

God and Socio-Economic Development in *Caritas in Veritate*

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The social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*¹ concludes thus: “Openness to God makes us open towards our brothers and sisters and towards an understanding of life as a joyful task to be accomplished in a spirit of solidarity. On the other hand, ideological rejection of God and an atheism of indifference, oblivious to the Creator and at risk of becoming equally oblivious to human values, constitute some of the chief obstacles to développement today” (CV 78). An attentive reading of this social document reveals that it is not a pious concluding exhortation to be kept in mind among many things related to development. These words are rather a reiteration of the central perspective of the entire document, namely, an integral development can never be achieved without an explicit recognition of truth – God. This article intends to highlight succinctly the God-dimension embedded within an ethical analysis of contemporary development. To this end, I shall point out seven interrelated aspects through which the indispensability of the religious dimension of development is outlined in the document. It will be followed by a brief critical appraisal of such a perspective and its relevance for the “developing” Indian society.

¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*: Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, 29 June 2009 (henceforth as *Caritas in Veritate* or *CV* with the article number).

The Necessity of God-Dimension for Integral Development

First, the intrinsic relation between God and development is shown by highlighting the truth of *divine origin* of human beings and of the *ultimate goal* of human activity. Every human being is, before all else, an image of God. The inviolability of human dignity is built on this *given*, as the biblical accounts of creation reveal. Failure to recognise this truth will only lead to exploitation of people by economic and financial systems (CV 45). Instead the acknowledgement of the divine origin of humanity changes radically the meaning of everything: “Man is not a lost atom in a random universe: he is God’s creature, whom God chose to endow with an immortal soul and whom he has always loved. If man were merely the fruit of either chance or necessity, or if he had to lower his aspirations to the limited horizon of the world in which he lives, if all reality were merely history and culture, and man did not possess a nature destined to transcend itself in a supernatural life, then one could speak of growth, or evolution, but not development” (CV 29). The nature of origin shows also the ultimate purpose of human endeavours on earth. Hence already in the introductory section that describes the objective and perspective of the document, the Pope points out the true goal of development: “Man’s earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family” (CV 7). When this perspective of eternal life is lost, then human progress will be deprived of breathing-space: “Enclosed within history, it runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth; humanity thus loses the courage to be at the service of higher goods, at the service of the great and disinterested initiatives called forth by universal charity” (CV 11).²

² On the importance of ‘eternal salvation’ in promoting the integral development of the human person, the Pope remarks: “[T]he great challenges facing the world

Second, the God-dimension of earthly development is also emphasized by appealing to the truth of *spiritual nature* that characterises human beings.³ On account of the intrinsic relation to God, the origin and goal of human existence, human life is to be considered a *vocation* from God. Everyone is called to respond to it by developing and fulfilling oneself. In this sense, citing the *Populorum Progressio* the pope recalls, the socio-economic development too is a vocation. It has a transcendent origin and its ultimate meaning becomes clear only in relation to God (CV 16). It is in their openness to God that human beings achieve their greatest possible fulfilment; this is the highest goal of personal development (CV 18). Hence development is not merely a question of material growth but one that is closely bound up with the human soul. Since human beings are a unity of body and soul, true human development cannot ignore the "health" of the soul. Happiness cannot be reduced to emotional well-being alone. It is something that touches the interiority of human life. Therefore it is only by attending to the spiritual nature of human beings many of the problems in development could be understood and solutions could be attempted at (CV 76). As experience informs us, the absence of development affects also the interior or spiritual life of peoples: "Being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships, causing great psychological and spiritual suffering" (CV 25).

at the present time, such as globalization, human-rights abuses, unjust social structures, cannot be confronted and overcome unless attention is focused on the deepest needs of the human person: the promotion of human dignity, well-being and, in the final analysis, eternal salvation." See, Benedict XVI, "Serving the Total Person, and All Persons," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 4 July 2007. 8.

³ The tirade against the prevailing reductionist visions of human beings has been one of the themes repeatedly explored by Benedict XVI. See for example: "The Human Person, the Heart of Peace", Message for World Day of Peace, 1 January 2007.

