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**The social and economic message of Benedict XVI's Caritas in Veritate in the perspective of the Roman Catholic social doctrine**

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**Citation**

Puggioni, R. (2013, June 25). *The social and economic message of Benedict XVI's Caritas in Veritate in the perspective of the Roman Catholic social doctrine*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/21021>

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Cover Page



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**Title:** The social and economic message of Benedict XVI's Caritas in Veritate in the perspective of Roman Catholic social doctrine

**Issue Date:** 2013-06-25

# Chapter VIII – Subsidiarity, solidarity and ecology

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter we analyse the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of solidarity according to *Caritas in veritate*. We will observe whether Benedict XVI proposes a new theoretical understanding or application of these principles. Moreover, we will see how these two principles are considered fundamental for the implementation of a global authority in financial matters.

The discourse about business ethics in the previous chapter will be the basis for analysing here the topic of the environment's preservation. Upon this view, giving to economic actors a certain degree of responsibility for their actions is relevant both for the human beings and for their environment. This means that the moral discourse proposed in *Caritas* regards not only the strict economic context, but also the production and consumption of energy and other topics related to the natural environment.

## 2. The principles of subsidiarity and solidarity according to *Caritas in veritate*

We arrive now to discuss two concepts that we have previously examined through the *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*.<sup>478</sup> These are the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of solidarity. Generally speaking, we will see that Benedict XVI remains attached to the perspective of the *Compendium*, for what regards their application. Namely, both the *Compendium* and Benedict XVI are convinced that the two principles are effective only when they come to be applied in a complementary way. A new element that we can observe in this discourse is that in *Caritas* the principle of subsidiarity is directly rooted in charity. The concept of subsidiarity is inscribed within the specific theological context of the Encyclical, where charity is the unifying force at the basis of social cohesion:

A particular manifestation of charity and a guiding criterion for fraternal cooperation between believers and non-believers is undoubtedly the *principle of subsidiarity* (see *Quadragesimo*, AAS 23, 203; *Centesimus*, 48; *Catechism*, 1883), an expression of inalienable human freedom. Subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, and it is always designed to achieve their emancipation, because it fosters freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility.<sup>479</sup>

In the perspective of Benedict XVI, the subsidiarity principle derives from the presence of charity in society.<sup>480</sup> He defines the subsidiarity principle with the same

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<sup>478</sup> See above IV, 4 – 5.

<sup>479</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2009. 57.

<sup>480</sup> See *Caritas*, 57.

criteria as it is in the *Compendium*. The principle is explained as emerging from the autonomy of the citizens, in the sense that the people may interpret their own issues and may freely try to develop what appears to them to be the most effective solution.

In regard to this definition, Benedict XVI understands subsidiarity as an act of freedom. Through the intermediate bodies<sup>481</sup> comes a help to those persons which are alone unable to solve some specific matters alone. From the standpoint *Caritas* this kind of intervention through the intermediate bodies should always be a tempered help. It should be, ideally, a very balanced and careful intrusion in citizens' private environments to avoid any institutional oppression or submission of the individual freedom. So that, Benedict XVI specifies, the functioning of the principle of subsidiarity in regard to the members of society 'it is always designed to achieve their emancipation'.

### **2.1. Subsidiarity, solidarity and international co-operation for development**

As usually happens in the explication of certain principles within the context of social teaching we observe how the single principle needs very often the complementary application of other principles to be fully understood and applicable.

In *Caritas* it is stated that to have an international process of development realized, without the exclusion of any social actor, subsidiarity has to be supplemented with solidarity. In Benedict XVI's view, this combination would avoid two risks. The first is social privatism; the second, a paternalist welfare assistance:

*The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need. This general rule must also be taken broadly into consideration when addressing issues concerning international development aid. [...] Aid programmes must increasingly acquire the characteristics of participation and completion from the grass roots. Indeed, the most valuable resources in countries receiving development aid are human resources: herein lies the real capital that needs to accumulate in order to guarantee a truly autonomous future for the poorest countries.*<sup>482</sup>

From this passage it is possible to see how Benedict XVI stretches the borders of the subsidiarity principle, moving from a delimited situation in which it regards a single state, to a larger international context, where the highest institutional level is a community or a group of states. The principle of subsidiarity applies in the same way also in this latter case. And Benedict XVI points out how subsidiarity and solidarity together could give their contribution to the world development when applied.

