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Pope Benedict's contribution to Catholic social teaching

Tony Magliano | Mar. 4, 2013 Making a Difference
Benedict Resigns

Being pope is a tough job. If he's liberal, the conservatives will criticize him. If he's conservative, the liberals will be critical of him. And if he takes the middle ground, he'll catch it from both sides.

But one area of Benedict's papacy I especially hope both conservatives and liberals will agree on and really take to heart is the valuable contribution he made to the church's social doctrine.

Let's take a look at some of his most notable and challenging contributions here.

First off, more than any other pope, he has taught and encouraged us to cherish and protect the environment. In fact, he has earned the unique distinction of being called "the green pope [1]."

In his 2010 World Day of Peace message, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," he boldly wrote: "Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?"

Greenpeace couldn't have said it any better.

In this year's World Day of Peace message, "Blessed are the Peacemakers," the former head of the Catholic church wrote: "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."

Here, Benedict is firmly standing on the principle of Catholic social teaching, which insists that the goods of the earth are meant to be shared by all, not selfishly hoarded by the wealthy few.

Benedict's clear condemnation of an "unregulated financial capitalism" should awaken the consciences of all those who selfishly promote the so-called free market, which overwhelmingly favors wealthy individuals and corporations at the expense of the poor and working class.

During the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Pope Benedict boldly declared, "In the name of God, I appeal to all those responsible for this spiral of violence, so that they immediately put down their arms on all sides."

In light of all of the death and destruction, Benedict added, "These facts demonstrate clearly that you cannot re-establish justice, create a new order and build authentic peace when you resort to instruments of violence."

Here, Benedict further developed the Catholic church's growing condemnation of war -- favoring nonviolent solutions.

In his compelling social justice and peace encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* ("Charity in Truth"), Benedict wrote, "Love -- caritas -- is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. ... Charity is at the heart of the church's social doctrine."

Charity "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)."

Imagine how wonderful all our relationships would be if we would allow love to govern them. Imagine how wonderful our world would be if we allowed love to govern our social, economic and political arenas.

Let's make it happen.

Thank you, Pope Benedict XVI, for strengthening the social doctrine of the Catholic church and for being a holy father to us. May God fill your remaining time on earth with peace and joy.

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