The spiritual nature of humanity does not in any way imply that human beings are capable of doing anything and everything. On the contrary, it is an invitation to acknowledge humbly the truth of *human finitude* and of the necessity of God. Any realistic attempt to build the society, the Roman Pontiff argues, must acknowledge the truth that human beings are, all by themselves, incapable of eliminating the evils in society. Any attempt to portray humans as self-sufficient could only lead to “confuse happiness and salvation with immanent forms of material prosperity and social action” (CV34). Technological advancement can at times blur this true spiritual and limited nature of human beings by reducing everything to material sphere and by appearing to be a panacea for all social ills. Therefore the document exhorts: “It requires new eyes and a new heart, capable of *rising above a materialistic vision of human events*, capable of glimpsing in development the “beyond” that technology cannot give” (CV77). It further reiterates: “*There cannot be holistic development and universal common good unless people’s spiritual and moral welfare is taken into account, considered in their totality as body and soul*” (CV 76). When the transcendent dimension of human existence is denied or marginalised, people can succumb to false securities created by different types of messianism, which can only make promises and create illusions and exploit human beings as a mere means for development (CV17).

Third, the acceptance of spiritual but limited nature of human beings enables us to understand better yet another truth, namely, the *relational* aspect of human existence. “As a spiritual being,” the encyclical contends, “the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures” (CV 53). True development is possible only when this fundamental category of relation is respected and promoted at all levels. For

such a truth to guide today's development, the social sciences alone are not enough; we need contributions from metaphysics and theology. In point of fact, poverty is often produced by refusing to accept the fundamentally relational nature of human beings (CV 53). A relational understanding of peoples envisions development not merely as cooperation for economic growth but as an opportunity for encounter between peoples and cultures. In this way the unique cultural traditions of every people could be preserved, rather than being absorbed or eliminated by the dominant, globalized technological civilization (CV 59). A globalised development might be able to bring people together and make them *neighbours*, but it cannot make them *brothers and sisters*. Human efforts alone cannot obtain this fraternity; we need to recognise its origin in a transcendent vocation from God the Father of all (CV 19).

The document repeatedly affirms the conviction that people can never, purely by their own human strength, build a fraternal community, nor can they overcome every division and barrier in their desire to build a truly universal community (CV 34). Such a project cannot be realised without an adequate spiritual vision of fellow humans: "Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognise the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discovering him or her and to mature in a love that becomes concern and care for the other" (CV 11). This vision is applied also at the global level: "The truth of globalization as a process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good. Hence a sustained commitment is needed so as to *promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence*" (CV 42). A perennial model for such development is found in the communion and relationship that exists between the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. The mystery

of the Trinity shows that true openness to the other does not necessarily imply loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration (*CV* 54). Similarly, authentic development is achieved when the community does not absorb the individual to the extent of annihilating personal autonomy, but rather promotes and appreciates it based on the vision that “the relation between individual and community is a relation between one totality and another” (*CV* 53).

In addition to the abovementioned truth of human beings – their divine origin, spiritual identity, and relational nature – the social encyclical points out the importance of God-dimension in three major realms that are directly related to development namely, economy, technology, and environment.

Fourth, a critical understanding of economy reveals that automatic and impersonal forces from market and politics alone cannot guarantee development. We need uprightiness and good consciences of people involved in business and politics to direct these activities in favour of true development. In other words professional competence must be complemented by moral consistency (*CV* 71). To function properly – true its nature – the economy needs to be guided by people-centred ethics (*CV* 45). The understanding of economy as an autonomous reality shielded from moral character instead leads to abuse of the economic process in a destructive manner (*CV* 34). In particular, we have to realise that it is the appropriate function of economy to fulfil the needs of the poor in society. The emancipation of the poor is not possible if the economy relies only on itself, for “it is not able to produce by itself something that lies outside its competence. It must draw its moral energies from other subjects that are capable of generating them” (*CV* 35). This in-built limit of economy necessitates creating possibilities for people to engage in economic

activities that are not purely motivated by the principle of profit. Many religious and lay initiatives demonstrate that such non-profit activities too can enrich society (*CV* 37). Nevertheless, this is possible only to the extent the State allows also the political players of religious nature to contribute to strengthening of democratic governance (*CV* 41). It is only by recognising and preserving the integral identity, vocation, and relational nature of human beings as outlined above that the economic activity can avail itself of the necessary moral forces to achieve its true scope.

