



Caritas in Veritate

Individual Reflection Guide



INTRODUCTION

For everyday Catholics, the publication of a new encyclical, or teaching document, by the Holy Father, is a significant event! These teaching documents are rare, high in authority, and deal with important challenges facing the Church and world. The recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, or *Charity in Truth*, provides a special invitation to Catholics to enter into prayer and reflection about how these important papal teachings touch our own lives.

This guide is designed to help individuals reflect in faith on Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. An "encyclical" is a letter that is a "teaching document" by the Holy Father. A "social encyclical" applies the consistent, traditional moral teachings of the Church to the social and economic challenges of the current day. The teaching letter *Caritas in Veritate* was written to address the current economic crisis, and deals with moral aspects of economic life, poverty and development, human rights and duties, environmental responsibility, and other moral and economic issues.

This guide includes twelve short reflections, each of which can be completed in 5 to 10 minutes. The quotations are from *Caritas in Veritate*. For further reading, refer to the section numbers noted in parenthesis for each quote.

Before each reflection period, you are invited to follow the preparation instructions below, to help prepare yourself for prayer.

PREPARATION

before each reflection

Before entering into your reflection, make sure that the following materials are easily accessible:

- A Bible, which you may wish to enthrone in a special space you create. For example, you could use a cloth, candles, and flowers to decorate the table on which you place your Bible.
- Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. Copies of the encyclical can be ordered from www.usccbpublishing.org, or the text of the encyclical is online at www.vatican.va.
- A pen or pencil, and a prayer journal or a notebook.

PREPARATION

You may also wish to take additional steps to prepare your prayer space and to minimize distractions during your prayer time:

- Turn off your TV, radio, computer screen, cell phone, or anything else that could be distracting.
- If you feel distracted by any ongoing noise, such as traffic outside or a conversation occurring in another room, you may choose to play some soft, instrumental music in the background.
- If you are in a room or office, you may wish to shut the door and/or post a “Do not disturb” sign.
- Position yourself in a comfortable but upright position, such as seated at desk or in an arm chair.

OPENING PRAYER



To begin each period of prayer and reflection, place yourself in the presence of God and then pray the following “Prayer for Charity in Truth.”

Father, your truth is made known in your Word.

Guide us to seek the truth of the human person.

Teach us the way to love because you are love.

Jesus, you embody Love and Truth,

Help us to recognize your face in the poor.

Enable us to live out our vocation to bring love and justice to your people.

Holy Spirit, you inspire us to transform our world.

Empower us to seek the common good for all persons.

Give us a spirit of solidarity and make us one human family.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ask the Holy Spirit to make you attentive to God’s will for your life and the world and end with the Lord’s Prayer.



Caritas in Veritate and Individual Reflections



REFLECTION 1:

Social Teaching Helps Us to Follow Christ

Read John 13:34-35

Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* was signed and released in June 2009. This encyclical, or teaching document, is the latest in a series of social encyclicals written by our popes over the last 120 years, as the Church sought to apply its moral principles and social teaching to emerging economic and social problems.

Jesus Christ is both divine and human. In his person he embodies what it is to live a fully human life. He is the model of how we are called to live. His teaching has both personal and social implications. These social encyclicals shine the light of the Gospel of Christ and the Church's moral teaching on changing social circumstances in order to provide guidance and support to Christians as we seek to live our faith in the world. In this way the teaching is both very traditional and ever new. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*:

The Church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging. This safeguards the permanent and historical character of the doctrinal "patrimony" which, with its specific characteristics, is part and parcel of the Church's ever-living Tradition. Social doctrine is built on the foundation handed on by the Apostles to the Fathers of the Church, and then received and further explored by the great Christian doctors. This doctrine points definitively to the New Man, to the "last Adam [who] became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45), the principle of the charity that "never ends" (1 Cor 13:8). It is attested by the saints and by those who gave their lives for Christ our Savior in the field of justice and peace. It is an expression of the prophetic task of the Supreme Pontiffs to give apostolic guidance to the Church of Christ and to discern the new demands of evangelization (12).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the Church speaks out on social issues? What can the Church and its teaching offer our society and world?
2. How much do you know about the social doctrine of the Church? How can you find out more?
3. How do the social teachings of the Church help you to respond to the call of Christ in the Scriptures to "love one another"?



REFLECTION 2:

A Rich Tradition of Social Teaching

Read: Psalm 119:12-18

Here are highlights from some of the encyclicals that are part of the Church's modern body of social teaching:

[Rerum Novarum](#) (*On the Condition of Labor*) 1891, Pope Leo XIII – Essentially the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching, truly groundbreaking, and a foundational document for many subsequent encyclicals (see below). This encyclical addresses the plight of workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, touching on issues that include socialism, unbridled capitalism, a living wage, workers' rights, support for unions, and a rejection of class struggle. Pope Leo first articulated the principles that underlie the preferential option for the poor.

[Quadragesimo Anno](#) (*On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*) 1931, Pope Pius XI – Commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical offers an update on the state of labor and industrialization, and strong critiques of communism, unrestrained capitalism, class conflict, and inequalities. Pope Pius denounces the concentration of wealth and economic power, and calls for the reconstruction of the social order based on subsidiarity.

[Mater et Magistra](#) (*Christianity and Social Progress*) 1961, Pope John XXIII – Issued 70 years after *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical looks to the Church as the “Mother and Teacher,” calling the world to salvation and better social relationships. It looks at science and technology, noting their power to improve the human condition, but also to limit human freedoms, and calling on governments to safeguard human rights. Pope John expressed concerns for the growing gap between rich and poor nations, for the plight of farmers and rural areas, and for the arms race. The encyclical calls on wealthier nations to help poorer ones.

[Pacem in Terris](#) (*Peace on Earth*) 1963, Pope John XXIII – Issued only two months before the pope's death, this encyclical is the first to be directed to “all men of good will,” instead of just to Catholics. In a response to the Cold War, the encyclical outlines necessary conditions for lasting world peace, looking at respect for human rights and disarmament. Pope John calls for the development of a world authority to protect the universal common good, condemns the arms race, and supports efforts to build peace.

[Populorum Progressio](#) (*On the Development of Peoples*) 1967, Pope Paul VI – This encyclical, which Pope Benedict's new encyclical commemorates, examines the economy on a global level, and addresses the rights of workers to decent work, just wages, decent working conditions, and to form and join unions. Pope Paul VI calls development the new name for peace, criticizes unjust economic structures that lead to inequality, and supports new international and social relationships.



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REFLECTION 2:

A Rich Tradition of Social Teaching

[Laborem Exercens](#) (*On Human Work*) 1981, Pope John Paul II – Issued to mark the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical once again emphasizes the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and the priority of labor over capital. Pope John Paul also addresses disabled workers, emigration, materialism, and the spirituality of work.

[Sollicitudo Rei Socialis](#) (*On Social Concern*) 1987, Pope John Paul II – This encyclical honored *Populorum Progressio* on its 20th anniversary, offering solidarity as a central requirement of our faith and times. Pope John Paul critiques East-West blocs and other “structures of sin” that compromise the progress of poor nations, and calls for solidarity between rich and poor nations.

[Centesimus Annus](#) (*The Hundredth Year*) 1991, Pope John Paul II – On the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II reflected on the current state of issues that Leo XIII had addressed in his day. It focuses on the moral dimensions of economic life, the advantages and limitations of the market, the role of business, and the responsibilities and limitations of government.

[Evangelium Vitae](#) (*The Gospel of Life*) 1995, Pope John Paul II – An affirmation of the gift of human life and the need to protect it, this encyclical explored many threats to human life, including the evils of abortion, euthanasia, and the use of the death penalty. It called the Church to be “a people of life and for life.”

