Brian McNeil with a foreword by James V. Schall (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010); For an excellent overview, see Tracey Rowland, "Modernity and the Politics of the West" in *Ratzinger's Faith*, op.cit., 105-122; see also D. Vincent Twomey, "An Introduction to Ratzinger's Theology of Political Life" in Kenneth D. Whitehead (ed.), *The Thought of Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI. Proceedings from the 32nd Annual Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Providence, Rhode Island, September 25-27, 2009* (Chicago, IL, University of Scranton Press, 2009), 23-40: ibid. "Benedict XVI: Joseph Ratzinger on Politics", *Logos* 18:4 (Fall 2015), 82-99.

³⁰ See "Naturrecht, Evangelium und Ideologie in der katholischen Soziallehre" (1964) in *G.S.* IV, 769-76, where he criticized, among other things, the early teaching's dependence on an inadequate understanding of natural law, one that was not uninfluenced by ideology (including the uncritical social/cultural assumptions of the day).

³¹ Addressing the topic: "The Church and Economics" (*Communio* ICR, 13, 1986, 199-204), Cardinal Ratzinger attempted to articulate the need for a genuinely moral approach to the economic question and called for a dialogue between the Church and economic science, but, interestingly, he does not expressly refer to Catholic social teaching. For criticism of Ratzinger's paper, see Lothar Roos (ed.) *Church and Economy in Dialogue. A Symposium in Rome*, Agostino Kardinal Casaroli, Joseph Kardinal Höffner, Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, Papst Johannes Paul II (Cologne: J. P. Bachem, 1986²).

³² Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith*, op. cit., 116.

³³ For an concise summary of that teaching, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Einheit der Nationen: Eine Vision der Kirchenväter* (Salzburg/Regensburg: Pustet, 2005 [originally 1971], 71-103 [= *G.S.* I, 587-606] on Augustine's rejection of the Roman political theology.

the Calabrian Abbot-mystic to be the father of modern political ideologies, including Nazism, Marxism and liberal capitalism.³⁴ While Ratzinger's own experience of Nazism made him wary of all ideologies, his theology of politics has, as it were, its immediate existential roots in the student revolts of 1968.

On being awarded the Augustine-Bea Prize in 1989, Cardinal Ratzinger admitted that, up to the 1968 student revolts, the relationship of the Church to the world had remained on the periphery of his scholarly concerns. This changed in 1968: the student revolts that began that year involved an instrumentalization of theology, indeed they were fired by the religious passion of a new generation. "Precisely anyone who wished to defend the intrinsic claims of religion and theology was now also compelled to defend the essential profanity and rationality of politics in opposition to a religion that had degenerated into ideology. This had to be accomplished in such a manner that, at the same time, excluded an idea of a rationality which confused rationality with freedom and thus blindness in the moral and religious sphere."³⁵ This basic concern marked Ratzinger's decades-long intellectual battle with both the radical secularization of politics in the West and the new attempt to fuse religion and politics that marked the rise of liberation theology in Latin America.

Catholic social teaching, following St Thomas Aquinas, sees the body politic (what we call the State) as such arising from created human nature and so as basically something positive. For Ratzinger, too, the body politic is basically good; it is part of the created order. (And here he parts company with Augustine who saw the State as necessitated by Original Sin.) Since politics is an expression of human freedom, Ratzinger argues, it is also open to the misuse of freedom: namely injustice, sin. Benedict points out that politics is not simply "a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life" but it is concerned fundamentally with achieving justice in society and so it has to do with morality and ethics, which precisely as dependent on human freedom, is an unending task. (The basic error of all political ideologies is that they are deterministic and thus more or less totalitarian.)

