The Link between Life Issues and Social Justice

Insights into Pope Benedict XVI's Social Encyclical Caritas in veritate

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Abstract. In his most recent encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI states that there is a profound connection between life issues and social justice. For example, when solidarity is undermined by abortion, it is also undermined in the relationship between the rich and poor countries of this world and between one generation and the next—with, in addition, disastrous consequences for the environment. In the encyclical, Benedict XVI states this connection but does not develop it to any great extent. In this essay, the author expounds the connection, staying as close as possible to what the Holy Father himself says both in *Caritas in veritate* and elsewhere. *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 12.3 (Autumn 2012): 449–460.

One of the several innovative features of Pope Benedict XVI's social encyclical *Caritas in veritate* is the connection he makes between life issues and social justice. In a section reviewing the contribution of Pope Paul VI to a precise articulation of the concept of authentic human development, Benedict XVI says that "the Church forcefully maintains [the] … link between life ethics and social ethics."[1]

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[1] Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (June 29, 2009), n. 15. Further references to the encyclical are given in the text.

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Benedict XVI credits Paul VI with first making this connection, saying that his encyclical on conjugal morality, *Humanae vitae* (1968), "indicates the *strong links between life ethics and social ethics*, ushering in a new area of magisterial teaching" (n. 15, original emphasis). The connection, Benedict XVI claims, is made even more explicit by Pope John Paul II in *Evangelium vitae*, when the latter indicates how the undermining of human dignity and justice through practices like abortion cannot but have ramifications for society in general. Benedict XVI reminds us of the words of his predecessor that "a society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized" (n. 15).[2]

Later in *Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI gives another example of the connection between life issues and social justice when he says that "one of the most striking aspects of development in the present day is the important question of respect for life, which cannot in any way be detached from questions concerning the development of peoples" (n. 28). Here, his point seems to be that a holistic definition of development must include the dimension of *moral development*, alongside those of economic development, cultural development, and so on. Since moral development is one criterion for measuring progress, Benedict XVI concludes that a society that disrespects life cannot claim to be truly developed. In this way, social development depends, in part, on society having a healthy attitude to life issues.

In *Caritas in veritate*, the Holy Father gives us only a glimpse of how he understands this connection between life and social justice. The general point is made forcefully, but he does not seek to develop it. Accordingly, in this essay, I will examine this connection a little more, staying as close as possible to the thought of Benedict XVI as I understand it.

Anthropology

Perhaps the most important point of contact between social justice and life issues is that of anthropology: man's understanding of himself. This is because all morality, personal as well as social, is ultimately founded on anthropology: depending on what you think man is, you will judge how he should act. If you think he is no more than an animal, then you will not expect sexual behavior different from that of animals: you will not, for example, expect monogamy and fidelity. Socially, the same is true: the structure of society flows from a vision of who man is. This is why the Marxist vision of human society, built as it is on a materialist idea of man, contrasts so starkly with the Catholic vision, which is founded on an understanding of man as a spiritual creature with supernatural goals.

The key point is that anything that warps the truth about the human person will necessarily warp our vision of human society. In this way, the culture of death—that is, a culture that promotes practices destructive of human life, like abortion, embry-

[2] John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995), n. 101.

onic stem cell research, physician-assisted suicide, and euthanasia—shapes a people's understanding of who man is and, therefore, what society is and how it should be structured. Various aspects of modern reproductive technologies, for example, do just that: they have a significant negative influence on man's self-understanding, on his implicit anthropology.

When it comes to life issues, the most obvious corruption in man's self-understanding is the degradation of the notion of human dignity, since in the culture of death the dignity of man is denied at every turn. Reproductive technologies effect another corruption, which Benedict XVI notes in *Caritas in veritate*, in that they breed *indifference* to the question of what is or is not human (n. 75). Creating, freezing, destroying, and experimenting on human embryos all take place in a context where the question of whether these individuals are human is not seriously addressed. Arbitrary legal time limits for embryo experimentation, such as the fourteen days specified by the U. K. Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, are set similarly, without seriously addressing the ontological status of the embryo. This indifference is also evident in the creation of a variety of human–animal hybrids, where the question of what is or is not human is effectively ignored.[3]

But there are necessary *social* repercussions to this indifference. Benedict XVI asks, "How can we be surprised by the indifference shown towards situations of human degradation, when such indifference extends even to our attitude towards what is and is not human?" (n. 75). Given the context of the encyclical, the degradation he is thinking of appears to be the poverty suffered by so many people in the world. His point is that when the notion of what is human is blurred by the use of reproductive technologies, the confusion also manifests itself in our attitude toward the poor. The result of this indifference is that "while the poor of the world continue knocking on the doors of the rich, the world of affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing those knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human" (n. 75).

