

What Does It Mean ‘To Be More’? Integral Human Development: Truth and Freedom

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In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI addresses the identity crisis of modern man: He does not know who he is, and he has reduced knowledge about himself to the experimental and particular sciences, which are incapable alone of revealing his true identity as a creation of God. This article traces the epistemological and anthropological shift from David Hume to the modern day and details Benedict’s response to this “new science of man.” *Caritas in Veritate* exposes the insufficiency of the modern, “enlightened” anthropology and raises anew the challenge of a reasoned metaphysical, anthropological, and theological reflection on the relationship between God and humanity for the sake of the development of the human person and society toward their ultimate destiny: to “be more” by freely responding to the call of God to live in unity with the love of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

We are experiencing a cultural and moral crisis, not just an economic one. This crisis is rooted in a concrete way to understanding human beings and their action in the world, which in turn implies a way of understanding God. The root of the crisis, therefore, is anthropological, not just financial, as might appear at first glance. The “economic crisis” is a manifestation of a *deeper crisis*.

The man who sells, buys, invests, trades, and so forth, before being an “economic actor” is a person. His *being a person* should *inform* all his activities: economic, legal, political, moral, and religious. These do not exist in isolation from each other and cannot be studied outside this *fundamental consideration*, which involves acting with a rationality capable of going beyond the merely

technical and practical. The human being is able to go beyond the immediate because he is called *to be more*; his own horizon is that of a rationality that, on one hand, can account for the basis of the real metaphysical dimension, and on the other, is capable of intangible free acts, to know and to love, which point to the immortality of the soul and eternal life.

Benedict XVI discusses the crisis in depth: Contemporary man—heir of the European man of enlightened modernity—does not know who he is. He has reduced knowledge about himself to the field of experimental and particular sciences. He has forgotten his status as creature and therefore his true identity. Studying the possible reasons for the crisis enables us to correct lifestyles arising from ignorance about ourselves where the human aspect is reduced and framed, on many occasions, in the immediacy of the experimental-empirical. The enlightened philosopher David Hume proposes these new keys to understanding man. Scholastic metaphysics will no longer be the foundation of knowledge about human nature. All branches of knowledge relating to human beings, from morality to religion, including economics and politics, presuppose a knowledge of human nature, but this knowledge has the condition of not going beyond the scope of sensory experience: “And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.”¹

We could say that this empirical-enlightened approach is one of the premises Benedict XVI questions in *Caritas in Veritate*, namely, this “new science of man” and the consequences resulting therefrom. Romano Guardini—also in dialogue with modernity—states unreservedly that the modern view of man is false because it has lost the particular mark of each person: being called by God.² This is where Benedict XVI and Paul VI agree with Guardini and disagree with the skeptic, Scottish philosopher Hume: What the person is and what its development consists of is not limited to the sensory and not clarified by the progress that reaches a reason apart from metaphysics and God. Rather, reason needs to elaborate on what the relationship is between man and God, both its metaphysical and its anthropological nature, as well as in the supernatural, spiritual-religious aspect. If man can explain the sensory experience, it is because he is beyond it, and not limited by it.

The Legacy of Empirical and Enlightened Modernity

The specific marks of this cultural and moral crisis according to Benedict XVI are:

1. *Moral relativism* that does not support a universal truth able to differentiate between acts of good and evil. Freedom is considered prior to truth and conscience prior to being.
2. *Cultural eclecticism* that makes different cultures interchangeable, as it does not support a common human nature. No culture is better or more appropriate than another, as it is thought that no culture reflects humanity fully.
3. *Materialistic and hedonistic view of life* that ignores the spiritual dimension of man, or his eternity. It is about enjoying physically and psychologically the more tangible goods and the more immediate pleasures.³

These characteristics translate in a social dimension to the reduced concept of man that is inherited from *that modernity* closely related to the empiricism illustrated in David Hume and John Locke:

1. *Man* is not a substance but a *self-sufficient individual*.
2. The soul is *psyche*, not as something substantive-ontological but as a set of sensory perceptions, both cognitive and affective.
3. The *distinction* between good and evil is equated with pleasure and sensory pain.
4. The horizon of *human development* is reduced to the level of *material and psychological well-being*, for which it is important to consume sensory goods and satisfy instincts and passions, connected to an instrumental reason that operates outside metaphysical knowledge and faith.⁴