Fifth, what is said hitherto of the entire economic sphere could be validly applied in particular to the realm of modern technology.⁴ In the evaluation of Benedict XVI, “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” (*CV* 68). Nevertheless, the danger does not exist in the technology itself. On the contrary, as a profoundly human reality, technology is linked to autonomy and freedom. Technological power expresses the hegemony of the human spirit over material reality, leading to betterment of living conditions. Through technology the human spirit can even more easily be drawn to worship and contemplation of God the Creator (*CV* 69). One has to be however wary of the new possibilities that are made available through modern technology. True development is achieved when the technological thinking of human mind grasps reality within the context of the holistic meaning of human life and activity, namely, as an expression of responsible freedom (*CV* 70).

⁴ It is important to note that *Caritas in Veritate* is the first social encyclical that dedicates a chapter (“Development of Peoples and Technology,” n. 68-77) to the theme of modern technology, while other documents have only touched upon it in passing.

The insistence on responsible freedom becomes all the more urgent today as the new advances in technology raise fundamental questions regarding the power of human beings, especially in the field of biotechnology.⁵ An integral human development demands that scientific and technologic reason be open to transcendence, with mutual assistance between reason and faith: “*Entranced by an exclusive reliance on technology, reason without faith is doomed to flounder in an illusion of its own omnipotence. Faith without reason risks being cut off from everyday life*” (CV74). Left to itself, such technological advancement can promote only a materialistic and mechanistic understanding of human life according to which the conscience is simply invited to decide based on many technological possibilities. Instead when reason and faith work together, the human mind is capable of arriving at and choosing what is good (CV75).

Practically speaking, it implies that scientific research and moral evaluation must go hand in hand. There should be collaborative efforts from theology, metaphysics and science in the service of humanity.⁶ We need a “guiding synthesis” that avails itself of contributions from these sciences. On the contrary, the papal document observes: “The excessive segmentation of

⁵ The reflections on technology outlined in *Caritas in Veritate* are very similar to the much-known ethical critique of modern technology presented by the German-American philosopher Hans Jonas. It would have been opportune here to acknowledge the contribution of such philosophers and engage them in dialogue. See, Hans Jonas. *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. trans. D. Herr (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). For a synthesis of Jonas’ analysis of modern technology and its critical appraisal see, Sahayadas Fernando, *Ethics of Modern Technology: An Introduction to Hans Jonas’ Ethics of Responsibility* (Chennai: Arumbu Publications, 2009).

⁶ On the necessity of inter-disciplinary collaboration the Roman Pontiff affirms: “Collaboration among the different sciences is a support that can never be lacking in order to achieve results that are effective and at the same time achieve authentic progress for all humanity. This complementarity allows one to avoid the risk of a

knowledge, the rejection of metaphysics by the human sciences, the difficulties encountered by dialogue between science and theology are damaging not only to the development of knowledge, but also to the development of peoples, because these things make it harder to see the integral good of man in its various dimensions” (CV 31). In tune with the fundamental scope of the document, the pope evinces the conviction: “Human knowledge is insufficient and the conclusions of science cannot indicate by themselves the path towards integral human development. There is always a need to push further ahead: this is what is required by charity in truth. Going beyond, however, never means prescindendo from the conclusions of reason, nor contradicting its results (CV 30).

Sixth, development in economy and technology has a direct bearing not only on human existence and activities but also on the natural environment. Therefore a proper vision of the created world is necessary for an integral human development.⁷ It is at this juncture that God-dimension of development becomes

widespread genetic reductionism which tends to identify the person exclusively in terms of genetic information and interactions with the environment. [...] Consequently, if one wishes to enter into the mystery of human life, no branch of science must isolate itself, claiming to have the last word. Rather, it must participate in the common vocation to reach the truth, though with the different methodologies and subject matter proper to each science.” See, Benedict XVI, “The Human Being: A Marvellous New Creation No Mere Genetic Combination,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 25 February 2009, 16.

