

## CHARITY, NOT JUSTICE, AS CONSTITUTIVE OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

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*The article argues that Pope Benedict XVI's inaugural encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, places the Church's competency in the area of charity, not justice. Achieving justice pertains to the role of the state in the political process. The Church's role regarding justice is indirect, through her social teaching and the activity of the lay faithful as citizens. The Church's charitable agencies must adhere to their Catholic identity, and the state has the duty to encourage and protect their activity.*

POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS FREQUENTLY STATED that he wishes to present the Church and the gospel it preaches not as a “no” but as a “yes,” an affirmation of humanity and a sign of hope. At the same time he insists that the Church and the gospel must be portrayed in all their originality and uniqueness, a mysterious and gratuitous manifestation of God's love for us. He accomplishes both these aims in the foundational encyclical of his pontificate, *Deus caritas est*.<sup>1</sup>

Part 2 of the encyclical describes in practical terms the service of charity the Church must perform in response to the divine love she has received in Christ, which is the emphasis of part 1. In this second part Benedict resurrects a term from the Church's social teaching virtually not heard since the 1971 World Synod of Bishops first used it, the term “constitutive.” That synod famously declared, “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel or, in other words, of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (December 25, 2005) no. 25, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html) (accessed February 17, 2007).

oppressive situation.”<sup>2</sup> What is notable is that for Benedict it is charity, not justice, that is constitutive of the Church’s mission. Twice in no. 20 of the encyclical he employs the term to describe *diakonia* (the ministry of charity) as a constitutive element of the Church’s deepest nature, along with *kerygma-martyria* (proclamation of and witness to the Word) and *leitourgia* (celebration of the sacraments).

In this article I will reprise the teaching of the 1971 synod regarding justice as constitutive of the gospel and describe the subsequent history of the term. I will refer to its “correction” in the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* of 1975, and its absence in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* issued in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I will then summarize the content of part 2 of *Deus caritas est* where the term “constitutive” is used and explore the roots of this teaching in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger from Augustine’s *City of God* and from Ratzinger’s dialogue with liberation theology during his service as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In a final section I will give an assessment and evaluation.

Cardinal Ratzinger, presiding as dean of the college of cardinals at the Mass to begin the conclave that elected him pope, returned to a favorite theme, the dictatorship of relativism, and referred to the waves of various ideologies that are threatening to overturn the small boat of believers.<sup>3</sup> Relegating action for justice and liberation to the competency of the state and preserving charity as a constitutive element of the Church’s very identity no doubt is based on Pope Benedict’s conviction that the Church must vigorously oppose “worldly ideologies” and protect the transcendent mission to which Christ entrusted it.

## JUSTICE AS CONSTITUTIVE

Since 1891 when Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical *Rerum novarum* on the rights of workers, it has become customary to issue new papal teaching on the anniversaries of this milestone document that inaugurated the modern phase of the Church’s social teaching. Thus in 1971 Pope Paul VI wrote *Octogesimo adveniens* (“On the Eightieth Year”). At that time there was ferment in the Church to respond to the cries for help coming from the third world. Pope Paul VI himself in his encyclical *Populorum progressio* of 1967 taught that development is the new name for peace, that if the world

<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Land, S.J., ed., *Justice in the World: Synod of Bishops: An Overview* (Vatican City: Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, 1972) 74–75.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Heinz-Joachim Fischer, *Pope Benedict XVI: A Personal Portrait* (New York: Crossroad, 2005) 88–89.

wants peace, it has to work for justice.<sup>4</sup> Thus in *Octogesimo adveniens* Paul VI expressed the hope that the upcoming synod would be able to provide assistance in studying the specific mission of the Church with regard to questions of justice.

The description of justice as constitutive of the Church's mission and of the preaching of the gospel occurs in the introduction of the synod's document. Its author was Vincent Cosmao, O.P., a consultant. According to Cosmao, the word "constitutive" makes engagement by the Church on behalf of justice no mere ethical deduction from faith but a very condition of its truth. In a speech given to the French hierarchy just before the synod, Cosmao asked,

Is the participation in the transformation of the world, perceived as unjust, merely a requirement flowing from the faith and expressing itself in the works of charity, or is it constitutive of Christ's Passover conceived as coextensive with human history, which is the history of human liberation?<sup>5</sup>

If it is the latter, if action for justice and human liberation are constitutive of the gospel, then, according to Cosmao, the preaching of the gospel "occurs" by means of action on behalf of justice.