[Deus Caritas Est](#) (*God is Love*) 2005, Pope Benedict XVI – Benedict's first encyclical emphasized the connections between love of God and love of neighbor. Pope Benedict said the Church could no more neglect charity than it could Scripture or the sacraments. He located love of the poor at the center of Catholic life.

[Caritas In Veritate](#) (*Charity in Truth*) 2009, Pope Benedict XVI – Anticipated since 2007, this encyclical follows up on the themes of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, calling it the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age. It deals with the ethics of contemporary economics; poverty and development; global solidarity; charity, justice, and the common good; rights and duties; and care for creation, among other topics.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. With which of the Church's social teachings and the documents listed in the summary are you most familiar? Least familiar? Do any of the topics covered by past encyclicals catch your attention in particular? Why?
2. Many of the social encyclicals deal with issues that affect people around the world. How do the Church's social teachings relate to you as an individual? How do you think you are called to respond?

**REFLECTION 3:
Charity and Justice**

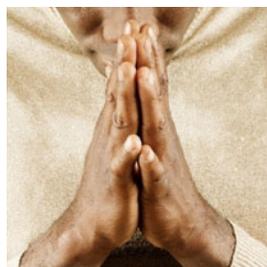
Read James 2:14-18

“Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbor; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones). For the Church, instructed by the Gospel, charity is everything because, as Saint John teaches (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16) and as I recalled in my first Encyclical Letter, ‘God is love’ (*Deus Caritas Est*): *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it*. Love is God's greatest gift to humanity, it is his promise and our hope” (2).

“If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity¹, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, ‘the minimum measure’ of it ¹, an integral part of the love ‘in deed and in truth’ (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving¹” (6).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does Pope Benedict describe “charity” in *Caritas in Veritate*? What did he mean by “micro-relationships” and “macro-relationships”?
2. What is charity? What is justice? How are they related?
3. In your own life, are you equally committed to the practice of charity and justice? If you and your neighbors all practiced justice and charity, what impact would this have on your lives and the world?



REFLECTION 4:

The Common Good

Read Mark 12:28-31

“To love someone is to desire that person’s good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is the good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of ‘all of us,’ made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is the good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards *it is a requirement of justice and charity*” (7).

“Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic. This needs to *be directed towards the pursuit of the common good*, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution” (36).

“*Development is impossible without upright men and women financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good*” (71).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to truly love another person? To love all of society?
2. What is the “common good”? Why is it a requirement of justice and charity?
3. Do you think that your conscience is “attuned to the requirements of the common good”? How can you better form your conscience to be sensitive to the good of all?
4. What is your role, as an individual Catholic and a person concerned about the well-being of others, in working for the common good?





REFLECTION 5:

The Church's Role in Development

Read: Matthew 25: 31-40

“The [Second Vatican] Council probed more deeply what had always belonged to the truth of the faith, namely that the Church, being at God's service, is at the service of the world in terms of love and truth. Paul VI set out from this vision in order to convey two important truths. ... [T]he whole Church, in all her being and acting — when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity — is engaged in promoting integral human development. She has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities: all the energy she brings to the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity is manifested when she is able to operate in a climate of freedom” (11).

“Feed the hungry (cf. Mt 25: 35, 37, 42) is an ethical imperative for the universal Church, as she responds to the teachings of her Founder, the Lord Jesus, concerning solidarity and the sharing of goods. Moreover, the elimination of world hunger has also, in the global era, become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and stability of the planet. Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional. What is missing, in other words, is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water for nutritional needs, and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises, whether due to natural causes or political irresponsibility, nationally and internationally. The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries” (27).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does the Holy Father mean when he says the Church has a “public role”? What can you do as Catholics to support this public role?
2. Pope Benedict XVI refers to the “structures” and “institutional” causes of hunger, and also says “commercial logic” cannot solve all social problems, like hunger. Why?
3. Have you ever experienced hunger? What was this experience like? How might your reflection help move you to act in solidarity with those who are hungry every day to change unjust social structures that lead to poverty and hunger?



REFLECTION 6:

Human Rights

Read: Isaiah 10:1-4

“In many cases, poverty results from a *violation of the dignity of human work*, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or ‘because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family’”¹ (63).

“A link has often been noted between claims to a ‘right to excess,’ and even to transgression and vice, within affluent societies, and the lack of food, drinkable water, basic instruction and elementary health care in areas of the underdeveloped world and on the outskirts of large metropolitan centers. The link consists in this: individual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate” (43).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What basic human rights do you believe that every person possesses? How is the dignity of the human person related to these rights?
- 2) What do you think is the difference between “basic rights” and the “right to excess” which the pope warns against?
 - a) What basic rights do you see threatened in your community? In the world?
 - b) Where is there excess in your own life? In your community? In our society?
- 3) How do you feel called to transform excess—in your own life, community, nation, and world—into resources that can be used to protect the rights of others?

REFLECTION 7:

Life: A Fundamental Right

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read: Psalm 139:1-16

“The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life” (27).

“*Openness to life is at the center of true development. . . By cultivating openness to life, wealthy peoples . . . can promote virtuous action within the perspective of production that is morally sound and marked by solidarity, respecting the fundamental right to life of every people and every individual*” (28).

“If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology” (51).

1. Why is the right to life considered the most “fundamental” of all rights?
2. In what ways do you see the right to life threatened in your community? In our world?
3. How is the right to life related to other basic rights, like the rights to food and shelter?
4. As a Catholic, how can you live out a commitment to promoting *both* human life *and* human dignity?



REFLECTION 8:

Duties Toward the Human Family

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read Proverbs 31:8-9

“The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty.¹ Many people today would claim that they owe nothing to anyone, except to themselves. They are concerned only with their rights, and they often have great difficulty in taking responsibility for their own and other people's integral development” (43).

“The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation” (7).

“The notion of rights and duties in development must also take account of the problems associated with *population growth*. . . *Morally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource*. Populous nations have been able to emerge from poverty thanks not least to the size of their population and the talents of their people. . . States are called to *enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family* founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society,² and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character” (44).

1. What is a duty? What duties do you have as an individual? How are duties related to the rights we possess as human beings?
2. What does it mean to have a duty to “secure a common good”? How well are you doing fulfilling your duty, as a Christian, to practice charity by working toward the common good?
3. How well is our society doing in fulfilling its duty toward the common good? How can you challenge those in positions of power to promote the common good?
4. How can we work to promote the rights and integrity of the family?



¹ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter [Populorum Progressio](#), 17: *loc. cit.*, 265-266.

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People [Apostolicam Actuositatem](#), 11.



REFLECTION 9:

Duties Toward the Environment and Future Generations

Read Genesis 9:8-13

“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. . . Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other” (48, 51).

“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. . . This responsibility is a global one, for it is concerned not just with energy but with the whole of creation, which must not be bequeathed to future generations depleted of its resources” (49, 50).

“What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles ‘in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.’ Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society” (51).

“Human beings legitimately exercise a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways, with the assistance of advanced technologies, so that it can worthily accommodate and feed the world's population. On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God's gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity” (50).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What duties do you have, as an individual Catholic, toward the natural environment? How might recognition of these duties challenge you to make changes in your lifestyle?
2. How well is your community, country and world, living up to their obligation to protect the natural environment? How can you help promote better stewardship in your community and nation?
3. What connections do you see between our duty to protect the environment and our duty to protect the rights of the human person?



REFLECTION 10:

**A Person-Centered
Economy**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read Leviticus 19:9-13

Read the first set of quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* and “A Catholic Framework for Economic Life,” shown in **TABLE 1** on the next page.

