

**Edgewood College Faculty Reflections on
Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical "God is Love"**

Josef Alois Ratzinger was elected Pope on April 19, 2005 and took the name Benedict XVI.. Nine months later, on Christmas Day, he signed "Deus Caritas Est" ("God is Love"), his first encyclical, which is expected to set the tone for his papacy.

In the tradition of the great Catholic monasteries of the Middle Ages, Edgewood College's Catholic Identify Committee distributed the encyclical to faculty representing different academic disciplines, for their study, reflection, and response. On April 27, scholars from Art History, Business, Computer Science, Education, Environmental Studies, Foreign Languages, History, Human Issues, Nursing, Religion, Sociology, and Women's and Gender Studies shared their reactions at a very lively public forum held in Anderson Auditorium.

We are now honored to publish four of these responses – reflections by scholars reading the encyclical through the lenses of Nursing, Liberation Theology, Art History/Women's and Gender Studies, and Business Ethics. We hope that people will continue to study the encyclical and participate in the continuing discussions regarding its content and spirit.

Reflections of a Nursing Professor

Catherine Andrews

In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI speaks on the power of love, challenging us to consider the many facets and dimensions it embraces. In the introduction, he explores the

thinking that prevailed in the time of the Old Testament, reminding us that man is a being made up of body and soul. He also states that man is truly himself when his body and soul are united.

In my profession of nursing, this phenomenon is played out in every interaction, encounter or meeting that nurses have with their clients. Nursing is often seen by others as a profession that deals with bodies, but it truly is a blend; that is, we work with both the body and the spirit. At Edgewood College we call this the psycho-social-spiritual component of nursing and we spend a great deal of time teaching our students how to address this aspect of the care they give. We carefully consider how individuals are responding to the situations they're in. In the hospital setting where I practice, individuals whose bodies are damaged in some way need treatment and care. I think of the care we give as a kind of love, one that calls for working with both the body and the soul or spirit. Are the individuals we care for going to fight and overcome their disabilities, make adaptations or are they going to give up? How can we best accompany them along this journey? For we believe and know that the soul/spirit plays an equal role in the process of healing. As nurses we call on that spirit to move the body when it doesn't want to participate. This is what we deal with in many of the settings where we practice.

Pope Benedict also speaks of two different kinds of love. One type of love is called Eros, which he defines as being worldly, possessive, and covetous. The other type of love is Agape, which is oblation, it is grounded in faith and given with a sense of offering and donation, a giving up. He notes that these two types of love can never really be separated. Man cannot always give, he must also receive. I've learned that it is often in the giving that I receive. I think this is what my students learn as they learn the "how" of becoming a nurse. They speak of this in the reflective journals they write, describing how meaningful the little things they do are and how much they learn and receive from the patients they care for.

Pope Benedict also speaks of love as charity. He speaks of charity in the sense of agape – giving, but also in terms of justice. He makes the solid claim that there should be social and civil order, a State where each person receives what is his or her due. And this is something that must be taken up anew by each generation, as politics and times change.

So the question one can ask is how does love fit with justice? In this encyclical, Pope Benedict refers to the parable of the Good Samaritan. He says that “charity is first of all the simple response to the immediate needs and specific situations.” He mentions professional competence, but, again, reminds us that this alone is “not sufficient.” He says that “human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern.” He refers to this connecting, this openness and this way of being as the “formation of the heart.” This, of course, meshes perfectly with our school’s motto: Heart speaks to heart. I think he’s reminding us that it is in the everyday, in the little ways of interacting with each other that love, charity, and justice emerge.

I love the phrase he uses: “A heart which sees”. This is where care, love, and justice blend. Seeing involves more than observing and inspecting; it also includes beholding, noticing, discerning, taking in and recognizing. Each of these is a practice, that takes time, energy, and attention to develop. It is by engaging in these practices with each individual encountered that connecting can occur. It is in these small but very powerful ways that love and justice will emerge as connections are formed and sustained.

This is one message that can be taken from this encyclical: a reminder to be open to others. It is the small things that count and we each can be a part of that every day in every encounter we have with another.

Reflections of a Liberation Theology Scholar

Rebecca Meier-Rao

Before becoming Pope, the very conservative Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was known for his hard line on issues of Roman Catholic doctrine. He silenced some Catholic theologians when they did not comply with that doctrine. By focusing his first encyclical on love, which is generally perceived of as an embracing topic, Pope Benedict XVI gives himself the opportunity to rearticulate Catholic doctrine without sounding overtly doctrinaire.

His discussion on charity versus justice, found in Part II of the encyclical, exemplifies this point. As Catholic Social Teaching has done for many years, Pope Benedict XVI now asserts that charity is one of the Catholic Church's main responsibilities in the world, and that the pursuit of justice is better left to the State (a re-iteration Catholic Social Teaching since the first encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891). This distinction is made for two very sound reasons.