Soon after the synod, which passed the term "constitutive" without comment into the final text, varying interpretations were offered about its meaning. Pope Paul VI, who sought to balance the insistence on justice in the Church's mission by announcing that the topic of the next synod would be evangelization, expressed disappointment with the previous synod's work by saying that he hoped the next synod would offer a "better and more subtle" definition of the relationship between the preaching of the gospel and the work of justice.<sup>6</sup> Bishop Ramon Torella Cascante, the special secretary of the 1971 synod on the theme of justice, stated, "It is very important that on the occasion of the coming synod action for justice and peace be reasserted in the perspective of evangelization as one of its integral parts. Naturally, ambiguities, misunderstandings, contradictions, and confusion should be avoided."<sup>7</sup> For Torella, "constitutive" interpreted as "integral part" of the gospel did not mean "essential part." It refers, he

<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (March 26, 1967) no. 76, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html) (accessed February 17, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Cosmao, O.P., "Justice dans le monde? Théologie sous-jacente au document du travail du Synode épiscopale," *Documentation catholique* 1589 (July 4, 1971) 638-40, at 639.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1974) 979, my translation.

<sup>7</sup> "Evangelization of the Modern World: Contribution of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace to the Synod of 1974," February 1974, p. 1. Document in the archives of the Commission.

explained, to “something which accompanies, but need not be present, that is, strictly speaking, a true proclamation of the gospel could take place without action for justice.”<sup>8</sup>

The official theologian on the theme of justice at the 1971 synod was Juan Alfaro, S.J., of the Gregorian University. According to Alfaro, Torella’s explanation of “constitutive” introduced an “unnecessary complication” that equivalently weakened the force and intent of the word. “Constitutive” and “integral” are not the same. Body and soul, he explained, are constitutive elements of the composition of a human being without which a human being would not be human. Torella, then, is in error, according to Alfaro. “This was not the thinking of the drafting group. It is to introduce another term altogether,” he concluded.<sup>9</sup>

### SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF “CONSTITUTIVE”

The synod of 1971 was the last to issue its own declaration at the conclusion of its deliberations. Thereafter, beginning with the synod of 1974 devoted to the theme of evangelization, the pope would receive the synod’s results and issue a document of his own. *Evangelii nuntiandi* would prove to be one of Paul VI’s most-cited and effective teachings. Called an “apostolic exhortation,” in it he declares that “the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the church.”<sup>10</sup>

In sections 2, 3, and 4 of the exhortation, Pope Paul defined the content and methods of evangelization. Christ himself is the good news who comes from God to proclaim salvation from sin and death. But evangelization itself is, according to the pope, a “complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact, they are complementary and mutually enriching.”<sup>11</sup>

In section 3, the pope describes what he calls the essential content and “secondary elements” of evangelization. Its essential foundation and center is the proclamation of Jesus Christ who comes to bring a salvation that is not something merely “immanent and restricted to our earthly existence but something transcendent and eschatological.” But, he continued, “evan-

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Ramon Torella Cascante, conversation with the author, Fall 1980, Rome.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in my article, “Action for Justice as Constitutive of the Preaching of the Gospel: What Did the 1971 Synod Mean?” *Theological Studies* 44 (1983) 298–311.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975) no. 14, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html) (accessed February 19, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* no. 24.

gelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the gospel and man's concrete life." Between evangelization and human advancement there are "profound links" that include the anthropological, theological, and evangelical orders. The person being evangelized is not an abstraction but, he explained, subject to social and economic realities. In theology we cannot dissociate the plan of creation from that of redemption. "The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored." The evangelical order is defined as that of charity, but "how in fact can we proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true authentic advancement of man?"<sup>12</sup>

In 2004 the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Intended as a complete overview of the teachings since Leo XIII to the present, it offers, in its own terms, "principles for reflection, the criteria for judgment and the directives for action which are the starting point for the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism."<sup>13</sup> Since it is composed of teachings of the popes, the councils, and Roman congregations, no synods of bishops are cited, and the term "constitutive" does not appear.