The Holy Father also notes that the practices of the culture of death "foster a materialistic and mechanistic understanding of human life" (n. 75). With in vitro fertilization and cloning, the inception of human life becomes a technical procedure,

[3] I do not mean to deny here that it might be morally permissible to develop transgenic animals in which a small amount of human genetic material is transferred into a developing animal embryo. It seems that this is licit in some circumstances, such as when, for example, the aim is to harvest a useful human product—like human insulin or blood-clotting factor—from the animal. In these cases, the use of transgenic animals is not an affront to human dignity, since the distinction between humans and animals is not blurred. Such procedures must be distinguished from other, more clearly illicit interventions, such as the production of human–animal hybrids, by cross-fertilization of human and animal gametes, the transfer of human cell nuclei into enucleated animal ova (cytoplasmic hybrid embryo creation), and the transfer of animal genetic material into human embryos. See, for example, Daniel Martin and Simon Caldwell, "150 Human Animal Hybrids Grown in UK Labs," *Daily Mail* (U.K.), July 22, 2011, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2017818/Embryos-involving-genes-animals-mixed-humans-produced-secretively-past-years.html.

and man appears to construct human life in the same way that he builds a car or house. IVF exudes the atmosphere of production and manufacturing. Accordingly, it incorporates quality control (genetic screening) and quantity control (so-called selective reduction). All this fosters a vision of human life as essentially material, meaning that man is nothing but matter and has no spiritual existence and so no spiritual goals. This materialistic vision of human life, subtly propagated by a technological attitude toward conception, casts its shadow over the whole of human life. It compounds a vision of human life as having no other goal than material well-being. It fosters, or at least reflects, *a materialistic and consumerist vision of society*. This, then, is another example of how a life issue has far-reaching social consequences.

The Common Good

It is intriguing that Benedict XVI points to *Humanae vitae* as the encyclical that first makes the connection between life issues and social justice. The connection is not self-evident, and in *Caritas in veritate* he does not expound on this thought, saying merely that "the encyclical *Humanae vitae* emphasizes both the unitive and the procreative meaning of sexuality, thereby locating at the foundation of society the married couple, man and woman, who accept one another mutually, in distinction and in complementarity: a couple, therefore, that is open to life" (n. 15).

An obvious point here is that the married couple is the "foundation of society," and poor conjugal morality undermines this foundation. There seems to be something else going on here too, however. In mentioning the "unitive and the procreative meaning of sexuality" and the requisite openness to life, Benedict XVI seems to be pointing out that spouses form a communion not just for the sake of their own well-being but, above all, for that of their common life with another, namely, the child. This is to say that the society of marriage is not ultimately for the private benefit of the spouses but *for a common good*, namely, the transmission of human life.[4]

In this sense, the society of marriage is a model for the wider society of the civil and political community. It reminds us that the raison d'être of every human society is the *common* good, not the maximizing of the *private* goods of its members. Here the common good is understood as those goods that are a benefit to all and attainable only by mutual effort, such as peace, universal prosperity, health care, learning, and so on.

The corollary is that contraception and other anti-life practices, such as abortion, pervert the society of the marriage, closing it in on itself and closing it off from the larger community. These practices are a denial that marriage contributes to a common good—a denial that can have only a negative effect on the perception of society itself, for it communicates the falsehood that society itself should be structured to maximize the attainment of the private and often selfish goals of its individual members.

Human Rights

It is undisputable that human rights must be at the heart of a sound society. As Pope John XXIII notes, the common good of a society is closely connected with respect

[4] John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (February 2, 1994), n. 19.

for human rights and the fulfillment of duties. He says, "It is generally accepted today that the common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed."[5] His point is that a guarantee of human rights protects those human goods that are necessary for human flourishing, such as life, learning, culture, and health. The emphasis on duties reminds us that these can be attained only by common effort.

