

Is Caritas in Veritate progressive?

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 9, 2009 NCR Today

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good this morning hosted a conference call with a group of experts on the Church's social teaching to discuss Pope Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*.

All the experts were agreed on the significance of the encyclical. *Caritas* "represents a comprehensive reinvigoration of Catholic social teaching for our age," according to Prof. Steven Schneck, director of the Life Cycle Institute at The Catholic University.

Looking ahead to tomorrow's meeting between Pope Benedict and President Obama, Schneck noted that criticisms of the encyclical come from both left and right. Frances Kissling and George Weigel may not agree about much, but they agree that the encyclical was wanting, albeit for different reasons. "The President and the Holy Father share mutual critics," Schneck observed, and not only regarding the encyclical. Both Kissling and Weigel have opposed the kind of "common ground" initiatives that characterize Obama's approach to controversial issues.

Jeusit Fr. Tom Reese characterized the pope's vision as related in *Caritas* as "a very progressive vision" and Prof. Vince Miller of Georgetown University discerned "a surprising similarity between Obama and Benedict" regarding both their common emphasis on hope and their rejection of despair in viewing our current socio-political arrangements as "a closed system." Miller also pointed out that both men consistently disappoint their most vocal supporters. (Read Miller's NCR essay: [Encyclical signals church not pulling out of politics](#) [1].)

I am not so sure I would call the pope's vision "progressive." I think it is more accurate to say that the pope's vision results in support for many policies that progressives support. The pope's vision, as he repeated several times in the encyclical, is an "integral" one and no one has ever accused the Democratic Party of having an integral vision. Still, it was remarkable that the experts assembled by Catholics in Alliance, all of whom spoke more or less from the left of the political spectrum, were enthusiastic about Benedict's opus while it has been the here-to-fore ultramontanists who have been objecting to the document.

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