Given that politics is not simply an administrative mechanism, Benedict goes on to ask: what is justice? For him, justice is predicated on the exercise of practical reason (prudence) - the kind of reason involved in debate leading to decision making, personal and collective - and that is where the problem lies. Practical reason can be blinded by what he calls "the dazzling effect of power and special interests." It is therefore in need of constant purification. "Here politics and faith meet." Faith, the encounter with the living God, opens up new horizons beyond reason but it also purifies reason. "From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more freely itself." Here the Pope sums up his life-long reflections on the relationship between faith and reason, beginning with his inaugural lecture in Bonn and culminating in his commentary on Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.³⁶ In the context of politics, Benedict sees the role of Catholic social teaching precisely here, namely: "to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgement and attainment of what is just."

³⁴ See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics. An Introduction* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1952), espec. 107-32.

³⁵ Quoted in Lothar Roos, Werner Münch, Manfred Spieker, *Benedikt XVI. und die Weltbeziehung der Kirche* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), 9.

³⁶ See *Truth and Tolerance*, op.cit., 182-209; of immediate relevance here is his dialogue with Jürgen Habermas in the Katholische Akademie, Munich, 19 January 2004: *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 2005); *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco, 2006).

It is not the Church's task to involve itself directly in politics. Ratzinger admits that the overcoming of the union of throne and altar that marked post-1648 Europe is one of the positive by-products of the Enlightenment.³⁷ It forced the Church to rediscover its New Testament roots. Accordingly, Ratzinger sees the Church's primary task in political life as the formation of conscience and the promotion of personal responsibility. Central to all his theology, but in particular his theology of politics, is the role of conscience, understood as our innate sense of the good and the true, of right and wrong.³⁸ Since this sense is often dulled by one's upbringing or cultural situation, it is in need of purification. The guidelines offered by Catholic social teaching contribute to that purification by stimulating greater insight into the requirements of justice. And so the guidelines, which can be prophetic in certain situations, awaken consciences.

The Church's task in achieving justice in society is, more importantly, to inspire in her members a greater readiness to act in accordance with the demands of justice, "even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest". In other words, the Church must move people to act on behalf of justice, cost what it may, and it should provide access to that inner spiritual strength needed to persevere. But he warns: "The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State." Neither can the Church remain detached. Her task is "to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper." Later he will clarify the source of that spiritual energy: love of neighbour arising out of loving God, what he calls: "social charity" [#29].

It is then the task of the State, not the Church, to achieve a just society. But even in the most just of societies, Benedict teaches, "Love - caritas - will always prove necessary" [#28b]. This is the second major point he makes: "Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such." He criticises the so-called "nanny-State", the welfare State that tries to regulate and control everything but cannot supply what the suffering person most needs: "loving personal concern" [#28]. He proposes limited State intervention based on the principle of subsidiarity, namely that the State should not try to replace, but rather support, initiatives arising within society, those forces, he describes, as combining "spontaneity and closeness to those in need". One such force is the Church; "she is alive with love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ" and offers not only material but also spiritual care, which is often more necessary than material. "In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live 'by bread alone' (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3)." Here he alludes to the devil's temptation of Our Lord, the theological and political ramifications of which he develops in Part One of his trilogy, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Having established the basic principles, he turns to determine more precisely "the commitment to the just ordering of State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other" [#29], which is the main objective of the Encyclical. It is not the Church's direct duty to establish just structures in society - that is the task of "the world of politics and the autonomous use of reason" - but, as we saw, its role is rather to help purify

³⁷ See "Theology and Church Politics" in his *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, op. cit., 48; also *A Turning Point for Europe?*, op. cit., espec. 60-6, which covers much the same ground as the Encyclical.

³⁸ See, chapter 9 in *Church, Ecumenism, Politics* op. cit.; *On Conscience* (Philadelphia/San Francisco: NCBC/Ignatius Press, 2007), 11-41; for a summary account, see D. Vincent Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of our Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 105-34.

reason and reawaken "those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run". In other words, the Church's task in establishing justice in society is indirect, i.e. through her social teaching and through giving the faithful the spiritual strength to engage in the struggle to establish justice in society. To the laity is given the specific mission of working, in cooperation with other citizens, for the common good in all areas of civil and political life. Their entire lives should be animated by what he calls "social charity" - which I take to mean love of neighbour fuelled by the Eucharist: that sacramental "mysticism" which is social in character [cf. #14].

