

The Pope issues a tired Old Left manifesto

Why, exactly, should rich countries send more money to Africa?

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Pope Benedict XVI apparently spent the last two years crafting "Charity in Truth," a remarkably confused encyclical in which the pontiff calls for radical reform of a market economy that, whatever its limitations, "has lifted billions of people out of misery." Though unprecedented in history, this phenomenal performance, it appears, wasn't quite enough. Sin was evident in the market along with the salvation. Hence, Pope Benedict concludes, the world needs a new economic order of some sort, "a world political authority," to infuse the [global economy](#) with moral conduct - and, more specifically, to supply poor countries with more foreign aid.

Perhaps, amid the research and the writing, Pope Benedict didn't get a chance to read Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo's *Dead Aid*, a passionate call for an end to foreign aid in Africa. Perhaps he missed Kenyan economist James Shikwati's comparable call to the Group of Eight a few years ago: "For God's sake, please stop [foreign aid]." (Ms. Moyo and Mr. Shikwati argue that foreign aid mainly finances huge bureaucracies, promotes corruption and teaches people to beg for a living.)

The most glaring omission in "Charity in Truth" is any reference to the \$1-trillion (U.S.) in foreign aid that Western governments have sent to Africa in the past generation - or to the largely negative consequences this aid meant for Africans. (In a 2005 study on foreign aid, prepared for the [International Monetary Fund](#), researchers concluded that they could find "little evidence of a robust positive impact of aid on economic growth.") Why, exactly, should rich countries send any more money to Africa? Pope Benedict's answer - because Christian love commands it - simply isn't persuasive.

"Charity in Truth" is better read as a pastor's Sabbath sermon, which it isn't, than as an anachronistic Old Left manifesto, which it is. The doctrinal thrust of the document encourages this deception, as do Pope Benedict's affirmations of the separation of church and state. "The Church does not claim to interfere in any way in the politics of States," the encyclical says. "The Church does not have technical solutions to offer." Of course it does - greater government aid for the underdeveloped world serving only as a single example. But in a religious context, as mere homily, who can object?

The problem, of course, is that the most holy intentions can produce the most devilish consequences. Foreign aid started innocently enough more than a century ago in the pennies that devout Christians dropped on collection plates to finance "the missions." Generous people living in rich countries still send more money to Africa than governments do - another glaring omission in "Charity in Truth." This private charity has a better record than the charity of states, which Pope Benedict prefers. The indictment of bureaucratic charity is simply that rich countries, most of them nominally Christian, have effectively killed Africa softly with their love.

Pope Benedict does not argue that personal charity no longer matters - but does press for greater government direction in collecting it and spending it. "Every Christian is called to practise this [state-directed] charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and the degree of influence he wields in the [world]," Pope Benedict writes. "This is the institutional path - we might also call it the political path - of charity." He rarely uses the word "government" but he means "government." More precisely, he means more government, which is implicit in his advocacy of "a true world political authority" that would manage the global economy "for the common good."

The primary problem now, the Pope says, is that the market economy has placed limits on the traditional power and authority of the state. The current economic crisis provides an opportunity to restore power to the state. "[A]s we take to heart the lessons of the current economic crisis, which shows the State's public authorities directly involved in correcting errors and malfunctions [of the market economy], it seems more realistic to re-evaluate their role and their powers," he says. "Once the role of the public authorities has been more clearly defined, one could foresee an increase in the new forms of political participation, nationally and internationally."

But the purpose of these "new forms of political participation" is clear: "[T]he market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function," he says. "The current crisis obliges us to re-plan our [economy], to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms [institutions]." These new global rules will determine "the destiny of man."

Yet, at the same time, Pope Benedict occasionally steps back and speaks more as a pastor, less as a counter-revolutionary. The market, he concedes, is really the people who are engaged in it. "Therefore," he says, "it is not the instrument [the market] that must be called to account, but individuals [in it]," a legitimate point to make in any sermon. You could make the same point about the church or the state.

Pope Benedict errs, though, on "the lessons of the current crisis" - which prove mostly that a sovereign government and its myriad benevolent

bureaucracies so loved the poor that they gave them mortgages they could not afford. Amen.

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