

Deus Caritas Est Outline January 2006

Introduction

Written to bishops, priests, deacons, religious and all the lay faithful. Date of publication: December 25, 2005.

Theme is “On Christian Love”

1. “God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16) is the **heart of the Christian faith** and **a summary of the Christian life**: “

- a. We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us.”
- b. To believe in God’s love expresses the fundamental decision of the Christian life.
- c. Being Christian is not an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with a person.
- d. The centrality of love in the Christian faith retains Israel’s faith center, to love the Lord “with all your heart... soul and ... might” (Deut 6:45).
- e. Jesus united the love of God with love of neighbor expressed in Lev 19:18 “you shall love your neighbor as yourself).
- f. Since God first loved us (1 Jn 4:10), love is not merely a command but a response to God’s gift of love toward us.
- g. In a world in which God’s name is associated with vengeance, hatred and violence, the message of God’s love is timely and significant.
- h. Encyclical broken into two interconnected parts:
 - o Love which God lavishes upon us.
 - This is more speculative.
 - Will clarify facts concerning God’s love toward man, with the intrinsic link between that Love and human love.
 - o Love which we in turn must share with others.
 - More concrete.
 - The ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbor.
 - Lengthy treatment beyond the scope of this encyclical. Wants to emphasize basic elements.
 - Purpose: to call forth renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God’s love.

Part I — The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History

A problem of language

2. God’s love is fundamental. It raises important questions about who God is and who we are.
 - i. Term “love” is one of the most frequently used and misused words, and it has many meanings.
 - j. We cannot prescind from the present day usage of the word: love of country, job, friends, work, family members, neighbor, God.
 - k. One stands out as epitome: love between man and woman, “where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness.”
 - l. Question: Are all forms of love basically one, or are we using the same word to designate totally different realities?

“Eros” and “Agape” – difference and unity

3. Ancient Greeks called *eros* “love between man and woman, neither planned nor willed, which imposes itself on human beings.”
 - a. Septuagint uses *eros* twice, NT never. NT prefers *agape*, which is infrequent in Greek usage. Christian usage points to a new and distinctly Christian understanding of love.
 - b. St. John uses *philia*, the love of friendship, to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples.
 - c. Nietzsche said Christianity had poisoned *eros*, by turning it bitter with commandments and prohibitions.
4. But Christianity did not destroy *eros*.
 - a. The pre-Christian Greeks considered *eros* a kind of intoxicating divine madness that overpowers reason, tears him away from finite existence, and allows him to experience supreme happiness.
 - b. This idea found expression in fertility cults and sacred prostitution, which was thought to allow, through *eros*, fellowship with the divine.