Upon this view, subsidiarity and solidarity must be present at the same time. Subsidiarity alone would provoke what Benedict XVI calls social privatism, a phenomenon caused by the absence of any institutional entity in governing socio-institutional processes. Social privatism can lead to the monopoly of private groups or association, excluding a public intervention even when necessary. On the other side, when solidarity becomes the unique and absolute value, it is possible that the

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<sup>481</sup> See above I, 4.3.

<sup>482</sup> *Caritas*, 58.

assistance coming from a public institution does not leave any space for autonomous social initiatives of private citizens. In such a case, instead of being characterized by a moderate and balanced intervention, the public institution transforms the objective of a welfare community in a paternalistic Animal. All this brings to significant augmentation the typical problem that usually affects public assistance, namely the lack of specificity in the intervention.

When these criteria of subsidiarity and solidarity are well balanced, the ideal path that Benedict XVI foresees calls for a development of poorer countries that comes from the specific contribution represented, for instance, by the local products. In the end, the relation that there is between rich and poor countries should be remarked by the application of the subsidiarity and solidarity principles. The direct monetary and social help of the rich countries is not denied; indeed, it is still considered fundamental in his view.<sup>483</sup> However, the measures to be taken should involve the authentic intention of the advantaged states to let others join their privileged situation. Countries on their way to development should be able to decide on their own the most favourable path towards the exit from poorness:

It should also be remembered that, in the economic sphere, the principal form of assistance needed by developing countries is that of allowing and encouraging the gradual penetration of their products into international markets, thus making it possible for these countries to participate fully in international economic life. Too often in the past, aid has served to create only fringe markets for the products of these donor countries. This was often due to a lack of genuine demand for the products in question: it is therefore necessary to help such countries improve their products and adapt them more effectively to existing demand. [...] Just and equitable international trade in agricultural goods can be beneficial to everyone, both to suppliers and to customers.<sup>484</sup>

A concrete measure that Benedict XVI desires to have implemented is allowing the products coming from disadvantaged countries enter the international markets. Benedict XVI states that this development aid has served in the past too often the interests of those who donated money with the end of creating market zones favourable only to them, and not to the poor countries involved.

We can argue that *Caritas* calls for an effective help in opening the possibilities for trade also for producers located in poor countries, with an eye to the particular characteristics of their products and to fairness in exchange, for instance, regarding the monetary value. Such an attitude calls, in the end, for the openness of all the operators in the socio-economic context that should see in the developing countries not so much competitors, but co-operators. On this level, indeed, co-operation involves also the sharing of educational knowledge and technological competence.<sup>485</sup>

Thus, in such perspective there are the two principles at work at the same time exactly as *Caritas* proposes. Subsidiarity is expressed at the level of the developing countries, in which there is freedom in choosing a specific and proper

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<sup>483</sup> See *Caritas*, 60.

<sup>484</sup> *Caritas*, 58.

<sup>485</sup> See A. VACCARO, A. J. G. SISON, Transparency in business: the perspective of Catholic social teaching and the '*Caritas in veritate*', in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 100. 2011. 23 – 24.

path. Solidarity comes from the developed countries that allow, encourage, and generally help, those countries in need on their way to the economic integration in the already organized global system.

## ***2.2 Solidarity and the Roman Catholic view of Caritas in veritate***

The principle of solidarity finds expression in *Caritas* also in its closing lines, where Benedict XVI proposes a view of the human global family inspired by the teaching of Jesus.

