



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

1. INTRODUCTION

Charity demands justice

CHARITY is love received and given. Because we have received God's love, we must be instruments of His grace and form networks of charity. We are responsible not only for our immediate neighbours, but also all those affected by social, economic and political policies.

The way the world understands charity is detached from ethical living; it easily dismisses charity as irrelevant. To counter this, we must link charity to truth. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality.

The world tends to relativise truth. Truth is what God has revealed to us about Himself and about his law.

There are two criteria for social action that flow from the principle of "charity in truth": justice and the common good.

Charity demands justice; we must always first give the other person what is due him or her. Charity also goes beyond justice because to love is to give, to offer what is mine to the other.

The common good is the good of oneself and the rest of society. To desire and strive for the common good is a requirement of justice and charity.

2. THE MESSAGE OF POPULORUM PROGRESSIO

Progress is a vocation

Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth) builds upon another important papal letter, Populorum Progressio (On Development of Peoples, written 40 years ago by Pope Paul VI).

Pope Paul VI makes the point that the Church is always engaged in promoting human development, and authentic human development concerns the whole person and every person.

He taught that progress is a vocation. This means that it is a call from God that requires an answer freely given. In some underdeveloped situations, people's freedom is hindered. Those of us who are free should work for the freedom of all others.

3. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN OUR TIME

We need to be more involved

The global economic crisis is an opportunity for discernment and to shape a new vision for the future.

We should start by addressing the difficulties of the present time.

Measuring progress by profit alone can actually cause poverty. The world's wealth is growing in absolute terms, but inequalities are on the increase.

Progress only on economic and technological terms is insufficient. We need to pay attention to human development. We also have to re-evaluate the role of the state in solving the crisis. We need new forms of political participation, nationally and internationally, where the people are more deeply involved.

Social welfare systems are being downsized. The call for workers' associations to defend their rights is more important than before.

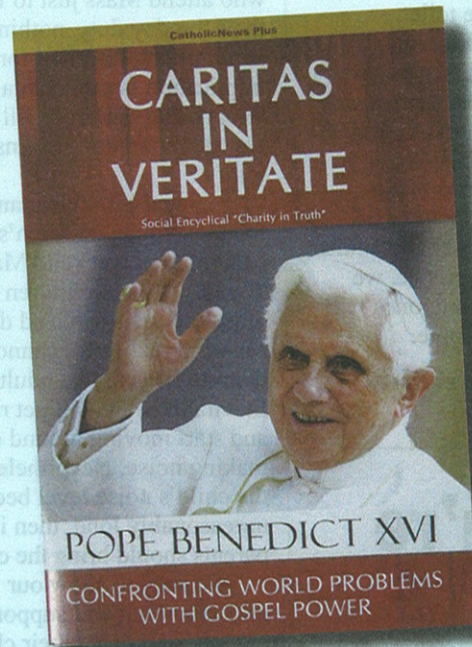
The increased commercialisation of culture can lead to dangers of cultural eclecticism (cultures are viewed as equivalent and interchangeable) and cultural levelling (indiscriminate acceptance of all lifestyles and conduct).

Many people around the world are still desperately hungry. Hunger is caused not by lack of resources, but by lack of will. Food and access to water should be universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination.

Poverty has led to high infant mortality.

PAPAL LETTER SIMPLIFIED

What we can learn from the global crisis



Pope Benedict XVI's latest encyclical, Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth), is considered his most important and it received much attention both within and outside the Church. The Pope wrote this social encyclical to address the global economic crisis, its causes and the path for future development. The subtitle is Confronting World Problems With Gospel Power. This article summarises the key points made in the encyclical, a 70-page letter in eight sections and addressed to all Catholics and people of good will.

Many countries and organisations promote contraception and abortion. There needs to be respect for and openness to life.

Religious freedom is tied closely to development. We should be concerned of religious fanaticism as well as religious indifference.

This picture of today demands new solutions. Such solutions should uphold the dignity of the individual and provide steady employment for everyone as a priority. Our economic choices should not result in disparities in wealth that are excessive or morally unacceptable.

4. FRATERNITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Be giving, give hope

We are blessed with astonishing gifts that go unrecognised because of a consumerist view of life. You could say that original sin has caused us to be selfish and inward looking.