How did we come to this situation? Benedict XVI dialogues with the European world of the Enlightenment. The historical display of some of its principles has resulted in the reduced concept that man has of himself and therefore also of society and God. Reason is reduced to an essentially technical-experimental use where there is no place for metaphysical foundation. From this perspective man is not a spiritual-corporeal substance but rather a particular and empirical individual whose vital horizon is reduced to a consumerist and historicist immanence. The most important thing in man is his material element, not the spirit,

which as an invisible reality is located in the realm of the unknown, of the dark and uncertain, of the illusory. Happiness is the satisfaction of the immediate: material well-being, on the one hand, and emotional well-being, on the other. The materialist immanence, in which human existence is cloistered, loses the spiritual and transcendent dimension of which man is capable as a reference for life: to know the truth, do good, and contemplate beauty. We know that getting to know the truth and to do good are accompanied by certain asceticism and self-control but just overcoming internal obstacles and self-sacrifice is repugnant to the enlightened modern man; hence Christianity is presented as that which is to be definitely overcome.⁵

The concept of human nature is reviewed and redefined, whereas the concept of creation is virtually eliminated. This Enlightenment, modern man believes he is self-sufficient: the sole author of himself as if there were not something already given, namely, an *ontic structure with certain dispositions or tendencies* that precedes any actualization of it. If this given structure is not taken into account, culture is built outside it and in some cases as a substitute, which is why for many people one culture is the same as another as none of them fosters what is genuine and authentically human; that which is common to all men and to be understood as a gift. As Benedict XVI states, “We all build our own ‘I’ on the basis of a ‘self’ which is given to us.”⁶ However, when man tries to create himself apart from his condition of being created, that is, in an immanent horizon, which turns its back to divine transcendence and the question about it, man experiences alienation and loneliness.⁷ Far from discovering himself as an *unavailable* being for himself and for others, he forgets his dignity, in whose image he has been created, to what he is called, and he is inserted into the mechanisms that drive the technical reason he uses.

Hence his anguish: He cannot always understand the deep root causes of it.⁸ Modern man is ill because his immanent knowledge prevents him from enjoying things as they are—in everything he just enjoys himself and looks at himself.⁹ Pieper says that “all neuroses seem to have as a common symptom an egocentric anxiety, a tense and self-centered concern for security ... that kind of love for one’s own life that leads straight to the loss of life.”¹⁰ This closure contrasts sharply with the Christian proposal that invites a person to lose life in order to find it, that is, to live decentralized of the I because centralization is for the animal world. Yet man cannot even live just like an animal, for if he does not live according to his humanity, then he also lives below the animal condition.¹¹ If man is not decentered of himself, if his epistemic and affective perception are not open to the other, if he is not able to act in justice, if he does not grow ontologically or spiritually, then man is lost and only half conscious of his indigence. He seeks

to be saved merely by becoming an object of medicine, especially as it involves the field of the *psyche*.

By becoming a manipulable object, he lives outside his sacred character. Therefore he considers that truth and, by extension to the concrete, life is what it is useful, feasible, and efficient for. Therefore, the “falsely enlightened” man comes to an action divorced from purpose, which makes him oblivious of who he is, what his being is, and to which dimensions it opens. He identifies life with a freedom understood as self-determination regardless of truth and moral responsibility. As “freedom is profoundly shaped by our being,” it gives freedom certain limitations.¹²

Freedom is not prior to the truth of being, but rather freedom follows that truth. Truth can only be known by a rational being capable of the universal, which means, in turn, that man is able to work innovatively and beyond what is particular and immediately sensory. Freedom outside the truth is equated to an instinctive mechanism; but that in itself is contradictory because in the worldview of solely mechanical efficiency, freedom is no more than a play on words.