We have seen in a previous chapter how Benedict XVI considers particularly relevant the contribution from other religions for sustainable development, being in this view in line with the teaching of Vatican II.<sup>486</sup> We can interpret this thought as his wish for a globalization that would be religious-inclusive. However, as is to be expected of a pope, the Roman Catholic perspective has priority, also in the concluding paragraphs of *Caritas*:

Christians long for the entire human family to call upon God as ‘Our Father!’ In union with the only-begotten Son, may all people learn to pray to the Father and to ask him, in the words that Jesus himself taught us, for the grace to glorify him by living according to his will, to receive the daily bread that we need, to be understanding and generous towards our debtors, not to be tempted beyond our limits, and to be delivered from evil (see Mt 6: 9 - 13).<sup>487</sup>

Therefore, Benedict XVI ends the Encyclical with the hope that all the people of the world can recognize God as ‘our father’, that they all will learn to pray with the prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples, recognizing God as the father of the human family.

In Benedict XVI’s thought, to recognize a father would mean also to recognize the people as brothers and sisters. Such a theological interpretation of the ‘Our father’ corresponds to what Benedict XVI wrote in his book about Jesus Christ. There, he underlined the relevance of individuating the fatherhood for the world, that in his idea makes easier the feeling of being a global family.<sup>488</sup>

We can notice how the theme of fraternity in a Christian theological perspective is definitely not new also in Ratzinger’s perspective.<sup>489</sup> In proposing such a perspective we acknowledge how Benedict XVI sees the global family in coherence with what we have seen through the *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church* about the global fraternal solidarity.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> See above VI, 3.

<sup>487</sup> *Caritas*, 79.

<sup>488</sup> See BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. New York: Doubleday, 2007. 141 – 142.

<sup>489</sup> See A. NICHOLS, *The theology of Joseph Ratzinger. An introductory study*. Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1988. IV.

<sup>490</sup> See above IV, 5.

### 2.3. Subsidiarity and a world leading authority for the common good

The subsidiarity principle as treated in *Caritas* is not only presented by Benedict XVI as an expression of human freedom directed to the solution of social problems. It also is claimed to represent the best remedy towards a state that might consider itself capable of acting at all levels of society, thereby meddling inappropriately in its social foundations. Such public intervention, from top to bottom, often suffers the problem of the standardisation and abstractedness of the solutions proposed. This means that the intervention leaves aside all the particularities of the concrete situation that eventually need to be addressed with particular care and special instruments.

In such a theoretical framework Benedict XVI proposes the subsidiarity principle as the ideal basis for the building of a global authority able to manage problems related to the globalization process:

[...] the principle of subsidiarity is particularly well-suited to managing globalization [...]. Globalization certainly requires authority, insofar as it poses the problem of a global common good that needs to be pursued. This authority, however, must be organized in a subsidiary and stratified way (*Pacem*, AAS 55. 274), if it is not to infringe upon freedom and if it is to yield effective results in practice.<sup>491</sup>

Two other elements have to be underlined here. The first regards the link that Benedict XVI makes between the subsidiarity principle and globalization. In his opinion the characteristics of the subsidiarity principle can fit the needs of a sustainable process of globalization. The second element worthy of attention is the appreciation that Benedict XVI makes for a globalization to be guided by a higher authority than that of the individual actors involved in the process.

Benedict XVI appears certain that globalization needs some degree of authority to direct human efforts towards the realisation of the common good. Such an authority will only work if the subsidiarity becomes its inspiring criterion. Benedict XVI uses the adjective ‘certainly’, referring to the need of a higher authority for better pursuing the common good at the international level. In his plea for an international authority, Benedict XVI brings forth a viewpoint that was introduced by John XXIII in the encyclical *Pacem in terris*.<sup>492</sup> Thus, a previous statement in social teaching is taken up in a contemporary standpoint, and accepted for the later state of affairs. Benedict XVI is inscribing his certainty about this topic in the traditional background of the social teaching.