The task proper to the Church *qua* Church is the practice of charity as an organized activity, in which she "acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature" [#29]. But, he adds, that the Church's organized charitable activities do not dispense with the need for the charity of the individual Christian, because in addition to justice man will always need love.

Vatican II had highlighted as one of the "signs of the times" the growing solidarity among peoples in the face of the immense suffering revealed to us by the mass media. That solidarity finds expression in various State agencies and humanitarian associations as well as direct State interventions (subsidies and tax relief). It has led to different forms of cooperation between Church and State agencies, as well with charitable organizations of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. All have the same goal: "a true humanism, which acknowledges that man is made in the image of God and wants to help him to live in a way consonant with that dignity" [#30].

But what, then, is distinctive about the Church's organized charity - *diakonia* - making it not an optional extra but essential to her very nature? The rest of the Encyclical - almost a fifth of its length - is devoted to clarifying the distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity and outlining the resultant spirituality which is indispensable for it to remain truly Christian and Catholic. In his letter explaining his Encyclical to the readers of *Familia Cristiana*, Benedict admits that it is the part that is closest to his heart. It is summed up in his affirmation that "justice can never make love superfluous. For above and beyond justice, mankind will always need love: only love can give a soul to justice".³⁹

3) Towards a spirituality for those charged with the Church's *diakonia*.

One of the most striking aspects of Ratzinger's theology is its spiritual dimension.⁴⁰ Following Augustine and Richard of St Victor, he understands theological enquiry to be nothing less than seeking the face of God. But what Pope Benedict XVI offers here is a sketch of some of the essential features of the spirituality required for the Church's organized charitable organizations to remain specifically Christian.⁴¹ The distinctiveness of ecclesial charitable activity is threefold: the rich humanity of those who care for those in need, their independence of political parties and ideologies, and finally their concern for the whole

³⁹ English translation by Elizabeth Zoppi, *The Word*, April 2006, 17.

⁴⁰ See D. Vincent Twomey, "Ratzinger on Theology as a Spiritual Science" in Deacon James Keating, *Entering into the Mind of Christ: The True Nature of Theology* (Omaha, Nebraska: Institute for Priestly Formation, 2014), 47-70; Scott W. Hahn, "Bringing theologians to their knees: Theology as a Spiritual Science in Benedict XVI, in *Eschatology, Proceedings of the 37th annual Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars*, edited by Elizabeth C. Shaw (2015), 3-32.

⁴¹ Early outlines of this spirituality are to be found in Cardinal Ratzinger's sermon on St Hedwig at the Mass for the opening of a German Caritas conference in Munich, 16 October 1979, and his sermon, again in Munich, on 400th anniversary of the death of St Vincent de Paul (texts in *Christlicher Glaube und Europa*, op. cit., 65-76, and 87-102 respectively).

person, not just man's material needs but also man's need for God. Each of these distinctive characteristics is rooted in the personal relationship between those responsible for the Church's charitable activity and God. Thus in addition to their professional training, these agents need a "formation of the heart". This means that "they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ that awakens their love and opens their spirits to others" [#31a]. They must be independent of all political parties and ideologies that would ignore the present needs of people in favour of working for a supposedly better world in the future. "The Christian's programme [...] is a 'heart that sees'. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly" [#31b]. Finally, even though those involved in charitable activities should not engage in proselytism,⁴² neither should they leave God and Christ aside. "Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God" [#31c]. Rather they must witness in their lives to God's love, knowing when to speak about God and when to remain silent.