⁷ The increasing awareness of ecological problems in Catholic social teaching in the last couple of decades is shown by dedicating an exclusive chapter on it in *Caritas in Veritate*: “The Development of Peoples Rights and Duties: the Environment,” n. 43-52. It is further accentuated in the Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2010, entitled, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Promote Creation”. In the context of marginalized treatment of this crucial social theme within the Catholic social teaching, this welcome development has an exemplary precedence in Chapter 10 of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, issued in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. For a critical analysis of the *Compendium* vis-à-vis environmental discussion, see Sahayadas Fernando, “Human-

indispensable. Faith in God reveals that nature is the result of God's creative activity. It is not a heap of scattered refuse but a wondrous work that contains a "grammar" which sets forth ends and criteria for wise use. Human beings have received the natural world as a gift to use it responsibly for fulfilling their legitimate needs but with due respect for its intrinsic balance. Hence nature cannot be exploited recklessly as if it were merely a collection of contingent data or raw materials for human pleasure. Nor can the natural environment be considered an untouchable taboo or divine. Much less nature can be viewed as something more important than the human person. These reductionist visions of nature do not contribute to integral development of society (CV 48). A Christian vision of "responsible stewardship over nature" underlines that God has created the natural world so that the entire human family could find in it the necessary resources to live with dignity. This attitude embraces not only the concerns of the present generation but also the welfare of future generations. At the basis of this vision lies the "covenant between human beings and the environment" which should reflect the creative love of God (CV 50).

The appeal to respect for the truth of human beings and to a holistic vision of economy, technology and environment reaches

Cosmos Relationship: A Critical Conversation with the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*," in *Relation and Relativity: Studies on Moral Issues. Festschrift in Honour of Rev. Dr. Felix Podimattam*, ed. Johnson Puthenpurackal (Delhi: Media House, 2010), 123-155. Despite these signs of improved interest, for S. McDonagh these documents lack: a serious awareness of the magnitude of the ecological challenges, lack of clarity about the urgency of confronting these problems, and absence of scientific data. See, Seán McDonagh, "To Protect Creation: A Teaching in Its Infancy," *The Furrow* 61 (2010): 363-374. For his earlier critique on the lack of ecological sensitivity in Catholic social teaching, see Seán McDonagh, "The Lack of an Ecological Critique in Catholic Social Teaching," in *The Development of Peoples: Challenges for Today and Tomorrow. Essays to Mark the Fortieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio*, ed. International Jesuit Network for Development (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2007), 182-195.

its zenith in the plea for an explicit, public recognition of the necessary role of religions in any integral development.

Finally, a truly human development is possible only when the right to religious freedom is respected and promoted by public authorities. On the contrary, every deliberate attempt to promote religious indifference or practical atheism deprives people of the moral and spiritual resources that are indispensable for authentic development (CV 29). A religious vision of human community reveals that development is not purely a product of human choices, but an intrinsic part of God's plan for humanity which precedes every human effort to build the society (CV 52). The denial of the right to public profession of one's religion and the right to illumine public life with the truths of religion can have therefore many negative consequences for true development:⁸ "Public life is sapped of its motivation and politics takes on a domineering and aggressive character. Human rights risk being ignored either because they are robbed of their transcendent foundation or because personal freedom is not acknowledged. Secularism and fundamentalism exclude the possibility of fruitful dialogue and effective cooperation between reason and religious faith" (CV 56).⁹ A true religious spirit

⁸ Even as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly emphasized the importance of both faith and reason for human society. In the dialogue with J. Habermas, for instance, he underlines the necessity of mutual purification between faith and reason in today's context of newly-gained technological power. See, Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), 55-80.

⁹ On various occasions Benedict XVI has underlined the unique contribution of religions to various aspects of development. For instance, on religious sources for peace he observes: "Religion, as a potent spiritual force for healing the wounds of conflict and division, has its own distinctive contribution to make in this regard, especially through the work of forming minds and hearts in accordance with a vision of the human person." See, Benedict XVI, "Poverty Grows as Human Rights Diminish," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 12 December 2007, 2. Again,

instead enables believers to collaborate even with non-believers in their united efforts to build a just and peaceful world in accordance with God's plan (CV 57). However, in today's context of religious fundamentalism that promotes violence and destruction in the name of God, adequate discernment on the contribution of religions is also needed (CV 55).

