

## Outline and Reflections on *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) January, 2006, Encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI

**Introduction:** God is love.

1. Christianity embraced, and then deepened and expanded Jewish faith. Looking to people of faith for renewed energy and commitment in response to God's love.

### Part I: The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History

2. Review of different popular uses of the term "love." Love between man and woman is the epitome of love.
3. Eros/Agape: Christian love new and distinct. A disciplining and purification of Eros, leading to Agape, a new vision of unifying love.
4. Pre-Christian world: promoted an eros that was not "divine madness" but degradation.
5. Love promises eternity, infinity, but needs discipline: integrating sexuality into overall existential freedom.
6. Song of Songs reflects two types of love – one insecure and searching; the other involving a real discovery of the other, seeking the good of the beloved, exclusive and forever.
7. Eros and Agape are connected, stages on a developmental path.
8. Love is a single reality with different dimensions [eros and agape]; either without the other is a caricature.

#### *The Newness of Biblical Faith*

9. Image of God: One, Source of all creation who loves humans with a personal love that elects some for the healing of all; gives Torah to understand human nature and how to live.
10. God's eros for humanity is totally agape – gratuitous and forgiving: God turns against Self, God's love against God's justice; reconciles love and justice through Christ's death.
11. Image of humans: seeking wholeness in the other, complementarity. Only in communion with the opposite sex can he become complete: Eros seeking marriage. This monogamous love is icon of relation between God and the people.

#### *Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God*

12. Starting point: contemplation of pierced side of Christ, God's love seeking us out.
13. Enduring presence of this sacrificial offering in Eucharist: Logos gives self as food.
14. This sacramental mysticism is social – Christ is one with all communicants; worship must lead to love.
15. Anyone who needs me, whom I can help is my neighbor: neighbor is universalized. Love of God and of humans is one.

#### *Love of God and Love of Neighbor*

16. Love of neighbor is the path to love of God.
17. Love of God grows to commitment of thought and sentiment.
18. Give every other person the love they crave. **Only readiness to encounter the neighbor and show love makes one sensitive to God too.** Renew that capacity to love at the Eucharist, which leads to love of neighbor.

### Part II: Caritas: The Practice of Love by the Church as a "Community of Love"

19. Church's charitable activity: Trinitarian love; Christ's Spirit moves us to love one another, become one human family.
20. Acts 2 & 4: **no room in the faith community for a poverty that denies anything essential for a dignified life.**
21. Diaconate is first organized structure in church for carrying out ministry of charity.
22. Essential activities of the Church: charity, sacraments, proclaiming the Word.
23. Diaconia: Lawrence declared the poor as the real treasure of the church.
24. Julian the Apostate declared charity as distinguishing feature of the Christian community.
25. Two essential facts:
  - a. Church's deepest nature: proclaim Word, sacraments, charity.
  - b. Church is God's family in world so no one should go without the necessities of life. We have a special responsibility to those within the church, but to all people also.



*Justice and Charity*

26. Rejects Marxist critique of charity as sustaining unjust system; pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods.

27. CST is a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid "even beyond the confines of the church." They should be addressed in dialogue with all who are seriously concerned with the world. This section states: "In 1891, the papal magisterium intervened with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII. This was followed in 1931 by Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. In 1961 Blessed John XXIII published the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, while Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), insistently addressed the social problem, which had meanwhile become especially acute in Latin America. My great predecessor John Paul II left us a trilogy of social Encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and finally *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Faced with new situations and issues, Catholic social teaching thus gradually developed, and has now found a comprehensive presentation in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council *Iustitia et Pax*. . . In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live."

28. Relation between commitment to justice and charity

a. Just ordering of society and state is a central responsibility of politics (autonomy of the temporal sphere; render to Caesar, etc.; religious freedom and harmony); State must recognize the Church as the social expression of the Christian faith. Justice is the aim and intrinsic criterion of all politics.

Faith purifies practical reason from blindnesses caused by power and special interests (Faith as an encounter with the living God that opens us and purifies our reason).

The role of the church is to teach natural law, form consciences, stimulate greater insight into the requirements of justice and readiness to act accordingly – helping people understand and take on the political battle. It can't stay on the sidelines, but it is not its role to make this teaching prevail.

b. Love, caritas, will always be needed; no society can be so just that it doesn't need it. Close loving personal concern vs. bureaucracy.

29. Formation of just structures not directly the duty of the Church, but of politics – the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The indirect duty of the Church is to contribute to purification of reason and reawakening of moral forces leading to establishment of just structures.

While the Church guides society in this way, **"The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful.** As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good." The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as "social charity."

*The multiple structures of charitable service in the social context today*



## 30. Struggle for justice and love today:

- a. Instant global communications create a type of global solidarity – a sign of our times. States respond mainly through subsidies or tax relief; humanitarian associations through resources. The solidarity of civil society surpasses that of individuals.
- b. They cooperate fruitfully and the church agencies bringing transparency and witness to love. Volunteer programs provide formation in self-giving. Church cooperates with other faith communities with same goals.

*Distinctiveness of the church's charitable activity*

## 31. Church's character as a witness to all with the spark of love within. Essential elements of Christian charity:

- a. Simple response to immediate needs and specific situations; requires professional training **and** loving concern, formation of the heart.
- b. Independent of parties and ideologies: not a means of changing the world ideologically; rejection of Marxist theory that charity supports the *status quo* of unjust systems. By making love present; we contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now with full commitment wherever opportunity arises, independent of partisan strategies and programs: we should cultivate a heart that sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.
- c. Charity must not be used for converting others.

*Those responsible for the church's charitable activity*

## 32. The Church at all levels from parishes to universal church is subject of charity. Bishops have primary responsibility as successors to apostles.

## 33. Personnel carrying out charity must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but must be grounded by faith working through love: people with a real relationship with Christ. Whoever loves Christ loves the church and wants it to be an ever better instrument and image of Christ's love.

## 34. Summary message: Love vs. clanging symbol: We must give of ourselves in the service.

## 35. With humility: the helper is not better than the one being helped. It is God's world and God's work; we are not personally responsible for it all.

## 34. Do not give into temptations to ideology or inertia or resignation; prayer needed as source of energy for service.

## 37. Reaffirm prayer rather than judging God or fanaticism or terrorism.

## 38. Job – faith keeps us going even when God is silent.

## 39. Faith, hope and charity go together: Faith: God gave us Son; God loves us and is love – see God's love in pierced heart of Christ on the cross: that love is God's light for the world. Hope: patience and humility.

*Conclusion*

## 40. Saints: Martin of Tours – irreplaceable value of individual testimony to charity; monastic witness, active orders.

## 41. Mary: visitation as service of charity/ magnificat as humility.

## 42. Mary is the Mother of all believers, and to “her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love.”

**Prayer of Benedict XVI**

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
 you have given the world its true light,  
 Jesus, your Son – the Son of God.  
 You abandoned yourself completely  
 to God's call and thus became a wellspring  
 of the goodness which flows forth from him.  
 Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.  
 Teach us to know and love him,  
 so that we too can become capable of true love  
 and be fountains of living water  
 in the midst of a thirsting world. Amen.

**Reflection Questions:**

Why, at this time in history, is Benedict XVI stressing that our God is a God of love?

Why are we called to responded with both love and justice to human needs?

What is the role of lay people in the Church in promoting social justice? (See section 29.)

The Pope declares that, without spiritual energy justice cannot prevail and prosper. How does the practice of love and openness generate spiritual energy?

