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Fighting hunger, beefing up unions part of pope's new social encyclical

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NCR Today

In his long-awaited new encyclical on the economy, Pope Benedict XVI appears set to call for new global synergies among labor unions in order to resist cuts in social safety nets, stronger efforts to combat world hunger, and greater protections for the ecological health of the planet.

Beyond those policy matters, the pontiff also will apparently strike three vintage personal themes:

Social justice depends upon individual conversion, and the roots of the present crisis are in an ethical deficit within economic structures, especially greed;

The defense of the poor and the defense of unborn life, implying opposition to abortion and artificial birth control, are necessarily linked.

Preaching Christ is not a distraction from building a better world, but the principal resource at the service of the true development of every single person and of all humanity.

Benedict's new social encyclical, titled *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), will likely not be released until early July, but this morning's *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's leading daily newspaper, carried lengthy extracts.

While the pope has consulted a number of experts, both economists and theologians, the final text of the encyclical appears to be very much his own work. According to the *Corriere* report, Benedict XVI has been working on the text for months, even correcting a draft during his mid-May trip to the Middle East.

As the title suggests, the idea of truth runs through the encyclical like a leitmotif.

Without truth, without trust and love for the truth, there is no conscience and no sense of social responsibility, the encyclical will assert, according to the extracts published this morning.

In the absence of respect for truth, Benedict writes, Social action falls into the hands of private interests and the logic of power, with destabilizing effects on society, all the more so in a society undergoing globalization.

The pope apparently will invite commercial and political leaders to cultivate a new awareness of the social responsibility of a business firm in an ample sense, which takes account of all the social effects of its activity. He will also call for urgent reforms in order to respond, courageously and without delay, to the great problems of injustice in the development of peoples.

Development of peoples, the pope writes, depends above all upon the recognition that we're all part of one family.

Though the pope takes on complicated questions about international economic structures in *Caritas in Veritate*, he also writes that the present crisis was born of an ethical deficit among individual persons, and that recovery will require a common ethical code founded at the same time upon faith and reason.

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Development is impossible without just human beings, without economic and political leaders who live the appeal to the common good strongly in their own consciences, the pope writes.

In keeping with much previous papal and Vatican commentary on economic affairs, Benedict XVI will apparently argue that globalization is potentially a positive social force, but that it cannot regulate itself. The pontiff will suggest that the present crisis suggests the need for several new ways of influencing globalization:

New synergies at the international level among labor unions, in order to confront reductions in networks of social security.

The presence of a truly global political authority, capable of regulating the global economy. Benedict will specify that he's not talking about a super-state or even necessarily an expanded United Nations, but some sort of planetary public authority regulated by law, attentive to the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, ordered to the common good, and committed to the promotion of authentic human development inspired by the values of the charity of truth.

Recognition of universal rights to adequate levels of food and water.

Greater possibilities for poor nations not to receive foreign aid, but to become meaningful participants in shaping international economic policies.

Understanding that the duties we have towards the environment are connected to the duties we have towards the person.

As he has many times in the past, Benedict XVI will apparently attempt to bring the church's pro-life advocacy and its peace-and-justice activism into alignment, arguing that the defense of the poor and the defense of unborn life are ultimately the same cause.

Openness to life is at the heart of true development, the pope writes. If personal and social sensibility for welcoming new life is lost, then other forms of welcome which are also useful for social life dry up.

A 'morally responsible openness' to life represents a 'social and economic richness,' the pope asserts.

In the end, according to the *Corriere* report, Benedict ends with an exhortation:

'We must take up the new responsibilities to which a new global scene is calling us with realism, trust and hope,' the pope writes. 'The world needs a profound cultural renewal and a rediscovery of the core values upon which a better future can be built.'

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