- c. The OT looked at this as a perversion of religiosity, but did not reject eros, but a warped and destructive form of it, a counterfeit divinization of it which strips its dignity and dehumanizes it.
- The temple prostitutes were simply exploited as instruments toward madness.
 - An intoxicated and undisciplined eros is no ascent into divine ecstasy, but a fall and degradation of man.
- d. Eros needs to be disciplined and purified if it is not just to provide fleeting pleasure, but a foretaste of the beatitude for which we yearn.
5. Two things emerge from study of eros past and present:
- a. There is a relationship between love and the Divine, because love promises infinity and eternity, a reality far greater and totally other than everyday existence.
- b. This goal is obtained only through purification and growth in maturity, through renunciation. This doesn't poison eros but heals it and restores it to true grandeur. Why?
- First and foremost, because man is body and soul and is truly himself only when body and soul are intimately united. If he stresses one and rejects the other, he would lose his dignity. Man loves, not just the spirit or the body alone that loves. Eros matures and attains its authentic grandeur only when man attains his full stature.
 - Contemporary world deceptively exalts the body but in fact, by reducing eros to pure "sex" makes the body a commodity, a thing to be bought and sold. Man thereby becomes a commodity. This is hardly a "yes" to the body. His body is considered a purely material part of himself to be exploited at will, an object he tries to make enjoyable and harmless. This is a debasement of the human body, which is no longer part of his freedom and an expression of his whole being.
 - Christian faith, on the contrary, has always considered man a unity in duality in which spirit and matter are brought to a new nobility. For eros to lead us to the divine beyond ourselves, there must be a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.
6. What does ascent and purification entail? How can love fully realize its human and divine promise?
- a. The *Song of Songs*, love-song poems exalting conjugal love, uses two words for love.
- Dodim, which suggests a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching.
 - Ahaba, which is translated agape, and replaces dodim. This word expresses a love involving the real discovery of the other, beyond selfishness. Love cares for the other. It is not self-seeking toward happy intoxication, but seeks the good of the beloved. It becomes renunciation and is ready for sacrifice.
- b. Love's ascent and inward purification leads it to become definitive in two ways:
- Exclusivity
 - Everlasting
- c. Love is ecstasy, not in the sense of momentary intoxication, but of an exodus from the closed inward-looking self toward liberation through self-giving. This in turn leads to the discovery of one's true self and of God.
- d. Jesus says, "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it."
- By these words, Jesus portrays his own path, the path of the fruitful grain of wheat and the Cross.
 - He also portrays in these words **the essence of love and of human life itself.**
7. Philosophical reflections lead to threshold of biblical faith.
- a. Began by examining whether love's different meanings point to some underlying unity and whether the Christian message of love has points of contact with common human experience of love? (JP II asked this in L&R).
- Eros and agape often contrasted as ascending and descending love, as possessive (concupiscent) and oblation (benevolent).
 - In philosophical and theological debate, sometimes contrasted toward the point of antithesis. Taken to the extreme, this would detach the essence of Christianity from the relations fundamental to human existence and make Christianity in a world apart.
 - Eros and agape can never be completely separated.
 - The more they find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. (Eros and agape are two aspects of the one reality of love).
 - i. The more eros draws near the other, it starts to seek the other's happiness and less one's own. Agape thus enters eros, otherwise eros is impoverished and loses its own nature.
 - ii. Man cannot live by oblation, descending love (agape) alone. He cannot always give; he must also

- receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift.
- iii. To become a source from which living water flows (Jn 7:37-38), one must drink from the original source, which is Jesus Christ's pierced heart (Jn 19:34).
 - iv. Church fathers, using Jacob's ladder, saw the inseparable connection between eros and agape. Eros seeks God and agape passes on the gift received. Receiving of love makes it possible for us to share it with others, as St. Paul did in contemplation and Moses did in the tent.

8. Initial, generic response to previous two questions:

- a. Love is fundamentally a single reality with different dimensions that at different times emerge. When two dimensions are totally separated, there is a caricature or impoverished form of love.
- b. Biblical faith does not establish a parallel universe opposed to human phenomenon of love. It accepts the whole man and intervenes in his search for love to purify it and reveal new dimensions of it. This newness of Biblical faith is shown in the image of God and the image of man.

The newness of biblical faith

9. The Bible presents us with a new image of God.

- a. First, God is unique. There is only one God, who alone is the creator of heaven and earth. He is the source of all that exists. His creation is therefore dear to him because it was willed by him.
- b. Second, God loves man, because man was willed by him as well.
 - Aristotle's notion of the Prime Mover was an object, not a subject, of love.
 - Israel's God loves. His is a personal, elective love, seeking to heal the whole human race. His love may certainly be called eros, yet it is also totally agape.
 - i. Hosea and Ezekiel described God's passion for his people with erotic images, or betrothal, marriage, adultery and prostitution.
 - ii. The deepest level of the love-relationship between God and Israel is in the giving of the Torah, opening Israel's eyes to man's true nature and showing her the path to true humanism. Through a life of fidelity to the one God, man experiences himself as loved by God and discovers joy in truth and righteousness.

10. God's eros is totally agape because

- a. It is bestowed in a completely gratuitous way
- b. It is a love that forgives. We see this aspect in Hosea's discussion of Israel's adultery and breaking of the covenant. God's passionate love for his people, for humanity, is a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. This is a prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross.

God, the Logos, the universal principle of all creation, is at the same time a lover with the passion of true love.

- a. Eros is thus supremely ennobled and purified to become one with Agape.
- b. The Song of Songs was included in the canon because it expresses God's and man's relationship: man can enter into union with God, his primordial aspiration, without being fused or lost in God. It is a unity that creates love, in which man and God remain themselves yet become fully one.