When the “enlightened” modern man contends that he is the author of himself, he ignores God in his innermost invisible truth, which he himself reveals. By faith we know that God is *logos* and *love*, and freely, without any need, he makes man to participate in his being, giving him the powers to act out of love and truth. That truth and love of which the human person is part are present in him as something prior and not produced by him. Yet the reality of original sin makes it difficult to understand these basic truths. *Enlightenment deism* ignores faith and operates with only an instrumental reason so that it fails to consider the consequences of what the original fall produces in man. *Enlightenment deism* of the empiricist conception wants the fallen man to be saved by his own technical-instrumental reason, and one of the conditions for this “self-salvation” is to think that both God and religion are somewhat illusory.¹³

Without considering, on the one hand, the rational faculties and the transcendental and, on the other hand, the reality of the supernatural dimension that faith makes explicit, man loses the keys to his *true development*, which, as Benedict points out in *Caritas in Veritate*, is simply to *respond to the vocation to which God calls him: to be part of the divine*, which is continuous Donation—inexhaustible source of truth and love. The vocation of man is known from the spirit and is an invitation to live a “supernatural life”; man is called to be like God, to live God’s way.¹⁴ His vocation and therefore his more authentic identity is being called to *become a perennial source of truth and love for others*. This translates into the social sphere in a just community. The source of that political community must be love in the supernatural sense, that is, charity, not only natural friendship.

A just society is only possible if the *love of God* works in man from that *logos* which is the truth, that is, the light that illuminates the meaning and significance of each and every created thing. When reason lives harmoniously with faith and from faith, *Jesus* appears as the face of God able to show how to live on earth supernaturally. Mere deism cannot support God's intervention in the history of men. From the view of Enlightenment deism, the history of salvation does not cohere, for God is considered a first principle of the universe that governs from physical laws, but human society and its history is a matter only of men. Hence, Simone Weil dares to say that the supernatural must reenter into science; the category of the supernatural and its reality restore the truth about man.¹⁵

In other words, either the man gets to know himself from God, or he cannot get to know himself at all, *but not knowing oneself is equivalent to refusing oneself existentially*. Both Sartre's Marxism and existentialism are presented as God-denying theories because they deny that man is created.¹⁶ The negation of God is always followed by the denial of man as Foucault and other contemporary voices have revealed. Stating that *there is no God*, is not to declare, as Sartre¹⁷ does, that there is no heaven, nor hell but rather *to find out that the world is a hell*, that violence abounds in the world at ease.¹⁸ In short, modernity largely produces a non-Christian culture. Without faith it becomes unfeasible and cut off from its source of specifically Christian values such as respect for life, liberty, and property that modernity assumes as fruits of a reason emancipated from tradition and all authority. It is what Guardini has called the dishonesty of modernity.¹⁹ The fruit of what we might call a "new enlightened paganism" is found today: a violence that does not respect the sanctuary of conscience, a skepticism that advocates for a weak reasoning, and finally, a scientism that makes a laboratory object of the supposed emancipated modern subject.²⁰

Integral Development

Faced with all this, Benedict XVI proposes an integral development that has at least two conditions: (1) overcoming materialistic reductionism and not ignoring the spiritual dimension of man, which enables supernatural life; and (2) expanding the use of reason so as to work with the faith in order to address the metaphysical and transcendent foundation of reality.

Now, how are the natural and the supernatural related in man? Is the split between faith and reason final?

What is natural to man is his rationality, which should be extended in relation to the reduction into which instrumental reason has fallen. Freedom is not prior to the rational being. Freedom is characterized by him and intrinsically linked with

truth, goodness, and beauty that act for freedom as its goals. Freedom is ordered to the end and chooses the means to the end but not the end in its ultimate sense.

The ultimate end is given (as well as the being) but not its realization. Freedom in man implies man's accountability for the gift received, therefore, only a *responsible freedom* grants a genuine autonomy. Autonomy is not spontaneously following the particular interest but rather determining oneself knowingly and voluntarily for the good and truth that man finds in himself—the natural law. Letting oneself go for the particular and immediate instinct is not autonomy, rather, autonomy is to choose the means that lead to the fullness that is experienced as having the command of oneself. The particular for being transitory always leaves man dissatisfied, which is why his end cannot be rooted only in material well-being.

Human life involves three dimensions: physical, psychic, and spiritual. The last two are not comparable because the psychic dimension even includes a sensory element, while the spiritual dimension is just the ability of man to rise above all that is sensory. The spiritual dimension is reflected when man cultivates formal knowledge and is related to the ultimate spiritual being who is God *par excellence*. The relationship with God may have psychological effects, but it is not essentially located in that area of life. He who knows God can experience joy and he who prays can feel peace and joy, but the knowledge of God and praying are not oriented to psychological effects but rather to the transformation of man, that is, his elevation to the supernatural order, to live divine life, which is certainly accompanied by peace, joy, and happiness.