In the section entitled "Social Doctrine, Evangelization and Human Promotion," however, the three links between evangelization and human promotion set forth in *Evangelii nuntiandi* are mentioned to support the thesis that the Church's social doctrine is "an integral part" and "an essential part"<sup>14</sup> of the Christian message. In another section, the permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine are said to be born of "the encounter of the gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbor in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society."<sup>15</sup> In these phrases, the vital connection between preaching the gospel in its entirety and justice, and between charity and the practice of justice, is maintained and underscored.

### CHARITY AS CONSTITUTIVE

*Deus caritas est* has a clear design. One part is speculative, the other practical. In part 1, Pope Benedict emphasizes the mysterious and gratuitous love God has for us which, like human love, is at the same time *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*, three dimensions of one and the same love. In part 2, his intention is to call forth a "renewed energy and commitment in the human

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. no. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. nos. 66, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. no. 160.

response to God's love."<sup>16</sup> In structuring the encyclical this way he wishes to emphasize that the Christian service of love is not to be identified with any welfare agency but is a specific expression of and response to God's love given to us.

He begins part 2 with a quotation from Augustine: "If you see charity, you see the Trinity."<sup>17</sup> From this trinitarian perspective, it is the Spirit who moves us to love one another as Christ has loved us. With this energy that the Spirit provides, we can do the works of evangelization in Word and in Sacrament and accomplish the ministry of charity.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, the church at its inception was constituted by these three elements: fidelity to the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of the bread and prayer, and "communion," which is to say, holding all things in common so that the distinction between rich and poor no longer existed (Acts 2:42; 4:32–37). To accomplish this communion, seven deacons were chosen, and their "diaconia," the ministry of charity, became constitutive of the church's fundamental structure. The pope concludes, "The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word."<sup>18</sup> He concludes, "For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."<sup>19</sup>

In the next section of part 2, entitled "Justice and Charity,"<sup>20</sup> the pope characterizes the Church's social teaching from Leo XIII to the present as the church's contribution to building a just society on the basis of reason and the natural law. Here her responsibility, unlike the ministry of charity, is indirect rather than direct. The just ordering of society and the state is a central responsibility of politics, not of the Church.<sup>21</sup> The Church forms consciences and motivates people to act by a clarification of reason contained in the Gospel. He cites Augustine's contention in *City of God*<sup>22</sup> that the state must be constituted by justice, or else it is no state. He quotes Jesus' distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (Mt 22:21). He refers to *Gaudium et spes* about the autonomy of the temporal sphere from church control.<sup>23</sup> It is the lay faithful, as citizens in a personal capacity, who "have the direct duty to work for a just ordering of society."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Deus caritas est* no. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* no. 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* no. 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* nos. 26–29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* no. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 4.4 (ed. Vernon J. Bourke, intro. Étienne Gilson, trans. Gerald Walsh et al. [New York: Image, 1958]).

<sup>23</sup> *Gaudium et spes* no. 36, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed February 19, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> *Deus caritas est* no. 29.

### THE ROOTS OF *DEUS CARITAS EST*

Augustine's thought has been formative for Pope Benedict throughout his intellectual life and, as we have seen, in *Deus caritas est*. In seeking the roots of Benedict's thought I refer to his lifelong engagement with Augustine and his dialogue with liberation theology during his tenure as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Augustine's great treatise *The City of God* was a response written over many years to the collapse of Rome in 410 to the forces of Alaric and the Gothic invaders. Was Christianity the cause of this catastrophe? Augustine's thesis is that the city of man, which is based upon cupidity, was destined to collapse of itself. The Christian belongs to the City of God, which is based upon charity, not to the earthly city—the Christian's true home is in heaven, a lasting city. We are as pilgrims upon this earth and strangers.

Writing before his election as pope, and drawing on *The City of God*, Ratzinger made these observations: "Where this fundamental attitude prevails, the church knows that it cannot be a state here on earth, for it is aware that the definitive state lies elsewhere and that it cannot set up the City of God on earth. It respects the earthly state as an institution belonging to historical time, with rights and laws that the church recognizes."<sup>25</sup> At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples that they must be in the world, yet not of it (Jn 17:11–16). According to Aidan Nichols, "In time this will become perhaps the most-insistent refrain in Ratzinger's criticism of the Catholic Church's self-reform."<sup>26</sup>

For Augustine the city of man is only a foil for the construction of the City of God. According to Nichols, there is a "denial of the relevance of the works of justice to grace-sustained righteousness, manifested in Augustine's almost demonic concept of the *civitas terrena*."<sup>27</sup> It would be a mistake, then, to read *The City of God* as a blueprint for the building of an earthly society. Augustine scholar Etienne Gilson declares, "If we examine St. Augustine's own teaching more closely, we shall see why the notion of a temporal human society endowed with its own unity and including the whole human race could not present itself to his mind."<sup>28</sup>

As a faithful disciple of Augustine, Benedict sets forth forcefully these distinctions between charity and justice, church and state, the heavenly city and the earthly one. But he adds, "Yet at the same time she [the church]

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad, 2006) 71.