We confuse happiness and salvation with material prosperity and social action.

There is a need for Christian hope. Hope is an absolutely gratuitous gift of God.

Our belief that the economy is not subject to moral influences has led to abuses and the loss of hope.

Economic and political systems must apply the principle of gratuitousness, that is, to be giving, to give hope.

The market is based on "commutative justice", meaning everyone plays fair, keeps their word, pays what they owe and does the work they are hired for.

The Church teaches that the market also needs "distributive justice" and "social justice". Distributive justice means that money, power and resources should be distributed to meet everyone's basic needs for a fully human life. Social justice means that every person is allowed to help and is actively involved in building a just society.

Business has a human significance prior to its professional one. We need a new kind of commercial enterprise, one that seeks both profit and the common good – not just profit alone. Concern for the common good cannot just be left to government or to civil society; it must also be the concern of the market.

Globalisation is about the world becoming more interconnected. It is neither good nor bad. Rather, it is what we make of it. Globalisation should be based on ethical criteria that focus on the common good.

5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEOPLE; RIGHTS AND DUTIES; THE ENVIRONMENT

The whole of the economy must be ethical

Many people are concerned only about their individual rights. They forget their duties and their responsibility to others.

In fact, duties reinforce rights. The sharing of reciprocal duties is a more powerful incentive for action than the assertion of rights.

Rights and duties apply to population growth. It is a mistake to consider population increase as the primary cause of under-development. States should promote the centrality of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman, and assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs.

People-centred ethics is beneficial to the economy. The whole of the economy must be ethical, not just some sectors of it.

We should be responsible stewards of nature. We must find a way for the whole human family to live comfortably on this earth. We should not transfer the cost of resources we use to other countries or to future generations.

A central environmental issue is energy. The hoarding of non-renewable energy resources by powerful groups and countries hinders development in poor countries. There needs to be renewed solidarity between developing and industrialised countries.

6. THE COOPERATION OF THE HUMAN FAMILY

We need dialogue between faith and reason

The human race should be a single family working together in true communion. It should not simply be groups of subjects

who happen to live side by side.

All religions can contribute to development if God has a place in public culture, society, economic and political institutions. Secularism – or its opposite, fundamentalism – hinders development.

Dialogue between faith and reason, between believers and non-believers, is to be encouraged. It makes charity more effective.

We should promote the principle of subsidiarity. This means matters should be handled by the smallest or least centralised authority possible. Globalisation must be marked by subsidiarity.

The rights and dignity of migrants and workers must be safe-guarded and respected. Foreign workers contribute to the economic development of the host country. There should be a global coalition in favour of decent work - work that expresses the essential dignity of the human being.

There is a strong need to reform the United Nations so that we can truly become a family of nations.

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES AND TECHNOLOGY

We need spiritual growth too

Technology has its benefits. It enables us to have dominion over matter. It reduces risks. It saves labour. It improves living conditions.

However, technology is not always good. It must always be attuned to the common good. Decisions must be the fruit of moral responsibility.

To see how preoccupation with technological solutions can distract from the deeper human values, let us look at three areas: peace among nations, social communications media, and bioethics.

Peace is sometimes thought of as a product of technology. Peace building may require technology, but more importantly, it requires values rooted in the truth of human life. The voices of the people affected must be heard and considered.

Social communications media are pervasive and hardly neutral. They can have a civilising effect if they are geared towards the common good.

Biotechnology gives an illusion of man's mastery of life. The "culture of death" of abortion, eugenics, euthanasia and other such practices, denies human dignity.

Bioethics presents a choice between transcendence and pure human reason. But it is a false choice. A technology based on human reason alone rejects meaning and value.

Reason without faith will flounder in an illusion of its own omnipotence. Faith without reason risks being cut off from everyday life. Reason and faith can work hand in hand to demonstrate what is good - provided we want to see it.

Development must include not just material growth but also spiritual growth. There is only holistic development and universal common good when people's spiritual and moral welfare is considered.

8. CONCLUSION

God is our greatest hope

Despite the enormous problems facing us, there is hope. God is our greatest hope.

Charity in truth is not produced by us; it is a gift from God. Development flows from this gift.

Development needs Christians with our arms raised to God in prayer. It requires us to trust in God's providence, mercy and love. It requires our attention to the spiritual life.