- 1) In your personal experience, how would you say that our society measures a “successful” economy? How do you measure economic success in your own life?
- 2) Based on what you have read, what moral principles does our faith insist should help guide economic life?
- 3) Why does Pope Benedict XVI say that the economy needs “ethics,” and that those ethics should be “people-centered” to function correctly?

REFLECTION 11:

**Workers, the Poor, and
the Economy**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read Jeremiah 22:13-17

Read the second set of quotes from *Caritas in Veritate* and “A Catholic Framework for Economic Life” in **TABLE 2** on the next page.

- 1) According to *Caritas in Veritate*, in what ways has the current economic system not worked to the benefit of workers and the poor?
- 2) What are some moral responsibilities of workers, owners, managers, stockholders, and consumers in economic life?
- 3) Which of these roles describe you? How can you make sure your actions as a worker, consumer, etc., reflect the moral principles of our faith?

REFLECTION 12:

**The Economy and the
Human Family**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read Luke 16:19-31

Read the third set of quotes on from *Caritas in Veritate* and “A Catholic Framework for Economic Life” from **TABLE 3**.

- 1) How has your own family and the people in your community been affected by the economic crisis? How has the crisis affected the economically poor in our nation or developing countries? How can you work to ensure that our leaders’ responses to the crisis benefit those who are most in need?
- 2) Why does Pope Benedict XVI say that both rich and poor countries benefit when we provide support to economically poor countries?

Pope Benedict XVI writes that the economic crisis has helped us to realize we need “new rules” and a “new vision” to guide economic life. What do you think these new rules and this new vision should look like?



*Caritas in Veritate and
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TABLE 1

from *Caritas in Veritate*
Pope Benedict XVI

from *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*
By the U.S. Catholic Bishops

<p>“The Church's social doctrine has always maintained that <i>justice must be applied to every phase of economic activity</i>, because this is always concerned with man and his needs” (37).</p>	<p>As followers of Jesus Christ and participants in a powerful economy, Catholics in the United States are called to work for greater economic justice in the face of persistent poverty, growing income gaps, and increasing discussion of economic issues in the United States and around the world. We urge Catholics to use the following ethical framework for economic life as principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and directions for action. These principles are drawn directly from Catholic teaching on economic life.</p>
<p>“The economic sphere is neither ethically neutral, or inherently inhuman or opposed to society. It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner” (36).</p>	
<p>“I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world's economic and social assets, that the <i>primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity</i>: ‘Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life’¹” (25).</p>	<p>1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.</p>
<p>“<i>The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly</i> — not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centered” (45).</p> <p>“The conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from ‘influences’ of a moral character, has led man to abuse the economic process in a thoroughly destructive way” (34).</p>	<p>2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family and serve the common good.</p>
<p>“The dignity of the individual and the demands of justice require, particularly today, that economic choices do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner²” (32).</p> <p>“The poor are not to be considered a ‘burden,’ but a resource, even from the purely economic point of view” (35).</p>	<p>3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.</p>

TABLE 2

<p>“Charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples” (6).</p> <p>“The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life” (27).</p>	<p>4. All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, and economic security.</p>
<p>“In many cases, poverty results from a <i>violation of the dignity of human work</i>, either because work opportunities are limited ..., or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family” (63).</p>	<p>5. All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.</p>
<p>“Unemployment today provokes new forms of economic marginalization... Being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships, causing great psychological and spiritual suffering” (25).</p>	<p>6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.</p>



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TABLE 3

***Caritas in Veritate*
Pope Benedict XVI**

***A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*
United States Catholic Bishops**

<p>“If the market is governed solely by the principle of the equivalence in value of exchanged goods, it cannot produce the social cohesion that it requires in order to function well. <i>Without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfill its proper economic function</i>” (35).</p>	<p>7. In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles, but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.</p>
<p>“Economic activity . . . needs to be directed towards the pursuit of the common good, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution” (36).</p>	<p>8. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to assure opportunity, meet basic human needs, and pursue justice in economic life.</p>
<p>“There is also increasing awareness of the need for greater <i>social responsibility</i> on the part of business. . . <i>Business management cannot concern itself only with the interests of the proprietors, but must also assume responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference</i>” (40). “It is good for people to realize that purchasing is always a moral — and not simply economic — act. Hence <i>the consumer has a specific social responsibility</i>” (66).</p>	<p>9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders, and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity, and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life, and social justice.</p>
<p>“The global market has stimulated. . . on the part of rich countries, a search for areas in which to outsource production at low cost . . . These processes have led to a <i>downsizing of social security systems</i> as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage in the global market, with consequent grave danger for the rights of workers, for fundamental human rights” (25). “Through support for economically poor countries by means of financial plans inspired by solidarity — so that these countries can take steps to satisfy their own citizens' demand for consumer goods and for development — not only can true economic growth be generated, but a contribution can be made towards sustaining the productive capacities of rich countries that risk being compromised by the crisis” (27).</p>	<p>10. The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid, and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need, wherever they might live on this globe.</p>
<p>“The current crisis obliges us to re-plan our journey, to set ourselves new rules The crisis thus becomes <i>an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future.</i>” (21). “On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself — God's gift to his children — and through hard work and creativity” (50).</p>	<p>According to Pope John Paul II in <i>Centesimus Annus</i>, the Catholic tradition calls for a “society of work, enterprise and participation” which “is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state to assure that the basic needs of the whole society are satisfied.” All of economic life should recognize the fact that we all are God’s children and members of one human family, called to exercise a clear priority for “the least among us.”</p>



REFLECTION 13:
Foreign Assistance

Read Matthew 5:1-10

“As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers. Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is” (19).

“The peoples themselves have the prime responsibility to work for their own development. But they will not bring this about in isolation”¹ (47).

“Aid programs 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” (58).

“In the search for solutions to the current economic crisis, *development aid for poor countries must be considered a valid means of creating wealth for all*. . . . From this perspective, more economically developed nations should do all they can to allocate larger portions of their gross domestic product to development aid, thus respecting the obligations that the international community has undertaken in this regard” (60).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does Pope Benedict mean when he writes, “As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers”?
2. What does our faith teach us about becoming one human family? Consider your own attitude toward persons in developing countries: Do you see them as brothers and sisters? How can you increase your awareness of and sense of solidarity with members of the human family who do not reside in your own community?
3. What does Pope Benedict mean when he says “people themselves have the prime responsibility to work from their own development”? What does this have to do with “grass roots” participation?
4. What role can you play in supporting others, in your community, and the world, as they work for their own development?

¹ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter [Populorum Progressio](#), 77: *loc. cit.*, 295.



REFLECTION 14:

Trade, Agriculture and Natural Resources

Read Deuteronomy 24:17-22

“There are those who fear the effects of competition through the importation of products — normally agricultural products — from economically poor countries. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that for such countries, the possibility of marketing their products is very often what guarantees their survival in both the short and long term. Just and equitable international trade in agricultural goods can be beneficial to everyone, both to suppliers and to customers” (58).

“Consumers should be continually educated¹ regarding their daily role, which can be exercised with respect for moral principles without diminishing the intrinsic economic rationality of the act of purchasing. ... [I]t can be helpful to promote new ways of marketing products from deprived areas of the world, so as to guarantee their producers a decent return” (66).

“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. These conflicts are often fought on the soil of those same countries, with a heavy toll of death, destruction and further decay. 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” (49).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The Holy Father argues that trade can reduce poverty, but sometimes doesn't. Why is this so?
2. What do you know about “fair trade” goods that can “guarantee their producers a decent return”? (If you aren't familiar with fair trade, visit www.crsfairtrade.org to find out more.) Consider: What changes can I make as a consumer to purchase goods that have been produced fairly and thereby support persons in poor communities in the United States, and globally?
3. Why does Pope Benedict say that poor countries ought to be involved in “regulating the exploitation” of natural resources? Why do you think that exploitation of natural resources sometimes leads to conflict? Do you own any products that may come from developing countries whose natural resources have been exploited?