The link made by Benedict XVI between the common good as an objective to pursue, and the need for a global authority for better doing that, rests on the same presupposition made almost fifty years ago by John XXIII. In the end, such a presupposition rests on simple logic: if the problem of the common good is related to a worldwide social level, instead of being related to a particular limited social context within national borders, this means the consequent necessary presence of a higher independent institution able to deal with moral, social and economical issues closely related to the achievement of the common good. In brief, there is the need of coordination at the global level.

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<sup>491</sup> *Caritas*, 57.

<sup>492</sup> See JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*. AAS 55, 1963.136 – 137.

Following this reasoning, the consequence is that the social teaching of *Caritas* proposes in the same way the presence of the principle of subsidiarity together with the solidarity principle as a positive path to manage the uncertainty of the globalization process.<sup>493</sup>

In the previous section we have noticed how the appeal to co-operation made by Benedict XVI was, in a certain way, directed to the good will of the individual actors in the global economic context. Here, instead, we can notice how the claim is addressed towards a more institutional level.

Indeed, there has been a recent interest, in the context of social teaching, in addressing some global issues with a more ‘structural’ approach. This is the case of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace that has presented in 2011 a document called *Towards reforming the international financial and monetary systems in the context of global public authority*.<sup>494</sup> In this document, the focus is on the building of a supranational entity with an authoritative character for regulating international financial transactions. The document quotes extensively both John XXIII and Benedict XVI<sup>495</sup> as sources, thus providing the evidence of the doctrinal foundation of this idea in Roman Catholic social thought. Some have severely criticized this document including playing it down as coming from the ‘lower echelons of the Roman Curia’,<sup>496</sup> others have recognized how ‘the vision in the document is underpinned by the Catholic principle of subsidiarity’.<sup>497</sup>

Economists like Joseph Stiglitz share standpoints similar to the one explored in *Caritas*. For him it seems obvious that ‘without comprehensive regulation, there will be regulatory evasion, [and] finance will go to the least regulated country’.<sup>498</sup> Referring to the economic crisis of 2008, Stiglitz recognizes that notwithstanding the fact that the practices of many, but not even all, financial corporations remained within the law, there was a moral deficit in their actions.<sup>499</sup>

More generally, the establishment of a world authority is proposed in the sense of an institutional solution for the global malfunctioning of economics. About the specific issue of finance, Benedict XVI opts for the construction of a world authority, thus addressing the institutional and structural level of the problem.

Nevertheless, Benedict XVI, again, addresses directly also the economic actors in the financial system. In doing this, he refers to the previous teaching of John Paul II. Benedict XVI’s position morally criticizes those who take advantage of a too-liberal economic configuration in order to gain uniquely private profits and ignore the decisive role of financial investments for the common good:

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<sup>493</sup> See *Caritas*, 67.

<sup>494</sup> Available online at:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20111024\\_nota\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20111024_nota_en.html)

<sup>495</sup> See *Caritas*, 67, and below IX, 4.2.

<sup>496</sup> Quoted in D. DORR, *Option for the poor and for the earth. Catholic social teaching*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012. 407

<sup>497</sup> Vincent Miller quoted in DORR, *Option for the poor and for the earth*, 408.

<sup>498</sup> See J. E. STIGLITZ, *Freefall. America, free markets, and the sinking of the world economy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 2010. 216.

<sup>499</sup> See STIGLITZ, *Freefall*, 278 – 281.



John Paul II taught that *investment always has moral, as well as economic significance* (see *Centesimus*, 36). All this - it should be stressed - is still valid today, despite the fact that the capital market has been significantly liberalized, and modern technological thinking can suggest that investment is merely a technical act, not a human and ethical one. There is no reason to deny that a certain amount of capital can do good, if invested abroad rather than at home. [...] What should be avoided is a speculative *use of financial resources* that yields to the temptation of seeking only short-term profit, without regard for the long-term sustainability of the enterprise, its benefit to the real economy and attention to the advancement, in suitable and appropriate ways, of further economic initiatives in countries in need of development.<sup>500</sup>

Benedict XVI stresses that profit that can be made through the means of finance can fit both the interests of financial investors and those of savers. He is convinced that the introduction of a more ethical approach within the framework of financial activities would not damage the financial systems, but will help it to growth both in developed and less-developed areas. This reflects indeed the general orientation of social teaching in regard to the moral concern that should be at the basis of economic action, according to which the moral demands would not damage at all the economic results of a financial activity, but rather will improve them indirectly, because they would improve the general social condition of the human beings involved.