The Roman Pontiff sums up the intrinsic relationship between God and human development in the following concluding lines:

“Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is. [...] Openness to God makes us open towards our brothers and sisters and towards an understanding of life as a joyful task to be accomplished in a spirit of solidarity. On the other hand, ideological rejection of God and an atheism of indifference, oblivious to the Creator and at risk of becoming equally oblivious to human values, constitute some of the chief obstacles to development today. *A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism.* Only a humanism open to the Absolute can guide us in the promotion and building of forms of

while addressing the United Nations General Assembly on 18 April 2008, he dealt at length with the respect for religious freedom and the negative effects its denial produces: “It pertains to the nature of religions, free practiced, that they can autonomously conduct a dialogue of thought and life. [...] It is inconceivable, then, that believers should have to suppress a part of themselves – their faith – in order to be active citizens. It should never be necessary to deny God in order to enjoy one's rights. [...] Refusal to recognize the contribution to society that is rooted in the religious dimension and in the quest for the Absolute – by its nature, expressing communion between persons – would effectively privilege an individualistic approach and would fragment the unity of the person.” See, Benedict XVI, “U.N.: Sign of Unity. Instrument of Service to the Human Family,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 23 April 2008, 13. For R. Rourke, the central feature of the political vision of Benedict XVI is that the State's openness to God and religion does not lead to theocracy, as is often feared. On the contrary, it enables the political power to resist the temptations of utopianism and totalitarianism. Cf. Thomas Rourke, “Fundamental Politics: What We Must Learn from the Social Thought of Benedict XVI,” *Communio* 35 (2008): 432-450.

social and civic life - structures, institutions, culture and *ethos* - without exposing us to the risk of becoming ensnared by the fashions of the moment. Awareness of God's undying love sustains us in our laborious and stimulating work for justice and the development of peoples, amid successes and failures, in the ceaseless pursuit of a just ordering of human affairs. [...] God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, because he is our All, our greatest hope" (CV 78).

Critical Appraisal: Theological Anthropology of Development?

These ideas on development from diverse perspectives vis-à-vis God-dimension have one intertwining thread: an integral human society cannot be built without explicitly recognising and respecting the truth of God's plan and love for humanity. Instead the contemporary development seems to be marked by marginalization of God, suppression of the role of religion in public life, and obscuring of the transcendent dimension of human beings. Retrospectively, we realize that it is a reiteration of what Benedict XVI has always been preoccupied with, as the previous major documents clearly demonstrate.

In the very first encyclical he emphasized the inseparability of love of God and neighbour, and affirmed that acknowledging and living in God's love is the heart of the Christian faith, which also offers a decisive direction to human life and activities:¹⁰ "God's love for us is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are."¹¹ In fact he concluded the reflection on love thus: "those who draw near to God do not

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*: Encyclical Letter on Christian Love, 25 December 2005, n. 1; see especially n. 16-18.

¹¹ *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 2.

withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them.”¹² A year later, in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Sacrament of Eucharist he underscores again the truth that in essence God is love, which is given to human beings as a gift from God.¹³ This truth of sacramental love is the foundation and the permanent source of nourishment for our efforts to build a more just and fraternal world.¹⁴ Hence he concluded: “The celebration and worship of the Eucharist enable us to draw near to God’s love and to persevere in that love until we are united with the Lord whom we love. The offering of our lives, our fellowship with the whole community of believers and our solidarity with all men and women are essential aspects of that *logiké latreía*, spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to God (*Rom 12:1*), which transforms every aspect of our human existence, to the glory of God.”¹⁵ Finally, in the Encyclical on Christian hope, he asserted that Jesus has revealed that the encounter with the living God offers hope that truly transforms life and the world from within.¹⁶ Such hope is however communitarian by nature, and hence is indispensable for the arduous effort to organise the society according to God’s design.¹⁷ Again he affirmed: “This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. God is the foundation of hope.”¹⁸ Therefore towards the end of the reflections on hope the

¹² *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 42

¹³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission, 22 February 2007, n. 2.

¹⁴ Cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 88-90.

¹⁵ *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 94.

¹⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*: Encyclical Letter on Christian Hope, 30 November 2007, n. 4.