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 36: *loc. cit.*, 838-840.

REFLECTION 15:
**Peacebuilding and
Development**

Read Isaiah 2:1-5

“Peace-building requires the constant interplay of diplomatic contacts, economic, technological and cultural exchanges, agreements on common projects, as well as joint strategies to curb the threat of military conflict and to root out the underlying causes of terrorism. Nevertheless, if such efforts are to have lasting effects, they must be based on values rooted in the truth of human life” (72).

“To manage the global economy; to revive economies hit by the crisis; to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result; to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration: for all this, there is urgent need of a true world political authority, as my predecessor Blessed John XXIII indicated some years ago. Such an authority would need to be regulated by law, to observe consistently the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, to seek to establish the common good¹, and to make a commitment to securing authentic integral human development inspired by the values of charity in truth” (67).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Take a moment to reflect on what it would be like to live in the midst of armed conflict. How would your daily life be different? How might your economic opportunities be compromised?
- 2) How are peacekeeping and peace-building related to reducing poverty?
- 3) The Holy Father emphasizes the need for international cooperation to address global issues. What are some of these issues?
- 4) Have you ever had the experience that solving a problem was easier in partnership with others, rather than by yourself? Why do you think the Holy Father encourages countries to address global issues together, rather than on their own?



¹ John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, *loc. cit.*, 293; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 441.

REFLECTION 16:

Responding to *Caritas in Veritate*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Read Luke 4:14-19

Read the Action Guide on pages 21-22.

Read the quote on the top left corner of the first page of the action guide on page 21. How would you describe your “vocation”? How do you think that you might be called to practice charity in your own life?

- 1) In which role (family member, worker, owner/manager/investor, consumer, or citizen) do you find action in response to your faith the most challenging? Why?
- 2) Visit some of the Web sites listed in the **Citizens** section. As you visit, note or bookmark pages with information you want to learn more about or share with others.
- 3) The suggestions for action for people in various roles are followed by references to paragraphs in *Caritas in Veritate* for further reflection. Make a plan to continue your reflection on the encyclical by reading and reflecting on some of the paragraphs referenced.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Everyday Catholics have an important role to play in living as witnesses of charity and truth. For inspiration and encouragement in the days and months ahead, pray and reflect on two messages from the Catholic bishops of the United States, reprinted on the following pages:

Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice

Excerpts from *A Place at the Table: A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children*

These messages, directed toward everyday Catholics, can help you to discern your response to *Caritas in Veritate* in your family, community, and world.



Action Guide



Respond to Pope Benedict XVI's important message *Caritas in Veritate* by taking these steps

"The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation."

Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 7



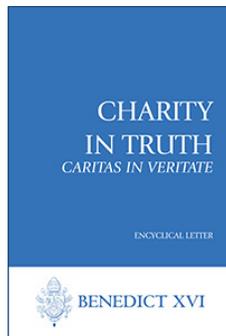
Prayer for Charity in Truth

Father, your truth is made known in your Word.
Guide us to seek the truth of the human person.
Teach us the way to love because you are Love.

Jesus, you embody Love and Truth.
Help us to recognize your face in the poor.
Enable us to live out our vocation to bring love and justice to your people.

Holy Spirit, you inspire us to transform our world.
Empower us to seek the common good for all persons.
Give us a spirit of solidarity and make us one human family.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Read the new encyclical, or teaching document, from Pope Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate* is available from

USCCB Publishing – To order the encyclical, visit www.usccbpublishing.org or call 800-235-8722.

Vatican Web site – View the text of the encyclical at www.vatican.va.

Reflect

Visit the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Web page on *Caritas in Veritate* at www.usccb.org/jphd/caritasinveritate/ for several useful reflection materials, including

An **individual study guide** to help you reflect on several important themes found in *Caritas in Veritate*.

A **group study guide** to use with your parish or other community to reflect on the teaching document together.

Pray

Use the **Prayer for Charity in Truth** to the left in your own prayer life and in group settings.

Read parts of the encyclical that you find challenging or that you seek to understand better.

Work with the liturgy planning team at your parish to create intentions for use during the Prayers of the Faithful based on themes found in *Caritas in Veritate*.

Act

Use the suggestions on the next page to act in response to *Caritas in Veritate*!



Responding to Caritas in Veritate



Families

Take time to **consider**: How well are we practicing charity toward others in our family and local community? What changes might we make in how we spend time and money to engage regularly in charity and action for justice?

As a family, **explore** some of the **resources** listed in the **Citizens** section below, to learn how Catholics can respond to issues affecting our world.

Reflect on these sections of *Caritas in Veritate*: 6-7, 15, 18, 43-44, 48-51, 53, 68, and 78-79.



Workers

In Catholic teaching, work is a way to support one's family, express one's dignity, and promote the common good. Take time to **consider**: Does my work allow me to use the gifts God has given me for the good of others? How can I apply the values of my Catholic faith and promote justice and charity in the work place? **Reflect** on these sections of *Caritas in Veritate*: 18, 25, 32, 40-42, 62-64, and 69.

Owners, managers, and investors

Business and investment decisions have moral implications. Take time to **consider** ways that your position offers you the opportunity to influence treatment of workers, protect the environment, share knowledge and technology; protect human life and dignity; and promote the common good of local and global communities. **Reflect** on these sections: 22, 25, 32, 35-42, 45-46, 48-51, 58, 62-63, 65, 69, 71, and 73.

Consumers

Consumers have social and moral responsibilities (66). Take time to **consider**: As a consumer, how am I called to live more simply? How can I change my purchasing choices to support companies that defend human life, treat workers fairly, protect creation, and reflect the values of Catholic moral and social teaching? **Reflect** on these sections of *Caritas in Veritate*: 22, 25, 43, 45-46, 48-51, 61, and 66.

Citizens

Take some time to explore the following Web sites, each of which offer opportunities to learn about, and respond to, issues that the Holy Father highlighted in *Caritas in Veritate*.

- Visit USCCB's **Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development** to learn about issues mentioned in the encyclical and to respond: www.usccb.org/sdwp/takeaction.shtml.
- Become one of a million Catholics who are part of **Catholics Confront Global Poverty** sponsored by USCCB and Catholic Relief Services: www.usccb.org/globalpoverty/ and www.crs.org/globalpoverty/.
- Contact the diocesan director for the **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** to learn how you can join the efforts of local groups working to address issues affecting those living in poverty: www.usccb.org/cchd and www.povertyusa.org/.
- Explore **Catholic Teaching on Economic Life** at the USCCB Web page www.usccb.org/jphd/economiclife/.
- Visit the USCCB **Faithful Citizenship** Web page for ideas on how you can advocate for human life and dignity year-round: www.faithfulcitizenship.org.
- Learn about the work of the USCCB **Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities**: www.usccb.org/prolife/.
- Consider the issues facing immigrants and refugees. Visit USCCB **Migration and Refugee Services**: www.usccb.org/mrs/.
- Campaign to End Poverty in America with **Catholic Charities USA**: www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.
- For more ideas on how *Caritas in Veritate* calls citizens to respond, **reflect** on these sections: 6-7, 20, 25, 28, 32, 35-45, 48-51, 53, 58, 60, 65, 67, 71, 75, and 78-79.



Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice

A Pastoral Reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium

Introduction

One of the great challenges for Christians is as old as our faith, but it takes on special urgency today as we approach the Third Christian Millennium. How do we connect worship on Sunday to work on Monday? How is the Gospel proclaimed not only in the pulpits of our parishes, but also in the everyday lives of Catholic people? How does the Church gathered on the Sabbath act as the People of God scattered and active every day of the week? How can we best carry the values of our faith into family life, the market place and the public square? How do we love our neighbor, pursue peace and seek justice in everyday choices and commitments?

In these reflections, we highlight one essential dimension of the lay vocation which is sometimes overlooked or neglected: the social mission of Christians in the world.¹ Every believer is called to serve “the least of these,” to “hunger and thirst for justice,” to be a “peacemaker.”² Catholics are called by God to protect human life, to promote human dignity, to defend the poor and to seek the common good. This social mission of the Church belongs to all of us. It is an essential part of what it is to be a believer.

This social mission is advanced in many ways—by the prophetic teaching of our Holy Father; by the efforts of our bishops' Conference; and by many structures of charity and justice within our community of faith. But the most common—and in many ways, the most important—Christian witness is often neither very visible nor highly structured. It is the sacrifice of parents trying to raise children with concern for others; the service and creativity of workers who do their best and reach out to those in need; the struggle of business owners trying to reconcile the bottom line and the needs of employees and customers; and the hard choices of public officials who seek to protect the weak and pursue the common good. The Church's social mission is advanced by teachers and scientists, by family farmers and bankers, by sales persons and entertainers.

The Catholic social mission is also carried forward by believers who join unions; neighborhood organizations; business groups; civic associations; the pro-life movement; groups working for social justice; or environmental, civil rights, or peace groups. It is advanced by Christians who stand up for the values of the Gospel. This mission is the task of countless Christians living their faith without much fanfare or recognition, who are quietly building a better society by their choices and actions day by day. They protect human life, defend those who are poor, seek the common good, work for peace, and promote human dignity.

Working for justice in everyday life is not easy. There are complex and sometimes difficult challenges encountered by women and men as they try to live their faith in the world. We applaud the efforts of all Catholics to live the Gospel by pursuing justice and peace in their everyday choices and commitments.

The Catholic Layperson: Discipleship and the Pursuit of Justice

Being a believer means that one lives a certain way—walking with the Lord, doing justice, loving kindness, living peaceably among all people. Christian discipleship means practicing what Jesus preached. Discipleship is



Caritas in Veritate and Individual Reflections

Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice



found in a relationship with Christ and a commitment to his mission of bringing “glad tidings to the poor./ . . . liberty to captives / and recovery of sight to the blind,/ to let the oppressed go free.”³

For Catholics, this takes on special meaning today. According to the Second Vatican Council, “It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. They live in the world, in each and every one of the world’s occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence. There they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world within, like leaven, in the spirit of the Gospel, by fulfilling their own particular duties.”⁴

We welcome and affirm the growing participation of lay women and men in the internal life of the Church. Service within the Church should form and strengthen believers for their mission in the world. With this pastoral statement we are addressing in a special way the demands of discipleship in the pursuit of justice and peace in everyday activity.

Followers of the Lord Jesus live their discipleship as spouses and parents, single adults and youth, employers and employees, consumers and investors, citizens and neighbors. We renew the warning of the Second Vatican Council, “One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and their day-to-day conduct.”⁵ By our baptism and confirmation, every member of our community is called to live his or her faith in the world.

Called to Justice in Everyday Life

Catholicism does not call us to abandon the world but to help shape it. This does not mean leaving worldly tasks and responsibilities but transforming them. Catholics are everywhere in this society. We are corporate executives and migrant farm workers, senators and welfare recipients, university presidents and day care workers, tradesmen and farmers, office and factory workers, union leaders and small business owners. Our entire community of faith must help Catholics to be instruments of God’s grace and creative power in business and politics, factories and offices, in homes and schools, and in all the events of daily life. Social justice and the common good are built up or torn down day by day in the countless decisions and choices we make. This vocation to pursue justice is not simply an individual task; it is a call to work with others to humanize and shape the institutions that touch so many people. The lay vocation for justice cannot be carried forward alone but only as members of a community called to be the “leaven” of the Gospel.

- Our **families** are the starting point and the center of a vocation for justice. How we treat our parents, spouses, and children is a reflection of our commitment to Christ’s love and justice. We demonstrate our commitment to the Gospel by how we spend our time and money, and whether our family life includes an ethic of charity, service, and action for justice. The lessons we teach our children through what we do as well as what we say determines whether they care for the “least among us” and are committed to work for justice.⁶
- **Workers** are called to pursue justice. In the Catholic tradition, work is not a burden, not just how we make a living. Work is a way of supporting our family, realizing our dignity, promoting the common good, and participating in God’s creation. This means often doing the ordinary well, making the most of our talents and opportunities, treating others fairly and with dignity, and working with integrity and



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creativity. Believers should be encouraged to choose their work based on how they can best use the gifts God has given them. Decisions made at work can make important contributions to an ethic of justice. Catholics have the often difficult responsibility of choosing between competing values in the workplace. This is a measure of holiness. Associations that enable workers, owners, or managers to pursue justice often make the witness of the individual more effective.⁷

- **Owners, managers, and investors** face important opportunities to seek justice and pursue peace. Ethical responsibility is not just avoiding evil, but doing right, especially for the weak and vulnerable. Decisions about the use of capital have moral implications: Are companies creating and preserving quality jobs at living wages? Are they building up community through the goods and services they provide? Do policies and decisions reflect respect for human life and dignity, promote peace, and preserve God's creation? While economic returns are important, they should not take precedence over the rights of workers or protection of the environment. Investors should examine ownership, management, and economic decisions in the light of the Catholic call to protect life, defend those who are poor, and seek the common good. These decisions promote human dignity or undermine it.⁸
- As **consumers**, believers can promote social justice or injustice. In an affluent culture that suggests that what we have defines who we are, we can live more simply. When we purchase goods and services, we can choose to support companies that defend human life, treat workers fairly, protect creation, and respect other basic moral values at home and abroad. We can also make conscious efforts to consume less.⁹
- All human beings have unique talents, gifts from God that we are called to develop and share. We should celebrate this diversity. People who use their skills and expertise for the common good, the service of others, and the protection of creation are **good stewards** of the gifts they have been given. When we labor with honesty, serve those in need, work for justice, and contribute to charity, we use our talents to show our love—and God's love—for our brothers and sisters.¹⁰
- As **citizens** in the world's leading democracy, Catholics in the United States have special responsibilities to protect human life and dignity, to stand with those who are poor and vulnerable. We are also called to welcome the stranger, to combat discrimination, and to pursue peace. Catholic social teaching calls us to practice civic virtues and offers us principles to shape participation in public life. We cannot be indifferent to or cynical about the obligations of citizenship. Our political choices should not reflect simply our own interests, partisan preferences, or ideological agendas but should be shaped by the principles of our faith and our commitment to justice, especially to the weak and vulnerable. The voices and votes of lay Catholics are needed to shape a society with greater respect for human life, economic and environmental justice, cultural diversity, and global solidarity. Catholic involvement in public life and legislative advocacy are important ways to exercise responsible citizenship. Participation in politics is a worthy vocation and a public trust. Believers who serve in public office have unique responsibilities and opportunities to stand up for human life and dignity, to pursue justice and peace, and to advance the common good by the policies, priorities, and programs they support or oppose.¹¹



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Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice



Supporting the “Salt of the Earth”

Church statements, structures, and initiatives are important for Catholic formation and action. Social ministry programs and structures provide valuable opportunities for believers to learn to act on the justice demands of their faith. Church social ministry efforts should encourage and complement the vital roles of believers in family, economic, and public life. However, there is simply no substitute for Catholic men and women carrying their faith into the world. Everyday discipleship for justice and the Church's organized social ministry can reinforce one another and help shape a more just society and more peaceful world. We hope these reflections can serve as an opportunity for increased dialogue on the demands of discipleship in our time.