Given the distinctive character of the Church's organized charities, their personnel must above all "be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening in them a love of neighbour" [#33]. Love of Christ implies love of the Church and so readiness to work with the Bishop "so that the love of God can spread throughout the world". With this "interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church",⁴³ they are able to preserve the distinctiveness of Christian service when cooperating with other humanitarian agencies, namely that love of which St Paul sings in 1 Cor 13. It is love born of our personal encounter with Christ. As a result of this encounter, "I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in the gift" [#34]. This way of serving others in need leads to humility: an awareness that being able to help other is no merit of our own, but due to God's grace, so that we can say: "We are useless servants" (Lk 17:10).

Considering the immensity of the problems and vast needs of others we can be driven to embrace "an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem" [#36]. On the other hand, inertia in the face of apparently insuperable problems is a real temptation. In such moments what is decisive is one's relationship with Christ. This too is needed to prevent us developing a contempt for humanity or giving in to resignation. This is where prayer is essential, if we are to persevere, as can be seen in the life of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. Benedict affirms that: "It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work" [#37]. He stresses the need for an intense prayer life based on an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ to prevent one from "falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism". It will also prevent one from revolt against God, blaming him for allowing injustice poverty, for his apparent lack of compassion.

Here Benedict shows his sensitivity with regard to the existential situation of those who, dedicating their lives to alleviating sufferings, experience what is truly horrendous and yet are painfully aware of our inability to alleviate it. He directs our attention to Job, who "could complain before God about the presence of incomprehensible and apparently unjustified suffering in the world" [#38] and who confessed was terrified by the Almighty. We, too, can cry out, like Jesus on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mt 27:46). Benedict does not belittle this experience, but encourages us to continue asking

⁴² The CIDSE Position Paper quoted by Archbishop Cordes states that "... efforts for conversion are not compatible with development work. When the solidarity we exercise without any hidden agenda is also at the service of the Church, that is fine! ..."

⁴³ This is precisely what the Position Paper issued by CIDSE expressly rejected.

this question in prayerful dialogue, knowing, as Augustine put it, *Si comprehendis, non est Deus*: "If you understand him, he is not God", while, at the same time, holding on in faith and "continuing to believe in the 'goodness and loving kindness of God' (Tit 3:4)" [#38].

He concludes with a reflection on faith, hope and charity. Hope is exercised in the virtue of patience, trusting in God even in times of darkness. "Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives victorious certainty that it is really true: God is love!" [#39]. And in the end that love will prevail when God will triumph over all the forces of darkness, as the Book of Revelation indicates at the end. "Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light - and in the end the only light - that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world - this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical" [39].

Conclusion

In his first Encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI sets out to reintegrate into the Church's mission her organized charities, which, as developmental aid agencies,⁴⁴ had become in effect little more than secular NGOs. And he does so in typical Ratzingerian fashion: by going to the theological root of the problem. And that is a widespread theological failure to understand, the nature of God's love for us, for humanity, revealed in the Pierced One and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He makes a series of important distinctions (noting their interrelatedness), such as the relationship between human love and divine love, faith and politics, Church and State, Catholic social doctrine and political ideologies, justice and charity. All of this he does in order, finally, to clarify what distinguishes the Church's organized charitable agencies from secular humanitarian organizations.

But above all the Pope shows how Catholic organized charities are integral to the God-given mission of the Church, whose origin and driving force is hidden in the mystery of God Himself. Ultimately, what distinguishes Catholic organized charities is not only the fact that the local Bishop carries the primary responsibility for them but, above all, that the personnel who are engaged in the Church's charitable activities are infused with the Spirit of Christ and develop a spirituality that empowers them serve those in need, those who are created in the image of God and are redeemed by Christ on the Cross. "What you have done to the least of my brothers, you have done unto me" (Mt 25.40). Like any good music, the more you listen to Mozart, the more you appreciate it, so too, the more one studies Pope Benedict XVI's first Encyclical, or indeed any of his theology, the more you can appreciate its richness, its depth, and its capacity to inspire.

⁴⁴ It is significant that Pope Benedict XVI avoids the term "developmental aid", presumably since it is freighted with the 1960s ideology characteristic of liberal capitalism.