Benedict XVI suggests that economic actors should prefer a long-term perspective, instead of the short-term.<sup>501</sup> It might be true that in the short-term the instant revenues might not appear satisfying in relation to the efforts made, but *Caritas* claims that if a long-term perspective is adopted, the benefit will regard both the life of the enterprise and the general well-being of the people where the financial investments are made.

### **3. Development and environment**

We now move towards a slightly different topic, maintaining nevertheless a reference towards the general concepts of sustainability, solidarity and the human person according to social teaching. We are going to consider what we may call a theology of the environment or an ecological theology, eco-theology as puts it.<sup>502</sup> These terms may sound new at this point of the analysis, but the theme is not totally new in the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. First traces of the interest in environmental issues from the Roman Catholic hierarchy came during Vatican II, in the context of the new relation between the RCC and the world envisaged in *Gaudium*.<sup>503</sup> Paul VI's *Octogesima adveniens*, in 1971, also started to evaluate the consequences of human actions for the environment.<sup>504</sup> A specific and concrete

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<sup>500</sup> *Caritas*, 40.

<sup>501</sup> See W. GRASSL, Hybrid forms of business: the logic of gift in the commercial world, in *J. Bus. Ethics*, 100. 2011. 112.

<sup>502</sup> See DORR, *Option for the poor and for the earth*, 432.

<sup>503</sup> See S. MORANDINI, *Nel tempo dell'ecologia. Etica teologica e questione ambientale*. Bologna: EDB, 1999. 66.

<sup>504</sup> See C. DEANE-DRUMMOND, Joining in the dance: Catholic social teaching and ecology, in *New Blackfriars*, 93. 1044. 2012. 195.

acknowledgement of the relevance of the ecological topic, together with a theological foundation for this argument, came with John Paul II in 1979, in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis*.<sup>505</sup> Concern for the environment has come to be involved in all the theological speculation about the role of the human being as a creature in the created world.

On the secular side the debate about the environment during the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century was stimulated by the knowledge of the damage that industrial pollution could cause. There was a new understanding of the environmental issue because there was the fear and awareness that some damages to the environment could cause the permanent loss of a natural good. In this sense the problem has been interpreted as an urgent and typical modern, and contemporary, issue also in the historical perspective of Hobsbawm about the twentieth century.<sup>506</sup>

*Caritas* claims to provide an adequate framework for interpreting this topic, due to the similarity with some concepts we have examined previously. Relevant concepts in Roman Catholic theology and social thought are the common good, the universal destination of goods, and the creation of the human being in God's image. Ecological issues involve the whole set of notions about the responsibility for the created world that are at the basis of the social doctrine's ideas on the economic organization of society.

Benedict XVI offers a discourse in which, while relating the discussion about development with the environmental issue, the central focus remains on our role as receivers of the gift of the created world by God.

This position that the human being holds in Christian teaching, Benedict XVI claims, should be regarded as the beginning of any serious reflection about our responsibilities for the environment.

We notice how this idea rests on the theological elaboration initiated by Paul VI and then consistently developed by John Paul II. The main elements in the previous popes that we find common to Benedict XVI's perspective are the responsibility of humanity towards creation as coming from God's mandate and the dangers that the exploitation of the natural environment for short term accumulation can cause.<sup>507</sup>

The fact that we are creatures and that God freely gives us the created world implies that we need to think about the relevance of our natural environment and our role of administrators in it. In fact, Benedict XVI states, when we ignore that God created us, and that we are also part of the natural system, we are losing sight of the respect that is due to the natural environment:

Today the subject of development is also closely related to the duties arising from *our relationship to the natural environment*. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. [...] In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up

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<sup>505</sup> See DEANE-DRUMMOND, *Joining in the dance*, in *New Blackfriars*, 198.