Parishes are essential sources of support and encouragement for Christian discipleship. At their best, parishes help believers prepare and go forth to live the Gospel in everything we do. The Sunday liturgy sends us forth to renew the earth and build up God's kingdom of justice and peace. We encourage our pastors and preachers to listen to their parishioners on the challenges of their daily lives and help bring the insight of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic teaching to these experiences. We affirm prayer and worship that help believers apply the Gospel to everyday situations. Across the country, there are examples of Catholic men and women gathering in small groups to examine the moral dimensions of their lives and work. They can enlarge their vision beyond the immediate and the individual experience when they are enabled to examine the structures and processes that shape social life. Catholic schools and religious education programs provide important lessons about living a life of justice and compassion and promoting participation in civic life. Many parishes participate in legislative networks and community organizing projects that involve parishioners in working for justice. And in thousands of parishes, other social ministry efforts provide valuable opportunities to help believers make choices about their time, money, and talents that reflect the justice demands of the Gospel. These parishes are convinced that the mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection unfolds within human life.

We applaud these efforts and urge our parishes to do even more. Our culture often suggests that religion is a private matter, to be tolerated as long as it is detached from our lives as workers and citizens. Catholic men and women look to our parishes to find the support, tools, and concrete help they need to resist this tendency and instead proclaim Christ's love, justice, and peace in everything they do.

The measure of the Church's organized social ministry is not simply the teaching shared, the services offered, or the actions taken, but also the support and challenge provided for men and women as they seek to live the Gospel in the world. Our community of faith needs to share its social teaching more clearly and comprehensively so that its principles can help shape the choices and actions of Catholics. Catholics also need to learn and further explore the links between faith and life, between theology and ethics, between what we believe and how we act every day. Catholics need to support one another as we take up these difficult tasks, helping each other to have the courage of our convictions, to stand up for what we believe, and to practice in our own lives what the Scriptures proclaim. As we approach the year 2000, our Conference is promoting a “Jubilee Pledge for Charity, Justice, and Peace” as one concrete way for believers to commit to renewed prayer, reflection, service, and action in preparation for the third Christian millennium (see Appendix.)

Conclusion

The Word of God calls believers to become “the salt of the earth, the light of the world.” The pope and the bishops are called to teach and lead, but unless the Church's social teaching finds a home in the hearts and



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lives of Catholic women and men, our community and culture will fall short of what the Gospel requires. Our society urgently needs the everyday witness of Christians who take the social demands of our faith seriously. The pursuit of justice is an essential part of the Catholic call to holiness, which is our true vocation: to live “in Christ” and to let Christ live and work in our world today.

Christian faith requires conversion; it changes who we are, what we do, and how we think. The Gospel offers “good news” and guidance not just for our spiritual lives but for all the commitments and duties which make up our lives. Living our faith in the ordinary tasks of everyday life is an essential part of what it means to be holy today.

As the third Christian millennium approaches, the call to live our faith in everyday choices and actions remains at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This call takes on renewed urgency as we approach the great jubilee, but it is not new. The task of disciples today was probably best and most simply expressed in the words of the prophet Micah:

*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”
(Micah 6:8)*



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Endnotes

¹Other major documents address in a more comprehensive way the vocation of the laity (e.g., *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, *On the Laity, Called and Gifted*, and *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*). Catholic teaching also outlines our broader social mission in a series of documents (e.g., *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, *Justice in the World*, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum*, *A Century of Social Teaching*, *Communities of Salt and Light*, and *Called to Global Solidarity*.)

²Matthew 25:31-46, Matthew 5:1-10.

³Luke 4:18.

⁴Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, #31.

⁵Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, #43.

⁶For more teaching, see *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)*, Pope John Paul II.

⁷For more teaching, see *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, Pope John Paul II.

⁸For more teaching, see *Tenth Anniversary Edition of Economic Justice for All*, U.S. Catholic Bishops.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰For more teaching, see *To Be a Christian Steward*, U.S. Catholic Bishops.

¹¹For more teaching, see *Octogesima Adveniens*, Pope Paul VI; *Political Responsibility*, U.S. Catholic Bishops.

The full text of this statement is online at www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/everyday.shtml.

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Excerpted from

A Place at the Table

A Catholic Recommitment to Overcome Poverty and to Respect the Dignity of All God's Children

A Pastoral Reflection of the U.S. Catholic Bishops

How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads? . . . Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning His voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty.

Pope John Paul II
Novo Millennio Ineunte, no. 50

I. A TABLE

A table is where people come together for food. For many, there is not enough food and, in some cases, no table at all.

A table is where people meet to make decisions—in neighborhoods, nations, and the global community. Many people have no place at the table. Their voices and needs are ignored or dismissed.

When we gather as Catholics to worship, we gather around a table to celebrate the Eucharist. It is at this altar of sacrifice that we hear the saving word of Christ and receive his Body and Blood. It is Christ's sacrificial meal that nourishes us so that we can go forth to live the Gospel as his disciples. Too often, the call of the Gospel and the social implications of the Eucharist are ignored or neglected in our daily lives. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insists, "The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest" (no. 1397).

In our world and nation, many of our sisters and brothers live in poverty. The causes are complex, but the results are clear. They cannot find decent work, feed their families, educate their children, secure health care, or find adequate housing. Millions of children live in nations with too much debt and not enough development, in societies with deadly diseases and inadequate health care, in lands where conflict and corruption leave people without a place at the table. Millions of families cannot live in dignity because they lack the conditions worthy of human life.

As Catholics, we must come together with a common conviction that we can no longer tolerate the moral scandal of poverty in our land and so much hunger and deprivation in our world. As believers, we can debate how best to overcome these realities, but we must be united in our determination to do so. Our faith teaches us that poor people are not issues or problems but sisters and brothers in God's one human family.

. . . .



Caritas in Veritate and Individual Reflections

A Place at the Table (excerpts)



IV. Analysis

The realities of poverty today are shaped by powerful economic, moral, and cultural forces. Among these is the rapid pace of globalization—the increasing global connections among our economic, cultural, social, and political lives. While we are becoming more connected as one human community, we often live and work in very different economies.¹²

- Some people are *pulling ahead*, harnessing their education and positions to seize the opportunities of economic life and the global marketplace.
- Many people are *left behind*. They lack the education, skills, access, and opportunity to compete. They include the hungry and homeless, subsistence farmers, victims of discrimination, those suffering with AIDS, those caught in violent conflict, and immigrants and refugees without the right papers or language skills. Discrimination, low wages, sweatshop conditions, and unjust trade and other policies leave many on the fringes of economic life.
- Many people are *struggling*. They have jobs or farms but may lack the income, health care, and other benefits to raise a family in dignity. They are working hard but not getting ahead. Their financial security is subject to investment decisions, market trends, world commodity prices, and other economic forces that are beyond their control. They worry about keeping their jobs or their farms, feeding and educating their children, paying for health care, and saving for their old age.

Our economic life is shaped increasingly by economic globalization, which offers both new potential and new problems. Some see this process as the source of many of the world's ills. For others, it is the solution. The question is not whether these forces will continue, but whether they lift people up or push them down, whether they drive people apart or bring them together. Will globalization increase gaps between rich and poor, or will it build new economic bridges and promote more participation in economic life among all people? As a community of faith, we can seek to shape what our Holy Father calls a "global culture of solidarity." We should assess economic globalization from every angle, but especially from the "bottom up," focusing first on how it touches people who have no place at the table.