First, there is a general assumption that the pursuit of justice necessitates the use of force at its worse and the enforcement of laws at its best. In a society that strongly believes in the separation of Church and State, both of these tasks are beyond the role of the Church.

Second, given the separation of Church and State, the Church has come to define its role as a spiritual and moral leader to the world. The Church should try to influence the State for the better (i.e. Pope John Paul II exhorted President George W. Bush not to bomb Iraq), but not become the State (i.e. Pope John Paul II could not force President George W. Bush not to go to war).

Most people will agree that these limitations on the Church are both good and necessary. But the world is not that simple.

Pope Benedict XVI is well aware that there are people within the Roman Catholic Church who believe the Church should be a driving force of justice in the world. Many very religious Catholics in the Latin American Church – that is, priests, nuns, and monks – got into trouble with the Church in the 1970s through the early 1990s when they became involved in base communities struggling for social, economic, and political change. Most of these base communities were initiated by proponents of Liberation Theology, a movement that posed a threat to the Vatican because it was influenced by Marxism (an atheistic philosophy) and because it put greater emphasis on the authority of the *suffering* people themselves than on the authority of the Church.

Liberation Theology called on the historical Jesus for a radical re-structuring of society so that justice might become a reality. Liberation theologians scoffed at the historically ineffective call to charity by the Roman Catholic hierarchy because it preserved the status quo, keeping the rich in power and the poor dependant on the whims of the opulent. Further, they said a Church that does not impose itself upon a corrupt State is not only allowing the corruption to continue but is in fact partially responsible for it.

During the 1970s-1990s (and before), the Catholic Church was commonly and overtly in league with corrupt Latin American governments. Liberation theologians and members of these base communities simply wanted the Church to be in league with the other side, the side of justice. In the face of a corrupt State the Church is bound to exceed its proper role; the question is whether it will side with the *powerful* by adhering to charity, or with the *weak* by adhering to justice. Even in the United States – with one of the best political systems in world history – what very often drives the State is neither justice nor the common good, but the good of the corporations and the wealthy few.

In response to these claims, Pope Benedict XVI maintains that it is the service of love, not justice, that answers to the most important needs and longings of humans. But his argument contains three false assumptions.

First, Pope Benedict XVI assumes that a Church driven by justice would have to neglect the spiritual needs of its people. Second, by equating justice with Marxism, he assumes that the pursuit of justice is purely a materialist one. Third, he assumes that a Christian faith that incorporates a secular philosophy or ideology, such as liberation theology did with Marxism, will eventually have its faith swallowed up by the ideology. In this argument he is essentially criticizing liberation theology, though never by name.

Therefore may it be clear that liberation theology has never been a purely materialist conception. It is a theology based in the faith of the Church and the belief that Jesus Christ brought a salvation that both encompasses and surpasses the material world. The love and the spiritual fulfillment produced by the Church remain fundamental to Christian faith, and striving for material justice does not make that role obsolete. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church has a long history of incorporating secular philosophies into its theologies and doctrines. The early Christian theologians depended heavily on Hellenistic philosophies, and Aristotelian philosophy was essential to the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

The Roman Catholic Church should re-evaluate its position on the relationship between justice and charity. The Church should devote *primary* attention to the vulnerable of the world, and test its doctrines by how well they serve those whom the world has forgotten. If, in fact, “the entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of [people],” then the Church should stand among those whom it serves and humbly listen before deciding

what its role of love entails. *Listening before acting* is what liberation theology has attempted to do and is, I believe, the task the Church should be fulfilling before any other.

Reflections of an Art History/Women's and Gender Studies Professor

Melanie Herzog

In reflecting upon Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, the perspective I offer is grounded in the interdisciplinary interrogation of representation, power, and voice fundamental to Women's and Gender Studies and the study of visual art. I do not speak for these programs, however, but rather offer my own thoughts.

This text, addressed "To the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious, and All the Lay Faithful, on Christian Love," provokes a number of questions for me, a Jewish woman reading, in essence, a letter not addressed to me. How am I to understand Judaism as a religion only of the past, foreshadowing Christianity and fulfilled in Christianity's emergence from it? Who within the Church, I ask myself, is represented in this letter? Who among the "men and women religious, and the lay faithful," is not? The Church is a powerful entity. How is power wielded here within the realm of love and justice?

"God is love," Pope Benedict begins. Part One of the text opens with consideration of "a problem of language" in discussing love in its various aspects. I notice the assumptions about gender embedded in language used here: God is masculine, the Church is feminine, God loves Man. Woman is prostitute, saint, and mother, and she completes man. The "epitome of love" is the love between man and woman. As someone benefiting from heterosexual privilege, I find myself invited into complicity with this exclusive construct of love.

