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Reflections on Pope Benedict's 2013 World Day of Peace message

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

In his Jan. 1 World Day of Peace message titled "Blessed are the Peacemakers," Pope Benedict XVI immediately laid out for us the foundation upon which the church's ministry for world peace must be built.

Using a challenging proclamation from the Second Vatican Council, the pope teaches that Christians must be committed "to sharing humanity's joys and hopes, grief and anguish."

The Holy Father is reminding us that God's peace is much more than the absence of war -- it is the universal experience of justice and love.

We not permitted to sit on the comfortable sidelines of life, safely viewing from afar humanity's problems. Rather, we must put ourselves into the muck and mire of this world.

The pope writes, "Peace is an order enlivened and integrated by love, in such a way that we feel the needs of others as our own, share our goods with others and work throughout the world for greater communion in spiritual values."

Pope Benedict's message wastes no time in confronting the personal and structural evils of greed, inequality and violence.

From the very first page he writes, "It is alarming to see hotbeds of tension and conflict caused by growing instances of inequality between rich and poor, by the prevalence of a selfish and individualistic mindset which also finds expression in an unregulated financial capitalism."

In his PBS documentary *Park Avenue: Money, Power and the American Dream*, Alex Gibney states that while income disparity has always existed in the U.S., it has accelerated sharply in the last 40 years. As of 2010, the 400 richest Americans controlled more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the U.S. population.

Just think about it: Four hundred people control more wealth than 150 million Americans combined.

Pope Benedict laments that the predominant economic model of recent decades calls for seeking maximum profit and consumption -- based on an individualistic and self-centered mentality -- while considering human beings as mere tools in economic competitiveness.

Unbridled capitalism cannot be trusted to work for the common good of humanity. It must legislatively be forced to do so. But instead, the political and economic system has been rigged to outrageously favor the wealthy over the middle-class and poor.

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And for those struggling to survive in extreme poverty throughout the world -- 1.4 billion human beings -- the inequality between them and the rich is tragically unjust.

In the face of "unregulated financial capitalism," the pope is calling us to build "a new economic model" for the sake of the common good: providing full dignified employment, food security for every person, and peaceful coexistence with all creation.

The Holy Father maintains that the path to "peace is above all that of respect for human life in all its many aspects ... True peacemakers, then, are those who love, defend and promote human life in all its dimensions ... Anyone who loves peace cannot tolerate attacks and crimes against life."

It's morally wrong and intellectually dishonest to claim oneself a peacemaker while permitting abortion -- brutal warfare against the unborn.

Following the example of Jesus, peacemakers cannot accept any form of violence. Instead, in the words of Pope Benedict, we must be committed to the truth that "Evil is in fact overcome by good."

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about the principles of Catholic social teaching. His email address is tonymagliano4@yahoo.com.]

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