Yet the culture of death fatally undermines the notion of human rights in three ways. First, and most obviously, it undermines the most foundational of rights, the right to life. This right is the basis of all other rights, such as rights to education, to shelter, to free association, and even to religious liberty.

Second, it denies the *innate* character of human rights, because it implies that human rights are *conferred* by society. So, for example, an unborn, mentally handicapped child might be said to lack the right to life because he or she will fail to achieve a level of mental activity deemed, by others, to be necessary for the conferral of the right. But this treats a *right* as a *privilege* and fatally undermines the whole notion of human rights, since a privilege is the antithesis of a right. Introducing such arbitrariness into the idea of human rights is like breaching a dam. It weakens and will eventually destroy the notion of human rights as such, to the great detriment of society as a whole.

Third, the culture of death severs the connection between rights and duties. True rights always have a correlative duty, because a right is precisely a power to fulfill a duty. So, for example, the right to religious liberty is founded on the duty to seek the truth about God: first duty, then right. The loss of a connection between rights and duties is particularly evident in arguments for euthanasia, where a right is claimed—a right to die—without any correlative duty. There can be no right to die since there is no duty to die.

The severing of duty from right, as we see in the case of euthanasia, has at least two negative effects on society. First, it promotes a culture obsessed with rights but shy of duties. As Benedict XVI notes, "An overemphasis on rights leads to a disregard for duties" (n. 43). A duty-less society is, of course, no society at all but rather a loose gathering of individuals in pursuit of solitary goals.

The second effect of severing rights from duties is that there is no longer a way for society to judge whether a claimed right really is a right. Benedict XVI notes that "it is important to call for a renewed reflection on how *rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere licence*" (n. 43, original emphasis). Once the connection is destroyed, there is no test by which to judge the validity of a right; the result is a mushrooming of claimed rights—such as the right to homosexual marriage—devoid of correlative duties and so without validity.

Benedict XVI goes on to note that this modern escalation of rights is accompanied by what we might call a rights gap. In the West, the cutting loose of duties from rights means that rights "run wild," becoming ever more exotic; at the same time, in the Third World, basic human rights are ignored. It is important to note that

[5] John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (April 11, 1963), n. 60.

they are ignored for the same reason, that is, the rich of the West are disregarding their duties—specifically, the duties of the rich to the poor.

Solidarity

Solidarity is one of the most important principles of Catholic social teaching. In *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, John Paul II describes it as "*a firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all*."[6] Solidarity is, in other words, what Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas would call *civic friendship*, something essential for the fabric of any society.

It is precisely here that the culture of death strikes, since it is, in the words of John Paul II, "a culture which denies solidarity."[7] Indeed, it is hard to imagine anything that undermines solidarity more than abortion and embryo experimentation. These two phenomena represent a refusal to include a particular group of society (the unborn) in the most basic of common goods, namely, life, a good that is the foundation of all other rights that any member of society could possibly enjoy.

Moreover, in abortion and embryo experimentation, solidarity is fractured at the point where it should naturally be the strongest, in the relationship of mother and child. If this relationship, the most primeval, can be compromised, there is no relationship whose solidarity cannot be compromised. It is farcical to imagine that a society can allow the solidarity of this relationship to be undermined and at the same time hope to promote solidarity between citizens who are strangers to each other or, even more so, between its citizens and those of different nations and different cultures. It is for this reason that Benedict XVI says, "Abortion and embryonic experimentation constitute a direct denial of that attitude of acceptance of others which is indispensable for establishing lasting relationships of peace."[8]

Similarly, at the other end of life, euthanasia and assisted suicide may masquerade as solidarity, but beneath the veneer of mercy they are fundamentally the opposite: failures in solidarity. In his book *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton calls suicide a "refusal to take the oath of loyalty to life," and says that "the man who kills himself, kills all men."[9] Euthanasia and assisted suicide are similar refusals of loyalty to life. True solidarity means standing by those who are suffering; it can never mean killing another person or helping another person kill himself. Chesterton's point about suicide, which is true of assisted suicide and euthanasia as well, is that these acts demoralize society as a whole because by them a person surrenders to the struggles and sufferings of life: struggles and sufferings that are, in many ways, the same for everyone.