V. A Tradition

The Biblical Vision

Our faith calls us to look at economic life in terms of its moral and human dimensions. Concern for the poor echoes through the Scriptures—in the passion of the prophets, the words and witness of Jesus, and the example of the early Church. The Church has lived out this concern in every age and every land. Our commitment to those who are in greatest need is rooted in the biblical vision of the sacredness of all human life. In the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis teaches us that every person is made in God's image and likeness¹³ and endowed with inalienable dignity, regardless of who we are, where we are born, or what we accomplish. As believers, we are called to treat all people—especially those who are suffering—with respect, compassion, and justice.

Genesis also teaches us that all of creation was made by God and ultimately belongs to God.¹⁴ The goods of creation must be used to advance the reign of God and the well-being of all. Private ownership is important to



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ensure freedom and dignity and to help people to meet basic needs, but the goods of creation are not to be controlled by some at the cost of injustice to others.¹⁵

Throughout the Old Testament, God calls his people to care for those on the margins of society.¹⁶ The God of Israel is a God of justice who protects and defends the poor.¹⁷ The prophets clearly reminded the people of Israel that a test of their faithfulness was the way they treated their poor and vulnerable—the widows, the orphans, and the aliens.¹⁸

In the New Testament, we learn how Jesus shared his love in a special way with those who were poor or vulnerable. In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and in the Parable of the Rich Young Man, Jesus urged us not to ignore those who are suffering in our midst and warned that attachment to riches can be a barrier to discipleship.¹⁹

Although Jesus reminded us that in a world marred by sin, the poor would always be with us,²⁰ he also challenged us to see him in those who are hungry or thirsty, in strangers, in the naked and imprisoned. In Christ's description of the Last Judgment, we learn that when we ignore the poor, we ignore Christ himself.²¹ As John Paul II has declared, "This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity. . . . By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity."²²

Catholic Social Teaching

Applying the Scriptures to human history has been the task of saints, church leaders, and ordinary believers through the centuries. The social doctrine of the Church provides principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and guidelines for the choices we make every day.²³

In the early years of the Church, Christian communities cared for their weakest members by sharing what they had.²⁴ According to St. Ambrose, "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich."²⁵

Catholic teaching about human dignity and economic justice has been a special focus of many papal encyclicals and statements of our bishops' conference, offering key themes and principles and applying them to the issues of the day. (See "[A Catholic Framework for Economic Life](#).")

Pope John Paul II insists that the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us that there is a special presence of Christ in the poor. This presence requires the Church to make a preferential option for those who are poor and vulnerable.²⁶ The principle of solidarity reminds us that as members of one human family, we see every "other" as our neighbor, who must share in the "banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God."²⁷ Solidarity calls us to care for our neighbors in need who are nearby and for those who are far away and to see all those who suffer as sisters and brothers.²⁸

Catholic teaching affirms that all persons, even those on the margins of society, have basic human rights: the right to life and to those things that are necessary to the proper development of life, including faith and family, work and education, housing and health care. Work is the key to the social question (cf. Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work*). Work should not leave people poor but should provide wages sufficient to achieve a standard of living that is in keeping with human dignity.²⁹ Workers have both an obligation and a right to work,³⁰



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as well as a right to participation, association, and economic initiative. This includes the right to choose to join a union and to bargain collectively.

In the Catholic tradition, concern for the poor is advanced by individual and common action, works of charity, efforts to achieve a more just social order, the practice of virtue, and the pursuit of justice in our own lives. It requires action to confront structures of injustice that leave people poor. Individual believers are called to be generous in sharing what we have with those in need and to promote justice through the choices we make in our families, schools, and workplaces, and through our participation in social and economic life.³¹

Our social doctrine is expressed and enriched by the Church's broad experience. Across the globe, our Church puts faith into action by feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, educating the young, caring for the sick, welcoming the stranger, providing access for persons with disabilities, and working for greater justice and peace. The Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental provider of education, health care, and human services in our nation. We are helping families and communities to combat hunger and homelessness, overcome poverty and dependency, build housing, resist crime, and seek greater justice. Catholic schools are among the best anti-poverty programs, offering first-rate education, moral truth, and discipline in communities across our nation. We welcome and resettle many refugees fleeing conflict and repression. We offer relief and development in more than eighty countries. (See "[National Catholic Efforts to Overcome Poverty](#).")

Our Church's commitment to find a place at the table for all God's children is expressed in every part of our country and in the poorest places on earth. All across the globe, the Church carries this forward because of who we are and what we believe about God and the human person. Our faith gives us the strength, identity, and principles we need to sustain this work.

VI. A Direction

Our efforts to serve and stand with the poor recognize and build on the essential roles and responsibilities of four institutions. In a sense, the table we seek for all rests on these four institutions, or legs: (1) what families and individuals can do, (2) what community and religious institutions can do, (3) what the private sector can do, and (4) what the government can do to work together to overcome poverty.

A first leg of the table is what *families and individuals* are called to do. Every person has a responsibility to respect the dignity of others and to work to secure not only their own rights but also the rights of others. Every day, parents throughout the world make sacrifices for the well-being of their children. Parents are the guardians of the life and dignity of their children. Support for marriage and family life is at the center of our campaign to restore dignity and to overcome poverty for children. Public policy and all our institutions must reward, encourage, and support parents, including single parents, who make wise decisions for their children. Their hard work, their love and discipline, and their time and presence within their families are a gift not only to their children, but to our society and to the common good. They are also significant investments in avoiding or escaping poverty.

A second leg of the table is the role and responsibility of community organizations and faith-based institutions. These institutions can help families make good choices and overcome discrimination and other obstacles. They can confront structures of injustice and build community, and they can demand accountability from public officials. Faith is a religious commitment; it is also a community resource. On the toughest problems, in the toughest, most desperate neighborhoods and villages, religious and community institutions are present and



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making a difference. In the United States, the growing attention to faith-based and other community institutions is overdue recognition of the work of Catholic schools, Catholic health care institutions, Catholic Charities, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and other groups. Here and abroad, our parishes and schools must continue to be clear about their identity and mission and must continue to be beacons of hope and centers of help for poor families and communities.

A third leg of the table is *the marketplace and institutions of business, commerce, and labor*. The private sector must be not only an engine of growth and productivity, but also a reflection of our values and priorities, a contributor to the common good. Examples of greed and misconduct must be replaced with models of corporate responsibility. Both employers and the labor movement must help the poorest workers to have a voice and a place at the table where wages and working conditions are set. A key measure of the marketplace is whether it provides decent work and wages for people, especially those on the margins of economic life. Parents need to be able to provide a life of dignity for their children by their work. Workers and farmers in this country and around the world need living wages; access to health care; vacation time and family and medical leave; a voice and real participation in the workplace; and the prospect of a decent retirement. Work must be an escape from poverty, not another version of it. The process of globalization must provide opportunities for the participation of the poorest people and the economic development of the poorest nations.

A fourth essential leg of the table is the role and responsibilities of *government*—a means to do together what we cannot accomplish on our own. In the Catholic tradition, government has a positive role because of its responsibility to serve the common good, provide a safety net for the vulnerable, and help overcome discrimination and ensure equal opportunity for all. Government has inescapable responsibilities toward those who are poor and vulnerable, to ensure their rights and defend their dignity. Government action is necessary to help overcome structures of injustice and misuse of power and to address problems beyond the reach of individual and community efforts. Government must act when these other institutions fall short in defending the weak and protecting human life and human rights.

