

A NEW SOCIAL ENCYCLICAL

VATICAN CITY, 7 JUL 2009 (VIS) - This morning in the Holy See Press Office a press conference was held to present Benedict XVI's new Encyclical "Caritas in veritate". Participating in the event were Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes, president of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum"; Archbishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, recently appointed as bishop of Trieste, Italy, and Stefano Zamagni, professor of political economy at the University of Bologna, Italy and consultant of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

In his remarks Cardinal Martini spoke of the need for a new social Encyclical twenty years after John Paul II's "Centesimus Annus" of 1991, and dedicated some attention to changes that have taken place over the last two decades.

"The political ideologies that characterised the period prior to 1989 seem to have lost their virulence, but have been replaced by the new ideology of technology", he said. "Various aspects of globalisation have been accentuated, due on the one hand to the fact that there are no longer two opposing power blocs and, on the other, to the worldwide computer network. ... Religions have returned to the centre of the world stage. ... Certain large countries have emerged from a situation of backwardness, notably changing the world geopolitical balance. ... The problem of international governance remains vital".

These "great novelties ... would be enough by themselves to motivate the writing of a new social Encyclical", said the cardinal, "yet there is another reason: ... 'Caritas in veritate' was conceived by the Holy Father as a commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of Paul VI's 'Populorum Progressio'" although the theme of this new Encyclical "is not the 'development of peoples', but 'integral human development'. ... We could say, then, that the perspective of 'Populorum Progressio' has been broadened".

"'Caritas in veritate' clearly shows not only that the pontificate of Paul VI was no 'backward step' for Church social doctrine, as has unfortunately often been said, but that that Pope made a significant contribution to forming a view of the social doctrine of the Church in the wake of 'Gaudium et spes' and earlier tradition, and provided the foundation upon which John Paul II could then build".

For his part, Archbishop Crepaldi spoke of various new topics dealt with in this Encyclical. "For the first time the two fundamental rights: to life and to religious freedom", he said, "are given explicit and extensive space in a social Encyclical. ... They are", he went on, "organically linked to the question of development. ... In 'Caritas in veritate' the so-called 'anthropological question' becomes to all intents and purposes a 'social question'".

Another two themes contained in the Encyclical are: the environment - in which nature is seen not as a "deposit of natural resources" but as "created word" entrusted to the human beings "for the good of everyone" - and technology - "the first time an Encyclical deals with this theme so fully". And the archbishop went on: "The continuous reference to Truth and Love infuses 'Caritas in veritate' with great freedom of thought which cuts through all the ideologies that unfortunately still weigh upon the question of development".

Cardinal Cordes explained how, "if the Pope's first Encyclical 'Deus caritas est' on the theology of charity contained certain indications on social doctrine, we now find ourselves with a text entirely dedicate to this subject".

After highlighting how "the social doctrine of the Church is an element of evangelisation", the cardinal warned against reading it "outside the context of the Gospel and its announcement", because doctrine "is born and must be interpreted in the light of the revelation".

The president of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" explained that "the heart of social doctrine is always mankind", and he went on: "The anthropological question requires us to respond to a central question: what kind of man do we wish to promote?. ... Can a civilisation survive without fundamental points of reference, without looking to eternity, denying mankind an answer to his most profound questions? Can there be true development without God?"

Referring finally to the concept of progress, the cardinal highlighted the fact that the Encyclical, "apart from unifying the two dimensions [of human promotion and announcement of the faith], introduces a further element into the concept of progress, that of hope", to which the Pope dedicated his second Encyclical "Spe salvi".

Professor Zamagni pointed out that the Encyclical is favourable "to the concept of the market typical of the civil economy, according to which it possible to experience human coexistence within a normal economic framework, and not outside or on the margins thereof".

"There are", he explained, "three structural factors to the current crisis. The first concerns the radical change in the relationship between finance and the production of goods and services that has become consolidated over the last thirty years. ... The second factor is the spread, at the level of popular culture, of the ethos of efficiency as the ultimate criterion with which to judge and justify economic matters. ... The third cause is connected to the specificity of the cultural environment that has become consolidated over recent decades on the crest, on the one hand, of globalisation and, on the other, of the advent of the third industrial revolution, that of information technology".