11. The Bible also presents us with the image of man.

- a. Adam's solitude showed his need for a helper. When Eve is formed from his rib, Adam finds the needed helper and rejoices that she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.
- b. We see hints of ideas in Plato and man and woman are incomplete without each other, and are driven by nature to seek in another of the opposite sex the part that can make him whole and complete.
- c. The Biblical account concludes with this being the reason why man leaves father and mother, clings to his wife, and they become one flesh (Gen 2:24).
 - We see here that eros is rooted in man's very nature. Adam is a seeker who abandons father and mother to find woman and become one flesh.
 - Eros directs man towards marriage, to a unique and definitive bond.
- d. Monogamous marriage corresponds to monotheistic God. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love is an icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa.

12. The real novelty of the NT is not in new ideas, but in Christ, who gives flesh and blood to OT concepts. This is an unprecedented realism.

- a. In OT, the novelty was not in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and unprecedented activity.
- b. This activity becomes dramatic when, in Jesus, God goes in search of his lost sheep. Jesus' words about the lost coin, prodigal son, good shepherd constituted an explanation of his being and activity.
- c. His death culminates the turning of God against himself to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. (No one has greater love...)
- d. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ, we understand that God is love. There this truth about God is contemplated and our definition of love must begin. There man discovers the path along which his life and love must move.

13. Jesus gave this act of oblation enduring presence in the Eucharist.

- a. The Logos becomes our food — as love.
- b. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. We enter the dynamic of his self-giving.
- c. The marriage between God and Israel is realized through union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift of his body and blood.
- d. This sacramental mysticism lifts us to greater heights than any human mystical elevation.

14. But this sacramental mysticism is social character, for in becoming one with the Lord in communion, we become one with all other communicants.

- a. We become one body. Union with Christ is union with all those to whom he gives himself.
- b. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or will come, his own.
- c. Communion draws me out of myself towards him and towards unity with all Christians.
- d. Love of God and of neighbor are truly united. God incarnate draws us all to himself.
- e. It's easy to see why agape became a term for the Eucharist. God's agape come to us bodily to continue in and through us his work of love.
- f. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis, can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love.
 - Jesus' summarizing the law and prophets in the twofold commandment of love, and his grounding the whole life of faith in it, is not simply a matter of morality that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization.
 - Faith, worship and ethos are interwoven as a single reality taking shape in the encounter with God's agape.
 - There can be no contraposition between worship and ethics.
 - i. Worship, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality of being loved by God and loving others in return. A Eucharist that does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.
 - ii. The commandment of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement; it has first been given.
 - iii. 15. Jesus shows us this truth in his parable of the Rich Man, who failed to grasp it.
 - iv. In the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows that anyone who needs me and whom I can help is my neighbor. It is universal but concrete.
 - v. The Church has the duty to interpret ever anew this relationship between near and far with regard to the actual daily life of her members.
 - vi. In the great parable of the Last Judgment, love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Here love of God and of neighbor becomes one: in the least of the brethren, we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.

Love of God and love of neighbor

16. We are left with two questions:

- a. Can we love God without seeing him?
 - 1 Jn 4:20 says that we cannot love the unseen God unless we love our brother whom we have seen.
 - The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor is emphasized.

- Love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God; closing our eyes to our neighbor blinds us to God.
- But God is not totally invisible to us. He has become visible in Christ, through whom we can see the Father (Jn 14:9).
- Christ's presence continues in Church history through the saints, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist.

b. Can love be commanded?

- Some say that love is a feeling that is either there or not, which can't be produced by the will.
- 17. Love is not merely a sentiment, which can come and go. A feeling can be a first spark, but it is not the fullness of love.
- God does not demand of us a feeling which we cannot produce. Experiencing his love, however, love can blossom as a response within us. This is part of the maturation of love. Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken in us the feeling of joy from being loved, but this encounter engages our will and our intellect. The yes of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in an all-embracing act of love.
- Love is never finished; throughout life it changes and matures.
- Love is *idem velle atque idem nolle*. The love story between God and man consists in the fact that the communion of will leads to a communion of thought and sentiment. God's will is not alien, but is now my own will. God is more present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy.