¹⁷ Cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 25

¹⁸ *Spe Salvi*, n. 31.

pope reiterates: "To protest against God in the name of justice is not helpful. A world without God is a world without hope. Only God can create justice. [...] This is our consolation and our hope."¹⁹

Unlike in these preceding magisterial pronouncements, in *Caritas in Veritate* the pope appeals to the necessity of respecting the truth of God's love from a predominantly *anthropological* perspective: the divine origin and destiny of humanity, the body-soul human identity, the transcendence of humans manifested in encounter with others, socio-economic organisation as an expression of human social nature, technological power as a domination of human spirit over matter, natural environment as a place to display human creativity in fulfilling basic needs and to exercise responsibility over the intrinsic order of creation, and the necessity of personal relationship with God through public, social religious expressions. Thus even the theological vision is essentially anthropological in nature. A reductionist perception of human being that denies the dimension of transcendence in human identity and activity cannot lead to authentic development. Even before becoming pope, Joseph Ratzinger has repeatedly underlined the necessity of acknowledging the imperfect and transitory nature of human efforts to order social life (*societas imperfecta*) and the indispensability of spiritual foundation of a State which emanates from the truth of Christian faith.²⁰ Nevertheless, he emphatically rejects any attempt

¹⁹ *Spe Salvi*, n. 44.

²⁰ On the indispensability of Christian faith and its contribution to modern State, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, trans. Michael J. Miller *et al.* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 193-208. These ideas on faith-politics relation are presented within a broader framework of church-world relation, with a scholarly introduction of Lieven Boeve, in Joseph Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 119-138. See also, Joseph Ratzinger, "Freedom and Liberation: The Anthropological Vision of the Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*," *Communio* 14, no. 1 (1987): 55-72.

to (ab)use faith, scripture, or theology for political ends.²¹ A mere “pragmatic” way (*orthopraxis*) of looking at the contribution of religions to political realm can only create a “short circuit”: “Religion cannot be forced into the service of practical-political objectives; the latter would become an idol; man, making God the slave of his plans, would degrade both God and himself.”²² Thus what emerges in *Caritas in Veritate* is an attempt to formulate a social synthesis of Joseph Ratzinger’s *theological anthropology of development*, with a clear statement on the hierarchy of importance in the same order, namely, God, human beings, and development.

It is also pertinent at this juncture to point out that the society which constitutes the background of *Caritas in Veritate* is predominantly one that is economically well developed or gradually ‘developing’ but secular in its convictions, or at least non-religious in expressions. To be sure, the problems that are specific to underdeveloped countries too are mentioned. But the document is not written from the *perspective* of the poor nations. The real concerns of poor nations are not the primary purpose of this social encyclical. This is not anything new in the more than a century-long tradition of Catholic social teachings.²³ The social documents

²¹ In the well-known “Report on the Church” twenty years after the conclusion of Vatican II, Ratzinger revisits and confirms his evaluation of “liberation theologies” and outlines the right relation between faith and politics. See, Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 169-190.

²² See, Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions - One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 102.

²³ For an extensive analysis of the recognition (or non-recognition) of the predicaments of the poor in the Catholic social documents up to the pontificate of John Paul II, see Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992). An enlightening multifaceted study on the place of the poor in Christian faith and practice is found in: Daniel G

from the universal Church are generally written as a response to prevailing socio-economic and political exigencies of the European and North American societies, with only passing generic references to the concerns of other countries across the world.²⁴ Admittedly, it is impossible to discuss within a single document the problems of all the countries. Hence a historical epicenter is inevitable. But often one wonders why it has to be geographically the same all the time. In fact the focus on the God-dimension in social development offers a unique opportunity to perceive development from the perspective of the poor.

Moreover, the document laments the marginalization of religion in the development of modern society. Believers belonging to various religions will have no major difficulty in sharing this religious emphasis. Nevertheless one has to admit that such a perspective is not without its own caveats. First, the social encyclical seems to refer to the loss of direct influence that *Christianity* had hitherto exercised in these societies. It does not really articulate the role of all the religions or religions in general. This perspective is demonstrated in the way the document's references to other religions and cultures are tagged with *caution*.²⁵ The *tone* of the

Groody, ed., *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). A provocative theological exploration on the depth and urgency of taking an option for the poor is outlined in: Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

²⁴ In addition to many references to the poor nations, the following articles discuss quite elaborately the situation of underdeveloped countries across the world: CV 27, 28, 33, 47, 49, 58, 62, 63.