<sup>26</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Thought of Benedict XVI* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2005) 50.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 266.

<sup>28</sup> Étienne Gilson, introduction to *City of God*.

cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the church deeply."<sup>29</sup>

"Let the church be what it is, or else let it not exist at all." According to Ratzinger's biographer, Heinz-Joachim Fischer, "this has been the overarching theological motto of both the young and the old Joseph Ratzinger."<sup>30</sup> As the newly named prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger was confronted with the immediate challenge of a new and political reading of Christianity in the form of liberation theology. His response in two instructions, a negative one in 1984 and a more positive one in 1986, constitutes a major instance of his conviction that the Church must maintain her uniqueness if she is to continue to exist at all. Both of these responses provide a necessary background for the understanding of the thinking that prompted part 2 of *Deus caritas est*.

To start with the second instruction on the Christian meaning of freedom and liberation, the key text is John 8:32: "The truth shall make you free." The quest for freedom and the aspiration to liberation from every oppression, according to the instruction, find their first source in Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Christianity is all about the new commandment, God's love, which involves love of neighbor.<sup>32</sup> Therefore there can be no gap between love of neighbor and the desire for justice. To contrast the two is to distort both love and justice.<sup>33</sup>

The new interpretation of Christianity, however, which the theology of liberation represents, leads, according to the earlier instruction, to a political rereading of Scripture that is reductionist of its spiritual content.<sup>34</sup> In giving such priority to the political dimension, the instruction continues, we are led to deny the radical newness of the New Testament and above all to

<sup>29</sup> *Deus caritas est* no. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Heinz-Joachim Fischer, *Pope Benedict XVI: A Personal Portrait*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad, 2005) 41.

<sup>31</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation (March 22, 1986) no. 5, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19860322\\_freedom-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html) (accessed February 19, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* no. 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* no. 57.

<sup>34</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation" (August 6, 1984) no. 27, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html) (accessed February 19, 2007).

misunderstand the person of Jesus Christ and the specific character of the salvation he gave which is, above all, liberation from sin, the source of all evils.

“The church, guided by the gospel of mercy and by the love for mankind,” it concludes, “hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might.”<sup>35</sup>

The Marxist ideology that characterizes some liberation theologies has now faded, but the dialogue with liberation theology helped greatly to sharpen the thinking that underlies *Deus caritas est*. In part, liberation theology was a reaction against Augustinian tendencies in the Church to downplay the importance of our earthly life and the necessary link between working for justice in this world and the love of God. Maintaining the proper balance has been a preoccupation of Benedict XVI. It was what led him to say that divine charity, not the human virtue of justice, is at the heart of the gospel.

### ASSESSMENT: A NEW EQUILIBRIUM

Over the years Joseph Ratzinger has maintained a consistent assessment of the crisis in the Church. In *The Ratzinger Report* (1985), he said that the Church does not need to return to the past in a kind of “restoration,” but rather must “search for a new equilibrium after all the exaggerations of an indiscriminating opening to the world, after the excessively positive interpretations of a world that is agnostic and atheistic.” The Church’s aim, he concluded, is “a newly discovered balance of orientations and values within Catholicism as a whole.”<sup>36</sup>

In a 2006 interview I conducted with Archbishop Paul Cordes, president of *Cor Unum*, the pontifical charitable council, he confirmed that the specific “push,” as he called it, of Benedict XVI is precisely this: balance, reason balanced and clarified by faith, is a single correlation and coherence, as the pope stated in his address at the University of Regensburg on September 12, 2006, and justice balanced and clarified by charity. In Regensburg the pope went on to say that if faith, for instance, is not balanced by reason, the result may be religious fanaticism.<sup>37</sup>

