

'Caritas In Veritate'

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The social teaching of the Catholic Church has had a profound, if not widely recognized, influence in social doctrines of governments, political parties and candidates ever since Leon XIII published “*Rerum Novarum*,” which came out strongly for the protection of workers’ rights in 1892. Benedict XVI’s encyclical—“*Caritas in Veritate*”—Love in Truth, which intends to update Paulus VI’s “*Populorum Progressio*,” is the most recent—June 29, 2009—pronouncement of the Church in this direction.

It is a deep theological and philosophical essay on the relationship between human and economic development. The onslaught of globalization and the global financial crisis prompted Pope Benedict to write it. As I read it, my reverie went back to an afternoon in 1967, the year “*Populorum Progressio*” came out, when I was riding in the back seat of a car with Luis Muñoz Marín. I was then secretary of Justice. Muñoz had retired from the governorship and was a member of the Senate. Those were the days of hope and progress in Puerto Rico.

We were in the middle of the campaign for the 1967 plebiscite on status. Voting would occur July 23. Riding up the old road from Caguas to Cayey headed for a rally where Muñoz would speak on behalf of Commonwealth status, I was talking to Muñoz about “*Populorum Progressio*,” which had just come out. “*Populorum Progressio*” had a lot to do with what the campaign was about because it addressed economic development and social justice, the principal factors that led Muñoz and the Popular Party leaders to abandon their pro-independence convictions because independence didn’t foster those factors, and turn to Commonwealth, which provided the optimal conditions to pursue these goals for Puerto Rico. Such a decision by Muñoz, giving up life-long political ideals to pursue higher values for our people, required clear understanding of our realities and a strong and guiding conscience.

“Love in truth—*caritas in veritate*—” Pope Benedict tells us, “is a great challenge for the Church in a world of progressive and expansive globalization. The risk of our times is that interdependence between humans and between peoples doesn’t coincide with an ethical interaction of conscience and intellect from which may result a development that is really human. Only with *caritas*, illuminated by the light of reason and faith, is it possible to achieve goals of development with a more human and humanizing character.”

Muñoz wasn’t a philosopher nor a theologian, but he instinctively approached economic and human development through social justice and the values that guide a good part of ‘*Caritas In Veritate*.’ The ethical interaction between conscience and intellect created in him the passion that drove him in the pursuit of our economic development to achieve social justice so every Puerto Rican would have a better future.

Muñoz believed economic development, social justice and political status or sovereignty aren't ends in themselves but tools for the integral development of the human person. Muñoz's ultimate goal was to bring about a society, or civilization, as he called it, where every Puerto Rican should be able to personally reach his or her full potential as a human being including his or her "spiritual" development through something vague that he called Operation Serenity.

"Caritas In Veritate," of course, goes further and deeper. The fountainhead of the social doctrines of the Church is *caritas* or love. This is the force that drives solidarity among human beings or among the peoples of the earth. However, *caritas* for the Church must be coupled with *veritas*, which is the truth not only of our objective realities but also the truth about the origins of humankind, our planet or the universe, or of all the universes that there may be and we don't know about. *Veritas* means God and revelation through Christ. "Caritas in Veritas" means the love that springs from God toward humankind and each of us which, in our objective realities, places in our hearts the passion for social justice, which moved Muñoz.

Benedict XVI's encyclical is anchored in the realm of faith; it identifies God as the source of love. I know Muñoz shared that faith. But the encyclical should be of value to believers and nonbelievers because love or *caritas* is in the realm of our senses. It is inscribed in the human heart and there is no question that solidarity has a component of *caritas* if also, in some cases, of self-interest.

"Human dignity and the demands of justice," Benedict tells us, "require above all today that economic options shouldn't increase inequalities in an excessive and morally unacceptable way, and that we continue seeking as a priority the objective of access to work for all."

The most stark and painful reality of Puerto Rico's economy today is that our rate of participation in the labor force is 43%, which is the lowest rate of participation in the world. This means that only 43% of our population is able and willing to work. The lack of opportunities to work, the lack of jobs, the fact there is no economic development generating jobs is the principal cause of this situation. The federal and Commonwealth safety nets do provide a disincentive but that wouldn't hold back most Puerto Ricans if there were abundant and attractive opportunities for work and personal progress.

As we look for a path to resume growth in our economy, the observations of "Caritas In Veritate" are as important today as those principles were in the days of Muñoz. The full integral development of each Puerto Rican must be our goal. This requires meaningful and sustainable expansion of our economy so it provides jobs and social justice for all. The path—yet to be charted—must lead to this objective.