

Caritas in Veritate - Pope Benedict XVI
A Summary in Question and Answer Form – by Joe Paprocki, DMin

Why are the Pope and the Church concerned with matters like the economy?

Jesus is concerned with the whole person. His Gospel compels us to live lives of charity toward others. To evangelize – to proclaim the Gospel – includes not only words, but actions. We show our love for others by works of charity and justice. Economic development requires both charity and justice – and both need to be grounded in truth: an understanding of human beings in relationship with a loving God.

Has the Church talked about issues like this before?

Yes, the Church has a long history of social teaching, brought to the forefront in an encyclical by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 titled *Rerum Novarum* (On Capital and Labor). 40 years ago, Pope Paul VI offered a social encyclical called *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), which pointed out how important the Gospel is for building a just society and the fact that many of the world's economic problems are not caused by a lack of material resources but are due to a lack of brotherhood when it comes to sharing those resources.

How is charity supposed to solve such huge problems?

Charity tends to be widely misunderstood in today's world. It is often dismissed as irrelevant and reduced to sentimentalism – i.e. being a “do-gooder.” That's why we need “charity in truth” – this means charity that is understood as being intimately connected with ethical living. Charity involves both the heart and the head; faith and reason. True love (charity in truth) deals with everyday real-life challenges and operates out of a deep understanding of our true identity as members of a human family united in God's love. To strive for the common good is how we show love of neighbor.

Isn't the economy just about making money?

In and of itself, profit (making money) is not bad and is, of course, quite useful. However, when individual profit becomes the only goal of an economy, poverty becomes a reality for many. This is especially true when profits are made improperly and without the common good of all in mind.

So what are some of the causes of the current economic crisis?

There are many causes: badly managed financial dealings, an over-emphasis on speculative financial dealings (i.e., playing the markets), new complexities of global interrelations, large-scale migration of peoples, the unregulated exploitation of the earth's resources, and a lack of respect for human life, just to name a few.

What is the effect on the “little guy” in all of this?

In general, the economy emphasizes the need for a greater competitive advantage, often achieved at the expense of workers who are losing more and more of the economic safety nets that were once provided for them by employers and by states. It is becoming increasingly difficult for workers to collectively bargain for conditions that provide for their basic needs. The Church continues to defend the right of workers to organize. Governments and businesses need to remember that the most important “capital” in the economy is the human person.

Why does hunger continue to be such a problem in our world?

People continue to suffer from hunger today, not because of a shortage of food, but because of a shortage of social resources. Our present economic systems do not guarantee sufficient food and water to meet basic nutritional needs for all people. Access to food and water is a universal right of all human

beings and we must create systems that ensure access to these resources for all people. Too often, we approach the world's resources with a consumerist attitude – as something to possess – instead of recognizing it as a gift from God that is intended to be shared.

Aren't there just too many people in the world? Shouldn't we control population growth?

Population growth and its related problems are worthy of serious attention, however, poverty continues to be a problem in many developed countries where birth control abounds. It is too simplistic to conclude that population growth is the cause of economic problems. Due attention must be given to responsible procreation but only in a way that respects the family and the unitive and procreative role of sexuality between a man and a woman in a marriage.

Do the wealthy have a responsibility to the poor?

Absolutely. Wealthy countries, in particular, need to look beyond their borders to see to it that the abundance that is available is meeting not only their own needs (some of which are selfish) but the needs of people everywhere. Globalization needs to lead to true solidarity with others.

But isn't the economy just about buying and selling?

All too often, it is. It's one thing to be concerned about fairness in transactions between those who have the resources to engage in transactions in the first place (commutative justice). However, the Church's social teaching has always emphasized the importance of fairness or justice for all people – including those who do not have the means to engage in economic transactions (distributive justice). Some people think that, in order for an economy to work, there simply needs to be a segment of people who are poor. The Church rejects this notion and calls for economic systems that recognize an obligation to care for those who lack basic needs.

But what does the economy have to do with morality?

When you get down to it, the economy is a system of interactions between human beings, all revolving around people's needs. Every aspect of an economic system involves the needs of human beings. That means that we have to look at how people are treated in an economic system. This means that every economic decision has a moral consequence. The economy relies on contracts between people, to regulate the exchange of goods and services between people, but it also needs to include a spirit of giving (charity).

In an economy, isn't the bottom line just about profit?

It doesn't need to be. In addition to businesses that are profit-oriented, there should be room for enterprises whose main goal is to support the common good. In other words, the economy does not have to be a rat race...it needs to be more civilized. There needs to be room for initiatives that seek not only profit, but also higher goals.

Isn't outsourcing of jobs a smart business strategy?

Unfortunately, this strategy is short-sighted. When companies outsource jobs, it shows more attention to shareholders (who often live elsewhere) than it does to workers (who are local). Companies need to recognize more of a responsibility to the society in which they are located, paying attention, not only to shareholders, but to stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference.

In an economy, isn't the goal to get rich quick?

Unfortunately, this is often the case, especially in the area of playing the market: the goal is most often on short-term profit without any thought to the long-term viability of a company or how it contributes to the overall economy and to the good of people. The outsourcing of jobs is another example of a short-term fix.

Do we really have the resources available to meet the needs of the whole world?

Without a doubt, yes. Unfortunately, most of these resources have ended up in the hands of those who already have the most – developed countries. Again, we need to think beyond our own boundaries and become more aware of the needs of others.

But in a free economy, shouldn't I be able to do as I please?

All too often, people conclude that they have earned everything they have by the sweat of their brow, without help from anyone else. This is especially true in the United States where people take pride in having “lifted themselves up by their own bootstraps.” As a result, people sometimes feel that they don't owe anything to anyone. They are concerned with their own rights. The Church emphasizes that, as part of the human family, we have a duty – a responsibility toward others. We need to remember that rights presuppose duties lest they become mere license. An overemphasis on rights leads to a disregard for duties.

What can and should we be doing with regard to non-renewable sources of energy?

It's very difficult for many poor countries to develop properly when so much of the earth's non-renewable energy resources are being hoarded by some few countries, power groups and companies. Many of the conflicts that trouble the world today revolve around access to natural resources. We need to find a better way to regulate the distribution of non-renewable resources, involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future.

What can economically developed nations do?

Economically-developed nations can provide assistance to under-developed countries by allocating larger portions of their gross domestic product to development aid – helping peoples to help themselves. The encyclical suggests that we also need a true world political authority to manage the global economy and all of its related issues.

In the end, won't technology solve our problems?

Technology, in and of itself, cannot solve our problems. Reason and faith need to work together. Without faith, reason (which is obsessed with technology) is doomed to fail because we are not all-powerful and have not, cannot, and will not solve all mysteries through technology. By the same token, faith without reason risks being out of touch with reality.

In conclusion...

We need to remember that the economy is about people and in order to talk about the development of people, we need to talk about the whole person – not just the body and the mind but the soul as well. For people to truly develop, we must have not only material growth but also spiritual growth. Our true calling is to be members of a family united in God's love. Christianity can offer an approach to the economy that truly respects and develops the whole person.