

A Letter from Bishop Braxton on Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical

Dear People of God:

On June 29, 2009, the Feast of the Holy Apostles Saints Peter and Paul, our Holy Father promulgated the third Encyclical Letter of his pontificate, [*Caritas in Veritate*](#). I urge all priests, deacons, religious and the Christian faithful to read, to study, discuss, and reflect upon the Pope's message in "Charity in Truth." The Pontiff's overview of the economic challenges the world is facing and his bold call for a new world economic order to work for the common good contains a depth and breath of insight that you will not find in any current analysis of the present economic turmoil, that is based exclusively upon secular economic theories. He reminds us the Gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant to every aspect of human life, including the economy.

Building upon and expanding the vision of Pope Paul VI's 1967 landmark Encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), the Holy Father addresses the consciences of those who oversee financial markets stating, "Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by an improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty." His challenges to the excesses of capitalism reflect a genuine Christian humanism that make it impossible to reduce the Holy See's perspective "liberal," "conservative," "left," or "right". The Encyclical, which was begun more than two years ago, was not written specifically to address the current crisis. However, the vision it contains certainly speaks to many of the factors that produce this crisis. The Encyclical contains food for thought for President Barack Obama and the Group of Eight leaders of the world's most industrialized nations who met in Italy shortly after the Encyclical was released. The Pope presented a personal copy of *Caritas in Veritate* to President Obama when he received him in a private audience at the Vatican.

Pope Benedict concludes the nearly fifty-page Letter with these encouraging words: "Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is. In the face of the enormous problems surrounding the development of peoples, which almost make us yield to discouragement, we find solace in the sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches us: "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5) and then encourages us: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). As we contemplate the vast amount of work to be done, we are sustained by our faith that God is present alongside those who come together in His name to work for justice...Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour."

There is no other religious body in the world and no other religious leader in the world that is in a better position to speak with wisdom and prudence about our current economic needs than the Catholic Church and the Pope. The Church brings centuries of experience and wisdom to the current crucial conversation about the economic stability of the world and the humanitarian needs of all people.

Caritas in Veritate is divided into six chapters that examine the complex financial realities of the world community (not just the United States), and the impact of those realities on the growth and development of individuals, communities and nations. This facilitates the possibility of studying the Letter one chapter at a time in an adult education group, with parish leaders, with individuals who are knowledgeable about matters of finance, and with all who desire a deeper appreciation of the Church's social teachings. I recommend that excerpts with discussion questions be placed in parish bulletins. Lay persons, who are knowledgeable of economic matters, are urged to lead discussions of the text in their homes. Please do not allow the fact that the topic is somewhat complex to discourage you from studying the Encyclical carefully. In this way you will be able to bring the insights of Catholic social teachings to the table when you discuss the most serious financial crisis the world community has faced since 1929 (Cf. *Caritas in Veritate* at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward K. Braxton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton
Bishop of Belleville