The false solidarity of euthanasia and assisted suicide boils down to the maxim that it is all right to eliminate suffering by eliminating the sufferer. This mentality is

[6] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (December 30, 1987), n. 38, added emphases.

[7] John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, n. 12.

[8] Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace* (January 1, 2007), n. 5.

[9] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 65.

evident in approaches to other social issues as well. In population and development, for example, it is encountered in proposals to reduce poverty by reducing the number of poor people, often by coercive and sometimes violent programs of birth control, without addressing the problem of alleviating the poverty itself. [10]

Family: The First Cell of Society

We have already noted that Benedict XVI, in pointing to *Humanae vitae* as the first encyclical to make the link between life issues and social justice, firmly places the married couple and the family at the center of human society. Indeed, in the words of *Apostolicam actuositatem*, the Second Vatican Council document on the laity, the family is the "first and vital cell of society." [11]

This cell is weakened by many influences of the culture of death. The devastating effect of abortion on the virtue of solidarity, which has already been noted, is felt first in the family. There is also the fracturing of family relationships that occurs through the use of various means of artificial fertilization. Heterologous artificial insemination, in which the male gametes come from a party other than the husband, multiplies paternal relationships, since the child will have a genetic father who is different from his social father. In vitro fertilization opens the way for an even more radical fracturing of the maternal relationship, since in addition to the genetic mother and the social mother there may potentially be a surrogate, or gestational, mother as well. Human cloning by somatic cell nuclear transfer further exacerbates parental fracturing, since it allows the complete bypassing of paternity and the multiplication of genetic mothers. With cloning, of course, the possibilities for perverting family relations are endless.

In addition to their destabilizing effect on the family through the perversion of family relationships, most forms of artificial fertilization also undermine marriage, the rock on which the family is founded. This occurs in all cases of heterologous artificial fertilization, which are effectively acts of marital infidelity. This is so because when a man and woman marry each other, one very important part of the unique gift they make to each other is that they promise to conceive only through each other's agency. In artificial insemination the wife effectively gives her fertility, and thereby herself, to another man.

Another way these techniques are a threat to marriage is that they make the marital act, sexual intercourse, only one among numerous ways in which children are procreated. Like fornication, the proliferation of methods effectively devalues the marital act and with it the special status of marriage. Similarly, if everyone were permitted to live in France, French nationality would count for nothing.

At the other end of the spectrum from the manufacturing of children is the culture of contraception, which seeks to prevent procreation in the first place. This, Benedict XVI notes, often results in what he calls "smaller and at times miniscule

[10] See, for example, Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Birth Control Solution," *New York Times*, November 2, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/03/opinion/kristof-the-birth-control-solution.html.

[11] Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam actuositatem* (November 18, 1965), n. 11.

families." The problem, he says, is that these families "run the risk of impoverishing social relations, and failing to ensure effective forms of solidarity" (n. 44). The point seems to be that "the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs."[12] It is where children, the future adult citizens of society, learn solidarity, self-sacrifice, sharing, and other social virtues necessary for the cohesion of society. Members of very small families are less adept at developing these virtues, since the virtues are less needed in such a domestic environment.

Closely connected with the health of the family is the experience of social *vitality*. Vitality is understood here to mean the social energy needed to tackle problems and bring about a universal and holistic development. In this regard, Benedict XVI draws a connection in *Caritas in veritate* between openness to life and social vitality: "When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man's true good" (n. 28).

Having children stretches a woman and a man, a mother and father. Without the challenge of children, a society runs the risk of becoming fat and flabby, not physically perhaps, but socially, and in this way unable to find the stamina that is needed to tackle the social problems of our time. Benedict XVI says,"The acceptance of life strengthens moral fibre and makes people capable of mutual help" (n. 28). There is also the fact that young people have more energy and often more zest for life. An aging society is, therefore, likely to be a society with less vigor.

Technocracy

A major part of *Caritas in veritate* is given over to what Benedict XVI, following in the footsteps of Paul VI calls technocracy.[13] This might be defined as an uncritical acceptance of, and trust in, technology. The Holy Father speaks of a "fascination" and "intoxication" with technology (n. 70).

