

Caritas In Veritate study session 2 overview:

From our previous session, we reviewed the themes of charity (love extended to another), justice (basic context of charity), common good (serves all human life even to the very least and most vulnerable).

Then we began to explore some more basic concepts from Chapter 2 beginning with the reference to Populorum Progressio (Development of Peoples) encyclical of Pope Paul VI, "...Life in Christ is the first and principle factor of development and he entrusted us with the task of traveling the path of development with all our heart and all our intelligence, that is to say with the ardor of charity and the wisdom of truth. It is the primordial truth of God's love, grace bestowed upon us, that opens our lives to gift and makes possible to hope for a "development of the whole man and of all men," to hope for progress "from less human conditions to those which are more human," obtained by overcoming the difficulties that are inevitably encountered along the way." (8)

We then explored Paul VI's vision of development: Goal – rescuing peoples from hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases, illiteracy while ensuring participation in the international economy as equals; social evolution into educated populations based on solidarity; and politically democratic regimes ensuring freedom and peace. The model of development in recent decades has been based on technology and profit driven. Where growth has happened it has been with difficult issues: financial speculation (damaging the real economy in our current crisis); migration; unregulated exploitation of earth's resources. Six concerns are outlined in relation to the signs of our times:

- 1) Downsizing of social security systems (safety nets) because of the price of competition in the global market; "grave danger to the rights of workers"; and disregard for the human person as the primary "capital" (to be safeguarded);
- 2) Hunger's enormous number of victims related to structural causes. Access to food/water are universal rights, and the prosperity of rich and poor nations is linked;
- 3) "Respect for life" cannot be "detached from the development of people; openness to life is at the center of true development; it opens wealthy peoples to the needs of the poor ones;
- 4) Denial of the Right to Religious Freedom where violence in the name of religion impedes development or religious indifference deprives people of "spiritual and human resources";
- 5) The Rights of Workers where excessive disparities are to be avoided (CEO gifts and bonuses vs. worker pay); steady employment as a priority goal (Campaign to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020); workers unions and maintaining protection of worker's rights;
- 6) Trade must be fair without high tariffs imposed by economically developed countries which harm poor ones.

The term "gratuitousness" was then taken up as our generous response to all that is gift from God by acts of love (charity) based in truth. The Holy Father notes that, sadly, our "purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life" often cause the gifts of our lives to be "unrecognized"(34). This led to a discussion of "entitlement" in our current culture, and into human rights and responsibilities/duties. "A link has often been noted between claims to a "right to excess", and even to transgression and vice,

within affluent societies, and the lack of food, drinkable water, basic instruction and elementary health care in areas of the underdeveloped world and on the outskirts of large metropolitan centers. The link consists in this: individual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate” (43).

This gave us to seriously question how this trend can be reversed in the heart of our culture.

We noted that the right to life was the fundamental right without which other rights are irrelevant. This is the reason we must defend life in it’s most vulnerable states (unborn, incapacitated, ill, elderly...) while at the same time defending other human rights for those who have the gift of life and are seeking to live with human dignity. Other rights we discussed were: food, water, shelter, education, health care, and work...

Our duties stem from the concepts of charity and seeking the common good in which our “neighbor’s” rights become our responsibility, so our duty to work for the rights and dignity of all, beyond our own “self-interest”. We have the duty to bring this voice of justice and charity in truth to the political, social, and economic structures and relationship of our time and place. Our faith invokes the transcendent and transformative power of God into our human structures, relationships and dialogues.

The myths related to population growth were explored. If all people (including those who are poor or in underdeveloped nations) are seen as “resource” and not “burden”, then people become the wealth which develops society and it’s natural resources in creative ways (as has been done through the dignity of work in developed nations). Resources used with a sense of distributive and social justice, rather than exploitation for profit, can provide for the needs of the people of our world.

“The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation”(7)

And so we pray, reflect and seek to act on the following questions as they relate to our lives today:

As a Catholic, how can I live out a commitment to promote *both* human life *and* human dignity?

How does duty call me to seek the common good?

How do I feel called to transform excess – in my own life, community, nation, and world – into resources that can be used to protect the rights of others?

How can I practice charity by working toward the common good and challenging those in positions of power to seek the common good?