18. Love of neighbor is possible, because, as Jesus shows, in God and with Him, I can love the person I don't like or know.

a. This happens through a communion of will and sentiments with God. I look on the other not simply with my eyes and feelings, but with Jesus'. His friend is mine. I can look upon them with the look of love they crave.

b. It's necessary to unite the two:

- If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God.
- But if I completely pay no heed to others, then my relationship with God will grow arid and loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.
- Saints, like Mother Teresa, renewed their capacity to love their neighbor from the Eucharist and their encounter with Christ acquired its realism and depth in their service of others.
- Love of God and neighbor are inseparable; they form a single commandment. Both live from the love of God who has loved us first.
- No longer is it a question of a "commandment" imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but of a freely-bestowed experience from within, which must be shared.
- Love is "divine" because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all" (*1 Cor 15:28*).

Part II — Caritas: The practice of love by the Church as a "community of love"

The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love

19. We see the Trinity in charity.

a. In the pierced one, we recognized the plan of the Father's love for our redemption, and the "giving of the Spirit" to fulfill the promise of "rivers of living water" that would flow from the hearts of believers.

b. The Holy Spirit harmonizes believers' hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love others as Christ loved them, to wash their feet and give their lives.

c. The Holy Spirit also transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, to witness before the world the love of the Father, who wishes to make a single family in his Son.

- The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seek's man's integral good through evangelization of Word and sacrament and promoting him in various arenas of life and human activity.
- Love is the service that the Church carries out to attend to man's suffering and needs, spiritual and material.

d. The service of charity is the focus of this second part of the encyclical.

Charity as a responsibility of the Church

20. Love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility of every disciple.
- a. But it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level (local, diocesan and universal).
 - As a community, the Church must practice love, which means that love needs to be organized to be an ordered service to the community.
 - We see this ordered service of love in the early Church, when they had all things in common and sold their goods to distribute them to those in need (Acts 2:44-45).
 - St. Luke provides a definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements are:
 - Fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles
 - Communion (koinonia) — they held everything in common; there's no distinction between rich and poor. This radical form of material communion could not be maintained, but its essential core that there can never be room for an undignified poverty remained within the community of believers
 - The breaking of the bread
 - Prayer
21. We see a decisive step in the implementation of this ecclesial principle with the choice of the seven deacons to care for the daily distribution of food to Hebrew and Greek Widows.
- a. The apostles' first duty was to "prayer" (The Eucharist and the liturgy) and the "ministry of the word." They no longer had the time to serve tables.
 - b. The seven deacons' task was not simply the mechanical work of distribution, because they were men "full of the Spirit and wisdom." In other words, their service was always spiritual, carrying out the responsibility of the Church for a well-ordered love of neighbor.
 - c. Through them, diaconia, the service of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way, because part of the fundamental structure of the Church.
22. As years passed and the Church grew, this exercise of charity — toward widows, orphans, prisons, the sick and needy — became essential along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word.
- a. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel
 - b. We see this in Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and "the great Christian writer" Tertullian.
 - c. 23. In 4th century Egypt, institutionalized diaconia were formed within each monastery for the service of charity. They became juridical corporations two centuries later and began to exist in each diocese. There were similar institutions in Naples about 600 and in Rome a century or two later.
 - d. We see in the example of Lawrence's considering the poor the Church's real treasure a living example of ecclesial charity.
 - e. 24. So great was the Church's organized practice of charity that Julian the Apostate (d. 363), in trying to restore paganism, tried to imitate the Church's charitable activity, considering it the reason for the popularity of the "Galileans."
25. Two essential facts emerge:
- a. The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility:
 - of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria),
 - celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and
 - exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*).
 - These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable.
 - 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
 - b. The Church is God's family in the world
 - In this family one should go without the necessities of life. The Church has a specific responsibility "to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).
 - But the love should extend beyond the family, to all our neighbors, as we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Justice and Charity

