

Overview of first session:

Group Study Session 1: Charity Justice and the Common Good

1. How does Pope Benedict describe “charity” in *Caritas in Veritate*?

“Charity” is love in its deepest sense. It goes vastly beyond our cultural definition of “charity” as giving directly (services or goods) to someone who has a need without them being required to pay anything. It is giving love.

What did he mean by “micro-relationships” and “macro-relationships”?

“Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour; it is the principle not only of microrelationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macrorelationships (social, economic and political ones). For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, “God is love” (*Deus Caritas Est*): *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it*. Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope” (2).

2. What does Pope Benedict mean by the “common good”?

The “common good” goes beyond what is OK for most people, but starts with the reflection of how it cares for the poorest among us.

“To love someone is to desire that person’s good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is the good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is the good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards *it is a requirement of justice and charity*” (7).

Why is it a requirement of justice and charity? “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it.” So the common good presupposes acting with justice and love (charity) toward all our brothers and sisters. “The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it give theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.” (6)

3. How are justice and charity related? If we practiced both justice and charity, what impact would this have on our lives and world?

“If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity¹, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, “the

minimum measure” of it ², an integral part of the love “in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving³” (6). If we all practiced God’s justice and charity, it would be the realization of God’s Kingdom here on earth. Governments would serve the common good; economies would serve the needs of all people; business would provide a way for creative work for all able to work; the environment would be cared for as the natural sustainer of life; even the most vulnerable humans would be cared for with dignity.

6. According to Pope Benedict the global common good includes a concern for the environment. (5)

“Human beings legitimately exercise a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world’s population. On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God’s gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity. At the same time we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it. This means being committed to making joint decisions ‘after pondering responsibly the road to be taken, decisions aimed at strengthening that *covenant between human beings and the environment*, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying’⁴” (5).

What can we do to act on this concern?

4. What does the Holy Father mean when he says the Church has a “public role”? (11)

“The [Second Vatican] Council probed more deeply what had always belonged to the truth of the faith, namely that the Church, being at God’s service, is at the service of the world in terms of love and truth. Paul VI set out from this vision in order to convey two important truths. ... [T]he *whole Church, in all her being and acting — when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity — is engaged in promoting integral human development*. She has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities: all the energy she brings to the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity is manifested when she is able to operate in a climate of freedom” (11).

What can we do as Catholics to support this public role?

How does this encyclical relate to our society/culture?

How does it relate to your life?

To what action does this teaching call me?