



owens: I'd like to begin by asking a little about the context of the document in question, *Caritas in Veritate*. Could you say a word about where it fits into the recent history of encyclicals as well as the general global environment in which it comes?

finn: Every pope seems to need a social encyclical or two, depending, and Benedict, this is his third, as you know. And so it was a logical thing that there ought to be one. It's been a long time coming. I remember I was in Rome for a conference on corruption in June of 2006 and the cardinal, Cardinal Martino, who heads the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, told us kind of slyly at the end of the conference that there would be a social encyclical out that Christmas, 2006. So that took a long time, but it comes from a pope who has not been known in his own personal life as having addressed justice issues. He's a systematic theologian and so I think there was a lot curiosity about what it was going to be and how would he approach this because it's not the area where he feels at home, even though, like every good theologian, he's got convictions there. It's not his strength.

you summarize the thrust of his message
on this point?

finn:

are politically engaged, and by that I think he means not just in the national politics, the electoral politics, but also in the development and building up of society. This way, it isn't just do-gooders who are out there trying to build new playground equipment over here for the kids, but rather that the very structure of society should be enlivened by this sort of civic engagement. These initiation of civil society, I think, get a better play here of more importance. The other place it comes up is in his rejection of what he called at one point the hegemony of the economy/state/ bi-polar presumption of so many people.

What's going on in the world? Well, there's the economy and then there's the state that regulates it, and that's what's going on. He said, no, let's keep in mind that there is this third part of life. He didn't want to identify at all with the third sector, as the French refer to it as or

It's hard to say how influential it will be, but I think, particularly given the current economic crisis, the materials that he's brought forth to think about economic life have a kind of impact today. Had he published this around Christmas of 2006 or even any time before the crisis began, there would have been a lot less interest in this kind of rethinking of the economy than of course there is now. I think that also contributes to its potential for having some kind of real impact on economic life.

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