In the last period of Pope John Paul II’s pontificate, according to Cordes, the pope asked that work be done in preparation for an encyclical on the theme of charity. A draft was completed and sent to him, but his illness

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. no. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Fischer, *Pope Benedict XVI* 33.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict XVI, Papal Address at the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html) (accessed February 28, 2007).

prevented him from acting on it. Perhaps, in part in deference to his predecessor's memory, Benedict took up this theme for his first encyclical. What Benedict did, however, typically, was to turn the whole treatment around. John Paul's unpublished draft had taken an inductive approach, mentioning all the initiatives of helping promoted by faith agencies and private benefactors and citing numerous instances of the Church's charitable works. From these instances, it then concluded to a testimony to the love of God that prompted everything. This order made a certain sense pedagogically. Benedict, however, reversed the procedure and made it deductive and more logically correct. He starts with a new part 1 about the nature of God as love and the grace that comes from the divine love to accomplish the works of charity. He also did something else very typical of him: he emphasized the central truths of the faith: God, Christ, love. He incorporated the earlier unpublished draft as part 2 of his encyclical. In the opinion of Cordes, the widespread positive response the encyclical received means that the pope was saying something many people were thinking, namely that the Church must present its message in positive terms, specifically as a message of love.<sup>38</sup>

Anticipating the encyclical's release, *Cor Unum* on January 23–24, 2006, sponsored an international conference on *Deus caritas est*. The pope's opening address is significant because, instead of merely repeating what he wrote in the encyclical, he probed more deeply into its theme, revealing additional insights. He took up again a biblical image found in the encyclical, that of the Good Samaritan, to demonstrate both the continuity that exists between Christian faith and the human search for love, while underscoring the novelty that faith brings to that search. He states, "The *eros* of God is not only a primordial cosmic power; it is love that created man and that bows down over him, as the Good Samaritan bent down to the wounded and robbed man lying on the side of the road. . . . We need the living God who loves us even to death."<sup>39</sup>

While the encyclical makes a clear distinction between the competencies of church and state, it also intends to show how much the state needs the church and, in fact, lives off the church. The church as a "living force" in society offers something far more important than material assistance, refreshment, and care for souls and the ministry of charity through loving personal concern.<sup>40</sup> In this way Benedict, according to Cordes, is opposing

<sup>38</sup> Archbishop Paul Cordes, interview by author, Rome, October 11, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Pontificium Consilium "Cor Unum," *Deus caritas est: Acts of the World Conference on Charity* (January 23–24, 2006) no. 8, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/corunum/documents/rc\\_pc\\_corunum\\_doc\\_20060707\\_Pubblicazioni\\_Doc\\_AttiCMC2006\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/corunum/documents/rc_pc_corunum_doc_20060707_Pubblicazioni_Doc_AttiCMC2006_en.html) (accessed February 19, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> *Deus caritas est* no. 28.

the so-called “nanny state” that does everything for everyone. In its confrontation with the secularized state, the church has to stress, in doing charitable works, the uniqueness that faith brings to such works based upon faith. There is the constant danger that church agencies, especially those relying on government funds, may feel that their religious identity is a burden and an encumbrance. One example Cordes gave me was the frequent requirement of governments that agencies they fund must be non-discriminatory in their hiring practices. Non-Catholics working for such agencies may not necessarily accept the specific motivation of these agencies.

What the encyclical does as well, in Cordes’ opinion, is to reinforce to the ordained members of the Church their special obligation toward charity. Vatican II and the new code of canon law, in speaking of the ordained, did not mention this paramount duty, no doubt presuming everyone knew it to be true. In the rite of ordination of a bishop, for example, the candidate is asked, among other questions, if he would willingly assume special care for the poor. From my own experience as diocesan director of the permanent diaconate, I found *Deus caritas est* with its declaration that *diakonia* is a constitutive element of the Church’s essence and its citation of the example of the Roman deacon Lawrence (d. 258) to illustrate how the early church institutionalized its charitable work, to be a powerful affirmation of this newly restored order in the Church.<sup>41</sup>

In achieving the proper balance between justice and love in the Church’s preaching and action, Benedict has chosen to emphasize love. In doing so, he is asserting what was my own conclusion in the assessment I gave to the validity of justice as constitutive in the synod of 1971. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., cites my final assessment in his *Preaching the Just Word*:

See the important article by Charles M. Murphy, “Action for Justice as Constitutive of the Gospel: What Did the 1971 Synod Mean?” *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 298–311. Murphy, at the time rector of the North American College in Rome, concluded that “the heart of the ambiguity about the meaning of constitutive . . . seems to reside in differing conceptions of what kind of justice is being referred to. If justice is conceived exclusively on the plane of the natural, human virtue of justice as explained in classical philosophical treatises, then such justice can only be conceived as an integral but nonessential part of the preaching of the gospel. But if justice is conceived in the biblical sense of God’s liberating action which demands a necessary human response—a concept of justice which is far closer to agape than to justice in the classical philosophical sense—then justice must be defined as of the essence of the gospel itself. The latter sense seems to reflect better the mentality of more recent Christian social doctrine” (308). The paragraph strikes me as a splendid clarifying insight.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See *Deus caritas est* no. 23.

<sup>42</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *Preaching the Just Word* (New Haven: Yale University, 1996) 128–29.

Two homilies that Ratzinger gave, one shortly before his election as pope, the other afterward, are illustrated in the deep personal convictions that underlie *Deus caritas est*.

In the cathedral of Milan, on February 25, 2005, Ratzinger preached at the funeral mass for Luigi Giussani, founder of the lay movement *Comunione e liberazione*. In a central section, Ratzinger describes the “difficult time, full of temptations and of errors,” the year 1968, which was also for himself, as we know, a year of clarification during his professorship at the University of Tübingen:

A first group of his [Giussani’s] followers went to Brazil and found itself face to face with extreme poverty, with extreme misery. What can be done? How can we respond? And there was a great temptation to say, “for the moment we have to set Christ aside, set God aside, because there are more pressing needs[;] we have first to change the structure, the external things[;] first we must improve the earth, then we can find heaven again.” It was the great temptation of that moment to transform Christianity into a moralism and moralism into politics, to substitute doing for believing. Because what does faith imply? We can say, “in this moment we have to do something.” And all the same, in this way, by substituting moralism for faith, doing for believing, we fall into particularisms, we lose most of all the criteria and the orientations, and in the end we don’t build, but divide.

Monsignor Giussani, with his fearless and unflinching faith, knew that, even in this situation, Christ, the encounter with Him, remains central, because whoever does not give God, gives too little, and whoever does not give God, whoever does not make people find God in the Fact of Christ, does not build, but destroys, because he gets human activity lost in ideological and false dogmatisms.

Don Giussani kept the centrality of Christ and, exactly in this way, with social works, with necessary service, he helped mankind in this difficult world, where the responsibility of Christians for the poor in the world is enormous and urgent.<sup>43</sup>

On April 24, 2005, Ratzinger gave the inaugural homily of his pontificate. He spoke about the symbolism of the pallium made of lamb’s wool “meant to represent the lost, sick, or weak sheep which the shepherd places on his shoulders and carries to the waters of life.” But, he continued, “the symbol of the lamb also has a deeper meaning.” Kings in the ancient past used to refer to their people as lambs that they could dispose of at will. This was an image of their power over others. “When the shepherd of all humanity, the living God himself became a lamb, he stood on the side of the lambs,” Benedict explained. He concluded:

It is not power but love that redeems us. This is God’s sign: he himself is love. How often we wish that God would show himself stronger, that he would strike deci-

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, homily preached at the funeral of Mons. Luigi Giussani, February 24, 2005, [http://www.clonline.org/funerale/ratzing240205\\_eng.html](http://www.clonline.org/funerale/ratzing240205_eng.html), with a few corrections of the translation in the first paragraph of the quotation; for the Italian original, see <http://www.clonline.org/funerale/ratzing240205.html> (accessed February 17, 2007).

sively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way; they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of human beings.<sup>44</sup>

There could be no better summary of what prompted *Deus caritas est*.

It seems clear that Benedict wishes the Church to be a public presence but not a political one. She is to form consciences and motivate the laity to put into practice the teachings of the Gospel. Achieving the proper balance, however, between the Church as a political force and one that is merely the religious expression of individuals practicing their faith in private is difficult to accomplish. "Laicity," the stepchild of the old anticlericalism that would be pleased to see the Church as an organization having no public role whatsoever and the fatalism that can beset faithful Christians about their earthly existences are dangers still to be avoided.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Fischer, *Pope Benedict XVI* 142.