The relationship with God is commonly understood as religion, but it is necessary to return to the definition of the concept because it has some connotations derived from modern rationalism and empiricism. As a result of the combination of both, Kant understands religion as a pure rational faith, that is, religion is fundamentally a moral message of universal and ethical order; it has overcome all forms of positive religion. Only the final step from the "historical faith" of the "ecclesial community" to the "pure faith of reason," which dictates only the moral standard, will definitely allow the establishment of a kingdom of God on earth—a state of ethics (divine), conqueror of the principle of evil.²¹ However there are those who emphasize the subjective religious feeling apart from any considerations of an objective and reasonable basis. The former do not address an essential element of revealed religion, which is precisely the experience of grace, and the latter run the risk of making a God in man's image, thus reversing the data revealed in Genesis.

Kant declares that it is not about knowing what God is but instead what he is for us as moral beings.²² Reducing religion to ethics and isolating it from its own

internal acts such as worship, devotion, and praying—acts due to the worship of God (a proper matter of religion according to Thomas Aquinas) and that are possible with the concurrence of grace, have also had serious repercussions for Christianity.²³ Influenced by Kant’s doctrines, Christianity turns into voluntarist moralism: It tears the being from his duty and loses contact with the reality of the divine; the emphasis is on the moral norm and forgets that it is directed to the perfection of human nature but that such perfection consists especially in the transforming work of grace, that is, divine action. It is Pieper who, aware of this deviation from such “Kantian Christianity” or “Christianized Kantianism,” when speaking of the nineteenth century states that the “moral teachings of the last century have separated mystical life as in essence ‘extraordinary’ from the ‘ordinary’ ethical sphere, and have consequently obstructed our view of the continuity in the unfolding of the supernatural life.”²⁴

Vindicating the spiritual dimension of man includes not only the ability of the man for immaterial acts such as knowing and loving but also the open horizon for man to perform them: immortal life, the discovering of oneself as a contingent being dependent on a higher being and, therefore, in relation to him. Thus philosophy is constituted as a preamble of faith but not as a substitute for it. When faith that defines supernatural life does not deviate from the reason natural to man, then we find out that the relationship with the Creator is not despotic but one of love and that man himself is invited to participate in it. For *the gift of God*, grace, man is called to become himself a donation—the giver, a gift. This reveals the supernatural dimension of man to which his nature *already tends*.

The characteristic distinction of God is giving because only God is a being in fullness, a being who in the words of Gregory of Nyssa is always being born and is never exhausted nor finished. The characteristic distinction of man is receiving because he is a created and contingent being. What man receives in his childhood and matures in his full age makes him a being capable of giving, that is, capable of acting as God. Therein lies the greatness of man and his supernatural end.

As explained by Professor Alvira,

If we consider the nature of man, just made up of body and soul as the other living beings, then what we call his spirit is supernatural, i.e., an addition to the pure nature that perfects and elevates him. If we, on the contrary, take directly and as a block everything that constitutes him, then the spirit is also part of human nature. It is natural for man to be supernatural.²⁵

The human being can only be understood as a certain natural-supernatural structure. It is natural for man to tend to the vocation for which he has been created and that *mysteriously* is the gift of God; it is grace. We must not forget that

the very fact of being created is already a first grace. Man should not deny his being created to be free, as modernity states, but should freely fulfill the natural possibilities in his created being.

When the Church speaks of development, it promotes it in a comprehensive way that encompasses all dimensions of man. That concept of development is not achieved from human forces alone. Benedict XVI points to a transcendent vision of the person: “it needs God: without him, development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to man, who falls into the trap of thinking he can bring about his own salvation, and ends up promoting a dehumanized form of development.”²⁶ Man will be saved if he understands and lives below his possibilities, which in turn are the gift of God: “man is constitutionally oriented towards ‘being more.’”²⁷ Let us remember that to live below the self is one of the elements of sin according to the Thomistic doctrine.