²⁵ See for instance CV 55. The non-official social teachings seem to pursue more positive and inclusive ways of looking at other religions. For an exemplary way of perceiving various religions and their commitment to social development, with contemporary 'models' of spirituality and justice taken from different religions across the continents, see Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

claim for “completeness” and “authenticity” of religion presumably found in Christianity needs a critical revision. Second, the traditional ‘religious’ convictions and values take on diverse expressions as the society evolves. Hence we need to recognize and appreciate also the non-religious manifestations of religious beliefs. In this regard, the document does not show enough optimism and appreciation of praiseworthy, humane development that has taken place in these societies. Absence of explicit, traditional religious expressions does not automatically mean eclipse of God or religion.

Finally, the document seems to give the impression that an explicit acknowledgement of religious dimension is almost an automatic guarantee for integral development of a society. A historical look at the development of nations might not completely agree with such an assumption. In some cases the contrary might be true. Many countries are languishing in poverty today not only because of the unjust international trade policy but also due to the colonial oppression that had the backing of religious leaders. Moreover, in countries where religions play a direct role in the national development, one cannot always see the kind of integral development the document envisages. The problem becomes more and more complex in multi-religious societies. In fact this encyclical would have offered a remarkable contribution if it had dealt in depth with the current issue of balancing different religious sentiments with civil harmony, at least from the Christian point of view. In other words, the issue of religious influence on socio-political development is so complex and varied that it cannot be assessed merely from the conformity with the official teachings of any one religion.²⁶ This implies that the use of religious arguments needs to be historically humble and geographically nuanced.

²⁶ Within Christian religion itself there are diverse views on the role of Christian faith in civil society. For researches in such pluri-Christian visions of contemporary political reality, see John A. Coleman, ed., *Christian Political Ethics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Christian Contribution to Indian Development: Investing on the Youth

The publication of *Caritas in Veritate* offers a providential opportunity for Christians in India to reflect on the intrinsic relation between faith and life. The urgency is felt more than ever before because of the rapidly changing contours of Indian society. The world is observing the economic development of India, and is beginning to acknowledge its impact on the global economy.²⁷ Even *Caritas in Veritate* makes a couple of references to the emerging economies in today's world, without naming them explicitly. While appreciating their positive growth, it warns against their reductionist vision of development and systemic limits.²⁸

In response to the principal appeal of *Caritas in Veritate*, the Christian communities have the urgent task of envisioning an appropriate role for religious truths within this process of change.

²⁷ To cite a couple of references: For a highly informative panorama of the Indian growth portrayed by experts in different fields, see Jayashankar M. Swaminathan (ed), *Indian Economic Superpower: Fiction or Future*, (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2009). Others instead try to answer some hard questions regarding the real beneficiaries within the new "economic Giants" – China and India – and its impact on the future of the global economy. See, Alan Winters and Shahid Yusuf (eds.), *Dancing with Giants: China, India and Global Economy*, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Publications, 2007). According to the eye-opening analysis of Paul Collier, India was grouped under the countries reeling in poverty until a couple of decades ago, but now it belongs to the group of four billion people who are making positive use of opportunities offered by globalization. Cf. Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What can be Done about it* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁸ What is said of these new economic powers could be truly attributed to the Indian economy, even though it is not certainly applicable to all the regions and peoples of the nation. See for instance, Cf 21 and 23. These preoccupations on 'emerging economies' of Asia have already been raised in his address to the "Centesimus Annus– Pro Pontifice Foundation": Benedict XVI, "The Human and Social Goal: Integral Development," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 30 May 2007, 2.

It is by no means an easy task as religion is gradually becoming identified with conflicts, violence and superstition. Religions are increasingly perceived as an obstacle rather than a resource for development. In the multi-religious society, they are adjudged to be a cause of division rather than a force for social harmony, especially by those claim to be promoters of development and national integration. Hence political views of religious leaders and organizations are immediately shelved as out-of-boundary interference. The scandalous behaviour of few religious heads, often thanks to disproportionate media coverage, raises new questions on the necessity of human mediation (clergy, god-men, religious organizations, etc.) for a personal, direct relationship with God. Consequently, the commitment of religious communities in the field of education and formation of young people is seldom publicly acknowledged among the factors that contribute to the present growth of India.²⁹ Secularism is becoming the most polemic term in today's Indian politics.³⁰