Technocracy implicitly claims that all mankind's major problems can be solved by the application of technology. Benedict XVI admits, "It is tempting to think that today's advanced technology can answer all our needs and save us from all the perils and dangers that beset us."[14] He notes, for example, that even world peace is seen as a goal that can be achieved by the mere application of technology (n. 72). Here, perhaps, he is thinking of such things as putting trust in missile shields instead of building bilateral relationships of trust and justice.

Elsewhere Benedict XVI suggests that technology has replaced religion. It, and not Christ, is hailed as the savior of the world. Commenting on Francis Bacon's claim that "the new correlation between science and praxis would mean that the dominion over creation—given to man by God and lost through original sin—would be re-established,"[15] Benedict XVI says,

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[12] Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum educationis,* (October 28, 1965), n. 3.

[13] Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (March 26, 1967), n. 34, and Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 70.

[14] Benedict XVI, Homily at Floriana, Malta (April 18, 2010).

[15] Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi* (November 30, 2007), n. 16.

> Anyone who reads and reflects on these statements attentively will recognize that a disturbing step has been taken: up to that time, the recovery of what man had lost through the expulsion from Paradise was expected from faith in Jesus Christ: herein lay "redemption." Now this "redemption," the restoration of the lost "Paradise," is no longer expected from faith but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis.[16]

This attitude, of course, is to be found *particularly* in that branch of technology called biotechnology, especially when biotechnology is thought to possess the power to overcome all sickness. It is always a good thing when cures are found to the diseases and disabilities that have plagued mankind down the centuries. The problem comes when morality is asked to subordinate itself to technology as a slave to a master. Science demands to go ahead of morality, promising that cures will be forthcoming if we are prepared to sacrifice our scruples about human embryos, clones, and hybrids, for example. This seems to be a central feature of technocracy: "The conscience is simply invited to take note of technological possibilities" and ignore moral objections (n. 75).

Indeed, in *Light of the World*, Benedict XVI points out that at the heart of technocracy is the divorce of technology from the question of what is good for mankind. The technocrat imagines that what is possible is good: "Whatever one can do, one must be allowed to do. Anything else would be contrary to freedom."[17] On this, Benedict XVI comments, "It becomes apparent that in the … concept of progress, compounded of knowledge and power, an essential perspective is lacking, namely, the aspect of the good. This is the question: what is good?"[18] Again the ramifications of this mentality are found beyond the bounds of biotechnology.

When it spills into the realm of economics, this mentality has distinct social implications. Morality is subordinated to the demands of economic progress. One example of this is that instead of a society's economic life being conformed to the good of the family, the family structure is made to conform to the demands of the economic life, as when both parents are forced to work. The current global economic crisis has its origin, in part, in precisely this mentality of cutting economic progress loose from the demands of morality (n. 21). This separation fuels greed, irresponsible lending, and speculation, leading to the difficulties that we now endure.

Ecology

The correct attitude of Christians toward the environment holds the middle ground between extremes of *cosmocentricism* and *consumerism*. Cosmocentricism turns creation into a museum not to be touched, while consumerism promotes a damaging exploitation of natural resources and consequent destruction of the environment. Catholic social teaching rejects both these extremes, but the culture of death makes it harder to find and hold this balance.

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[16] Ibid., n. 17.

[17] Benedict XVI, *Light of the World*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Adrian J. Walker (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010), 44.

[18] Ibid., 43.

On the one hand, research products like human–animal hybrids blur the distinction between the human and animal worlds. This leads to a leveling-out in which the unique status of mankind and the fact that creation was a gift for his benefit are obscured. The danger in such a leveling-out is that creation becomes a museum not to be touched. Of course, there is something of a paradox here. It is precisely on account of an *excessive* interference with creation (e.g., human–animal hybrids) that people become less sure of the unique status of human beings. But then, if human beings are not really anything special, there is little justification for the claim that creation is for the benefit of mankind. This leads eventually to the idea of creation as a museum: a collection of interesting exhibits (of which man is one among many) to be looked at but hardly ever touched. Such a mentality is evident, for example, in such ecological philosophies as so-called Deep Ecology.