Benedict XVI wonders, “What does it mean ‘to be more’?”²⁸ Following Paul VI, he answers, “the essential quality of ‘authentic’ development ... [is] to promote the good of every man and of the whole man.”²⁹ Real development does not leave any human dimension uncultivated but implies understanding that living up to the best that is in man is to discover the vocation to eternal life, to be saved by the love of God and participate in him, and to facilitate this same development in others. When man experiences himself as contingent, that is, limited, he also experiences the need to be saved. This is particularly evident in the experiences of pain, suffering, and death. This is why the most forgotten virtue today is perhaps fortitude in its true sense: to be willing to die to safeguard justice, that is, what is owed to each one, in this case also what is owed to the Creator—worship and honor owed to him as the creature.

Paul VI calls real progress *vocation*, which is not something that constrains the being or hinders its development, but rather, the dimension that gives him plenitude and invites him to use his freedom.³⁰ God has placed being in man and has granted him the ability to reach his full potential, although not in isolation, but instead from the natural and supernatural that man already finds in him, that is, with the help that God provides both in the natural and supernatural dimensions. When man attends to that call *to be more* he intervenes in reality, driven by an internal principle of energy.³¹

Conclusion

The answer that Benedict XVI gives to the question of what it means *to be more* could be summarized by saying that *all men recognize and respond freely to the transcendent vocation* to which he is called in both its personal and its social

sense. Each man's relationship with the love of Jesus Christ and with the commitment to justice and peace in society imply this authentic development. This is the original vocation, whose center is *living in unity with Christ's charity*. The supernatural as a gift is part of the integral development that the Church proclaims. This claims a free and responsible acceptance by man. If God is eclipsed, then real development disappears and man does not know his deepest truth. Being open to such development involves overcoming the split between faith and reason, established by the earliest modernity, and admitting that man is able to know truth and love.

Real development as a gift means being open to the spiritual life: "rendering life on earth 'divine,'" the longing of Christians is that the entire human family may address God as "Our Father."³²

Notes

1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3 vols., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 1:xx.
2. Cf. Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World: A Search for Orientation*, trans. Joseph Theman and Herbert Burke (London: Sheed & Ward, 1957), 98–100.
3. Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), 32. Henceforth *CV*.
4. Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2 vols., in *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes* (London: Rivington, 1824), 1:1.2.27, §§ 21, 26.
5. Cf. Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 121–22.
6. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 68.
7. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 53.
8. Cf. Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 58–60.
9. Cf. Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston et al. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 2.
10. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 134.
11. Robert Spaemann, *Happiness and Benevolence*, trans. Jeremiah Alberg (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 116–17.
12. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 68.

13. Cf. David Hume, "Of a Particular Providence and a Future State," in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], in *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 132–48.
14. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 79.
15. Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 288: "The science of the soul and social science are alike impossible, if the idea of the supernatural is not rigorously defined and introduced into science on the basis of a scientific conception, so as to be handled with the utmost precision in all matters relating to science."
16. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. and ed. Martin Milligan (Mineola: Dover, 2007), 112: "A *being* only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his *existence* to himself. A man who lives by the grace of another regards himself as a dependent being. But I live completely by the grace of another if I owe him not only the sustenance of my life, but if he has, moreover, *created my life*—if he is the *source* of my life."
17. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Devil and the Good Lord, and Two Other Plays* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 141: "It was I who cheated, I who worked miracles, I who accused myself today, I alone who can absolve myself; I, man. If God exists, man is nothing.... God doesn't exist. He doesn't exist. Joy, tears of joy. Halleluiah!... I have delivered us. No more Heaven, no more Hell; nothing but earth...."
18. Cf. Gustave Thibon, *Nietzsche ou le Déclin de l'Esprit* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1975), 55. Cf. also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40.
19. Cf. Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 128.
20. Cf. Remo Bodei, "¿Hacia humanos de criadero?" *Thémata* 39 (2007): 15–22.
21. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113, 128.
22. Cf. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 141.
23. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 81–84.
24. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 140.
25. Cf. Rafael Alvira, *La razón de ser hombre. Ensayo acerca de la justificación del ser humano* (Madrid: Rialp, 1998), 112.

26. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 11.
27. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 14.
28. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 18.
29. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 18.
30. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 16.
31. Cf. Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 84–85.
32. Benedict XVI, *CV*, 79.