The debate about how to address poverty in the United States and abroad too often focuses on just one of these four foundations and neglects others. While these four elements work together in different ways in different communities, a table may fall without each leg. Some emphasize family responsibility or the role of religious and community groups. Some insist the market can solve all our problems. Others see a government solution for every challenge, while still others see government corruption as an insurmountable obstacle to development. These narrow positions are not our tradition. The Catholic way is to recognize the essential role and the complementary responsibilities of families, communities, the market, and government to work together to overcome poverty and advance human dignity. . .

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops supports (1) decent work, living wages, and workers' rights, (2) accessible and affordable health care for all, (3) genuine welfare reform that helps families escape poverty as they leave dependency, and (4) fair treatment of immigrants, farmers, and farm workers. Our Conference supports efforts to reduce debt and to increase development assistance, to oppose corruption and to end exploitation, and to restrain conflict and violence—all of which diminish or destroy the lives of poor people. (See "[USCCB Statements on Economic Issues](#).")

We will continue this advocacy, and we urge others to join our efforts. We will do all we can to make our voices heard, especially as welfare is reshaped, as policies toward immigrants and refugees are reviewed, and as new investments and approaches in foreign assistance are enacted. Every Catholic and all our communities



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of faith are called to join in the search for the moral values and virtues and for the just policies and social investments that will help people escape the trap of poverty and overcome the barriers of injustice. We recognize that the choices we make to build the common good will require sacrifice from all of us. Those who have more can make choices to use less, to share more, and to advocate for greater justice so that all people have the resources to provide for themselves and their families. For all to have a place at the table, some of us may have to take a smaller place at the table. . .

VII. A Call

For believers, this mission is not simply a matter of economics or politics but of discipleship. We may sometimes differ about the specifics of how best to serve those in need, overcome poverty, and advance human dignity, but it is impossible for a Christian to say, "This is not my task." This mission is an essential part of what makes us disciples of Christ. As the Letter of James insists,

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.³²

This is a time for faith demonstrated by good works. Such discipleship begins with prayer and worship. Prayer is essential if we hope truly to practice charity and to promote justice for those in need. We cannot worship a God of love or follow Christ's example of concern for those who are "least" if this love and concern are not consistently reflected in our liturgical celebrations. The poor and vulnerable should never be forgotten in our public worship or our private prayer. Just as we worship together worldwide on the Sabbath, we must work together in solidarity the rest of the week to live out the Gospel.

Preaching, education, and formation in our communities of faith must reflect the Church's option for the poor and vulnerable. Through preaching, education, and religious formation, we reflect and pass on to others the beliefs we share as followers of Jesus. If they are to be true to the demands of discipleship, then homilies, faith formation programs, schools, universities, and seminaries must reflect Christ's concern for those in need. They should also affirm our Church's teaching about the obligation to serve others, to overcome structures of sin, and to work for greater justice in the world. We urge those who preach and those who teach to do more to consistently share—in our parishes, schools, universities, and seminaries—the call to serve and to promote justice for those who are poor.

Each of us has many opportunities in our *everyday lives* to make choices that help or harm those who are most vulnerable. In our families, we can make time to serve those in need and to become involved in efforts that promote justice. We can raise our children with an ethic of service and a passion for justice. As workers, owners, and managers, Catholics should contribute to a workplace that is safe and respectful, where workers have a voice and can earn enough to support themselves and their families. As consumers and as investors, we can support businesses that contribute to the common good, treat workers fairly, and do not exploit the poor and vulnerable. As consumers, we can also live more simply so that there might be enough at the table for all. As faithful citizens, we should take seriously our responsibilities to vote and to voice our convictions in support of public policies that defend human life and promote the human dignity of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of helping people at risk. Every believer is called to *serve those in need*. Through parishes and dioceses and through committees and organizations, we house the homeless, feed the



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hungry, visit those in prison, welcome immigrants, and provide countless other services. While we can be proud of what the Church already does, let every believer commit today to greater personal involvement in meeting the demands of the Gospel and the needs of our sisters and brothers. Each of us must become involved in efforts to share what we have and to overcome structures of injustice. We must also make the time in our busy lives to assist those with urgent needs.

The Gospel and Catholic teaching require us to serve those in need and *to work for a more just society and world*. Both charity and justice are required by our faith. As citizens in the most powerful democracy on earth, we have unique opportunities to use our voices and votes to shape a more caring community, a more just nation, and a more peaceful world. We can join with others in our parishes, local community organizations, and legislative networks. We also can join with parishes and dioceses in other parts of the world and in ecumenical and other forms of action and advocacy. When people join with others to demand respect for their dignity and rights, not only do they help themselves, but they also build up the entire community and advance the common good. Our faith calls us to engagement, not retreat—to renew the earth, not flee the world.

The most challenging virtue of our time may be *solidarity*. This has been a defining element of Pope John Paul II's leadership and witness.³³ He insists that whatever our national, ethnic, religious, or economic differences, we are all God's children, members of one human family. "Loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in a shrinking world. In our prayer, formation, service, and citizenship, and in our programs of twinning and outreach, we must break through the boundaries of neighborhood and nation to recognize the web of life that connects all of us in this age of globalization.

Each of us must find concrete ways to act on this mission in our lives. Resources for carrying forward this form of Christian discipleship as individuals and as parishes, dioceses, schools, and educational programs can be found in the materials that build on and complement this reflection.

VIII. A Challenge

The call to overcome poverty and to uphold human dignity is not new. It is as old as the prophets and as current as today's headlines. Today this challenge is especially compelling because we have the capacity to make a difference and because the impact of rapid globalization makes it more urgent. Building on past progress and new opportunities, we can make this a time for hope. Hope offers the promise that, with God's help, shared sacrifice, wise investment, and renewed commitment, we can actually reduce substantially the levels of poverty, hunger, and human deprivation in our own land and around the world.

The First Letter of John calls us to the task:

"If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine."³⁴

This is a time not for "just words or mere talk" but for "active and genuine" commitment by Catholics in the United States to work with others to make a place at the table for all God's children.



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Notes

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States 2000*.
- ² United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2002*.
- ³ Mt 25:44-45.
- ⁴ Lk 4:8.
- ⁵ World Bank Group, *World Development Indicators 2000*.
- ⁶ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 1999*.
- ⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Supplemental Survey*.
- ⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2001*.
- ⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States 2000*.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ World Bank Group, *World Development Indicators 2000*.
- ¹² See U.S. Catholic bishops, *Tenth Anniversary Edition of "Economic Justice for All,"* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997), nos. 4-5.
- ¹³ See Gn 1:26-27.
- ¹⁴ See Gn 1:26-30, 5:18.
- ¹⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), nos. 2402-2407.
- ¹⁶ See Lv 19:9-15.
- ¹⁷ See Ps 113:7, 140:13.
- ¹⁸ See Is 10:1-5; Jer 22:3; Ez 22:29-31.
- ¹⁹ See Lk 16:19-31.
- ²⁰ See Mt 26:11.
- ²¹ See Mt 25:44-45.
- ²² Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 49.
- ²³ See CCC, no. 2423.
- ²⁴ See Acts 4:32-34.
- ²⁵ De Nabuthe, c. 12, n. 53; (PL 14, 747). Cf. J. R. Palanque, *Saint Ambrose et l'empire romain* (Paris: de Boccard, 1933), 336ff.
- ²⁶ See *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 49.
- ²⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988), no. 39.
- ²⁸ See Bl. Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress)*, no. 157.
- ²⁹ See Bl. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1963), no. 20.
- ³⁰ See Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus (On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991), no. 43.
- ³¹ See Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Workers)*, nos. 35-36.
- ³² Jas 2:15-17.
- ³³ See *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38.
- ³⁴ 1 Jn 3:17-18.



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