<sup>506</sup> See E. J. HOBBSAWM, *The age of extremes. The short Twentieth century 1914 – 1991*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994. XIX. 3.

<sup>507</sup> See DEANE-DRUMMOND, *Joining in the dance*, in *New Blackfriars*, 195, 197, 203.

either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation.<sup>508</sup>

Benedict XVI understands nature as something that is created by God out of the love for human beings. In his theology he claims that such a creation deserves the maximum of care, and humanity is called to make use of nature for his needs, but at the same time should act to preserve it. Human beings should respect its rhythms and balances. This attitude outlined in social doctrine, that may be seen as a proper 'administration of goods', has been described as 'stewardship', and goes parallel with the 'partnership' with the rest of creation.<sup>509</sup>

This discourse presents social thought's view about the created world and puts humanity as a whole at the centre of God's plan. In fact, the human being is considered here the principal administrator that can control this inheritance. This causes the possibility for human beings to properly use the natural resources that may come from creation. Human beings can abuse their responsibility as administrators in exploiting without any care what they have at their disposal. It is in regard of this latter possibility that in *Caritas* Benedict XVI notices two risks. One concerns an exasperated and radical naturalism, or extreme environmentalism, that may arise when nature is placed at a higher level of importance than the human being. The other, on the opposite side, concerns an excessive exploitation of the resources that nature offers without concern for the generations that will come in the future.<sup>510</sup>

Ultimately, *Caritas* calls for a balanced attitude towards the use of natural resources, in this regard Benedict XVI already prospected a necessary shift in lifestyles that are dangerously oriented and rooted in consumerism.<sup>511</sup> If we literally pillage the environment around us we are probably determining a development based on the misuse and abuse of resources and people, while its ultimate end would be concerned uniquely with finding other ways for the exploitation of new resources.

#### ***4. Responsibility, energy and human ecology***

The discourse on development and the preservation of the natural environment calls for the consideration of the energy problems of our time. There is indeed a concrete risk about contemporary society using a huge part of natural resources with disastrous consequences for future generations. In the perspective proposed in *Caritas* this is a concrete risk, but it is possible to avoid this risk.

The depletion of natural resources and global warming has acquired its specificity and popularity outside the theological context of RC social teaching. The discourse about nature in *Caritas* is influenced by the relevance that ecological topics have in the contemporary public and academic debate.

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<sup>508</sup> *Caritas*, 48.

<sup>509</sup> See DORR, *Option for the poor and for the earth*, 437.

<sup>510</sup> See *Caritas*, 48; DORR, *Option for the poor and for the earth*, 434 – 435; DEANE-DRUMMOND, *Joining in the dance*, in *New Blackfriars*, 208.

<sup>511</sup> D. A. FARBER, *Sustainable consumption, energy policy, and individual well-being*, in *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 65. 2012. 1499 – 1500.

On natural environment, Benedict XVI focuses the attention on a notion that was introduced in social teaching by John Paul II. This is the concept of ‘human ecology’.<sup>512</sup> The adjective ‘human’ related to the noun ‘ecology’, aims to delineate an ecology not uniquely environmental, but specifically ‘human’. We may also say that human ecology would include the more specific environmental ecology within it.