26. Marxism claimed that the poor need justice not charity.

- a. Marx thought that in charity the rich shirk their obligation to work for justice for the poor.
- b. They thought we need to build a just social order so that no one needs to depend on charity.
- c. There is some truth here, but much that is mistaken.
 - The fundamental norm of the state is a just social order to guarantee to each person, according to principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods. This has been emphasized by the Church's social doctrine.
 - With the industrialization of society in the 19th century, however, a new class of salaried works arose that brought radical changes in the social fabric. The relationship between capital and labor became decisive and there were new sources of power concentrated in the hands of a few.
 - 27. Church leadership was slow to realize the need for a new approach to the new structuring of society. Over the past century, the Church's social encyclicals have responded to this new order and given a set of fundamental guidelines offering valid approaches beyond the confines of the Church. They must be addressed by all those concerned for humanity and the world.
 - The illusion of Marxism — and its promise of a panacea for the social problem through revolution and the collectivization of the means of production — has vanished.

28. Two fundamental situations need to be considered:

- a. The political order, and not the Church, has the central responsibility to order society and the state justly.
 - There is a distinction between Church and the state, between what belongs to Caesar and to God. These spheres are distinct, but always interrelated.
 - The state may not impose religion, yet it must guarantee religious freedom and harmony between the followers of different religions. The Church, as a social expression of Christian faith, has a proper independence and structure on the basis of faith as a community that the State must recognize.
 - Justice is the aim and the criterion of all politics.
 - i. Politics is more than a mechanism for ordering public life.
 - ii. Politics has to do with ethics and determine how justice can be achieved here and now.
 - iii. To do this, it must know what justice is, and avoiding the ethical blindness that comes from power and the allure of special interests. Here politics and faith meet.
 1. Faith is an encounter with the living God.
 2. It also purifies reason, liberating it from blind spots and helping it to become more itself.
 3. This is where **Catholic social doctrine** has its place. It has no intention of giving the Church power over the state, or to impose on others the ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. *Its goals are to purify reason and contribute to the acknowledgement and attainment of what is just.*
 4. The Church's social teaching argues on the basis of reason and the natural law, what is in accord with every human being's nature.
 - It is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life.
 - Rather the Church wishes to form consciences in political life and stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly.
 - The Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.
 - The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State.
 - Yet she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.
 - She has her part to play through rational argument.
 - She has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.

- A just society is the achievement of politics not the Church. The Church is concerned with bringing about an openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good.
- **Love**, charity, is always necessary, even in the most just society.
 - i. No ordering of the state can eliminate the need for a service of love.
 - ii. To eliminate love is to eliminate man. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness and material need.
 - iii. The state that would provide everything would ultimately become a bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing loving personal concern, which every suffering person needs.
 - iv. We need a state that, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and support initiatives arising from different social forces that combine spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces.
 - v. The Church's love does not simply offer material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, which often is more necessary than material support.
 - vi. To think that just social structures would make charity superfluous masks the materialistic conception that man can live by bread alone. This demeans man.

29. We can now describe the precise relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the state and organized charitable activity:

- a. The Church has an indirect duty toward the formation of just structures through the purification of reason and the reawakening of moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor perduring.
- b. The lay faithful have the direct duty, through politics, of working for a just ordering of society.
 - As citizens of the state, they are called to take part in public life. They cannot relinquish their participation in structures to promote the common good.
 - The mission of the lay faithful is to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences.
 - Charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore all of their political activity, lived as "social charity."
- c. The Church's charitable organizations, however, constitute a proper work and agreeable task, in which she acts with direct responsibility (and not just through collateral collaboration) to do what corresponds to her nature.
- d. The Church can never be exempted from practicing charity as an organized activity of believers. And this service will always be needed, because in addition to justice, man always will need love.