On the other hand, and in contradiction to the first trend, the manipulation of human life at its inception—something that is part and parcel of reproductive technologies—leads to a materialistic vision of life. It empties procreation of its mystery and leads us to view life from only a materialistic perspective. As already noted, this materialistic outlook on human life fuels a *consumerist* vision of creation, which is the basis for reckless exploitation of the environment.

The middle ground between cosmocentricism and consumerism is found by adhering to the principle of *stewardship*. This is the master principle of social teaching about the environment, and it implies two things: first, that creation is ultimately not the property of man but of God, and second, that creation is entrusted to the care of man so that he can make use of it. He must not exploit, waste, or destroy it, but he may certainly benefit from it and develop it.

Before the principle of stewardship can be respected and applied in relation to creation, however, man must appreciate it and apply it *to himself*, because the gift of life is precisely that—a gift—and with it come the responsibilities of a steward. If a man thinks he can do whatever he wants with his own life, then it is unlikely he will have much restraint when it comes to the rest of creation. One of the pillars of the culture of death, voluntary euthanasia, strikes directly at this truth about stewardship, claiming that a person's life is his own in an absolute way and may therefore be disposed of without reference to other people or to God. If the stewardship of his own life is undermined in this way, it is unlikely that he will be able to care for the rest of creation responsibly.

We have already seen how abortion fatally weakens the virtue of solidarity, yet it is precisely this virtue of solidarity that is needed for the balanced use of the goods of creation. Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI have noted that, at heart, the environmental crisis is a *moral* crisis. Benedict XVI says that, when it comes to the environment, "the decisive issue is the overall moral tenor of society" (n. 15).[19] By this he means that behind the exploitation of the environment is greed, and greed manifests a failure in solidarity: a failure to share the goods of creation both with others and with future generations. When solidarity wanes, the environment suffers.

[19] See also John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (January 5, 1991), n. 37.

Also pertinent here is the logic of *respect*. Benedict XVI points out that anti-life practices erode respect for human life, and once respect for life is eroded, there is little reason to respect the rest of creation. After all, if man, the pinnacle of creation, is not respected, why should the rest be?

> If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves. (n. 51)

Last, it is worth noting that, contrary to prevalent secular wisdom, openness to life is not a threat to the environment. Rather, openness to life fosters in children the priority of being over having.[20] It is the opposite mentality—when people value having over being—that threatens the environment. The culture of death fosters having over being in countless way, as, for example, in encouraging the use of contraception and abortion for limiting family size and thereby increasing material prosperity.

Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to put some flesh on the bones of Pope Benedict XVI's claim, made in *Caritas in veritate*, that there is a profound connection between life issues and social justice.

An obvious question to ask is the direction of the influence. Do life issues give birth to erroneous concepts of social life, or is it the other way around? Are life issues simply a manifestation of prevailing social attitudes and structures? Does legalizing abortion, for example, really cause a deterioration of solidarity in a given society, or is it a symptom of solidarity that has already been compromised?

My own view is that these aspects of the culture of death are like watersheds. The legalization of abortion does indeed reflect an already existing negative attitude or trend in society away from solidarity, but it also goes a long way toward definitively establishing this attitude as acceptable. Anti-life practices emerge out of a social context, yet they are singularly important in solidifying the attitude that they manifest. The same can be said, for example, of the relationship between technocracy and biotechnology. The attitude that morality must give way to science pre-dated the modern revolution in biotechnology, as can be seen in the exploitation of the working class in nineteenth-century industrialization, for example, but this attitude has become nearly universal and almost unassailable under the influence of biotechnology.

Finally, the connection between life issues and social justice has an important consequence of the implementation of Catholic social teaching. The social teaching of the Church is, of course, meant to be more than a theory. It is a call to action. In particular, the lay faithful are called to try to implement it in the societies where they live. As Vatican II tells us, "It belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God

[20] Ibid., n. 36.

by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will."[21] This is often difficult because of the limited influence Catholics have in many societies. On the other hand, all of us are involved to some extent in life issues. Questions of conjugal morality are ubiquitous for married persons, and everyone has to make decisions about medical treatment and, ultimately, how he will face death. In these ways, everyone is afforded the opportunity to implement Catholic social teaching by bearing witness to the truth about human life, the truth that underpins social morality.

[21] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), n. 31, quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 898.