This human ecology so characterised includes also other elements that may affect the life quality of the human beings. Obviously the concern for environmental problems remains crucial. In addition to this concern there is a more general cultural and moral issue. The concept of human ecology, in this sense, is also related with that of the integral human development, where the adjective human regards all the cultural aspects that belong to the sphere of humanity, and that should be fulfilled in an integral way.<sup>513</sup>

Throughout the whole of social thought until *Caritas*, this element of interrelation among diverse sciences and now different human realities persists. This character of interrelation that pervades the intellectual atmosphere of Benedict’s XVI theology is often expressed within the text of *Caritas*. Also when speaking about human ecology Benedict XVI defines the relation between a morally healthy society and a good preservation of the natural environment as follows:

There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood. The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: *when ‘human ecology’ (Centesimus, 38; 40<sup>th</sup> World day of peace 2007, 8) is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits. Just as human virtues are interrelated, such that the weakening of one places others at risk, so the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature.*<sup>514</sup>

There is, in the idea of Benedict XVI, a reciprocal influence between the moral world on one side, and the ecological one on the other. At this level the bond between economic development and ecological issues appears to be more tight.

The care we have for the natural resources of the world is determined by the care we have for ourselves, as human beings, in our everyday social life. And in the reverse direction the natural environment around us may influence our self-conception. That is to say that growing up in an environment where wasting and indiscriminate polluting is common, might cause less respect also for human beings. And, the opposite, a culture where the respect for the environment is taken seriously in all its aspects, would also help the moral growth of the human beings in it.

This is the meaning of a human ecology in the social thought. It is the ecology of the human being, which affects the person’s wholeness, considered also as part of a natural system to be preserved.

We are going to see now how Benedict XVI concretely faces the energy problem. In the context of social teaching the problems related with the production and consumption of energy fall in the same order of principles as those that regard wealth production and distribution, namely, energy should be shared. Benedict XVI addresses both public and private entities, as the actors that should start a changing process in the use of natural resources for producing energy:

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<sup>512</sup> See DEANE-DRUMMOND, *Joining in the dance*, in *New Blackfriars*, 202.

<sup>513</sup> See *Caritas*, 48.

<sup>514</sup> *Caritas*, 51.

Questions linked to the care and preservation of the environment today need to give due consideration to *the energy problem*. The fact that some States, power groups and companies hoard non-renewable energy resources represents a grave obstacle to development in poor countries. Those countries lack the economic means either to gain access to existing sources of non-renewable energy or to finance research into new alternatives. The stockpiling of natural resources, which in many cases are found in the poor countries themselves, gives rise to exploitation and frequent conflicts between and within nations. [...] The international community has an urgent duty to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future.<sup>515</sup>

We can see how the accumulation of energy resources for personal use or profit is seen in *Caritas* exactly similar to the way social thought saw the accumulation of financial capital in few hands without the intention of serving the common good. Such a development is, in Benedict XVI's view, deplorable. Even more regrettable is it when powerful entities hold a privileged position in producing energy in the non-developed and poor countries where the energy source comes from, without supporting in any way the growth of those countries.

*Caritas* makes an appeal towards private entities, like the corporations of the energy sector that should remember their role as agents for the common good, and to the main public international institutions and organizations, which are charged with building a legal framework able to avoid the easy exploitation of natural resources at the expense of the environment and of indigenous populations.

What was said here needs to be integrated with one more consideration. Not only energy needs to be shared but it also needs a sustainable employ and production, capable of guaranteeing the same access to energy for all countries. As we know that certain sources are non-renewable, Benedict XVI points out that there must be a strong focus on research into alternative sources of energy together with their sustainable use.<sup>516</sup> What *Caritas* seeks is a renewed solidarity that should pervade the relationship between developed and non-developed countries. It is, again, primarily a claim for international agreements and institutions that should set a legal framework in which energy resources are not seized by a few entities, public or private.

Benedict XVI sets a lofty goal for the international community, which is charged with the responsibility of working towards a fair use of natural resources. Notwithstanding these considerations, it has been pointed out how in *Caritas*, Benedict XVI still speaks too general on specific and systematic changes that are necessary, especially regarding the attitude of those countries that consume far more energy than average.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> *Caritas*, 49.

<sup>516</sup> See *Caritas*, 49.

<sup>517</sup> See DEANE-DRUMMOND, *Joining in the dance*, in *New Blackfriars*, 204.