It is in this situation that Christian optimism summons us to bring the Good News of Christ to all the people of India *in* and *through* the on-going economic development. How can Christian communities play an important role in the public realm? In my

²⁹ The "reports" on the nation portrayed in the magazines around important anniversaries such as the Independence of India often tend to neglect the contribution from religious communities. For instance, the Independence Day Special survey on "India's finest institutions that make the nation work" has no place for religious institutions. To add insult to injury, the survey is followed by a long analysis of communal conflicts, fanned by divisive faiths, in the Kashmir Valley. That is the picture of religion and faith frequently portrayed in the mass media. See, *India Today*, 25 August 2008.

³⁰ This collection of essays offers a reality-check on the tormenting question of secularism in the light of recent communal conflicts. See, Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (eds.), *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

opinion, one of the effect ways of doing it is to focus on the Christian youth – both boys and girls. The situation of young people is the visible indicator of the vibrancy of any society – and of the Church. They are both the immediate beneficiaries as well as most vulnerable victims of economic development, especially one that is propelled by modern technological advancement.³¹ Sudden increase of wealth in the hands of youth could blur the traditional hierarchy of values as quickly as despair leads to suspension of truth. Highly sensitive as they are towards injustices, their creative energies could be easily manipulated by power-groups for destructive ends. It is here that religions *can* and *must* play the important role of *accompanying* the young in shaping their vision of life and in instilling the right order of values.

More concretely, creating possibilities for access to basic and higher education is the essential key to development of a person and society. Exposed to wider socialization in the places of study, work, and recreation, the rising generation is bound to confront perceptions of life that are different from one's own culture and religion. Hence instilling adequate knowledge of one's own religion and culture has to be complemented by open as well as critical appreciation of other cultures and religions. In this way they could become a leaven of religious harmony in the multi-religious society. This might require, for instance, a social and sacramental re-evaluation of inter-religious and inter-caste marriages. At the ecclesial level, too, we need to recognize young people as a vital force in animating the life of the believing community. The expertise of young people in various sciences and professions could be made

³¹ On the impact of modern technology on Indian youth, see: Sahayadas Fernando, "Youth in Technological India: Emerging Possibilities and Changing Moral Perspectives," in *Youth India: Situation, Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Jesu Pudumaidoss *et al.* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2006), 19-38. In fact the whole book deals with various aspects of the life of young people in modern India.

use of to enlighten others. This is applicable in particular to young people who are economically rich, because everyone influences the course of development.³² Generosity and sacrifice will never be lacking on the part of the youth when they are respected for what they are. Responding to their hidden theological thirst in a way suitable to their age and attractive to their mentality could be another fruitful contribution. Traditional catechism and weekly homilies are not enough. Other creative ways may have to be devised. Finally, young Christians must be motivated again and again to take more active participation in the civil society as well as in party politics. Creating possibilities for critical knowledge of current political scenario could be a great service.

In short, the Church in India would do well to invest on the young if it desires to establish the Kingdom of God in the changing society. The success of such empowerment of the young through accompaniment depends to a great extent on the unity and credibility of religious leaders. Internal squabbles among the clergy and religious on account of material property and caste affiliation can only sap the vitality of the Church. Respect for the variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit within the Church and mutual appreciation of diverse apostolic commitments can instead enable the Church

³² Despite the *intriguing* title, Amaladoss makes an enlightening observation in this regard. In order to bring about justice for the poor, he contends, we need to make an "option for the non-poor", that is, for the rich and the powerful, the middleclass intellectuals, and the religious leaders. These *non-poor* have to be challenged and transformed to see the injustice in society and to make necessary amendments because of their control over social organs that lead to the suffering of the poor. Non-violent in its methodology, such an "inclusive perspective in social transformation" is much more difficult and challenging than the option for the poor. See, Michael Amaladoss, "An Option for the Non-Poor," in *Negotiating Borders: Theological Explorations in the Global Era. Essays in Honour of Prof. Felix Wilfred*, ed. Patrick Gnanapragasam and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 574-586.

leaders from being submerged in divisive issues and to focus on the primary objectives of the ministries they are entrusted with – serving the People of God, the poor youth in particular.

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