Yet this Encyclical is also about "love of neighbor" as manifested in charity and the pursuit of justice. How then, I ask, is this read by gay and lesbian Catholics wrestling with their

relationship to the Church, for it denies the presence and power of their love, of their finding God's love through their own? Whose love for whom is recognized and validated is, after all, a matter of justice.

In the second part of the Encyclical, Pope Benedict distinguishes between justice as “something which concerns the Church deeply” and the duty of the “lay faithful” as members of the broader society to work for justice. The pope assigns justice as the responsibility of the State, and charity, care for the soul, as the work of the Church. Based in recognition of the systems of power and oppression within which the necessity for charity is maintained, Judaism also makes a distinction between charity – Tzedakah – and work for justice - Tikkun Olam, the repair of the world. Both reside at the heart of Jewish teachings on “love of neighbor.”

I think about the connections among love and justice, love as the pursuit of justice through Tikkun Olam and through the Catholic teachings of Liberation Theology of which Pope Benedict is implicitly critical in this text. As I reflect upon the work of so many within the Church, particularly the Sinsinawa Dominican sisters whose values underlie the mission and vision of Edgewood College, I see their passionate love for justice as the manifestation of their love of God.

Reflections of a Business Ethics Professor

Denis Collins

I have given many business ethics public talks and usually, while dining with my hosts prior to the talk, someone will joke, “So Business Ethics, isn't that a contradiction in terms?” Yes, some people in businesses do unethical things, and we have all experienced that. On the other hand, many people in business do ethical things. We are, after all, both saints and sinners.

With this in mind, I was particularly interested to read Pope Benedict XVI's comments in Part II of the encyclical regarding the practice of love. How does the concept "love thy neighbor" apply within the context of daily business activities and capitalism? While your competitor tries to takeover your market share and drive you into bankruptcy, should you love thy competitor or turn the other cheek? Does the concept of maximizing profits contradict the concept of charity?

Pope Benedict XVI clearly differentiates different purposes for different realms of social subsystems. The State is responsible for our physical well-being and the just ordering of society, and the Church is responsible for our spiritual well-being and charitable acts.

Where does business and economic subsystem fit into this framework? The Pope notes that Marxism attempted to systematically rid the world of poverty by having the State takeover the duties of Business and the Church, and failed terribly. He then moves on to other issues.

Following the Pope's logic, I would like to propose that the Holy Trinity of subsystems consists of the State (the political subsystem), the Church (the spiritual subsystem), and Business (the economic subsystem). Although the Church and Business may be somewhat independent of the State, it is the State that determines just how independent they are. Under dictatorial communism, there was little independence. Under democratic capitalism there is tremendous independence.

Therefore, the State fulfills the role of the Parent (makes and enforces the rules), Business fulfills the role of the Child (generates new revenue sources), and the Church fulfills the role of the Holy Spirit (makes sure that the Parent and Child adopt the appropriate principles to guide their decisions).

This is the Holy Family of social subsystems. With assistance from the Holy Spirit – daily spiritual meditations help – a businessperson can love God, love his/her neighbor, and run a

profitable business. Indeed, business ethics researchers report that ethical companies are more profitable than unethical companies.

But then why does the relationship between economic and spiritual behavior seem to be in conflict, as suggested by the often repeated sarcastic business ethics joke noted in the opening paragraph, rather than in harmony?

In reality, the Holy Family – the State, Business, and Church – is a dysfunctional family. We live in purgatory, not heaven, where human beings struggle with a concept called sin.

What went wrong? According to the first part of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, although God is love, we neither adequately receive God's love nor adequately channel God's love to others. The Pope grounds his theological explanation of this problem in the Garden of Eden story. According to the Pope, Adam represents first man and Eve first woman and, "only together do the two represent complete humanity and become 'one flesh'."

Unfortunately, we do not read about Adam and Eve ever achieving spiritual maturity. Instead, as the biblical story progresses, the still spiritually immature Adam and Eve give into temptation and soon thereafter give birth to Cain and Abel. The eldest son then kills his younger brother, and we've been struggling with self-centeredness and anger management ever since.

Human history has been one long lineage of dysfunctional families repeating the same mistake by inappropriately receiving and giving God's love to each other. In modern times, men and women continue to give birth to children prior to achieving spiritual maturity. Spiritually immature parents raise spiritually immature children, who then go to college, earn a business degree, and become part of organizations populated by other spiritually immature people. As a result, every day the media reports a new business scandal, with Enron being just the most egregious.

Despite the many tempting opportunities to do otherwise, we must continue to do our best to embody God's love within ourselves, our families, and our organizations. My faith is that some day boys and girls will progress through adolescence and become one with God before having children and becoming CEOs. They will then be able to fully channel God's love not only to their own children, but also to their employees, customers, suppliers, and the natural environment. At that point, we will have finally depart from purgatory and find ourselves back in the Garden of Eden.