The multiple structures of charitable service in the social context of the present day

30. The overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world today:

- a. Means of mass communication have made our planet smaller.
 - This togetherness gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, but our increased awareness about others' needs challenges us to share their situation and difficulties.
 - We see how much suffering there is in the world due to material and spiritual poverty.
 - Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbors in need. As distance between people decreases, our charitable activity must increase.
 - We also have greater means at our disposal to distribute food and clothing, provide housing and care.
 - Concern for others must transcend national boundaries. State agencies, through subsidies or tax relief, and humanitarian associations have allowed for civil society's society to surpass individuals' solidarity.
- b. Many forms of cooperation between State and Church have been born and borne fruit.
 - Church agencies can give a Christian quality to civil agencies through transparency and a faithfulness to duty.
 - We have also witnessed other charitable and philanthropic organizations as well as a rise in volunteer work. Benedict appreciates all of them.
 - Young people's involvement becomes a school of life, forming them in solidarity and readiness to offer others not just material aid by their very selves. This culture of life, ready to lose oneself for others, counteracts the "anti-culture of death" shown in drug use.
 - New forms of charitable activity have arisen in the Church and older ones have taken on new life and energy. It's possible in them to establish a fruitful link between evangelization and works of charity.

Benedict applauds in particular cooperation of the Church's agencies with those of other Churches and Ecclesial communities.

31. The distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity

- a. The increase in charitable organizations is due, first, to the fact that the Creator inscribed the command to love one's neighbor in man's very nature.
- b. It is also a result of the presence of Christianity in the world, as we see in the example of Julian the Apostate. For this reason it is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintains all of its splendor and does not become just another form of social assistance.
- c. What are the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial charity?
 - Christian charity is first a simple response to immediate needs like hunger, nakedness, homelessness, illness, incarceration.
 - i. Church's charitable organizations should do everything in their power to provide resources and competent personnel for this work.
 - But professional competence is not sufficient, because those in need also need heartfelt concern and humanity.
 - Hence workers need a formation of the heart through the encounter with God in Christ, who awakens their love and opens their spirit to others.
 - Love of neighbor will pass from an imposed commandment to a intrinsic duty of faith acting through love.
 - Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies
 - i. Charity is not a means to change the world ideologically, but exists to make present the love which man always needs.
 - ii. Marxism taught that anyone who engaged in charitable activity was serving an unjust system that prevented revolution and the struggle for a better world. Charity was rejected and attacked as a means to preserve the status quo.
 - But this is inhuman. It sacrifices people of the present to the *moloch* of an imaginary future.
 - One doesn't make the world more human by refusing to act humanely now. We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now.
 - iii. The Christian program — Christ the Good Samaritan's program — is a heart that sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.
 - Charity cannot be used as a means of engaging in proselytism. Love is free; it cannot be a means toward achieving another end.
 - i. This does not mean that God and Christ must be left aside, for our charity is always concerned with the whole man.
 - ii. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the absence of God.
 - iii. But those who practice charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others.
 - iv. A pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. God's presence as love is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is love.
 - v. The best defense of God consists in love and the members of the Church, by their words, silence and example, should be witnesses of this.

Those responsible for the Church's charitable activity

32. The true subject of the work of Catholic charitable organizations is the Church herself — parishes, dioceses and the universal church.

- a. Paul VI established *Cor Unum* to orient and coordinate the charitable organizations and activities promoted by the Church.
- b. Bishops, as successors of the apostles, are charged with primary responsibility for carrying out the program we find in *Acts*.
 - The Church as God's family must remain a place where help is given and received, and a place where people are prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help.

- During Episcopal ordination, the bishop promises, in the Lord's name, to welcome and be merciful to the poor and those in need of consolation and assistance.
 - The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops emphasized that the exercise of charity is incumbent upon each Bishop, and like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, is an essential part of the Church's mission.
33. The Church's charitable workers must not be inspired by ideologies, but guided by the faith that works through love (Gal 5:6).
- a. They must be persons moved by Christ's love, which has awakened in them the love of neighbor.
 - b. "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).
 - c. The consciousness that in Christ, God has given himself for us, even to death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and with him, for others.
 - d. Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ.
 - e. The personnel of every Catholic charitable organization need to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop so that the love of God can spread throughout the world.
 - f. By sharing in the Church's practice of love, they wish to be witnesses of God and Christ.
 - g. 34. Christian charity workers should work in harmony with other organizations to care for those in need, while respecting the dimension of love Christ requested of his disciples. St. Paul said that if he gives away all he has and is martyred, but doesn't have love, he gains nothing (1 Cor 13:3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service. It sums up the reflections I have offered throughout this encyclical.
 - h. Practical activity will always be insufficient unless it visibly expresses a love for man nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the sufferings and needs of others because a sharing of my own self with them. I must be personally present in my gift.
35. This proper way of serving others leads to humility.
- a. The one who serves is not superior to the one served, however miserable his situation.
 - b. Christ took the lowest place in the world — The Cross.
 - c. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so, they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own.
 - d. This duty is a grace.
 - e. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate Christ's words that we are "useless servants" (Lk 17:10). We are not acting on the basis of superiority, but because the Lord has enabled us to do so. We are instruments in the Lord's hands.
 - f. This knowledge can also free us from thinking we're personally responsible for building a better world. In humility we do what we can and leave the rest to the Lord.

