

## Chapter 5

# Globalization in Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*

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### ABSTRACT

*Benedict XVI, the present pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, published Caritas in Veritate in June 2009. This third papal encyclical of his is distinguished from his others that dealt with the area of theology commonly known as “constructive” or “systematic.” In this most recent publication, Benedict XVI moves his writing into a rich historical arena known as Roman Catholic social teaching. Building upon a solid tradition of popes tackling political, social, and economic issues, Benedict XVI tackles acute contemporary concerns. The key areas Benedict XVI addresses in this encyclical are globalization, the economy, technology, and the environment. Germane to this text, this chapter will seek to explain how globalization is described and critiqued by Benedict XVI in this pivotal letter of his pontificate. While globalization will be the primary focus, because of the interrelationship between the aforementioned topics, attention obviously will also to be given to the other primary areas.*

### INTRODUCTION

The British public policy strategist Alex MacGillivray noted in his manuscript *A Brief History of Globalization: The Untold Story of our Incredible Shrinking Planet* that there were over five thousand texts on globalization in circulation. One recent text is particularly noteworthy. *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, an extension of the 1999 work *The Lexus and the*

*Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* written in 2005 by New York Times columnist and Pulitzer prize winner Thomas L. Friedman stands out for its broad popularity. Coupled with its wide international distribution, Friedman's text placed the concept of globalization in the forefront of public discourse. While the term “globalization” has been in circulation, as historians and economist acknowledge, since the dawn of civilization, Friedman's acclaimed *The World is Flat* offers a critical resume of contemporary globalization, particularly, as he notes, in a post 9/11 world

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and pushes the notion of globalization into the mainstream of conversations.

Even though Friedman made globalization a more significant part of civil discourse, a precise definition can be challenging upon which people can agree. Academics, politicians, historians, sociologists, and the like have an understanding of globalization and move to an appraisal of how the future of the global village might be envisaged from their particular vantage points. The Roman Catholic Church, hereafter RCC, has engaged in this type of analysis and has isolated their own appreciation of how they understand globalization and forecast its future.

The goal of this chapter is to offer an appreciation of how the RCC understands globalization, more specifically Benedict XVI, the present pontiff of the church, as he appreciates globalization in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* published in July 2009. To accomplish this, the chapter will first offer a resume of the themes of Roman Catholic Social Teaching (hereafter RCST) in order to set the context for Benedict XVI's letter. It will then place *Caritas in Veritate* within the historical encyclical tradition identifying the ways in which the themes have been employed as a lens for the RCC to evaluate the contemporary landscape. A resume of the letter will follow. Finally, it will isolate critical issues within Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* that concern itself with globalization and its relative concerns of the economy, technology, and the environment.

## **THE THEMES OF ROMAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING**

Throughout its rich history, RCST, built upon philosophical and theological foundations, has used the framework of particular themes to underscore the dignity of the human person, the value of human progress and global development, and, the corresponding collective efforts necessary to sustain a dynamic human existence where all might

flourish. In 1998, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*. This document probed the difficulty of disseminating RCST to the general public, no less the Roman Catholic faithful. As a response, it proposed creative ways to encourage greater appreciation and implementation of RCST in today's society. In their efforts, the bishops isolated seven themes which they believe could form the matrix to discuss any socioeconomic or political issue. These themes, the bishops contend, could serve as the foundational lens by which the RCC can use to critique the different facets of society. Daniel Groody (2007) calls these themes "ethical coordinates" in assessing and directing globalization (118). Before attempting to show their usefulness in evaluating globalization, it would be helpful to understand the individual themes.

The first theme is the most central one focusing on the life and dignity of the human person. This is the starting point for all of RCST and undergirds all the subsequent principles of RCST. Human life is sacred and has a profound dignity, at all its stages, from development to death. Humanity enjoys this dignity by virtue of being in relation to the God of Jesus Christ. Such a dignity is not acquired by any particular cache of virtues possessed or dependent on personal accomplishment. It is freely bestowed. The human person is understood as an "imago Dei," a reflection of God. Helmut Thielicke (1966) coined the term "alien dignity" to describe this reality. This belief in the inherent dignity of the human person forms the foundation of a rich moral vision for the human community and undergirds all the other principles of RCST. For the RCC, every human person is precious and the litmus test of any decision must be whether it promotes or denigrates the life and dignity of the human person.

A call to family, community and participation, is the second theme. It advances a theological proposition to the philosophers' understanding of the human person as a social animal, not one

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