The importance of prayer

36. Sometimes, we can be driven towards an ideology that aims at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem.
- a. At other times, we can be tempted to inertia, as if nothing can truly be accomplished.
 - b. A living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path.
 - Prayer is concretely and urgently needed to draw strength from Christ.
 - People who pray are not wasting their time in the face of desperate situations and doesn't undermine the struggle against our neighbors' poverty. Mother Teresa's example shows us that prayer is the inexhaustible source of that service.
 - 37. We have to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of activism and growing secularism in many Christians engaged in charitable work.
 - Prayer does not change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather it seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus, asking him to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work.
 - A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism.
 - An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God and thinking oneself more compassionate than he.
 - 38. Job complained before God about incomprehensible and apparently unjustified suffering. Often we

cannot understand why God refrains from intervening. We should continue to ask him in prayer, “Lord, holy and true, how long will it be?” (Rev 6:10).

- Our protest is not a challenge to God, or to suggest error, weakness or indifference. Rather, it is the deepest and most radical way of affirming our faith in his sovereign power. This is a witness to others.

39. Faith, hope and charity go together.

- a. Hope is practiced through patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure, and through humility, which accepts God’s mystery and trusts him even at times of darkness.
- b. Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that God really is love! It transforms our impatience and doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands and that, in spite of all darkness, he triumphs in glory.
- c. Love arises from the faith which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus. Love is the only light that can illumine a world grown dim and give us courage to persevere. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it, because we are created in God’s image. *To experience love and in this way cause the light of God to enter the world is the invitation I extend with this present encyclical.*

Conclusion

40. The Saints

- d. They exercised charity in an exemplary way.
- e. Martin of Tours (+397), almost an icon illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity.
- f. St. Anthony the Abbot (+356), who in his face-to-face encounter with God in prayer, sensed the need to transform his whole life into the service of neighbor in the service of God. He cared for strangers, the sick, the poor.
- g. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, Teresa of Calcutta all stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will.
- h. The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.

41. Mary: Mary is outstanding among the saints and a mirror of holiness

- a. She cared for Elizabeth during the last three months of her pregnancy.
- b. Her program of life was to “magnify the Lord,” to put the Lord, not herself, at the center.
- c. The Lord is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor.
- d. She knows that she will contribute to the salvation of the world if she places herself completely at the disposal of God’s initiatives.
- e. She is a woman of hope, trusting in God’s promises for a Messiah.
- f. She is a woman of faith, and is blessed because she believed. Her Magnificat, a portrait of her soul, wove together the OT, showing she was attuned to God’s thoughts and one with his will.
- g. She is a woman who loves. If a person thinks God’s thoughts and wills what God wants, it cannot be otherwise. We see this in Bethlehem, in Cana, in her humility during Jesus’ public ministry, at Calvary, and then around the disciples of her Son waiting for the Holy Spirit.

42. Intercession of the saints

- a. Lives of saints are not limited to earthly biographies but include their being and working in God after death.
- b. Those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them.
- c. We see this in Mary. Every generation beholds their mother in her.
- d. She is close to them in needs and aspirations, joys and sorrows, loneliness and common work.
- e. Testimonials of gratitude in every continent and culture are a recognition of a love that is not self-seeking but benevolent. At the same time they should the infallible intuition that love is possible as a result of the most intimate union with God.
- f. This allows those who have drunk from the fountain of God’s love to become in turn a fountain from which “flows rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38).
- g. Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is, and from where it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power.

- h. To her, Benedict entrusts the Church and her mission in the service of love.
- i. Prayer: 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